



Exemplary and Habituation of Parents' Religious Behavior for Early Childhood Moral and Religious Development

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of exemplary and habituation of parents' religious behavior in supporting the moral and religious development of early childhood. Children in the early age stage are in the phase of imitation and value formation, so the family environment, especially parents, is the main factor in instilling moral and religious values. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with data collection techniques through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation on families in the Tulangbawang Lampung. The results showed that parents' exemplary religious practices such as worshipping, praying, and telling the truth consistently have a positive influence on children's behavior. In addition, the habituation of religious activities in daily routines, such as reading prayers together and attending family religious activities, strengthens children's understanding of moral and spiritual values. Thus, exemplification and habituation carried out consistently by parents prove to be an important foundation in shaping children's religious character from an early age.

Keywords: Religious Behavior, Early Childhood, Moral and Religious

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INTRODUCTION

Moral and religious development in early childhood is an important foundation in shaping a child's character and personality in the future. During early childhood, children are at a developmental stage that is highly sensitive to the values around them (Rachmad et al., 2023). During this phase, children begin to learn to distinguish between good and bad, understand rules, and recognize basic concepts of right and wrong (Utama & Dea, 2023). Moral development relates to a child's ability to understand social norms, develop empathy, and foster honesty, fairness, and responsibility (Sari, 2023). Meanwhile, religious development includes instilling spiritual beliefs, introducing them to religious values, and cultivating the habit of practicing daily religious practices and practices. When morals and religion are instilled from an early age, children will more easily internalize these values until they become part of their personality (Rahmawati, Asbari, & Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Insan Pembangunan, 2022). Children who are accustomed to practicing moral and religious values will tend to have good character, such as being helpful, respectful to others, disciplined, and having an awareness of worship. (Rusdiani, Setyowati, Agustina, Nurleha, & Mahardhani, 2023).

Early childhood children are at a very sensitive stage of development in absorbing values, both through direct instillation and through the example set by those around them, especially parents (Ferdian Utama, 2017) . In the family context, parents have a primary role as the first and primary educators who provide the basics of moral and religious values to their children (Utama, Arif, & Maharsi, 2024) . In the family context, parents have a primary role as the first and primary educators for their children. This means that before children are exposed to formal educational environments such as schools, the family—especially parents—is the first place children learn about various things, including moral and religious values (Kamaruddin et al., 2023) . The role of parents is very vital because children at an early age tend to imitate and follow the behavior of those closest to them, especially their fathers and mothers. Parents play a role in instilling moral values, such as honesty, respect, responsibility, and a spirit of mutual assistance (Tehrani, Yamini, & Vazsonyi, 2024) . Furthermore, parents also serve as role models in religious matters, such as teaching prayer, introducing worship, and cultivating religious behavior in daily life. Moral and religious education provided by parents generally takes place through two main ways: through role models (real examples in daily actions) and habituation (training children to do good deeds regularly) (Eka Sari, Noviana Komsu, Al-azhaar Lubuklinggau, Sri Yanti, & Hecksa Manora, 2023) . When parents are able to set good examples in being honest, disciplined, and religious, children will more easily imitate and internalize these values (Juwita & Yunitasari, 2024) . Therefore, the family has an irreplaceable role in building the foundation of a child's character and personality from an early age, especially in terms of morals and religion, which will become a guide for the child's life in the future (Baharun, 2016) .

In Indonesia, the family is viewed as an informal educational institution that plays a significant and influential role in children's growth and development, particularly in shaping religious and moral attitudes (Fortuna & Khadir, 2022) . This aligns with the general view of Indonesian society, which places the family as the primary foundation of social life (Udin, Sopian, Andari, & Setiawan, 2023) . Family education occurs naturally through daily interactions between children and parents, without being bound by a formal curriculum like that found in schools. Indonesian culture, which upholds religious and moral values, also strengthens the family's role in shaping children's character. Education within the family is not merely about providing rules but also instilling positive habits that become part of a child's life. Therefore, the family in Indonesia is a crucial early environment in shaping children's moral and religious attitudes that will persist into adulthood (Karlina, Sopian, Saefurridjal, & Fatkhullah, 2023) . This is in line with the mandate of Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System which emphasizes the importance of the family's role in children's education ("Law of the Republic of Indonesia (Sisdiknas)," 2003) . Through role models and habits, parents are expected to be able to be real examples for children in implementing good behavior, such as praying before and after doing activities, telling the truth, respecting others, and helping others (Inten, 2017) .

