

IMPLEMENTATION OF FOOD BASED LEARNING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AS A MEANS OF INSTILLING SOCIAL AND HUMANITIES VALUES

Sri Widhiyanti
{swdhiyanti@gmail.com}

Tangerang Raya University, Banten, Indonesia

Abstract. Food education for early childhood not only serves to introduce concepts of nutrition and health but also serves as a means of developing social character and humanitarian values. Through food-related activities, children learn about social processes, appreciate the work of others, and understand the importance of sharing and gratitude. This article examines the concept of food education for early childhood within a social and humanitarian context using a descriptive qualitative approach. The analysis shows that food education integrated with socio-humanitarian values can strengthen children's moral development, empathy, responsibility, and cooperation. The role of teachers and parents is key to building a humanistic and sustainable food culture.

Keywords: Food Education, Early childhood, Social humanities, Early childhood education

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (PAUD) is a crucial foundation for a child's holistic development, encompassing cognitive, social, emotional, moral, and spiritual aspects. It is during this period that children begin to form attitudes, habits, and core values that will influence their future behavior. Therefore, every learning activity in PAUD should not only be academically oriented, but also focus on the formation of values and character. Character education in early childhood plays a fundamental role in shaping a child's personality and identity from an early age. Early childhood is a golden age (*golden age*) where children's cognitive, social, emotional, and moral potential develops rapidly. At this stage, children begin to learn basic life values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, empathy, and respect for others. These values form the primary foundation for character development, which will influence children's future behavior and personality.

One form of education that can integrate various aspects of child development is food education. Food is not only related to biological needs but also has profound social and humanitarian significance. A child needs to have the attitudes, knowledge, and skills to understand food products and the reasons for consuming them. Children should understand the importance of healthy living and the steps to maintain and cultivate a healthy lifestyle. Children need to know and recognize healthy food, physical health, disease prevention, and the connection between healthy nutrition, a healthy body, and efforts to prevent disease as a result of critical thinking and new knowledge. Furthermore, as an effort to shape attitudes, children need to develop values of respect for the food they consume, good behavior in realizing the desire to obtain food, and awareness of healthy lifestyle habits.

Various studies have shown that food-based activities play a crucial role in early childhood education. According to Wardhani et al. (2019), good food education provides children with the knowledge and skills to choose healthy foods for their future by recognizing halal food sources, proper processing, and unhealthy food. Mirawati's (2018) research found that food education through fun cooking fosters various developmental aspects, including physical-motor, language, social-emotional, moral-religious, and artistic skills. Fun cooking is a fun activity for children and is thought to stimulate various mathematical abilities, such as number sense, patterns, geometry, measurement, and other mathematical skills, as it is specifically designed to engage children in various mathematical processes. According to Maharani (2023), fun cooking activities involve

preparing food, identifying the ingredients and tools used, identifying the names of the foods, and practicing making them. Fun cooking can enhance children's creativity through play, such as children having new ideas, being able to produce new things, being able to solve problems in activities, and being able to recognize food ingredients. Puspita (2024) in her research stated that through gardening activities, children will experience various developments, including social-emotional, cognitive, and physical-motor development. Gardening can increase complexity and integrate adaptation from the environment inside and outside of school. Garden-based learning is the use of gardens as a learning tool where children are directly active by preparing planting media, planting, caring for, and harvesting, thus providing children with experiences for ecological literacy and environmental awareness that must be built from an early age, where they will later understand about preserving the existing nature (Hardiansyah, 2022: 1576).

Based on these studies, food education practices in early childhood education institutions are generally limited to introducing healthy foods and promoting cognitive and physical motor development without linking them to broader social and humanitarian values. However, the context of food holds great potential for developing social awareness and humanitarian values from an early age. Therefore, it is important to examine how food education can be effectively implemented in early childhood learning as a means of instilling these values. In a social and humanitarian context, food education can serve as a bridge to instilling the values of empathy, responsibility, cooperation, and awareness of the importance of natural resource sustainability and shared well-being. This study aims to describe the implementation of food education in early childhood learning activities and also identify the social and humanitarian values that emerge through food education activities.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive approach. This approach was chosen because it aimed to deeply understand how the implementation of food education can serve as a means of instilling social and humanitarian values in early childhood. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore the meanings, social interactions, and values that emerge in everyday learning contexts.

The research subjects included early childhood education (PAUD) teachers as implementers of food learning activities, children aged 4–6 years as the primary participants in the learning activities, and parents as supporters of learning activities at home. The research location was Baitul Ilmi PAUD, Cisoka District, Tangerang Regency, which has routine food-based activities such as *cooking class*, *garden project*, or food sharing activities (*food sharing day*). The location was selected purposively, namely institutions that have integrated food themes into the learning process. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted interactively using the Miles & Huberman (1994) model, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Triangulation techniques were used to ensure data validity.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Based on observations and interviews, food education at the Baitul Ilmi Early Childhood Education Center (PAUD) is implemented through thematic activities integrated into the daily curriculum. These activities include garden-based learning, simple cooking, learning about local food ingredients, and sharing food. Teachers act as facilitators, connecting each food activity with social and humanitarian values.

