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The Formation of Moral Values in Early Childhood Education: Mapping, Challenges, and Teacher Requirements Based on Observations in 10 Kindergartens and Nursery Schools in Bantul

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the moral values taught, the challenges faced, and the needs of teachers in instilling moral values in early childhood education. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through observation and interviews with 10 early childhood and kindergarten institutions in Bantul. The findings show that respect, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and empathy are the most dominant values taught through habituation, modeling, and daily routines. Teachers reported challenges such as children's limited concentration, behavioral diversity, and low family involvement, and emphasized the need for continuous training, innovative teaching, and stronger collaboration with parents. These challenges arise from the unique developmental characteristics of early childhood and the lack of consistency between school and family moral education. Therefore, contextual and engaging learning strategies are needed to ensure effective internalization of moral values. This study highlights the teacher's role as a model and facilitator of character development and the importance of parent collaboration. Its impact provides practical insights for educators and policymakers to design integrated, family-based moral education programs that strengthen children's character formation from an early age.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Formation of moral values early childhood is an important foundation in character development, which will affect the behavior patterns, personality, and way the child interacts with his or her environment in the future (Kemala, 2023). In recent years, educators have observed a growing concern over the decline in children's social behavior, such as reduced respect toward peers and adults, low empathy, difficulty following rules, and a tendency toward self-centeredness. These problems are often linked to inconsistent moral guidance between home and school, as well as the influence of digital media that shapes children's attitudes and interactions. Early Childhood Education as the first educational environment after the family has a strategic role in instilling moral values through habituation, example, and daily routine activities (Ardiyanti & Khairiah, 2021; Faelasup & Hasanah, 2025; Kemala, 2023). For example, through the Pancasila Student Profile policy, Indonesia emphasizes the importance of strengthening religiosity, integrity, mutual cooperation, and independence from an early age (Multazam & Setiasih, 2023; Ningrum et al., 2023). Other research findings also confirm that these values can be instilled effectively through children's social interaction both in early childhood education units and in other environments (Wijaya & Nuraini, 2023).

Previous research shows that there are challenges that hinder the effectiveness of the process of moral value formation in early childhood. However, many previous studies have focused narrowly on curriculum content or classroom-based interventions, without providing a comprehensive map of which moral values are emphasised, what specific challenges teachers face, and the actual support they need in implementing moral education. Teachers as the main agents face the diversity of children's characters, limitations of contextual learning methods (Faelasup & Hasanah, 2025). Lack of family attention to aspects of character education in the home environment (Widyastuti & Muwa, 2025; Wulandari & Ningsih, 2023). As well as lack of synergy between education at school and at home (Cholimah et al., 2024). Moreover, not all PAUD teachers receive sufficient training in implementing creative approaches (Hasbi, 2025).

In practice, the cultivation of moral values in PAUD is also faced with various challenges, such as the diversity of children's behaviors, limited concentration, and family support that is not always optimal (Fatimah et al., 2025). This condition requires teachers not only to function as educators, but also as facilitators, role models, as well as innovators in developing learning strategies that are in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood (Hasbi, 2025). Consequently, gaps remain in strengthening teacher competence in creating creative, contextual, and sustainable moral learning that connects home and school education.

Therefore, this study aims to map the moral values commonly practiced in PAUD institutions, identify the challenges faced in their cultivation, and explore the specific needs of teachers in developing their pedagogical competence and creativity. Through observations and interviews in 10 kindergartens and nursery schools in Bantul, this study addresses existing research gaps by providing an in-depth mapping of moral values, identifying practical classroom challenges, and analyzing teacher requirements for effective moral education. Thus, the findings are expected to make a meaningful contribution to strengthening early childhood character education in a more comprehensive, contextual, and sustainable manner.

2. METHODS

This research is a qualitative descriptive that aims to describe in depth the practice of moral value formation, teacher challenges, and training needs in the PAUD environment. Data were

collected by interview, observation, and documentation techniques. Semi-structured interviews with teachers and principals regarding the values taught, challenges, and training needs. The informants consisted of teachers and principals from 10 kindergarten/family planning institutions in Bantul Regency and its surroundings who were selected purposively because these institutions have active character education programs.

