

Educator Strategies in Instilling Early Childhood Religious Character

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Abstract

This study analyzed educators' strategies for instilling early childhood religious character. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method and data collection procedures through interview techniques, observation, and documentation. The collected data related to students' numeracy skills and the use of innovative tree media were analyzed using data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions. The result of this study is that religious character is an integration of creed, sharia, and morals. PAUD Kartika Buana Pagotan Geger Madiun instills religious feelings in students, which is associated with the creation of PAUD religious culture both related to aspects of creed, sharia, and morals as well as the encouragement of leaders to go through the order of spiritual values that are entrenched in PAUD. The creed aspect is introduced through songs, games, and fairy tales. The Sharia aspect invites students to practice worship, and the moral element is instilled through school rules and student promises. The commitment to maintaining religious culture in PAUD Kartika Buana is always considered, even though the facilities for places of worship have yet to be available.

Keywords

character education; ecce; educator strategy; religious character



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1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is important in shaping children's character from an early age. Children at that age are particularly vulnerable to environmental influences and the education they receive. Therefore, it is important for early childhood education institutions to pay attention to a holistic approach in forming children's character, including their religious nature (Supriani & Arifudin, 2023). Early age, or age 0 to 6 years, is often called Golden Age, commonly called the golden age (Sacred, 2020). Why is that? Because it is at this time that the child's ability develops rapidly. Children's character should also be instilled from an early age. Our character is invested according to the stages of child development. Moreover, in the formation of children's character, patience and continuity of educators are needed.

PAUD (Early Childhood Education) Kartika Buana is an educational institution that realizes how important it is to instill religious character in early childhood. The institution is strongly committed to providing holistic education, which includes aspects of religion and spirituality in child development. Investing in religious nature in early childhood involves a rich understanding and experience of spiritual values and spirituality (Travelancya & Asfahani, 2022). A holistic approach is used to achieve this goal within PAUD Kartika Buana. One of the strategies applied is through habituation and practice of daily religious values. Teachers in ECCE serve as good models in using religious values in everyday life. They integrate religious values in various activities, such as singing spiritual songs, telling religious stories, and introducing children to religious rituals and practices appropriate to their beliefs.

Learning through play and creative activities is also important in cultivating religious character in ECCE. Children are invited to role-play and apply religious values in everyday situations (Mustakimah & Mu'amamah, 2021). Through this activity, children can gain a deeper understanding of religious concepts and how to apply them (Alfurqan et al., 2020). The entire learning process in ECCE is designed to create an environment that supports the development of children's religious character (Luthfiyah & Zafi, 2021). Teachers strive to build a welcoming and inclusive climate where children feel comfortable sharing their spiritual thoughts and experiences (Fachri et al., 2022). This allows them to learn from each other and grow in their faiths.

Children who attend ECCE institutions can develop a higher understanding and awareness of religious values and spirituality. They learn to be responsible, empathetic, and committed to practicing their religion (Maimun & Mardiana, 2023). Through this article, readers can understand the importance of instilling religious character in early childhood and gain insight into strategies that can be applied in

educational institutions such as PAUD Kartika Buana. Thus, we can play an active role in forming a strong young generation with a solid foundation in religious values and spirituality.

The previous research related to the theme above is titled "Educator Strategies in Cultivating Honest Character in Early Childhood" (Early, 2022). The results proved that the integrated components of character education implemented in an integrated manner positively changed students' behavior and attitudes, especially honest characters. Research "Asma'ul Husna Character Cultivation in Early Childhood in PAUD ELPIST Temanggung" (Hartati et al., 2021). The results showed that to instill Asma'ul Husna's character values in his students, PAUD Elpist Temanggung combines the curriculum from the Foundation based on Ahlus sunnah wal jamaah an nahdiyah and the Ministry of National Education using various methods. The supporting factor in this implementation is that teachers have high knowledge, motivation, and adequate infrastructure. Research "Integration of Learning Through Play in the Cultivation of Early Childhood Religious Character" by (Novitasari & Wulandari, 2021) found that learning through play and creative activities effectively teaches religious values in early childhood. This approach creates a fun and interactive learning environment, strengthening children's understanding and appreciation of spiritual teachings. Research "Integration of Character Education into Islamic Religious Education and Civic Education Learning in the Millennial Era" (Hubbi et al., 2020) The results were obtained as follows: (a) Learning planning in Khadijah Bagek Nyake Aikmel Islamic Middle School is well implemented, this is evidenced by the actions taken by the teacher in compiling the syllabus, lesson plans, teaching materials, and evaluation instruments before learning begins; (b) The learning process is quite good because the learning material taught is integrated with character values; (c) Evaluation of learning conducted by the teacher of student learning outcomes is optimal. Penelitian "Efektivitas Pendekatan Holistik dalam Penanaman Karakter Religious Anak Usia Dini" (Yatun et al., 2021) found that a holistic approach that includes habituation of religious values in daily life, learning through religious stories and stories, as well as children's introduction to spiritual practices, is effective in enriching children's understanding and appreciation of religious values.

