

Revitalizing Exemplary-Based History Learning to Strengthen the Character of the Younger Generation

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Abstract

Optimal history learning is inherently rich in life values that have great potential to shape the character of the younger generation. Therefore, teachers need to revitalize history learning so that the exemplary values contained in historical materials can be understood, internalized, and implemented by students in their daily lives. This study aims to analyze the revitalization of exemplar-based history learning to strengthen the character of the younger generation. The study used a qualitative, descriptive design and was conducted at State Senior High School 1 Takengon, Aceh. Data collection was conducted through observation and interviews with two teachers and five students, who served as research informants. Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. The study's results show that teaching history is an effective way to instill important values such as honesty, responsibility, and love for the country. When students have learning experiences that matter to them and relate to real life, they can not only understand what happened in the past but also take in the good values found in those events. Because of this, history classes help build students' character and make their sense of national identity stronger in today's changing world.

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1. INTRODUCTION

History learning plays a strategic role in shaping the character of the younger generation, as it embodies exemplary values born from the nation's long history (Fadli et al., 2022). History is not merely a record of past events, but also a reflection of values that can serve as guidelines for facing present and future challenges (Ima et al., 2022). However, in the rapid pace of the digital era, history learning often loses its appeal and becomes mired in rote learning.

The reality on the ground shows that many students still view history as a boring, irrelevant, and overly theoretical subject (Sopacua et al., 2020). Learning that focuses on the chronology of events, dates, and figures without delving into deeper meanings makes students less able to internalize the values contained within. Consequently, history learning does not fully contribute to optimal character formation and often becomes merely a formality in the curriculum (Basri et al., 2024).

High school students, as the current generation of young people, face increasingly complex moral and social challenges, such as a crisis of integrity, low social empathy, and the negative impacts of globalization and digitalization (Marovah & Ncube, 2024). This phenomenon

demonstrates a gap between the historical knowledge learned in school and the implementation of values in everyday life (Popa, 2022; Suciati et al., 2023). Therefore, efforts are needed to revitalize history learning, focusing not only on cognitive aspects but also emphasizing character building through exemplary values (Nokes, 2022; Sakti et al., 2024).

Making history lessons more engaging by telling the stories of great people is a powerful way to address this problem. Mansyur et al., (2025) emphasizes the importance of incorporating values such as honesty, courage, responsibility, and love for the country in classroom lessons, so students can not only look up to these values but also practice them every day. In the same way, Agus Mursidi, (2025) says that sharing these good values is important for helping students grow in character and know right from wrong over time. This way, history becomes more than just old events and turns into a real source of inspiration, helping students face future challenges with lessons learned from the past.

This research examines how teaching history can help students grow in more caring and meaningful ways. Making history lessons more lively, as in this example, is not just a way to teach, but an important step in helping young people build strong character in a fast-changing world. Studying history by learning from role models is a smart way to help young people develop strong values to navigate the challenges of today's world.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. Design Research

This study uses qualitative (Johnson & Christensen, 2022) in-depth observation and description to show how learning history can help teach students important values (Fadli, 2021). By watching how lessons unfold, how teachers and students interact, and how history is taught, the study shows that every event and person in history can help students learn values such as honesty, courage, responsibility, and love for their country. Students do not just receive information but are encouraged to think about, understand, and connect these values to their own lives. History lessons are no longer just about memorizing facts, but have become a real and meaningful experience that helps shape students' character.

The teachers and students in this study were from State Senior High School 1 Takengon, Aceh, and were chosen to represent a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and characteristics. This helped the researchers obtain more complete and varied information and examine history learning through good examples from different points of view.

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection this research was carefully conducted to understand how learning from role models works in real classrooms. The methods used included watching what happened in class and talking to people there. Observations were used to examine how teachers and students interacted, which teaching methods were used, and how role-model values were incorporated into the history lessons. By watching these activities, researchers got a real sense of how learning happens in the classroom.

Interviews were held with teachers and students to learn about their understanding, experiences, and views on learning history with role models. Interviews with teachers focused on how they teach, choose materials, and try to build good character. Interviews with students aimed to find out how well they understand and use role-model values in their daily lives. By using both methods, the data collected gives a fuller and clearer picture of how character is built through history lessons. The following shows the interview questions used for both teachers and students.

Table 1. Interview Guidelines for Teachers

No	Aspect	Question
1	Understanding	What do you understand about history learning based on exemplary values?
2	Planning	How do you integrate exemplary values into history materials?
3	Implementation	What methods do you use to teach these values?
4	Media	What learning media do you use?



5	Impact	Do you see any changes in students' attitudes after learning?
6	Challenges	What difficulties do you face during the teaching process?

