



# Seven Profiles of Exemplary Religious Teachers: A Comparative Study in Southeast Asian Muslim Minority Countries

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## Abstract

Teachers are educators who devote themselves to an educational institution and have the task of guiding and teaching students both within and outside the curriculum. A teacher's character will have an impact on their students. Good character will have a positive impact, and conversely, bad character will have a negative impact. Therefore, teachers must have good character so that they can be role models for their students. This study aims to identify the characteristics of teachers so that they can be good role models for students and other teachers. This study uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. The data sources were taken from observations and individual interviews with nineteen informants consisting of teachers and students using purposive sampling techniques. All data obtained were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman analysis technique. The results of the study show seven findings related to role model teachers in Islamic education in 2024. The seven findings are: i) able to instill Islamic values in students, ii) professional, iii) empathetic, iv) disciplined, v) responsible, vi) motivational, and vii) communicative. All of these findings are expected to serve as guidelines for teachers and as a primary reference for future researchers working on similar topics in different contexts.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the main factors in enlightening the life of a nation. One of the environments that provides education is school. There are many elements in school, one of which is students and teachers. Teachers are educators who educate their students in an educational institution (Adawiyah, 2021; Elvira, 2021; Tawa, 2019; Warif, 2019). A good teacher is one who can treat their students with empathy and understand that each student has different abilities and needs. Students will understand the material presented by the teacher if the teacher can deliver the material well (Damri et al., 2020; Dinda et al., 2023; Islami & Lubis, 2016; Mawa & Mawa., 2024). Education is an institution managed to develop human potential, transfer knowledge, train skills, nurture and develop personality, and pass on cultural values to the next generation, whether at home, in the community, or at school (Duryat, 2021; Suryadi, 2022).

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Teachers are professional educators whose main duties are to educate, teach, guide, direct, train, assess, and evaluate students in early childhood education, formal education, primary education, and secondary education (Aliyyah et al., 2020; Dwi & Maskuri, 2023; Illahi, 2020; Rahawarin et al., 2023; Wangi et al., 2022). In Islamic educational literature, there are a number of terms that refer to the meaning of educator/teacher. These terms include *al-murabbi*, *al-mu'allim*, *al-muza'aki*, *al-ulama*, *al-rasikhuna fi al-ilm*, *abl al-zikr*, *al-muaddib*, *al-mursyid*, *al-ustaz*, *ulul al-bab*, *ulu al-nuba*, *al-faqih*, and *al-muwa'id*. Meanwhile, Mubaimin mentions only 7, namely: *ustaz*, *mu'allim*, *murabbiy*, *mursyid*, *mudaris*, *mu'addib*, and *muzaki* (Kasmar et al., 2019).

Teaching involves the process of delivering material that is tailored to various factors, including student conditions, availability of resources, teacher abilities, and available time (Ikhsan & Humaisi, 2021; Ni'mah et al., 2020; Nurmadiyah & Komariah, 2020; Nurpajar, 2020). Therefore, before starting the learning process, teachers need to prepare themselves by studying the material to be delivered so that it can be conveyed effectively and efficiently. Being a teacher is not easy; there are many obstacles and challenges both in and outside of learning. However, teachers must still carry out their duties professionally. Teachers should naturally be role models for students, and to be exemplary teachers, they need to be prepared (Iskandar, 2019; Wati & Trihantoyo, 2020).

Teacher quality standards are related to teachers' performance in carrying out their duties by always involving students in various learning experiences. The ability of an educator can improve student learning outcomes. To motivate a teacher, rewards/recognition can be given. One such reward can be in the form of an award for exemplary educators (Indriyani et al., 2020).

In this context, the role of teachers, especially those who teach Islamic Religious Education, is very important. Moreover, an Islamic Religious Education teacher must have qualifications that are not only evident in their capacity as a classroom teacher, but also in their ability to apply religious principles in everyday life (Adib, 2024; Kusen et al., 2024). Islamic religious teachers are educators who have broad responsibilities in the religious domain. They not only teach but also act as educators who guide children in shaping good character. The teacher's task is not only to convey material but also to implement these values in daily life so that students can obtain real examples (Arlina et al., 2023).