Documentation of daily programs, value modules, and habituation activity plans. Observation of moral value habituation activities in the classroom and school environment. The analysis was conducted using data reduction, grouping, and thematic interpretation methods in accordance with the data analysis techniques proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (Bingham, 2023; Nicmanis, 2024), namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. To ensure the validity of the data, triangulation of techniques (observations, interviews, documentation) is carried out.

The triangulation technique was analysed by comparing and integrating data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation. Observation data was used to identify moral value practices in 10 kindergartens and preschools in Bantul. Interview data was obtained from in-depth interviews with principals and teachers regarding the moral values fostered in schools, issues in fostering moral values, and expectations of education to strengthen the growth of moral values in children. Meanwhile, documentation data supports the verification of facts from observations and interviews. The convergence of these three techniques ensures the validity and depth of the findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. RESULTS

3.1.1. Moral values instilled in children at school

The results of the research were obtained from in-depth interviews with teachers, observations and documentation obtained from Alhamdulillah's IT Kindergarten, Masyithoh Al-Iman Kindergarten, ABA Bulus Kulon Kindergarten, Krapyak Islamic Children's Kindergarten, Al Azhar Islamic Kindergarten 38 Bantul, Aisyiyah Marsudisiwi I Kindergarten, Aisyiyah Surya Melati Kindergarten, Chipmunk Kindergarten, Cendekia Kindergarten, and Avicenna Kindergarten which are located in Bantul Regency and have a good character program in the institution. Institutions that instill moral values in children at school can be seen in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Moral values instilled in children at school.

No.	Moral Values	Number of Institutions	Information
1.	Respect/ Manners	11	The most dominant values appear in the form of speech, greetings, social ethics Referred to as respect, respect, manners towards teachers/friends
2.	Responsibility	5	Referred to in the context of personal duties, routines, and responsibilities
3.	Honesty	5	Internalized through stories, interactions, and confessions of mistakes
4.	Discipline	2	Related to school regularity and rules
5.	Empathy/love for each other	2	Appears in the context of sharing, loving friends, social care
6.	Independence/Independence	2	Children are trained to do their own tasks and take responsibility for themselves
7.	Islamic Manners (to Allah/Messenger/environment)	2	Especially for Islamic-based schools (Al Azhar, etc.)
8.	Concern	2	Included in social values and sharing
9.	Tolerance	1	Mentioned in the context of social diversity
10.	Collaborate	1	Referred to through group activities such as art projects
11.	Simplicity, openness, general character	1	Implicit, not dominant

Based on Table 1. the findings showed that there are eleven moral values that are consistently taught by kindergarten and nursery school teachers through habituation, example, and class routines in daily learning activities. The analysis revealed that manners or respect are the most dominant value and almost prioritized across almost all institution, followed by responsibility and honesty as the main focuses. Other values such as discipline and empathy were also found, although not as universally emphasized as the top three values. In Islamic-based schools, religious values such as adab to Allah, the Prophet, and the Qur'an are distinctly highlighted. Meanwhile social values such as cooperation, tolerance, and concern are recorded to be present but are still limited in their application.

The moral values that most often appear are respect and good manners, which are taught by 8 out of 10 institutions. A teacher from Krapyak Islamic Child Development Kindergarten emphasized that manners are the foundation of children's social ethics and must be instilled from an early age through daily routine such as morning greetings, using polite words such as "please", "sorry", and "thank you", and demonstrating respectful behaviour towards teachers and friends. Similarly, a teacher from Masyithoh Al-Iman Kindergarten explained that respect instilled through activities such as respecting other opinions, queuing, and listening when others speak.

