

Implementation of the "Mini Hajj" Program as Education on Worship Practices for Early Childhood at RA Al Manar Padang Sidempuan

Dina Suryani AM, Nanda Rahayu Agustia

Abstract

The "Mini Hajj" program is one of the learning innovations based on religious practices that aims to introduce the fifth pillar of Islam concretely to early childhood. This study aims to describe the implementation, impact, and challenges of the Mini Hajj program at RA Al-Manar Padang Sidempuan. The method used is qualitative research with a case study approach. Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. The results of the study show that the implementation of Mini Hajj is carried out systematically through the introduction of Hajj materials, manasik simulations (thawaf, sa'i, wukuf, and throwing jumrah), as well as the use of attributes and visual media. This program has succeeded in increasing children's understanding of the hajj, building religious attitudes from an early age, and strengthening the habituation of spiritual behavior in the school environment. The challenges faced include limited media and the need for intensive mentoring from teachers. In conclusion, Mini Hajj is an effective educational program to instill the values of worship and spirituality in early childhood.

Keywords: *Mini Hajj, Worship Practice, Early Childhood, RA Al-Manar*

Dina Suryani AM

Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Indonesia

e-mail: dinamadhaif91@gmail.com

Nanda Rahayu Agustia

Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Indonesia

e-mail: nandarahayu@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id

International Conference Global Islamic Education: Cultivating Tolerance and Interfaith Cooperation in A Multicultural (GIE), Theme: Strengthening Tolerance and Peace.

<https://proceeding.pancabudi.ac.id/index.php/GIE>

Introduction

Early childhood education is an important foundation in shaping children's character, personality, and spiritual foundation. (Nofianti, R. 2021) Early age is a period called the *golden age*, which is the phase when the child's brain development reaches its maximum level and is very responsive to stimulation, including in the aspects of values and spirituality (Sujiono, 2012). In this context, religious education has a strategic role because it not only instills knowledge, but also shapes attitudes, behaviors, and good habits from an early age (Daradjat, 2009).

One of the challenges in Islamic religious education for early childhood is how to convey abstract material in a concrete, fun, and easy-to-understand manner for children. Hajj, as the fifth pillar of Islam, is one example of worship that is complex and difficult for children to understand because its implementation is far from their daily lives and involves many stages. Therefore, an innovative learning approach is needed and in accordance with child development. (Utami, R. D. 2018). Simulation of hajj manasik in the form of *Mini Hajj* activities is one of the effective methods to introduce the concept of hajj to children (Hasibuan, 2020).

The *Mini Hajj program* is a form of educational practice that combines elements of play, hands-on experience, and religious values. Children are invited to undergo the stages of the hajj such as thawaf, sa'i, wukuf, throwing jumrah, and tahallul through miniature holy places and guidance from teachers who act as facilitators (Hasibuan, 2020). This approach is in line with the principles of *Contextual Teaching and Learning* (CTL), where learning takes place through direct involvement of children in activities that are meaningful and relevant to their lives (Musfiroh, 2013).

Within the framework of the early childhood education curriculum, play is the main approach used to stimulate children's development. Through play, children develop various aspects of abilities such as motor, cognitive, language, social-emotional, as well as religious and moral values (Sujiono, 2012). Therefore, packaging the hajj in the form of educational games such as *Mini Hajj* is a strategic step to instill Islamic values naturally and pleasantly.

RA Al Manar Padang Sidempuan is one of the early childhood education institutions that has implemented the *Mini Hajj* program as part of religious learning activities. This program is designed not only to introduce the fifth pillar of Islam to children, but also to foster a sense of love for Allah SWT and develop religious attitudes in children from an early age.

This study aims to examine in depth how the implementation of *the Mini Hajj program* as an education on worship practices for early childhood at RA Al Manar Padang Sidempuan. The focus of the study includes the form of activities, learning strategies, as well as children's responses and understandings to these activities.

