

Sowing Habits, Reaping Character: The Role of Behaviorist Theory in Islamic Religious Education

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Abstract

The gap between religious understanding and students' everyday behavior indicates that mastery of religious knowledge does not always lead to positive habits and moral conduct. This study aims to analyze the position of behaviorist theory in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and formulate a model connecting habituation with students' character formation. This non-empirical qualitative library research employed content analysis of primary works underlying behaviorist theory and Islamic education, complemented by recent scholarly articles published between 2016 and 2026. The findings show that stimulus-response principles, repetition, reinforcement, shaping, and modeling correspond with Islamic educational concepts such as riyadhah, mujahadah, tadaruj, and uswah hasanah. These principles can support the development of worship skills, discipline, and positive behavioral habits. However, their application presents limitations when habituation relies excessively on material rewards, potentially shifting religious practice from internal awareness toward external motivation. Based on this synthesis, the study proposes a behavioristic-tarbawi model comprising stimulus arrangement and role modeling, guided habituation, meaningful reinforcement, and internalization of intention. Within this model, behaviorism functions as a pedagogical instrument for behavioral formation rather than an ontological foundation of Islamic education. The model provides a framework for PAI teachers to move beyond behavioral compliance toward independent religious awareness, although empirical testing is still required to establish its effectiveness across learning contexts.

Keywords: Behaviorist Theory, Character Formation, Habituation, Islamic Religious Education, Reinforcement.



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INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is fundamentally concerned not only with the acquisition of religious knowledge but also with the formation of individuals who embody faith, piety, moral conduct, and socially responsible behavior in everyday life. This orientation has become increasingly important because students may demonstrate adequate understanding of religious concepts while showing inconsistent discipline, honesty, responsibility, and social concern in their everyday conduct. Firjiyanti (2026) identifies a gap between students' understanding of religious material and its practical application, particularly when classroom instruction remains strongly dependent on conventional teacher-centered approaches. The persistence of this gap indicates that the effectiveness of IRE cannot be assessed solely through cognitive achievement because religious learning also requires the transformation of knowledge into repeated patterns of conduct. Behaviorist learning theory provides one established framework for explaining learning as observable behavioral change generated through relationships among stimuli, responses, repetition, and reinforcement (Schunk, 2020). In Islamic educational practice, this perspective can be recognized in activities such as repeated prayer exercises, memorization of short Qur'anic chapters, habituation to congregational worship, teacher praise, and corrective responses to inappropriate behavior. Such practices place habit formation at an important point of connection between religious instruction and the development of conduct, creating a need to examine how behavioral mechanisms can be positioned within the broader objectives of Islamic character formation.

Behaviorist theory has exerted substantial influence on educational thought because it conceptualizes learning through observable changes in behavior and emphasizes the role of

environmental conditions in shaping responses (Skinner, 1953). Its development through classical conditioning, connectionist learning, and operant conditioning established a theoretical foundation for understanding how repeated interactions between environmental stimuli and behavioral responses can produce relatively stable patterns of conduct (Pavlov, 1927). Within educational practice, the principle of repetition is particularly relevant because repeated exposure and structured practice can strengthen learned responses and gradually establish behavioral regularity. In Islamic Religious Education, these principles can be observed when students repeatedly perform religious practices under structured instructional conditions and receive responses that encourage or correct their behavior. The relevance of behaviorist principles to IRE has been explicitly discussed in relation to operant conditioning, particularly through the use of reinforcement and behavioral consequences during religious learning activities (Arifin & Humaedah, 2021). The approach has also been examined as relevant to Islamic education when behavioral formation is directed toward educational objectives that extend beyond immediate classroom compliance (Pratama, 2019).

Recent scholarship further demonstrates that behaviorist principles are already embedded in various forms of Islamic educational practice, particularly through reward, punishment, reinforcement, drilling, and habituation. Hadi and Sari (2022) found that the implementation of behaviorist principles in Islamic Religious Education was associated with the development of behaviors such as politeness, honesty, responsibility, perseverance, and religious practice. Khairunnisa and Prastowo (2024) examined drill-and-practice methods in elementary Islamic Religious Education and showed the relevance of repeated structured activities for supporting religious learning behaviors. Research on prayer instruction similarly demonstrates that behaviorist approaches can be applied through systematic repetition and behavioral practice to facilitate the acquisition of religious routines (Nuralim et al., 2023). Other scholarship has expanded the discussion from the acquisition of isolated behaviors toward broader Islamic character formation, indicating that behaviorist strategies can contribute to character development when integrated with religious educational objectives (Wardati et al., 2025). These findings suggest that behavioral mechanisms may provide practical means for translating abstract religious instruction into concrete habits, but they also reveal a conceptual distinction between producing observable conduct and cultivating the deeper moral orientation that gives such conduct religious meaning. The distinction becomes particularly important because Islamic character cannot be adequately understood as a collection of externally visible behaviors detached from intention, consciousness, and the internalization of religious values.

