

HABITUATION OF RELIGIOUS VALUES AT AN EARLY AGE: STRATEGIES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at how Islamic values are taught to young children through daily habits. It focuses on TK Alam J. A Warraihan, an Islamic early childhood school. The research uses a qualitative case study method. Data was collected through observations, interviews, and documents. Teachers, students, and parents were the primary sources of information. The study found that Islamic values are taught through daily routines. These include prayers, polite behavior, and learning in nature. These routines help children grow in mind, heart, and action. Key factors that support this method include teachers being good role models, learning in a natural setting, and parents helping at home. However, there are also challenges. These include limited time, lack of resources, and differences in family backgrounds. This study shows the strengths and weaknesses of using daily habits to teach religion. It adds to ideas about how to build character in Islamic schools. It highlights the value of learning through authentic experiences. The model can be used in other schools to support spiritual and child-centered learning.

Keywords: Internalization of religious values, Islamic values, early childhood education.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is the earliest and most fundamental stage in forming character and personality. It is the golden age, during which children experience rapid development in all aspects, including physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, and spiritual. (Ashoumi, Hidayatulloh, & Ashari, 2023). According to psychological development theory, early childhood is a very sensitive phase to various stimuli, so it is the most appropriate time to instill the fundamental values of life. One of the basic values that is important to be internalized from an early age is religious values. (Nabila, 2024).

A critical dimension of early childhood education is religious education. Religious values are not just subject matter but are integral to building children's character and personality. (Ahmadi et al., 2024). Religion teaches norms, ethics, and universal values that can guide children in living a harmonious social life. (Ahmadi et al., 2024). Internalizing religious values from an early age will form a solid foundation for children's moral and spiritual development and a foundation for creating a responsible, honest, disciplined, and empathetic person towards others.

Religious education functions as a process of transferring knowledge about religious teachings and shapes children's spiritual awareness and religious behavior. Internalizing

religious values means making them part of a child's belief system, attitudes, and behaviors, manifest in daily life. (Atmaja, 2024). Habituation helps children form routines that reflect the values they want to instill, such as honesty, kindness, gratitude, and concern for others. (Ningsih & Wiyani, 2021). In religious education, habituation includes praying before and after activities, saying greetings, being polite to teachers and friends, sharing, and showing respect and gratitude to God. (Iwan, 2022). Through habituation, these values are known by children and lived and practiced consistently.

Habituation will be more successful in a socially, emotionally, and spiritually supportive environment. In this case, the role of the educator is very central because the teacher is not only a facilitator of learning but also a model or example that children will imitate. (Taufiq, Sahdan, & Setianingsih, 2024). One early childhood education institution that is interesting to study in this context is J. A Warraihan Nature Kindergarten. This school carries nature-based education, making the natural environment the primary medium and source of learning. Nature-based education aims to develop children's full potential through direct interaction with the natural environment, such as soil, water, plants, animals, and other natural phenomena. (Delviany, Risnawati, Rizqa, Sabrina, & Satrial, 2024). In this approach, children are invited to learn contextually, actively, and reflectively, so that they not only understand the subject matter theoretically but also experience and internalize values through authentic experiences.

Nature-based education is believed to be able to shape children's spiritual sensitivity. Intense interaction with nature can foster a sense of awe towards God's creation, an attitude of gratitude, and build awareness of the greatness and order of His creation. (Saini, Putri, Fauzan, Pratama, & Sirojudin, 2025). However, few studies have examined how habituation strategies are applied in nature-based education, especially to instill religious values in early childhood. Most studies highlight habituation strategies in the context of conventional schooling, without explicitly linking them to an environment-based contextual approach.

This study aims to answer this need by examining how the habituation strategy is implemented in J. A Warraihan Nature Kindergarten is a means to internalize religious values in students. The primary focus of this research is to describe the forms of habituation activities carried out, the role of teachers and the environment in supporting the process, and the challenges and opportunities faced in its implementation. By examining the practices of habituation in the context of natural education, it is hoped that effective patterns and

strategies can be found to support early childhood religious education that is relevant to the times.

Internalizing religious values through contextually applied habituation strategies is expected to provide a strong moral foundation for children facing complex life challenges. In addition, the nature-based education approach is considered relevant in shaping spiritual awareness, social responsibility, and ecological concerns that are increasingly needed in a world increasingly affected by environmental and value crises.

Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to developing the theory of faith-based character education integrated with the nature education approach. Practically, this research can be a reference for educators, managers of PAUD institutions, and educational policymakers in designing learning strategies that integrate religious values into contextual and fun educational practices. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on applying habituation strategies in the context of nature education, which has not been much of a concern in the study of early childhood education in Indonesia.

Thus, this research is not only expected to enrich the scientific discourse in early childhood education and religious education, but also to have a concrete impact on developing more meaningful, relevant, and transformative educational practices, the habituation strategy as a method of internalizing religious values in J. A Warraihan Nature Kindergarten is a concrete example of an integrative effort between spiritual values, character education, and a sustainable environment-based approach. Through this research, it is hoped that a model of habituation strategy can be formulated that is not only pedagogically effective but also contextual and adaptive to the needs of child development and the demands of the times.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The habituation strategy is one of the most effective approaches in early childhood education for instilling religious values through consistent and repeated practices until these values become part of a child's daily routine. (Yusuf, Laela, & Hariyadi, 2022) Highlight early childhood as a critical period for character formation, where repetition of positive behaviors strengthens value acquisition. This aligns with Skinner's operant conditioning theory and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, emphasizing the importance of social interaction and cultural context in shaping children's cognitive and moral development. Internalizing religious values goes beyond verbal instruction; it requires real-life experiences, such as group prayers, storytelling about prophets, and spiritually meaningful play-based activities. Recent studies also

show that nature-based education, such as that implemented in TK Alam, provides an ideal environment for children to internalize Islamic values through daily interactions with nature and integrated spiritual practices. (Minhaji, Hosaini, & Maktumah, 2024). Teachers play a key role as role models and facilitators in this process, where their consistency and example greatly influence the success of habituation. (Kamilah & Aisyah, 2024). Thus, habituation is a pedagogical strategy and a meaningful process of value internalization contextualized within early childhood education settings.

METODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study type, which aims to deeply understand the implementation of habituation strategies in internalizing religious values at J. A Warraihan Nature Kindergarten. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the process, meaning, and context of implementing habituation strategies holistically and contextually. (Safarudin, Zulfamanna, Kustati, & Sepriyanti, 2023).

Data were obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were made of habituation activities in children's daily activities, while interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, and parents to explore their perspectives on the strategies used. (Hasan et al., 2025). Documentation collected included curriculum, activity schedules, and relevant child development records.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques involving data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing based on emerging themes. (Safarudin et al., 2023) Triangulation of sources and methods was applied to ensure data validity. The analysis was done descriptively and interpretively to reveal the habituation patterns and their meaning. With this method, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of how habituation strategies support internalizing religious values in a nature-based educational environment.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The strength of the qualitative approach in this study is reflected in its ability to present rich and meaningful contextual narratives. The researcher was not limited to gathering data in a technical sense but actively engaged in capturing the subtle social dynamics that emerged through the interactions between teachers, children, and their surrounding environment. By immersing in these lived experiences, the study provides a nuanced

perspective on how values are internalized, revealing layers of meaning that would likely be overlooked in a purely quantitative analysis. This depth of insight allows for a more holistic understanding of the educational process, especially in the context of early childhood religious and character development.

Based on field observations at TK Alam J. A Warraihan, the strategy of habituating Islamic values is structured through daily routines such as group prayers before and after learning, exchanging greetings, and nature-based activities like planting and exploring the environment. Children appeared enthusiastic in participating and displayed positive behaviors, such as helping one another and maintaining environmental cleanliness. Documentation of learning activities, including teacher journals, activity photos, and student development evaluation sheets, supports these observational findings. The data reveal a strong connection between daily activities and the goal of instilling religious values. For instance, the planting activity is accompanied by teaching the value of gratitude toward Allah's creations, as noted in the analyzed Daily Activity Plans.