Researchers understand the urgency of the role of Islamic Education teachers in raising public awareness of the diversity of Islamic knowledge taught, both in schools and as role models for the surrounding community so that they are able to provide good education to their children (Judrah et al., 2024; Shapitri, 2024). Students inevitably seek role models or people to emulate and look up to. If teachers educate well, then in the future students will also be good; if not, then students may not be good either. Students are very adept at imitation, therefore, teachers are expected to be good role models so that students can imitate and emulate good things, thereby becoming good intellectuals themselves. A competent teacher demonstrates dedication to improving their knowledge, has effective teaching skills, and is able to adapt teaching methods to the individual needs of students (Guspita et al., 2025; Jaafar et al., 2023; Oktavia et al., 2023).

Teachers as role models means that teachers serve as examples in various aspects of life for students, both positive and negative. This includes demonstrating good behavior and morals. Because students tend to imitate what they see in their teachers, it is important for teachers to set positive examples (Karso, 2019). The role of teachers is very influential on students' views. Although the role of teachers as

role models is very important, the reality in the field shows that not all teachers are able to be good role models for students. Some teachers may not be aware of the importance of being role models in every aspect of daily life (Jumiati, 2018; Maherah, 2020; Sinulingga, 2023).

Previous research conducted by Nufiar Syamsuddin in 2022, entitled “The Role of Islamic Education Teachers in Character Education in Schools,” showed that among the forms of character building carried out were teaching, guidance, and encouragement and setting a good example in practicing religious values. Therefore, in relation to the character building of students, Islamic Education teachers hold a central position, especially when children are in a school or madrasah environment. It is hoped that students will develop good character traits, such as being honest, polite, brave, hardworking, responsible, and so on.

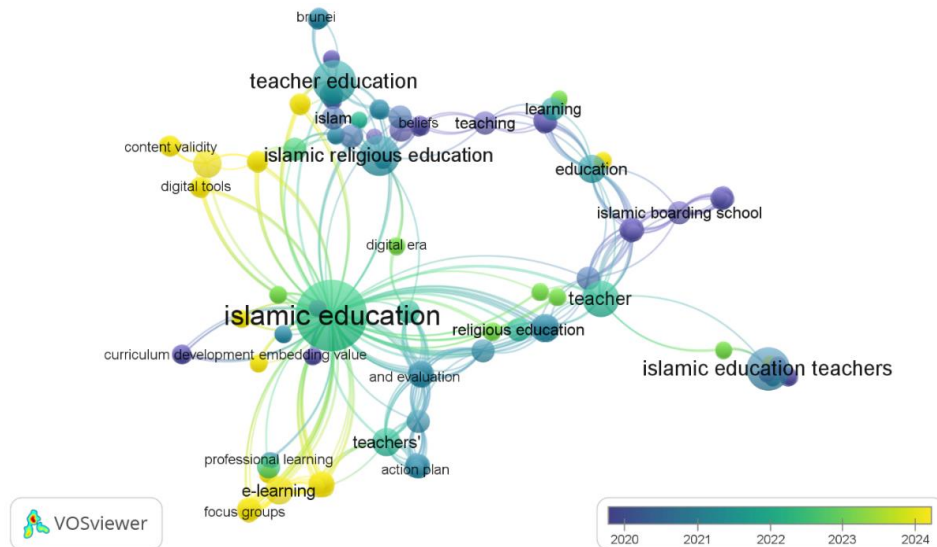
In line with the research conducted by Muchlis in 2019 “Characteristics of exemplary teachers in the review of the Quran surah al-kahf verse 65”. Among the most important competencies that a teacher must possess, as understood from QS al-Kahf: 65, are religious competence (*'abdun*), personality competence (*rahmah*), pedagogical competence, and professional competence (*'ilm*).

