

## **Instilling Faith and Morals in Early Childhood**

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### **ABSTRAK**

*The instillation of faith (aqidah) and morals (akhlaq) in early childhood is a strategic step in shaping strong Islamic character, especially in response to the challenges of the modern era. This study aims to examine an integrative approach involving families, schools, and digital media in embedding the values of aqidah and akhlaq in children. Using a qualitative research method based on literature review, this study reveals that early childhood is a golden period where children possess exceptional abilities to absorb positive values. The findings indicate that synergy between families, formal education, and digital media supervision is the key to addressing modernization challenges that often contradict religious values. This study also highlights the importance of wisely utilizing digital media as a supportive tool to reinforce Islamic values. The research contributes by offering practical and relevant strategies to support the development of Islamic character in early childhood through a holistic and integrated approach.*

**Keywords:** Faith Instillation, Morals, Early Childhood, Islamic Education, Digital Media, Islamic Character.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Early childhood education is a pivotal stage in the development of an individual's character and personality (Sakti et al., 2024). During this period, children undergo rapid development in multiple domains, including physical, emotional, and intellectual. This period offers a significant opportunity for parents and educators to instill fundamental values that will influence children's attitudes, behaviors, and cognitive development. It is imperative for all segments of society to comprehend the pivotal role of early childhood education in laying the foundation for life.

It is well-documented that early childhood is a period of significant absorption of environmental values. In the context of Islamic education, the introduction of akidah and akhlak at this stage is of particular importance, as they serve as the foundational elements of Islamic values. These values, when instilled during this critical period, have the potential to provide a robust foundation of aqidah for children, influencing their future interactions with others and shaping

their moral compass (Najamudin, 2024). Timing is of paramount importance; the cultivation of aqidah and akhlak during this period can have a profound and lasting impact on an individual's development, extending into adulthood.

However, the challenges associated with instilling values of aqidah and akhlak in early childhood cannot be disregarded. The influence of modernization and globalization frequently introduces novel values that are not aligned with Islamic teachings (Pulungan, 2024). Digital media, consumerist lifestyles, and the absence of parental attention serve as inhibitors in the process of value education in children (Steiner-Adair et al., 2014). This necessitates the formulation of a specialized strategy to ensure the perpetuation of these values, despite the presence of substantial challenges.

A systematic approach is imperative in the design of strategies to instill aqidah and akhlak in early childhood, ensuring their integration and effectiveness. The family, as the child's primary environment, plays a pivotal role in instilling these values through exemplary behavior and habituation. In addition, educational institutions and society must collaborate to create an ecosystem that fosters the development of Islamic character. With a targeted approach, children can be nurtured to become individuals who possess aqidah, a noble character, and are equipped to face the challenges of modern life.

Consequently, the responsibility for instilling aqidah and akhlak in early childhood is shared by families, schools, and communities. The education system must prioritize the inculcation of Islamic values to cultivate a generation with Islamic character. By recognizing the significance of the golden period in children's lives, various challenges can be effectively addressed through measurable strategies. This article will delve into the strategic steps and solutions to the challenges in instilling aqidah and akhlak in early childhood.

The cultivation of aqidah and akhlak in early childhood is of paramount importance, as this period is regarded as the most effective for character development (Maraendar et al., 2024). However, there is often a lack of realization that this optimal window for child development is not being utilized to its fullest potential in instilling Islamic values. Indeed, the rapid development of children's brains during this period renders them highly receptive to the teachings of aqidah and akhlak, which can lay the foundational groundwork for their future lives. The oversight of this critical period can result in the loss of valuable opportunities to nurture a generation that is imbued with Islamic character.

In this developmental stage, children exhibit an exceptional capacity to assimilate and retain positive values from their surroundings. However, many parents and educators remain unaware that instilling aqidah and moral values necessitates early habituation. This necessity is frequently eclipsed by the prioritization of academic and technical aptitude development. Consequently, the

cultivation of spiritual and moral values is often eclipsed by the influence of contemporary lifestyles that are less conducive to the development of Islamic character.

A further gap that must be addressed is the lack of integrated strategies and approaches for instilling *aqidah* and *akhlak* in early childhood. The challenges posed by modernization, such as the influence of digital media and the lack of family interaction time, further increase the risk of erosion of moral and religious values. Although the need for the formation of children's Islamic character is evident, many parties still lack clear guidelines to overcome this obstacle. Consequently, there is an imperative for a strategic and value-based approach to address this deficit and ensure the efficacy of children's Islamic character development.

