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## Implementation of Religious Character in Developing Religious Values in Early Childhood: A Case Study at TK Negeri Gansal

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the implementation of religious character education in developing religious values among early childhood learners at TK Negeri Gansal, Banggai Kepulauan Regency, Indonesia. Early childhood (0–6 years) is widely recognized as a critical period for establishing moral and spiritual foundations. This study aims to describe the implementation process, evaluate its effectiveness, and identify challenges and solutions in strengthening religious character in daily school activities. This research employed a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with the principal, teachers, and parents, and documentation of learning programs and school activities. Data analysis followed an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that religious character education was implemented effectively through consistent habituation, including daily prayers before and after activities, religious songs, and teacher role modeling. Most students achieved good to very good development in indicators such as recognizing God's creations and practicing daily worship routines. Challenges included limited learning media and inconsistent reinforcement at home. Strengthening parent involvement and developing varied learning resources are recommended to sustain children's religious character development.

## 1. Introduction

Education is a strategic effort to develop a generation with strong character, intelligence, and noble behavior. Early childhood education (ECE), which covers children aged 0–6 years, is considered a crucial phase often referred to as the “golden age.” During this period, children's brain development occurs rapidly and they show high sensitivity to learning experiences and environmental stimulation. Therefore, character building—particularly religious and moral values—must be introduced early as a foundation for children's ethical and spiritual development in the future.

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Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System defines early childhood education as a developmental effort provided to children from birth to six years through educational stimulation. Its purpose is to support children's physical and spiritual growth and development to prepare them for further education. In this context, strengthening religious and moral values through positive character education is an essential contribution of ECE. It helps children grow into individuals who are religious, civilized, morally responsible, and socially aware, in line with the development of spiritual intelligence. Spiritual intelligence refers to the ability to give meaning to life and is reflected in honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and empathy.

From a psychological perspective, early childhood is associated with the sensorimotor and preoperational stages, as proposed by Piaget. At this stage, children learn through concrete experiences, symbols, exploration, and imaginative play, and their thinking tends to be egocentric. Consequently, learning should be designed to be enjoyable, contextual, play-based, and balanced between biological, psychological, social, and spiritual needs. Contemporary ECE is not solely focused on academic readiness for elementary school but also emphasizes positive character development such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and other competencies relevant to 21st-century learning.

Religious character is one of the core values that should be developed during early childhood. Religious character refers to attitudes and behaviors that reflect obedience to religious teachings, tolerance toward other faiths, and harmonious living with others. It includes aspects of faith, piety, honesty, responsibility, and social care, which serve as guidelines for social interaction and daily life. Marzuki (2020) emphasizes that internalizing religious values in early childhood character formation can be achieved through role modeling and consistent habituation.

At TK Negeri Gansal, Tinangkung Selatan District, Banggai Kepulauan Regency, the cultivation of religious values is a major focus. The school recognizes that religious character development requires structured and sustainable efforts. The implementation of religious character education in this kindergarten is conducted through habituation methods, such as praying before and after activities, greeting routines, and integrating religious values into learning content. This approach is considered effective because it encourages children to develop consistent religious habits and fosters a religious culture within the school environment.

In addition, learning media and digital learning resources have increasingly been recognized as supportive tools in strengthening children's engagement in educational activities. Studies published in the *Journal of Educational Sciences* (JES) highlight that structured learning media such as e-modules and child-friendly digital materials can support literacy, motivation, and learning outcomes (Imran et al., 2025; Wahyuni et al., 2025). Although the present study focuses on religious character habituation, the role of varied learning media is relevant in addressing challenges such as limited teaching resources in early childhood settings.

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This study is important given the urgency of religious character education during the golden age and the limited research focusing on habituation effectiveness in rural or island regions such as Banggai Kepulauan. Previous studies, including Suwardani (2020), have highlighted the importance of integrating character education into daily routines in ECE and the role of teachers as role models. Syafaat et al. (2021) also found that young children absorb values more easily through direct practice and consistent habituation than through conventional teaching methods. Therefore, this study aims to describe the implementation of religious character education at TK Negeri Gansal, evaluate its effectiveness in developing children's religious values, and identify challenges and solutions encountered during the process.

## **2. Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to explore in depth how religious character education was implemented in a real school context, particularly in early childhood learning activities (Yin, 2009). The research was conducted at TK Negeri Gansal, located in Gansal Village, Tinangkung Selatan District, Banggai Kepulauan Regency, Indonesia, with data collection carried out for approximately one month to allow sufficient time for repeated observations and interviews. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling based on their relevance to the research objectives, consisting of the school principal, classroom teachers, and several parents, while children's learning activities were observed naturally during daily routines.