The novelty of this article lies in the emphasis on religious character cultivation strategies implemented in PAUD Kartika Buana, which combines a holistic approach, the role of teachers as models, learning through play, and a religiously friendly educational environment. This article integrates previous research findings with a focus on the specific context in PAUD Kartika Buana, providing practical guidance

and inspiration for early childhood education institutions in instilling religious character in children effectively.

2. METHODS

This article uses qualitative research methods, namely research proposed to describe and analyze phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of individuals and groups (Nana Syaodih Sukmadinata, 2007), (Yunanto et al., 2021). This study uses a descriptive approach because the researcher wants to describe and analyze educators' strategies in instilling early childhood religious character in PAUD Kartika Buana Geger Madiun.

The primary data from this study are students of PAUD Kartika Buana, Geger District, Madiun Regency. Other data sources will be taken from school principals, teachers/homeroom teachers A and B, and some documentation in the PAUD Kartika Buana institution, Geger District, Madiun Regency.

The strategies used in this study were to collect data on educators' plans for instilling early childhood religious character. They are as follows:

1. Observation

The observation method focuses attention on an object using all five senses (Suharsimi Arikunto, 2006). Researchers use the observation method to obtain primary data and secondary data. The author's observation is by observing the strategies of educators in instilling early childhood religious character in PAUD Kartika Buana Geger Madiun.

2. Interview

The interview method is a way two people communicate; one person uses questions to learn information from another for a specific purpose. (Dedi Mulyana, 2004)

3. Documentation Methods

Method Documentation is a data collection method used to trace historical data (Burhan Bungin, 2001).

Data were analyzed during the research process (*an ongoing process*) (Miles & Huberman, 1992).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the discussion on cultivating early childhood religious character in PAUD Kartika Buana, a holistic and comprehensive approach is the main focus in achieving this goal. This approach aligns with child development theory, especially Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development and James Fowler's theory of spiritual

growth. The holistic approach applied at PAUD Kartika Buana involves a rich understanding and experience of religious values and spirituality. This aligns with Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which states that children experience different stages and need real expertise to internalize moral values. By providing hands-on experience through learning through games, creative activities, and the practice of daily religious values, PAUD Kartika Buana encourages children to develop a deeper understanding of religious concepts and related moral values. In addition, the role of teachers as good models in applying religious values is also important in cultivating religious character in early childhood. The teachers at PAUD Kartika Buana set a strong example for children to practice religious teachings daily. This aligns with James Fowler's theory of spiritual development, which emphasizes the importance of models in assisting children in the building and internalizing their religious beliefs. Teachers who consistently and authentically practice religious values create a learning environment that supports children's spiritual development.

In addition, a religious-friendly educational environment is also an important factor in cultivating the religious character of early childhood. An environment that facilitates dialogue, mutual understanding, and positive religious experiences provides opportunities for children to grow in their faith. James Fowler's theory of spiritual development emphasizes that children need a supportive environment to develop their spiritual lives. PAUD Kartika Buana provides a space for children to explore and strengthen their faith by creating an inclusive and faith-friendly educational environment.

Overall, the strategy of cultivating early childhood religious character in PAUD Kartika Buana combines a holistic approach, the role of teachers as models, and a religiously friendly educational environment. This approach aligns with the theory of moral development and spirituality, which emphasizes the importance of real experiences, the role of models, and supportive environments in forming a child's religious character. By implementing this strategy, PAUD Kartika Buana can effectively instill religious feelings in early childhood and provide a solid foundation in religious values and spirituality.

Based on the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 above, it can be known that there are five scopes in education (Khunaifi & Matlani, 2019). First, there is a conscious and planned effort from education providers to create a learning atmosphere and learning process. Second, educators and learners interact to realize the learning atmosphere and approach. Third, students are not objects but subjects actively participating in learning. Fourth, there is potential in every student that can

be developed so that students. Fifth, education output is that humans have religious and spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble morals, and skills needed by themselves, society, nation, and state.