Despite the growing literature, important conceptual and empirical limitations remain unresolved concerning the relationship between externally regulated behavior and the internal dimensions of Islamic character. Much existing research emphasizes reward, punishment, reinforcement, and repetition as instructional techniques, while comparatively limited attention is given to explaining how these mechanisms interact with intention, sincerity, spiritual awareness, and the internalization of religious values. A review of behaviorist theory from an Islamic educational perspective indicates that behavioral principles require contextualization within the broader aims and values of Islamic education rather than being adopted as a self-sufficient educational philosophy (Affandi et al., 2025). The problem becomes more complex when external rewards constitute the dominant mechanism because students may associate desirable religious conduct primarily with material or social consequences rather than with an internally meaningful commitment to Islamic values. Studies of reward and punishment demonstrate that behavioral consequences can influence student conduct, while their educational effects depend on how such mechanisms are designed and implemented within the learning environment (Anggraini et al., 2019). Recent attempts to integrate behaviorist theory with the educational thought of Al-Ghazali have begun to address this problem by relating behavioral discipline to processes of self-training and spiritual cultivation (Khasan et al., 2026). Yet the literature still lacks a sufficiently systematic framework explaining how externally reinforced behavior can develop into stable habits and subsequently become connected with conscious internalization of Islamic values.

This unresolved relationship carries theoretical and practical significance because an overly narrow application of behaviorism could reduce Islamic Religious Education to a system of rewards and sanctions intended primarily to secure obedience. Such an orientation may produce behavior that depends heavily on external supervision, whereas Islamic education seeks to cultivate conduct grounded in faith, moral awareness, and responsibility that can persist beyond situations involving direct

reinforcement. Islamic character education has been associated with efforts to develop students' independence by connecting religious values with broader processes of character formation (Abrori & Ikhwan, 2024). At the same time, behavioral principles should not be dismissed entirely because repetition, habituation, discipline, and gradual practice have important parallels within classical Islamic educational thought (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). Ibn Khaldun's educational perspective also provides a classical basis for understanding gradual practice and habituation as processes through which behavioral dispositions may become established (Ibn Khaldun, n.d.). The central practical challenge is therefore to determine how reinforcement can function as an initial pedagogical scaffold while gradually directing students toward conscious appreciation and internal commitment to religious values rather than permanent dependence on external rewards.

The present study is positioned at the intersection of educational psychology and Islamic pedagogy by examining behaviorism not as a comprehensive philosophy of Islamic education but as a pedagogical mechanism that can be critically integrated into the formation of religious habits and character. The study first identifies the fundamental principles of behaviorist learning and examines their conceptual correspondence with selected principles within the Islamic educational tradition. It then analyzes the application of reinforcement, repetition, habituation, and behavioral regulation in Islamic Religious Education while considering their potential and limitations for character formation. The analysis further develops a behaviorist-tarbawi framework that conceptualizes behavioral habituation as an initial pedagogical process that can be directed toward the gradual development of conscious and internally meaningful religious conduct. Rather than positioning observable behavior as the final educational outcome, the proposed framework distinguishes between externally reinforced action, stabilized habit, and progressive internalization of Islamic values as interconnected dimensions of character formation. Theoretically, the study seeks to clarify the position of behaviorism as a pedagogical and methodological resource that can support Islamic education without determining its ultimate conception of human development, morality, and religious purpose. Methodologically, the study contributes a structured conceptual synthesis that brings psychological learning theory into dialogue with Islamic pedagogical thought and provides a basis for understanding how the formation of habits can be connected with the development of religious character.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a non-empirical qualitative library research design because the data are derived entirely from published literature rather than from direct data collection involving students, teachers, or educational institutions. The study is conceptually oriented toward examining the position of behaviorist theory in the formation of habits and character within Islamic Religious Education (IRE) (Rufaedah, 2018). The data sources comprise theoretical literature, Islamic educational scholarship, academic books, and peer-reviewed journal articles addressing behaviorism, IRE, habituation, behavioral reinforcement, and character formation. Literature was selected according to its substantive relevance to the research focus, scholarly credibility, contemporary relevance, and the availability of sufficient information for systematic analysis (Rahmah & Aly, 2023). The analytical framework centers on key behaviorist concepts, including stimulus–response relationships, repetition, reinforcement, punishment, and habit formation, which are examined in relation to the objectives and normative foundations of Islamic education (Affandi et al., 2025). This approach enables the study to examine the conceptual relationship between mechanisms of behavioral formation and the broader aims of Islamic education without assuming that observable behavioral change automatically represents the internalization of religious values.