Data were collected through triangulation of methods, including direct observations of habituation practices such as prayers before and after activities, greeting routines, religious songs, recognition of God's creations, and manners-related behaviors; semi-structured interviews with the principal, teachers, and parents to explore perceptions, strategies, and challenges related to religious character development; and documentation such as lesson plans, daily activity records, photos of religious activities, and other school archives to support the findings. In qualitative research the main instrument is the researcher, supported by an observation sheet, interview guide, and documentation checklist to ensure systematic data collection (Yin, 2009). Data analysis followed the interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, in which relevant information was selected, coded, categorized, and organized into thematic narratives before conclusions were verified through continuous comparison across data sources. To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied technique triangulation (observation, interviews, and documentation) and source triangulation (principal, teachers, parents, and children's activities) to strengthen credibility and minimize researcher bias.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

The implementation of religious character education at TK Negeri Gansal was systematically integrated into both formal learning activities and children's daily

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routines at school. Rather than being taught as a separate subject, religious values were embedded in everyday classroom interactions, morning routines, and play-based learning activities. Teachers played a central role in this process by serving as role models who demonstrated religious behavior through their language, attitudes, and consistent guidance. In early childhood education, modeling is considered one of the most effective approaches for character formation because young children tend to learn through imitation and observation of adults around them. When teachers consistently demonstrate practices such as praying, expressing gratitude, greeting others politely, and showing respect, children gradually internalize these behaviors as part of their daily habits. Supporting this idea, Anggraini (2024) emphasized that the habituation of daily prayers can significantly improve children's understanding, discipline, and consistency in practicing religious activities from an early age.

One of the main strategies implemented in the school was the regular practice of praying before and after classroom activities. This simple yet meaningful routine helped children become accustomed to remembering God in their daily activities and gradually strengthened their religious awareness. The repetition of prayer routines also fostered discipline and a sense of responsibility among children. In addition to habituation practices, teachers also integrated religious values into thematic learning activities so that children could relate moral and spiritual concepts to real-life experiences. For instance, when students learned about animals with two legs, such as chickens and ducks, teachers connected the lesson to the idea that animals are part of God's creations that humans should appreciate, respect, and care for. This approach allowed children to understand academic content while simultaneously developing a sense of gratitude toward nature and living beings. Observations indicated that children tended to understand learning material more easily when the concepts were linked to religious meanings, gratitude practices, and simple moral messages related to their daily experiences.

The effectiveness of religious character education in the school was assessed through systematic observation of 18 children using three main indicators: recognizing God's creations, practicing daily worship routines, and demonstrating polite behavior. These indicators were selected because they represent essential aspects of early religious character development, including spiritual awareness, worship practices, and social attitudes. Children's development was categorized using four assessment levels commonly applied in early childhood education: Very Well Developed (BSB), Developed as Expected (BSH), Beginning to Develop (MB), and Not Yet Developed (BB). The observation results showed that most children demonstrated good to very good development in recognizing God's creations. Many children were categorized as BSB and BSH, indicating that they were able to identify elements of nature such as animals, plants, and natural phenomena as part of God's creations and express appreciation toward them. Only a small number of children were categorized as MB, which suggests that they still required further guidance and reinforcement from teachers.

Similarly, in the indicator of daily worship routines, the majority of children showed positive development. They were observed participating actively in prayer

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sessions before and after learning activities, singing simple religious songs, and engaging in collective prayer routines organized by the school. These repeated activities helped children gradually build familiarity with basic religious practices in a natural and enjoyable way. Over time, these routines became part of the children's daily habits rather than activities performed only when instructed by teachers.

