

The Role of Teachers in Improving Early Childhood's Religious Values

Tika Astria Liani¹, Husnul Khotimah², Zaenal Arifin³

Institut Pembina Rohani Islam, Jakarta

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of teachers in fostering religious values in early childhood within a formal educational setting. This study employed a qualitative approach with descriptive methods to gain a deep understanding of religious learning practices implemented by teachers. Data collection techniques included observation of learning activities, in-depth interviews with teachers, and documentation studies relevant to the early childhood religious education process. The data obtained were analyzed using qualitative analysis techniques, including data reduction, data presentation, and systematic conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through diligent observation and triangulation of data collection techniques. The results indicate that teachers play a strategic role in strengthening religious values in early childhood, manifested through their understanding of basic religious concepts, the implementation of habitual worship practices, the use of varied and contextual learning strategies, and modeling religious attitudes and behaviors in daily life within the school environment. These findings confirm that optimizing the role of teachers significantly contributes to the internalization of religious values in early childhood and is a crucial factor in the formation of religious character from an early age.

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Corresponding Author:

Zaenal Arifin

Institut Pembina Rohani Islam, Jakarta

Email Coresspondent: zaenal.arifin8719@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood (ECD) refers to children from birth to 6 years of age. During this period, their development and growth patterns are developing rapidly and require stimulation to support their future growth and development. According to Mulianah Khaironi, early childhood is defined as children between the ages of 0 and 6. During this period, development occurs very rapidly. Research shows that approximately 40% of human development occurs during early childhood. Therefore, early childhood is considered so important that it is termed the "golden age." Every individual experiences early childhood, but this early age only occurs once in a person's life, so the existence of early childhood should not be wasted (Talango, 2020).

Rizqina & Suratman state that early childhood is the right time to provide a foundation for the development of physical abilities, language, social-emotional skills, self-concept, artistic, moral, and religious values (Ardiansari & Dimyati, 2021). Therefore, children have great potential to optimize their development. Growth and development go hand in hand. Every aspect of a child's development must be optimally developed, as they are interconnected and influence each other.

The instillation of religious values is a conscious and planned effort to prepare students to recognize, understand, internalize, and practice, thus fostering faith in their religion. This aligns with the definition of education as a path chosen to help students improve their knowledge, faith, piety, and physical well-being. This directs students to ensure that

everything they do benefits themselves and society, thereby achieving the goal of happiness in this world and the hereafter (Hardiansyah & Mas'odi, 2020).

One of the most important aspects that must receive attention in early childhood education is Islamic religious education. This Islamic religious education provides religious values related to implementing religious teachings in daily life. Religious activities for early childhood involve prayer, worship, and behavior in accordance with religious teachings. The benefits of these activities are expected to eventually shape children into individuals who are devout in their worship and behave in accordance with their religious teachings. If children are not consistently trained from an early age, it is feared that as they grow older, they will become individuals who lack a strong sense of religious commitment in their daily lives (Ardiansari & Dimyati, 2021).

According to Prof. Komarudin Hidayat, as quoted by Imas, children's spiritual essence is reflected in their spontaneity, imagination, and boundless creativity, all of which are carried out openly and cheerfully (Inawati & Athfal, 2017). This demonstrates that children's religious values are not solely related to worship rituals but encompass the spontaneity and creativity that develop throughout their learning process. For example, when children are taken to the prayer room (*musholla*), they can be taught to tidy up their sandals before entering. This habit will become ingrained in the child, so they will spontaneously become accustomed to tidying up their sandals or shoes. Furthermore, it also teaches children good manners when entering a prayer room, respect for others, and a concern for tidiness. If religious values are firmly ingrained in a child, they will grow and develop, possessing the ability to practice religious teachings and exhibit good behavior, thus creating a positive influence on themselves and their surroundings (Noor, 2020). Conversely, if religious values are not optimally instilled and developed, negative behaviors will emerge and tend to deviate from religious rules (Minarti, 2013).

To successfully shape a child's personality and foster religious values, appropriate stimulation is required. This stimulation can come from parents, teachers, or the community. This stimulation is highly beneficial for developing religious values in early childhood. The role models provided by parents, teachers, and the community are likely to shape children into individuals who practice religious teachings and possess noble morals.