Kandiri & Arfandi in 2021 with the title “Teachers as models and role models in improving student morality” showed that good moral guidance is not based solely on teachings in the form of commands or prohibitions, but must be based on setting a good example by teachers in the school environment. Rahendra Maya in 2013 with the title “The essence of teachers in the vision and mission of character education” shows that teachers are role models. Teachers are “believed” (listened to) and “*imitated*” (imitated). Teachers are not only skilled at teaching how to answer National Examination questions, but their lives must also be an example for their students.

Abdul Hamid in 2020 with the title “The Application of the Exemplary Method as a Learning Strategy to Improve Islamic Education Learning Outcomes” shows that the exemplary method is very effective because it is in line with human nature, which tends to imitate or emulate figures considered important in their lives. This is evident in the tendency of students to imitate the words and behavior of their teachers. In applying this method, role modeling is the main consideration. Providing role models for teachers to their students is the goal, not just a tool. By making role modeling the goal, teachers become the target in applying this method, while students place teachers as the central role models to be imitated or emulated directly and used as real-life experiences.

This study aims to provide deeper insight into the characteristics of a teacher who can be a role model for students. Of course, this study needs to be conducted and discussed scientifically. Although previous researchers have discussed Islamic education teachers, they have not discussed the characteristics of role model teachers. In this study, the researcher presents relevant previous studies, which are used as references to enrich the material for further research.

Based on the Scopus database, referring to previous studies conducted by researchers from various countries using the keywords “Islamic education teachers” and “role model teachers.” The researchers analyzed the data as shown in figure 1 using VoSviewer software, which is a tool for analyzing data that has been used by previous researchers (Rasdiany et al., 2022; Sabrina et al., 2024).



**Fig 1. Vosviewer analysis with the keywords Islamic education teacher, role model teacher (Scopus database 2020-2024)**

Based on figure 1 above, which the author analyzed on Sunday, August 25, 2024, at 23:45 WIB, from published research, it was found that previous studies from various countries related to role model teachers in Islamic religious education had never been developed. Existing research findings show that research on Islamic education teachers in general, such as evaluation, Islamic education teachers, and Islamic education teacher curriculum, Meanwhile, research on the characteristics of role model teachers in Islamic religious education has not been found. Therefore, this research is worthy of being conducted as a primary reference for future researchers who will discuss Islamic education teachers, role model teachers, and for teachers, the results of this research can be used as a benchmark on how to become a teacher who is a role model for students.

## METHODS

This type of research is a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach (Asril et al., 2023; Maputra et al., 2020). Data sources were obtained through interviews with nineteen informants, all of whom were selected using purposive sampling techniques (quotation). According to Elkhaira et al., (2020); Engkizar et al., (2018); Mutathahirin et al., (2022); Oktavia et al., (2020) the four criteria were: having the competence to understand the research problem well, still being active in the field being studied, having the time to provide information to the researcher, and being honest in providing information according to the data and facts in the field. The informants interviewed by the researcher were teachers who were still actively teaching in several schools and students who were still in school. After the interviews with all informants were completed, the researcher conducted the transcription process, then extracted the data relevant to the research needs.

After the interviews were completed with all informants, the researchers conducted a thematic analysis to identify themes in accordance with the objectives and requirements of the study. Thematic analysis is one technique that researchers can use to analyze interview results so that they are clear and easy for readers to understand (add quote). The entire thematic analysis process above was carried out using the Miles and Huberman technique as shown in figure 2 below:

