

Strategy for Developing Religious and Moral Aspects in Early Childhood

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Abstract

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This research underscores the significance of cultivating moral and religious values in early childhood, as these aspects form the foundation for the development of children's behavior, interests, and talents. To effectively nurture morals and religion, educators must employ strategic approaches both in classroom instruction and in their interactions with students within the school environment. This study employs qualitative methods, specifically a literature review, which involved collecting, reducing, compiling, organizing, and discussing relevant articles. The research was conducted at TKIT Al Huda Center in Semarang City. The findings suggest that effective learning media, such as Al-Quran, audio storytelling, series images, multimedia resources, and educational games, can significantly enhance the development of moral and religious values in children. Additionally, strategies such as engaging in play, introducing Asmaul Husna, conducting religious activities, and storytelling were identified as effective in fostering moral and religious growth in early childhood.

1. INTRODUCTION

Religious values are fundamental obligations for every individual. In Indonesia, every citizen is mandated to adhere to a religion recognized by the state. Religion plays a crucial role, particularly in the moral development of children and their interactions with others. These values, which are derived from or connected to the Almighty God, serve as a guide for life (Syamsudin, 2012: 112). Instilling religious values in children not only supports their immediate growth and development but also equips them with the moral compass necessary for their future lives.

According to Law Number 23 of 2002, Article 9, Paragraph 1, regarding child protection, every child has the right to receive an education that fosters their personal development and intelligence, in alignment with their interests and talents. A fundamental attitude that young children must cultivate is a strong moral and religious foundation. Early childhood is the most appropriate period for instilling these values. While parents play a pivotal role in establishing the moral and religious foundations, the role of teachers in early childhood education is equally significant (Hidayat, 2007).

According to the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 137 of 2014 concerning National Standards for Early Childhood Education, children's achievements in religious and moral aspects at the age of 4-5 years include knowing their religion, imitating prayer movements in the correct sequence, saying prayers before and/or after activities, recognizing good and bad behavior, becoming accustomed to proper conduct, and exchanging greetings. By ages 5-6, these achievements expand to include a deeper understanding of their religion, participating in worship, demonstrating honesty, being helpful, polite, respectful, and sportsmanlike, maintaining personal and environmental cleanliness, recognizing religious holidays, and respecting the religions of others.

Early childhood development encompasses a wide range of areas including physical, cognitive, social-emotional aspects, social context, morals, language, self-identity, and gender (Sit, 2015). Suryana (2021) emphasized that in addition to cognitive stimulation, early childhood education should also focus on motor skills, language, social-emotional development, and religious morals. In educational settings such as PAUD (Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini - Early Childhood Education), moral and religious aspects are essential considerations. Marshall et al. (2021) assert that the religious aspect is vital in every child's life, as it shapes a person's identity and is intertwined with formal life, state law, and social existence.

This underscores that morals serve as one of the foundational elements of early childhood development. Morals can be understood as a code of behavior, guiding decisions on what is fair or unfair (Mukarromah et al., 2021). Meanwhile, religious aspects are described as elements of conscience and personal attitude, rather than formal constructs (Muhaimin, 2018). Religion plays a crucial role in nurturing the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural dimensions of a child's life through non-curricular learning activities, where parents and teachers act as role models and mentors (Towoliu & Hartati, 2021).

The integration of morals and religion into every lesson in school necessitates that teachers employ strategic approaches in their classrooms. According to Tuna (2022), educators should collaborate with parents to develop strategies that effectively introduce religious and moral aspects into classroom learning. Building strong communication channels between teachers and parents is essential for supporting children's moral development. Masdalipah, as cited by Wahyuni and Purnama (2021), emphasized that early childhood is the ideal period for laying the foundation of religious and moral values.

Mintarsih (2017) highlights the significance of early childhood education, noting that it encompasses character development, including religious and moral values. A strong foundation in these values will fortify a child's identity as they grow. During the early childhood phase, children are in an imitation stage, where they rapidly absorb and replicate behaviors from their environment (Fauziddin, 2016). However, research conducted by Nurhayati (2019) revealed that the moral development of children aged 5–6 years is often inadequate. This is evidenced by behaviors such as reluctance to help peers, mocking others who have fallen, refusing to apologize for mistakes, unwillingness to forgive, and impatience while waiting in line. Therefore, collaboration among various stakeholders is essential to foster a generation that contributes positively to society.

