

Instilling Religious Values in Early Childhood from the Perspective of Abdullah Nashih Ulwan

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the concept of instilling religious values in early childhood from the perspective of Abdullah Nashih Ulwan. This research used a qualitative approach with a library research design. The primary data source was Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's *Tarbiyatul Aulad fil Islam*. Secondary data sources included books, scholarly articles, and research findings relevant to religious education in early childhood. Data were collected through documentation techniques and analyzed using content analysis through the stages of identification, classification, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that the instillation of religious values according to Abdullah Nashih Ulwan includes the values of faith, worship, morals, and social relations. These values must be instilled from an early age in a gradual and continuous manner. Ulwan offers five main methods, namely exemplary conduct, habituation, advice, attention and supervision, and the provision of educational consequences. Exemplary conduct becomes the main method because children learn religious behavior through the real actions of parents and educators. Habituation is used to form regularity in praying, worshiping, greeting others, maintaining cleanliness, speaking honestly, and respecting others. Advice is delivered through simple language, stories, and dialogue that suit children's development. Attention and supervision are carried out with affection, while consequences are given gradually and without violence. This study concludes that Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's concept emphasizes the comprehensive instillation of religious values through the unity of knowledge, exemplary conduct, habituation, supervision, and the educational environment. Its implementation requires cooperation among families, schools, and communities so that religious values develop into children's habits and character.

Keywords: Religious Values, Early Childhood, Islamic Education

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Introduction

Early childhood education is a crucial stage in forming the foundation of an individual's personality and character. During this period, children are in a phase of rapid development that is often called the golden age. Therefore, this stage is highly appropriate for instilling fundamental values, including religious values (Mhd. Habibu Rahman, 2020). Instilling religious values from an early age plays an important role in shaping children's patterns of thought, attitudes, and behavior so that they align with Islamic teachings and can serve as a guide for life in the future.

Religious values in early childhood do not only include ritual worship, such as prayer and supplication. They also include the formation of creed, morals, and ethical conduct as an integrated whole in the development of children's personalities (Casini & Listiana, 2024). Creed functions as the foundation of belief that builds children's awareness of God's existence, so they have a clear life orientation from an early age. Meanwhile, morals and ethical conduct function as guidelines for daily behavior, both in relationships with other people and with the surrounding environment. The integration of these three aspects is highly important because early childhood is a phase of imitation and value internalization. Every stimulus given to children can strongly influence long-term character formation (Nareswari, 2024).

The instillation of these values aims to build a foundation for thinking and acting that is in harmony with religious teachings. Children who are accustomed to religious values from an early age will be better able to develop self-regulation, empathy, and moral awareness in facing various life situations (Meilasari & Ichsan, 2024). This is in line with the findings of (Elfiadi, 2023), which show that religious education in early childhood has a positive correlation with the development of children's spiritual and socio-emotional intelligence, including the ability to distinguish good and bad behavior based on the values they believe in.

Furthermore, the instillation of religious values also functions as a preventive shield against various forms of behavioral deviation in the modern era, which is marked by the rapid flow of globalization and digitalization (Mastiana Nainggolan, 2023). Children who are not equipped with strong religious values tend to be more vulnerable to negative environmental influences, such as aggressive behavior, a lack of manners, and weak social responsibility. Conversely, children who receive consistent religious education from an early age tend to show more disciplined, honest, and responsible behavior (Damayanti & Solihin, 2019).

In addition, religious education in early childhood also plays a role in forming noble character (*akhlaqul karimah*), which is the main goal of Islamic education. This character is reflected not only in the vertical relationship with God but also in horizontal relationships with other people, such as helping one another, respecting others, maintaining honesty, and keeping trust. In this context, educational approaches that emphasize habituation and exemplary conduct become very important because young children more easily absorb values through concrete experience than through abstract explanation (Fardah et al., 2023).

In practice, the instillation of religious values in early childhood is carried out through various methods, such as exemplary conduct, habituation, storytelling, and enjoyable learning activities. These methods have proven effective in helping children understand religious values in a simple and contextual way according to their developmental stage. Innovative approaches, such as storytelling about the prophets, also show a significant influence in forming children's creed and morals in the current era of globalization.

On the other hand, the challenges of instilling religious values in early childhood have become increasingly complex along with the rapid development of digital technology and changes in family parenting patterns (Zaini et al., 2021). Technological progress, especially the presence of digital devices and increasingly easy internet access, has a significant impact on children's developmental processes. Young children are now more frequently exposed to digital

content that is not necessarily aligned with religious values. This can affect their patterns of thought, attitudes, and behavior (Syafa'atun Nahriyah, 2017). Without appropriate guidance, technology can become a factor that weakens the internalization of religious values in children.