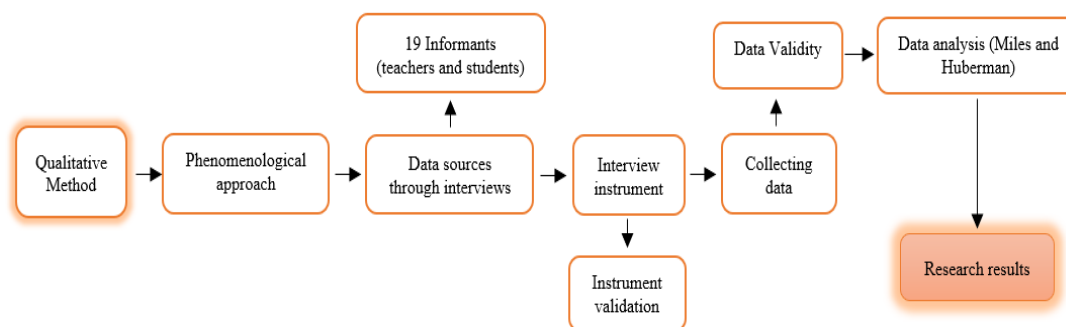


Fig 2. The steps in qualitative research

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on interviews conducted with nineteen informants, the findings clearly identified seven characteristics that a role model teacher must possess. These seven characteristics are shown in figure 3 below:

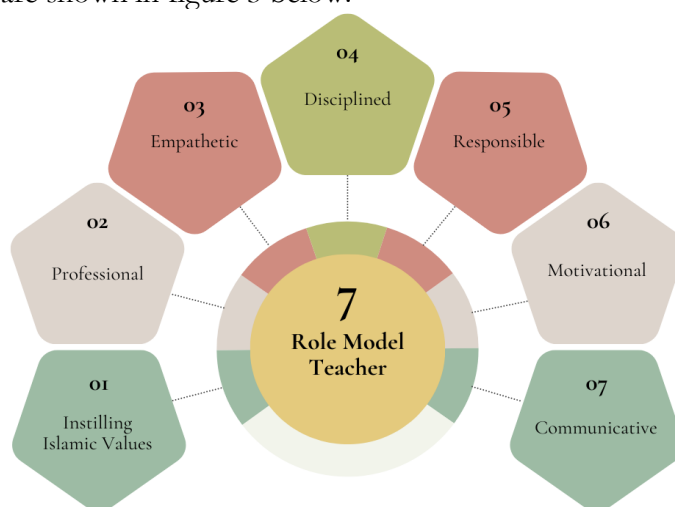


Fig 3. Seven characteristics of exemplary teachers in Islamic religious education

Based on figure 3, researchers can explain that after conducting in-depth interviews with informants, there are six characteristics that role model teachers in Islamic education must have. These six characteristics are: i) instilling Islamic values in students, ii) being professional, iii) having empathy, iv) being disciplined, v) being responsible, vi) being a motivator, and vii) being communicative.

The researcher will describe the interview excerpts with informants based on the seven findings above. The interview descriptions presented are brief excerpts from the informants' statements during the interviews. Although the interview excerpts were conveyed by the informants in slightly different language, they actually have more or less the same purpose and meaning.

The first finding (able to instill Islamic values in students). Islamic values themselves are a set of principles in doing something based on the Quran and hadith, which are positive in nature and manifested in the physical and spiritual experiences of the individual. Islamic values should indeed be applied in every learning process, because nowadays many students still have poor attitudes and behavior. The instillation of Islamic values is an action or method of instilling knowledge about Islam, in the form of values of faith, worship, and morals based on the Quran and Hadith, with the aim that students are able to practice their knowledge in their daily lives properly and correctly (Susandi, 2020). As stated in the following quote from an

informant.

*...By teaching and not only explaining the definitions and effects, but also teaching why, so that students understand the reasons why they must do all of that. By practicing and instilling it slowly. For example, with the material on prayer, not only explaining the material, but also practicing it directly (informant 1);... Starting from the teacher's own application of honesty, fairness, proper behavior, guarding the tongue, and dressing cleanly (informant 2);...by always incorporating Islamic values into the teaching and learning process, such as reciting prayers before studying, reading the Quran, and reciting Asmaul Husna (informant 3);... giving points to students, children who get a lot of points will be given rewards, so that students will compete to do good deeds, each student will be given 50 points if they do good deeds, students who violate the rules/do something bad will have 10 points deducted. If this system is implemented, students will compete to do good deeds, and they will always do good deeds because they have been taught this from a young age (informant 4)*