Data analysis was conducted through content analysis involving systematic reading, identification, coding, categorization, comparison, and synthesis of relevant arguments across the selected sources. The initial stage focused on identifying concepts that explain behavioral formation, while the subsequent stage compared these concepts with principles of habituation, moral education, and character development within Islamic educational thought (Pratama, 2019). The synthesis stage then examined areas of conceptual convergence, divergence, limitation, and possible integration between behaviorist principles and a tarbawi framework in Islamic Religious Education. Analytical rigor was strengthened through source triangulation by comparing perspectives from educational psychology, behaviorist scholarship, and Islamic educational literature to reduce dependence on a single theoretical perspective (Rahman & Zamakhsyari, 2025). The analysis also maintained a conceptual

distinction between behaviorist principles as pedagogical mechanisms and Islamic educational objectives as the normative framework for human and character development. The resulting synthesis provides a conceptual basis for understanding how habituation and behavioral reinforcement may function as pedagogical stages toward religious character formation, while empirical testing of the proposed framework remains necessary in future IRE research (Khasan et al., 2026).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Behaviorism as a Theory of Learning: Genealogy and Core Principles

Behaviorism emerged as a major psychological orientation that shifted attention toward observable behavior and the environmental conditions associated with its formation. Learning within this perspective is understood through changes in behavioral responses that can be identified through interactions between stimuli, responses, and their consequences. Nauli et al. (2022) explain that behaviorist thought places observable behavioral change at the center of learning processes rather than treating internal mental activity as the primary object of analysis. This orientation subsequently influenced educational practices by encouraging teachers to organize learning environments through structured stimuli, repeated activities, and identifiable behavioral outcomes. Schunk (2020) describes behaviorist learning as a process in which environmental events shape the probability of particular responses through conditioning and reinforcement. In educational contexts, this theoretical orientation provides a systematic explanation of how repeated experiences can gradually establish stable patterns of behavior.

The development of behaviorism was closely associated with early experimental studies of learning and conditioning, particularly the work of Ivan Pavlov on conditioned reflexes. Pavlov (1927) demonstrated that a previously neutral stimulus could acquire the capacity to elicit a response after being repeatedly associated with an existing stimulus. This mechanism became the basis of classical conditioning and established the importance of environmental cues in the formation of behavioral responses. Suryatno (2023) explains that conditioning theory conceptualizes learning as an association-building process in which particular stimuli become connected with particular responses through repeated experience. In educational practice, this principle suggests that predictable classroom routines, cues, and environmental arrangements can influence students' behavioral readiness. The principle is relevant when learning requires consistent responses to recurring situations, although conditioning alone does not adequately explain complex forms of moral reasoning and conscious value formation.

Thorndike subsequently expanded the behavioral explanation of learning through his work on stimulus-response connections and the laws governing their strengthening. His perspective emphasized that responses followed by satisfying consequences tend to become stronger, whereas responses that do not produce satisfying consequences become less likely to recur. Amsari (2018) explains that Thorndike's behaviorist theory has important implications for educational practice because repeated exercise and the consequences of responses can strengthen learned behaviors. The principle of exercise is particularly significant because repetition allows a response to become increasingly established through continuous practice. Abidin (2022) similarly indicates that behaviorist learning can be implemented through repeated activities that encourage learners to develop stable behavioral patterns. Within education, repetition therefore functions as a mechanism for consolidating responses that are expected to become increasingly consistent. This theoretical foundation is particularly relevant to educational practices involving regular and repeated religious activities.

Skinner developed behaviorism further through the concept of operant conditioning, which emphasizes the role of consequences in maintaining or modifying behavior. Skinner (1953) argued that behavior is influenced by the consequences that follow it, making reinforcement an important mechanism for increasing the likelihood of desired responses. Positive reinforcement provides a favorable consequence following a behavior, whereas punishment is intended to reduce the recurrence of undesirable behavior. Rahmah and Aly (2023) explain that the educational application of behaviorism commonly involves reinforcement, repetition, and carefully organized learning conditions to strengthen targeted behaviors. Skinner's concept of shaping also demonstrates that complex behavior can be developed progressively by reinforcing successive approximations toward a desired response. This mechanism allows teachers to divide difficult learning tasks into smaller behavioral steps rather than expecting learners to demonstrate complete mastery immediately. Such an approach is particularly

applicable to practical learning activities in which observable improvement can be identified through successive stages of practice.