Table 2. Interview Grid for Students

No	Aspect	Question
1	Understanding	What do you understand from history lessons?
2	Values	What values do you learn from historical figures?
3	Experience	How is your experience when learning history?
4	Application	Do you apply these values in your daily life?
5	Perception	Do you find history learning interesting? Why?
6	Expectation	What kind of history learning do you want?

The interview instrument framework is designed to be simple yet focused, exploring in depth the practice of role-model-based history learning. The primary focus is to identify how teachers plan, implement, and evaluate learning that incorporates exemplary values, as well as how students understand, experience, and implement these values in their daily lives.

2.3. Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study used several methods to check and compare information, ensuring the findings were accurate and detailed, following the Miles and Huberman method (Maxwell & Reybald, 2015; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The analysis had three main steps: first, picking out and focusing on important information from observations and interviews about learning with role models. Next, the data were shared as stories and grouped by themes to make them easier to understand and study. The last step was drawing conclusions, which were checked repeatedly to ensure the data remained consistent and correct. This approach is expected to give a clear, organized, and detailed picture of how history lessons can help build character.



Figure 1. Research Data Analysis

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Result

Revitalizing history learning based on exemplars is a strategic step toward addressing the challenges of character building for the younger generation in the increasingly complex digital era. History learning is no longer simply understood as conveying facts and past events, but must be directed as a medium for internalizing life values derived from the exemplary role models of historical figures and events. Therefore, this study comprehensively examines three main aspects: understanding and planning for exemplary-based history learning; implementing learning and using media; and the impacts, obstacles, and efforts to revitalize learning. These three aspects form an interrelated whole, illustrating how exemplary values are not only designed but also implemented and felt by students. It also identifies various obstacles and development opportunities to create a more meaningful, contextual, and character-building history learning experience.

3.1.1. Understanding and Planning History Learning Based on Exemplars

Interviews with teachers at State Senior High School 1 Takengon, Aceh, revealed that history education has significant potential to instill exemplary values in students. This is evident in a

teacher's statement: *"History learning is very suitable for instilling exemplary values because it contains many figures who can serve as role models for students."* This statement indicates that teachers recognize the strategic role of history not only as a conveyor of information but also as a medium for character development through inspirational figures. This finding reinforces the importance of history's affective dimension in education.

In terms of lesson planning, teachers also revealed that *"the material chosen is usually related to figures or events with positive values, so that students can emulate their attitudes."* This demonstrates that teachers have made efforts to integrate exemplary values into lesson planning, albeit at a rudimentary level. This planning has not been systematically incorporated into the learning materials; rather, it focuses on selecting materials deemed relevant to character values. This finding confirms that value integration has begun, but still requires strengthening in more structured aspects of lesson design.

The teacher also stated that *"so far, the delivery of exemplary values has been mostly inserted into the material explanations, not specifically included in the learning activities."* This statement indicates limitations in the design of learning that explicitly targets the internalization of values. Thus, although teachers conceptually understand the importance of evidence-based history learning, in practice, more systematic and targeted innovation is still needed in planning. Therefore, strengthening the development of learning tools is necessary so that exemplary values are not merely complementary, but become a core part of the history learning process.

3.1.2. Implementation of Learning and Use of Media

The implementation of history instruction at State Senior High School 1 Takengon demonstrates efforts to integrate exemplary values through the delivery of material based on historical figures and events. Interviews revealed that teachers emphasized that history has significant potential in shaping students' character because it is rich in life values. This was reinforced by one teacher's statement: *"The media used in learning must be tailored to the material so that the values conveyed can be fully understood by students."* In practice, learning is conducted through lectures combined with storytelling to strengthen students' understanding of the values contained in each historical event. These findings indicate that the learning process has led to meaningful learning, although the approach used remains conventional and requires reinforcement through innovative methods and a wider range of media.

In terms of media use, teachers have begun using simple visuals to support instruction, such as images of figures and instructional videos. *"We sometimes use videos or images to make it easier for students to understand the material and not just imagine it,"* the teacher explained in the interview. The use of this media is considered effective in helping students visualize historical events and reinforcing exemplary values. However, the use of more interactive digital media has not been optimal, so learning still doesn't fully leverage technology's potential as a tool for strengthening character rooted in historical values.

From a student's perspective, learning history becomes more engaging when it is accompanied by relevant media and stories. *"If it's explained using stories about famous figures or videos, it's easier to understand and less boring,"* said one student. However, students also felt that media use was inconsistent, and learning sometimes reverted to monotonous lectures. These findings confirm that the success of role-modeling-based history learning depends not only on the material but also on implementation strategies and the use of varied, interactive, and contextual media to increase student engagement and more effectively strengthen the internalization of character values.

