

The Forming Christian Character: The Contribution of Out-of-School Education to Build Strong Foundations for Early Childhood

Eva Saryati Panggabean

Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar, Indonesia

 eva.panggabean@gmail.com

Abstract

This research aims to reveal the contribution of out-of-school education in forming Christian character in early childhood. In the context of child development, out-of-school education has great potential to strengthen the foundations of Christian character through various activities and social interactions outside the formal school environment. The research method used is literature study and content analysis, with a focus on out-of-school education programs which have been proven effective in forming Christian character in early childhood. The research results show that activities such as religious activities, moral development, and providing Christian values through stories and games can make a positive contribution in shaping children's character. An interactive and participatory approach in out-of-school education has also been proven to be able to develop positive attitudes, morality and Christian values in early childhood. These findings emphasize the important role of out-of-school education as a complement to formal education in forming Christian character in young children, so that it can help them grow into individuals with integrity and responsibility in the context of Christian values. The practical implication of this research is the need for further attention to the role of out-of-school education in early childhood character development, as well as providing recommendations for educators, parents and related parties in designing educational programs that support the formation of Christian character in the early stages of a child's life.

Keywords: Forming Christian Character, Education of Early Childhood

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received
March 02, 2024

Revised
May 04, 2024

Accepted
May 15, 2024

Published by

ISSN

Website

This is an open access article under the CC BY SA license

CV. Creative Tugu Pena

2774-4299

<https://attractivejournal.com/index.php/bse/>

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>



INTRODUCTION

Character education in early childhood plays a crucial role in forming the moral foundation and values that will guide them throughout life. In the midst of the dynamics of society that continues to develop, out-of-school education has emerged as an important arena that can make a significant contribution to building Christian character in young children (Simamora, 2019).

Early childhood is a critical period in character formation, where they begin to develop attitudes, values and behavior that will shape their identity in the future. Formal education at school may be an important aspect, however, the presence of education outside of school is becoming increasingly relevant in responding to the deep need for character formation based on Christian values.

Early childhood education has a central role in forming the basis for character formation in children from an early age. At this stage of development, children not only experience physical growth, but also cognitive, social and emotional development which influences the formation of their values and attitudes in the future. Formal education at school is an important element, but education outside of school also has a contribution that cannot be ignored in forming a strong foundation of character, especially Christian character.

In an ever-changing environment, challenges and influences from various directions can influence children's character development. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to how children can acquire basic moral, ethical and spiritual values and principles from an early age. Out-of-school education, through religious programs, extracurricular activities, and social interactions outside the formal classroom environment, is an important alternative to support the character formation of early childhood (Saihu & Marsiti, 2019).

The importance of Christian character in forming individuals who have integrity, empathy and concern for others has become the main focus for many parents, educators and other stakeholders (Waruwu & Sibarani, 2023). Therefore, this article aims to explore and analyze the contribution of out-of-school education in forming Christian character in early childhood, and how it can build a strong foundation for their growth and development.

Through an in-depth understanding of the role of out-of-school education, it is hoped that this article can provide valuable insight for parents, educators and related parties to better understand how to support children in developing Christian character from an early age. By detailing the positive contributions of out-of-school education, this article aims to enrich the discussion surrounding the formation of children's character from the perspective of deep Christian values.

Literature Review

Definition of character

Character is a complex concept that includes an individual's values, attitudes, morality, and behavior. Character formation is the main focus in early childhood education because this period is considered critical in forming moral and ethical foundations. Several key concepts related to character need to be understood to detail the dimensions and aspects involved in the process of forming a child's character.

According to Lickona (in Rahman & Wassalwa, 2019), character is defined as moral qualities that reflect a person's values, attitudes and behavior that describe a positive personality. Character is not only about what a person does in front of others, but also about integrity and morality that are reflected in personal decisions. Character is a complex and multifaceted concept, often used to describe a person's traits and behavior that reflect an individual's moral, ethical and personality values (Julaeha, 2019). Character can include qualities such as honesty, responsibility, fairness, and empathy.

Research by Sari & Nofriadi (2019) highlights the importance of character formation in early childhood. They emphasize that the influence of the social environment, family, and education in the early stages of life can form the basis of strong character. Apart from the influence of the family environment, education plays an important role in shaping individual character. Bilda (2016) emphasizes that education is not only about the transfer of knowledge, but also about the formation of values and ethics that shape a person's character.

