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Internalizing Islamic Values through Early Literacy Activities in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Early childhood is a formative period for developing intellectual, social, emotional, moral, and spiritual capacities. This study describes how Islamic values are internalized through early literacy activities at PAUD Makanatut Thalibin, Aluh-Aluh District, Banjar Regency, South Kalimantan. It employed a descriptive qualitative case-study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, and analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that literacy activities—including letter and number recognition, storytelling, discussions, drawing-based narratives, Islamic songs, and listening to Islamic storybooks—serve not only to develop language skills but also to introduce politeness, honesty, responsibility, compassion, mutual assistance, and recognition of God as the Creator. Teachers integrate these values through habituation, role modeling, Islamic expressions, repetition and recalling, reflective questions, and links between literacy themes and religious occasions. Supporting factors include teacher collaboration, parental involvement, and institutional support. Constraints include limited age-appropriate Islamic reading materials, diverse family backgrounds, and limited specialized teacher training. Teachers respond by developing their own materials, using digital resources, and strengthening communication with parents. The study highlights early Islamic literacy as an integrated means of language development and character education.

Keywords

character education; early childhood education; early literacy; Islamic values; value internalization

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) is a strategic stage for laying the foundations of children's intellectual, social, emotional, moral, and spiritual development. At this stage, children readily absorb information, behaviours, and values from their surroundings. Education therefore needs to extend beyond cognitive development to include character formation and noble values, particularly Islamic values that contribute to children's identity within Islamic education.

PAUD Makanatut Thalibin, located in Aluh-Aluh District, Banjar Regency, South Kalimantan, is an Islamic early childhood education institution that seeks to shape children's character from an early age. It integrates Islamic values into learning, including through early literacy activities. Reading Islamic storybooks, listening to stories of the prophets, writing Arabic hijaiyah letters, and holding simple discussions about good character provide opportunities to introduce Islamic values in ways that are accessible to young children.

Despite this potential, the specific forms and processes through which Islamic values are internalized through early literacy in ECE institutions—particularly in peripheral areas such as Aluh-Aluh—have received limited attention in the research context described by this study. Practical challenges include teachers' limited references for designing enjoyable Islamic literacy media and methods, as well as the lack of documentation of effective practices. Previous work cited in the source manuscript emphasizes that early literacy supports not only language development but also the formation of values and attitudes (Rohma, 2022), while Islamic early childhood education can introduce religious values through contextual and enjoyable approaches (Widiastuti et al., 2023). Research on the integration of early literacy and Islamic-value internalization in this local setting remains limited.

The study addresses this gap by examining early literacy activities at PAUD Makanatut Thalibin. It focuses on four questions: what forms of early literacy activities are used to internalize Islamic values; which Islamic values are introduced; how teachers integrate those values into literacy activities; and what factors support or hinder the process. The study is intended to contribute to scholarship on Islamic early childhood education and value-based literacy, while offering practical considerations for teachers and institution managers.

METHODS

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach and a case-study design to understand the process of internalizing Islamic values through early literacy activities in the natural setting of PAUD Makanatut Thalibin, Aluh-Aluh District, Banjar Regency, South Kalimantan. The study focused on literacy activities such as reading, storytelling, recognizing Islamic letters and words, and listening to stories containing Islamic values. The values examined included honesty, compassion, respect, responsibility, and love for Allah and His Messenger. The research context included teachers and Group B children aged 5–6 years, with attention to relevant classroom learning activities.

The participants and information sources included ECE teachers, children participating in the activities, the head of the institution, and parents as partners in children's home education. Data were collected through participant observation of classroom literacy activities; in-depth interviews with teachers, the head of the institution, and parents concerning objectives, strategies, and perceptions; and documentation of daily lesson plans (RPPH), storybooks, Islamic literacy media, activity photographs, and children's work.

Data were analyzed interactively using the Miles and Huberman model (1994), comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

Credibility was supported through source triangulation (comparing information from teachers, children, and parents), method triangulation (observation, interviews, and documentation), and time triangulation (repeated observations in different situations). The analytical sequence is summarized as follows: classroom observations, interviews, and documents → data reduction → descriptive data display → conclusion drawing and cross-source verification.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Institutional Profile and Informant

PAUD Makanatut Thalibin is an early childhood education institution in Aluh-Aluh District, Banjar Regency, South Kalimantan. Its vision is to develop children who are intelligent, have good character, and possess noble morals, while introducing Islamic values from an early age. The principal informant was Nadia, S.Pd., a teacher who had taught at the institution for four years. She holds a bachelor's degree in Islamic Early Childhood Education (PIAUD) and is actively involved in designing and implementing early literacy activities that integrate Islamic values.

Forms of Early Literacy Activities

The activities combine language development with the introduction of Islamic values. First, children recognize letters and numbers by writing, tracing letter forms on the board, and naming them together with the teacher. In addition to the Latin alphabet, children are introduced to hijaiyah letters and the numbers one to ten in Arabic. Second, storytelling and informal discussions invite children to describe personal experiences, including what they did at home before coming to school. These activities strengthen speaking skills and confidence in expressing ideas. Third, children draw pictures or build with Lego and then explain their creations, developing imagination, sequential thinking, and self-expression.

