

Dynamics of Moral and Ethical Development in Children through Religious-Based Education

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Abstract

In the contemporary world, as parents increasingly acknowledge the crucial role of quality education in shaping their children's future, particularly through religious education, uncertainties persist regarding the most effective platforms for its implementation and delivery. This qualitative research aims to explore optimal locations for imparting religious education to children and investigate its role in the moral and ethical development of children through faith-based learning. The research involved interviews with ten parent informants to gather insights into the best platforms and impacts of religious education on children's moral and ethical growth, which were then analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, key influences, and the extent of religious education's effectiveness in shaping children's character and ethical values. The findings show that religious education can be accessed through formal schooling, non-formal Quranic education, and the family. School-based religious education covers both theoretical and practical aspects, while Quranic education provides in-depth Islamic values. The family integrates religious values into daily life, with parents serving as primary educators and role models. The research highlights the significant impact of religious education on moral and ethical character, spiritual foundation, social skills, cognitive development, independence, and communication. It advocates for the integration of religious values across all educational platforms, emphasizing its role in fostering intellectually skilled and morally upright individuals.

Keywords: character building, children's education, faith-based education, moral and ethical development, parental role, religious learning

Abstrak

Di era modern, semakin banyak orang tua yang menyadari betapa pentingnya pendidikan berkualitas bagi masa depan anak-anak mereka, terutama dalam hal pendidikan agama. Namun, masih banyak yang bingung tentang tempat terbaik untuk menyampaikan pendidikan agama secara efektif. Penelitian kualitatif ini bertujuan untuk memahami tempat terbaik bagi anak-anak dalam menerima pendidikan agama serta bagaimana peran pendidikan berbasis keimanan dalam membentuk moral dan etika mereka. Dalam penelitian ini, wawancara dilakukan dengan sepuluh orang tua untuk mengetahui pengalaman mereka dalam memberikan pendidikan agama kepada anak-anak serta dampaknya terhadap perkembangan moral dan etika mereka. Data yang diperoleh kemudian dianalisis secara tematik untuk menemukan pola, faktor yang memengaruhi, serta efektivitas pendidikan agama dalam membentuk karakter anak. Hasil

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penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan agama bisa diperoleh melalui tempat seperti sekolah formal, pendidikan Al-Qur'an non-formal, serta lingkungan keluarga. Sekolah memberikan pendidikan agama dalam bentuk teori dan praktik, sementara pendidikan Al-Qur'an membantu anak memahami nilai-nilai Islam lebih mendalam. Di dalam keluarga, orang tua berperan sebagai pendidik utama yang mengajarkan nilai-nilai agama dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa pendidikan agama memiliki dampak besar pada pembentukan karakter moral dan etika, landasan spiritual, keterampilan sosial, perkembangan kognitif, kemandirian, serta komunikasi anak. Oleh karena itu, penting bagi semua pihak untuk mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai agama dalam berbagai tempat pendidikan agar anak-anak tumbuh menjadi individu yang cerdas secara intelektual dan berakhlak mulia.

Kata kunci: pembelajaran agama, pembentukan karakter, pendidikan anak, pendidikan berbasis keimanan, peran orang tua, perkembangan moral dan etika

Introduction

Character development is a fundamental aspect of education, as it shapes individuals into morally responsible and ethical members of society. Education is not merely about acquiring knowledge but also about instilling values that guide human behavior in everyday life. In this context, morality and ethics play a crucial role in shaping a child's personality, influencing their decisions, interactions, and overall social engagement. Education is the cornerstone of individual development, encompassing the guidance and leadership that foster optimal growth and independence in children (Samrin, 2015). Central to this process are morals and ethics, integral elements in character building, inseparable from the broader learning experience. Morality, an inherent dimension of behavior, is intrinsic to every individual as part of human capacity (Pradnyani, 2015). Often referred to as habits, morals shape human interactions, and a positive moral personality fosters effective social engagement.