1.1 Garden based learning

The garden-based learning program implemented at Baitul Ilmi Preschool (PAUD) involves growing vegetables. Vegetable-growing is a form of contextual learning that is highly relevant for early childhood education (PAUD). Through this activity, children not only learn about plants and

their growth processes but also develop character values such as responsibility, cooperation, environmental stewardship, and independence. This learning aligns with the learning-by-doing approach, which emphasizes hands-on experience as the primary learning resource for children.

The stages carried out in this activity include the preparation and introduction stage, planting stage, maintenance stage, harvest stage, and reflection stage. In the initial stage, the teacher introduces various types of vegetables to be planted, such as kale, spinach, tomatoes, or chilies. Children are encouraged to observe the shape of the seeds, the color of the leaves, and the health benefits of the vegetables. The teacher uses images and short videos as media. This stage aims to build initial knowledge and foster children's curiosity. In the planting stage, the teacher prepares small pots or polybags, fertile soil, and seeds. Children are guided to sow the seeds in the soil, water them sufficiently, and place the pots in a sunny location. The care stage is carried out continuously, usually over several weeks. Children are invited to take turns watering the plants daily, pulling weeds, and observing the growth of leaves or flowers. At this stage, the teacher invites children to discuss changes they see, such as the size of the plants or the emergence of new shoots. When the vegetables have grown and are ready to be harvested, children are involved in the harvesting process. Harvesting is both a fun and educational activity, as children can see the results of their own efforts. The final stage is reflection, where children and teachers discuss their experiences throughout the process from planting to harvest. Children are invited to share their feelings during the activity, such as feeling happy when the plant grows, or disappointed when the plant withers.

From the observations, one prominent social value was found in the activities garden based learning is cooperation. Children learn to work in small groups to prepare the soil, plant seeds, and care for plants. In this process, they learn to share tasks, help each other, and appreciate the work of their peers. These values foster a spirit of mutual cooperation and strengthen children's social skills in establishing positive relationships with others. This is consistent with research conducted by Munadhifah (2025) that gardening activities contribute to the development of social skills in children who work in small groups, enabling them to interact and communicate with their peers. Children learn to share tasks, respect each other's opinions, and work together to achieve common goals. Observations show that children work more easily together and demonstrate empathy when they collaborate in groups to count objects around them. In line with that, according to Sutrisno and Harjono (in Ratnasari et al., 2018) explains that gardening is the activity of planting plants which is indirectly provide knowledge about plant life and train Psychomotor skills are developed when planting.

Furthermore, garden-based learning activities also instill the values of responsibility and caring. This is evident when children are encouraged to care for plants daily, watering, fertilizing, and maintaining the cleanliness of the garden area. Through these activities, children learn that every action impacts the survival of other creatures. This builds awareness of the importance of caring for nature and fosters a caring attitude towards the surrounding environment. According to Widyastuti and Anshori (2024), when children feel responsible for the cleanliness and health of the environment where they learn and play, they develop self-awareness and an intrinsic drive to preserve nature without the need for constant adult direction.

The values of discipline and perseverance are also developed through this activity. The process from planting to harvest requires time and patience. Children learn that good results don't come instantly, but rather through consistent effort and hard work. These values help children understand the importance of the process in achieving goals and foster a tenacious and patient character.

1.2 Cooking class

Cooking class activities are a form of experience-based learning that is very beneficial for young children. Through simple cooking activities, children not only learn about ingredients and food preparation processes, but also develop social, moral, and humanitarian values. This learning helps children understand the meaning of cooperation, responsibility, and caring for others.

The initial stage of this cooking class activity is preparation, which begins with introducing the children to cooking. The teacher explains the purpose of the activity, the ingredients to be used, and the necessary tools, such as spoons, containers, and a blunt knife specifically for children. Children are introduced to food ingredients such as vegetables, fruit, eggs, and bread while discussing their health benefits. At this stage, the teacher also instills the values of cleanliness and safety, for example by washing hands before starting the activity. Social values instilled in this stage are personal responsibility and concern for the environment. Children learn that cleanliness is part of caring for themselves and others. The second stage is the core of the cooking class activity. Children begin to actively participate in the cooking process. The teacher assigns roles according to the children's abilities and provides guidance so that each child is equally involved. In this stage, children learn cooperation and mutual assistance. They must help each other and wait their turn to use cooking utensils. When a friend is having difficulty, the teacher encourages other children to help. Children learn that helping each other and sharing tasks is a form of mutual affection. After the cooking process is complete, the children are invited to arrange and serve their dishes. Teachers instill a sense of appreciation for the work of both themselves and their peers by enjoying meals together in a friendly atmosphere. Children are encouraged to share food with their peers and teachers as a simple expression of social responsibility. Children experience joy when they see others enjoying their cooking. They learn that giving and sharing can bring feelings of happiness, not loss.