Interviews with teachers affirm that habituation is implemented not only through instruction but also through direct role modeling. One teacher stated: "Children learn most effectively by observing. That's why we ensure we perform all religious activities with the children, not just tell them to do it." Teachers also emphasized the importance of (Mahdiyah, Nazlia, Arsih, & Jannah, 2024) A humanistic and contextual approach to teaching Islamic values aligns with those who assert that religious education for early childhood must be grounded in love, patience, and exemplary behavior. Interviews with parents further reinforce these findings. Many reported noticeable behavioral changes in their children at home. One parent shared: "My child has started praying independently without being reminded. Sometimes, they even remind us if we forget to pray." This suggests that the internalization of values extends beyond the school environment. These findings support the argument of (Nurhakki, Rustan, & Syam, 2021). Habituation is an effective method in character education, as education is about acquiring knowledge and forming habits and attitudes. Furthermore, this reflects the concept of holistic education as described by (Rahman, 2022), which emphasizes the balanced development of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in the learning process.

Habituation Strategy as an Effort to Internalize Religious Values

Internalizing religious values in early childhood education is a necessary process that plays a role in forming children's character and personality at J. At Warraihan Nature Kindergarten, the habituation strategy is the main approach in instilling these values. The results show that this habituation strategy is carried out by integrating religious values into children's daily lives. Habituation is carried out in the context of play, nature exploration, and social interactions involving teachers and the environment. The habituation activities found in the field include reading prayers before and after activities, getting used to saying greetings, instilling gratitude for God's creation during nature exploration activities, and habituation to share, help, and respect others. These strategies are consistently applied in all children's activities, both formal classroom activities and free outdoor activities. For example, when children do planting activities or explore nature, teachers will link these activities with Islamic values such as trustworthiness, responsibility, and love for the environment as a form of worship to Allah SWT.

Implementing this strategy aligns with Tilaar's theory, which asserts that the internalization of values cannot be done through the transfer of knowledge alone but requires repeated direct experiences and a supportive social context. (Safarudin et al., 2023). In J. At Warraihan Nature Kindergarten, the experience is realized through concrete activities that provide space for children to live and experience the meaning of religious values

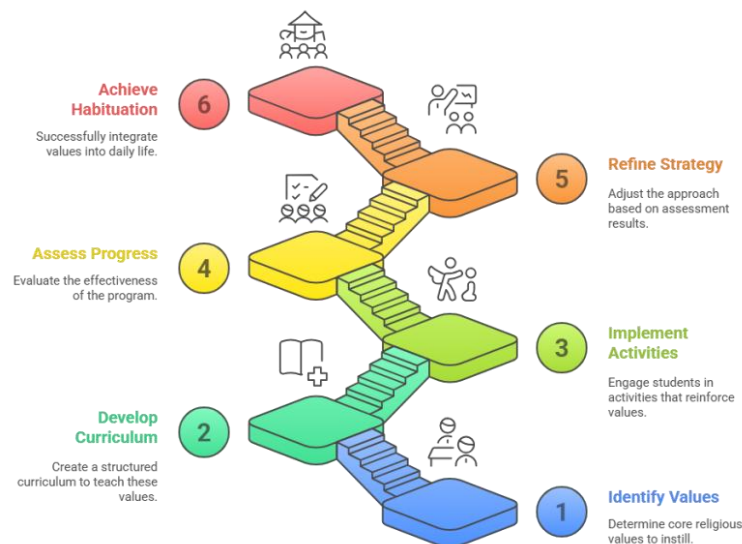


Figure 1: Strategy for habituation of religious values at an early age

In addition, this habituation strategy also emphasizes the importance of role modeling. The teacher becomes the central figure who directs children and is a real example of practicing religious values. This supports Bandura's view in social learning theory, which states that children learn through observation and imitation of the models they see (Firdaus, Ruswandi, Saefuddin, & As'ad, 2024). When teachers consistently demonstrate religious behavior, such as praying solemnly, mentioning God's name when explaining natural phenomena, or being gentle and loving to children, children tend to imitate them naturally. Habituation through this example has proven to be an effective means of internalization because it is based on the tendency of early childhood, which is very responsive to concrete examples.

The natural environment that characterizes J. A Warraihan Nature Kindergarten also supports the successful habituation of religious values. The open, beautiful, and natural learning environment allows for a contextualized learning process. In an atmosphere that blends with nature, children learn about science and get space to contemplate the greatness of God's creation. This aligns with Friedrich Froebel's educational philosophy that nature is the best teacher for children because it can guide them towards spiritual awareness through sensory experiences. (Tambak, Hamzah, Sukenti, & Sabdin, 2021).