Ethics, as the study of good and bad, plays a crucial role in guiding human actions with mindfulness. Ethical education helps individuals develop moral awareness and responsibility, ensuring that they engage thoughtfully in daily activities, including personal interactions and social responsibilities (Judrah et al., 2024). Ethical considerations also extend to various aspects of life, such as proper conduct in eating and drinking, financial transactions, and community interactions. Education, as outlined in the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, aims to create a structured learning environment that fosters students' intellectual, moral, and spiritual development. It serves as a means to cultivate self-control, religious awareness, noble character, and essential life skills that align with their identity and potential (Nurhayati, 2020).

Emphasizing children's behavior in daily activities, ethics education serves as a fundamental pillar in shaping their character. Its influence extends beyond the school environment, reaching into communities and families, where the foundation for children's character development is established. Studies indicate that moral and ethical development in children is significantly influenced by early childhood education (Amalia & Latifah, 2019). Other research highlights that parental behavior serves as a role model

for children in developing moral values, particularly during early childhood (Wuryaningsih & Prasetyo, 2022). Additionally, studies have identified variations in religious education methods, with some parents relying on formal schooling, others opting for non-formal Quranic education, and many integrating religious learning within the family environment (Setyawan, 2019).

While numerous studies have explored character education and faith-based parenting, there remains a noticeable gap in research comparing the effectiveness of different religious education models in shaping children's moral and ethical development. Most existing research has either concentrated on religious education within school settings or the influence of parenting on children's ethical growth. However, there is limited investigation into how formal religious instruction in schools, informal Quranic education, and family-based learning together impact children's character development. Addressing this gap is essential to determine which educational context has the most significant effect, especially considering the diversity of access and parental preferences across social and cultural backgrounds.

This study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing and comparing various religious educational settings and assessing their influence on children's moral and ethical formation. By incorporating insights from parents, educators, and the children themselves, this research aims to offer a holistic view of the most effective environment for instilling religious values and character.

The study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which highlights how a child's development is shaped by interconnected environments such as the family, school, and broader community (Dharma, 2023). This theoretical lens supports the study's goal of examining how different educational environments contribute to character building. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory also informs the research by emphasizing the importance of social interactions in the development of learning and moral values, thereby underscoring the role of both parents and institutions in religious education (Kurniati, 2025). Furthermore, Baumrind's Parenting Styles Theory offers a framework for understanding how different parenting approaches—authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive—affect children's moral growth (Nasution et al., 2024). This combined framework allows for a comprehensive exploration of how various religious education settings influence character development.

Parents and educators are key figures in guiding children to develop piety, good character, and appropriate behavior. Given the sensitivity of early childhood as a foundational stage, it is critical to begin religious education early. Doing so helps children distinguish between right and wrong and lays the groundwork for strong moral character. Research also shows that parenting styles greatly influence children's learning motivation and overall behavior (Wahyuningsih & Krisnatuti, 2017). Islamic Religious Education, which encompasses both spiritual and practical dimensions of teaching, plays an essential role in shaping children's personalities in accordance with Islamic values. It aims to deepen their devotion to Allah and instill high moral standards (Syahid & Kamaruddin, 2020).

The early childhood period (ages 0–6) offers a prime opportunity for character development guided by parents, teachers, and others involved in a child's life. In this

phase, religious education—especially in the Islamic context—can effectively prepare children to recognize and internalize piety. Studies also indicate that mothers, in particular, have a significant influence on children's psychosocial and moral growth (Hastuti et al., 2021). This research delves into individual experiences, offering a comprehensive view of how challenges are faced and moral values are built through religious education. Religious education significantly influences the growth and development of children, akin to molding a clean sheet of white paper with black ink. It is imperative to instill good values aligned with morals and religion in children from an early age, providing them with a foundation for navigating life.

Teaching children need not be forceful; leading by example is a potent approach, considering children are adept imitators. Parents, being constant influences, must be mindful of their behavior in front of children, aiming to set positive examples. Unfortunately, many parents neglect their role in guiding children, assuming schools handle this responsibility. Given that 70 percent of a child's time is spent at home, parents play a crucial role in shaping behavior (Fitri & Satrianis, 2018). While schools contribute to behavioral education, parents must recognize their primary influence on children and actively engage in teaching proper behavior. Leading by example is a potent approach, considering children are adept imitators.