The crucial role of moral and religious education in early childhood demands that teachers implement specialized strategies in the learning process. According to Panjaitan et

al. (2020), teachers are instrumental in the religious and moral development of young children, employing effective media, methods, and strategies such as habituation, modeling, and exemplifying positive attitudes aligned with Islamic teachings. Futaqi (2018) further suggests that teachers should carefully select media, strategies, techniques, and methods that align with the learning theme and engage students actively in the learning process. Consequently, teachers become central figures in early childhood education, particularly in the development of religious and moral aspects (Julaeha, 2019). Parents, meanwhile, serve as the primary support system for children's development at home (Fitri & Naimah, 2020), working closely with teachers to foster holistic self-development (Winarti, 2020; Junaidi, 2020).

Learning strategies play a crucial role in the development of religious and moral aspects in children. Effective strategies simplify the process for teachers to achieve their educational goals, while well-defined learning objectives are essential for a child's academic success. As noted by Susanty and Mahyuddin (2022), learning strategies are key determinants for teachers in setting and achieving learning goals for young children. However, developing appropriate strategies for this age group can be challenging for educators.

Several factors contribute to the decline in children's moral and religious development. Firstly, the erosion of religious behavior and attitudes among adults, influenced by societal changes over time, has a direct impact on children (Hidayati, 2020). Secondly, the widespread availability of television, gadgets, and smartphones exposes children to negative content, which adversely affects their attitudes, morals, and religious beliefs (Munisa, 2020). Lastly, the effectiveness of strategies, methods, and learning media used to foster children's religious and moral development must be enhanced and diversified to ensure children can absorb these values effectively (Wahyuni & Aryani, 2021). This research, therefore, aims to explore and explain strategies for developing religious and moral aspects in early childhood.

This study also considers several previous studies but distinguishes itself in various ways. For instance, the research by Kartini et al. (2022) focuses on instilling religious values during classroom learning, while Husna and Mayar (2021) emphasize strategies for introducing Asmaul Husna to foster religious and moral values in young children. Additionally, Iftitah (2020) examines strategies for developing religious values in early childhood at the Surabaya Islamic Center Kindergarten, incorporating routine activities, integration, and special events.

2. METHODS

This study employs qualitative methods, specifically a literature review, to explore strategies for the religious and moral development of early childhood. Conducted between January and March 2024 at the Al Huda Center IT Kindergarten in Semarang City, Central Java, the research focuses on identifying effective approaches for nurturing these aspects in young children. The literature review draws upon a wide range of sources, including books, journals, articles, and scientific publications (Azizah & Kholifah, 2021). To achieve the research objectives, the following steps were undertaken by the researchers::

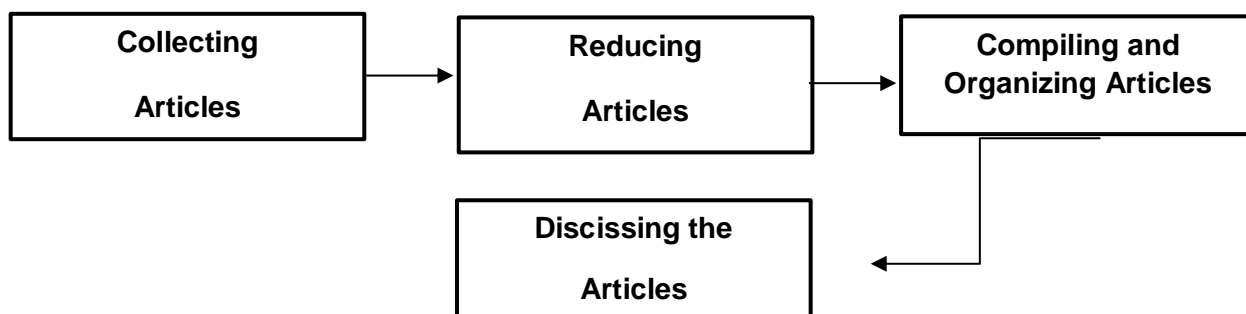


Figure 1. Research Design

In the first stage, researchers collected various scientific articles from relevant journals. These articles were then downloaded and organized into a single folder. The second stage involved reducing the number of articles by thoroughly reviewing each one and excluding those that were not directly relevant to the research objectives. This reduction process helped identify the most suitable sources, making it easier for researchers to integrate and connect the necessary and relevant theories to the research subject. In the subsequent stage, researchers analyzed the selected articles, focusing on those from library journals. The authors then connected, compared, and contrasted theories, identifying both similarities and differences, and linking relevant concepts. The final step of the research process involved synthesizing the findings and drawing conclusions.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The strategy for fostering religious and moral development in early childhood is rooted in the effective use of learning media and classroom strategies. As noted by Ayu Intan Permana et al. (2022), these strategies are significantly influenced by the quality of the learning media and the methods employed by educators. This research demonstrates that the combination of well-designed learning media with appropriate educational strategies can effectively enhance the moral and religious development of young children.