In connection with the holistic approach, (Budiarti, 2019) shows that character formation should not only emphasize moral aspects, but also involve comprehensive social and emotional aspects. In addition, Ryan and Bohlin (in Nuhamara, 2018) emphasize that character includes moral, emotional and social development, which forms the basis of

individual behavior. They view character as a collection of moral traits that guide individuals in interacting with their surrounding environment.

Kohlberg's theory of moral development (in Sulystio, 2014) also makes a significant contribution to understanding character. Kohlberg proposed six levels of moral development that involve understanding ethics and values, from the preconventional level to the postconventional level. This concept helps understand the complexity of character in the context of individual moral development.

In the context of Christian character formation, Lapsley and Narvaez (in Haninuna, 2023) discuss the importance of religious values in guiding behavior and decision making. They emphasize that Christian character includes aspects of spirituality and morality that are recognized and practiced in everyday life. From a positive psychology perspective, Peterson and Seligman (Arumsari, 2018) compiled a list of 24 universal character strengths that can be found in various cultures and religions. This diversity of character includes honesty, courage, justice, and compassion, all of which have relevance in the formation of Christian character. By understanding these concepts, the formation of Christian character in early childhood can be understood as a holistic effort involving moral values, ethics and spirituality.

Christian character

Christian character reflects the values and teachings in the Christian religious tradition that guide individual behavior. The formation of Christian character in young children is a crucial aspect of moral and spiritual education. Several key concepts related to Christian character need to be understood to detail the dimensions and principles involved in this process.

1. Christian Values

The Christian values that underlie character include love, justice, honesty, and humility. This is confirmed by (Sirva et al., 2023), who states that Christian character education emphasizes moral and spiritual development which originates from the teachings of the Christian religion.

2. Religion education

Religious education has an important role in forming Christian character. According to Van Brummelen (in Sinaga et al., 2021), religious education helps children understand Christian teachings, internalize moral values, and integrate beliefs in everyday life.

3. Morality and Ethics

Forming Christian character also involves understanding morality and ethics. According to Sidjaga (2019), Christian morality focuses on compassion, responsibility and sacrifice as an integral part of Christian character.

4. Prayer and Spirituality

Aspects of spirituality, including prayer and involvement in religious practices, are also key elements in forming Christian character in young children. Smith suggests that prayer and spiritual practices can help form a humble attitude and connectedness to God (Wantoro et al., 2023).

Early childhood

Early childhood is a critical period in character formation. According to Lerner (in Inayah et al., 2022), character formation at this stage can provide a strong foundation for children's moral, social and emotional development. The early period of life, especially in early childhood, is a critical stage in human development. They underscore the importance of positive stimulation, good care, and emotional interaction at this stage to form the basis of a child's development.

The preoperational stage plays an important role in the cognitive development of early childhood. In this period, children begin to develop simple moral understanding and understand the difference between right and wrong. The preoperational stage is a key

phase in early childhood cognitive development. In this period, children begin to develop an understanding of the world around them and the ability to think symbolically. Identify typical psychosocial stages in early childhood, with a focus on initiation and self-confidence stages. Understanding these psychosocial characteristics helps design appropriate character building approaches.

Character education in early childhood is a main concern. The importance of a caring and caring approach in shaping children's character from an early age. Early childhood education has an important role in providing a strong foundation for children's development. The importance of a holistic approach that supports physical, social and cognitive development in early childhood (Rohmah et al., 2023). By understanding the basis of these concepts, Christian character education in early childhood can be implemented holistically, incorporating Christian values in every aspect of their development. This article will explore the contribution of out-of-school education, especially in guiding children towards a strong Christian character, by referring to the main principles found in related literature and research.

METHOD

Research design

Qualitative research design refers to the plan or strategy chosen by a researcher to systematically combine research components in a logical way. Qualitative research is carried out in settings that exist in real life or nature, with the aim of investigating and understanding the meaning given by individuals or groups regarding social problems or humanitarian aspects (Abdussamad & Sik, 2021).

