

The Role of Religious Extracurricular Activities in Strengthening Islamic Character of Early Childhood Learners at TK Dharmawanita Kotanopan

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of religious extracurricular activities in strengthening the Islamic character of early childhood learners at TK Dharmawanita Kotanopan. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed to explore how religious extracurricular programs contribute to the development of children's Islamic character in a natural educational setting. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that religious extracurricular activities play a significant role in strengthening Islamic character values such as faith, worship practice, moral behavior, discipline, responsibility, and social care. These activities include Qur'an reading practice, daily prayers, Islamic songs, storytelling of prophets, and habituation of Islamic manners. The implementation process is carried out through continuous habituation, teacher role modeling, and structured reinforcement in both curricular and extracurricular contexts. The study also indicates that the effectiveness of religious extracurricular activities is supported by a strong Islamic school culture, teacher consistency, and parental involvement. However, challenges such as differences in children's developmental readiness, limited learning facilities, and varying family backgrounds may influence the internalization process. In conclusion, religious extracurricular activities serve as an effective and contextual strategy for strengthening Islamic character in early childhood education. This study contributes to the development of Islamic early childhood education by highlighting the importance of structured religious activities in shaping children's moral and spiritual foundation.

Keywords: religious extracurricular activities, Islamic character, early childhood education, habituation,

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Introduction

Character education is one of the main focuses of the national education system in Indonesia. The policy of strengthening character education emphasizes the importance of developing moral values, including religious values, discipline, and responsibility as integral components of the educational process (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018). However, in practice, various behavioral problems are still found among early childhood learners, such as low levels of discipline and insufficient habituation of religious values (Lickona, 2013; Wiyani, 2014). This condition indicates that the internalization of values has not yet been optimally achieved, both within the family environment and educational institutions.

Early childhood is a critical phase in character formation because it is the golden age, a period of development that significantly determines personality formation in the future (Suyadi, 2010). At this stage, children require appropriate educational stimulation so that character values can be optimally instilled. This is in line with Nofianti (2021), who states that early childhood education serves as the foundation for shaping children's attitudes, behavior, and character through continuous habituation processes.

From the perspective of Islamic education, Islamic character encompasses moral values (*akhlakul karimah*) such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, and obedience in practicing religious teachings (Nata, 2016). The formation of such character is not only conducted through formal instruction but also through habituation and role modeling in various daily activities (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). Therefore, strategies are needed that can integrate Islamic values contextually into children's daily lives.

One strategy with strong potential for strengthening Islamic character is through religious extracurricular activities. These activities provide children with direct experiences in practicing Islamic values through activities such as Qur'an reading and writing, worship practices, and other religious programs. Extracurricular activities also function as self-development platforms that strengthen character formation through habituation and real-life experience (Mulyasa, 2012). In the context of early childhood education, practical and repetitive activities are considered more effective in shaping children's character compared to purely theoretical learning (Nofianti, 2021).

In addition, the success of character formation in children is also closely related to the role of the family. Parenting styles significantly contribute to shaping children's character through consistent habituation at home. This is in line with Agustia (2022), who states that parental involvement in religious habituation activities can support early character development. Therefore, synergy between schools and families is an important factor in the success of character education.

However, in practice, the role of religious extracurricular activities in strengthening Islamic character among early childhood learners has not yet been fully optimized. Several challenges include limited implementation time, lack of integration with core learning activities, and differences in family backgrounds that affect the consistency of habituation at home.

Specifically, in the local context of TK Dharmawanita Kotanopan, religious extracurricular activities have been implemented as part of the school program. However, there has been no in-depth study examining how these activities contribute to strengthening Islamic character in early childhood learners, as well as the factors influencing their effectiveness.

Based on this description, there is a gap between the potential of religious extracurricular activities as a means of strengthening Islamic character and their actual implementation in practice. Therefore, this study is important to analyze the role of religious extracurricular activities in strengthening Islamic character among early childhood learners at TK Dharmawanita Kotanopan.

Literature Review

2.1. Early Childhood Education and Character Formation

Early childhood education (ECE) is a fundamental stage in the formation of individual character. At this stage, children experience very rapid development and therefore require appropriate stimulation to develop positive attitudes and behaviors. According to Nofianti (2021), early childhood education serves as the foundation for character development through continuous habituation in daily life. Therefore, the educational environment must be able to provide meaningful learning experiences that are appropriate to the child's developmental stage.

Character refers to values embedded within a person that are reflected in daily behavior. Lickona (2013) states that character consists of three integrated components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, which must be developed in a holistic manner. In early childhood education, character formation is carried out through simple, concrete, and repetitive activities so that children can easily understand and internalize them (Wiyani, 2014).