The second theme (high professionalism towards the profession). Teacher professionalism is rooted in the word profession, which means work based on education and expertise. Professionalism itself can mean quality, conduct that is characteristic of a profession or a professional person. Teacher professionalism can mean a professional teacher, namely a teacher who is able to plan teaching and learning programs, implement and lead the teaching and learning process, assess the progress of the teaching and learning process, and utilize the results of the assessment of learning progress and other information in improving the teaching and learning process (Sohaya, 2019). As stated by the following informant.

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The third theme (having empathy). In Islamic studies, empathy is defined as a person's ability to help, understand the thoughts, and listen to the feelings of others sincerely and wholeheartedly (Badriyah et al., 2019). As stated by the informant in the following.

*...Teachers must understand other people's feelings. As with students, teachers must understand their students' circumstances. If a student is having problems and wants to talk to the teacher, then the teacher must listen to the student's story (informant 8)...; ...have patience in teaching. For example, if a student does not understand the lesson, the teacher will explain again what the student does not understand. If there are students who misbehave, they should be reprimanded politely first, not immediately scolded (informant 9);...A teacher can teach their students about the importance of caring for others and give real examples of how small actions can have a positive impact on those around them (informant 10); ...Exemplary Islamic education teachers must have sincere concern for their students. They must understand the needs and potential of students and support their emotional and academic development (informant 11)*

The fourth theme (discipline) is a state that is formed from a process and series of behaviors that describe the values of obedience, compliance, loyalty, regularity, or order. Thus, discipline means compliance with rules or obedience to supervision, as well as control to develop orderly behavior (Marlina et al., 2021). As stated by the

following informant.

*...A disciplined teacher is one who is able to start and end lessons on time, dress neatly and appropriately, enforce classroom rules, and so on (informant 12)*

The fifth theme (responsibility) refers to an individual's attitude and behavior in carrying out the tasks and obligations that they must perform, whether those tasks are toward God, the country, the environment, society, or themselves. It is very important for students to have a sense of responsibility, especially responsibility for learning. In order to improve their responsibility for learning, teachers have an important role in school, for example in providing learning. The application of the learning methods provided by teachers must be appropriate, such as giving assignments. Giving assignments has the advantage of developing students' thinking skills, creativity, independence, and responsibility. Regarding the fifth theme of this research findings, one informant clearly stated to the researcher that:

*...a responsible teacher is one who is able to educate and teach students to become better individuals in accordance with Islamic teachings, able to deliver material in accordance with established provisions, and so on (informant 13)*

The sixth theme (motivator) found in the world of education is that the issue of motivation has always been a topic of interest. This is because motivation is seen as one of the most dominant factors in determining whether or not educational goals are achieved. Motivation comes from the word motive, which means a state, need, or impulse, whether conscious or unconscious, that leads to a certain behavior. A motive is an internal driving force within a subject to perform certain activities in order to achieve a goal. A motive is a state, need, or impulse within a person, whether conscious or unconscious, that leads to a certain behavior (Darniyanti & Saputra, 2021). As stated in the following informant.

*...as a motivator, a teacher has the duty to teach, so that our students do not become lazy in their studies, we must encourage them so that those who were initially lazy in their studies become more enthusiastic about learning (informant 14); ...motivating students who were initially shy to ask questions to become active, those who lacked confidence to become more confident. Teachers can even show their students the right path to take, not just focusing on delivering material. Of course, each teacher has a different way of motivating their students, some through words and some through actions (informant 15); ...for example, if there are students who intend to go to college but do not have sufficient financial resources, teachers must be able to convince these students that they can attend college with the help of Smart Indonesia Card, regional scholarships, and other scholarships. Sometimes students want to go to college but lack the financial resources and encouragement from those around them, so the motivation of a teacher is needed (informant 9)*