Research methods

This research method uses a qualitative or descriptive research approach. The basis of information for this research is obtained from the literature found in books, journals, and articles. In general, there are two types of research methods, namely qualitative research that aims to produce and test theories. This qualitative research focuses on referencing the meaning, concept, definition, and explanation of certain topics, with researchers looking for theoretical sources that are then analyzed to conclude the research results. According to Abdussamad & Sik (2021), qualitative research methods are used to examine objects in natural conditions, where the researcher acts as the main instrument. The data collection technique was carried out using triangulation, and data analysis was inductive. Qualitative research results focus more on meaning than generalization. .

Data collection tools

1. Literature Research

The literature review was carried out with the aim of enriching understanding of various concepts which will become the basis or guideline in the research process. Researchers also utilize literature reviews as part of data collection techniques. This type of secondary data is used to support the research process, where information is collected from newspaper articles, books and previous scientific works. The focus of literature study is to find facts and understand the concept of methods that have been used in previous research. In carrying out the literature study, the researcher used data collection techniques by reading and recording articles relevant to the research procedure, through book and document references (Fadli, 2021).

2. Use of Documentation

Documentation is a record of events that have occurred, which can be in the form of writing, drawings or monumental works. The documentation used in this research acts as supporting data for the results of observations and interviews related to the form of verbal and non-verbal messages as well as the obstacles faced by the author.

Data analysis technique

The selected literature will be filtered based on inclusion criteria, such as relevance to the topic, out-of-school education methods, and Christian character formation. The selection of literature will ensure a diversity of views and findings that can enrich the analysis. Analysis will be carried out on the selected literature. The analysis process will include identifying main themes related to the contribution of out-of-school education in forming Christian character in early childhood. Information categorization and thematic grouping will be the focus in this analysis. Findings from the literature will be synthesized to form a comprehensive understanding of the contribution of out-of-school education to the formation of Christian character in early childhood. These findings will be used to build arguments and develop a strong conceptual framework. Conclusions from the literature analysis will be used to formulate views and recommendations regarding the contribution of out-of-school education in forming Christian character in early childhood. This conclusion will cover key aspects that need to be considered in designing out-of-school education programs that support the formation of Christian character. The results of the literature analysis will be presented systematically and comprehensively in written form outlining the key findings and patterns that emerge from the literature that has been analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Contribution of Out-of-School Education to Building a Strong Foundation for Early Childhood

Out-of-school education has a central role in forming a strong foundation for Christian character in early childhood. This contribution involves various aspects, including developing moral values, strengthening spiritual identity, and forming positive attitudes towards others. The following are several discussion points related to the contribution of out-of-school education in building a strong foundation for early childhood:

a. Formation of Christian Values

Out-of-school education, especially through religious programs and extracurricular activities, is the main vehicle for conveying and internalizing Christian values to young children. In a relaxed and creative environment, children can learn moral values such as love, honesty and justice, which are the foundation of Christian character. Formation of Christian Values in Out-of-School Education, including: 1) Religious and Worship Programs: One of the main ways of forming Christian values in out-of-school education is through religious and worship programs. Activities such as prayer, reading scriptures, and other religious activities can provide deep spiritual experiences to young children; 2) Lectures and Learning Activities: Lectures and special learning activities about Christian values can also be an integral part of out-of-school education. Through lectures and lessons, children can be given a deeper understanding of moral and ethical principles in the context of Christian values; 3) Values-Based Creative and Artistic Activities: Applying Christian values in creative and artistic activities is also an effective approach. Through art, drama, or other creative activities, children can be actively involved in expressing and understanding the moral values promoted by out-of-school education; 4) Humanity-Based Community Service: Teaching children to serve society actively based on Christian values can be an integral part of out-of-school education programs. Through this activity, children can learn about love, caring and social responsibility; 5) Models of Behavior and Role Models: The importance of the role of models of behavior and role models in shaping Christian values should not be ignored. Mentors, teachers, or companions who act as moral role models can have a significant positive impact in forming the character of young children; 6)

Discussion and Reflection Activities: Encouraging children to engage in discussion and reflection activities related to Christian values is a constructive step. This gives them the opportunity to ask questions, understand, and deepen their understanding of the teachings and values of the Christian religion.