2.2. Religious Extracurricular Activities in Early Childhood Education

Extracurricular activities are activities conducted outside formal learning hours aimed at developing students' potential, interests, and talents. In Islamic education, religious extracurricular activities play an important role in strengthening the understanding and practice of Islamic values. Mulyasa (2012) states that extracurricular activities can serve as an effective means of character formation through direct experience and habituation. In early childhood, religious extracurricular activities such as Qur'an reading and writing, worship practices, and other religious activities help children understand and practice Islamic values concretely. In addition, practical and enjoyable activities are more easily accepted by young children compared to purely theoretical learning (Nofianti, 2021). Therefore, religious extracurricular activities are considered an effective strategy for strengthening Islamic character in children.

The strengthening of Islamic character in early childhood is influenced by several factors, one of which is religious extracurricular activities conducted at school. These activities function as a means of habituation and internalization of Islamic values through direct experience.

Conceptually, the relationship between variables in this study can be described as follows:

- a. Input: Islamic values
- b. Process: Religious extracurricular activities (habituation, role modeling, reinforcement)
- c. Output: Islamic character of early childhood learners

In addition, external factors such as parenting styles also influence the success of character development. Therefore, synergy between school and family is required to ensure that the internalization of values can take place optimally.

Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. This approach was chosen because the study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of religious extracurricular activities in strengthening Islamic character among early childhood learners within a natural context. Through a qualitative approach, the researcher is able to explore meanings, processes, and participants' experiences comprehensively, resulting in a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2014). The research was conducted at TK Dharmawanita Kotanopan. The site was selected purposively because the

institution implements religious extracurricular activities as part of its character education program. The study was carried out over approximately two months, including preliminary observation, data collection, and data analysis stages. The research subjects consisted of the principal, teachers, and students. In addition, parents were included as additional informants to obtain more comprehensive data regarding children's character development in the family environment. Informants were selected purposively based on their knowledge and direct involvement in the implementation of religious extracurricular activities (Sugiyono, 2017).

Data collection techniques in this study included observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to directly examine the implementation of religious extracurricular activities and children's behavior during these activities. Interviews were conducted in depth with the principal, teachers, and parents to obtain information regarding the role of extracurricular activities in strengthening children's Islamic character. Documentation was used to complement the data, including activity schedules, photographs, and other supporting documents (Sugiyono, 2017).

Data analysis was carried out using the interactive model proposed by Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data reduction involves selecting and simplifying relevant data. Data display is presented in descriptive narrative form to facilitate understanding. The final stage is conclusion drawing, which is conducted continuously throughout the research process to ensure valid findings. To ensure data validity, this study used triangulation techniques, including source triangulation and method triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from different informants, while method triangulation was carried out by comparing observations, interviews, and documentation. In addition, the researcher conducted member checking by confirming the data with informants to ensure the accuracy of the information obtained (Creswell, 2014).

Overall, the research procedure includes preparation, implementation, data analysis, and report writing stages. These stages were carried out systematically to ensure that the research findings are valid, credible, and in accordance with scientific research standards. Data analysis in this study followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and simplifying field data. Data display was presented in descriptive narrative form to facilitate interpretation. The final stage involved continuous conclusion drawing throughout the research process to ensure valid and accountable findings. To ensure data validity, triangulation techniques were applied, including source and method triangulation. Source triangulation compared data from different informants, while method triangulation compared observation, interviews, and documentation. In addition, member checking was conducted to verify the accuracy of data with informants (Creswell, 2014).

Results

The findings show that religious extracurricular activities at TK Dharmawanita Kotanopan play an important role in strengthening Islamic character among early childhood learners. These activities are implemented as part of the school program to familiarize children with recognizing, understanding, and practicing Islamic values in their daily lives. The forms of activities include habituation of prayer recitation, memorization of short surahs, introduction to Arabic letters, simple worship practices, greeting habits, and other religious activities adapted to children's age and developmental abilities. The implementation of religious extracurricular activities is conducted in a simple, enjoyable, and repetitive manner.

Teachers not only deliver verbal instruction but also provide direct examples for children. Students are guided to imitate, habituate, and practice Islamic values through daily school activities. This habituation pattern can be observed in activities before learning, during play, in peer interactions, and when following teacher instructions.

The findings indicate that religious extracurricular activities contribute to the development of several aspects of Islamic character, namely religiosity, discipline, responsibility, politeness, and positive behavior. Religious character is reflected in children's habits of reciting prayers before and after activities, greeting others, and participating in memorization of short surahs. Discipline is shown through children's compliance with rules, punctuality, and obedience to teacher instructions. Responsibility is demonstrated by children's ability to complete simple tasks, take care of learning materials, and participate in activities until completion.

