



## Fostering Religious Character in Early Childhood Through Islamic Values and Daily Habits

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### ABSTRACT

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This study aims to explore the implementation of character education based on Islamic values in shaping the religious attitudes of early childhood students. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed via data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that internalization of key religious values honesty, discipline, and responsibility is achieved through habit formation, modeling, and integration of these values into daily learning activities. Children's religious attitudes are observed in behaviors such as performing daily prayers, demonstrating politeness, and showing empathy toward others. Challenges include variations in family backgrounds, which may affect consistency in character development. The study highlights that fostering religious character in early childhood requires a holistic approach involving both family and school, supported by professional educators and institutional policies. The results underscore the importance of creating structured, consistent, and engaging strategies to nurture moral and spiritual growth, ensuring that children not only understand religious teachings but also practice them in daily life, forming the foundation of strong character from an early age.

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## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (PAUD) represents a critical stage in human development, during which children begin to form their core moral and religious character. This period is marked by high levels of imitation and a strong capacity to absorb values from the surrounding environment through concrete experiences (Ananda, 2017). Instilling religious values at this stage is crucial, as they form the foundation for ethical decision-making, social behavior, and spiritual growth throughout life. The normative PAUD curriculum already emphasizes religious and moral education as key developmental outcomes for children (Ghina & Ningsih, 2021). However, the rapid growth of digital technology and global cultural influences presents new challenges, as children

are increasingly exposed to content that may erode these foundational values. Evidence shows that unfiltered access to digital media can affect children's behavior and social-emotional development (Yuliansyah et al., 2025). Therefore, studying effective strategies for fostering religious character in early childhood is vital for ensuring positive societal outcomes in the next generation.

Despite the recognized importance of religious and moral education in early childhood, multiple societal challenges impede its effective implementation. The proliferation of digital devices exposes children to unfiltered content, including language and behaviors that contradict ethical and religious norms (Anggraeni et al., 2023). Such exposure can lead to imitation of inappropriate speech and behavior, demonstrating a lack of understanding of underlying moral values (Ayu, 2023). A national survey conducted by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (PPPA, 2025) revealed that over half of young children use electronic devices for more than two hours daily, correlating with reduced quality of social interactions. Additionally, research indicates a strong relationship between excessive gadget use and delayed social-emotional development (Dwi & Chandra, 2021). Consequently, early childhood education faces the dual challenge of integrating character education while mitigating the negative influences of technology, making it critical to explore practical approaches that effectively instill religious values in children.

Field observations reveal several concrete manifestations of challenges in character development among young children. Many children struggle to follow simple rules, such as waiting in line, tidying up toys, or completing classroom tasks (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, 2024). Religious practices, including daily prayer, polite behavior, and respect for teachers, are inconsistently observed without teacher guidance (Sari et al., 2024). Emotional regulation is another area of concern; early childhood educators report increased irritability, impatience, and difficulty managing conflicts among students (Saputri & Puspitasari, 2022). The inability to manage emotions affects not only immediate classroom behavior but also long-term academic and social development (Harrington et al., 2020). These phenomena underscore the necessity of structured, consistent, and contextually adapted character education programs (Khofsah, 2025; Rahman, 2026; Shoha, 2026). Without early intervention, children risk internalizing maladaptive behaviors influenced by external digital content and inconsistent home guidance, highlighting the urgency of implementing effective methods for cultivating religious and moral character during the formative years.

Previous research has explored methods for instilling religious values in early childhood education, with habit formation emerging as a particularly effective strategy. Hirlan and Mukminah (2025) demonstrate that systematically forming daily habits aligned with Islamic values improves children's religious

and moral attitudes. Similarly, Febrian et al. (2025) report that routine practices of greeting others, performing prayers, and demonstrating honesty and discipline contribute positively to the internalization of religious character. Firdaus et al. (2025) further highlight that incorporating akhlakul karimah values through daily routines strengthens discipline, empathy, and responsibility (Hefniy & Alwahedi, 2025; Hikmah & Mudarris, 2026; Holidi, 2025; Manshur, 2026). Despite these findings, a research gap exists: many studies focus on short-term interventions or are limited to controlled classroom environments, leaving insufficient evidence regarding the holistic integration of family, school, and community influences in sustaining long-term character development.

