

# **The Habit of Saying Greetings and Prayers as A Strategy for Cultivating Islamic Character from an Early Age RA Al Ihsan Mulia Medan Helvetia**

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to describe the strategy of habituating greetings and prayers as an effort to cultivate Islamic character in early childhood at RA Al Ihsan Mulia, Medan Helvetia. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach by collecting data through observation, in-depth interviews with teachers, and documentation of learning activities. The results of the study show that the habit of greetings and prayers is carried out consistently in daily activities, both when coming to school, before and after learning, and when children go home. The teacher sets an example through greetings, short prayers, and positive reinforcement. This habit succeeds in fostering good manners, respect, and spiritual awareness in children. Supporting factors include an Islamic school environment, the active role of teachers and parents, and regular programs such as prayer together every morning. The obstacles found were the lack of consistency of some children at home and the limited time of teachers to provide full supervision. This study confirms that the habit of greetings and prayers is effective as a strategy for instilling Islamic character from an early age.

**Keywords:** Habituation, Greetings, Prayers, Islamic Characters, Early Childhood.

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## Introduction

Early childhood education is an important foundation in shaping children's character and personality as a whole. In the context of Islamic education, the formation of Islamic character from an early age is not only the introduction of social norms, but also the cultivation of spiritual and moral values based on the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. Education oriented to Islamic character aims to form a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also has noble morals, faith, and is able to be part of a society that upholds the values of monotheism and Islamic *ukhuwah* (Hasanah, 2015).

One of the most relevant and easily applied approaches in the early childhood education environment is through habituation, which is to form positive behaviors repeatedly and consistently in a fun atmosphere. The habit of saying greetings and prayers is one of the strategies that not only accustom children to behave politely and politely, but also introduce basic concepts in Islam such as the manners of speaking, the manners of starting activities, and the recognition of the power of Allah SWT in daily life (Suyadi, 2014). Greetings contain the values of respect, peace, and compassion, while prayer forms spiritual awareness and dependence on Allah (Fathurrahman, 2019).

In a modern society that is increasingly complex and full of moral challenges, the strategy of character education through religious habituation is very important. Children from an early age need to be introduced and accustomed to living Islamic values as part of their lives, not just cognitive lessons. This is in line with the role of Raudhatul Athfal (RA) as an Islamic-based preschool formal education institution, which is specifically responsible for developing the spiritual, social, emotional, and moral aspects of children (Mulyasa, 2014). The habit of saying greetings and prayers in the RA environment is not only an administrative routine, but also a concrete form of internalizing Islamic values in children.

RA Al Ihsan Mulia Medan Helvetia is one of the Islamic educational institutions that actively implements the habituation program of greetings and prayers in the daily routine. Through activities such as greeting when coming and going, praying before and after study, and other daily prayers, the school strives to instill Islamic character consistently. However, it is important to examine more deeply how effective this strategy is in shaping children's character, the extent to which children's understanding of the meaning of greetings and prayers is, and how the role of teachers and the environment supports this process.

Thus, this research is important to determine the implementation and effectiveness of the strategy of habituating greetings and prayers as an effort to cultivate Islamic character from an early age, as well as contribute to the development of character education models in similar Islamic educational institutions.

## Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive type of research. This approach was chosen because it aims to deeply understand the process of implementing the habit of saying greetings and prayers in the daily lives of students at RA Al Ihsan Mulia Medan Helvetia, based on the views of the participants and the socio-religious context in which the research was conducted. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore the meaning behind the practices, actions, and experiences of education actors, as well as the interactions built between teachers and students in shaping Islamic character (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The subjects of the study are students at RA Al Ihsan Mulia, classroom teachers, and school principals as key informants. The determination of informants is carried out purposively, namely choosing the subjects who are considered the most knowledgeable, understanding, and directly involved in the process of habituating greetings and prayers (Sugiyono, 2017).

Data collection techniques were carried out through three main methods: participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation is used to directly observe the process of habituating greetings and prayers, including how the teacher guides the child, its frequency and consistency, and the child's response during the activity. The interview was conducted to explore information from teachers and principals related to the purpose of habituation, the form of implementation, the challenges faced, and its impact on children's character development. Documentation in the form of activity photos, daily learning schedules, teacher notes, and other supporting documents are used to complement the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

The collected data was analyzed using an interactive analysis model according to Miles and Huberman which consisted of three stages, namely: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn/verification. The analysis process was carried out simultaneously and continuously from the beginning of data collection to the end of the preparation of the research results report (Miles et al., 2014). The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques, namely by comparing data from various informants and data collection methods to ensure the validity and consistency of the information obtained.