In addition, religious extracurricular activities also strengthen children's social behavior. Children become accustomed to respecting others, taking turns, sharing, and using polite language. This indicates that religious activities not only affect worship-related aspects but also children's social behavior in daily life. Teachers play a key role as guides and role models in the character-building process. Supporting factors for the success of religious extracurricular activities at TK Dharmawanita Kotanopan include teacher commitment, principal support, a religious school environment, and cooperation with parents. Teachers play an important role in guiding children through habituation and role modeling. Parents are also a supporting factor because habituation at school needs to be continued at home to ensure consistent character development.

However, the study also identified several challenges, including limited time for activity implementation, differences in children's abilities in participating in religious activities, and uneven habituation of Islamic values in the family environment. Some children are already accustomed to religious activities at home, while others still require more intensive guidance. Therefore, synergy between school and family is essential in strengthening Islamic character in early childhood.

Overall, religious extracurricular activities at TK Dharmawanita Kotanopan serve as a medium for habituation, role modeling, and reinforcement of Islamic values. These activities help children understand Islamic teachings concretely through direct experiences appropriate to their developmental stage in early childhood education.

The findings show that religious extracurricular activities play a strategic role in strengthening Islamic character among early childhood learners. These findings are consistent with the concept of early childhood education, which emphasizes the importance of continuous habituation in shaping children's behavior. At an early age, children are in a critical developmental phase; therefore, character values need to be instilled through concrete, simple, and repetitive activities (Nofianti, 2021; Suyadi, 2010).

Religious extracurricular activities at TK Dharmawanita Kotanopan serve as an effective medium for instilling religious values. Through activities such as prayer recitation, memorization of short surahs, worship practice, and greeting habits, children gain direct experience in practicing Islamic values. This is in line with Mulyasa (2012), who states that extracurricular activities can serve as a means of character formation because they provide learners with opportunities to learn through real experience and habituation.

The formation of Islamic character in early childhood cannot rely solely on theoretical instruction. Children need concrete examples from teachers and their surrounding environment. In this context, teachers act as role models who demonstrate Islamic behavior in daily activities. Teacher modeling is crucial because young children tend to learn by imitating the behavior of adults around them. This finding aligns with Al-Ghazali (n.d.), who emphasizes that moral character can be developed through continuous practice, habituation, and repetition.

Islamic character formed through religious extracurricular activities includes religiosity, discipline, responsibility, politeness, and social awareness. These values are part of *akhlakul karimah*, which is a key objective in Islamic education. Nata (2016) explains that Islamic character reflects behaviors aligned with Islamic teachings, such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and obedience in practicing religious obligations. Thus, religious extracurricular activities not only strengthen children's religious knowledge but also shape positive behavior in daily life. The findings also indicate that habituation is the main strategy in character development. Children who are routinely guided to recite prayers, greet others, follow rules, and behave politely are more likely to internalize these values as part of their habits. This is consistent with Wiyani (2014), who states that character formation in early childhood should be carried out through simple, concrete, and repetitive activities so that they are easily understood and practiced by children.

In addition to the school environment, parental involvement also plays a significant role in the success of Islamic character formation. Habituation carried out at school becomes more effective when supported by the family environment. Children who consistently experience religious habituation at home tend to adapt more easily to religious activities at school. This is in line with Agustia et al. (2022), who state that parenting practices in habituating religious activities play an important role in developing children's religious character.

The challenges in implementing religious extracurricular activities indicate that strengthening Islamic character requires a continuous process. Limited time, differences in family backgrounds, and variations in children's abilities are challenges that must be managed by the school. Therefore, schools need to design activities that are more structured, enjoyable, and appropriate for early childhood development. In addition, communication between teachers and parents should be improved so that Islamic values can be consistently reinforced both at school and at home.

Based on these findings, religious extracurricular activities can be understood as a character education process that integrates three main elements: habituation, role modeling, and reinforcement. Habituation is carried out through repetitive religious activities; role modeling is provided by teachers through real behavior; and reinforcement is given through guidance, motivation, and appreciation for children. Thus, religious extracurricular activities make an important contribution to the development of Islamic character among early childhood learners at TK Dharmawanita Kotanopan.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that religious extracurricular activities play an important role in strengthening Islamic character among early childhood learners at TK Dharmawanita Kotanopan. These activities are implemented through

habituation of prayer recitation, memorization of short surahs, introduction to Arabic letters, worship practices, greeting habits, and Islamic behavior in daily life.

Religious extracurricular activities function as a medium for habituation, role modeling, and reinforcement of Islamic values. The Islamic character developed in children includes religiosity, discipline, responsibility, politeness, and social care. The success of these activities is supported by teachers' roles, principal support, a religious school environment, and parental involvement.

The challenges encountered in implementing religious extracurricular activities include limited time, differences in children's abilities, and variations in religious habituation within the family environment. Therefore, stronger collaboration between schools and parents is needed to ensure that Islamic character formation can take place optimally and sustainably..

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