In addition, changes in parenting patterns in modern families also create specific challenges. Many parents tend to have limited time to accompany their children because of work demands, so the role of religious value education in the family becomes less optimal. More permissive or poorly directed parenting patterns can also cause children to lack consistent habituation to religious values. In fact, consistency in habituation and exemplary conduct is the main key to the successful instillation of values in early childhood.

Moreover, an increasingly heterogeneous social environment and the influence of globalization also strengthen the challenges of forming children's religious character. Children easily absorb various values from their surroundings, whether these values are in line with or contrary to religious teachings. This condition requires more serious efforts to filter and direct the values children receive so that they remain within the framework of religious education.

Therefore, a comprehensive, systematic, and context-sensitive educational concept is needed so that the instillation of religious values can run optimally from early childhood. This concept must not only emphasize cognitive aspects or the introduction of religious teachings. It must also include behavioral habituation, creed strengthening, and character formation through methods that match children's developmental stages. An integrated approach among families, schools, and community environments becomes very important so that the process of internalizing religious values can take place continuously and effectively.

In this context, Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's thought is relevant to examine because it offers a concept of child education that emphasizes balance among exemplary conduct, habituation, and comprehensive moral development. Thus, the implementation of a systematic and religious value-based concept is expected to answer various challenges that arise in the process of early childhood education in the modern era. In his thought, Ulwan emphasizes that child education must cover the aspects of faith, morality, mentality, social life, and physical development in an integrated way. He also states that effective educational methods for instilling religious values include exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*), habituation, advice, attention, and educational punishment.

Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's thought is relevant to contemporary research findings that emphasize the importance of holistic and continuous approaches in early childhood education, particularly in the instillation of religious values. This shows that classical Islamic educational concepts still have strong relevance in answering the challenges of modern education. Based on the explanation above, research on Instilling Religious Values in Early Childhood from the Perspective of Abdullah Nashih Ulwan is important for deeper study. This research is expected to contribute theoretically and practically to the development of Islamic education, especially in formulating effective strategies for instilling religious values in early childhood.

Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Instilling Religious Values

The instillation of religious values is the process of internalizing religious teachings into individuals gradually through learning, habituation, and exemplary conduct. This process does not only aim to provide knowledge about religious teachings. It also aims to shape attitudes, behavior, and character that correspond to these values. In the context of early childhood education, the instillation of religious values is very important because children at this stage are in a developmental phase that is highly sensitive to environmental stimulation.

Religious values include various aspects, such as creed or faith, worship or religious practice, and morals or moral behavior. These three aspects must be instilled in an integrated

manner so that children do not only understand religious teachings theoretically but can also implement them in daily life.

2.1 Early Childhood

Early childhood refers to children aged 0 to 6 years, who are in a period of very rapid growth and development. This period is often called the golden age, namely a critical period that strongly determines later development. According to Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, young children are in the preoperational stage. At this stage, they begin to think symbolically but remain limited to concrete matters. Therefore, religious values must be instilled through concrete methods, such as exemplary conduct, habituation, and direct experience.

In addition, from Lawrence Kohlberg's perspective of moral development, young children are in the preconventional stage. At this stage, children's moral judgments are still based on consequences, such as reward and punishment. This shows that educational methods involving habituation and reinforcement are highly effective in instilling religious values in children.

Research Methodology

This research used a qualitative approach with a library research design. This approach was selected because the research focused on examining the concept of instilling religious values in early childhood based on Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's thought as written in his works, particularly *Tarbiyatul Aulad fil Islam*. Qualitative research aims to understand phenomena deeply through the analysis of textual data, not numerical data. The data sources in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's main work, *Tarbiyatul Aulad fil Islam*, which served as the main reference in examining the concept of child education from an Islamic perspective. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from relevant literature, such as books, scholarly journals, articles, and previous research findings related to early childhood education and the instillation of religious values.

Data collection was carried out through documentation study by collecting, reading, and examining various written sources related to the research topic. The collected data were then selected and classified according to the research focus, namely the concepts, methods, and relevance of instilling religious values in early childhood. The data analysis technique used was content analysis. This analysis was carried out by identifying, categorizing, and interpreting textual content related to the concept of instilling religious values according to Abdullah Nashih Ulwan. The analysis process involved several stages, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was conducted by selecting relevant information. Data display was presented in the form of systematic descriptions. Conclusion drawing was carried out by formulating the research findings comprehensively.

Results

4.1. The Nature of Instilling Religious Values in Early Childhood

The analysis of Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's thought shows that the instillation of religious values is a process of guiding children to know Allah, understand the foundations of Islamic teachings, become accustomed to worship, and display behavior that aligns with Islamic values. This process is not limited to the delivery of religious knowledge. The instillation of religious values must shape children's awareness, attitudes, habits, and behavior in everyday life.