The values of responsibility and honesty consistently taught in five institutions each. A teacher from Aisiyiah Surya Melati nursery school described responsibility is internalized through simple tasks such as tidying up toys, taking care of personal belongings, or completing duties such as prayer and worship. Meanwhile, a teacher from IT Alhamdulillah kindergarten stated that honesty is developed through discussions, storytelling, and encouraging openness when making mistakes. The teacher from Al Azhar Islamic Kindergarten 38 Bantul also noted that honesty is carried out in daily activities supported by storytelling activities that help children understand truthfulness through relatable narratives.

The value of discipline as explained by teachers from Chipmunk nursery school and Cendekia nursery school is cultivated through the regularity of daily schedule and adherence

to class rules, such as praying before lessons, sitting while eating, or disposing of waste properly. Meanwhile, empathy was taught through sharing activities and group-based learning as reported by Avicenna nursery school and ABA Bulus Kulon Kindergarten. Additional values such as independence, Islamic manners, care, tolerance, and cooperation were also identified as integral aspects of moral formation.

3.1.2. Early childhood problems in the cultivation of moral values

Based on the results of observations and interviews, it was found that various problems faced by teachers in the process of forming children's character through the cultivation of moral values. These problems can be categorized into five main groups seen in **Figure 1**, each with varying frequency and urgency. This analysis aims to identify patterns of challenges experienced in the field and provide a basis for the formulation of appropriate coping strategies.

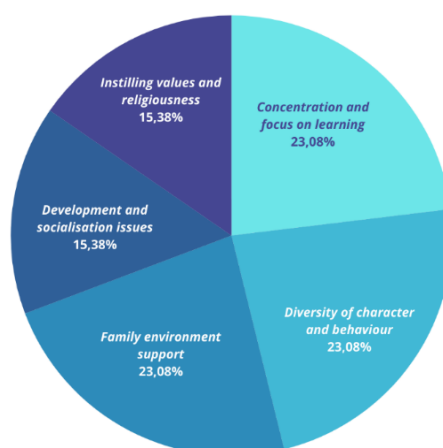


Figure 1. Common problems encountered by children.

Based on Figure 1. the most dominant problems identified are children's concentration and focus during learning, the diversity of children's characters and behaviors, and limited family environment support which are 23.08% each. Teachers reported that early children are easily distracted, tends to engage in play or conversation during learning activities. Another major issue presented by the teachers was related to the diversity of children's characters and behaviors. Teachers face a variety of children's characters, including children who aggressive, dominant, or show inappropriate behavior.

Family environment support also emerged as a significant challenge. Teachers from several institutions reported limited support from parents in reinforcing character values at home. In some cases, family conditions were found to be less supportive due to issues such as conflict, lack of interaction with children, or unhealthy home environments.

Other problems that are also widely found are problems of child development and socialization as well as value habituation and religiosity which are 15.38% each. Difficulties such as speech delay, strong egocentrism, and limited social interaction were reported to hinder moral values formation. Additionally, some children struggled with prayer routines, memorization, or religious practices conducted at school.

3.1.3. The expectations of PAUD teachers in strengthening the cultivation of moral values

Most teachers expect practical and fun training, such as *storytelling* moral games, music, and other creative media to teach children values. The teacher from the IT Kindergarten Alhamdulillah explained that the method will help them convey grades effectively and

interestingly. In addition, the teachers of Al Azhar Islamic Kindergarten 38 Bantul, Aisyiyah Marsudisiwi I Kindergarten, Aisyiyah Surya Melati explained their hope for long-term training based on best practices which is not only a one-time seminar. Teachers feel that applicative, tiered, and accompanied training will have more impact in improving their competence in shaping children's character.

Another hope that is quite prominent is the organization of workshops that emphasize the habituation of Islamic characters, the use of educational technology, and storytelling skills. The teacher mentioned the importance of thematic workshops that focus on character values and the use of technology in moral and religious education. Teachers also emphasized the importance of synergy with parents through routine parenting programs, as well as strengthening the role of teachers as character models, especially in the aspect of Islamic values. Teachers also emphasized the importance of synergy with parents through parenting programs, both in the form of routine education and joint evaluation. Meanwhile, the hope for strengthening the role of teachers as role models of Islamic character was also conveyed by related teachers to show teachers' awareness of the importance of imitating values directly through daily attitudes and behaviors.