The cultivation of faith and *akhlak* in early childhood has been a subject of extensive research, emphasizing the pivotal roles of families and formal educational institutions. The family, as the initial environment for children, is frequently regarded as the primary foundation in shaping Islamic character through exemplary guidance and daily practices (Munachifdlil Ula & Shihabbuddin, 2024). Concurrently, formal education institutions, such as schools, are recognized as pivotal in reinforcing religious values through a curriculum grounded in religion (Sihono & Cahyo, 2024). Nevertheless, contemporary challenges, including the pervasive influence of digital technology and the paucity of direct interaction between parents and children, impede the effective execution of this role.

Despite the prevalence of research emphasizing the significance of instilling Islamic values from an early age, a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges posed by modernization remains underdeveloped. For instance, the impact of digital media on the internalization of children's moral values is frequently perceived as a threat, with no available strategies for families or schools to leverage it as an educational medium. Moreover, while numerous studies have emphasized the pivotal role of each environment (e.g., family, school, community) in nurturing Islamic values, there is a paucity of research on the integration of these three domains within a cohesive, collaborative framework (Nurul Aini et al., 2024).

This study aims to address this gap by developing an integrative strategy for cultivating creed and *akhlak* in early childhood that can accommodate modern challenges. This approach is expected to connect the roles of family, school, and community in shaping children's Islamic character holistically. Furthermore, this research endeavors to proffer concrete solutions to address hitherto under-explored challenges, such as the dearth of parental guidance in leveraging digital technology as an instrument for inculcating the values of *aqidah* and *akhlak*. This undertaking is of paramount importance to ensure that succeeding generations maintain a robust moral and spiritual foundation in the face of evolving times.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

In this study, the researchers employed qualitative research methods, which entail a library research approach aimed at examining various relevant literature sources, including books, journals, articles, and other documents (Movitaria et al., 2024) related to the cultivation of faith and morals in early childhood. The researchers then processed, formulated, and analyzed the data obtained from these various readings in depth, subsequently compiling it into a systematic and structured narrative.

This qualitative research approach entails the analysis of natural phenomena, wherein the researcher functions as the primary instrument in the collection of data. To ensure the validity of the findings, the researcher employs triangulation techniques, which involve the verification of data from multiple sources and approaches. This methodological technique is employed to mitigate the likelihood of bias or inaccuracy in the information obtained. This multifaceted approach enables researchers to attain a more profound and comprehensive understanding of the object of study from diverse perspectives (Sugiyono, 2008).

The author utilizes a variety of literature sources, including academic books, scientific journal articles, and other references pertinent to the research theme, to collect data. The data obtained is then recorded, analyzed, and synthesized into conclusions that support the research objectives (Ratnaningtyas et al., 2023). It is anticipated that this approach will yield valid findings and contribute to the scientific discourse on instilling faith and morals in early childhood.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The subject of akidah akhlak learning aims to provide students with knowledge, appreciation, and correct belief in matters that are considered obligatory for Muslims. Consequently, students are expected to behave in accordance with the guidance of the Qur'an and Hadith in their daily lives. Through the study of akidah akhlak, students acquire knowledge and guidance to enable them to live and practice Islamic teachings related to morals. This encompasses human relationships with God, with oneself, and with the surrounding environment. Student behavior, both within the academic environment and in the broader societal context, is expected to reflect the knowledge acquired in the classroom (Hosaini et al., 2021). This behavior serves as a crucial metric for assessing the efficacy of the learning objectives of akidah akhlak.

### **Aqidah**

Aqidah or akidah in Indonesian language, defined as the principles of faith determined by Allah SWT, is a fundamental tenet in Islam and belief in these principles is essential for an individual to be considered a believer (*mu'min*) (Karim,

2017). Research has demonstrated that fostering akidah in early childhood is crucial for developing robust spiritual foundations. The period of childhood, characterized by its malleability and receptivity to spiritual values through habituation and exemplification, offers a crucial window of opportunity for instilling creedal values in children (Suhulah & Yulianty, 2023). This study's findings underscore the efficacy of family-based approaches, such as collective prayer, the pedagogy of tawhid, and the integration of Islamic values through narrative, in introducing children to the concept of creed. However, the role of the family in this process is often overlooked due to a lack of awareness or time among parents. Consequently, children miss out on the opportunity to develop a deep understanding of the creed during this critical period of their development.