According to Ulwan, children have basic potential that needs to be directed through proper education. This potential can develop when children receive guidance, exemplary conduct, affection, and a supportive environment. Therefore, education from early childhood has an important position in forming the foundation of children's personalities. The study of

Ulwan's thought also shows three important elements in child education, namely the selection of appropriate methods, educator readiness, and the creation of a conducive educational environment.

Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's concept of child education actually covers seven fields, namely education in faith, morals, physical development, intellect, psychology, social life, and sexuality (Abdullah Nashih 'Ulwan, 2015). These seven fields are interrelated. However, in the context of instilling religious values in early childhood, the analysis can be grouped into four main values, namely faith, worship, morals, and social values.

4.1.1. Faith Values

Faith values are the main foundation of child education from Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's perspective. Children need to be introduced to Allah, the sentence of tawhid, the Prophet, the Qur'an, and the foundations of Islamic teachings from an early age. This introduction aims to form children's emotional and spiritual relationship with religion.

The instillation of faith values must be carried out through simple activities that are easy to understand. Parents and teachers can introduce Allah through His creations, such as humans, plants, animals, water, the sky, and the surrounding environment. Children can also be accustomed to saying the sentence of tawhid, basmalah, hamdalah, istighfar, and expressions of gratitude.

At the early childhood stage, the concept of faith should not be delivered through abstract theological explanations. Teachers and parents need to connect it with concrete experiences. Children can be invited to understand that food, health, family, and nature are gifts from Allah. This approach helps children know religion in a positive, close, and enjoyable way. Ulwan places tawhid as the foundation that directs children's growth. Tawhid education needs to be given from the beginning so that the development of children's attitudes and behavior has a strong foundation of faith.

4.1.2. Worship Values

The findings show that religious values are also instilled through the introduction and habituation of worship. Children are not only given explanations about the obligation to worship. They are also involved in worship practices according to their developmental stage. Forms of instilling worship values in early childhood include praying before and after activities, following prayer movements, listening to Qur'anic recitations, memorizing short surahs, recognizing places of worship, and participating in religious activities. Children can also be accustomed to greeting others, responding to greetings, and reciting prayers before eating, sleeping, learning, and leaving the house.

The habituation of worship does not aim to burden children with demands beyond their ability. Its main purpose is to build closeness, joy, and regularity in carrying out religious activities. Children need warm and enjoyable worship experiences so that they do not view religion as a collection of prohibitions and pressure. According to Ulwan's thought, habituation is an important method for instilling faith, worship, and morals. Actions that are carried out regularly will help children form more stable patterns of behavior.

4.1.3. Moral Values

Moral values in Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's thought relate to the formation of good behavior toward Allah, oneself, parents, teachers, friends, and the environment. These values include honesty, responsibility, politeness, patience, affection, discipline, cleanliness, and care. The instillation of morals cannot be carried out sufficiently through commands and prohibitions. Children need to see concrete examples from adults. Teachers who ask children to speak politely must use polite language. Parents who teach honesty must also show honest

behavior in family life. Inconsistency between adult words and actions can weaken the process of value instillation.

In early childhood, moral values can be instilled through simple activities, such as queuing, sharing toys, helping friends, tidying play equipment, apologizing, saying thank you, and maintaining cleanliness. These activities connect religious values with concrete actions that children can perform. Ulwan's thought places moral education as part of comprehensive child education (Khairul Abdillah Harahap, Muh. Wasith Achadi, 2025). Children need to be guided so that they can recognize good and bad behavior and have a religious foundation in determining their actions.

4.1.4. Social Values

Religious values from Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's perspective also have a social dimension. Religiosity is not only visible in individual worship but also in children's relationships with others (Tambunan & H., 2024). Children need to be guided to respect the rights of others, care for others, cooperate, help, and maintain good relationships.

The instillation of social values can be carried out through group play activities, sharing food, visiting sick friends, helping teachers, and giving some of one's belongings to others. Teachers can also use role play to introduce helping behavior, asking permission, apologizing, and resolving conflict properly.

Social values need to be instilled together with faith and moral values. Children need to understand that loving friends, helping others, and protecting the environment are part of religious teachings. Thus, religious education does not stop at the ability to memorize prayers and short surahs. It must also be visible in children's social behavior.

4.2. Methods for Instilling Religious Values in Early Childhood

4.2.1. Exemplary Conduct Method

The findings show that exemplary conduct is a very important method in Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's thought. Young children have a tendency to imitate the behavior of people close to them. The words, habits, ways of worshipping, and ways adults treat others become sources of learning for children.