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 implementation process of the *Mini Hajj program* in the RA Al Manar Padang Sidempuan, based on the views of the participants and the social context in which the research was conducted. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore the meaning behind the practices, actions, and experiences of educators (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The subjects of the study were group B students (aged 5–6 years) at RA Al Manar, 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 and directly involved in the implementation of *the Mini Hajj* program (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 *Mini Hajj activities*, including interaction between children and teachers, media use, and children's responses during activities. The interviews were conducted to gather information from teachers and principals related to the objectives, implementation, and evaluation of the program. Documentation in the form of activity photos, teacher notes, and lesson implementation plans (RPPH) were used as complementary 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. This process is carried out simultaneously and continuously from the time the data is collected to the stage of reporting results (Miles et al., 2014). The validity of the data is maintained by triangulation techniques and techniques to ensure the validity of the data.

With this approach, it is hoped that the results of the research will be able to provide a complete picture of how *the Mini Hajj program* is implemented as a means of worship education in early childhood education, as well as its impact on children's spiritual understanding and experience.

Results and Discussion

This study aims to examine in depth how the implementation, impact, and challenges of the implementation of the Mini Hajj program at RA Al-Manar Padang Sidempuan. Based on field observations, interviews with principals, teachers, and documentation during the activity, the following results were obtained:

1. Planning and Preparation of the Mini Hajj Program

Mini Hajj activities are prepared for two to three weeks before the implementation. Teachers prepare a schedule of activities consisting of:

- a. Thematic introduction of the pillars of Islam and Hajj.
- b. Creation of learning media (mini Kaaba, Shafa-Marwah hill, replica of Arafah tent, and jumrah place).
- c. Coordinate with the parents of students to prepare children's ihram clothes and activities provisions.

The material is delivered in stages with a play-while learning approach. Children are first introduced to key words such as ihram, thawaf, sa'i, and wukuf, with the help of pictures, animated videos, and Islamic children's songs with the theme of hajj. The use of visual and audio media is very helpful in increasing children's attention and understanding.

In line with the theory of early childhood learning, systematic and contextual planning of activities is essential to stimulate all aspects of child development (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009).

2. Implementation of the Mini Hajj Program

The Mini Hajj program was held in the school yard which was changed to symbolically resemble the atmosphere of Makkah. All children wear ihram clothes and follow the flow of manasik activities:

- a. Thawaf: Circumnavigating the mini Kaaba 7 times while reciting talbiyah.
- b. Sa'i: A small run between "Shafa and Marwah hills".
- c. Wukuf: Sitting solemnly in the tent of Arafah while listening to the prayer of the teacher.
- d. Throwing a jumrah: Using a small ball of paper as a replica of a pebble.

Each activity is accompanied by teachers and parent volunteers. The teacher explains the meaning of each worship practice in a simple and appropriate manner for the child's age. Kids

are enthusiastic about participating in each stage because of the fun atmosphere, full of movement involvement, and designed like role-playing.

This activity is in accordance with the principles of early childhood learning, namely through direct experience (experiential learning) which gives meaning to abstract knowledge (Suyadi & Ulfah, 2013).

3. Response and Development of Students

Interviews and documentation show that most children:

- a. Able to mention the names of the pillars of hajj and their order correctly.
- b. Showing changes in attitudes such as being more patient when queuing, respecting friends, and saying talbiyah spontaneously.
- c. Expressing the desire to go on Hajj "really" as they demonstrate.

The teacher also noted that after the Mini Hajj activity, it is easier for children to discuss the values of worship, such as sincerity, intention, and obedience to the rules. This shows that these activities not only hone the cognitive aspect, but also the affective and psychomotor aspects of the child.

Religious learning activities that are applicable are able to instill deeper spiritual values than lecture or memorization methods. According to (Rozana, S., Wulan, D. S. A., & Hayati, R. 2020)

4. The Role of Teachers and Parental Involvement

Teachers play many roles at once in the program: as directors, explainers, models, and facilitators of learning. The teacher also compiles the narrative of the hajj manasik in the form of simple stories and dialogues to make it more interesting for children.

