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### THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN INSTILLING NOBLE CHARACTER VALUES THROUGH PLAY METHOD

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#### ABSTRACT

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*Character education plays a crucial role in shaping students' morals, especially in early childhood. Teachers are responsible for instilling Akhlakul Karimah values to develop children's ethical and moral behavior. This study aims to analyze the role of teachers in instilling noble character values through play-based methods in early childhood education. The research employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with early childhood teachers in several educational institutions. Data analysis techniques included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the play method enhances children's understanding of moral values in a fun and interactive way. Activities such as role-playing, storytelling, and collaborative games allow children to grasp moral concepts naturally and contextually. Additionally, teachers play a central role as facilitators and role models, guiding children in applying Akhlakul Karimah values in daily life. This study concludes that the play method is an effective strategy for instilling character values in early childhood. Future research is recommended to explore the implementation of this method in broader educational contexts.*

#### INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) serves as the fundamental foundation in shaping children's character and personality (Umar et al., 2021). This period is often referred to as the golden age, where children possess a high capacity for learning and can easily absorb the values instilled by their environment, particularly from teachers and parents (Hanifah & Solehuddin, 2023). One of the essential aspects of character education is the cultivation of Akhlakul Karimah values, such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, politeness, and care for others. These values serve as essential provisions for children to interact with their social environment and develop into individuals with noble character.

In the context of formal education in ECE, teachers play a central role in shaping children's character. As educators, teachers are not only responsible for delivering academic material but also serve as role models for children in their daily lives (Hanifah et al., 2023). Children tend to imitate their teachers' behavior, making the teacher's role in instilling Akhlakul Karimah crucial. When teachers consistently demonstrate good behavior, children will find it easier to understand and apply these moral values in their own lives.

The teaching methods used to instill Akhlakul Karimah values significantly influence the success of character education in early childhood (Fahrudi, 2022; A. Hasanah, 2015; Muhibah et al., 2022). Since young children learn through concrete experiences and direct interaction, the most appropriate method is the play-based approach. Play is not only an enjoyable activity for children but also an effective means of introducing moral and social concepts. Through play, children can learn to differentiate between right and wrong, collaborate with peers, and understand others' feelings and needs. Various types of games can be utilized to instill Akhlakul Karimah values. For example, role-playing games help children understand honesty and empathy, cooperative games foster teamwork and helpfulness, while rule-based games teach discipline and responsibility. Teachers play a crucial role in designing games that are not only entertaining but also have strong educational value. With proper guidance, play can become a powerful tool for character development from an early age. However, in practice, instilling Akhlakul Karimah values through play-based methods is not always smooth. Teachers often face various challenges, both internal and external. One of the main challenges is the diversity of children's backgrounds, including cultural differences, family environments, and varying levels of understanding of moral values (Maghfiroh et al., 2020). Children raised in environments that do not strongly support positive character development may find it more difficult to accept and apply the values taught at school.

Additionally, limited instructional time poses another challenge in integrating moral values into play-based learning. Within a packed curriculum, teachers must balance academic instruction with character education. In many cases, character education receives less attention as greater emphasis is placed on cognitive development. However, Akhlakul Karimah values are essential components in shaping a morally upright generation. Another significant challenge is parental involvement in the character development process. Even if Akhlakul Karimah values are taught at school, inconsistency at home may hinder children's understanding and application of these values. Therefore, strong collaboration between teachers and parents is necessary to ensure that children receive consistent moral guidance both at school and at home.

This study aims to explore the role of teachers in instilling Akhlakul Karimah values through play-based methods. The focus of this research is to identify how teachers implement play-based learning to shape children's character, the challenges they face, and the solutions they apply to overcome these obstacles. Through this study, it is hoped that more effective approaches can be discovered for fostering moral values in early childhood. The findings of this research are expected to provide broader insights for educators, parents, and education policymakers in enhancing the effectiveness of character education in ECE. If play-based methods are properly implemented and supported by all stakeholders involved in children's education, children will develop a strong foundation of character from an early age, shaping them into individuals with noble character in the future.