Law number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System affirms the commitment to implementing character education. This is contained in formulating the functions and objectives of national education. National education functions to develop abilities and shape the character and civilization of a dignified nation to educate the nation's life. National education aims to develop the potential of students to become human beings who believe and are devoted to God Almighty, have a noble character, healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, and independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens.

Character is the values of human behavior related to God Almighty, oneself, fellow humans, the environment, and nationality manifested in thoughts, attitudes, feelings, words, and deeds based on religious norms, laws, manners, culture, and customs. Character is part of the aspects of student personality that relate to the consequences of students in obeying or not obeying ethical behavior and whether or not they are consistent in holding a stance or getting. In the Qur'an, character means nature, character, and mental attitude. In the Qur'an surah al-Qalam verse 4, Allah says:

And you are a great creature.

"And verily ye are true of great ethics" (QS. AlQalam: 4).

Sa'id ibn Abu Afox said from Qatadah regarding the meaning of His words: And surely you are truly virtuous. (Al-Qalam: 4) It is told to us that Sa'd ibn Hisham once asked Aisha (r.a.) about the morals of the Holy Prophetsa. So, Aisha asked him, "Have you not read the Qur'an?" Sa'id replied, "Yes," Aisha said: Then the morals of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) are the Qur'an.

Abdur Razzaq has narrated from Ma'mar, Qatadah, Zurarah ibn Aufa, from Sa'd ibn Hisham who said that he once asked Aisha, "O um Mu'minin, tell me about the morals of the Messenger of Allah?" Aisha asked back, "Have you not read the Qur'an?" I replied, "Yes." So, he said: His morals are the Qur'an.

They are seen from one of expert researchers in character education, namely Thomas Lickona, Ki Hadjar Dewantara, and Lawrence Kohlberg. The three figures defining the concept of education have different emphases, but they essentially have the same view, which can be presented in the following recapitulation table.

Table 1. Similarities and differences of character and moral education theory by

Lickona, Dewantara, and Kohlberg

No	Study Aspect	Lickona	Dewantara	Kohlberg
	Basic Concepts of Character and Moral Education	<p>The focus of the study: Character Education And moral: Moral knowing, Honest filling, ethical action.</p> <p>The process towards maturity and humanize humans or Individual</p>	<p>The focus of the study: Budi's Education Ethics.</p> <p>The process towards maturity and humanize humans or Individual.</p>	<p>The focus of the study: Development or Reasoning Moral. Value cultivation through stages sequentially.</p> <p>The process towards maturity and humanizing human beings or Individual</p>
	Character Education Process	Through education at school and Family supported (parent)	Through education at school and Family supported (parents), and movement.	Through education At school and The family supported (people old).
	Approach in Practice	<p>1. Emphasis on cognitive, affective, and behavior.</p> <p>1. Supported by school culture and family.</p>	<p>1. Emphasizes cognitive, affective, and psychomotor</p> <p>2. Supported keg. Extracurricular</p>	<p>1. Emphasize cognitive.</p> <p>2. Supported Extracurricular activities</p>
	Parties Who Play a Role in Character Education in Schools	Principals, Teachers, Staff, and Students	Principals, Teachers, Staff, and Students	Principals, Teachers, Staff, and Students

	The Role of Education	Developing learning materials with an integrated approach, namely learning with noble values that integrated to be internalized (lived) into a reference for behavior and manifested (practiced) as a combination of Inner material Deeds of Disciples every day so that is a habit.	The process towards maturity and humanizing humans or individuals	Assisting moral development or moral decision development
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The characters expected by the Indonesian people, as stated in the Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 87 of 2017, are religious, honest, tolerant, disciplined, hardworking, creative, independent, democratic, curiosity, national spirit, love of the country, respect for achievements, communicative, love of peace, love of reading, care for the environment, care for social, and responsible.

Early childhood education is a stage of education that focuses on the development and learning of a child from an early age, usually from birth to about 6 or 7 years of age (Basri, 2021). This education is very important because this period is critical in children's development, during which they begin to develop social, cognitive, emotional, and physical skills. Early childhood education aims to provide a fun and meaningful learning experience while paying attention to the needs and characteristics of child development at this stage. The main goal is to stimulate the holistic growth and development of the child, build a strong foundation for further learning, and help the child develop basic skills and knowledge necessary in everyday life. Children will engage in various developmentally appropriate learning activities and experiences during early childhood education. This includes playing, singing, drawing, working on logic games, interacting with peers, and exploring the surrounding environment. Through these activities, children can develop social, cognitive, and motor skills and build an initial understanding of concepts such as numbers, letters, colors, shapes, and more.