Seventh theme (communicative). Communicative teaching is a process in which teachers select and plan what students will learn (content or subject matter), decide on the best way to help students learn (learning methods and approaches), and determine how teaching success is defined and how student learning progress can be communicated (evaluation and feedback). There is a dynamic interaction between various elements in the communicative teaching process. What a teacher does with students may not be suitable or optimal if done by another teacher with a different group of students. Teachers must also pay attention to the influence of factors outside the communicative teaching process they have chosen. They must have good communication skills and be able to understand students so that they can receive the subject matter clearly and effectively (Novebri & Dewi, 2020).

*...Teachers must be able to understand and overcome the difficulties faced by students, such as listening to students attentively, appreciating every question and thought from students,*

*providing solutions, and helping students overcome learning difficulties. A student will be able to follow the teacher's instructions if the teacher is able to nurture the students well (informant 16); ...In the learning process, teachers must be able to create an interesting and engaging atmosphere (informant 17); ...they actively listen to students and provide constructive feedback. For example, they hold question and answer sessions in class to ensure that students understand the material and can ask questions or express their concerns (Informant 18); ...teachers must communicate regularly about student progress and needs using WhatsApp, face-to-face meetings, or school communication platforms to maintain school involvement and parent involvement in the education process (informant 19)*

To make it more interesting, the researcher will discuss seven findings about the characteristics of these exemplary teachers based on theory, expert opinions, and previous research findings that discuss more or less the same topic.

First, instilling Islamic values in students. Carrying out the educational process by teaching students. Education in schools, especially religious education, plays a very large role in shaping a person's religiosity. Religious experiences gained (ever done) at school have a significant impact on students' religious practices in their daily lives. Furthermore, when linked to the definition of Islamic Religious Education, Muhaimin defines Islamic Religious Education as an effort to make students able to learn, need to learn, be motivated to learn, want to learn, and be continuously interested in learning about Islam, both for the purpose of knowing how to practice religion correctly and learning about Islam as knowledge (Pitrianiingsi, 2023; Rahmatika & Susilawati, 2024).

Teachers play many roles, but the most important ones are, first, as providers of accurate knowledge to their students. Second, teachers are mentors of noble character, because noble character is the main pillar that supports the survival of a nation. Third, teachers provide guidance to their students on how to live a good life, namely, to be people who know their creator, which prevents them from becoming arrogant, and to be people who know how to do good to the Messenger, to their parents, and to others who have been kind to them. The role of Islamic religious education teachers is very important in instilling character education in students. Teachers serve as role models for their students by setting an example of good character so that they can shape a generation that also has good character.

The second is professionalism. It is well known that teachers must not only master the knowledge or science they teach, but also master how to convey that knowledge effectively and efficiently, as well as having noble character (Engkizar et al., 2018). A teacher with high dedication will always devote time, energy, and thought to the success of their students. Professional teachers master the teaching materials or subject matter to be taught in the teaching and learning interaction. They have the ability to plan, conduct, and implement learning evaluations (Assel, 2022).

Third is having empathy. Empathy is generally considered to be an individual's ability to put themselves in another person's position, where empathy refers to affective (emotional), cognitive, experiential, or both types of understanding. There is agreement that there are two necessary components: empathy implies a certain perspective in speaking and also prosocial behavior such as sharing and providing assistance. This indicates an individual's social awareness and sensitivity. Both imply prosocial behavior, the ability to recognize and understand the feelings, needs, and perceptions of others (Nababan, 2022; Randa, 2021).

Fourth is discipline. Discipline is one of the keys to success for an educator. A disciplined teacher is one who has an attitude and behavior that demonstrates compliance with applicable rules (Mahfudi, 2023). Discipline is the starting point for

character education in schools because without respect for rules, authority, and the rights of others, there can be no good environment for teaching and learning.

