

Teacher Strategies in Introducing the Concept of Worship to Early Childhood at RA Al-Khairat Tamiang

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze teacher strategies in introducing the concept of worship to early childhood at RA Al-Khairat Tamiang, supporting and inhibiting factors, and teacher efforts in overcoming learning obstacles. The study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type. Data were obtained through observations of learning activities, interviews with the principal and teachers, and documentation of religious programs. Data analysis included data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data validity was tested through triangulation of sources and techniques. The results showed that teachers introduced the concept of worship through strategies of role modeling, habituation, demonstration, direct practice, storytelling, singing, the use of concrete media, positive reinforcement, and collaboration with parents. The materials introduced included daily prayers, purification, prayer movements, reading short surahs, dhikr, charity, maintaining cleanliness, and respecting others. Teachers not only introduced the procedures of worship but also explained their meaning in simple language. The success of the strategy was supported by teacher consistency, a religious school environment, learning media, and family involvement. Learning obstacles included differences in children's abilities, easily distracted attention, inconsistent habits at home, and limited media. Research concludes that introducing worship becomes more effective when teachers integrate concrete examples, routine habits, hands-on practice, play experiences, and family support. These strategies help children recognize worship as a close, enjoyable, and meaningful activity in their daily lives.

Keywords: *Teacher Strategies, Concept of Worship, Early Childhood, Habits, Role Models*

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Introduction

Early childhood education is a fundamental phase in the entire educational process because during this period, children experience rapid growth and development, including cognitive, language, physical-motor, socio-emotional, and religious and moral values. Therefore, the implementation of Early Childhood Education (PAUD) cannot be understood solely as an effort to prepare children for academic readiness, but rather as a process of forming the foundation of personality, character, and life habits that will influence children's development at subsequent levels.

In this context, religious and moral education plays a very strategic role because it provides a foundation for children to recognize good values, distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior, and build positive relationships with God, other people, and their surroundings (Mhd. Habibu Rahman, 2020). National regulations also place this dimension as a crucial part of early childhood education standards. The PAUD Content Standards emphasize that the scope of learning materials must be developed according to children's developmental milestones, while the PAUD Graduate Competency Standards emphasize that children need to understand the teachings of their religion, practice worship according to their religion or beliefs, and demonstrate noble moral behavior in daily life with adult guidance (Helandri et al., 2024).

Based on this framework, the introduction of religious practices in PAUD institutions, including Raudhatul Athfal (RA), cannot be positioned as an additional activity or merely a complement to the curriculum (Amirudin et al., 2024). Rather, the introduction of religious practices is a core part of the educational process, aimed at instilling religious character from an early age through concrete, simple, and developmentally appropriate learning experiences (Lutfiyah & Malang, 2024). At an early age, children are not yet effectively exposed to religious teachings in abstract and complex theoretical forms. They more easily understand religious values through familiarization, role models, repetition, a pleasant atmosphere, and direct practice in daily activities, such as praying, greetings, maintaining cleanliness, sharing, being honest, respecting teachers and parents, and following basic worship procedures according to their religion (Andryani et al., 2023). Therefore, religious education activities at RA are not merely oriented toward children's ability to imitate movements or recite certain readings, but are more directed toward developing spiritual attitudes, discipline, responsibility, and noble morals that form the foundation of a child's future personality.

Furthermore, strengthening religious and moral values in early childhood is increasingly urgent amidst rapid social change, the rapid flow of information, and the challenges of character formation in the modern era (Bahtiar Siregar, 2023). Children grow up in a very diverse and open environment, so they need a strong foundation of values to be able to develop not only as intelligent individuals, but also as people who are faithful, have good morals, and are able to live side by side in harmony with others.

In this case, RA institutions have an important role as an educational environment that typically integrates the development of all aspects of children's development with the habituation of Islamic values in everyday life (Wardati & Rhida, 2024). Therefore, the introduction of worship must be designed pedagogically, in stages, according to children's developmental needs, and implemented through synergy between teachers, parents and the school environment. If this process is carried out consistently, then RA will not only become a place where children learn to recognize religious symbols and practices, but also become the initial space for the formation of a generation that is religious, has character and has a strong moral foundation from an early age (Harahap & Siregar, 2020).

