

Strategies for Developing Early Childhood Religious Character Through Islamic Education

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Abstract:

This study examines the strategy of developing early childhood religious character through Islamic education as an effort to form a moral and spiritual foundation from an early age. The background of this research is the phenomenon of degradation of moral values among the younger generation which indicates the importance of cultivating religious character from an early age. The aim of the research is to identify and analyze various effective strategies in the development of early childhood religious character through Islamic education. The research method used is a library research with a qualitative descriptive approach. Data was collected from various literature sources in the form of scientific journals, books, and academic articles relevant to the research topic. Data analysis is carried out through content analysis to identify patterns, themes, and strategies that emerge from various sources. The results of the study show that early childhood religious character development strategies can be carried out through various approaches, including habituation methods, examples, storytelling, Quranic learning, worship habits, religious school culture, and collaboration with families. The implementation of holistic strategies that integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects has been proven effective in shaping children's religious character. This study concludes that the development of religious character requires an integrated approach between educational institutions, families, and communities with the application of consistent and sustainable methods. The implications of this research encourage the development of an early childhood education curriculum based on Islamic religious values and improve the competence of educators in implementing character development strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is an important foundation in shaping the personality and character of an individual in the future. In this golden age phase, children experience very rapid development in various aspects, including moral and spiritual development (Purnama, 2020). The importance of instilling religious values at an early age cannot be ignored, considering that the character formed during this period will be a provision for children's lives in the future.



The phenomenon of moral degradation that occurs in contemporary society shows the urgency of forming religious character from an early age. Various cases of juvenile delinquency, harassment, and other deviant behavior indicate a weak foundation of character instilled in childhood (Luhfiyah, 2021). This condition is exacerbated by the development of digital technology which has a positive and negative impact on children's character development.

Islamic education has a strategic role in shaping the religious character of early childhood. Islam as a comprehensive religion provides a complete guide to character formation through the teachings of the Quran and Hadith (Nikmah, 2023). Islamic religious values include aspects of faith, worship, and morals which if instilled from an early age will form a person who has faith, piety, and noble character.

Early childhood education institutions, especially Islamic-based ones such as Raudhatul Athfal, Integrated Islamic Kindergarten, and Islamic Play Groups, have a great responsibility in implementing religious character education. Various learning strategies and methods have been developed to integrate religious values into daily learning activities (Murniati, 2025). However, the effectiveness of the strategy needs to be studied in depth to provide guidance for education practitioners.

Several previous studies have examined certain aspects of early childhood religious character development. Research by Lestari and Indrayanah (2024) examined the implementation of Al-Quran learning in forming religious character, while research by Trimuliana, Dhieni, and Hapidin (2019) explored the religious behavior of children aged five to six years in character model PAUD institutions. The study by Purnama and Wahyuni (2020) analyzed the development of religiosity through the Quranic story method, while the study by Achmad et al. (2022) examined the role of teachers in the formation of religious character.

Despite the extensive research, there is still a need to integrate these findings into a comprehensive and holistic strategic framework. This research aims to identify, analyze, and synthesize various strategies for the development of early childhood religious character through Islamic education that have been studied in the scientific literature. Thus, this research is expected to contribute in the form of practical guidance for educators, parents, and stakeholders in early childhood education.

The formulation of the problem in this study is: What is the strategy for developing early childhood religious character through Islamic education? What methods are effective in implementing religious character education? What is the role of various stakeholders in supporting the development of early childhood religious character? This research is expected to provide theoretical benefits in enriching the study of early childhood religious character education as well as practical benefits as a reference for educational institutions in designing and implementing character education programs.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method or library research. This method was chosen because it is in accordance with the research objectives of reviewing,

analyzing, and synthesizing various scientific literature related to the strategies for the development of early childhood religious character through Islamic education. Literature research allows researchers to explore a wide range of theoretical perspectives and empirical findings that have been published in the academic literature.

The data sources in this study are secondary data derived from various scientific publications including national and international journals, textbooks, seminar proceedings, and academic articles relevant to the research topic. The criteria for selecting literature sources include: relevance to the topic of early childhood religious character development and Islamic education, publication in the last ten years to ensure the novelty of information, credibility of sources from indexed journals or trusted publishers, and completeness of methodology and discussion.

This study uses twenty main references consisting of accredited and reputable scientific journals that discuss various aspects of early childhood religious character development. These sources were selected through a systematic search using keywords: religious character education, early childhood, Islamic education, learning strategies, habituation methods, teacher examples, and Quranic learning.