Early childhood education also promotes an inclusive approach and supports diversity. Each child is valued as a unique individual and has different needs. Teachers and educators in early childhood education act as facilitators in creating a safe,

stimulating, and child-friendly learning environment. They focus on developing all aspects of child development, including cognitive, emotional, social, and motor skills.

In early childhood education, collaboration with parents and families is also important. Parents are considered partners in the child's educational process, where they support the child's development, provide emotional support, and share information about the child's needs and progress. Overall, early childhood education is an important foundation in child development. Through this education, children can develop skills, knowledge, and character to help them become successful and empowered individuals.

The character of children aged 2-3 years is in an important and interesting stage of development. During this time, they undergo many changes in various aspects of development, including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional. Some common characteristics seen in children aged 2-3 years include (Yatun et al., 2021): (1) Exploratory: Children aged 2-3 years are very interested in exploring the world around them. They are curious about objects and environments and use their senses to explore and understand new worlds. They will often explore by touching and examining objects around them. (2) Imitative: Children aged 2-3 years tend to imitate the behavior and actions of adults or other children around them. They observe and try to imitate the movements, facial expressions, and behavior of others. These imitations play an important role in their learning and social development. (3) Language is developing rapidly: Children experience a significant improvement in language development at this age. They start using words more and can understand simple instructions. Children ages 2-3 may also begin to form short sentences and incorporate words to convey their thoughts and desires. (4) Emotional and temperament: Children aged 2-3 years begin to explore various emotions and react to situations in more tangible ways. They can show love, excitement, frustration, anger, and anxiety. Sometimes, they may also experience rapid mood swings. (5) Independence: Children begin to show the urge to do things independently at this stage. They want to try doing various tasks such as dressing, putting things in place, or cleaning themselves. Encouraging and providing opportunities for 2-3-year-olds to exercise independence is important in their development. (6) Early socialization: Children aged 2-3 years build social relationships with children their age. They learn to play together, share toys, and interact with their peers. Adult supervision and guidance are essential in facilitating positive social interactions at this stage. Understanding the characteristics of 2-3-year-olds is important to provide appropriate support and stimulation in their education and development. By understanding this stage of development, parents and educators

can create a supportive environment, provide proper motivation, and encourage holistic development in early childhood.

The age of 4-6 years, often early, is also an important stage in child development. In this period, children progress in various aspects of development, including physical, cognitive, social, and emotional. Some common characteristics seen in children aged 4-6 years are (Triaristina & Mukhlis, 2019)(1) Better motor skills: Children aged 4-6 years experience improved fine and gross motor skills. With better coordination, they become more skilled at controlling body movements, such as writing, drawing, folding paper, or running and jumping. (2) Developed language skills: During this time, children continue to develop their language skills. They can use more complex sentences, express ideas and thoughts more clearly, and understand complicated instructions. They also begin to develop early reading and writing skills at this age. (3) Rapid cognitive development: Children aged 4-6 years significantly improve their cognition and understanding of the world around them. They can solve simple problems, recognize patterns, group objects based on similarities, and begin to develop an understanding of time, numbers, and space. (4) Strong imagination: The child's imagination develops rapidly at this age. They can fantasize and pretend in a variety of roles or situations. This imaginative ability is important in developing creativity, problem-solving, and social understanding. (5) Better social and interaction skills: Children aged 4-6 begin developing better social skills. They are better able to interact with peers, share, collaborate, and play in a more structured manner. They also understand basic social rules and learn to control their emotions and behavior. (6) Increased self-control: Children begin to develop the ability to control themselves at this stage. They know to wait their turn, follow the rules, and regulate their emotions more effectively. Although they still need guidance, they develop independence in decision-making and daily actions.

It is understood that every child is unique, and their development can differ in degree and time. However, a general understanding of the characteristics of 4-6-year-olds can help parents and educators provide appropriate support, design engaging learning experiences, and facilitate holistic child development.