In the institutional context, RA/BA/TA Al Khairat Tamiang is registered as a private RA educational unit located in Kotanopan District, Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra, with NPSN 69729875. As a madrasa-based institution, RA has a strategic position to introduce worship not merely as verbal knowledge, but as a life experience that is close to children's routines. The latest policy study also confirms that elements of religious and moral values in

RA include the values of faith or monotheism, the values of worship, and moral values which can be integrated across learning activities.

Various recent studies show that the introduction of religious values and worship in early childhood is most effective when carried out through concrete strategies and close to the child's world. (Lorenza et al., 2023) shows that daily religious habits, such as greetings, prayers, Duha prayers, memorizing short letters, and reading Islamic stories, contribute to building children's responsibility and respect. (Hikmah & Said, 2025) also emphasizes the importance of an integrative thematic approach, creative media, daily religious practices, and family cooperation in instilling religious values. Meanwhile, (Amirudin et al., 2024) found that understanding prayer is easier to introduce through consistent habituation and support from concrete learning media.

Apart from habituation and direct practice, the introduction to worship in early childhood is also enriched through stories, games, songs and visual media. (M. Fadlillah, 2016) through a systematic study found that learning media plays an important role in instilling religious and moral values in children aged 4-6 years. Home support is also very crucial, because the collaboration between parents and educators has been proven to strengthen children's tolerance, honesty, manners and habits of worship.

The problem is, there are still many PAUD and RA institutions that have introduced worship, but have not organized their strategies systematically. Some activities stop at rote memorization or formal routines, without reaching meaning appropriate to the child's age. On the other hand, the latest research mapping on the formation of moral values in kindergarten also shows that there are challenges to teacher needs, implementation strategies, and consistency of the learning environment. Based on these gaps, this article aims to formulate relevant teacher strategies to introduce the concept of worship to early childhood at RA AlKhairat Tamiang in a structured, contextual and appropriate manner according to the child's developmental stage.

Literature Review

1. Teacher Strategies in Early Childhood Learning

Teacher strategies are a series of methods consciously planned and used to effectively achieve learning objectives. In the context of early childhood education, teacher strategies are not simply understood as teaching techniques, but rather as patterns of action that encompass activity planning, method selection, media use, management of learning interactions, and evaluation of child development (Sri Yulan Giola, 2024).

In early childhood, learning strategies must be tailored to the child's developmental stage, which is characterized by concrete thinking, easy imitation, relatively short attention spans, and learning best through direct experience, repetition, habituation, and a fun playful atmosphere. Therefore, teacher strategies in early childhood education (PAUD) and RA cannot be equated with those at higher levels; teachers must present learning that is simple, contextual, active, and relevant to children's daily lives. Various studies also show that in teaching religious and moral values, teachers tend to use strategies that emphasize role models, habituation, storytelling, play-while-learning, and daily practice because these strategies best align with the learning characteristics of early childhood.

2. Teachers as Central Figures in the Introduction to Worship

In early childhood education, teachers hold a crucial role because children learn not only through lengthy abstract explanations but also through observing the behavior of adults around them (Sri Yulan Giola, 2024). Therefore, teachers serve not only as transmitters of material but also as role models, guides, facilitators, directors, and creators of a religious learning atmosphere in the classroom. In the context of introducing worship, teachers are not simply

required to teach readings or movements but must also provide meaningful religious experiences for children.

Teachers need to demonstrate consistent religious behavior, such as greeting, praying before and after activities, maintaining cleanliness, speaking politely, demonstrating patience, and carrying out worship practices in an orderly manner. Research on teacher strategies in RA also shows that role modeling is a key strategy because young children tend to imitate figures they consider important in their lives, especially teachers. Therefore, the success of introducing the concept of worship is greatly influenced by the personal qualities and consistency of teachers' behavior in daily learning.

