

Implementation of Islamic Education in Early Childhood in Forming Religious Character at Raudhatul Athfal (RA) Islamic Boarding School Luhur

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<p>Abstract: This study aims to analyze the implementation of Islamic education in early childhood in shaping religious character at RA Pesantren Luhur. The background of this research is based on the importance of instilling Islamic values from an early age as the main foundation for character development in children. This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and documentation involving the principal, teachers, and students. The results of the study indicate that the implementation of Islamic education at RA Pesantren Luhur is carried out through various activities, such as daily religious habituation (praying, congregational prayer, and reciting the Qur'an), exemplary behavior demonstrated by teachers, and the use of engaging learning methods appropriate to children's developmental stages. The religious values instilled include faith, good morals, discipline, and responsibility. In addition, the role of teachers and the school environment is highly significant in shaping children's religious character. In conclusion, the implementation of Islamic education that is conducted consistently, systematically, and based on role modeling is effective in shaping the religious character of early childhood. Therefore, collaboration between schools and parents is essential to support the success of Islamic education from an early age.</p>	<p>Keywords: Islamic education; early childhood; religious character; learning implementation.</p>
<p>Abstrak: This study aims to analyze the implementation of Islamic education in early childhood in shaping religious character at RA Pesantren Luhur. The background of this research is based on the importance of instilling Islamic values from an early age as the main foundation for character development in children. This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and documentation involving the principal, teachers, and students. The results of the study indicate that the implementation of Islamic education at RA Pesantren Luhur is carried out through various activities, such as daily religious habituation (praying, congregational prayer, and reciting the Qur'an), exemplary behavior demonstrated by</p>	<p>Keywords: Islamic education; early childhood; religious character; learning implementation.</p>

teachers, and the use of engaging learning methods appropriate to children's developmental stages. The religious values instilled include faith, good morals, discipline, and responsibility. In addition, the role of teachers and the school environment is highly significant in shaping children's religious character. In conclusion, the implementation of Islamic education that is conducted consistently, systematically, and based on role modeling is effective in shaping the religious character of early childhood. Therefore, collaboration between schools and parents is essential to support the success of Islamic education from an early age.

A. Introduction

Education is a fundamental aspect in shaping an individual's character and personality from an early age. From an Islamic educational perspective, the educational process is not only oriented towards mastery of cognitive aspects but also emphasizes the development of attitudes, morals, and spirituality integrated into daily life. Islamic education aims to shape individuals who are faithful, pious, and possess noble morals in accordance with Islamic values. Therefore, implementing Islamic education from an early age is crucial as the initial foundation for shaping a child's religious character (Tafsir, 2014).

Early childhood is in a crucial developmental phase, often referred to as the golden age. During this period, children have the ability to optimally absorb information and values, so every stimulus provided will significantly influence their future personality development. In this context, Islamic education plays a strategic role in instilling the values of faith, worship, and morals from an early age. The instillation of these values occurs not only through formal learning processes but also through habituation and direct experience in daily life (Suyadi, 2013). Early childhood is inherently unique and distinctive. They can express themselves spontaneously (active and energetic), possess a strong curiosity, a high level of enthusiasm for many things, and are adventurous, exploratory, and imaginative. However, children also get bored easily, have short attention spans, and are egocentric.

Furthermore, Islamic education for early childhood cannot be separated from an approach that aligns with the characteristics of child development. Early childhood tends to learn through play, imitation, and concrete experiences. Therefore, learning methods in Islamic education need to be designed in an engaging, enjoyable, and contextual manner so that children can easily understand and internalize them. Methods such as role modeling (*uswah hasanah*), habituation, and direct experience are effective approaches in shaping children's religious character (Ramayulis, 2012).

Religious character is an important indicator of the success of Islamic education. This character reflects attitudes and behaviors based on religious values, such as faith, piety, honesty, discipline, responsibility, and concern for others. The formation of religious character cannot be achieved instantly, but rather requires a continuous process involving various educational environments, including family, school, and community. Synergy between these three environments is essential for the optimal development of instilled religious values in children (Ulwan, 2007).