- b. **Strengthening Spiritual Identity**
Religious programs in out-of-school education provide children with opportunities to deepen their understanding of spiritual identity. Through prayer, worship, and religious discourse, children can develop a deeper connection to Christian religious values, building a solid spiritual foundation from an early age.
- c. **Moral and Ethics Development**
Out-of-school education also provides a platform for children to learn and practice moral and ethical concepts. Through social activities and shared experiences, children are invited to make decisions based on Christian moral principles, which form the basis of ethical behavior throughout life.
- d. **Formation of Positive Attitudes and Empathy**
Social activities in out-of-school education, such as humanitarian activities and community service, provide opportunities for children to form positive attitudes and empathy towards others. This creates hands-on experiences that support the development of Christian character, where children learn to care, share, and help those in need.
- e. **Flexibility and Creativity**
The advantage of out-of-school education lies in the diversity of activities that can be adapted to children's needs and interests. Flexibility and creativity in out-of-school education enable the delivery of Christian values through methods that are interesting and relevant to young children.

With these contributions, out-of-school education opens up space for young children to build a strong foundation of Christian character, preparing them to face various moral and spiritual challenges in their lives. It is hoped that the continuation of these efforts will have a significant positive impact on the character development of young children in the context of Christian values.

2. Out-of-School Education Challenges Build Strong Foundations for Early Childhood

Even though out-of-school education has an important role in forming the foundation of early childhood character, it is not free from several challenges that can affect its effectiveness. Some of these challenges need to be acknowledged and addressed so that the contribution of out-of-school education can have an optimal impact. Here are some aspects of the challenge to consider:

- a. **Accessibility and Participation**
One of the main challenges is accessibility to out-of-school education programs. Especially for families who live in remote areas or have economic limitations, accessing these programs can be difficult. Accessibility is the main obstacle in out-of-school education for early childhood, especially in remote areas and with low economic conditions. Limited infrastructure and transportation can be an obstacle for children to access educational programs outside the formal school environment. This can result in unequal participation of young children, so that those who need this contribution are limited.
- b. **Program Quality**
Not all out-of-school education programs are of the same quality. Some programs may not have a clear structure or guidelines, causing uncertainty regarding achieving the goals of Christian character formation. Monitoring and improving program quality is key to overcoming this challenge.

- c. **Resource Limitations**
Most out-of-school education programs face limited resources, both in terms of funding and teaching staff. This can limit the sustainability of the program and the variety of activities that can be offered to children. Greater resource support is needed to expand coverage and increase program effectiveness.
- d. **Difficulty Integrating with Formal Education**
Another challenge is integrating learning from out-of-school education with the formal education curriculum at school. Character formation must be sustainable and mutually supportive, but a lack of synergy between these programs can hinder the achievement of the goals of Christian character education as a whole.
- e. **Cultural and Diversity Challenges**
Involvement in out-of-school education programs can be characterized by cultural challenges and diversity. Programs that do not take into account diverse cultures and beliefs can have difficulty understanding and accommodating the needs of children from different backgrounds.
- f. **Parental Involvement**
Parent involvement in supporting out-of-school education programs can also be a challenge. Factors such as busy parents, limited time, or lack of understanding of the importance of Christian character education can become obstacles to optimizing the role of parents in supporting the formation of children's character.
A deep understanding of these challenges is important for designing strategies and policies that can increase the effectiveness of out-of-school education in forming Christian character in early childhood. By addressing these challenges, it is hoped that out-of-school education can become more inclusive, effective, and have a positive impact on the character formation of young children.

CONCLUSION

The contribution of out-of-school education in forming Christian character in early childhood, it can be identified that out-of-school education has a significant role in building a strong foundation for Christian character. Religious programs, extracurricular activities, and social interactions in out-of-school contexts provide opportunities for children to understand, internalize, and apply Christian values in their daily lives. Out-of-school education has a positive impact by providing an environment that supports the formation of Christian character. Early childhood children are not only introduced to the teachings of Christianity, but are also given the opportunity to experience these values through social interactions, games and creative activities. This contribution is not only limited to spiritual aspects, but also includes moral, ethical aspects and positive attitudes towards others. However, awareness of several challenges such as accessibility, program quality, and integration with formal education is the key to increasing the effectiveness of out-of-school education in forming Christian character. There needs to be cooperation between educational institutions, parents and communities in creating an environment that supports and stimulates the development of Christian character in early childhood. By paying attention to these challenges and continuing to improve the quality of programs, out-of-school education can become a strong partner in building a strong foundation of Christian character in early childhood. As a result, it is hoped that children can grow up as individuals with integrity, responsibility, and bringing Christian values to every aspect of their lives. This conclusion underlines the important role of out-of-school education as a pillar of Christian character formation in the early stages of a child's life.