Tulangbawang Regency, as one of the regions in Lampung Province, has strong socio-cultural characteristics, including religious ones. The majority of its residents hold fast to religious values and customs. This creates a potentially supportive social environment for the development of children's moral and religious character. However, in this modern era, families face various challenges that can impact parenting patterns and the values taught to children.

The rapid growth of technology, such as the use of the internet, social media, and digital devices, makes it easier for children to be exposed to a variety of information that may not align with moral and religious values. If not properly guided, technology can distance children from family values and encourage consumerist behavior, individualism, and dependence on devices.

Furthermore, the flow of globalization brings in foreign cultures that often differ from the social norms and religious values adopted in Indonesia. Globalization facilitates cultural exchange, but it can also lead to shifts in values, especially if children are exposed to foreign cultures without any filtering or supervision from parents. Changes in modern lifestyles also influence parenting patterns within families (Mangatur et al., 2023). Parents who are busy with work or activities outside the home often have limited time to interact with their children. As a result, parental attention to their children's moral and religious education can diminish. This situation makes children more vulnerable to losing role models in the family, so that moral and religious education, which should be a priority, can be neglected (Jadidah, Alfarizi, Liza, Sapitri, & Khairunnisa, 2023). Therefore, amidst the challenges of this modern era, the active role of parents in providing role models and accustoming children to religious and moral behavior is increasingly important. Parents are required to be able to adapt their parenting patterns to current developments, without neglecting the religious and moral values that guide their children's lives.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine in-depth how parents in Tulangbawang Regency practice role models and cultivate religious behavior in order to foster and develop morals and religious attitudes in young children. This research is also expected to provide a concrete picture of effective parenting strategies and provide recommendations for parents, educators, and other stakeholders in efforts to shape children's character from an early age.

METHOD

This research method uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to explore in depth the practice of exemplary religious behavior and habituation carried out by parents, and its influence on the moral and religious development of early childhood. This descriptive research focuses on describing in detail the social phenomena that occur in family life, particularly in childcare oriented toward the formation of religious character. This research was conducted in Tulangbawang Regency, Lampung Province. This location was chosen because the community is known to have a strong religious background and still maintain local values in their daily lives. The subjects in this study were parents of young children, namely children aged 3 to 6 years, who actively implement exemplary and habituated religious behavior in the family environment. In addition, early childhood children also served as supporting informants in this study to determine the extent of the influence of parental exemplary behavior on their moral and religious development. Data collection techniques in this study included in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted semi-structured with parents to obtain information about the forms of exemplary and habituated religious behavior they implement and their influence on their children. Observations were conducted directly to observe exemplary practices and habits within the family, including how children responded to their parents' behavior. Documentation was conducted by collecting photographs, notes, or recordings of activities that demonstrated the application of religious values in daily life. (Arias, Arias, & Rodríguez-Medina, 2021).

The data analysis technique used in this study is qualitative descriptive analysis, which involves three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction is carried out by filtering and sorting relevant data from interviews, observations, and documentation. Data presentation is done in the form of descriptive narratives, tables, or matrices to facilitate understanding of the research findings. The final stage is conclusion drawing, which summarizes the findings to answer the research problem formulation. To ensure data validity, this study uses source triangulation techniques, namely by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, member checking is also carried out by reconfirming the interview results with

informants to ensure the truth and accuracy of the data. The researchers also held discussions with fellow researchers or experts in the field of early childhood education through peer discussions to assess the feasibility of the research results. Through these steps, this study is expected to produce valid and accountable data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Moral and Religious Development