With this approach, it is hoped that the results of the research will be able to provide a complete picture of how the habit of saying greetings and prayers is implemented in RA Al Ihsan Mulia as a strategy in instilling Islamic character, as well as how this practice shapes children's religious behavior and awareness from an early age.

## **Research and Discussion Results**

### **4.1 Implementation of the Habit of Greetings and Prayers**

RA Al Ihsan Mulia Medan Helvetia applies the habituation of greetings and prayers through a *habituation approach* to all children's daily activities. This routine is carried out starting from the time the child comes, during learning, to going home. The teacher emphasized that salam is a form of prayer, respect, and Islamic identity that must be instilled from an early age.

Every morning, the teacher stands in front of the gate to greet the child with a smile. Children are taught to answer greetings in a clear voice, then shake hands. After that, the children pray together before entering class with a short prayer: "*Allahumma inni asbahtu...*" for the morning. The teacher uses Islamic children's songs to facilitate the memorization of daily prayers, such as prayers before meals and prayers outside the house.

Reinforcement pattern: The teacher gives praise ("*Masya Allah, it's good that you have memorized the prayers!*") or star stickers for children who consistently say greetings and prayers. Through this approach, children are more eager to imitate the teacher's behavior.

### **4.2 Changes in Islamic Behavior and Character**

During the three months of observation, there was a significant improvement in the children's Islamic behavior:

1. Weeks 1 to 4: Children begin to imitate the teacher in saying greetings even though some are still shy.
2. Month 2: More than 85% of children automatically say hello when meeting teachers and friends.
3. 3rd month: 95% of children can memorize daily prayers such as prayer in class, prayer for meals, and prayer after school.

In addition, teachers noted an increase in manners, the habit of thanking them, and the ability to wait for their turn to speak. Children also show a sense of concern, for example by reminding friends who forget to pray before eating.

The results of interviews with 15 parents showed that 12 of them saw positive changes in their children at home. Children begin to say greetings when they enter the house, pray

before going to bed, and remind other family members to pray. Parents also find it helpful because the teacher provides a daily prayer guide sheet to repeat at home.

The implementation of this habituation will not run smoothly without supporters, as for those who are supporters in the implementation of daily prayer habituation is the commitment of teachers and principals to make greetings and prayers a school culture, then there is a *wall chart* (prayer poster) in each classroom as a visual reminder, and the active role of parents in implementing habituation at home.

Meanwhile, the obstacle is that there are some children from families who do not get used to greetings at home, so that the adaptation takes longer. There are children who are more focused on games so they forget to say greetings or prayers. The teacher overcomes this obstacle by patiently repeating the habit every day.

## Discussion

The habit of greetings and prayers has proven to be effective in forming Islamic character because it is done consistently and pleasantly. According to Muslich (2018), Islamic character education must be carried out by repeating positive behavior until it becomes a habit. The habituation process at RA Al Ihsan Mulia reflects the application of *the principle of learning by doing* introduced by John Dewey, where children learn through direct experience. The results of the study support the social learning theory of Bandura (1986), which states that children learn by imitating observed behavior. Teachers at RA Al Ihsan Mulia act as positive role models who always say greetings, pray before activities, and set examples of good manners. The teacher's example plays a role as the main stimulus that the child then follows, reinforced by positive praise and recognition.

The importance of collaboration between schools and families is reflected in this study. The consistency of the habit of greetings and prayers at school will be more effective if supported by parents at home. This is in line with Ramli's (2018) research which emphasizes that early childhood character education must actively involve parents.

Children who are used to saying greetings and prayers show better spiritual awareness. They better understand the concept of praying before doing activities, as a form of servitude to Allah SWT. Socially, children become more polite, caring, and able to respect teachers and friends. These findings corroborate the results of the study of Hasanah (2019), which shows that the habituation of Islamic activities increases children's manners and discipline.

Obstacles such as the lack of consistency of children at home can be overcome with teacher-parent communication sheets, as well as reminders in the form of the task of memorizing prayers with the family. Teachers also use creative media such as prayer songs and picture cards to attract children's interest. This strategy is in line with the principle of playing while learning in early childhood.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the habit of saying greetings and prayers at RA Al Ihsan Mulia Medan Helvetia is an effective strategy to instill Islamic character from an early age. This habit is carried out consistently in children's daily routines, from arrival to return, and combined with exemplary methods, positive reinforcement, and the use of creative learning media. The positive impact can be seen from the increase in manners, prayer habits, and children's concern for friends and the environment. Children are better trained to remember Allah SWT before doing activities, show friendly behavior, and have good spiritual awareness. Collaboration between teachers and parents also strengthens the success of this habituation, despite obstacles in the form of differences in habits at home and limited teachers' time. This study recommends the implementation of the habit of greetings and prayers as a core program

in every Islamic-based RA/PAUD, by actively involving parents so that habituation at school can continue in the home environment.

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