## METHOD

The research method used in this study is descriptive qualitative, which aims to provide a detailed and in-depth depiction of the studied phenomenon without conducting experiments (Abdussamad, 2021; Syahril, 2016). This approach allows the researcher to comprehensively explore how early childhood education (ECE) teachers instill Akhlakul Karimah values through play-based methods.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews with two ECE teachers who have experience in implementing play-based learning. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to gain a deeper understanding of the strategies used by teachers, the challenges they face, and their role in shaping children's character through play-based education. Additionally, the collected data was analyzed using data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion-drawing techniques to identify patterns and emerging themes from the research findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Teacher's Role in Instilling Moral Values

In early childhood education, teachers have a very important role in instilling moral values (Suryadarma & Haq, 2015). Children at an early age are in a developmental stage that is very receptive to and imitates the behavior of those around them, especially teachers. Teachers are not only responsible for teaching academic knowledge but also in shaping children's moral character through various fun and interactive learning strategies (Tadjuddin, 2018). One of the approaches used in this study is to observe how teachers apply the play method in teaching moral values to children.

One of the ways teachers instill the values of Akhlakul Karimah is through various learning media that are interesting and in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood. Teachers utilize storybooks, educational shows on digital TV, and character-based games as the main means of teaching moral concepts to children. The use of these media aims to make it easier for children to understand values such as honesty, patience and compassion in everyday life. In addition, interactive and interesting media can increase children's involvement in the learning process, so that the values taught can be absorbed better.

In an interview with a ECE teacher, she explained that the approach used to instill Akhlakul Karimah values is not only limited to verbal teaching but also through media that is attractive to children. The teacher said, *"Instilling the values of Akhlakul Karimah to early childhood through various media. The first is through storybook media, then the second is through digital TV. We often read fairy tale books with stories that have moral messages. In addition, we are also good role models for children because they tend to imitate what teachers do and model."*- Mrs. Mawar

This statement confirms that the use of media such as storybooks and educational shows plays an important role in helping children understand moral values better. Teachers who are creative in choosing learning media will find it easier to shape children's character effectively. However, a different perspective was conveyed by another teacher who emphasized the importance of habituation in daily life as the main way of instilling Akhlak Karimah to children.

The teacher stated, *"In instilling the values of Akhlakul Karimah, as much as possible I first model how these values are applied in everyday life. It is not enough just once, but it must be repeated so that it becomes a habit. Young children learn from what they see and experience every day. Therefore, I always give examples in simple things such as daily prayers, saying*

*and answering greetings, caring for each other, throwing garbage in its place, and eating and drinking while sitting.” - Mrs. Melati*

This opinion emphasizes that consistent habituation in daily activities is more effective in building children's character. By teaching children through concrete examples and routine activities, Akhlakul Karimah values can be embedded naturally without seeming forced. In addition to the use of learning media, it is important for teachers to be good role models for children (Hamid, 2017; Pitaloka et al., 2021). In instilling Akhlakul Karimah values in early childhood, teachers have an important role in forming good habits that will be embedded from an early age. This habit is carried out through various routine activities at school, such as reading prayers, saying greetings, and familiarizing good manners. In addition, teachers also teach honesty, discipline and responsibility, which are not only applied at school but also in everyday life (Hasanah, 2015). By being a role model, teachers help children imitate the positive attitudes and behaviors shown by the adults around them.

According to Mrs. Mawar, the ECE teacher interviewed, *“The values of Akhlakul Karimah are taught through daily habituation, such as reading daily prayers, memorizing short surahs, and getting used to greetings when coming to school and entering class. Children are also taught to kiss the teacher's hand and use polite words such as please, thank you, and sorry. In addition, teachers instill the value of honesty by inviting children to take responsibility for their actions and provide appropriate consequences. Time discipline is also a concern, such as ensuring children arrive on time and follow the activity schedule in an orderly manner.”*

In line with Mrs. Melati, she added that *“The habituation of moral values is also carried out through prayers before and after activities, reading hadiths or daily prayers, and singing songs with the theme of good habits. In addition, children are taught to throw garbage in its place, say good things, and ask for help politely. These activities are designed so that children understand moral values in a fun way and are easily applied in everyday life.”*

The habituation of Akhlakul Karimah values at school is not only done through direct instruction, but also through real examples and repeated habits (Munaamah et al., 2021). Both teachers agree that strengthening character in early childhood requires a gentle and fun approach, such as singing, playing, and providing examples in everyday life. In addition, the concept of consequences is also an important strategy in shaping attitudes of responsibility and discipline. Children are invited to understand that every action has consequences, both positive and negative. Early childhood has a tendency to imitate the behavior of those around them, especially teachers who they consider as the main figure in the school environment. Teachers must show attitudes and behaviors that are in accordance with the values of Akhlakul Karimah, such as speaking politely, being honest, and behaving well in every situation (Hanifah et al., 2023).

