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The role of teachers in instilling religious character in children aged 5-6 years in kindergarten

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Abstract

This study aimed to understand the role of teachers as educators and guides in implanting the religious character of five-year-old children and to examine the impact of this on group B children at TK Fathunintention. The research employed data collection methods such as observation, interviews, and documentation, with the data analysis following the techniques outlined by Miles and Huberman, which involved data condensation, data display, and verification. The study found that teachers played a pivotal role in implanting religious values through the use of breeding methods, which proved effective in shaping the religious character of the children. The results showed that, through these practices, children became capable of performing wudhu independently, memorizing short verses, correctly executing prayer movements, memorizing daily prayers, and reciting greetings. These practices not only enhanced the children's religious knowledge but also contributed to their moral development and spiritual growth. It was clear that the teachers' methods created a nurturing environment for the development of religious character, where the children could practice and internalize religious teachings in a meaningful way. Based on these findings, it was recommended that other institutions adopt similar structured methods to foster religious character, ensuring the integration of religious values into the daily lives of young children. Further research was suggested to focus on the long-term impact of these educational approaches on the children's moral and spiritual growth, as well as investigate the role of parental involvement in supporting religious education. Teacher training programs were recommended to enhance the educators' ability to implement religious character education effectively, with an emphasis on pedagogical strategies that encouraged the holistic development of children's religious identity, ensuring consistency in the implementation of these practices across educational settings.

Keywords: Teacher's Role, Religious Character, Kindergarten, Children aged 5-6 years

1. Introduction

The role of a teacher is not just a profession but a crucial element in shaping students' character, knowledge, and skills (Anspal et al., 2012). Teachers engage in a series of interrelated behaviors in specific situations with the goal of fostering behavioral changes and supporting student development (Bundick et al., 2014). As facilitators and mentors, teachers do more than just deliver lessons—they help develop critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and ethical values that prepare students to face real-life challenges (Birgili, 2015; Zabit, 2010). Beyond academic instruction, teachers also shape students' attitudes and self-confidence, ensuring they grow optimally in various aspects of life (Amerstorfer et al., 2021; Lestari, 2009; Pradestya et al., 2024), emphasizes that teachers have a significant responsibility in guiding students toward achieving their life goals to the fullest (Korthagen, 2004; Pakabu et al., 2024).

Similarly, Mardiningsih (2010), Hughes (2005) asserts that a teacher's primary role is not only to impart knowledge but also to educate, guide, and direct students to become knowledgeable and responsible individuals. Therefore, teachers must create an interactive and engaging learning environment, adapt teaching methods to students' needs, and integrate technology and innovative approaches into the learning process (Groff, 2013; Pahmi et al., 2024). By doing so, teachers shape a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also morally upright, socially skilled, and prepared to contribute positively to society.

According to Jones and Goble (2012), teachers as mentors are to help students who are having difficulties (learning, personal, social), develop student potential through creative activities in various fields (science, art, culture, sports) the characteristics of mentors have existed in the teacher to process the teaching and learning process. Thomas Lickona states that character is defined as nature, disposition, mental traits, morals or manners that distinguish a person from others. Character is a person's natural trait in responding to situations morally (Hafizallah, 2024). This natural trait is manifested in real actions through good behavior, honesty, responsibility, respect for others and other noble characters (Sukino et al., 2024). In Islamic teachings, humans are born in a state of fitrah as a basic human potential related to beliefs that include values, attitudes and the need to interact with the environment (Wibowo, 2012). Character is identical to morals so that character is a universal human behavioral value that includes all human activities, as well as the environment that is manifested in thoughts, attitudes, feelings, words and actions based on religious norms, law, etiquette, culture and customs (Chowdhury, 2018).

From the understanding of the experts above, it can be concluded that the role of a teacher is a person who educates, guides, fosters, directs and is also responsible for forming discipline in students. Teachers are not just people who stand in front of the class delivering lessons, but teachers are also members of society who must play an active role in fostering and directing the development of their students into adults and responsible members of society. To achieve the objectives, research questions are created, such as:

- 1.1 What is the role of teachers as educators and mentors in implanting religious character students in kindergarten?
- 1.2 What is the impact of religious character building in kindergarten?