Most prior studies emphasize the effectiveness of habit-based approaches but often neglect the role of teacher modeling and parental involvement in early childhood settings. Ningsih et al. (2025) note that children learn effectively by observing authoritative figures, demonstrating the importance of consistent role modeling in daily routines. Furthermore, variations in family background and support can weaken the impact of school-based character education programs (Hasanah et al., 2024). These gaps underscore the need for comprehensive, context-sensitive studies that document both the methods and outcomes of religious character education, including parental collaboration, daily habit integration, and behavioral monitoring. Addressing these gaps is essential to develop evidence-based strategies that are scalable and adaptable to diverse social and digital environments in early childhood education.

This study contributes to the field by examining a fully integrated character education program that combines habit formation, modeling, and parental engagement. Unlike prior research that often isolates classroom interventions, this study investigates the program's effectiveness in real-world settings, observing the tangible impact on children's attitudes, habits, and religious practices. It also contextualizes these practices within the digital age, where exposure to social media and technology can counteract traditional values. By documenting best practices and identifying challenges, this study provides actionable insights for educators, parents, and policymakers seeking to strengthen early childhood religious education. The findings aim to serve as a replicable model for institutions facing similar challenges, bridging the gap between theory and practical application.

The central research problem is how to effectively instill Islamic values to foster religious character in early childhood amid digital and cultural influences. Preliminary observations suggest that combining habit formation, teacher modeling, and family involvement can significantly enhance the internalization of values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and empathy. This study argues that sustainable character development requires a holistic approach that integrates school programs, daily routines, and home support while considering the challenges posed by technology and diverse family environments. By

documenting implementation strategies, outcomes, and obstacles, the study contributes both theoretical and practical knowledge, providing a foundation for designing comprehensive, contextually relevant religious character education programs in early childhood education.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative case study design to provide an in-depth examination of the implementation of a character education program based on religious values in shaping the religious attitudes of early childhood students (Magri & McQueen, 2023; Zahavi, 2019). The case study approach was chosen to understand the phenomenon naturally and comprehensively, emphasizing the subjective experiences of teachers and parents as the main actors in the educational process. Through this design, the study captures the complexity of the program's implementation, including the integration of religious values into daily activities, and allows for the exploration of both observable behaviors and perceptions that contribute to the development of children's religious character.

The research was conducted at RA Ar-Rahman in Medan Krio, North Sumatra, selected because the institution has implemented character education based on religious values in an integrated and systematic manner within its curriculum. The school incorporates religious practices and moral development into daily learning activities through a structured Character Education Program. The location provides a rich context for observing how Islamic values are instilled in early childhood education, offering practical examples of habit formation, modeling, and parental engagement. The selection of this location ensures that the study can provide meaningful insights into effective practices for fostering religious character in young children.

Data were collected using multiple techniques to ensure comprehensive understanding. Observations were conducted on February 12–15, 2026, using a participatory approach to examine the learning process and children's interactions both inside and outside the classroom. Interviews with the principal, teachers, and parents were conducted from February 16–18, 2026, to capture their perspectives on the program's implementation. Additionally, supporting documents such as learning program materials, reports on religious activities, liaison books, and activity documentation were collected. The triangulation of these sources strengthened the validity of the study by providing multiple perspectives on the implementation and outcomes of the character education program.

Data analysis was conducted through a systematic qualitative process consisting of data reduction, data display, and verification. Data reduction involved condensing field notes, interview transcripts, and documentation to

focus on relevant themes related to religious character development. The reduced data were then presented through narrative descriptions and thematic matrices to organize patterns and relationships. Verification was carried out by confirming findings with key informants, including teachers and parents, to ensure the credibility and reliability of the results. This approach allowed the researcher to draw accurate conclusions regarding the effectiveness and challenges of implementing character education based on religious values in early childhood education.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RA Ar-Rahman Medan Krio is an early childhood education institution established in 2022. The school is situated on a 587m<sup>2</sup> plot of land located at Jl. Serayu 1, Dusun IV, Medan Krio Village, Sunggal Subdistrict, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra Province, and is led by Mrs. Sugiati, S.Pd. In an effort to foster children's religious character from an early age, the institution has developed a character education program based on Islamic values.

From an interview conducted with the principal, several findings emerged regarding the school's success in implementing this religious character-building initiative. The results of the interview with Mrs. Sugiati, S.Pd., as the principal, are as follows:

*"This school was established in response to concerns about religion within our community. It is a response to concerns regarding the erosion of moral values and the lack of positive role models in society. Therefore, this school aims not only to educate children intellectually but also to prioritize character development—not merely as a subject but as an integral part of our culture. So, we've created a character-building program for our curriculum, training for teachers, and the main program is a religious education program in the form of regular study sessions every Wednesday for teachers and other staff. I do focus on the spiritual aspect, because a good school stems from a good spiritual foundation."*

This is consistent with the findings of an interview with teacher Ms. Diah Nurjannah, S.Pd, who stated that:

*"Character-building programs are already incorporated into the curriculum. Daily, weekly, and monthly programs have been established. In addition, the school also has programs for teachers and staff."*

The interviews revealed that the success of religious character education at RA Ar-Rahmah Medan Krio is due to the strong commitment of the principal and the entire academic community, which is implemented through the curriculum and programs that incorporate religious values. The program focuses not only on character development for students but also on teachers and other

academic staff through regular training and religious study sessions. The cultivation of sound inner character among teachers and the academic community is a crucial factor in shaping children's character at school.