3.1.3. Impact, Obstacles, and Efforts to Revitalize Learning



Research at State Senior High School 1 Takengon, Aceh, shows that role-modeling-based history learning has a positive impact on students' character development. Through historical material that incorporates exemplary values from national figures, such as honesty, courage, and responsibility, students begin to demonstrate increased moral awareness and social attitudes. These values are not only cognitively understood but also internalized in daily behavior, such as discipline, respect for teachers, and concern for the surrounding environment, indicating that history learning has strong potential as a vehicle for character building.

Based on student interviews, the exemplary values conveyed in history learning have a motivating impact on their lives. This is evident in a student's statement that, *"The stories of historical figures make me more enthusiastic about learning and want to emulate their good behavior in my daily life."* This statement was reinforced by another student who said, *"Learning history becomes more meaningful because it's not just about memorizing, but also about learning lessons for life."* These findings indicate that exemplary values are not only understood but also serve as a driving force for students' intrinsic motivation.

However, this study also highlights several obstacles in implementing role-modeling-based history learning. Teachers still face limitations in developing innovative learning methods and the suboptimal use of technology-based media. This is reinforced by teacher interviews, which stated that *"we are still limited in the use of digital media and varied methods, so learning is sometimes dominated by lectures."* Furthermore, limited learning time and curriculum demands that emphasize cognitive aspects pose challenges to deeply integrating exemplary values.

As part of a revitalization effort, teacher interviews indicate awareness of the need to develop more contextually and meaningfully grounded history learning. A teacher stated that *"revitalizing history learning needs to be done by emphasizing exemplary values in every subject so that students not only understand history but also emulate its values."* This statement demonstrates the teacher's commitment to directing history learning as a means of character building. Therefore, revitalizing history learning based on exemplars is a crucial step toward creating a more reflective, innovative, and relevant learning experience for the younger generation in the modern era.

3.2. Discussion

Revitalizing history learning through role models is a strategic step toward shifting the learning paradigm from mere memorization to meaningful learning oriented toward character building (Ferdi Hasan et al., 2026). When the exemplary values of historical figures are explicitly highlighted in learning, students not only understand events but also grasp the moral meaning contained within them. This makes history living values, not just dead facts, making it relevant to students' lives today (Amin & Ritonga, 2024).

The integration of exemplary values into history learning has been proven to have a motivational and affective impact on students (Ridho et al., 2025). Students become more engaged, reflective, and encouraged to emulate the positive attitudes learned from historical figures. History learning has great potential as a medium for internalizing values, especially when delivered through a contextual approach that is close to students' experiences (Wijayanti et al., 2025). History learning not only develops cognitive aspects but also strengthens students' affective dimensions and character.

The revitalization of learning has not been optimal. Learning is still dominated by conventional methods such as lectures, with limited use of media (Bih Ni, 2024). This condition is one factor contributing to the perceived lack of interest in history learning among some students. Limited learning innovation and the underutilization of technology are key challenges that must be addressed immediately to make the learning process more interactive and participatory (Muhammad et al., 2022; Sertel et al., 2023).

Previous research (Emier Azka et al., 2025; Selim & Farhan, 2024; Setyawan et al., 2022) has shown that making history lessons focus more on role models is very important for building good

character in young people, especially with the new challenges of the digital age. History lessons should not just teach facts and past events; they should also highlight the good examples set by people and events in history. With this method, students are expected not only to understand the material but also to take in values like honesty, responsibility, and love for their country in their daily lives. Making history lessons more focused on these values is an important way to make learning more meaningful, relevant, and helpful for the character growth of young people (Basir B et al., 2025; Purwaningsih, 2024).

Revitalizing role-model-based history learning requires developing more innovative learning strategies, such as the use of digital media, values-based storytelling, and student-centered approaches (Purmintasari, 2025). Teachers are required to act as facilitators capable of connecting historical material to students' real lives, so that exemplary values can be more deeply internalized. It is hoped that history learning will be an effective tool in shaping a young generation that is characterful, reflective, and ready to face challenges in the digital era.

4. CONCLUSION

The revitalization of exemplar-based history learning in strengthening the character of the younger generation has proven relevant and in accordance with the nature of history learning itself, because historical material is fundamentally rich in life values that can serve as examples. These values, such as honesty, courage, responsibility, and nationalism, when conveyed appropriately and contextually, can become life lessons for students, not simply memorized knowledge. Therefore, history learning should focus on the process of internalizing values, so that students can understand, feel, and implement them in their daily lives. The implication is that history learning must continue to be revitalized through more engaging, innovative, and meaningful approaches, so as to erase students' negative perceptions of history as a boring subject and make it an inspiring, character-building learning space.

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