3.2. DISCUSSION

3.2.1. Moral values instilled in children at school

The findings indicate that early childhood education institutions in Bantul place strong emphasis on developing moral values through daily habituation and modeling, particularly focusing on respect, responsibility, and honesty. This shows that teachers perceive these values as the foundation for building children's social and moral behavior. These three moral values, as explained by Thomas Lickona, constitute the second aspect of a person's moral knowledge (Hafizallah, 2024). The predominance of respect and manners aligns with the sociocultural context of Indonesia, where politeness and courteous behavior (*adab*) are deeply rooted in both cultural and religious teachings (Kemala, 2023; Multazam & Setiasih, 2023). The frequent inclusion of morning greetings, polite expressions, and listening habits suggests that moral formation in PAUD is embedded within everyday classroom routines rather than taught as separate lessons, which is consistent with the principle that moral learning in early childhood is best achieved through modeling and imitation (Faelasup & Hasanah, 2025).

The emergence of responsibility and honesty as equally emphasized values reflects teachers' awareness of nurturing children's sense of accountability and integrity from an early age. These findings support previous studies asserting that the development of moral responsibility in early childhood begins with small, concrete tasks that foster a sense of duty and self-regulation (Anggraeni et al., 2021; Salsabila, 2021). However, the current study highlights that while these values are taught consistently, their implementation still depends heavily on the teacher's initiative and classroom culture rather than a structured institutional policy. This indicates a gap in systematic curriculum integration of moral education, echoing earlier research that found moral values often depend on individual teacher practices rather than school-wide planning (Cholimah et al., 2024; Widyastuti & Muwa, 2025).

The values of discipline and empathy demonstrate teachers' efforts to balance moral reasoning with social-emotional development. However, compared to the dominant values of respect and responsibility, these are less emphasised, indicating that affective aspects such as empathy have not been fully integrated into everyday pedagogical practice. However, the findings of this study contradict with the moral development of children as described by Martin L Hoffman, who states that empathy is the foundation of children's moral

development, beginning with basic feelings of empathy such as crying or feeling uncomfortable (Li et al., 2025; Rosyida et al., 2025).

It is interesting to note that Islamic-based schools demonstrate a more prominent inclusion of religious moral values, such as respect for Allah and the Prophet, strengthening the influence of religious identity on moral pedagogy. These results confirm earlier studies that found faith-based institutions tend to contextualize moral education through spiritual narratives, religious rituals, and Quranic modeling (Hasbi, 2025; Ningrum et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the limited appearance of broader social values such as cooperation and tolerance suggests that moral formation in PAUD still leans toward individual and vertical (teacher-child) moral interactions rather than horizontal (peer to peer) social morality. This gap is crucial because social moral competence such as empathy, sharing, and mutual respect is a core aspect of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila expected in Indonesia's early childhood education framework (Wijaya & Nuraini, 2023).

Furthermore, these findings highlight that teachers play a central role as moral agents, but often face challenges related to pedagogical creativity, family involvement, and contextual adaptation, as explained by Lickona that teachers are one of the factors that shape children's character to follow the values and needs of the surrounding community (Husnaini & Parendi, 2022). The problems faced by these teachers reinforce the finding that teachers often find it difficult to maintain consistent moral learning due to a lack of family cooperation and inadequate training in creative and contextual approaches, thus requiring teacher competence in reflective moral pedagogy, such as through storytelling, project-based learning, and structured collaboration between schools and homes as the main focus for future interventions and innovations (Aryati et al., 2023; Fatimah et al., 2025; Jukić, 2024; Wulandari & Ningsih, 2023).

