

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION MANAGEMENT IN REALIZING STUDENTS' CHARACTER

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze early childhood education management in realizing students' character at Raudhatul Athfal (RA) Tunas Harapan Jatijajar, Kebumen. The research is a qualitative study conducted at RA Tunas Harapan. Data collection techniques include interviews, observations, and document studies. The data analysis technique follows the Miles & Huberman & Saldana model, consisting of three stages: data condensation, data display, and data verification. The findings reveal that the early childhood education management in realizing students' character at RA Tunas Harapan Jatijajar is carried out in the following stages: Planning, which is done through meetings. Implementation, which involves integrating students' character into learning and providing good role model. Evaluation, which involves setting standards and methods to measure achievements, including the establishment of standards and criteria for various needs, and carried out regularly.

Keywords: Character, early childhood, management

INTRODUCTION

Each child is an individual with their own potential and characteristics (Fatimah, 2019). Early childhood education is an educational institution that educates children during the golden age period. The golden age of a child is the critical period in their development, typically occurring between the ages of 0-5 years. During this time, a child's brain develops rapidly, reaching about 80% of its adult capacity. This period is crucial because the experiences and stimulation provided to the child will have a significant impact on their physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development. During this time, a child's memory is highly receptive to stimuli from the environment. A positive environment will serve as a good learning place for developing a child's character (Rohmadi et al., 2020; Untung et al., 2023).

Character education is a primary goal in the national education system in Indonesia (Sakban & Sundawa, 2023). Therefore, creating students with strong character is the main objective of an educational institution. An educational institution that focuses on character education for children in the golden age period is early childhood education. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) of the Republic of Indonesia, Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is an institution that provides education for children aged 0-6 years as part of the national education system. This institution aims to support the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of children through learning activities appropriate to their developmental stage. This emphasizes that early childhood education is not only aimed at providing cognitive stimulation but also at holistically developing the social, emotional, and spiritual aspects of children. Character education in early childhood plays a crucial role in shaping children's personalities and morals from an early age. This period, known as the golden age, is a critical stage in a child's development, where the formation of fundamental values, such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and empathy, serves as a foundation for their growth and development in the future (Buana et al., 2024; Uce, 2017).

A strong character is not formed instantly, but rather through a process of learning and the consistent instillation of values (Haryanti & Setyanddari, 2020; Sihombing, 2022). Therefore, character education for early childhood needs to be carefully planned (Gunawan, 2017; Sobarna & Hakim, 2017) and involve engaging approaches such as learning through play, moral stories, and group activities. With this approach, children can understand moral and ethical values in daily life in a way that is appropriate for their developmental stage. Character education implemented from an early age is expected to become a strong foundation for children to face future challenges, both in their personal lives and in their social environment. This makes character education in early childhood education (PAUD) a strategic step in building a generation with noble morals and integrity.

In addition, the roles of teachers, parents, and the environment are crucial to the success of character education. A strong synergy between educational institutions and families will create an environment that supports the growth of children with good character (Rokhmaniyah et al., 2021; Suhartono et al., 2018). Character education in early childhood is not only about educating children to become good individuals but also preparing them to be responsible members of society with a positive contribution. The collaboration between schools, families, and communities will have a positive impact on children's character development and even become the key to their success.

Based on the explanation above, this study aims to analyze the management of character education for early childhood at RA Tunas Harapan Jatijajar, Kebumen. The research can serve as a recommendation for stakeholders to develop character education for children, both at the early childhood education level and in higher education.

RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative case study methodology was employed in this study. The present investigation employed a field research methodology at Raudhatul Athfal (RA) Tunas Harapan Jatijajar, Kebumen. Techniques for gathering data include documentation, interviews, and observation. The triangulation technique is used to ensure the validity of the data. Additionally, the Miles, Huberman, & Saldana model—which consists of three stages—is used for data analysis (Miles et al., 2014). These stages are data condensation, data display, and data verification. Data condensation is the process of simplifying, selecting, or transforming raw data into a more focused and meaningful form. Data display is the step of presenting the results of data condensation in a systematic and organized format, helping to understand and analyze the information. The final stage involves interpreting the displayed data to identify meaning, patterns, or relationships, as well as verifying the conclusions drawn.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

This study focuses on the management of early childhood education institutions/rauddhatul athfal in character education for children. The management stages include three phases: planning, implementation, and evaluation.