Despite the increasing emphasis on character education, a major challenge remains: determining the most effective place for imparting religious education. While previous studies have explored the role of religious education in moral development, there is a lack of research that compares the effectiveness of different educational formal schooling, non-formal Quranic education, and family-based learning. This gap raises questions about which environment best facilitates the integration of religious values into children's daily lives and long-term character development.

Previous research has extensively covered various aspects of character education in students, but this study uniquely delves into religion-based children's character education from an Islamic perspective. Our focus lies in understanding where and at what age children can receive Islamic religious education, whether from parents or school teachers. Examining the work of Fitri and Na'imah, early childhood plays a crucial role in the development of morality, influencing behavior, manners, morals, and character. The guidance provided by parents or educators during this formative period significantly impacts a child's future development (Fitri & Na'imah, 2020).

Expanding on this, Islamic religious education serves as a fundamental source of truth and strength, playing a crucial role in shaping character development. This perspective aligns with the broader educational objectives of fostering intellectual growth and moral excellence within Indonesian society (Kulsum & Muhid, 2022). Similarly, research underscores the profound impact of understanding and practicing Islamic teachings. In this context, religious education not only cultivates moral awareness but also strengthens faith and provides essential guidance for ethical behavior (Romlah & Rusdi, 2023).

This study is particularly relevant given the increasing concern among parents about the most effective setting for nurturing children's religious and ethical development. As religious education plays a fundamental role in shaping character, it's essential to explore how different learning environments contribute to children's moral

understanding and spiritual growth. In today's fast-changing world, where children encounter a wide range of external influences, identifying supportive educational settings becomes even more urgent.

What sets this study apart is its comparative approach to three distinct educational contexts: formal religious instruction in schools, non-formal Quranic learning, and religious education within the family. While many previous studies tend to focus on just one of these areas, this research offers a broader perspective by evaluating the strengths and challenges of each. It also explores how religious values can be effectively reinforced across these different environments, promoting a more well-rounded approach to character development.

By offering new perspectives on the impact of faith-based education, this study aims to enrich academic conversations and inform real-world practices. The insights gained are expected to guide educators, parents, and policymakers in choosing the most effective strategies for cultivating Islamic moral values in children—helping them grow into individuals who are not only intellectually capable but also ethically and spiritually rooted.

Methods

Participants

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure they had relevant experience related to the research topic. The study was designed to provide flexibility for participants and to ensure a diverse group of respondents from multiple regions.

The research was conducted over two months, from November to December 2023, and involved mothers from various regions in Indonesia. These mothers had been consistently applying faith-based education practices at home for at least one year. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic, participants were selected not only based on their experience but also considering their socioeconomic status, educational background, and geographic diversity. These factors were important, as they significantly influence how religious values are introduced and maintained within the household.

The inclusion criteria required that participants were mothers who had been applying religious-based educational practices for at least one year, were actively involved in their children's moral and religious upbringing, and represented diverse educational backgrounds and socioeconomic conditions. This study involved ten mothers. Prior to participation, the mothers were informed about the research objectives, procedures, and ethical considerations. Informed consent was obtained, and participation was entirely voluntary. Confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing names, securely storing data, and allowing participants the option to withdraw at any stage. The details of the children referenced by the participants are outlined in Table 1 and the children listed above are those of the participating mothers. Initials are used to maintain confidentiality. Ages were reported by the mothers and reflect the children's ages during the time of data collection.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, allowing participants to reflect on their experiences and provide narrative insights into how they implement faith-based education at home. The interview guide explored how mothers introduced religious teachings, how they observed their children's moral and emotional responses, and the challenges they encountered during the process.

To address the developmental aspect of moral understanding in young children, the interview questions were tailored to focus on concrete, observable behaviors and parent-child interactions. Children's ages ranged from 3 years 7 months to 8 years old. Given the young age of some children, the study acknowledged the limitations in assessing internal moral reasoning directly. Therefore, maternal narratives served as the primary lens through which the development of moral and ethical behaviors was interpreted.

Table 1. Children's age and initials (as reported by participating mothers)

Name	Age
HL	3 years 7 months
ZD	3 years 7 months
ZR	4 years old
AM	4 years old
RY	4 years old
UM	5 years old
SF	5 years old
HR	6 years old
KZ	6 years old
AF	6 years old
AL	6 years old
NZ	8 years old

Measurement

This study employed a semi-structured interview guide, developed with reference to existing literature on faith-based education and children's moral development. The instrument was adapted from frameworks on parental involvement in religious education (Amalia & Latifah, 2019; Wahyuningsih & Krisnatuti, 2017), which focus on how parents contribute to shaping their children's religious values at home.