Behaviorist theory later developed beyond a strict stimulus-response framework through greater attention to observation and modeling. Bandura (1977) proposed that individuals can acquire behaviors by observing the actions of others and the consequences associated with those actions, thereby broadening explanations of learning beyond direct reinforcement. This perspective is important because learners do not always need to experience reinforcement personally before developing a particular behavioral response. Slavin (2018) explains that observational processes allow learners to acquire behavioral patterns through models whose actions provide information for subsequent behavior. In classroom settings, teachers and peers can therefore function as behavioral models whose actions communicate expectations alongside verbal instruction. Soki (2019) emphasizes that the contribution of behavioristic theory to education lies in its practical capacity to organize learning experiences, behavioral reinforcement, and observable outcomes. The inclusion of modeling also creates an important conceptual connection with educational traditions that emphasize exemplary conduct.

Taken together, the major strands of behaviorist theory identify several interconnected mechanisms of learning, including environmental stimulation, association, repetition, reinforcement, consequences, shaping, and observation. Affandi et al. (2025) argue that behavioristic theory remains relevant to Islamic educational contexts when its practical mechanisms are integrated with broader educational purposes rather than treated as an independent educational philosophy. From this perspective, behaviorism can explain how particular religious behaviors may be initiated, repeated, strengthened, and stabilized through structured educational experiences. Majid and Suyadi (2020) demonstrate that behavioristic principles can be applied in Islamic Religious Education through systematic practice and reinforcement of desired learning behaviors. The theoretical contribution of behaviorism therefore lies primarily in explaining the pedagogical mechanisms through which behavioral habits can be cultivated. Its explanatory scope becomes more limited when learning is defined through internal intention, moral consciousness, spiritual awareness, and autonomous commitment. These limitations provide the basis for examining how behaviorist mechanisms can be positioned within Islamic educational thought without reducing religious character to externally observable behavior.

Convergences and Boundaries between Behaviorism and Islamic Education

The relationship between behaviorist learning theory and Islamic education can be understood through the shared recognition that repeated experience plays an important role in forming stable patterns of conduct. Behaviorism explains repetition as a mechanism for strengthening stimulus-response connections, whereas Islamic educational thought places repetition within processes such as *tikrar*, *ta'awwud*, and *riyadhah*. Nuralim et al. (2023) demonstrate that repeated practice is particularly relevant in learning prayer because correct performance requires continuous guidance and habituation. Repetition in this context does not merely increase behavioral frequency but can gradually establish consistency in performing religious practices. Al-Ghazali (n.d.) similarly places *riyadhah* within a broader process of training the self through repeated practices directed toward moral and spiritual refinement. The convergence therefore lies in the recognition that repeated action can shape conduct, while the difference concerns the educational purpose attached to that conduct.

The principle of environmental conditioning also has a meaningful correspondence with the Islamic educational emphasis on creating a supportive religious environment. Behaviorist theory views environmental stimuli as factors that influence the emergence and maintenance of particular responses, while Islamic education recognizes the influence of family, peers, teachers, and institutional culture on learners' behavioral development. Karnila et al. (2023) show that religious activities and PAI competencies can function together as important components of character formation within an educational environment. A religiously structured environment can provide recurring cues that encourage students to perform prayer, recite the Qur'an, maintain discipline, and practice appropriate interpersonal conduct. Alfajri et al. (2026) explain that the integration of behavioristic principles with Islamic educational values becomes more meaningful when environmental conditioning is connected with spiritual and moral objectives. The correspondence is therefore located not simply in controlling the environment but in organizing environmental experiences that repeatedly expose learners to desirable religious practices.

Table 1. Correspondence between Behaviorist Concepts and Islamic Educational Traditions

Behaviorist Concept	Correspondence in Islamic Education	Points of Convergence and Limits of Compatibility
Stimulus and environmental conditioning (Pavlov)	<i>Bi'ah islamiyah</i> , religious environment, righteous peers, and school religious culture	Environment influences and shapes habits, but is not the sole determinant because of <i>fitrah</i> , reason, and human will
Repetition/exercise law (Thorndike)	<i>Tikrar</i> , <i>ta'awwud</i> , and <i>riyadhah</i>	Repetition strengthens habits, but Islamic education extends beyond outward habits toward character and <i>tazkiyat al-nafs</i>
Positive/negative reinforcement (Skinner)	<i>Tsawab</i> , <i>targhib</i> , praise, prayer, and proportionate <i>'iqab/tarhib</i>	Consequences can strengthen or reduce behavior, but reward should not become the final purpose; the ultimate orientation is God's pleasure and conscious goodness
Shaping	<i>Tadarruj</i>	Gradual behavioral formation corresponds with staged religious instruction, such as gradual prayer education
Observational learning (Bandura)	<i>Uswah hasanah</i> and the teacher as role model	Observation and modeling correspond with <i>uswah</i> , but Islamic modeling also carries moral and spiritual significance