1.1. Planning

The planning for character development in children at RA Tunas Harapan Jatijajar includes annual meetings of the institution, curriculum design, classroom management, environmental management of the institution, socializing the character education program, and involving the role of parents.

1.1.1. Annual meetings of the institution

The annual meeting held by the institution serves as a means to plan more directed programs for the institution in order to achieve its educational goals. Additionally, the purpose of the annual meeting is to evaluate the institution's performance over the past year and plan the work programs for the upcoming year. The effective implementation of the annual meeting can enhance transparency, accountability, and collaboration among all parties involved. This finding aligns with research

conducted by Narung et al., which stated that good deliberation can generate creative ideas (Narung et al., 2022). According to an interview with the principal, the annual meeting allows all educators and staff to contribute ideas and suggestions in creating future programs for the institution. The creative and innovative ideas that arise are then used to develop high-quality educational programs, particularly character education programs.

This is further supported by an interview with a teacher, who stated that the principal demonstrates democratic leadership, so when meetings are held, all teachers and staff are given the opportunity to share their ideas and suggestions. As a result, through mutual consensus, all educational programs can be implemented effectively and collaboratively.

1.1.2. Curriculum design

The curriculum is a set of systematic plans or programs that include goals, materials, methods, and evaluations designed to educate students to achieve certain competencies. The curriculum serves as a guide for educators in delivering lessons and developing students' potential in accordance with the established standards (Rokhmaniyah et al., 2019). A clear curriculum design can help schools determine more directed educational programs, especially in learning activities.

Integrating character education into the curriculum is an appropriate step because children engage in learning in the classroom and interact with teachers every day. Character education integrated with the curriculum is an approach in which moral and ethical values are systematically instilled in all learning activities, both in subjects and other activities at educational institutions. Character education is not a separate program but an inseparable part of the learning process. This is supported by interviews with the principal and teachers, who stated that the curriculum design at RA Tunas Harapan Jatijajar focuses on character education in addition to the development of knowledge and skills. With the right curriculum design to develop character education in children, activities during the learning process or outside of learning activities will be more directed (Aluf, 2024; Fawzi et al., 2022).

1.1.3. Classroom management

Classroom management is one of the important aspects in creating a conducive learning environment that supports students' character education (Nurizka & Rahim, 2019). In the context of character education, classroom management not only focuses on organizing academic activities but also on developing students' attitudes, behaviors, and moral values that will shape their personalities. Effective classroom management can facilitate the creation of a positive atmosphere that supports optimal character learning (Hidayat et al., 2020). Classroom management is key to the development of children's character. When children feel comfortable in the classroom, teachers can more easily guide students, including in instilling character education. Based on observations, teachers have managed the classroom well by consistently guiding children to behave well. Some of the classroom management techniques used by teachers to develop children's character include implementing character-based learning, providing ample opportunities for children to explore and express themselves, and always giving recognition to students.

The use of teaching strategies by teachers can support the development of children's character. One of the strategies frequently used by teachers in character development during class is storytelling and singing. These two strategies are the most commonly used by teachers in teaching. Through the characters in stories, students can learn about good and bad behaviors. This helps them understand the consequences of these behaviors (Fitriani, 2019; Habsari, 2017). Meanwhile, through the method of singing, children will learn from the meaning in the lyrics of the song. With the teacher's guidance, students can understand the meaning of the lyrics being sung. By integrating singing into lessons, children can learn positive values such as cooperation, discipline, empathy, as well as develop their self-confidence, creativity, and communication skills (Hayati et al., 2019; Mahdaleny & Hadiyanto, 2022).