To tailor the instrument to the specific goals of this research, both the wording and focus of the questions were modified. Unlike previous frameworks that addressed general parental involvement, this study concentrated on three core aspects. First, it explored how parents implement strategies to introduce and reinforce religious values within the household. Second, it investigated the challenges they encounter in maintaining consistent religious education at home. Lastly, the study examined the perceived impact of these efforts on children's behavior, particularly through parents' observations regarding changes in their children's moral and ethical conduct.

To ensure the tool's validity and reliability, two experts in child psychology and religious education reviewed and validated the interview guide. Adjustments included simplifying complex terminology to enhance parent comprehension and expanding the questions to encompass a wider range of religious learning approaches (e.g., formal

school-based education, Quranic tutoring, and family-based instruction). The interviews featured open-ended questions, allowing participants to share their experiences in detail, while also providing flexibility to explore emerging insights during the conversations.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. This process involved familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing those themes, defining and naming them, and finally producing the report.

Themes were identified inductively from participants' narratives, allowing insights to emerge organically from the data. Particular attention was given to repeated expressions, shared experiences, and patterns of meaning-making regarding religious education and children's moral behavior.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, member checking was conducted by summarizing key interpretations and sharing them with participants for feedback. Peer debriefing was also used to challenge the researcher's interpretations and minimize bias during the analysis process.

Findings

Access to Faith-Based Education in Children's Character Building

Faith-based education plays a pivotal role in shaping children's character, and understanding its accessibility across various settings helps reveal how moral and ethical values are instilled. This study examined three main sources of faith-based education: formal schooling, Quranic/religious tutoring, and religious instruction within the family setting.

Formal Education in Schools

School-based religious instruction significantly contributes to a child's understanding of faith by delivering structured and curriculum-based lessons. However, while schools provide an organized approach, they may not fully capture the personalized nature of religious education offered in family or Quranic settings. The integration of religious education with other subjects can sometimes dilute its focus on character building, limiting opportunities for deep personal reflection.

For younger children (ages 3-5), religious learning in school often involves interactive and play-based methods that are emotionally engaging. At this early stage, children benefit more from learning through emotions and imitation rather than abstract reasoning.

HL, in Preschool Playgroup, begins religious learning through these interactive methods. His parents noted that while the exposure is valuable, the lessons might become more impactful if they were connected to his personal, everyday experiences. HL's mom stated, "HL learns daily prayers and short surah's at his preschool, but we believe the lessons would be more meaningful if connected to his everyday experiences." HL's mom further highlighted his moral development, noting, "When he

brings lunch to school, even if it is only a small portion, HL always shares it with his friends.” The challenge in school-based settings is often making religious teachings relatable to a child’s real-world experiences.

For older children (ages 6-8), religious instruction in schools may become more structured and involve a deeper understanding of religious values, but the time dedicated to these lessons is often limited.

ZD benefits from the structured environment at school, which reinforces the religious teachings learned at home. However, his parents pointed out that the limited time spent on religious lessons at school means that their impact may be constrained, stating, “School time is limited, so the time for religious education is also restricted; the primary foundation of religion remains at home.” Therefore, they rely on home education to deepen his understanding.

NZ, enrolled in Al-Muttaqin School, experiences a robust integration of Islamic values throughout the school environment. His parents chose the school specifically for its religious emphasis, noting, “NZ always offers his seat to elders and seniors, reflecting the value of respect emphasized at school.” The school’s nurturing atmosphere provides a supportive foundation for ethical behavior and moral development, which they believe is crucial at an early age. However, while the environment promotes moral values, the challenge lies in ensuring the consistency and depth of religious teachings, which can sometimes be more superficial compared to home-based or Quranic education.

Quranic Classes

Quranic classes provide a more focused and interactive setting for religious development, offering a level of engagement and personalization that is often missing from formal education. These classes allow for deeper exploration of religious texts and principles, and students benefit from individualized attention. However, they may lack the comprehensive development found in family or school-based education, as their focus is primarily on religious content rather than moral or social development in a broader context.