The moral and religious development of early childhood is an important process that occurs in the early stages of a child's life, which greatly influences the formation of a child's character and attitudes in the future. In theory, the moral and religious development of early childhood is an important process that greatly influences the formation of a child's character and attitudes in the future. According to the theory of moral development proposed by Jean Piaget, early childhood is in the heteronomous stage or external morality, namely when children view rules as something absolute and originating from adults. At this stage, children obey the rules for fear of punishment or hope for rewards. Meanwhile, Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development states that early childhood is generally at the preconventional level, where children's moral behavior is based on obedience to avoid punishment and gain personal gain (Satianingsih, Maftuh, & Syaodih, 2018). In the theory of religious development, James W. Fowler explains that early childhood is in the intuitive-projective faith stage, namely the stage when children learn about religion through imagination, religious symbols, and imitate adult worship practices such as prayer and religious rituals. Children's understanding at this stage is still simple and concrete.

Furthermore, according to Albert Bandura's social learning theory, early childhood develops moral and religious behavior through observation and imitation, where they imitate the behavior of adults around them, especially parents and teachers. When children receive praise or rewards for their good behavior, they tend to repeat it (Grusec, 2007). Early childhood is also known as the golden age, where children's brain development is very rapid, making it very easy for them to absorb moral and religious values through habituation, role models, and consistent social interactions (Nurlina et al., 2024). Based on these theories, early childhood moral and religious development is a gradual process influenced by cognitive maturity, social learning, and the surrounding environment, which will become an important foundation for children's character and attitudes in the future.

Moral development encompasses a child's ability to understand the concepts of good and bad, right and wrong, and the social norms prevailing in their environment. At this stage, children tend to imitate the behavior of adults, such as parents and teachers, and obey rules in response to rewards or punishments. Children also begin to demonstrate simple empathy, such as helping a friend in need. Meanwhile, religious development encompasses children's introduction to religious values, religious symbols, and religious activities. Early childhood typically begins to imitate religious movements, such as praying, or participating in other religious activities, and enjoys religious stories that contain moral messages. The main factors influencing the moral and religious development of early childhood include the family, school, and community environments. Parental role models and the practice of good behavior in daily life are key in shaping the moral and religious character of early childhood. Children at this age are at a developmental stage that is highly sensitive to environmental influences, particularly from the family as their closest environment. (Faizah, Hamzah, Farantika, Utama, & Anggia, 2024). Parents who consistently demonstrate honesty, discipline, courtesy, care, and diligent worship will serve as real examples for their children, so that children tend to imitate and follow these behaviors. In addition to role models, habits also play an important role, such as getting children used to saying hello, praying before eating, apologizing, and sharing with others. Other strategies that can be applied to foster the moral and religious development of early childhood include telling moral and religious stories that contain messages of goodness, whether through fairy tales, stories of the

prophets, or local legends full of wisdom. Giving positive rewards, such as praise or simple gifts when children demonstrate good behavior, can also motivate children to continue doing good. In addition, simple discussions in language that children can easily understand can help them understand the meaning of every good and bad deed. The use of fun media, such as songs, pictures, or videos that contain moral and religious messages, is also very effective in strengthening children's understanding. Through these various strategies, early childhood will gradually learn to recognize, understand, and apply moral and religious values in everyday life, so that good character is formed from an early age.

Religious Habits and Parental Exemplary Behavior

The first finding shows that parental role models play a key role in instilling moral and religious values in children. Parents consistently set an example in religious practices, such as performing the five daily prayers, reading the Quran, and praying before and after activities. Children who witness their parents performing religious practices regularly tend to imitate them and become accustomed to doing similar practices, even if they are still simple and require guidance. Beyond religious practices, parents also set an example in their daily behavior, such as telling the truth, being polite, and helping each other with family members and neighbors.

