

# Habit of Greetings, Smiles and Greetings as A Strategy for Forming Noble Morals in Early Children at Negeri Pembina Barumun State Kindergarten, Padang Lawas

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## Abstract

This study aims to describe the practice of greeting, smiling, and greeting (3S) as a strategy for developing noble character in early childhood at Pembina Barumun State Kindergarten, Padang Lawas. The research method used was descriptive qualitative, with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. The results showed that the practice of greeting, smiling, and greeting was consistently implemented in every daily activity, from the time children arrived at school, throughout the learning process, and until they left. Teachers played an active role in providing role models, positive reinforcement, and regular reminders to the children. This practice was proven to increase children's politeness, empathy, and friendly behavior towards both friends and teachers. Supporting factors for the practice of greeting, smiling, and greeting were a religious school environment, parental involvement, and local cultural support that upholds politeness. Challenges faced included differences in children's character and a lack of consistent implementation at home. This study confirms that the practice of greeting, smiling, and greeting can be an effective strategy for instilling noble character and Islamic character values from an early age.

**Keywords:** *Practice, Greeting, Smiling, And Greeting, Noble Character, Early Childhood*

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## Introduction

Early childhood is often referred to as the golden age, a crucial stage in human development during which children experience rapid physical growth and psychological development. At this stage, children have an extraordinary ability to absorb values from their environment. Therefore, the strengthening of character values must begin early through approaches that are aligned with the world of children. One of the most important character values, which serves as the foundation of social life, is noble character (*akhlak mulia*), which reflects politeness, empathy, responsibility, and social awareness (Suyadi, 2020).

In the context of early childhood education in Indonesia, character building is an essential aspect stipulated in the 2013 Early Childhood Education Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013 PAUD) and reinforced by Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which emphasizes that education aims to develop students' potential and shape a dignified national character and civilization. In Islamic education in particular, *akhlak* holds a central position, even higher than knowledge itself. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "*Indeed, I was sent to perfect noble character*" (HR. Ahmad). This indicates that education which does not instill *akhlak* neglects the very essence of the Prophetic mission.

One simple yet highly effective strategy in instilling *akhlak* is through the habituation of Salam (greeting with peace), Senyum (smile), and Sapa (greeting/acknowledgement)—known as the 3S approach. This strategy not only introduces children to values of politeness and respect for others but also embeds Islamic values and a sense of togetherness in social life. *Salam* represents prayer and compassion in Islam; a *smile* is an expression of love and kindness that requires no cost yet has great impact in building closeness; while *sapa* teaches children attentiveness and care towards others (Yusuf, 2019).

At TK Negeri Pembina Barumon, Padang Lawas, the practice of 3S has been implemented as an approach to fostering polite behavior and respect for others. This practice is applied in various moments, such as when children arrive at school, meet teachers and peers, and during classroom and playtime interactions. The habituation of 3S is not only carried out by teachers but also instilled through role modeling. Teachers welcome children with warm greetings and smiles, which are then naturally imitated by the children.

Although seemingly simple, this habituation carries profound meaning. A sincere smile or a simple greeting can lay the foundation for the development of positive character traits such as humility, attentiveness, and respect. In the long run, this strategy is believed to nurture children who are not only cognitively intelligent but also socially and spiritually competent. Research by Mulyasa (2014) shows that habituation is an effective strategy in character education, as it shapes behavior through repeated practice.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this strategy does not occur automatically without challenges. Several factors can influence the success of the 3S habituation, including the consistency of teachers in implementation, support from the school environment, parental roles at home, and children's individual dispositions. Therefore, further studies are needed to explore how the implementation of 3S is carried out in practice, the challenges faced, and the extent to which this strategy contributes to shaping children's noble character.

This study is significant, as there has been limited academic research that specifically addresses the 3S habituation strategy in the context of early childhood education within formal institutions such as public kindergartens (*TK Negeri*). The findings of this research are expected to serve as both a reference and a model of best practices that can be adopted by other early childhood institutions (*PAUD*) in strengthening character education, particularly in fostering noble character (*akhlak mulia*) among young children.

## Research methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive type, as it aims to describe and explain in depth the phenomenon of practicing greetings, smiles, and salutations (3S) in the context of forming noble character in early childhood. The descriptive qualitative approach allows the researcher to explore the meanings, experiences, and perceptions of the subjects in depth as well as to understand the social and cultural context in the environment of TK Negeri Pembina Barumun Padang Lawas (Creswell, 2014).