In Quranic classes, the adjustment in teaching methods depends on the child’s developmental stage. For younger children, like those around ages 3-5, the focus is often on basic moral lessons and simple memorization of verses, using methods that engage the child’s emotional world, such as storytelling and interactive play. At this stage, moral teachings are introduced through role modeling and imitation. As children grow older (ages 6-8), the lessons become more reflective, encouraging children to think about the meanings of Quranic verses and their practical applications in daily life. This progression helps children internalize ethical values at a deeper level.

SF, attending classes at Masjid Al-Falah, benefits from the mosque’s community-oriented setting, which fosters both spiritual growth and moral development through peer interaction and religious practice. Her mother noted, “SF often shares with her friends, such as when she gave her favorite toy to comfort a friend who was feeling sad.” However, the challenge of Quranic education lies in balancing spiritual learning and moral behavior outside the mosque environment. Without consistent reinforcement in other settings, children may struggle to apply religious teachings in daily life.

AF and AL attend Taman Pendidikan Al-Quran (TPQ) every Saturday. Their parents appreciate the program's focus on Quran reading and practical applications of Islamic values, stating, "They enjoy learning the stories of the prophets and memorizing short surahs at the TPQ, then sharing those lessons at home." *Yet, they acknowledge the time constraints, noting, "Since it only takes place once a week, we must reinforce the teachings at home to ensure the values remain ingrained."* This limited frequency may not provide the ongoing reinforcement necessary for internalizing the teachings and applying them in everyday interactions. This indicates that while Quranic classes help deepen religious knowledge, their impact is enhanced when reinforced consistently across different environments (home, school, and social settings).

Family-Based Religious Education

Religious education at home plays a central role in early character development, as it allows children to observe religious practices in action. Parental involvement through role modeling and daily routines strengthens the child's connection to faith. While home-based education provides personalized learning, it may lack the structured environment and community support found in schools or Quranic centers.

For younger children (ages 3-5), this education often focuses on modeling behavior and incorporating religious practices into daily routines, such as saying prayers, telling stories, and practicing good manners. These activities are crucial for developing basic moral values, as younger children learn best through observation and imitation.

HR, who is homeschooled by her mother, benefits from a highly personalized and meaningful learning experience. Her mother shared, *"I teach her about religion in a relaxed manner, such as telling her that when she grows up, she should wear a hijab, and it has stuck with her—she refuses to take it off even when it's dirty."* HR's intellectual curiosity is also evident, as her mother noted, *"She is very inquisitive and often asks questions like, 'Is it permissible in Islam to eat cats? Why is it prohibited to eat dogs?'"* However, without external social interactions and structured peer learning, HR's exposure to broader social values may be more limited.

AM learns religious learning through experiential activities at home, guided by his parents. His parents explained, *"We teach the Qur'an and daily prayers through behavioral examples, such as sharing with family; though sometimes he needs reminders."* While this approach is holistic, focusing on behavior as a means of learning, the lack of formal religious education might mean gaps in his theoretical understanding of faith compared to children who attend structured classes.

For older children (ages 6-8), family-based education can include more reflective discussions about religious principles and moral behaviors, helping them connect their faith to their everyday actions.

UM follows a well-rounded program at home, focusing on physical, intellectual, spiritual, and moral education. Her parents emphasized, *"We teach physical, intellectual, spiritual, and ethical development through role modeling, as children are natural imitators."* This holistic approach ensures that all aspects of her development are supported; yet it may face the challenge of providing the same level of social engagement and peer interaction found in formal schooling or Quranic classes, which can enhance moral learning through community experiences.

RY, who has not yet received formal religious instruction, observes and imitates his older sibling. His parents noted, *“He learns tauhid and ethics indirectly through his older sibling, who is already in school.”* While this form of learning is effective in shaping basic manners and behavior, it lacks the intentionality and depth found in formal or Quranic settings. His moral education is largely dependent on the example set by his family, which, although valuable, might lack the reinforcement of structured, expert-led instruction.