1.1.4. Environmental management of the institution

The management of the institution's environment greatly supports the development of children's character. Not only the learning environment in the classroom but also the environment outside the classroom has an impact on children's development. An inclusive institution contributes to students' comfort in learning and interacting. Schools must teach children to respect differences, whether cultural, religious, or abilities (Irhamna & Purnama, 2022; Ningsih et al., 2023). This finding is reinforced by an interview with the principal, who stated that RA Tunas Harapan Jatijajar always strives to provide comfort for students. One of the efforts made by the school is not to differentiate between students based on abilities and cultures. This program helps prevent children from experiencing bullying, which has a significant impact on their psychological well-being and character, potentially leading to school dropouts. This finding is also relevant to research by Rokhmaniyah et al., which shows that bullying is a crucial factor that significantly impacts the increase in school dropouts (Rokhmaniyah et al., 2021).

Providing a child-friendly educational institution with complete facilities, such as a play area, has a positive influence on children's character development. Adequate facilities can foster children's exploratory spirit, which in turn enhances their curiosity, creativity, and social attitudes among fellow students. According to an interview with the principal, the facilities at RA Tunas Harapan Jatijajar are not as complete as those in other schools. However, the institution has good resources, such as the high enthusiasm of the teachers and support from the surrounding community, which makes this school one of the most popular early childhood education institutions. Despite the limited facilities, the spirit of educating and developing children's character remains strong. The character development we undertake is by optimizing the available resources, such as the spacious children's play area and the presence of a place of worship, which supports the development of religious character. This has become a strength for the school in fostering students' attitudes and skills during their time at school. Religious character development is a main program for the institution, alongside other aspects of character development. This is because religious character is considered the key to the development of other character traits (Lubis et al., 2024).

1.1.5. Socializing the character education program

Socialization is a technique used by the institution to provide understanding and information about educational programs at the school to the wider community, especially to parents, about the character education program. This process has a significant impact on the quality of the school, both in internal and external aspects. The socialization carried out by RA Tunas Harapan Jatijajar is done both directly and through other media, such as social media. Using various methods to socialize the education program can help the school create a positive brand in the community. Based on an interview with the principal, socialization at the institution is done through two techniques: directly and by optimizing social media. Direct socialization usually takes place during meetings with parents and committees. Social media platforms, such as Instagram and WhatsApp, are frequently used by the institution to socialize educational programs. This finding is consistent with research by Singh & Kediya, which shows that social media influences the branding of educational institutions. Properly optimizing social media will create an effective tool for enhancing the school's branding (Singh & Kediya, 2020).

1.1.6. Involving the role of parents

Parents play an important role in the formation of a child's character. A good collaboration between the school and parents will also have a positive impact on the child's development. This is because, essentially, the family environment is the first environment for a child (Suhartono et al., 2018). Parents who are committed to their children's success will provide support to the school in carrying out school programs. The alignment of activities carried out at school and at home will strengthen the child's character. Based on an interview with the principal, one of the school's successes in instilling character in children is the involvement of parents. This finding is relevant to research conducted by Hasibuan, which shows that the support between educational institutions and parents is key to the development of students' character (Hasibuan, 2023).

1.2. Implementation

The implementation of character building at RA Tunas Harapan Jatijajar uses various methods, such as the habituation method, modeling, and integration with classroom learning. Below is an explanation of each method used by the school in developing children's character.

1.2.1 Habbituation

The habituation method is the most commonly used method by educational institutions in developing children's character. The habituation method can have a positive impact on children's development if carried out consistently and with discipline. With high consistency and discipline, children will become accustomed to these behaviors, and the character will become ingrained in them. The habituation activities carried out at RA Tunas Harapan Jatijajar include memorizing short Quranic verses, memorizing hadiths, performing Duha prayers, praying, giving charity, practicing queuing, and other activities. These habituation activities are done every day during teaching and learning activities. The teacher introduces these activities to the children first and explains why they should engage in these habits. Then, the students are asked to carry out these activities repeatedly. This finding is relevant to previous research that shows the habituation method is effective in character building for children (Anggraeni et al., 2021; Cahyaningrum et al., 2017).