The data collection technique is carried out through documentation by identifying and collecting a variety of relevant literature from electronic journal databases, digital libraries, and institutional repositories. Each literature source is then read in depth to understand the concepts, theories, methods, and findings presented. Important information from each source is documented systematically to facilitate the analysis process.

Data analysis uses content analysis techniques with stages: data reduction to identify information relevant to the focus of the research, categorization to group data based on emerging themes and patterns, interpretation to understand the meaning and relationships between concepts, and synthesis to integrate various findings into a comprehensive strategy framework. The analysis process is carried out iteratively by comparing findings from various sources to identify consistency, differences, and emerging patterns.

The validity of data in literature research is ensured through source triangulation by comparing information from various literature sources to ensure the consistency and validity of the findings. The credibility of the source is ensured through the selection of literature from accredited and reputable journals. Dependability is maintained through systematic and transparent documentation in the data collection and analysis process. Confirmability is fulfilled through the presentation of objective analysis results and based on the literature data studied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Religious Character in an Islamic Perspective

Based on literature studies, religious character from an Islamic perspective includes comprehensive dimensions including aspects of *aqidah* or belief, worship or religious rituals, and morals or morals. Research shows that religious character is not just a cognitive understanding of religious teachings, but the internalization of Islamic values that are manifested in daily attitudes and behaviors (Tadjuddin, 2021). Religious character values

that need to be developed in early childhood include faith in Allah, obedience to worship, honesty, politeness, discipline, gratitude, empathy, and tolerance.

The formation of religious character in early childhood has special urgency considering that this period is a critical period in personality development. Neuroscience research shows that experiences and stimulation given at an early age will shape brain structures and behavioral patterns that last into adulthood (Suyadi, 2018). Therefore, the cultivation of religious values in the golden age phase will have a long-term impact on children's spiritual and moral development.

Strategies for Religious Character Development Through Habituation Methods

The habituation method is a fundamental strategy in the development of early childhood religious character. The results of the literature review show that habituation that is carried out consistently and continuously is able to form religious behaviors inherent in children (Ahsanulhaq, 2019). This habit includes various religious activities such as praying before and after activities, reading the Quran or juz amma, performing congregational prayers, performing ablution, saying greetings, and behaving politely.

The implementation of the habituation method in PAUD institutions is carried out through a structured daily routine. Research in various Islamic PAUD institutions shows that effective habituation requires consistency, example from teachers, and parental involvement (Hasanah, Fauziah, & Munastiwi, 2019). Habituation is not only carried out in the school environment, but also needs to be strengthened at home through collaboration with family.

The results of the study show that school culture habituation based on Islamic values, such as congregational prayer, reading the Quran, and daily manners, is able to increase the development of Islamic character in children (Supiyardi et al., 2024). This habituation has a positive impact on the development of children's religious and moral attitudes. Furthermore, habituation carried out from an early age will form good habits that will carry over into adulthood.

Strategies for Developing Religious Character Through Example

Exemplary or qudwah hasanah is a very effective educational method in shaping the religious character of early childhood. Literature reviews show that early childhood has a strong tendency to imitate the behavior of adults around them, especially teachers and parents (Wahyuni & Suyadi, 2022). Therefore, example is a method that cannot be separated from the process of religious character education.

Research on the implementation of teacher exemplary in religious character education has shown significant results. Teachers who show examples in the attitude of obedience to worship, behave well according to religious teachings, speak politely, and respect each other have a positive influence on the formation of children's religious character (Hasanah, Lutfiani, & Hidayanti, 2024). This example is not only shown when the teacher is in the classroom, but also outside the classroom through verbal and nonverbal communication.

An important aspect of example is consistency between words and deeds. Early childhood is very sensitive to these inconsistencies, so teachers and parents must ensure that the values taught are also practiced in daily life. Consistent example will build children's trust and strengthen the internalization of religious values.

Strategies for Developing Religious Characters Through Storytelling Methods

The storytelling method is a very effective approach in instilling religious values in early childhood. The results of the literature review show that stories, especially Quranic stories and exemplary stories from prophets, are able to convey moral and spiritual messages in an interesting and easy-to-understand way for children (Purnama & Wahyuni, 2020). Through stories, abstract values can be visualized and concretized so that they are easier to digest by the child's thoughts who are still at the stage of concrete development.