The three settings—formal education, Quranic learning, and family-based education—each have distinct advantages and limitations in shaping a child's character. Formal education provides structured moral and religious education, but it is often generalized and lacks personalization. Quranic classes offer deeper engagement with religious texts and a community-based atmosphere, but they can be time-limited and may lack holistic development. Family-based education, while personalized and deeply rooted in everyday practice, faces challenges in providing the social interaction and structured learning that another setting offer.

Together, these different pathways support both the intellectual and spiritual aspects of a child's development. However, the interplay between these environments—how they complement or sometimes conflict with one another—requires further exploration. For example, a child attending Quranic classes may be well-versed in religious principles but may lack the application of these teachings in social or familial contexts without a solid foundation of moral education at home or in school. Similarly, children who primarily receive religious education at home might excel in moral behavior but could benefit from more structured, peer-driven learning experiences.

In synthesizing the narratives across all three educational settings, several key patterns emerged. First, the role of mothers was consistently highlighted as central to religious learning. As the primary caregivers and educators in the household, mothers served not only as transmitters of religious knowledge but also as behavioral role models. Their consistency, emotional warmth, and commitment to religious routines shaped the children's understanding of values such as patience, gratitude, respect, and responsibility.

Second, findings indicate that character traits such as discipline, empathy, and honesty were the most frequently emphasized by parents, regardless of the educational setting. For instance, children in Quranic classes tended to show discipline and persistence in memorization, while those raised primarily through family-based learning exhibited stronger emotional bonding and daily application of moral behaviors. Children in formal schools, although benefiting from structured knowledge, often required reinforcement at home to translate those lessons into lived behaviors.

Third, there was a notable interdependency between the educational settings. Parents often used insights gained from school or Quranic lessons as reference points to discuss moral behavior at home. Conversely, home-based religious routines, such as daily prayers, storytelling, or practicing good manners, were often cited as enhancing the child's understanding of school teachings. This dynamic confirms that religious education works most effectively when it is continuous and contextual across multiple settings.

Lastly, age appeared to influence the depth of understanding and behavior internalization. Younger children (ages 3–5) primarily responded through imitation and emotion-based learning, while older children (ages 6–8) began to demonstrate reflective thinking and internal value reasoning. This progression highlights the importance of age-appropriate strategies in faith-based education.

These patterns underscore the need for collaborative, age-sensitive, and consistent religious education, wherein schools, Quranic institutions, and families actively communicate and reinforce shared values.

Discussion

Faith-based education plays a pivotal role in supporting children's moral, spiritual, cognitive, social, and emotional development. The findings of this study reinforce how religious values, when integrated into formal schooling, Qur'anic instruction, and family-based learning, provide a holistic foundation for character formation.

Developmentally, early childhood (ages 0–8) is a critical period for shaping foundational values and behaviors. According to developmental psychology, children at this stage exhibit rapid cognitive and emotional growth, high receptivity to modeling, and growing capacity for moral reasoning. Religious education that aligns with these stages—such as storytelling from sacred texts, age-appropriate memorization, and ritual practices—can foster deep internalization of values. For instance, HR's early memorization of Qur'anic verses and her ability to consistently practice modesty reflect the cognitive and emotional receptiveness of this developmental window.

Rather than emphasizing religious knowledge in isolation, Islamic education during childhood focuses on internalizing core virtues such as kindness, honesty, patience, and justice (Sari & Haris, 2023). The repeated exposure to these values across contexts (school, home, community) allows children to practice them in real-life situations. The observed behaviors of HL, HR, KZ, and ZR illustrate how religious instruction, when developmentally appropriate, cultivates morally grounded behavior.

The family environment, particularly in the early stages of development, significantly influences children's personality formation and ethical orientation. Children learn through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. The cases of RY and NZ, who exhibit respect and care toward others, exemplify the impact of religious parenting strategies during these formative years (Nurmadiyah, 2016). This suggests that religious education is most effective when it resonates with the developmental stage of the child—e.g., emphasizing moral stories for young children, encouraging reflective thought in older ones.

Spirituality is another essential dimension shaped by religious education. HL exhibits sincere care for others, reflecting a deeper understanding of life's meaning, while HR's consistent worship and commitment to hijab—even while unwell—illustrate strong spiritual values (Salimah et al., 2023). These traits, including calmness and discipline, stem from both parental guidance and religious instruction (Rindawan et al., 2020).