The correspondence between behaviorism and Islamic education becomes particularly visible in the use of reinforcement and consequences during learning. Behaviorism explains reinforcement as a mechanism for increasing the probability that a particular response will recur, whereas Islamic educational traditions contain concepts such as *tsawab*, *targhib*, praise, encouragement, and proportionate corrective measures. Pratama (2019) argues that behavioristic principles can be relevant to Islamic Religious Education when reinforcement is connected with the formation of desirable religious behavior. Praise and encouragement can provide immediate recognition when students demonstrate honesty, discipline, responsibility, or consistency in worship. Such practices may strengthen the behavioral tendency to repeat positive actions, particularly during the early stages of learning. At the same time, Islamic education gives reinforcement a broader ethical orientation because the desired behavior is not expected to remain dependent on external rewards.

The principles of gradual learning and behavioral modeling provide another important point of convergence. Skinner's concept of shaping explains how complex behavior can be developed through successive steps, while Islamic education contains the principle of *tadarruj*, which recognizes the importance of gradual development according to learners' capacities and stages. Khasan et al. (2026) illustrate the relevance of gradual behavioral formation in integrating behavioristic principles with Islamic perspectives on student discipline in PAI. Bandura's emphasis on observational learning also corresponds with the Islamic concept of *uswah hasanah*, in which exemplary conduct becomes an important source of learning. Bandura (1977) explains that individuals can acquire behavioral patterns through observing models and the consequences associated with their actions. In Islamic education, however, the teacher's example is not merely a behavioral stimulus because exemplary conduct also communicates moral values and religious commitments.

These correspondences do not mean that behaviorism and Islamic education are theoretically identical. Behaviorism primarily explains learning through observable behavior, environmental influences, repetition, reinforcement, and consequences, whereas Islamic education addresses a broader conception of human development involving *fitrah*, reason, moral consciousness, intention, and spiritual orientation. Rufaedah (2018) argues that behavioristic theory can be considered from an Islamic perspective when its educational mechanisms are understood within the wider framework of

Islamic values. A learner may repeatedly perform an act correctly while still requiring deeper processes of understanding and intentional commitment for that act to become part of religious character. Rahman and Zamakhsyari (2025) emphasize that behavioristic learning in Islam needs to be connected with dimensions of human development that extend beyond externally observable responses. This distinction prevents religious education from being reduced to behavioral compliance alone.

The distinction between pedagogical mechanism and educational purpose is consequently central to integrating behaviorism with Islamic education. Behavioristic mechanisms can explain how an intended behavior is introduced, repeated, reinforced, and gradually stabilized, while Islamic educational thought determines why the behavior should be cultivated and what kind of person the learner is expected to become. Affandi et al. (2025) emphasize that behavioristic principles require integration with Islamic educational values when applied within PAI. The resulting relationship can be understood as selective integration rather than theoretical equivalence. Behaviorism contributes practical mechanisms for organizing learning experiences, whereas Islamic education provides the moral and spiritual framework that gives those mechanisms direction. This distinction becomes important when behavioral success is evaluated not only through visible compliance but also through the development of meaningful religious character.

Application of Behaviorism in Islamic Religious Education: Practices, Contributions, and Limitations

The application of behavioristic theory in Islamic Religious Education can be observed most clearly in learning activities that require repeated practice and the formation of consistent religious behavior. PAI contains various practical competencies, including prayer, ablution, Qur'anic recitation, memorization, discipline, honesty, and other forms of religious conduct that require learners to move from instruction toward repeated performance. Hadi and Sari (2022) explain that behavioristic principles can be implemented in PAI through structured practice, reinforcement, and repetition of desired responses. Drill and practice are particularly relevant when learners need to master sequences of actions or reproduce specific religious recitations accurately. Khairunnisa and Prastowo (2024) show that the use of drill and practice in PAI provides a structured mechanism for strengthening students' mastery of religious learning materials. The pedagogical value of this approach lies in its capacity to transform initially guided actions into increasingly stable routines through systematic practice.

One of the most direct applications is the use of repeated practice in worship-related skills. Prayer movements, prayer recitations, ablution procedures, and memorization of short surahs involve sequences that can be divided into manageable steps and practiced repeatedly. Nuralim et al. (2023) demonstrate that behavioristic principles can support prayer learning by combining repeated practice with correction and reinforcement. Immediate feedback enables students to identify incorrect responses before those responses become established patterns. Majid and Suyadi (2020) similarly describe behavioristic learning in PAI as an approach that can organize learning activities around observable responses and systematic reinforcement. The process becomes more effective when repetition is accompanied by explanations of the meaning and purpose of the religious practice rather than being treated as mechanical reproduction. This combination allows behavioral accuracy to function as an initial pedagogical target while leaving room for deeper understanding and religious awareness.