Islamic-based early childhood education institutions, such as Raudhatul Athfal (RA), play a strategic role in implementing Islamic education systematically and purposefully. Through a curriculum integrated with Islamic values, RA serves not only as a place of learning but also as an environment that supports the development of children's religious character. Activities such as daily prayer, worship, Quranic study, and moral development through social interaction are essential components of this educational process (Mulyasa, 2014).

RA Pesantren Luhur, as an Islamic boarding school-based early childhood education institution, has a unique approach to implementing Islamic education. The Islamic boarding school's strong religious atmosphere provides significant opportunities for children to learn and familiarize themselves with Islamic values from an early age. Programs such as worship practices, regular religious activities, and teacher role models are supporting factors in shaping

children's religious character. However, the success of this Islamic education implementation requires a more in-depth study to determine its effectiveness in shaping children's character.

Furthermore, the challenges of developments in the era of globalization and digitalization also impact early childhood education patterns. The rapid flow of information can influence children's values and behavior if not balanced with a strong education, particularly religious education. Therefore, the implementation of Islamic education needs to be continuously developed to remain relevant to current developments without abandoning the fundamental values of Islamic teachings. This is crucial so that children not only possess intellectual intelligence but also a strong religious character as a preparation for facing the challenges of modern life (Suyadi, 2013).

Based on this description, this study focuses on analyzing the implementation of Islamic education for early childhood in shaping religious character at RA Pesantren Luhur. This research is crucial to understand the processes, strategies, and supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of Islamic education at this institution. Furthermore, the results of this study are expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of Islamic education, particularly at the early childhood level.

B. Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological approach. In qualitative research, the data collected are not numbers, but rather words or images. The data in question comes from interviews, field notes, photographs, personal documents, and other sources (Moleong, 2019:11). Qualitative research methods are often called naturalistic research methods because the research is conducted in natural settings; also called ethnographic research because this method was initially widely used for research in cultural anthropology; and referred to as qualitative because the data collected and analyzed are more qualitative in nature.

Qualitative methods are used to obtain in-depth data, data that contains meaning. Meaning is the actual data, data that is definitely the value behind the visible data. Therefore, qualitative research does not emphasize generalization but rather emphasizes meaning. Generalization in qualitative research is called transferability (Sugiyono, 2018:13). According to Badgan and Taylor, qualitative methodology is defined as a research procedure that presents descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from observable people or actors. Qualitative research is used to uncover descriptive data from information about what they do and experience in relation to the research focus (Moleong, 2019:4).

In accordance with the theme discussed by the researcher, this study employed field research. This research was conducted directly in the field, specifically at RA Pesantren Luhur. To obtain the necessary data, the researcher conducted observations of a phenomenon. The field researcher took extensive field notes, which were then coded and analyzed in various ways. This approach was used to conduct research related to the implementation of Islamic education for early childhood.

C. Results and Discussion

Based on research conducted at RA Pesantren Luhur, it was found that the implementation of Islamic education to shape the religious character of early childhood is carried out systematically through various programs integrated into daily school activities. This implementation is not only formal in the classroom learning process, but also embodied in a religious school culture conducive to children's spiritual development.

The first implementation is carried out through habituation activities carried out routinely and continuously. These habituation activities include praying together before and after activities, reciting the Asmaul Husana (Asmaul Husana), performing congregational prayers, and practicing simple recitation of the Quran. Furthermore, children are taught to greet, behave

politely, and respect teachers and peers. This habituation is carried out daily, indirectly forming patterns of religious behavior in children.

In practice, this habituation is carried out using a fun and non-coercive approach. Teachers provide guidance in simple, easy-to-understand language and provide positive reinforcement when children successfully complete activities. This makes children feel comfortable and motivated to repeat these religious behaviors in their daily lives. The second implementation is carried out through exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*) provided by teachers. Teachers act as primary figures who serve as role models for children in their behavior. Teachers' patient, compassionate, disciplined, and consistent attitudes in carrying out religious duties serve as models directly imitated by children. The interaction between teachers and children serves as an important medium in the process of internalizing religious values. Furthermore, teachers also demonstrate exemplary social behavior, such as helping one another, honesty, and responsibility. Children who observe these behaviors tend to imitate them in their daily interactions, both at school and at home. This demonstrates that role models have a powerful influence on the character formation of early childhood. Teachers, as the children's elders, must be able to exemplify behaviors of tolerance and religious moderation. This can be done by prioritizing tolerance in daily life and teaching children good behavior to strengthen their character in everyday life.