### **Play Method in Instilling Moral Values**

Play is one of the effective learning methods in early childhood education (Majumdar, 2020). This is in line with Piaget's cognitive development theory (1962), which states that children learn through active interaction with the surrounding environment. In the preoperational stage (2 - 7 years), children tend to use imagination and exploration in understanding the world. Play becomes the main means for children to gain experience and build new understanding (Ahmad et al., 2016; Marinda, 2020).

Teachers stated that play provides a space for children to learn without feeling pressured. According to Mrs. Mawar, *“Play allows children to learn naturally, because when children are enjoying their activities, teachers can slip moral messages indirectly.”* This statement was

reinforced by Ibu Melati, who emphasized that *“Children tend to explore more freely in play, so they can learn from their own experiences and mistakes.”*

This is in accordance with Vygotsky's theory (1978), which proposes the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is the distance between a child's current ability and the potential that can be achieved with the guidance of adults or peers (Silalahi, 2019). In the context of play, teachers can act as scaffolders who provide developmentally appropriate directions or challenges. In this way, children learn not only through direct instruction but also through exploration and social interaction.

In addition, role play, puzzles and constructive games such as lego are very effective in teaching values such as honesty, discipline and helping. Teachers also stated that the success of this method depends on how teachers practice these values in play activities.

One example of such practice is a social experiment using money in the bathroom. *“At that time I put money in the bathroom. Approximately Rp 1,000. Then uh children when children enter the bathroom want to take ablution water to carry out the habituation of dhuha prayer. Some children take some children to the office while the money is down, then talk to communicate to the teacher. That I found that I found Rp 1,000 in money in the bathroom. I don't know who it belongs to. But with that kind of attitude the child.”*-Mrs. Mawar-

The cultivation of moral values such as honesty, discipline, and helping in early childhood learning can be analyzed through Lawrence Kohlberg's (1984) theory of moral development (Ibda, 2023). Kohlberg developed this theory by dividing moral development into three levels with six stages, which describe how a person thinks about right and wrong based on his experience and understanding of social norms (Hasanah, 2019). In the context of early childhood learning, role play, puzzles, and constructive games such as lego are effective methods in helping children understand moral values.

### **Collaboration between Teachers and Parents in Instilling Moral Values**

Collaboration between teachers and parents has an important role in instilling moral values in children (Kholil, 2021). Teachers and parents must have harmony in familiarizing moral values so that children get consistent experiences in the school environment and at home. Mrs. Melati emphasized that *“Moral values are not only instilled at school, but also at home because children spend more time in the family environment. With good communication between teachers and parents, the process of instilling moral values can run more effectively.”*

The collaboration between teachers and parents is carried out through various simple habits that are applied repeatedly. As Mrs. Mawar mentioned, *“The habit of kissing parents' hands before going to school and greeting them when entering the house is a real example of the values of Akhlakul Karimah that can be taught in both environments. This habit, though simple, helps children understand the importance of respect, manners, and affection in daily life.”*

This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, which states that a child's development is influenced by various environments (microsystems), including family and school. If these two environments are in harmony in instilling moral values, children will more easily internalize and practice good habits in their lives (Hanifah & Kurniati, 2024; Salsabila, 2018). Conversely, if there are differences in the application of values at school and at home, children may experience moral confusion and struggle to understand what is right and wrong.

Character education also emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in shaping children's morals. Teachers can provide information to parents about the habits being implemented at school so they can continue them at home. Likewise, if parents have already instilled certain values at home, teachers can observe and support the development of these habits at school. The collaboration between teachers and parents becomes a key factor in the success of character development in children. By fostering good communication, mutual

understanding, and the application of Akhlakul Karimah values at both home and school, children will more easily grow into individuals with good morals. Therefore, strong collaboration between teachers and parents is essential in educating and guiding children to ensure that moral values are optimally instilled from an early age.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that the role of teachers in instilling Akhlakul Karimah values in early childhood requires the active role of teachers, the application of appropriate methods, and support from parents. Teachers not only act as teachers but also as role models in shaping children's character through consistent habituation. The play method is an effective approach because it provides a fun learning experience and makes children understand moral values naturally. In addition, collaboration between teachers and parents is essential so that the values taught at school can be reinforced at home.

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