Table 2. Applications of Behaviorism in Islamic Religious Education, Contributions to Character, and Potential Risks

Form of Application	Example of Practice in Islamic Religious Education	Potential Contribution	Risks and Critical Notes
Drill and practice	Wudu, prayer movements and recitations, and memorization of prayers or short surahs with immediate correction	Accuracy in worship, discipline, and habit formation	May become mechanical or monotonous when disconnected from meaning

Positive reinforcement	Praise for honesty, points, or opportunities to lead prayer	Motivation, sense of appreciation, and repetition of positive behavior	May create dependence on material rewards or shift the learner's intention
Negative reinforcement and educational sanctions	Reprimands, light educational tasks, easing tasks for disciplined students, or point deductions	Awareness of consequences and behavioral order	Must remain proportionate and nonviolent to prevent fear-based learning
Environmental conditioning/routine	Weekly religious activities, Qur'an recitation, and <i>Duha</i> prayer	Religious culture and sustained religious habits	May produce formalism when activities lack meaningful understanding

The second important application concerns reinforcement as a means of maintaining desirable behavior during the learning process. Teachers may provide verbal praise, recognition, opportunities to lead religious activities, or other educational forms of appreciation when students demonstrate discipline, honesty, responsibility, or consistency in worship. Rozi and Arifin (2025) explain that Skinner's behavioristic approach can be used to strengthen students' motivation in PAI through reinforcement directed toward desired learning behaviors. Reinforcement can be particularly useful during the initial stages of habituation because students receive clear information about which behaviors are valued within the learning environment. Chen (2023) notes that reward and punishment can influence children's behavior when consequences are consistently connected with particular actions. Within Islamic education, however, reinforcement needs to remain proportionate and educational rather than becoming the principal reason for performing religious conduct. The pedagogical objective is to use external reinforcement as temporary support while gradually encouraging learners to recognize the intrinsic moral and religious value of the behavior.

Environmental conditioning and routine also provide a practical mechanism for embedding religious practices within everyday school life. Regular Qur'an recitation, congregational prayer, *Duha* prayer, religious greetings, and scheduled Islamic activities can create recurring environmental cues that encourage students to perform expected behaviors. Abrori and Ikhwan (2024) emphasize the importance of Islamic religious education values in developing independent character through educational practices that encourage students to internalize responsible conduct. Repeated exposure to religious routines can make desirable behaviors more familiar and easier to reproduce in appropriate situations. Wardati et al. (2025) indicate that integrating behaviorist principles into Islamic character building can support the development of consistent student conduct within the madrasah environment. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of routine depends on whether students understand the values represented by those activities. Routine that is maintained solely through external control may produce visible compliance without necessarily producing conscious commitment to religious values.

The practical contribution of behaviorism in PAI therefore lies primarily in its capacity to provide structure for habit formation and observable behavioral development. Repetition can strengthen practical religious skills, reinforcement can clarify behavioral expectations, and structured environments can provide consistent opportunities for practicing desirable conduct. Anggraini et al. (2019) show that reward and punishment can have identifiable implications for student behavior when implemented within educational settings. These mechanisms can be useful for establishing foundational discipline, particularly when learners are still developing the behavioral consistency required for religious practices. Abidin (2022) also emphasizes the relevance of behavioristic principles for developing behavioral patterns through structured learning experiences. The contribution should nevertheless be interpreted as pedagogical rather than comprehensive because stable outward behavior does not automatically demonstrate internalized religious values. PAI therefore requires behavioral mechanisms to be connected with understanding, reflection, moral reasoning, and intentionality.

The limitations of behavioristic application become particularly important when reinforcement, repetition, or sanctions are used without sufficient attention to meaning and learner autonomy. Excessive drill may encourage mechanical performance, while excessive dependence on rewards can

shift students' attention from the value of an action toward the consequence received after performing it. Arifin and Humaedah (2021) demonstrate that operant conditioning can be applied in PAI learning, but its implementation requires careful attention to the educational context and the desired behavioral outcomes. Punitive practices also require clear boundaries because fear-based compliance may produce short-term behavioral changes without supporting positive moral development. Rahmah and Aly (2023) emphasize that behavioristic strategies need to be implemented through appropriately structured learning conditions rather than through reinforcement alone. A balanced application therefore requires teachers to determine which behaviors should be habituated, which forms of reinforcement are educationally appropriate, and when external reinforcement should be reduced. The resulting approach positions behaviorism as one component of PAI pedagogy rather than as a complete framework for developing Islamic character.