The third implementation is carried out through learning activities integrated with Islamic values. During the learning process, teachers use various methods appropriate to the characteristics of early childhood, such as playing, storytelling, singing, and the use of visual media. The learning materials focus not only on academic aspects but also include an introduction to the values of faith, worship, and morals.

Activities such as telling stories of the Prophet and his companions, educational games with Islamic nuances, and hands-on practice in worship are part of the applied learning strategy. Through these methods, children not only

understand Islamic values cognitively but also experience and practice them in their daily lives. In addition to these three main aspects, it was also found that the Islamic boarding school environment makes a significant contribution to supporting the implementation of Islamic education. The religious atmosphere created in the school environment helps children adapt more easily to Islamic values. Regular religious activities also strengthen the development of children's religious character.

However, several obstacles face in the implementation of Islamic education at RA Pesantren Luhur. One of the main obstacles is the differences in the children's family backgrounds, where not all parents consistently implement religious education at home. Furthermore, limited learning time at school also poses a challenge in optimizing the development of children's religious character.

In addition to aspects of habituation, role modeling, and learning, this study also found that teachers regularly evaluate children's religious character development. This evaluation is conducted through direct observation of children's behavior in daily activities, such as participation in religious services, politeness, and social interactions with friends. The evaluation results indicate that most children experience positive development in religious aspects, although the level of achievement varies.

These differences in development are influenced by several factors, including family background, intensity of learning, and the child's level of readiness to accept the values taught. Children who receive full support from their families tend to show faster religious character development than children who receive less attention to religious aspects at home. Furthermore, the study also found parental involvement in supporting the implementation of Islamic education, although this is not yet optimal. Some parents participate in school activities, such as attending parent-teacher meetings and supporting their children's religious activities at home. However, others are less consistent in continuing the habits taught at school.

In another aspect, it was found that the use of visual and audio-based learning media had a positive impact on children's understanding. Media such as Islamic videos, images, and religious songs were able to capture children's attention and facilitate their understanding of religious concepts. This indicates that innovation in learning is a crucial factor in increasing the effectiveness of Islamic education for early childhood.

This study also showed that the social environment at school plays a crucial role in shaping children's religious character. Interactions between peers accustomed to religious behavior create an atmosphere that supports positive character development. Children tend to remind each other of good deeds, such as reminding them to pray or be polite.

The results of the study indicate that the implementation of Islamic education at RA Pesantren Luhur has been effective through an integrated approach of habituation, role modeling, and learning. This approach aligns with the concept of Islamic education, which emphasizes a balance between cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in the learning process (Tafsir, 2014).

Repeated habituation has proven to be an effective strategy in shaping children's religious character. This is because young children have a tendency to imitate and repeat frequently occurring behaviors. Thus, routine activities such as prayer, congregational prayer, and reading the Quran can form positive habits that become ingrained in children (Suyadi, 2013). Furthermore, habituation not only serves as a means of introducing religious values but also as a process of deep internalization. When children engage in an activity repeatedly, the values contained within it become part of their personality. Therefore, consistency in implementing habituation is key to the success of Islamic education in early childhood.

Teachers' role models are also crucial in shaping children's religious character. Teachers, as close figures to children, play a strategic role in providing concrete examples of how Islamic values are applied in everyday life.

Children tend to imitate the behavior they observe, so teachers' attitudes and actions significantly influence a child's character development (Ulwan, 2007).