The descriptive research type was chosen because it does not aim to test hypotheses, but rather to systematically and factually describe the practice of 3S as a character education strategy. The main focus of this study is the process, not quantitative results, so the emphasis is placed on narratives, social interactions, and the dynamics that occur during the habituation process.

The subjects in this study were selected using purposive sampling, namely the selection of informants who were considered to best understand and be directly involved in the practice of 3S in the school. The main subjects included: classroom teachers, the principal, parents of students, and the students themselves. The selection of these informants aimed to obtain a holistic picture from various perspectives.

The researcher used three main techniques to collect data, namely: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted through moderate participation (Spradley, 1980), where the researcher was present in the environment but not actively involved in learning activities, acting only as an observer. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with the principal, teachers, and some parents. The interviews were recorded with the informants' consent and transcribed for analysis. The researcher also reviewed various supporting documents such as: Daily Lesson Plans (RPPH), daily/weekly habituation activity agendas, school programs on character education, communication books (between parents and teachers), and photo or video documentation of children's activities. These documents were useful in supporting data obtained from observations and interviews.

The data were analyzed through three stages:

1. **Data Reduction**

The results of observations, interviews, and documentation were selected, classified, and simplified according to the research focus.

2. **Data Presentation**

The reduced data were organized in narrative form, matrices, and interview excerpts to make them easier to understand and analyze thematically.

3. **Conclusion Drawing and Verification**

The researcher drew conclusions by identifying patterns, categories, and themes that emerged in the data, and then verified them with other data or informants (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana).

## Results

Based on the results of observations conducted over three weeks at TK Negeri Pembina Barumun, the practice of greetings, smiles, and salutations (3S) was applied consistently every day. This activity began as soon as the children entered the school gate. Teachers stood to welcome the children with a friendly smile while greeting them, then gave a warm salutation such as, "Good morning, dear, how are you today?" Children were trained to respond to the teachers' greetings with cheerful expressions.

Teachers did not merely offer formal greetings but also demonstrated how a sincere smile could create a sense of comfort for the children. For example, when a child appeared unenthusiastic, the teacher would gently greet them while patting their shoulder and offering a

loving salutation. This action made the child feel cared for and valued, making it easier for them to engage in the 3S routine.

Apart from the school gate, the 3S routine was also carried out inside the classroom before beginning learning activities. Each child was encouraged to greet their classmates with a smile and a salutation. The teacher first provided an example, then invited the children to imitate it. This activity not only created a warm and pleasant learning atmosphere but also trained the children's social skills.

Documentation results showed that in the first week, about 40% of the children still appeared hesitant when greeting or addressing their peers. However, after repetition and positive reinforcement in the form of praise and small hugs from the teacher, by the third week, 90% of the children appeared enthusiastic and were able to perform greetings, smiles, and salutations independently.

### 1. Teacher Strategies in Instilling the 3S Routine

Teachers employed several strategies to ensure the 3S routine ran optimally, namely:

- a. Role Modeling: Teachers acted as the main role models by consistently greeting, smiling sincerely, and addressing both children and parents at all times. According to Bandura's social learning theory (1986), children imitate adult behaviors they consider role models, making teacher role modeling the key to success.
- b. Repetition: Teachers applied the principle of repetition so that the 3S routine became ingrained in children's behavior. Every day, teachers consistently encouraged children to greet and smile not only when arriving but also when leaving school.
- c. Positive Reinforcement: Children who performed greetings, smiles, and salutations well were given praise, star stickers, or motivational words such as *"Great job, you greeted so politely!"* This aligns with Skinner's reinforcement theory (Sudjana, 2017).
- d. Collaboration with Parents: Teachers encouraged parents to continue this routine at home, for example by habituating children to greet family members every morning and evening.

### 2. Impact of the 3S Routine on Building Noble Character in Children

The 3S routine not only fostered politeness but also cultivated respect and empathy. Based on interviews, teachers stated that children who were initially indifferent had become more sensitive to those around them. They became accustomed to greeting teachers and peers, even taking the initiative to ask how others were doing.

Observations also revealed changes in attitudes:

- a. Children became more cheerful and friendly, creating a more conducive classroom atmosphere.
- b. Children learned to express positive emotions through smiles and salutations.
- c. Children began to understand Islamic values, particularly the Sunnah of greeting as encouraged by the Prophet Muhammad SAW (HR. Muslim).

These changes align with Hasanah's (2019) view that the habituation of positive behavior in early childhood forms the foundation for noble character development in later stages.