The Behavioristic-Tarbawi Model: From Habituation to Internalization

The preceding analysis indicates that behavioristic mechanisms can contribute to Islamic Religious Education when they are placed within a broader *tarbawi* framework. The central issue is not whether behavior should be habituated, but how habituation can develop toward conscious, meaningful, and morally oriented religious conduct. Hasibuan (2020) explains that Islamic Religious Education requires learning strategies that connect religious knowledge, practice, and character development within an integrated educational process. A behavioristic approach can provide the initial structure through which learners encounter stimuli, observe models, practice desired behaviors, and receive appropriate feedback. Ibn Khaldun (n.d.) similarly emphasizes the importance of gradual formation and repeated practice in the development of stable dispositions or *malakah*. The integration of these perspectives produces a conceptual model in which external behavioral formation serves as an entry point toward deeper religious internalization rather than becoming the final educational objective.

The first stage of the proposed model is stimulus arrangement and role modeling, in which teachers intentionally organize the learning environment and demonstrate the behaviors expected from students. Religious symbols, scheduled activities, classroom routines, teacher conduct, and peer practices can function as environmental cues that repeatedly expose learners to desirable patterns of conduct. Pavlov's (1927) conditioning framework provides a theoretical basis for understanding how recurring environmental cues can become associated with particular behavioral responses. In Islamic education, this process can be strengthened when teachers themselves demonstrate the conduct that they expect students to practice. Bandura (1977) explains that observation allows learners to acquire behavioral patterns through exposure to models, making teacher conduct an important component of the learning environment. The stage therefore combines environmental structuring with *uswah hasanah*, allowing students to encounter religious behavior not only as an instruction but also as an observable example.

Table 3. Behavioristic-Tarbawi Model for Islamic Religious Education Learning

Stage	Behaviorist Principle and Tarbawi Correspondence	Operationalization in Learning	References
Stimulus arrangement and role modeling	Conditioning/ environment and <i>bi'ah islamiyah/ uswah hasanah</i>	Teacher designs religious rules, worship schedules, environmental cues, and models the expected behavior	Pavlov; Bandura; Karnila et al.
Guided habituation	Repetition/shaping and <i>riyadhah/tadarruj</i>	Practice wudu, prayer, and memorization through immediate correction, small steps, and meaningful guidance	Thorndike; Al-Ghazali; Khairunnisa & Prastowo
Meaningful reinforcement	Positive/negative reinforcement and	Value-linked praise, social recognition, and honored roles while limiting material	Skinner; Pratama

Internalization of intention	<i>tsawab/targhib/ 'iqab</i> proportionally	rewards and avoiding harmful sanctions	Khasan et al.
	Gradual reduction of external reinforcement and <i>ikhlas /muraqabah /tazkiyat al-nafs</i>	Reflection, worship and character journals, reduction of external reinforcement after stable behavior, and cultivation of awareness of God	

The second stage is guided habituation, which transforms initial exposure and observation into repeated practice under teacher supervision. Students are guided to perform religious behaviors through manageable steps, receive immediate correction, and repeat the activity until the desired response becomes increasingly stable. Khairunnisa and Prastowo (2024) demonstrate that drill and practice can provide a structured mechanism for developing competence in PAI through repeated performance and correction. The process corresponds with *riyadhah*, in which disciplined practice contributes to the formation of desirable dispositions through continuous training. Al-Ghazali (n.d.) places repeated self-training within a wider process of disciplining the self, indicating that repetition becomes educationally meaningful when directed toward moral refinement. Guided habituation therefore differs from mechanical repetition because the teacher progressively connects behavioral practice with understanding, purpose, and appropriate religious meaning.

The third stage is meaningful reinforcement, in which consequences are used to strengthen desirable conduct while gradually shifting attention away from external rewards. Praise, social recognition, opportunities to perform valued roles, and constructive feedback can communicate that honesty, discipline, responsibility, and religious commitment are valued within the learning environment. Skinner (1953) provides the behavioral foundation for using consequences to increase the recurrence of desired responses, but Islamic education requires these consequences to remain proportionate to the moral purpose of learning. Pratama (2019) emphasizes that behavioristic mechanisms can be relevant to PAI when they are connected with Islamic educational objectives rather than being treated as isolated techniques. The teacher can therefore use reinforcement as temporary pedagogical support while explaining the values underlying the behavior being reinforced. This approach reduces the risk that students interpret religious conduct merely as a means of obtaining rewards or avoiding sanctions.