The implementation of the storytelling method in the formation of religious character requires careful preparation both in terms of content and delivery techniques. Research shows that teachers make thorough preparations including the selection of relevant and varied stories, the use of supporting media such as finger puppets or smart box media, and creative storytelling through the modulation of voices, expressions, and character characterization (Hamidah & Tabassum, 2025). Variations in the delivery of stories make learning more interesting and increase children's absorption of the values conveyed.

Research has also shown that storytelling methods are effective in developing various aspects of religious character such as honesty, patience, courage, sincerity, and compassion. Children not only listen to stories, but are also stimulated to reflect on the values contained in the stories and apply them in daily life. The use of supporting media such as hand puppets, radiant images, or multimedia has also been shown to increase the effectiveness of storytelling methods.

Strategies for Developing Religious Character Through Learning the Quran

Learning the Quran is a fundamental component in early childhood Islamic education. Literature studies show that the implementation of learning the Quran is not only aimed at teaching the ability to read the Quran, but also to instill love for the Quran and the values contained in it (Lestari & Indrayanah, 2024). Al-Quran learning for early childhood is adjusted to the child's level of cognitive development with an emphasis on the recognition of hijaiyah letters, memorization of short letters, and understanding of simple meanings.

Al-Quran learning methods developed for early childhood include Iqra, Qiraati, Tilawati, and other methods that are adapted to the characteristics of children. The implementation of Al-Quran learning in PAUD institutions is carried out through various activities such as memorizing short letters, getting to know hijaiyah letters through educational games, reading the Quran in a fun method, and understanding the stories in the Quran. Research shows that learning the Quran is carried out in a fun and non-coercive method has a positive impact on the development of children's religious character.

The Al-Quran curriculum in PAUD institutions also integrates character learning through understanding the values contained in the verses of the Quran. Children are not

only taught to read, but also to understand and apply Islamic values in their daily lives. Collaboration with parents in accompanying children to learn the Quran at home is also an important factor in the success of learning.

Holistic Strategies in the Development of Religious Character

A holistic approach to early childhood religious character development emphasizes the importance of integrating various aspects of learning. Literature review shows that PAUD teachers implement holistic strategies by integrating daily worship habits, the use of storytelling methods with exemplary stories, interactive learning based on religious values, and parental involvement in the educational process (Murniati, 2025). This holistic approach includes cognitive aspects in the form of understanding of Islamic teachings, affective aspects through appreciation and appreciation of religious values, and psychomotor aspects through worship practices and noble behaviors.

The implementation of a holistic strategy requires strong collaboration between various parties. Educational institutions play a role in designing an integrative curriculum, providing a conducive learning environment, and training teachers with adequate competencies. Teachers play the role of facilitators, role models, and motivators in the learning process. The family plays a role in reinforcing the values taught in school through practice at home. Society plays a role in creating a social environment that supports the formation of religious character.

The results of the study show that the application of a consistent holistic strategy is able to increase children's understanding of religious values such as honesty, gratitude, and empathy. Children who receive a holistic religious character education show better behavior in terms of discipline, politeness, and responsibility. They are also better able to internalize religious values and apply them in daily social interactions.

The Role of School Culture in the Development of Religious Character

School culture with religious nuances makes a significant contribution to the formation of early childhood character. Literature review shows that a strong school culture can create a learning environment that supports the internalization of religious values. Religious school culture encompasses various aspects such as religious routines, Islamic social interactions, physical environments that reflect Islamic values, and school policies that are based on religious values.

The implementation of religious school culture can be seen from various practices such as the habit of reciting prayers before and after activities, congregational prayers, cults or short *tausiyah*, commemoration of Islamic holidays, *infak* and *almsgiving*, and the use of polite language. The physical environment of the school is also designed to support the formation of religious character through the display of Quranic verses, Islamic wall decorations, *musallas* or places of worship, and libraries with collections of Islamic books.

Research shows that a school culture that is consistent in implementing religious values has a positive impact on the formation of children's character. Children who are in a school environment with a strong religious culture tend to show better behavior in terms of

discipline, honesty, and responsibility. They are also more likely to adopt religious values as part of their identity.

Collaboration with Families in the Development of Religious Character

The family is the first and main educational environment for children. Literature review shows that collaboration between educational institutions and families is very important in the development of early childhood religious character. Parents have a responsibility to instill religious values through proper parenting, exemplary in daily life, and habituation of religious practices at home.