Instilling a religious atmosphere in schools is at least influenced by three things; Creating a spiritual atmosphere in schools, school leaders creating a religious atmosphere in schools and outside schools, and the availability of mashallah (places of worship) to create a sacred atmosphere in schools.

a. Creating a Religious Atmosphere in PAUD Kartika Buana

The religious aspect includes three things: creed, sharia, and morals. The spiritual atmosphere in PAUD Kartika Buana covers these three aspects as seen in the following activities:

1) Aqidah Aspect

Aqidah plays an important role in the religion of Islam, as it is the Foundation of faith and the fundamental Foundation that shapes a Muslim's worldview, actions, and morality. A strong and true aqidah becomes the basis for correct worship practices, understanding of religious concepts, and meaningful life in Islam. *Aqidah Islamiyyah* means faith that must be firm with Him, His Apostles, His Angels, His books, the Day of Judgment, and destiny, good and bad. *Aqidah Islamiyyah* means adhering to the main principles of religion and what has been agreed upon by Salafush Salih with unanimous submission to Allah both in His commands, His laws, and obedience to Him and emulating the Prophet SAW.

PAUD Kartika Buana introduces *Aqidah Islamiyah* according to the characteristics of early childhood. Conducted singing and storytelling activities, PAUD educator Kartika Buana invited students to know that Allah is One, know the Prophet Muhammad and his family, know the books of Allah, provide a picture of the end day/doomsday and provide an understanding of the provisions/destiny of Allah.

2) Sharia Aspects

The worship skills of students in PAUD Kartika Buana are developed through worship practice activities. These activities include the habituation of reading short letters at the beginning of the meeting, the practice of ablution every Friday, the practice of praying every Friday, Friday sadaqah, and not being allowed to bring provisions during Ramadan.

3) Moral Aspect

Morals can be defined as how a person behaves, behaves, and treats himself and others; Therefore, there is morality or ethics to the creator, oneself, animals, and even plants. Of course, there are also ethics to the family, social ethics, political ethics, business ethics, trade ethics, farming ethics, professional ethics, interstate relations ethics, and so on.

The attitude of PAUD Kartika Buana students, both to themselves and to others, is contained in the discipline and promises of students. Rules of conduct have rules that students must obey while in school. Rules of conduct are arranged for mutual order so that students and school residents do not interfere or get interference from others. The students' promises are more emphasized in their

attitudes towards themselves, such as reading prayers before and after activities, greeting, not being whiny, being independent, and having personal responsibility towards students.

b. The Role of PAUD Leader Kartika Buana

The role of the principal is very important in creating a religious culture in an educational institution. Religious culture in schools can be made when the principal performs his function as an administrator. Building a religious culture in schools is important, especially in achieving school education goals.

The overall values set in cultivating PAUD Kartika Buana have become the school's goal. It has been internalized and developed in the culture of the school community. Creating a religious culture is also influenced by the example of school principals, students, and education staff and the commitment to maintain it even though the infrastructure at PAUD Kartika Buana has yet to fully support the cultivation of religious and cultural character.

c. Availability of Mushalla (Place of Worship) in PAUD Kartika Buana

Places of worship are educational facilities that can be used to instill the characteristics of students. According to E. Mulyasa, Educational facilities are equipment and equipment that are directly employed and support the educational process, especially the learning process and teaching. While educational infrastructure, according to Ibrahim Bafadal, is all basic equipment that indirectly supports the implementation of the educational process in schools.

PAUD Kartika Buana carries out prayer and ablution practices every Friday. However, there is no place of worship. The method of prayer is carried out in the classroom. As for the ablution place, it is readily available. The ablution place of PAUD Kartika Buana is by the child's height; this makes it easier for children to carry out ablution practice activities.

4. CONCLUSION

The characters expected by the Indonesian people, as stated in the Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 87 of 2017, are religious, honest, tolerant, disciplined, hardworking, creative, independent, democratic, curiosity, national spirit, love of the country, respect for achievements, communicative, love of peace, love of reading, care for the environment, care for social, and responsible.

Religious character is a person's religious character that arises from conscience manifested in attitudes and behaviors that are obedient to spiritual teachings and tolerant and live in harmony with followers of other religions. Religious character is the integration between creed, sharia, and morals.

Instilling a religious atmosphere in PAUD Kartika Buana, influenced by; the creation of a spiritual atmosphere in schools and the support of school leaders in creating a religious atmosphere in schools even though the infrastructure is not fully adequate. But all of that helps the learning process because teachers at PUD Kartika are required to create fun and impressive learning creativity even with existing infrastructure.

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