3. The Concept of Worship in Early Childhood

Substantively, worship is a form of human devotion to God, manifested through belief, speech, attitudes, and actions in accordance with religious teachings. However, in the context of early childhood, the concept of worship is not introduced through complex theological explanations, but rather through simple experiences that children can understand. At this stage, worship is more appropriately introduced as good habits performed for the sake of God, such as praying, saying hello, being grateful, sharing, respecting parents and teachers, maintaining cleanliness, performing ablution, imitating prayer movements, listening to Quranic recitations, and participating in other simple religious activities. Thus, introducing the concept of worship to early childhood is not only oriented towards children's ability to imitate certain movements or phrases, but also towards the development of a religious attitude, a sense of enjoyment of worship activities, and the formation of noble morals in daily life (Sufiani et al., 2022).

The RA curriculum guide emphasizes the integration of Islamic values into all aspects of child development. Research on the learning of religious and moral values at RA indicates the addition of religious activities such as tadarus (recitation of the Koran), dhuha prayer, Arabic language introduction, and the development of religious attitudes as part of the educational process.

Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive approach to provide an indepth description of teacher strategies in introducing the concept of worship to early childhood at RA Al-Khairat Tamiang. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on the learning processes, experiences, and practices that occur naturally within the school environment. The research subjects included the RA principal, class teachers, and assistant teachers, who were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in worship learning activities. The research data consisted of primary data obtained directly from informants and secondary data from supporting documents, such as teaching modules, semester programs, RPPH (Lesson Plans for Religious Activities), religious activity schedules, and documentation of learning activities.

Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, interviews and documentation. Observation is used to directly observe the implementation of teacher strategies in introducing the concept of worship, such as the habit of praying, practicing ablution, prayer movements, memorizing daily prayers, and teacher example in religious behavior. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to obtain more in-depth information regarding planning, implementation, obstacles and teacher efforts, while documentation was used to complement and strengthen field data. The data obtained was analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, namely through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, while the validity of the data was tested through source triangulation and technical triangulation so that the research findings had strong credibility.

Results

The research results show that the introduction of the concept of worship at RA AlKhairat Tamiang is implemented through planning integrated with daily learning activities. Teachers do not treat worship as a stand-alone topic. Instead, they incorporate the values and practices of worship into the opening activities, main activities, break times, closing activities, and daily interactions. Learning planning is guided by children's developmental needs. Teachers select worship materials relevant to children's lives, such as greeting, reciting prayers, understanding ablution (wudu), following prayer movements, memorizing short surahs (chapters), maintaining cleanliness, sharing food, and giving alms. This selection of materials aligns with the Foundation Phase Learning Outcomes, which guide children to begin recognizing and practicing the basic teachings of religion and cultivating noble behavior.

Teacher planning includes activity objectives, materials, methods, media, and assessment methods. Learning objectives are not limited to children's ability to memorize recitations. Teachers also guide children in recognizing prayer times, following the order of worship, maintaining cleanliness, demonstrating orderly behavior, and understanding the simple reasons for performing worship.

Teachers adjust the difficulty of the material to the children's ages and abilities. In the initial stages, children are introduced through observation and imitation. In the next stage, children follow the movements, recite the readings together, and practice with guidance. Once the children become accustomed to the practice, the teacher provides opportunities for them to perform the activities more independently.

1. Strategies Implemented by Teachers at RA Al-Khairat Tamiang

a. Modeling Strategy

Modeling is the primary strategy in introducing the concept of worship. Teachers provide examples before asking children to perform an activity. Teachers greet the class upon entering, recite prayers before class, maintain cleanliness, speak politely, and demonstrate orderly worship procedures. This strategy aligns with the characteristics of young children, who tend to learn through observation and imitation. Research on early childhood character education shows that adult role models play a crucial role because children imitate behaviors they repeatedly observe.

In practicing ablution (wudu), the teacher demonstrates the sequence of washing the body parts. The teacher does not simply provide verbal instructions. She demonstrates how to turn on the faucet sufficiently, prioritize the right side of the body, and maintain the cleanliness of the ablution area. The children then follow the teacher's movements step by step. During prayer activities, the teacher stands in front of the children and demonstrates the movements of takbir, bowing, iktidal, prostration, sitting, and greeting. The teacher uses slow movements so the children can observe clearly. This strategy helps children connect religious terms with concrete actions.