Polite behavior was also emphasized as an integral component of religious character development. Teachers encouraged children to practice social manners such as greeting teachers and friends, speaking politely, thanking others, and saying goodbye before leaving school. These behaviors were consistently reinforced through reminders, demonstrations, and positive reinforcement from teachers. Observations indicated that children increasingly practiced these manners spontaneously as the routines became internalized. The consistent integration of religious values, daily worship practices, and polite social behavior demonstrates that character education at the school was implemented holistically, addressing both spiritual awareness and social development. The observation results related to children's daily worship routines are summarized in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Observation Results of Early Childhood Learners on Daily Worship Routines

Overall, the religious value development program implemented at TK Negeri Gansal has shown positive results in supporting children's religious, moral, and social development. Through daily habituation activities such as praying before and after learning, greeting teachers and peers politely, singing religious songs, and recognizing God's creations in their surroundings, children gradually developed an understanding of religious values that are closely connected to their daily behavior. These activities not only helped children recognize basic religious practices but also fostered positive attitudes such as respect, gratitude, discipline, and empathy toward others. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that not all children have reached the highest level of development in religious behavior. Some children still require more intensive guidance and consistent reinforcement from teachers during classroom activities. Therefore, continuous teacher support, patience, and structured monitoring are necessary to ensure that every child can gradually internalize and practice religious values in their daily routines.

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The practical implications of this study emphasize the importance of using more varied and engaging learning strategies to strengthen the development of religious values among young learners. Teachers can integrate picture storybooks containing moral and religious messages, children's religious songs, simple storytelling sessions, and interactive discussions to make religious learning more meaningful and enjoyable. In addition, consistent teacher role modeling plays a crucial role in early childhood education, as children tend to imitate behaviors demonstrated by adults around them. When teachers consistently demonstrate polite language, respectful interactions, and regular religious practices, children are more likely to adopt these behaviors naturally.

Supporting this perspective, Ramadhani and Wirman (2024) emphasize that habituation methods in introducing daily prayers significantly contribute to the improvement of children's religious values. This indicates that religious education should not only focus on cognitive understanding but also on repeated practice and meaningful experiences in everyday life. Moreover, parental involvement is equally essential in reinforcing the values learned at school. Parents can support the continuity of religious character education at home by encouraging daily prayers, demonstrating respectful behavior, and creating a supportive family environment that nurtures children's spiritual growth.

Another important issue identified in this study is the limited availability of varied teaching media to support religious learning activities. Several studies suggest that the integration of innovative learning resources, such as child-friendly e-modules, visual learning materials, and structured digital media, can enhance students' motivation, literacy development, and creative thinking. Although these studies were not specifically conducted in the context of early childhood religious habituation, their findings provide valuable insights into the potential benefits of incorporating more diverse learning media in classroom activities. Research by Imran et al. (2025) and Wahyuni et al. (2025) indicates that digital and interactive learning resources can increase learner engagement and support more effective knowledge construction.

Therefore, teachers are encouraged to gradually develop and utilize more varied teaching media, including visual aids, simple digital resources, and interactive storytelling tools, to strengthen children's interest and participation in daily learning activities. Furthermore, when designing learning media, teachers should also consider usability aspects to ensure that the materials are attractive, accessible, and appropriate for children's developmental stages. As highlighted by Abdurrahman et al. (2025), usability evaluation plays an important role in ensuring that educational media can effectively support learning outcomes. Based on these considerations, several challenges faced by the school and the corresponding solutions implemented to address them are summarized in Table 1.

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Table 1. Challenges and Solutions in Implementing Religious Character Education at TK Negeri Gansal

| No. | Challenges                                                                                       | Solutions Implemented by the School/Teachers                                                                          |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Limited availability of varied religious learning media (storybooks, teaching aids, and videos). | Teachers created simple DIY media from recycled materials and used short religious songs to support habituation       |
| 2   | Inconsistent reinforcement at home due to differences in family habits and religious practices.  | The school strengthened parent communication through meetings and consultations to align home and school habituation. |
| 3   | Differences in children's ability to understand and memorize daily prayers.                      | Teachers provided individual guidance and applied repetition through enjoyable songs and movements.                   |
| 4   | Limited access to teacher training on innovative strategies for religious character education.   | Teachers conducted peer-sharing within teacher groups and improved skills through independent learning resources.     |

#### 4. Conclusion

The implementation of religious character education in developing religious values among early childhood learners at TK Negeri Gansal has been carried out effectively. The program was mainly implemented through consistent habituation practices, such as praying before and after activities, daily religious routines, and teacher role modeling. These strategies supported children in recognizing God's creations, practicing worship routines, and demonstrating polite behavior in school settings. However, several obstacles were identified, including limited learning media and inconsistent reinforcement of religious habits at home. Therefore, strengthening collaboration between teachers and parents is essential to ensure continuity of character development. In addition, teachers are encouraged to apply more varied learning strategies, such as storytelling, picture books, and religious songs, to enhance children's engagement and internalization of religious values in daily life.

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