Farming, feeding animals, keeping the environment clean, and exploring local ecosystems provide spiritual experiences that enrich internalizing religious values. In these activities, teachers guide children to recognize the order and beauty of God's creation, which fosters an attitude of awe, gratitude, and responsibility as caliphs on earth. This process shows that habituation creates routine and brings deeper spiritual meaning and awareness.



Figure 2. Getting Students Used To Performing Prayers

The findings also show that the habituation process is reinforced with reflective activities. After certain activities, children are invited to have a light discussion or asked to retell what they experienced and learned. This process allows children to express their understanding of the values they have acquired. Reflective activities like this deepen the internalization process because children are trained to link actions with values, rather than simply repeating behaviors without meaning.

Interviews with teachers revealed that the habituation strategy is not carried out separately from the curriculum but is integrated into all learning activities. Teachers design activities so that religious values emerge naturally in the learning process. This shows that the habituation strategy is not just an additional activity but an inherent part of the education system run by the school.

Support from parents is also an essential factor in the effectiveness of habituation. Interview results show that parents feel the positive impact of this strategy at home. Children show new habits that reflect religious values, such as praying diligently, greeting parents with greetings, and showing empathy to family members. This confirms that the habituation at school has a transfer effect to the home environment, especially when there is synergy and communication between teachers and parents. (Huda, 2024) Research shows similar findings, namely that habituation will be more successful when carried out continuously between school and family.

Thus, the habituation strategy at J. A Warraihan Nature Kindergarten is a contextual, fun, and Meaningful implementation of religious character education. Through consistent but straightforward activities, children learn to recognize, feel, and practice religious values daily. Habituation carried out naturally, supported by a conducive environment, and the active role of teachers and parents, makes the value internalization process run entirely and sustainably.

The Challenge and Opportunity in Implementing Islamic Habitation

The process of internalizing Islamic values through the habituation method in J. A Warraihan Nature Kindergarten involves various factors that support and influence each other. This habituation method aims to instill religious values in children's lives consistently and thoroughly, hoping they will become an integral part of their behavior. The success of this internalization process depends on several supporting factors in the school and family environment, as well as the challenges or obstacles that must be faced. On the other hand, if not adequately addressed, these obstacles can reduce the effectiveness of habituation.

Understanding the factors that support and hinder the internalization of Islamic values through this habituation method is essential.

One of the main supporting factors is the role of the teacher as a role model in everyday life; teachers at J. A Warraihan Nature Kindergarten not only acts as a teacher, but also as a model for the children. As educators who teach religious values, teachers must show good examples in every aspect of their lives. Observing the teacher's behavior, children imitate and internalize these values daily. This is by Albert Bandura's social learning theory (1986), which states that children learn through the process of observation and imitation of the behavior of the models they see (Andrian, 2012). Thus, the example given by the teacher is the primary key in forming religious habits in children.

In addition, the conducive learning environment at J. A Warraihan Nature Kindergarten is also an essential factor in internalizing Islamic values. This nature-based learning invites children to see the greatness of God in each of His creatures. Caring for plants, playing outdoors, and exploring the natural surroundings provide direct experience and link religious values to real life. Friedrich Froebel's educational principle that emphasizes the importance of nature as a learning medium is very relevant to the approach taken at J.A Warraihan Nature Kindergarten (Ratnawati & Nasehudin, 2024). In this case, children are invited to feel and experience God's presence through His creation, which helps them more easily understand and internalize Islamic values in everyday life.

In addition to teacher and environmental factors, parental involvement in supporting the habituation process is also significant. Good communication between the school and parents is crucial in realizing consistent and sustainable internalization of religious values. Although there are strong supporting factors, it cannot be denied that some obstacles can reduce the effectiveness of Islamic values habituation. One of the main obstacles is the limited resources owned by the school. Although J. A Warraihan Nature Kindergarten strives to create an environment that supports the internalization of religious values. However, limited facilities can hinder these efforts, such as a limited number of teaching staff and a shortage of religion-based teaching materials. Limited resources also affect the quality of learning provided to children. Without sufficient and developmentally appropriate teaching materials, it is not easy to implement religious values to their full potential.