Table 4. Illustration of the Behavioristic-Tarbawi Model in Three Islamic Religious Education Topics

Stage	Congregational Prayer	Short-Surah Memorization	Honesty (<i>Adab</i>)
Stimulus arrangement and role modeling	Teacher models orderly congregational prayer and establishes prayer-time cues	Teacher demonstrates correct recitation and establishes regular memorization cues	Teacher consistently demonstrates truthful communication and creates situations requiring honest responses
Guided habituation	Students repeatedly practice prayer procedures and congregational discipline with correction	Students practice verses repeatedly with pronunciation and memorization guidance	Students practice truthful responses in classroom situations and receive guidance when mistakes occur
Meaningful reinforcement	Praise and opportunities for responsibility are given for consistent participation	Recognition is provided for effort, accuracy, and persistence rather than memorization alone	Recognition emphasizes the value of truthfulness and responsibility rather than material reward

Internalization intention	of	Students are guided to understand prayer as worship and responsibility before Allah	Students connect memorization with understanding and appreciation of the Qur'an	Students are encouraged to practice honesty even when external recognition is absent
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The fourth stage is internalization of intention, which represents the transition from externally supported behavior toward internally guided religious conduct. At this stage, reinforcement is gradually reduced as students become capable of maintaining desirable behavior without continuous external consequences. Khasan et al. (2026) demonstrate the relevance of integrating behavioristic principles with Islamic perspectives so that behavioral discipline can develop within a broader religious framework. Internalization requires learners to understand why a behavior is important and to connect it with *ikhlas*, *muraqabah*, moral responsibility, and awareness of God. Rahman and Zamakhsyari (2025) emphasize that behavioristic learning in an Islamic framework needs to accommodate dimensions of human development that cannot be fully represented through observable responses. The teacher's role consequently shifts from controlling behavior toward facilitating reflection, understanding, and independent moral commitment. At this stage, successful learning is indicated not merely by whether students perform a desired action in the teacher's presence but by whether the behavior remains meaningful when external supervision and rewards are absent.

The four-stage model positions behavioristic mechanisms as an initial pathway toward broader Islamic character formation rather than as a complete explanation of religious learning. The teacher begins by organizing stimuli and modeling conduct, continues through guided repetition, uses meaningful reinforcement, and gradually facilitates the internalization of religious intention. Wardati et al. (2025) indicate that the integration of behaviorist theory into Islamic character building can support the development of consistent student conduct when behavioral strategies are connected with Islamic values. The model also allows behavioristic techniques to operate alongside other educational perspectives because character formation involves observation, understanding, reflection, motivation, and personal commitment. Abrori and Ikhwan (2024) emphasize that strengthening Islamic religious values is closely related to the development of independent character, suggesting that educational success extends beyond externally regulated behavior. The proposed model should therefore be understood as a conceptual framework derived from the literature rather than as an empirically validated intervention model. Future empirical research can examine how each stage operates across different ages, religious competencies, school environments, and forms of Islamic character development.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that behavioristic theory occupies a conditional position within Islamic Religious Education (PAI), offering practical pedagogical mechanisms while requiring clear boundaries in its application. The principles of stimulus-response, repetition, reinforcement, shaping, and modeling correspond with several Islamic educational practices, including *ta'awwud*, *riyadhah*, *tadarruj*, and *uswah hasanah*, particularly in developing worship skills, discipline, and positive behavioral habits. The analysis indicates that repetition and structured practice can strengthen desired religious behaviors, while appropriate reinforcement can help maintain consistent participation and encourage the repetition of constructive conduct. However, behavioristic mechanisms alone cannot fully represent the broader objectives of Islamic education because religious character also involves intention, moral consciousness, spiritual awareness, and the internalization of Islamic values. Excessive dependence on external rewards, punishment, or continuous teacher supervision may produce behavioral compliance without ensuring that learners understand the meaning of their actions or maintain them independently. Behaviorism can therefore function as a pedagogical instrument for behavioral formation when its mechanisms are directed toward the moral, spiritual, and educational objectives of Islam. Effective habituation in PAI requires a gradual movement from externally supported and observable behavior toward conscious commitment to religious values and responsible practice.

Based on this conceptual synthesis, the study proposes a behavioristic-tarbawi model consisting of four interconnected stages: stimulus arrangement and role modeling, guided habituation, meaningful reinforcement, and internalization of intention. The first stage emphasizes the creation of a consistent religious environment and exemplary teacher behavior that provides learners with clear behavioral cues

and models of Islamic conduct. The second stage develops desired behaviors through repeated practice, gradual guidance, correction, and structured habituation in activities such as prayer, Qur'anic memorization, and religious etiquette. The third stage employs reinforcement in a meaningful and proportionate manner so that recognition supports positive behavior without becoming the primary motivation for religious practice. The fourth stage directs learners toward internalization by gradually reducing dependence on external reinforcement and strengthening awareness of intention, responsibility, and accountability before Allah. This model remains conceptual because it was developed through library-based synthesis rather than empirical testing, so its effectiveness in producing sustainable Islamic character cannot yet be established. Future empirical research can examine the model across different educational levels and religious learning contexts to determine the conditions under which behavioristic strategies can develop from externally supported habituation into autonomous behavior grounded in Islamic values.

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