Furthermore, the pervasive influence of digital media has emerged as a significant challenge in instilling the values of faith in children. A substantial amount of content that is not aligned with Islamic teachings is readily accessible, and it has the potential to influence children's perceptions of akidah (Masithoh, 2019). Examples of negative content include animated films that promote non-Islamic values. Cartoons that include elements of magic, prophecy, or fictional characters with powers that are considered to exceed the power of Allah can influence children's understanding that power or help can come from creatures, not from Allah. Consequently, children may start to believe in supernatural things that are not in accordance with the teachings of Tauhid. This research reveals that parental assistance in the use of digital media is needed to ensure children are exposed to positive values. One effective approach involves the utilization of Islamic applications or educational programming that fosters children's faith. This suggests that digital media can serve as a tool to support the learning process of the akidah.

The findings of this study also indicate that formal educational institutions, such as Islamic kindergartens, play a substantial role in instilling the values of akidah. Tauhid-based curricula, which include teaching the shahada, understanding Allah, and introducing basic worship practices, have been found to assist children in comprehending the fundamental tenets of Islam (Haerul et al., 2023). However, the efficacy of this approach is contingent upon the collaborative efforts of schools and parents. The findings indicate that children who receive consistent teaching of the akidah in both school and home environments demonstrate a more profound understanding of the subject matter compared to those who receive teaching in only one of these settings.

## **Akhlak**

Akhlak is defined as an inner condition integrated with a person's soul, which encourages certain actions. This condition must be so deep that it produces actions

that are not just temporary, but become consistent habits in daily life. According to Imam Al-Ghazali, akhlak encompass more than mere action or knowledge; they are the bedrock of one's character, shaping habits that define daily life (Prasong, 2023). Akhlak education, as outlined by Al-Ghazali, encompasses a series of fundamental principles of morals and the virtues of attitudes and character that children must acquire and internalize from an early age until they reach the age of maturity, thereby preparing them to live a life in accordance with Islamic principles.

According to Al-Ghazali, the akhlak education of early childhood constitutes a formal educational approach aimed at establishing the foundational elements for the comprehensive growth and development of children. This education encompasses various domains, including physical aspects such as fine and gross motor coordination, intellectual domains like thinking ability, creativity, and emotional and spiritual intelligence, socio-emotional domains encompassing attitude, behavior, and religion, language, and communication. This pedagogical approach is meticulously tailored to the distinctive stages of development that characterize early childhood.

According to Al-Ghazali's akhlak education approach, educators can employ clear methods and curricula, such as the mujahadah and riyadhah-nafsiyah methods, to instruct children. The mujahadah method entails perseverance and soul training through the repetition of actions that promote the development of virtuous character. The riyadhah-nafsiyah method involves the cultivation of moral integrity through spiritual exercises. In addition to these academic pursuits, children are allotted time for play and physical activities, arts, and other forms of expression. They are instructed in the intrapersonal and interpersonally, and are methodically introduced to letters, reading, agriculture, the environment, and the universe. This introduction process is gradual and in accordance with the child's world, namely the world of play, with the objective of rendering the learning process enjoyable for children. Through play, children can express their ideas and feelings. The positive emotions that children experience in these interactions contribute to their overall development. It is essential to emphasize that this educational approach is characterized by wisdom and compassion, ensuring that children receive the necessary support and guidance throughout their learning journey (Wahab, 2020).

The cultivation of akhlak in early childhood is a critical step in the formation of moral and ethical individuals in their social life (Maraendar et al., 2024). The findings of this study demonstrate that the habitual practice of positive behaviors within the family unit, such as sharing, apologizing, and respecting parents, is highly effective in fostering noble moral. The role of family models in instilling akhlak values is also highlighted, with studies showing that families who consistently demonstrate proper manners tend to have more success in this regard.

However, the lack of parental attention to this aspect can result in children imitating negative behaviors from their surroundings.