A democratic parenting style while still paying attention to religious values has proven to be effective in shaping children's religious character. Research shows that parenting that prioritizes two-way communication, provides freedom within the boundaries of religious norms, and applies educational consequences has a positive impact on the development of children's religious character. Parents who apply this parenting style tend to produce children who have good religious understanding as well as critical thinking skills.

Parental involvement in character education programs in schools can be done through various ways such as attending parent-teacher meetings, accompanying children in religious activities at home, participating in parenting programs on religious character education, and communicating regularly with teachers about child development. Effective collaboration between school and family creates consistency in instilling religious values, so that children get strong reinforcement from the two main environments in their lives.

Challenges and Solutions in the Development of Religious Character

Early childhood religious character development faces various challenges in the digital era. The rapid development of technology has a positive as well as negative impact on the formation of children's character. On the one hand, technology can be used as an interesting learning medium. On the other hand, uncontrolled digital content can erode instilled religious values.

Another challenge faced is the limited competence of educators in implementing religious character development strategies. Not all PAUD teachers have a deep understanding of religious character education or skills in applying effective learning methods. The limited facilities and infrastructure in several PAUD institutions are also an obstacle in the implementation of character education programs.

Solutions to overcome these challenges include improving the competence of educators through intensive training on religious character education, developing an integrative curriculum by integrating religious values in all aspects of learning, wise use of technology by developing digital learning media based on religious values, strengthening tricenter collaboration between schools, families, and communities, and developing monitoring and monitoring systems. comprehensive evaluation to ensure the effectiveness of the program.

CONCLUSION

Based on the literature review that has been conducted, it can be concluded that the development of early childhood religious character through Islamic education requires a comprehensive and holistic approach. Effective strategies include habituation methods to form habits of worship and noble character, examples from teachers and parents as models of religious behavior, storytelling methods to convey moral values through exemplary stories, learning the Qur'an adapted to the child's developmental stage, and the creation of a school culture with religious nuances.

The implementation of holistic strategies that integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects has been proven effective in shaping children's religious character. This approach requires strong collaboration between educational institutions, families, and society as the tricerter of education. Consistency in the application of religious values in various environments of children's lives is the key to successful character formation.

The role of teachers is very important in the implementation of religious character development strategies. Teachers not only function as teachers, but also as role models, facilitators, and motivators. Teachers' competence in understanding the characteristics of early childhood and applying appropriate learning methods is a crucial factor in the success of character education. Therefore, improving teacher competence through continuous training is very necessary.

The involvement of parents in the education of children's religious character cannot be ignored. The family as the first educational environment has a very big influence on the formation of children's character. Proper parenting, exemplary in daily life, and good communication between parents and children are important factors in strengthening the religious values taught in schools.

Challenges in the digital era require adapting religious character development strategies. Technology can be used as an interesting learning medium, but there needs to be strict control and mentoring to ensure that the content accessed by children is in accordance with religious values. The development of digital learning media based on religious values can be a solution to combine technology with character education.

This study provides several practical recommendations for early childhood education stakeholders. First, educational institutions need to develop a curriculum that integrates religious values in all aspects of learning with a fun approach and appropriate to the child's developmental stage. Second, an intensive and continuous training program is needed for PAUD educators to improve competence in implementing religious character education.

Third, it is necessary to develop a systematic parenting program to improve parents' understanding and skills in educating children's religious character at home. Fourth, educational institutions need to strengthen religious school culture through habituation of religious routines, the creation of a conducive physical environment, and the development of policies based on religious values. Fifth, a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system is needed to ensure the effectiveness of character education programs and make continuous improvements.

The theoretical implication of this study is to enrich the scientific treasure of early childhood religious character education in an Islamic perspective. This study integrates various findings from the scattered literature into a comprehensive strategy framework. Practically, the results of this research can be a guide for education practitioners in designing and implementing effective religious character development programs.

The limitation of this study is the use of literature review methods that do not involve direct observation or experimentation in the field. Further research is recommended to conduct empirical studies by implementing strategies that have been identified and quantitatively measuring their effectiveness. Longitudinal research is also needed to look at the long-term impact of religious character education received at an early age on character development in adolescence and adulthood.

Future research may also explore the development of technology integration models in religious character education, examine the effectiveness of different character learning methods in different contexts, analyze the role of government policies in supporting religious character education, and examine best practices of religious character education in different countries to gain adaptable learning.

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