Fourth, teachers read Islamic storybooks aloud and play songs containing Islamic messages, allowing children to become familiar with positive and religious language. Fifth, interactive Islamic-themed learning is incorporated into daily routines. For example, children sing a song about numbers in Arabic each morning, while the teacher writes hijaiyah letters on the board for the children to repeat. The activities use habituation and enjoyable repetition to introduce Islamic content.

Islamic Values Introduced through Literacy

The literacy activities introduce several Islamic values. Politeness and Islamic etiquette are reinforced when teachers model expressions such as "Assalamu'alaikum," "Masya Allah," and "Subhanallah" during storytelling and

everyday interaction. Honesty and responsibility are introduced through stories about honest and responsible children, followed by questions that encourage children to relate the message to their own lives. Compassion and mutual assistance are conveyed through stories that encourage children to help and care for others in everyday school situations.

The recognition of God as the Creator is introduced through stories about nature. Teachers invite children to notice elements such as stars and fruit and connect their beauty with Allah's creation, using expressions such as "Subhanallah, what beautiful creations of Allah." Islamic storytelling is scheduled twice a week and selected according to religious and character-related themes that are close to children's experiences.

Teachers' Strategies for Integrating Islamic Values

Teachers use simple, contextual language and explain concepts through concrete examples that match children's cognitive development. They repeat and revisit values (recalling), connecting the messages of stories with children's daily activities. After storytelling, teachers use questions and reflection, such as asking who likes helping friends or what can be learned from a story. Teachers also provide direct role models by greeting others, responding patiently to children, and demonstrating honesty and compassion in daily interactions.

Literacy themes are linked to the religious calendar and important occasions, including Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha. For example, the story of Prophet Ibrahim may be used during Eid al-Adha. This contextualization helps children connect classroom learning with religious events and their experiences at home and in the community.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Supporting factors include collaboration among teachers in planning and conducting Islamic literacy activities, parental involvement in reinforcing Islamic values at home, and support from the head of the institution and the surrounding community. These factors help the literacy programme remain aligned with the institution's vision of Islamic character education.

The main constraints are the limited availability of Islamic reading materials appropriate to children's developmental stages, differences in family backgrounds that may result in inconsistent reinforcement of values at home, and limited specialized training for teachers in Islamic literacy. Teachers respond by using digital media to find resources, creating their own teaching materials suited to local contexts and children's needs, and working more closely with parents. The teacher also expressed the need for more varied Islamic teaching materials, professional

development, and active involvement from parents and the community.

Discussion

The findings indicate that early literacy at PAUD Makanatut Thalibin functions as more than a means of developing language skills; it is also a medium for transmitting Islamic values. Storytelling, listening to songs, informal discussion, and shared writing introduce basic religious and moral concepts through cognitive and affective experiences. This is consistent with the source manuscript's discussion of Rohma (2022), which treats early literacy as involving meaning-making and values as well as technical reading and writing skills. Islamic stories, for example, make honesty, compassion, and politeness more concrete and relatable to children.

The teachers' strategies are aligned with the developmental characteristics of young children. Habituation, role modeling, repeated exposure to values, and reflective question-and-answer sessions provide multiple opportunities for children to encounter and begin to understand the values. Such practices are consistent with Khasanah (2021), who emphasizes role modeling, habituation, and a supportive environment in cultivating children's morals. They also reflect the view that children learn through concrete experiences, observation, imitation, and social interaction, as discussed in the source manuscript through Piaget and Vygotsky.

The contextualization of literacy themes around Ramadan, Eid al-Adha, and other religious concepts helps connect classroom activities with children's everyday environments. Rather than presenting religious information in an abstract form, teachers relate values to stories, events, and familiar experiences. This is important because young children are more likely to understand values when they are presented in concrete and meaningful situations.

The constraints identified in the study also reveal the importance of institutional and family support. Limited age-appropriate reading materials and limited teacher training require teachers to take initiative by developing resources and using digital materials. Communication with parents is equally important because values introduced at school may not always be reinforced consistently at home. The findings therefore suggest that Islamic literacy is most effective when teachers, school leaders, families, and the surrounding community work together. Internalization is holistic: it involves children's knowledge of values, their affective responses to those values, and their opportunities to practise them in everyday behaviour.

CONCLUSION

Early literacy activities at PAUD Makanatut Thalibin are implemented in varied and enjoyable forms, including letter and number recognition, storytelling, drawing-based narratives, listening to Islamic storybooks and songs, and simple discussions.

These activities develop children's language abilities while providing opportunities to introduce politeness, honesty, responsibility, compassion, mutual assistance, tolerance, and recognition of God as the Creator.

Teachers integrate Islamic values through role modeling, habituation, Islamic expressions, repetition and recalling, reflective questions, and the connection of literacy themes with religious occasions. Teacher collaboration, parental involvement, and institutional and community support facilitate the process. The main barriers are the limited availability of age-appropriate Islamic reading materials, diverse family backgrounds and parenting practices, and limited specialized teacher training. Teachers address these barriers by creating learning materials, using digital resources, and strengthening cooperation with parents.

ECE teachers are encouraged to continue developing enjoyable, developmentally appropriate literacy activities containing Islamic values. Institutions should provide contextual, child-friendly Islamic materials and relevant teacher training. Policymakers may use these findings as a consideration in strengthening Islamic character education through literacy, particularly in peripheral areas. Future studies may examine similar practices in other institutions and local contexts to identify variations in strategies and implementation.

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