2. Methods

2.1 Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of participants in depth. Qualitative research was chosen because it allows researchers to investigate human experiences in their natural settings, prioritizing the meanings and interpretations that individuals assign to their realities. Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on numerical measurements and statistical analysis, qualitative research aims to capture rich, detailed descriptions of a phenomenon. The phenomenological approach was particularly suited for this study as it seeks to understand human experiences from the perspective of those who have lived them. Phenomenology, rooted in philosophical traditions, focuses on how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences. Rather than imposing predefined categories, this approach allows themes to emerge naturally from the data. It helps uncover hidden meanings, emotions, and perspectives, providing a deep and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

In this study, phenomenology was used to analyze participants' subjective experiences and personal reflections, revealing how they interpreted and assigned meaning to the situations they encountered. The primary goal of this research was not to generalize findings to a broader population but to illuminate the essence of the phenomenon by capturing the unique and shared experiences of the participants.

2.2 Participants

The participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that those chosen had direct and meaningful experiences related to the phenomenon being investigated. The selection criteria included: (a) Personal experience with the phenomenon.

Ability to articulate experiences in detail. (b) Diverse backgrounds to provide a range of perspectives. (c) Willingness to participate and share insights openly. Since phenomenological studies prioritize depth over breadth, the number of participants was determined by the principle of data saturation—the point at which no new themes or insights emerged from the data. Typically, phenomenological research involves 5 to 15 participants, allowing for a thorough exploration of personal narratives while maintaining a manageable dataset for in-depth analysis.

The participants' backgrounds varied, depending on the focus of the study. For example, if the study examined educational experiences, participants could include teachers, students, and school administrators. If the research focused on a personal challenge, participants might be individuals who had undergone similar life experiences. The diversity among participants ensured a well-rounded and multifaceted perspective on the phenomenon. Each participant played a critical role in shaping the findings, as phenomenology relies heavily on rich, personal narratives. By engaging with individuals who had direct, lived experiences, the study was able to uncover authentic insights that reflected real-world complexities.

2.3 Data Collection

To ensure a comprehensive and credible dataset, the study adopted a triangulation strategy, combining multiple data collection methods. This strategy enhanced the validity of the findings by cross-verifying information from different sources. The primary data collection methods included.

Observation

Observations were conducted to capture real-world behaviors and interactions relevant to the phenomenon. The researcher either acted as a non-participant observer, where interactions were recorded without interference, or as a participant observer, engaging in the setting while documenting key moments. Observations focused on: (a) participants' behaviors, expressions, and interactions in different contexts. (b) Environmental and situational factors influencing their experiences. (c) Non-verbal cues and emotions that might not be fully expressed in interviews. (d) Field notes and, where possible, photographs or video recordings were used to document observations. This ensured that significant moments were accurately captured and later analyzed in conjunction with other data sources.

In-depth Interviews

The primary method of data collection was semi-structured in-depth interviews, allowing participants to share their experiences freely while enabling the researcher to explore emerging themes in greater depth. Interviews followed a flexible yet guided format, where open-ended questions encouraged participants to reflect on their experiences. Sample questions included:

"Can you describe a moment when you felt deeply affected by this experience?"

"How did this situation influence your emotions and perceptions?"

"What meaning do you assign to this experience?"

The interview process involved several steps: (a) Building rapport to make participants feel comfortable and open. (b) Encouraging storytelling, allowing participants to express themselves in their own words. (c) Using probing techniques to explore deeper meanings and emotions. (d) Recording and transcribing interviews verbatim for accuracy.