Exemplary conduct can be carried out through the behavior of praying, performing worship, speaking honestly, keeping promises, maintaining cleanliness, and respecting others. Teachers and parents do not only serve as providers of information. They become real examples of the values taught. Exemplary conduct must be carried out consistently. Teachers cannot instill discipline if they are often late. Parents also find it difficult to instill politeness if they are used to using harsh words. Therefore, the personal quality of educators becomes an important part of the success of children's religious education. The study by (Asri & P., 2020) on Ulwan's method shows that exemplary conduct applies at all times because the actions of parents and educators can become learning materials for children.

4.2.2. Habituation Method

Habituation aims to transform religious values into behavior that is performed regularly. Children are guided to repeat positive activities until these activities become part of their routine. Habituation can be carried out through activities such as greeting others when arriving, praying before learning, washing hands before eating, tidying play areas, sharing, and saying thank you. Teachers need to arrange clear routines so that children obtain consistent experiences.

Habituation must be accompanied by brief explanations. Children are not only directed to perform certain actions. They also begin to be introduced to the reasons behind those actions. For example, children are accustomed to sharing because religion teaches care. Children are

accustomed to maintaining cleanliness because cleanliness is good and beneficial behavior. The study by (Ulwan, 2020) also identifies habituation as one of the five main methods of child education according to Abdullah Nashih Ulwan. The other methods include exemplary conduct, advice, supervision, and punishment or consequences.

4.2.3. Advice Method

Advice is used to help children understand values, correct mistakes, and know the consequences of an action. However, advice for young children must use short, concrete, and easy-to-understand sentences. Advice can be delivered through stories of the prophets, stories of pious children, conversations, hand puppets, pictures, songs, and role play. Stories help children understand values through characters and events. After storytelling, teachers can invite children to mention the good behavior shown by the characters.

Teachers need to avoid advice that is too long. Young children's concentration skills are still developing. Short advice, delivered at the right time and accompanied by examples, is easier to understand than long lectures. Advice also must not be used to embarrass children. Teachers need to talk about mistakes calmly and direct children toward correct behavior. This approach enables children to understand mistakes without feeling rejected.

4.2.4. Attention and Supervision Method

Attention and supervision are carried out by observing the development of children's faith, worship, morals, and social behavior. Supervision in this concept does not mean controlling children excessively. Supervision is a form of responsibility and care from educators. Teachers and parents need to know children's habits, playmates, media use, language exposure, and behavioral changes. If children show inappropriate behavior, adults need to provide guidance immediately. Supervision must be accompanied by affection. Children need a sense of security so that they are willing to accept direction. A good emotional relationship makes it easier for children to imitate, listen to, and follow adult guidance.

The family environment, community, educational institutions, and places of worship influence the formation of children's religious values. Therefore, the instillation of values cannot be assigned only to teachers or schools. Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's thought has several strengths. First, his concept is comprehensive because it covers faith, morals, physical development, intellect, psychology, social life, and sexual education. Second, Ulwan does not only discuss educational materials. He also discusses methods and the responsibilities of educators. Third, his concept places the family as the primary educational environment. Fourth, the concept connects religious values with concrete behavior.

The study by (Saleh, 2018) also shows that the values of child education in Tarbiyatul Aulad fil Islam include seven fields and use five main educational methods. Nevertheless, its implementation requires adjustment. Some discussions were born in a social and cultural context different from the current conditions of early childhood education. Teachers need to adjust language, media, forms of discipline, and learning activities to children's age and needs. Adjustment does not mean changing the basic values. The values of tawhid, worship, affection, responsibility, honesty, and care can still be maintained. Adjustment is made in the way these values are delivered and applied.

Conclusion

The instillation of religious values in early childhood from Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's perspective is a comprehensive, gradual, and continuous educational process. The values instilled include faith, worship, morals, and social values. Faith values become the foundation for forming children's relationship with Allah. Worship values form the habit of practicing religious teachings. Moral values guide children's behavior toward themselves and others. Social values foster care, cooperation, respect, and helping others.

Abdullah Nashih Ulwan offers four educational methods, namely exemplary conduct, habituation, advice, and attention and supervision. Exemplary conduct becomes the main method because children learn through adult behavior. Habituation forms behavioral regularity. Advice provides understanding of values. Attention and supervision maintain children's development. Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's concept is relevant to early childhood education when applied according to children's developmental characteristics. The instillation of religious values needs to use concrete, simple, enjoyable activities that are close to children's lives. Its success requires consistent adult behavior and cooperation among families, schools, and communities. Through this cooperation, religious values are not only understood as knowledge but also develop into children's habits and character.

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