Modeling is also applied in social behavior. The teacher demonstrates how to share, apologize, express gratitude, respect friends, and maintain cleanliness. Thus, the concept of worship is not only introduced through rituals. The teacher also introduces worship through good behavior in everyday life.

b. Habituation Strategy

Habituation is carried out through routine activities carried out consistently. These activities include saying greetings, praying before and after studying, reading short surahs, reciting tayibah sentences, praying before meals, tidying up play equipment, maintaining cleanliness, and practicing prayer. Habituation helps children remember actions through repetition. Children not only receive information about worship, but also experience and practice it every day. Research (Cahyaningrum et al., 2017) shows that habituation and role modeling can support the internalization of character values in early childhood.

Teachers implement habituation through three forms of activity: routine activities, spontaneous activities, and programmed activities. Routine activities occur at relatively fixed times. Spontaneous activities are carried out when certain situations arise. For example, teachers encourage children to recite "Istighfar" after making a mistake or to say "Alhamdulillah" when they receive something. Programmed activities are implemented through practicing ablution (wudu), congregational prayer, introducing Ramadan, sharing activities, and commemorating Islamic holidays.

Habituation is carried out without demanding perfection in children's reading and movements. Teachers provide assistance as needed. They emphasize children's courage to try, involvement in activities, and habit development rather than formal precision.

c. Demonstration and Direct Practice Strategy

Teachers use demonstrations to explain the concept of worship, which involves a sequence of movements. This strategy is particularly applied to introducing ablution (wudu) and prayer. The teacher demonstrates each step, explains it briefly, and then asks the children to practice. Demonstrations make abstract material more concrete. Children can see the connection between the teacher's explanation and the actions to be taken. The use of demonstration methods in early childhood learning provides opportunities for children to observe, imitate, and be directly involved in learning activities.

The practice of ablution is carried out by introducing a simple sequence. The teacher verbally introduces the intention, washes the hands, rinses the mouth, washes the face, washes the hands up to the elbows, wipes the head, cleans the ears, and washes the feet. The teacher provides gentle correction if the child misses a particular step.

During prayer practice, the children follow the teacher's movements together. The teacher does not immediately demand that they memorize the entire recitation. The teacher begins with short recitations, basic movements, and orderly postures during prayer. Skills are developed gradually. Direct practice provides children with sensorimotor experiences. Children use their bodies, sight, hearing, and language simultaneously. These experiences help children remember the procedures of worship better than learning based solely on lectures.

d. Storytelling Strategy

Teachers use stories to introduce the purpose and values inherent in worship. Stories are chosen from stories of the prophets, families, children's lives, or simple stories about good behavior. Through stories, teachers introduce the reasons for prayer, the importance of prayer, the benefits of maintaining cleanliness, the value of sharing, and an attitude of gratitude. Children are encouraged to understand that worship is not simply a series of recitations and movements. Worship is related to obedience to God and good behavior towards others.

Teachers convey stories using intonation, expression, pictures, and simple questions. After the story is complete, teachers invite children to answer questions such as:

- 1) What did the character in the story do?
- 2) Why did the character pray?
- 3) How did the person who received the help feel?
- 4) Which actions can be imitated? What can children do at home?

Storytelling strategies help teachers convey religious values through situations that children can easily understand. Research on strategies for developing religious and moral values shows that storytelling can be an appropriate approach for early childhood learning because it connects moral messages with concrete experiences (Safitri & 'Aziz, 2019).

e. Singing and Movement Strategy

Teachers use songs to help children remember the recitations, sequence, and values of worship. Songs are used to introduce the pillars of Islam, prayer times, the order of ablution, daily prayers, and commendable behavior. Singing makes learning more enjoyable.