Methods for developing Islamic religious values in early childhood can be achieved through storytelling, singing, field trips, role-playing, conversations, demonstrations, projects, assignments, and habituation. The strategy for developing Islamic religious values in early childhood can be implemented through routine activities, integrated activities, and special activities. Teachers can assess the development of religious values in early childhood through observation.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive approach. This approach was chosen because the study aims to deeply understand the role of teachers in fostering religious values in early childhood, as they naturally occur in the school environment. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore meanings, processes, and social dynamics that cannot be measured quantitatively (Creswell, 2014). The descriptive approach was used to systematically and factually describe the role of teachers in instilling religious values in students, based on data from observations, interviews, and documentation. This study emphasized contextual meaning and understanding rather than generalizing findings (Sugiyono, 2017)

The study was conducted at Cahaya Ananda Kindergarten (TKIT Cahaya Ananda), Depok City. The subjects were teachers at Cahaya Ananda Kindergarten, who play a direct role in the learning process and fostering religious values in early childhood. Informants

were selected purposively, based on considerations of teachers' active involvement in learning, teaching experience, and relevance to the research focus (Patton, 2015). The number of informants consisted of five teachers, representing groups A and B.

Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted interactively and continuously, following the Miles & Huberman analysis model which includes: data reduction, data presentation and drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). Data validity was guaranteed through trustworthiness techniques, which include: Credibility, through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time, as well as member checks. Transferability, by presenting a detailed description of the research context. Dependability, through auditing the research process. Confirmability, by ensuring that findings are based on empirical data, not researcher subjectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Research Results

This study aims to describe the role of teachers in fostering religious values in early childhood at Cahaya Ananda Kindergarten in Depok City. Data were obtained through observation, in-depth interviews with teachers, and documentation studies.

The results indicate that teachers have a fairly good understanding of religious values relevant to early childhood, including fostering worship habits, introducing faith values, and developing morals. Teachers view religious values as not limited to formal worship practices but also reflected in daily behaviors such as greetings, praying, being honest, and behaving politely. As stated by Ms. WA, "Examples of religious values that must be instilled in early childhood include worship activities such as prayer, ablution, recognizing God through His creation, and recognizing the Asmaul Husana (the Beautiful Names of Allah). The researchers concluded that teachers' knowledge of religious values in early childhood plays a crucial role in shaping good habits in children. Continuous efforts are needed to improve teachers' knowledge through adequate training and collaboration among teachers to create a spiritually rich educational environment for children.

Teachers employ various learning strategies to foster religious values in early childhood, including worship center learning models and habituation methods, singing, storytelling, role-playing, and projects. These strategies are designed to ensure that religious values are learned in a fun, non-coercive, and easily understood way. The worship center model allows children to gain hands-on experience practicing religious practices, such as daily prayer and supplication. As Ms. IS explained, "To foster religious values, we focus on holding worship centers. In these centers, students are more focused on being introduced to and taught about religious values. In these centers, we conduct dramatizations and tell stories about the Prophet's stories. Then, we focus on practicing prayer and other forms of worship. We also encourage the practice of reciting the Muslim pledge and supplication before and after activities."

Meanwhile, singing and storytelling methods help children remember religious messages through media that are appropriate to their developmental characteristics, as explained by Mrs. CH: "In instilling religious values in early childhood, I usually use the habituation method and singing on a daily basis. Because by singing, children will better remember the messages of the songs they sing daily, learning also becomes more enjoyable at school, and supported by the habits we implement every day, children become accustomed to engaging in activities with pleasure. Project methods, such as Ramadan charity activities, provide contextual experiences that strengthen the internalization of religious values in real life.

Teachers' exemplary behavior plays a very significant role in shaping and enhancing religious values in early childhood. As Mrs. LK stated, "One way to build positive relationships so that children can understand and apply the religious values taught is by setting an example, because by setting an example, they will follow what their teacher does. Therefore, it is important for teachers to set good examples. Furthermore, they need to convey advice well so that children are motivated and engage in worship with joy." Teachers consistently demonstrate religious behavior in their daily school life, such as patience, honesty, empathy, and proper worship. Young children tend to imitate the behavior of adults they consider important figures. Therefore, teachers' consistency in implementing religious values is an effective learning tool. These findings confirm that religious education for early childhood is more effective through concrete examples than through mere verbal instruction.