Another barrier that needs to be considered is the lack of provision for teachers regarding teaching religious values. Not all teachers deeply understand how to teach Islamic

values to young children in a fun and developmentally appropriate way. Without sufficient training, teachers may struggle to choose proper methods to teach religious values in a way that appeals to children. More intensive teacher training on teaching religious values in early childhood is needed to improve the effectiveness of Islamic values habituation in schools.

Finally, the pressure to achieve high academic results is also a hindering factor that cannot be ignored. Some kindergartens focus more on academic achievement, such as reading or counting skills, than character development and religious values. While academic achievement is essential, too much emphasis can reduce attention to forming children's character based on religious values. For this reason, a balance is needed between academic skill development and character building based on religious values so that children can grow into individuals who are not only intelligent but also have good morals and spirituality.

Although various supporting factors can help internalize Islamic values in J. A Warraihan Nature Kindergarten, obstacles such as limited resources, time, and differences in family background still need to be considered and overcome. With the synergy between the school, parents, and the community, it is hoped that Islamic values can be well embedded in children, so that they can practice the teachings of Islam in their daily lives. The success of this internalization of religious values depends on the method of habituation and solid cooperation between all parties involved in children's education.

This research provides several important implications for early childhood education development, especially in efforts to internalize Islamic religious values through habituation. First, the results show that habituation carried out consistently in the school environment can shape religious behavior in children. Other schools must develop and implement habituation strategies integrated with daily learning activities, especially at the early childhood education level. This will help children understand religious values and instill habits they can practice.

Secondly, this study also shows the importance of teachers as role models in internalizing religious values. Teachers who demonstrate religious behavior in their daily lives significantly impact children's habituation process. Improving teachers' competence in teaching religious values and character development is needed. Training and debriefing for teachers on how to teach religious values effectively will help improve the quality of religious education in schools, especially at the early childhood education level. Third, parental involvement is a key factor in internalizing religious values. Schools need to strengthen cooperation with parents in supporting this habituation process. Counseling or training for

parents on the importance of consistency in applying religious values at home is required in order to strengthen the results obtained at school. Fourth, constraints such as limited resources and time indicate the need for more efficient management in the learning process at school. Schools need to consider allocating more balanced time between academic activities and faith-based character development and optimally utilizing existing resources to support achieving religious education goals. Overall, this research contributes to developing a model of religious value-based education in early childhood education and emphasizes the importance of integrating schools, families, and communities in creating an environment that supports the internalization of religious values holistically and sustainably.

The findings of this study have several important implications for early childhood education, particularly in the context of religious and character development. First, the emphasis on habituation through role modeling highlights the need for educators to deliver instructional content and consistently demonstrate the values they seek to instill. This suggests that teacher training programs should emphasize reflective practices, emotional intelligence, and the embodiment of moral and spiritual values. Second, the role of the natural and social environment as part of the internalization process implies that schools should create learning environments that encourage meaningful interaction between teachers and students and between students and their surroundings. Designing classroom and outdoor spaces that facilitate these interactions may enhance the overall effectiveness of value-based education. Third, the reported continuity of value internalization at home suggests the importance of school-parent collaboration. Educators and policymakers should consider developing programs that actively engage parents in the educational process, ensuring consistency between the values taught at school and those practiced at home. Finally, using a qualitative approach in this study demonstrates the value of in-depth, contextual inquiry in understanding complex human experiences. Future research in early childhood education could benefit from incorporating similar methodologies to explore what children learn and how and why they internalize certain values in specific contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the habituation strategy employed by Warraihan Early Childhood (WEC) effectively shapes religious behavior in early childhood. Daily practices such as prayer, polite behavior, and the contextual introduction of Islamic values through nature-based activities contribute significantly to internalizing these values in children's

everyday lives. Key supporting factors include the role of teachers as consistent role models, a learning environment that nurtures spiritual growth, and active parental involvement. The success of this habituation process relies not only on educators but also on parents who reinforce religious values at home.

However, several challenges affect the consistency of value internalization, such as limited instructional time, resource constraints, and socio-cultural differences among families. To address these issues, stronger collaboration between educators and parents is essential. Additionally, human resources development and adequate facilities should be prioritized to enhance the overall quality of value-based education at WEC. Overall, this study contributes to advancing faith-based education models at the early childhood level. Its findings offer a valuable reference for other educational institutions seeking to implement effective, holistic, and sustainable strategies for instilling religious values in young learners.

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