REFERENCES

- Abdussamad, H. Z., & Sik, M. S. (2021). *Qualitative Research Methods*. CV. Syakir Media Press.
- Arumsari, C. (2018). Character Strengths and Virtues in Guidance and Counseling. *Journal of Innovative Counseling : Theory, Practice & Research*, 2(1), 1–5.
- Bilda, W. (2016). Planned Character Education Through Mathematics Learning. *AlphaMath: Journal of Mathematics Education*, 2(1), 46–53.
- Binsen Samuel Sidjaga. (2019). Character-Based Christian Religious Education Curriculum Framework in Higher Education. *Jurnal Jaffray*, 17(1), 73–90. <https://doi.org/10.25278/jj.v17i1.314>
- Budiarti, Y. (2019). Character Education: A Collective Effort. *Journal of Civic Education: Media for the Study of Pancasila and Citizenship*, 3(1), 78–83.
- Fadli, M. R. (2021). Understanding Qualitative Research Method Design. *Humanics: Scientific Study of General Subjects*, 21(1), 33–54.
- Haninuna, B. (2023). Value-Based Learning Model, Character Education Based on 1 PETER 2: 23. *Vine Journal*, 4(2).
- Inayah, Nur, S. F., & Wiyani, N. A. (2022). Formation of a friendly character through the habit of smiling, greeting, saying hello, being polite, polite (5s) in early childhood. *ASGHAR: Journal of Children Studies*, 2(1), 12–25.
- Julaeha, S. (2019). Problems of Character Education Curriculum and Learning. *Journal of Islamic Education Research*, 7(2), 157. <https://doi.org/10.36667/jppi.v7i2.367>
- Nuhamara, D. (2018). Prioritizing Character Dimensions in Christian Religious Education. *Jaffray urn*, 16(1), 93–114.
- Rohmah, Mi'rotul, R., & Azizah, R. (2023). The Role of Holistic Education for Early Childhood Character Development. *Journal of Education and Learning Dimensions*, 11(1), 154–165.
- Saihu, S., & Marsiti, M. (2019). Character Education in Efforts to Prevent Radicalism at Public High School 3, Depok City, West Java. *Andragogy: Journal of Islamic Education and Islamic Education Management*, 1(1), 23–54. <https://doi.org/10.36671/andragogi.v1i1.47>
- Sari, S. Y., & Nofriadi, N. (2019). Character Formation in Early Childhood. *MANTHANO: Journal of Christian Education*, 2(1), 31–41. <https://doi.org/10.55967/manthano.v2i1.29>
- Simamora, K. S. D. (2019). Christian Religious Education and Its Significance in Character Formation. *Provided*, 2(2), 36–53.
- Sinaga, J., Sagala, R. W., Ferinia, R., & Hutagalung, S. (2021). The Fundamental Role of Pastors for Teachers During a Pandemic in Character-Based Online Learning: Challenges and Support Systems. *Journal of Christian Religious Education (JUPAK)*, 2(1), 13–35. <https://doi.org/10.52489/jupak.v2i1.61>
- Sirva, O., Pariu, K. Y., Parangki, N., Patoding, A. J., & Puang, F. T. (2023). A biblical study on the teaching of parents in the formation of children's character. *Journal of Educational Sciences (JIP)*, 1(4), 613–628.
- Sulystio, B. (2014). Moral and Character Development: A Review of Concepts for Learning. *Semantics*, 3(1).
- Taufiqur Rahman, & Siti Masyarafatul Manna Wassalwa. (2019). Implementation of Character Education Management in the Moral Development of Students. *Indonesian Islamic Education Journal*, 4(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.35316/jpii.v4i1.175>
- Wantoro, Jonathan, & Kole, N. (2023). Building Students' Spiritual Discipline Through Reading and Memorizing the Bible. *Inculco Journal of Christian Education*, 3(2), 167–182.
- Waruwu, E. W., & Sibarani, M. (2023). Analysis of Guru Pak's Vision and Mission in the Context of the Independent Curriculum Viewed from the Perspective of Christian

Copyright Holder :

© Eva Saryati Panggabean (2024).

First Publication Right :

© Bulletin of Science Education

This article is under:

CC BY SA