Interaction and collaboration between teachers and parents play a crucial role in fostering religious values in early childhood. Intensive communication allows for the continuity of religious values instilled between the school and home environments. Teachers regularly communicate with parents about their children's religious development, so that the values instilled in school can be continued and reinforced at home. As stated by Mrs. TA, "Collaboration between teachers and parents is crucial, because children are not always under the supervision of teachers, nor are they always under the supervision of parents. Therefore, communication between teachers and parents is crucial. It would be a waste if children were taught religious values at school but still had the freedom to do so at home. Therefore, communication must be consistent; what is implemented at school must also be implemented at home." This finding suggests that a disconnect between school and home education has the potential to hinder the internalization of religious values, while good collaboration strengthens the holistic development of children's religious character.

Evaluation of children's religious development is conducted holistically through behavioral observations, task-based assessments, and observations of daily habits. Assessments focus not only on outcomes but also on the process and consistency of children's behavior in applying religious values. Teachers also consider differences in individual characteristics of children, including family background and level of understanding, in conducting evaluations. As stated by Mrs. CH, "In assessing early childhood development, we must consider several factors about the child. For example, what kind of family they come from." "Is the family highly religious or just religious? And also the child's level of understanding, whether they grasp information quickly or have difficulty grasping it. Because this will influence their daily religious values." This contextual and flexible evaluation approach allows teachers to gain a more comprehensive picture of the development of religious values in early childhood.

3.2. Discussion

The research results show that teachers' understanding of religious values is a fundamental factor in successfully instilling religious values in early childhood. Teachers with sound religious knowledge tend to be able to design contextual learning that is appropriate to children's developmental needs. This finding aligns with research by Sitorus (2025), which states that teachers' religious competence significantly influences the formation of students' religious attitudes in early childhood education.

The learning strategies used by teachers, such as worship centers, habituation, singing, storytelling, role-playing, and projects, reflect a learning approach oriented toward direct experience. This approach aligns with the principles of early childhood education, which emphasize learning through play and concrete experiences (Alfadhilah, 2025; Suryana, 2021). Dini's research also shows that habituation methods

and creative activities are effective in increasing religiosity in early childhood because they provide meaningful learning experiences (Dini, 2022).

Teachers' exemplary behavior is a key finding that reinforces Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which states that children learn through observation and imitation of significant figures. In the context of Islamic education, role modeling (*uswah hasanah*) is the primary method for moral formation (Ritonga et al., 2024), as religious values are more easily internalized through concrete examples than through mere verbal instruction (Samsudin et al., 2021). Teachers' consistency in demonstrating religious behavior has been shown to help children understand and apply these values in their daily lives.

The interactions between teachers and parents established in this study demonstrate the importance of collaboration in religious values education. This finding aligns with Tsakila's research, which confirms that parental involvement strengthens the continuity of religious values instillation between school and home (Tsakila & Basri, 2025). Without family support, religious values instilled in schools have the potential to develop less optimally (Sopia Aprilia Ningsih et al., 2025).

In terms of evaluation, the holistic assessment approach used by teachers aligns with the concept of authentic assessment in early childhood education. Assessments that emphasize observation of the process and context of children's behavior allow teachers to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the development of children's religious values (Amanda et al., 2024; Rahayu et al., 2025). Consideration of differences in individual characteristics of children also demonstrates that evaluations are conducted in a humane and developmentally oriented manner.

Overall, this discussion confirms that improving religious values in early childhood is the result of an integrative teacher role, supported by appropriate learning strategies, exemplary behavior, collaboration with parents, and a holistic evaluation system. These findings reinforce the literature on Islamic education and early childhood education (PAUD) that religious education in early childhood must be carried out sustainably and contextually.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion presented above regarding the role of teachers in fostering religious values in early childhood at Cahaya Ananda Kindergarten in Depok City, it is clear that despite the decline in children's growth and development potential, children who do not achieve their targets are still experiencing significant decline. The teachers' strong knowledge of religious values, effective teaching strategies, positive role models, positive interactions between teachers and parents, and the use of measurement and evaluation methods are effective guides in rebuilding and enhancing religious values in early childhood.

Through strong knowledge, teachers can provide students with a strong understanding of the importance of religious values. By implementing creative and interactive strategies, teachers can make learning more engaging and enjoyable and help children internalize religious values in their daily lives. Furthermore, positive interactions between teachers and parents can support the development of religious values. Appropriate measurement and evaluation methods are also very helpful in monitoring and measuring the development of religious values in early childhood.

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