In addition, parental involvement as technical support is essential. Parents help children wear ihram clothes, deliver provisions, and even accompany children during the procession. This activity strengthens the synergy between schools and families in children's religious education.

Parent-teacher collaboration in spiritual learning provides a consistent environment between school and home, just as the formation of a child's spiritual character requires cross-environment cooperation. (Bredekamp, 2009)

5. Implementation Challenges

Some of the obstacles faced during the implementation of the program include:

- a. Limitations of ideal props.
- b. Time limitations, especially when children start to get tired.
- c. Variations in the child's level of understanding, which requires an individualized approach.

However, these challenges can be overcome through rescheduling, small group rotations during simulations, and support from schools and parents. Teachers also make adjustments by shortening the time of the activity and using more visual illustrations.

The implementation of the Mini Hajj program at RA Al-Manar Padang Sidempuan shows that the practice of hajj can be introduced in a fun way to early childhood through a learning approach that is in accordance with their developmental stages. Children aged 5–6 years are in the phase where they learn most effectively through hands-on, concrete experiences. Thus, Mini Hajj becomes an educational medium that not only teaches theory, but also introduces children to the values of worship through easy-to-understand symbolic practices (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009).

Through this activity, children can directly touch the replica of the Kaaba, walk while doing talbiyah, run a small run between Shafa and Marwah, and sit together during wukuf at

Arafah. These experiences make a deep impression and are an effective way to form a child's spiritual understanding from an early age. In addition, this activity also helps children in social and emotional development, such as learning to queue, follow instructions, and be patient during the process (Fitri, 2017).

Teachers have an important role as facilitators in this process. Not only acting as technical directors, teachers also guide children in understanding the meaning of each practice carried out. The teacher simplifies terms such as "thawaf" and "ihram" into narratives and role-plays, so that the children feel like they are really on the journey of the Hajj. This approach strengthens children's emotional and spiritual involvement, as well as brings them closer to Islamic values without heavy cognitive pressure (Suyadi & Ulfah, 2013).

Parental involvement is also an important point in the success of this program. They accompanied and provided support during the activity, which created synergy between education at home and school. This reflects the importance of the role of the family in shaping children's character, including in the aspect of religious education (Ellis & Brewster, 2002).

From the observations, it appears that after participating in the Mini Hajj program, children are more familiar with Islamic terms and practices, and show enthusiasm for worship. Some children even began to imitate talbiyah and hajj movements while playing at home. This shows that this program not only functions as a ceremonial activity, but also has an impact on children's daily behavior (Fitri, 2017).

Nevertheless, the implementation of this program is not free from challenges. One of them is the limitation of ideal media or teaching aids, as well as limited implementation time due to limited children's concentration. However, with the creativity of teachers and the support of parents, these challenges can be overcome well, even becoming a learning in itself in designing religious programs for early childhood (Suyadi & Ulfah, 2013).

Overall, the Mini Hajj program at RA Al-Manar is an example of good practice in grounding Islamic teachings from an early age through a fun, practical, and meaningful approach. This proves that Islamic values can be instilled without having to burden children with heavy theories, but through fun and loving experiences (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009).

Conclusion

The Mini Hajj program implemented at RA Al-Manar Padang Sidempuan has proven to be an effective, fun, and in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood development. Through activities that combine real simulations, narratives, and role-playing, children are not only introduced to the fifth pillar of Islam, but also begin to understand spiritual values such as patience, discipline, and togetherness.

Concrete experiential learning through the practice of Mini Hajj encourages children's active involvement, as well as strengthens their understanding of religious symbols. Teachers play the role of the main facilitator in simplifying the concepts of worship into activities that are easy to understand and enjoyable. On the other hand, support from parents has a positive influence in strengthening the values instilled during the activity.

With the right approach, the Mini Hajj program can be a model of early childhood Islamic education that is applicable, integrative, and has a long-term impact on the formation of children's religious character. This emphasizes that religious education does not have to be delivered in the abstract, but can be instilled through real practices that are full of meaning and compassion.

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