In this context, role models are not limited to aspects of worship but also encompass social behaviors such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility. When teachers consistently demonstrate these behaviors, children will more easily internalize these values in their lives. In terms of learning, using methods appropriate to the characteristics of early childhood has been proven to increase the effectiveness of Islamic education. Methods such as playing while learning, storytelling, and singing make the learning process more engaging and enjoyable. This is important because early childhood tends to have a short attention span, requiring a creative and innovative approach (Mulyasa, 2014). Furthermore, the integration of Islamic values into every learning activity is also a supporting factor in shaping children's religious character. Islamic values are not taught in isolation but are integrated into all aspects of activities, so children can understand and practice them comprehensively.

However, research also indicates obstacles to the implementation of Islamic education, particularly related to the lack of synergy between schools and families. Education provided in schools will be more effective if supported by a family environment that embraces the same values. Therefore, parental involvement in the educational process is crucial to ensure the sustainability of children's character development. In addition to family factors, other challenges faced include environmental influences and technological developments, which can influence children's behavior. Therefore, more intensive efforts are needed to control and direct technology use to ensure it remains aligned with Islamic educational values.

Overall, the implementation of Islamic education at RA Pesantren Luhur has shown positive results in shaping the religious character of early childhood. This is evident in changes in children's behavior, who are becoming more disciplined, polite, and accustomed to performing religious duties. Therefore, it can be concluded that Islamic education, implemented consistently,

integratedly, and supported by a conducive environment, can have a significant impact on the development of children's religious character.

The findings of this study reinforce the importance of ongoing evaluation in assessing the development of children's religious character. Observation-based evaluation is considered more effective than written tests, as religious character is more evident in concrete behavior in everyday life. This aligns with the concept of character education, which emphasizes affective and psychomotor aspects, rather than solely cognitive ones (Mulyasa, 2014).

Differences in the development of religious character among children demonstrate that education cannot be generalized. Each child has a different background and developmental level, so the approach used must also be tailored. In this regard, teachers are required to understand the characteristics of each child so that the learning process can run effectively (Suyadi, 2013).

Suboptimal parental involvement is one of the challenges in implementing Islamic education. The family is the first and primary educational environment for children. A mismatch between school and home education can hinder the internalization of religious values. Therefore, more intensive communication and collaboration between schools and parents is needed (Ulwan, 2007).

The use of visual and audio-based learning media was also a key finding in this study. These media have been shown to increase children's interest and understanding of religious material. This indicates that Islamic education needs to adapt to technological developments to remain relevant and engaging for early childhood. With the right approach, technology can be an effective tool in supporting the learning of Islamic values. Furthermore, a conducive social environment in schools contributes significantly to shaping children's religious character. Positive interactions among peers create a school culture that supports the inculcation of religious values. In this context, school not only functions as a place of learning, but also as a social environment that shapes children's behavior as a whole.

Furthermore, the results of this study indicate that the successful implementation of Islamic education is not determined by a single factor, but rather the result of the interaction of various factors, such as learning methods, the role of teachers, the school environment, and family support. Therefore, a holistic and integrative approach is essential to optimizing Islamic education for early childhood. Thus, it is understandable that developing religious character in early childhood is a complex process and requires the involvement of various parties. Effective implementation of Islamic education must be able to integrate various strategies and approaches that are appropriate to the needs and development of children.

D. Conclusion

Based on the research results and discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of Islamic education for early childhood at RA Pesantren Luhur has been systematically implemented through various approaches, including habituation, role modeling, and integrated learning with Islamic values. Habitual activities such as daily prayer, congregational prayer, and Quran reading have been proven to gradually and sustainably shape children's religious behavior. Furthermore, teacher role models play a crucial role in shaping children's religious character, as young children tend to imitate the behavior they observe in everyday life. The learning process, which utilizes enjoyable methods tailored to children's characteristics, also contributes to the successful instilling of values of faith, worship, and morality.

The research also shows that the religious environment of the Islamic boarding school, along with the support of teachers and some parents, are contributing factors to the successful implementation of Islamic education. However, several obstacles remain, such as a lack of consistent education within the family environment and limited learning time at school. Overall, the implementation of Islamic education, which is consistent, structured, and supported by a conducive environment, effectively shapes the religious

character of early childhood. Therefore, strong synergy is needed between schools, teachers, and parents to optimize the process of forming children's religious character from an early age.

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