Fifth is responsibility. Instilling discipline indirectly instills responsibility. Moral discipline will foster responsibility in students. Moral discipline is the reason for developing students to respect rules, appreciate others, and recognize the authority of teachers; a sense of responsibility in students for the good of their character; and their responsibility for morality within a community in the classroom (Purwanti & Haerudin, 2020).

The sixth is a motivator. From Burhanuddin, Djamarah conveys that the function of a teacher as a motivator is to encourage students' enthusiasm for learning. In order to provide encouragement, teachers can analyze the problems that cause students to be lazy in learning. At all times, a teacher must be ready to be a motivator, because in educational interactions, it is not impossible for some students to experience learning difficulties.

Teachers encourage students to develop cultural literacy and citizenship awareness by developing their abilities through Scouting, literacy posts, and reading corners, so that students are sensitive to the conditions that occur in their surrounding environment. Teachers also provide motivation so that students have the personality and social skills to solve social problems with a spirit of togetherness in community and national life (Burhanuddin et al., 2022).

Teachers who are effective in carrying out their duties are those who succeed in motivating their students to learn. Therefore, to be effective in teaching, teachers must strive to understand the meaning of learning motivation itself and develop and stimulate their students' motivation to learn to the maximum level. In the teaching and learning process, teachers are required to have a variety of knowledge and understanding that is useful for generating and increasing their students' motivation while learning, so that the learning process they guide is optimally successful. Therefore, teachers need to understand, appreciate, and apply various principles and techniques to generate and increase student motivation in learning (Lestari et al., 2023; Umasugi, 2020).

Seventh is communicative. Teachers must be able to create two-way learning through good communication. There is feedback as a response from students. Students are able to convey ideas well that can be understood by others, both by teachers and other students (Junedi et al., 2020; Triwardhani et al., 2020).

Communicative teachers play an important role in the learning process, serving as a link between knowledge and students. In this context, effective communication includes two types: verbal and nonverbal. Verbal communication involves the use of words, both spoken and written, while nonverbal communication includes body language and facial expressions that convey specific meanings. Some communication principles that teachers should pay attention to include: The message conveyed must be clear and have a defined purpose. Teachers must be able to understand and empathize with what students are experiencing in order to create better relationships. Effective communication involves feedback from students, not just one-way communication from teachers to students. Communicative teachers also act as motivators, helping students feel comfortable and confident in asking questions and participating in learning. By establishing good communication, teachers can create a fun and productive learning atmosphere (Muhammad, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

A teacher who can be a role model is: i) a teacher who can instill Islamic values in students; a role model teacher in Islamic Religious Education must be able to shape students' personalities to have good character, such as being able to educate their students to have better morals. ii) professional; a professional teacher must have special abilities and expertise in the field of teaching so that they can carry out their duties well. iii) empathetic, a role model teacher must have empathy for students and other teachers. Empathy is the ability to understand and feel what others are experiencing, such as being a good listener for students who need someone to talk to. iv) disciplined, a role model teacher must be disciplined, such as arriving in class on time and ending lessons according to the scheduled time. v) Responsible: A responsible teacher is one who is able to teach students and improve their character. vi) Motivator: A role model teacher must be a motivator for their students. A motivator is someone whose profession is to motivate others, such as a teacher who must motivate their students so that they can be enthusiastic about learning again. vii) Communicative: A role model teacher is a teacher who has good communication with students or fellow teachers, such as a teacher who must be able to establish good communication with their students so that students feel more comfortable talking.

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## DECLARATIONS

### Author Contribution

**Susan San Htay:** Writing-Preparation of original manuscript, **Ei Thet Hmoo Po:** Conceptualization, Methodology, **Krim Ulwi:** Visualization, Investigation, Improve Content, **Patri & Julio Tomas Pinto:** Data accuracy, Improve Language.

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The data and language usage in this article have been validated and verified by English language experts and no AI-generated sentences are included in this article.

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The authors declare that this research was conducted without any conflict of interest in the research.

### Ethical Clearance

The place or location studied has agreed to conduct research and is willing if the results of this study are published.

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