### 3. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Supporting factors for the success of this program included:

- a. Teacher commitment to providing role models and positive reinforcement.
- b. Support from the principal, who provided facilities such as 3S posters in every classroom corner.
- c. Parental cooperation in continuing the routine at home.

Inhibiting factors included:

- a. Inconsistency among some parents in implementing the 3S routine at home.

- b. The influence of electronic media that displayed impolite behavior, which children easily imitated.

Teachers sought to overcome these obstacles through intensive communication with parents, providing education on the importance of the 3S routine in shaping noble character.

## Discussion

The research findings show that the habituation of greetings, smiles, and salutations (3S) is an effective strategy for shaping the noble character of early childhood. This strategy works through mechanisms of repetition, teacher role modeling, and positive reinforcement. In the context of early childhood education, character formation cannot be carried out solely through lectures or instructions but requires real approaches through consistent behavioral examples.

These findings are consistent with Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, which emphasizes that children learn through observation and imitation of significant role models. Teachers who consistently greet, smile, and address children every day provide positive modeling. Teacher role modeling has been proven to be the dominant factor in the success of this habituation. Children not only listen to instructions but also see direct examples from teachers, making it easier for them to internalize the behavior.

This habituation process was effective because it was supported by repetition and positive reinforcement. Sudjana (2017) emphasized that repetition is one of the basic principles in habit formation. At TK Negeri Pembina Barumon, repetition was carried out daily during children's arrivals and departures, as well as in classroom interactions.

In addition to repetition, positive reinforcement also played an important role. Teachers gave praise or small rewards to children who consistently practiced the 3S routine. This aligns with Skinner's view that reinforcement strengthens expected behavior. Children who were initially shy, after receiving appreciation, showed increased confidence and independence in greeting and addressing their peers.

The practice of greetings is not merely a social habit but has a strong religious foundation. In Islam, giving greetings is a highly recommended Sunnah, as the Prophet Muhammad SAW said: "*Spread greetings among you...*" (HR. Muslim). Thus, the application of 3S not only develops children's social character but also strengthens Islamic values relevant to the goals of moral education (Hasanah, 2019). This shows that the integration of character education and religious education can be carried out through simple activities such as greetings, smiles, and salutations.

### 1. Social and Emotional Impact on Children

Another interesting finding is the positive impact of 3S on children's social and emotional development. Children who were accustomed to greeting teachers and peers became friendlier, more cheerful, and more confident. They also learned to respect others and express empathy. These behavioral changes support Vygotsky's (1978) argument that social interaction is a key factor in children's personality development.

In addition, the classroom atmosphere became warmer and more harmonious, reducing the potential for conflicts among children. Teachers reported that children began to initiate greetings without being prompted. This indicates that the habituation had reached the stage of internalization, where positive behaviors were carried out consciously and spontaneously.

### 2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in a Practical Perspective

The success of this program cannot be separated from the support of teachers, the principal, and parents. Collaboration between schools and families is key to ensuring consistency both at school and at home. However, challenges arose when some parents were less consistent, as well as the influence of digital media that often displayed impolite behavior.

Teachers addressed these obstacles through intensive communication with parents and by providing education about the importance of habituating Islamic manners.

These findings are in line with Ramli (2018), who stated that the consistent habituation of Islamic behavior is effective in instilling positive character in early childhood. This research also reinforces Agustia (2024), who explained that character formation must begin at an early age through habituation, not merely through advice.

In conclusion, the 3S routine can be regarded as a simple yet effective strategy for shaping noble character in early childhood. This strategy can serve as a best practice model to be applied in other early childhood education institutions, provided that there is active involvement from all parties, especially teachers and parents.

## Conclusion

The habituation of greetings, smiles, and salutations (3S), consistently implemented at TK Negeri Pembina Barumon, is an effective strategy for instilling noble character in early childhood. Through teacher role modeling, repetition, and positive reinforcement, children become accustomed to being polite, friendly, and respectful toward others. This strategy has a positive impact on children's social and emotional development, making them more confident, able to interact well, and capable of showing empathy.

The success of the 3S habituation is supported by teachers' commitment and parents' involvement, although challenges remain, such as a lack of consistency in implementation at home and the influence of media. The 3S routine not only cultivates social habits but also instills Islamic values in line with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) about the importance of giving greetings and doing good to others.

Thus, the habituation of greetings, smiles, and salutations can serve as a best practice model in early childhood education as an effort to build Islamic character and noble morals from an early age.

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