The main social values in activities cooking class is cooperation. The cooking process requires children to work in groups, sharing tasks such as washing ingredients, mixing dough, or arranging food on plates. In this atmosphere, children learn to help each other, respect the roles of their peers, and understand the importance of working together to achieve common goals. This activity fosters a spirit of mutual cooperation and strengthens social relationships between friends. Furthermore, cooking activities also teach the values of responsibility and discipline. Children are given the opportunity to play specific roles in the cooking process, such as preparing ingredients or clearing the table afterward. Through these small responsibilities, children learn that every action has consequences, and they must be accountable for their assigned tasks. The value of discipline is also formed when children follow the cooking steps sequentially according to the teacher's instructions.

The values of caring and empathy also develop naturally through cooking. When children see a friend in need, they are encouraged to help. When the food is shared, children learn to understand the joy of sharing with others. From this simple experience, empathy and social awareness emerge that sharing happiness is part of humanity. Furthermore, cooking class is also an effective way to instill the values of justice and togetherness. When sharing the results of cooking, teachers direct children to share fairly with all their friends, without discrimination. Through this process, children learn the meaning of equality, respect for the rights of others, and understand the importance of social justice. This experience helps children develop character that respects others and understands the meaning of living together in harmony.

Another human value evident in cooking is gratitude and appreciation for hard work. Children learn that the food they enjoy comes from a long process and requires the cooperation of many parties, from the farmer, the vendor, to the cook. This awareness fosters respect for the efforts of others and teaches children not to waste food.

1.3 Food sharing

Food sharing is a highly meaningful form of social and humanitarian learning for young children. Through this activity, children learn the meaning of togetherness, empathy, and compassion for others. Food sharing is not just the physical act of sharing food; it is also a means of instilling moral and humanitarian values that shape children's character from an early age.

The food sharing activity at Baitul Ilmi Early Childhood Education (PAUD) goes through several stages. The first stage is the planning stage and an introduction to the meaning of sharing. At this stage, teachers invite children to discuss the importance of sharing food, who can receive it, and how the recipient feels. Teachers explain in simple language that sharing is a form of caring for others

and a way to show gratitude for the sustenance they have. This stage lays the foundation for developing children's social understanding, where they begin to recognize the concepts of empathy and solidarity. The second stage is the preparation for the food sharing activity. Children are involved in preparing the food to be shared, either by bringing it from home or making it together at school. Teachers provide guidance on cleanliness, tidiness, and responsibility during the preparation process. Through this activity, children learn to work together, respect each person's role, and develop a sense of responsibility for the tasks they are entrusted with. The third stage is the implementation of the food sharing activity. At this stage, children directly share food with friends, teachers, or the surrounding community. Teachers guide children to share politely, smile, and say kind words. This activity is a crucial moment where children experience firsthand the joy of giving. Through this experience, children learn that sharing is not just about giving objects, but also about fostering a sense of love and caring for others. The fourth stage is reflection and reinforcement of values. After the sharing activity is complete, the teacher invites the children to talk about their experience: how they felt while giving, what they learned, and why sharing is important. The reflection stage helps children internalize social and humanitarian values such as empathy, compassion, and solidarity. Teachers can reinforce the meaning of the activity by relating it to everyday life, for example by modeling simple ways of sharing at home or in the community.

Overall, food sharing activities in Early childhood are not only social activities that enjoyable but also a means of developing profound character. Through educationally designed stages, children learn to understand and practice humanitarian values in a practical way. These activities help foster social sensitivity, empathy, gratitude, and the joy of giving—values that are fundamental to the growth of caring and humane individuals. Thus, food sharing is one of the important strategies in early childhood character education to form individuals with noble morals and a high social spirit.

CONCLUSION

Food education for early childhood plays a strategic role in shaping social and humanitarian character from an early age. Through various activities such as *cooking class*, *garden based learning*, and *food sharing*, children not only learn about food processing and sources, but also directly experience life values related to empathy, responsibility, cooperation, and gratitude. This experiential learning allows children to understand that food is not just a physical need, but also a medium for fostering social and moral awareness. Activities that actively involve children in the process of planting, cooking, and sharing food provide opportunities for them to learn to appreciate the hard work of others, understand the importance of togetherness, and foster a caring attitude towards the environment and others. Thus, food education serves as an integrative means between cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects that mutually reinforce each other in the formation of children's character. Thus, food education not only contributes to improving children's nutritional literacy and life skills, but also serves as a crucial foundation for developing strong social and humanitarian character. Through contextual and meaningful learning experiences, children grow into caring, responsible, and empathetic individuals, reflecting civilized and humane human beings.

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