Educational institutions, too, play a pivotal role in shaping children's akhlak compass. Teachers who embody akhlak values through their actions can significantly influence students' behavior in the classroom. The integration of moral education through play or storytelling can help children develop a sense of right and wrong. This study underscores the importance of structured moral education in schools, highlighting that children who receive such instruction are better equipped to exhibit positive behaviors compared to those who primarily learn from their family environment.

The present study also highlights the critical role of digital media in shaping children's akhlak development. The pervasive exposure to diverse forms of media, both positive and negative, can influence the development of children's moral compass. This phenomenon underscores the need for parents and educators to play a proactive role in monitoring their children's media consumption and providing alternative content that aligns with Islamic moral values. Such efforts are crucial in ensuring that children receive a balanced and comprehensive understanding of moral principles, fostering the development of well-rounded individuals who can contribute positively to society.

### **Author's Analysis**

The findings of this study are consistent with the principles of Kohlberg's moral development theory, which posits that during early childhood, individuals are in the preconventional stage of development. In this stage, moral values are acquired through the mechanisms of rewards and punishments (Nainggolan & Naibaho, 2022). This finding lends further support to the notion that habituation and role modeling within the family environment play a pivotal role in fostering a comprehensive understanding of akidah and akhlak values. This research also supports Al-Qarni's (2019) study, which emphasizes the importance of collaboration between families and schools in shaping Islamic character in early childhood.

However, this study identified a novel challenge, namely the influence of digital media, a topic that has received scant attention in previous research. In contrast to Iskarim's (2016) study, which emphasizes the role of the family, this study demonstrates that the synergy between family, school, and digital media monitoring is pivotal in addressing the discrepancy in the cultivation of akidah and akhlak. Consequently, this study offers a novel perspective on the necessity of an integrative approach to confront the challenges posed by modernization.

The present study contributes to the findings of Amrullah et al. (Amrullah et al., 2024), who underscored the significance of digital technology in Islamic

education. The study demonstrates that effective management of digital media can serve as an instrumental tool in instilling values of akidah and akhlak. The utilization of Islamic-based educational applications and content enables children to learn in a more interactive and engaging manner. This contributes to the development of learning strategies for akidah and akhlak that are relevant to contemporary needs.

The findings of this study underscore the pivotal role of akidah and akhlak cultivation in early childhood in shaping a robust Islamic character. The solution to the challenges posed by modernization is found in the collaborative efforts of families, educational institutions, and the oversight of digital media. This integrative approach, which engages multiple stakeholders, is poised to address the deficiencies in character education, with the objective of nurturing individuals who possess faith, a noble character, and the capacity to navigate the complexities of modern life.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The cultivation of akidah and akhlak in early childhood is a critical strategic step in shaping a robust Islamic character in future generations. This period is characterized by children's remarkable capacity to absorb positive values through habituation, role modeling, and interactions. In addressing the research question of how to effectively instill Islamic values in children amidst the challenges posed by modernization, this study proposes an integrative approach that combines the influences of family, school, and digital media management. This approach is designed to address the needs of character building in the Islamic context while also providing a solid foundation for children to navigate the rapidly changing times.

The study further corroborates the notion that the family remains the predominant environment exerting the most influence on the formation of children's values, akidah, and akhlak. Through parental example, daily habituation, and the reinforcement of Islamic values, children can develop a profound comprehension of akidah and the imperative of good behavior. However, contemporary challenges, such as the pervasive influence of digital media and materialistic lifestyles, necessitate the collaboration of schools with families in shaping children's Islamic character. A curriculum based on the tenet of tauhid and structured moral learning has proven to be effective in strengthening these values in early childhood.

The primary contribution of this study lies in its provision of pragmatic guidance and pertinent strategies that foster the collaboration between family, educational institutions, and digital media in the development of children's character. Additionally, the study offers a novel perspective on the potential of digital media, when utilized judiciously, to serve as an effective instrument in

reinforcing akidah and akhlak values. This approach addresses a critical gap in existing research by offering a tangible solution to the lack of integration among these diverse components.

Consequently, this research is poised to offer novel insights to parents, educators, and policymakers, facilitating the enhancement of Islamic character education in early childhood. Moreover, the findings of this study will inform the development of more pertinent learning methods and educational policies, better equipped to address the challenges of the contemporary era. The cultivation of faith and morals that is carried out consistently and integrated will produce a generation that is not only faithful and noble, but also ready to face the complexity of the world while still upholding Islamic values.

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