Media for developing religious and moral aspects, learning media play a crucial role in the educational process, significantly contributing to the achievement of learning goals. High-quality media are particularly effective in fostering the development of religious and moral aspects in early childhood. According to Maulana et al. (2020), learning media can create concrete learning environments and situations that are essential for early childhood development. Malapata and Wijaningsih (2019) emphasize that in early childhood education, every effort should be made to provide maximum stimulation to support the development of children's moral and religious values, highlighting that early childhood is an optimal period for instilling these aspects.

One of the most effective learning media for developing children's religious and moral values is the Quran. The Quran offers a wealth of moral and religious teachings, and its implementation in early childhood education profoundly influences the development of these values (Aprida, 2022). Learning the Quran not only helps in shaping the Islamic character of young children but also fortifies them against negative influences.

Audio storytelling is another powerful medium that teachers can utilize to enhance children's moral and religious development. Audio media, when used for storytelling, stimulates the brain, enhances oral language skills, and reinforces moral values in early childhood (Khotimah et al., 2021). Teachers can incorporate audio storytelling across various learning themes, which captivates children's interest and fosters enthusiasm for learning. As children engage with the stories, they can easily grasp the values conveyed by the teacher, allowing moral and religious teachings to be effectively ingrained in them.

Learning media that utilize images are also highly popular among young children. Aprinawati (2017) explained that serial image media can significantly enhance the development of children's speaking skills, morals, and religious values in early childhood. Serial image media consist of a series of images that are thematically related, often accompanied by conversations or narratives designed to help children understand the events depicted. This type of media is particularly effective in helping teachers foster moral development and instill religious values, as the pictures and stories are easily comprehensible for young children. The vibrant colors in the images further capture children's attention, thereby generating strong interest and engagement during the learning process.

In addition to image media, teachers can also incorporate multimedia learning and educational games. According to Sri Suharti et al. (2023), these mediums have been shown to effectively support the development of moral and religious aspects in early childhood. The use of games and multimedia in the classroom makes it easier for teachers to capture students' interest and sustain their engagement. This approach not only fosters curiosity, which facilitates learning, but also allows teachers to integrate various life lessons into the activities, reinforcing moral and religious teachings. Moreover, since play is a natural characteristic of this age group, incorporating games into the learning process helps to prevent boredom and maintain children's focus.

Strategy Developing Moral and Religious Aspects, This method is essential for fostering moral and religious development in young children. According to Ika Juhriati et al. (2022), it is highly effective for introducing children to Allah, worship practices, and other positive moral behaviors. In practice, teachers can lead congregational prayers to familiarize children with prayer rituals. Additionally, they can model various positive behaviors, such as greeting others, using the right hand for giving, and entering the toilet with the left foot. Since young children often do not fully grasp the implications of their actions, they require direct examples from teachers. Therefore, educators play a crucial role in implementing this method within the classroom and school environment.

Play Strategies with Children: This approach is designed to build a strong rapport with children, particularly those who are still developing maturity and independence. According to Nurma et al. (2022), during play, teachers can instill a sense of responsibility in children by encouraging them to follow rules, take care of toys, and share with friends. Teachers can motivate children by explaining that Allah loves those who help and cooperate with others.

Introducing Asmaul Husna: This strategy helps children gain a deeper understanding of God by introducing them to Asmaul Husna, the attributes of Allah, at an early age. Amalia Husna (2021) suggests several methods for incorporating Asmaul Husna into classroom activities, including the 2-2 method, singing, storytelling, and interactive animations. By regularly engaging with Asmaul Husna, children not only memorize these

attributes but also develop strong religious values. Teachers can observe how children's enthusiasm for learning about Allah SWT grows, contributing to the cultivation of good character from an early age.

Activity-Based Learning: Children more easily grasp religious and moral concepts when they are actively involved in the learning process, both in and out of the classroom. Rizky Noer et al. (2023) note that this strategy aligns with the "learning by doing" approach, allowing students to apply moral and religious teachings in real-life contexts. Activities such as brushing teeth, performing ablution, and participating in social charity within the school environment, as well as practicing Manasiq Hajj or visiting places of worship (religious tourism) outside of school, provide practical applications of these values.

Storytelling Strategies: Storytelling is an effective method for instilling religious and moral values in young children. This approach is particularly popular because it engages children through a combination of images, sounds, and movements. Latifah (2019) highlights that storytelling significantly impacts the development of children's religious and moral values. Through storytelling, children learn about these concepts by relating to the characters and themes presented in the stories.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, various media can be effectively utilized for the religious and moral development of children, including the Quran, audio storytelling, series image media, multimedia learning, and educational games. Teachers can employ several strategies to foster moral and religious growth in early childhood, such as behavioral coaching, play-based strategies, activity-based learning, introducing Asmaul Husna, and storytelling. These approaches collectively support the holistic development of children's moral and religious values.

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