In the domain of social development, faith-based education supports prosocial behaviors such as empathy, cooperation, and generosity. These values are often best

cultivated during middle childhood (ages 6–12), a phase when peer relationships and social interactions become more prominent. HR lending a pencil and HL sharing personal belongings despite scarcity demonstrate altruistic behaviors nurtured by early religious instruction (Nurhayati et al., 2020; Siddique, 2024). These observations align with theories suggesting that moral reasoning and perspective-taking skills evolve during this stage.

The absence of social care may lead to egocentrism or withdrawal from others, underscoring the role of religious learning in shaping empathy and communal values (Sari & Eliza, 2021). Through this lens, faith-based education extends beyond religious knowledge, embedding concern for others in children's everyday actions.

Religious education also intersects with cognitive development. Engagements such as Qur'anic memorization, religious storytelling, and value-based reflection stimulate cognitive processes including memory, comprehension, and moral judgment. HR's inquisitive nature and ZD's ability to connect life experiences with divine teachings reflect how religious instruction can promote critical thinking when matched to developmental capacity (Bening & Ichsan, 2022; Firman & Anhusadar, 2022).

In a globalized world, Islamic education must also support children's ability to navigate civic life while maintaining religious identity. Islamic global citizenship education (IGCE) encourages self-reflection and critical thinking (Saada, 2023). AM's memorization and understanding of the Qur'an demonstrate how religious engagement cultivates discipline and analytical skills, preparing children for diverse social contexts.

Parents also play a key role in cognitive development by relating life events to divine teachings, as seen in ZD's case. This approach builds reflective thinking and strengthens children's understanding of religious values.

Character development rooted in patience, *tawakal*, and gratitude forms a solid foundation for resilience (Kamila, 2023). HR's early exposure to Qur'anic recitation and her memorization of half of Juz 30 by age five reflect not only learning independence but also a strong moral core. ZD's independent decision-making, guided by religious values and supported by parental encouragement, illustrates the role of religious education in shaping confident, ethical individuals.

Communication and emotional expression also benefit from religious instruction. Children learn to apologize, thank others, and express feelings in respectful ways—skills vital for healthy interaction (Prayugo, 2020). For example, HR's solemnity in worship and HL's polite language use show how internalized values influence emotional behavior. AM and ZD demonstrate the ability to express feelings appropriately, while AF and AL learn to maintain positive social relationships grounded in empathy and respect.

While the developmental impact of religious education may vary due to differences in home environment and personal disposition, the overall findings affirm that faith-based education plays a significant role across all developmental stages. By aligning religious content with age-appropriate pedagogy, it not only enhances moral and spiritual growth but also supports intellectual, social, and emotional development.

However, this study has its limitations. The qualitative design and limited participant scope constrain broader generalizations. Additionally, relying heavily on parental narratives may introduce bias. Future research should explore these dynamics

through larger samples and mixed-method approaches, with particular attention to how religious pedagogy can be tailored to developmental stages in diverse cultural contexts.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

The importance of the quality of children's education is increasing, and religious education for children is the main focus for parents. Children receive religious-based moral and ethical education not only from formal schooling but also through family and Quranic classes. Religious learning at school covers both theoretical and practical aspects, while the Quranic classes focus on deepening Islamic values. In the family environment, parents play an active role in becoming educators and role models in integrating religious values into daily life. Religious education has a significant impact on six aspects, consisting of moral and ethical character building, a solid spiritual foundation, social skills, cognitive growth, independence, communication, and emotional expression. With this, faith-based education is the key to the growth and development of children for future generations to become smart individuals, not only intellectually but also morally and spiritually wise.

Recommendation

To enhance the quality of children's religious education, it is recommended to strengthen collaboration between parents, schools, and religious institutions to ensure consistent delivery of religious values. Parents should be empowered through educational programs to become active role models in integrating religious teachings into daily life. Educational institutions are encouraged to prioritize character development alongside theoretical knowledge by incorporating practical applications of religious values. Additionally, continuous evaluation and innovation in teaching methods can improve the effectiveness of religious education, fostering children's intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth as future generations.

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