2.4 Data Analysis

The study used inductive thematic analysis, where findings emerged naturally from participants' narratives rather than being pre-imposed. The data analysis process followed Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological framework, consisting of several key stages: (1).

bracketing (Epoche Stage); before analyzing the data, the researcher engaged in bracketing, setting aside personal biases and assumptions to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' experiences. This step helped maintain objectivity and authenticity in the analysis. (2) horizontalization; in this stage, all participant statements were given equal importance, preventing premature conclusions. The researcher identified and extracted key expressions, emotions, and themes without prioritizing any one perspective. (3) thematic analysis; thematic analysis involved grouping significant statements into themes and subthemes. This process included: (a) Coding recurring patterns in participants' narratives. (b) Identifying shared experiences across different individuals. (c) Categorizing data into textural (what was experienced) and structural (how it was experienced) descriptions. (4) essence of the experience; the final step was synthesizing findings into a holistic narrative, capturing the core essence of participants' lived experiences. This step aimed to construct a meaningful and insightful portrayal of the phenomenon, reflecting both individual uniqueness and collective themes.

3. Results and Discussion

The Role of Teachers as Educators and Mentors

Based on the results of the researcher's observations, Fathunniat Kindergarten is one of the schools that implements the instillation of religious character in children. A teacher has various roles that must be carried out, one of which is as an educator and mentor. The following are the results of an interview with the principal as a stakeholder regarding the role of teachers as educators and mentors in the formation of children's religious character. In addition, the researcher also observed that teachers at Fathunniat Kindergarten educate and guide their children very well, the teachers there educate and guide through the habituation method. In their daily lives, children are trained to pray Duha, memorize short verses, memorize daily prayers, get children used to speaking politely, say hello when meeting teachers, when eating children are accustomed to sitting and eating and giving using the right hand. The teachers always reflect positive things towards children.

The program arranged or designed by the principal is very good for teachers so that children's religious character can be formed. Thus, researchers can conclude that teachers have tried to educate and guide children in instilling religious character values in the school environment, both in the learning process and outside of class hours to get used to carrying out small examples. One of the programs carried out by the school is the Dhuha prayer program which is carried out every day except Saturday, this aims to get children used to carrying out their obligatory worship as Muslims. In addition, there is a classical program of short verses and prayers where this program is aimed at all Fathunniat Kindergarten students and teachers in order to get students used to loving the Qur'an as their holy book, the process of implementing students is divided according to their memorization level and will be guided by each teacher who is responsible for the class.

This is in line with the results of the study by Purnomo et al. (2023) that teachers as educators and mentors provide good examples, in speaking and behaving politely in front of their students. When teachers give good examples, children will easily imitate them. By teaching good behavior from an early age, teachers can easily shape the behavior of their students to become responsible, honest, polite, and disciplined. Then the teacher also directs the learning process well. So that children can easily absorb perfect lessons So that children can easily absorb perfect lessons.

The impact of religious character building on group B students at Fathunniat Kindergarten

Based on the results of observations at Fathunniat Kindergarten, the impact of instilling religious character is seen to be very good, such as children can perform ablution independently, memorize short verses, memorize daily prayers, children speak politely, say hello when meeting teachers, when eating children sit, eat and give using the right hand. Thus, the researcher concluded that teachers are able to instill religious attitudes in children

very well. This has a positive impact on children's religious character, starting from children who are accustomed to praying dhuha, murojaah memorization and prayers, daily prayers, dhikr. In addition, positive behavior or character is also clearly seen when children are active at school, starting from throwing garbage in its place, saying and returning greetings, helping friends who are in trouble to sharing with friends. This is in accordance with Setiawati's research (2020), that the impact of religious character on children is that children say hello, pray, dhikr, memorize hadiths, memorize short surahs, and also recognize the hijayah letters and children say hello and return greetings.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the study and discussion related to the analysis of the role of teachers as educators and mentors in instilling religious character in group *b* children at fathunniat kindergarten and the impact of instilling religious character in children in the group, the researcher can draw the following conclusions. The role of teachers as educators and mentors in instilling religious character in children shows success. teachers educate and guide by means of habituation methods for instilling religious character. the impact of instilling religious character in fathunniat kindergarten includes, children can perform ablution independently, memorize short verses, memorize prayer movements correctly, memorize daily prayers, say hello when meeting teachers, and children can learn to ask for help when they need help, apologize when they do something wrong, and thank you when they get a gift.

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