The finding that parental role models play a key role in instilling moral and religious values in children can be analyzed through several theories of moral and religious development. According to Albert Bandura's social learning theory, children learn through observing and imitating the behavior of those around them, especially their parents. When parents consistently perform religious practices such as prayer, reading the Quran, and praying before or after activities, children will observe and imitate these behaviors. This modeling process makes children accustomed to performing religious practices, even if they are still simple and require guidance. Furthermore, parental role models in daily behaviors such as telling the truth, being polite, and helping each other also serve as important models for children to imitate. Bandura also emphasized that positive reinforcement, such as praise or rewards, will encourage children to continue repeating these good behaviors. Furthermore, according to Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, early childhood is at a preconventional level, where children's moral behavior is based on efforts to avoid punishment or gain rewards.

At this stage, children may imitate their parents' good behavior out of a desire for praise or attention, even though they do not yet fully understand the moral meaning behind their actions. However, these habits will become a strong moral foundation in subsequent stages of development. Meanwhile, according to James W. Fowler's theory of religious development, early childhood is in the intuitive-projective stage, a stage in which children learn about religion through imagination, stories, and observations of their parents' behavior. Children do not yet understand religious teachings abstractly, but the experience of seeing their parents worship regularly will form the basis of their religious beliefs and attitudes. Based on these three theories, it is clear that parental role models in worship and daily behavior are key to instilling moral and religious values in early childhood, because children tend to imitate the behavior they see directly, especially when accompanied by habituation and positive reinforcement.

The second finding shows that the habituation of religious behavior within the family is carried out through structured daily routines. Parents consciously train their children to pray before bed, before and after meals, and encourage them to participate in religious activities such as children's religious study groups or religious education in the community. This habituation is carried out slowly and consistently, so that children become accustomed to and make religious behavior a part of their daily lives. Furthermore, parents also teach their children to speak kindly, apologize, and express gratitude, which are all part of a religion-based moral education.

Observations show that children accustomed to religious role models and routines at home demonstrate better moral behavior, such as being more manageable, showing empathy toward peers, and understanding the concepts of right and wrong. Children also begin to demonstrate an awareness of religious practices, although still in their early stages. This demonstrates a strong link between parenting styles, including role models and religious habits, and the moral and religious development of early childhood.

The findings of this study align with theories of moral and religious development, which emphasize the crucial role of the family environment in shaping a child's character. Early childhood is in the imitation stage, making parental role models the most effective factor in shaping a child's behavior. Furthermore, the habituation theory asserts that repeated actions will become ingrained habits in a child. Therefore, the practices of parents in Tulangbawang Regency demonstrate that moral and religious education, initiated within the family, has a significant impact on a child's character development.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that parental role models and the instilling of religious behavior play a crucial role in fostering and developing moral and religious attitudes in early childhood. These practices not only shape children's current behavior but also lay the foundation for their future character development. This study also emphasizes the need for parents to continuously enhance their children's active role in their religious and moral education, particularly amidst the increasingly complex challenges of the modern era.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research on parental role models and the habituation of religious behavior in Tulangbawang Regency for the moral and religious development of early childhood, it can be concluded that parental role models play a very large role in instilling moral and religious values in children. Children at an early age tend to imitate their parents' behavior, especially in terms of carrying out religious duties such as prayer, reading the Quran, and praying before doing activities. In addition, parents also serve as role models in daily attitudes, such as telling the truth, being polite, and helping each other, which are then emulated by children in their lives. Furthermore, the habituation of religious behavior carried out routinely within the family has proven effective in shaping children's religious character. This habituation includes activities such as praying together, attending children's religious studies, and getting children used to saying good words, such as apologizing and thanking. These routines slowly form positive behavioral patterns in children, both in religious aspects and social attitudes in the surrounding environment.

Overall, this study shows that the combination of role models and consistent parental practices has a positive impact on the moral and religious development of young children. Children who are accustomed to observing and practicing religious behavior with their families demonstrate more polite behavior, develop a greater awareness of worship, and begin to understand the concepts of right and wrong in everyday life. Therefore, this study confirms that families, especially parents, play a central role in shaping the moral and religious character of young children through consistent role models and practices. Therefore, it is important for parents to continue to set a good example and create a family environment conducive to children's moral and religious development, especially amidst the increasingly complex challenges of the modern era.

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