Systematically, the program is implemented through integration into the curriculum, the instillation of Islamic values in daily activities, and the enhancement of educators' capabilities through regular training and mentoring. One of the flagship programs is a regular religious study session every Wednesday specifically designed for teachers as a means of strengthening their spirituality and professionalism. The principal emphasizes that the quality of the school is largely determined by the quality of the teachers, making teacher character development a key strategy in shaping the character of the students.

The findings of this study align with previous research indicating that the success of character education is significantly influenced by school culture (Retnasari et al., 2021) and teachers' exemplary behavior as primary role models for young children (Wulandari et al., 2024). Effective character education is not limited to formal programs but must also be integrated into policies, leadership, and consistent practices. Furthermore, strengthening religious values through teacher training has been shown to enhance the consistency of character education implementation in early childhood education settings (Saputri & Puspitasari, 2022). Thus, a principal's strategy focused on developing teachers' spiritual and professional capacities represents a strategic approach to fostering children's character in a sustainable manner.

The implementation of Islamic values to foster religious character at the school is reflected in the following interview with the principal:

*"Children learn by example, so I practice these values myself first. At this school, we are not allowed to speak rudely or harshly, and I treat the teachers the same way. Children are more easily shaped through habits and setting a good example, so religious values such as honesty, responsibility, and good manners are best conveyed by setting an example."*

From interviews with teachers, the application of Islamic values to build character is described as follows:

*"In addition to the classroom curriculum, we instill honesty, responsibility, politeness, compassion, and discipline through consistent practice. Neither teachers nor students are allowed to use harsh language or shout. The principal sets an example for the teachers as well. For instance, when greeting students as they arrive, we welcome them with warmth and eye contact. Teachers often talk while walking with other teachers. This is not allowed. If children are late, we do not scold them, but we ask them why they are late. We explain that if they are late because of their parents, we will communicate*

*with their parents. If a child makes a mistake, we ask them to be honest, apologize, and take responsibility. Likewise, if a teacher makes a mistake, we must also apologize.”*

The application of Islamic values in fostering religious character at school is carried out through the strategies of setting a good example and consistent practice within the school culture. The principal first positions himself as a role model by being mindful of his speech, refraining from speaking harshly or loudly, and treating teachers and students with courtesy and kindness. Teachers then reinforce these values through consistent practice in daily activities, such as greeting children warmly, engaging in empathetic dialogue when children make mistakes, instilling honesty and responsibility through reflection, and building communication with parents. The practice of apologizing both by students and teachers demonstrates a school culture that genuinely instills the values of humility, responsibility, and justice.

These findings align with research confirming that the success of character education in early childhood is significantly influenced by school culture and the exemplary role of teachers as central figures in the internalization of values (Cahyaningrum et al., 2017). Consistent practice in daily interactions effectively shapes children’s religious character. Furthermore, subsequent research confirms that teachers’ exemplary behavior is the most effective strategy for instilling moral and religious values in young children. Thus, the practices implemented by the school align with scientific findings that religious character is more effectively shaped through. (Hasanah, 2019)

The results of the observations reveal several learning strategies that integrate habituation, modeling, and a play-based learning approach to instill religious values in young children. These strategies are systematically designed and consistently implemented in daily, weekly, and thematic programs, ensuring that the process of internalizing religious values occurs continuously and becomes ingrained in children’s behavior. To provide a more structured description, the following table summarizes the forms of implementation for character education based on religious values:

**Table 1. Program Strategies, Implementation Methods, and Objectives**

No	Strategies Program	Implementation Methods	Objectives
1	Religious Practices	Making it a habit to pray before and after activities, memorizing prayers, practicing prayer, reciting short surahs, showing	Instilling spiritual awareness, discipline, and a love for religious teachings from an early age. Meanwhile, respect for teachers and kindness toward others are encouraged to foster a polite, empathetic,

		respect to teachers, and doing good deeds for others	and responsible character, as well as noble moral values, so that Islamic values can be internalized in children's daily behavior
2	Positive reinforcement conditioning	The teacher praises and acknowledges the child's good behavior.	Encouraging children to continue behaving well.
3	Cultivating Exemplary Behavior	Teachers demonstrate patience, use polite language, and behave kindly, courteously, and humbly	Setting a direct example for children by behaving in accordance with Islamic values. It is hoped that this approach will help shape children's characters so that they are gentle, polite, respectful of others, and able to control their emotions in daily interactions.
4	Weekly Program	Friday Charity, Regular teachers' study session, Ethics class every Wednesday, Teacher-parent communication book	Instilling a sense of social responsibility and the habit of sharing from an early age, strengthening educators' spirituality and exemplary conduct as role models for children, and fostering an understanding of and the practice of virtuous behavior in daily life
5.	Monthly Program	Regular parent meetings Teacher meetings to evaluate and develop monthly programs	Strengthening parents' spirituality and exemplary behavior as role models for their children. Ensuring that the program is implemented effectively, purposefully, and sustainably, and making improvements based on evaluation results to enhance the quality of learning and character development in children
6.	Adaptation of learning materials and methods	Storytelling Strategy: Exemplary stories, stories of the Prophets and their companions. Play and Simulation Strategy: Role-playing and case studies Media-Based Strategy: Islamic animated videos, songs about moral values and worship	To foster Islamic character development in a way that aligns with children's natural tendencies to tell stories, play, and engage with audiovisual media.

As shown in the table above, the implementation of character education based on Islamic values is carried out through a comprehensive and sustainable approach, encompassing daily routines, positive reinforcement, teacher role modeling, weekly and monthly programs, as well as integration into learning materials and methods. All strategies are designed to instill spiritual awareness, foster noble character, and develop attitudes of discipline, empathy,

responsibility, and social concern in young children. Furthermore, the involvement of teachers and parents through regular guidance and program evaluations demonstrates a synergy between school and family in building a consistent religious culture. Thus, character education is not merely taught conceptually but is also internalized through practical activities aligned with children's developmental characteristics.

This program faces challenges; some of the obstacles encountered in implementing it are outlined in the following interview with a teacher:

*"My biggest challenge is the attitude of parents who are difficult to work with. The parents' backgrounds in terms of parenting styles, religious beliefs, and economic status have a significant impact."*

A similar sentiment was expressed by the school principal, as presented in the following interview:

*"The children at this school come from the surrounding neighborhood. Their family backgrounds are diverse, and many parents do not yet fully understand their religion. So we have to be patient; that's why I organized religious study sessions for parents to help enlighten their hearts."*

The main challenge in implementing an Islamic values-based character education program lies in external factors, particularly the students' family backgrounds. Teachers noted that a lack of cooperation from some parents, differences in parenting styles, varying levels of religious understanding, and families' socioeconomic conditions pose obstacles to reinforcing character values at school. The school principal also emphasized that the diversity of family backgrounds and the limited religious understanding in the surrounding community influence the process of internalizing values in children; therefore, schools need to be patient and proactive, for instance, by conducting regular religious study sessions for parents as an effort to build synergy between the school and the family.

These findings align with the research by Nur'aeni & Lubis (2022), which states that children may face obstacles in moral development, particularly regarding negative character traits, which can result from parenting styles that do not align with the child's developmental stage, as well as the disparity between the parenting approaches in the school environment and those practiced by parents at home. Therefore, there must be collaboration between schools and parents through effective parenting education programs to strengthen consistency in character development within both the home and school environments. (Muthiarah, 2024)

## CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this study is that the development of religious character in early childhood can be effectively fostered through a holistic and integrated approach that combines habit formation, modeling, storytelling, play-based learning, visual and audiovisual media, and positive reinforcement. The study highlights the essential role of collaboration among schools, teachers, parents, and the wider community in reinforcing children's religious attitudes, including honesty, discipline, empathy, politeness, and responsibility. Innovations such as daily connection books and the Islamic Character Week program demonstrate practical strategies that translate religious values into observable daily behaviors, offering a meaningful lesson that structured, consistent, and contextually adapted programs can produce measurable improvements in children's moral and spiritual development.

The study's strengths lie in its contribution to academic knowledge and practice, providing empirical evidence on effective methods for implementing religion-based character education in early childhood settings. At the same time, the research is limited by its focus on a single institution and the short-term observation period, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research is recommended to expand the study across diverse socio-cultural contexts, apply mixed-methods designs to capture both qualitative and quantitative outcomes, and include longitudinal follow-up to assess the sustainability of character development over time.

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