Children follow the lyrics, rhythm, and movements together. The use of songs also helps children who are not yet able to maintain attention for long periods (Suwarti et al., 2023). Teachers combine singing with body movements. When introducing the order of ablution, children perform movements that correspond to the lyrics. When introducing prayer, children imitate the takbir, bowing, and prostration movements. The integration of movement and song helps children understand the material through auditory and kinesthetic experiences. Teachers ensure that songs serve as a means of introduction, not a substitute for worship practices. After the singing activity, the teacher invites the children to participate in a simple simulation or practice so that the concepts introduced don't stop at memorizing the song.

2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

a. Supporting Factors

The introduction of the concept of worship is supported by several factors. First, teacher commitment. Teachers demonstrate sincerity in providing examples and maintaining consistency in activities. Second, a supportive school environment. A religious atmosphere, worship equipment, prayer posters, and routine activities make it easier for children to recognize worship practices.

Third, concrete learning media. Media helps teachers transform abstract explanations into tangible and tangible experiences. Fourth, children's enthusiasm. Activities involving movement, singing, role-playing, and hands-on practice encourage children's participation. Fifth, parental support. Children who receive similar habits at home tend to be more likely to participate in school activities. Home visit programs and family communication can also strengthen the development of children's religious and moral values when implemented in a planned manner.

b. Inhibiting Factors

The first barrier stems from differences in children's abilities and experiences. Not all children receive the same religious stimulation at home. The second barrier relates to children's easily distracted attention. Excessively long activities can reduce children's engagement.

The third obstacle is limited media and facilities. Practicing religious practices requires adequate space, equipment, and group organization. The fourth obstacle relates to inconsistent home habits. Children have difficulty developing habits when school rules differ from family practices. The fifth obstacle stems from a lack of varied methods. Oneway explanations quickly bore children. Therefore, teachers need to combine verbal methods with movement, songs, stories, media, games, and hands-on practice.

3. Efforts to Overcome Obstacles

Teachers overcome obstacles by shortening activity durations, dividing children into small groups, reviewing material, and using more engaging media. Teachers also adjust targets based on children's abilities. To overcome inconsistent home habits, teachers increase communication with families. Teachers do not assign burdensome religious tasks to children. Teachers suggest simple activities, such as praying together, taking children to the mosque, introducing prayer equipment, or involving children in sharing activities. Teachers also utilize materials available in the environment. Picture cards can be made from simple paper. The prayer practice space can be a remodeled classroom. Stories can be conveyed through puppets, teacher-made drawings, or role-playing. Establishing a habit of worship requires continuity between school and home.

Children can experience confusion if the school implements a habit but the family does not set a similar example. Collaboration does not mean moving the entire school program home. Teachers need to provide realistic activities. Parents can invite children to pray together, recite prayers, maintain cleanliness, or share with family members. Communication needs to be twoway. Teachers report on children's progress, while parents provide information about their children's habits at home. This data helps teachers adjust their approach. These findings reinforce research showing that instilling religious and moral values requires a collaborative role between the school, family, and the community.

Conclusion

The strategies used by teachers at RA Al-Khairat Tamiang to introduce the concept of worship to early childhood include role modeling, habituation, demonstration, hands-on practice, storytelling, singing, movement, the use of concrete media, positive reinforcement, an individual approach, and collaboration with parents. Modeling helps children see real-life examples. Habituation builds consistency in behavior. Demonstrations and practice concretely reinforce worship procedures. Stories help children understand values and meaning. Songs, movement, and media maintain attention and facilitate retention. Worship materials don't just focus on the ability to recite prayers or follow prayer movements. Teachers also introduce cleanliness, discipline, gratitude, sharing, respect for others, and responsibility. This approach places worship as an integral part of children's lives.

Supporting factors include teacher consistency, a religious environment, media availability, children's enthusiasm, and family support. Barriers include differences in children's abilities, easily distracted attention, limited facilities, a lack of varied methods, and inconsistent home habits. Teachers overcome these obstacles through repetition, individual mentoring, small group activities, varied methods, the use of simple media, and communication with parents. This strategy becomes more effective when schools and families implement consistent practices. Introducing the concept of worship to early childhood should not be oriented solely toward memorization. Teachers need to foster simple understanding, direct experience, positive attitudes, and voluntary habits. With this approach, children can recognize worship as a close, safe, enjoyable, and meaningful activity.

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