1.2.2 Role model

Role modeling is the process in which a child imitates the behavior of others. A teacher is considered a second parent after the child's parents. Therefore, a teacher should naturally set an example for students in demonstrating good behavior. Through role modeling, students will imitate the behaviors exemplified by the teacher. Based on observations, the teacher was seen setting a good example for the students, such as disposing of trash properly, maintaining classroom cleanliness, demonstrating how to organize learning tools, showing enthusiasm in every activity, arriving on time, and always respecting others. This was also reinforced by an interview with the principal, who stated that teachers are considered second parents to their students and therefore must provide good examples. Additionally, the longer interaction with children makes a teacher an appropriate role model for the children. As the principal, it is important to provide guidance and motivation to teachers to consistently set good examples for students in both attitudes and behavior. This finding is consistent with research conducted by Fatimah et al., which shows that the role modeling method is very effective in developing students' character (Fatimah et al., 2022).

1.2.3 Integration with classroom learning

Character development can be integrated into classroom learning. The internalization of character education into learning means that students not only learn academically but also receive moral formation and the development of good personality. Based on an interview with the principal, it was stated that every lesson at RA Tunas Harapan Jatijajar is always integrated with character education, starting from the initial activity of lining up before entering the class, beginning with a prayer, and then during the learning process, students are taught to be orderly, disciplined, and responsible, as seen in the material being taught. Below is a table describing the character education achievements that are internalized in the learning process.

Table 1. Implementation of Character Education at RA Tunas Harapan Jatijajar

No	Character	Yes	No	Description
1	Religious	√		Praying before and after learning
2	Tolerance	√		Respecting fellow friends
3	Discipline	√		Arriving at school on time
4	Creative	√		Creative in learning
5	Independent	√		Carrying out tasks independently
6	Curiosity	√		Being critical and always asking questions to the teacher
7	Love for the country	√		Participating in the flag ceremony and singing the national anthem
8	Envorimental awarness	√		Throwing trash in its proper place

9	Responsible	√	Taking responsibility for tidying up and returning the toys that have been used
10	Social awarness	√	Helping friends in need, sharing snacks, and visiting friends who are sick or have experienced misfortune

Table 1 shows that students have developed good character. This result proves that classroom learning can effectively develop children's character. This is consistent with previous research that classroom learning plays a crucial and effective role in shaping students' characte (Arfandi & Shaleh, 2016; Darnanengsih & Rusyaid, 2020).

1.3. Evaluation

Evaluation in character development is conducted using observation, attitude scales, and daily journals. Based on an interview with the school principal, it was mentioned that the evaluation conducted in the early childhood education program to realize character education is carried out through observation and assessment using control books. Observational assessment is a classroom evaluation performed by teachers or students by observing students' behavior. Based on the observation results, it shows that teachers conduct observations during the learning process. For example, in the character education theme "drinks," the focus is on discipline, independence, and religiosity. In the evaluation, the observation function is to directly assess the students' attitudes in the field. If any behavioral deviations are found, educators can use spontaneous reprimands as an evaluation form.

The attitude scale assessment is a classroom evaluation consisting of a series of attitude statements about something, with responses rated on a scale, such as four, five, or seven points. The attitude scale is used by teachers to evaluate the students' noble character (akhlaq karimah) to understand how many students grasp social attitudes in their environment. Based on the interview with the school principal, it was stated that the attitude scale method can be used to assess social behavior among students in their environment. For example, an attitude assessment could focus on collaboration between students and their participation during learning.

In the implementation of the assessment through the control book, a grading book is created, which is then referred to as the control book. In the control book, there are types of student characters that must be observed by parents or guardians when students are at home or outside of school. Parents or guardians then fill in the control book based on what the students do.

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that the early childhood education management in realizing students' character at RA Tunas Harapan Jatijajar is carried out in the following stages: Planning, which is done through meetings. Implementation, which involves integrating students' character into learning and providing good role model. Evaluation, which involves setting standards and methods to measure achievements, including the establishment of standards and criteria for various needs, and carried out regularly. The recommendation in this study is the need to establish a strong partnership between schools, families, and the community to develop the child's potential comprehensively, not only in terms of character but also by strengthening other skills for the child.

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