3.2.2. Early childhood problems in the cultivation of moral values

The findings reveal that the main challenges in forming moral values in early childhood education relate to children's limited concentration, behavioral diversity, and lack of consistent family support. These issues reflect the characteristics of early childhood development described by Richard D. Kellough, in which short attention spans, strong curiosity, and a preference for play-based interactions often make it difficult for children to focus for long periods of time (Dasopang et al., 2022; Sakinah & Dalimunthe, 2022). Teachers, therefore, must adopt flexible and engaging learning strategies that align with the natural tendencies of young learner as described by Lickona approaches such as storytelling, role play, and project-based activities can make moral learning more meaningful and enjoyable for children (Almazroui, 2022; Fitri et al., 2024). Storytelling as a means of forming children's character is obtained through understanding the moral value of a story (Gusmayanti & Dimiyati, 2021).

The diversity of children's behaviors further complicates classroom management and value formation. Differences in temperament, emotional regulation, and social maturity require teachers to apply differentiated and responsive approaches. Without adequate training in managing behavioral diversity, teachers may struggle to balance attention between children who need extra guidance and those who are more independent. This finding underscores the importance of continuous professional development for early childhood teachers, particularly in classroom management, socio-emotional learning, and positive behavior reinforcement techniques (Pupíková et al., 2021). Teacher professional development can support children's moral development in schools in accordance with community needs, as discussed in Rebore's

six characteristics of professional teachers, which consist of understanding and acceptance of duties; willingness to cooperate with students, fellow teachers, parents, and the community; ability to develop a vision and position for continuous growth; service orientation; ability to guide and nurture student behaviour; and application of a code of ethics (Abdallah & Wardat, 2021; Khorasgani, 2019).

Another key finding concerns the limited role of families in supporting moral education. The lack of parental involvement and inconsistent modeling of moral behavior at home weaken the continuity of value formation. When the values taught at school are not reinforced within the family environment, children may experience confusion and inconsistency in understanding right and wrong. Enhanced cooperation between schools and families is crucial to ensure that moral values are consistently internalised in both environments, as explained by Lickona, who states that cooperation between schools and families is an important aspect in shaping children's character (Hafizallah, 2024). Joint parent-teacher programs, family workshops, and communication platforms can serve as effective bridges for shared responsibility in moral development.

Additionally, issues related to children's developmental and socialization difficulties as well as challenges in value habituation and religiosity – indicate that moral education cannot be separated from broader aspects of child development. Lickona described that character education must be carried out gradually, following the stages of child development, because character education is not only related to moral knowledge, but also moral feelings and moral actions (Husnaini & Parendi, 2022; Nainggolan & Naibaho, 2022; Sholeh et al., 2022). Children who experience delays in speech or social adjustment may require more individualized support to understand and express moral concepts. Similarly, the challenges in habituating religious practices highlight the need for a more participatory, joyful approach that integrates faith-based learning with daily routines rather than rigid instruction.

3.2.3. The expectations of PAUD teachers in strengthening the cultivation of moral values

The findings reveal that teachers in early childhood education settings express a strong need for practical, engaging, and sustainable training programs that can be directly applied in daily learning. This indicates that existing professional development opportunities are often perceived as too theoretical or short-term, providing limited impact on classroom practices. The emphasis on creative media such as storytelling, moral games, and music reflects teachers' awareness that moral values are best internalized by young children through active participation and experiential learning as described by Lickona (Fitri et al., 2024; Maftuna, 2025; Narasid & Rahman, 2025). These findings suggest that character formation should be integrated into play-based and interactive activities rather than delivered through verbal instruction alone.

The demand for continuous and accompanied training shows that teachers value long-term capacity building over one-off seminars. This underscores the need for systematic professional development models that include mentoring, peer sharing, and reflective practice. Such models would allow teachers to gradually develop and refine their moral pedagogy in real classroom contexts. When teachers are provided with ongoing support and feedback, they are better equipped to translate moral concepts into meaningful learning experiences for children (Khorasgani, 2019; Pupíková et al., 2021; Triani & Muslam, 2025).

The interest in thematic workshops focusing on character education, Islamic values, and educational technology reflects the evolving expectations of teachers in the digital era. Teachers recognize that technology can serve as a bridge between traditional moral teachings and the modern learning environment. The integration of digital tools, such as interactive

videos and learning apps can enrich moral instruction and make it more relatable to children's daily experiences (Chu et al., 2024; Undheim, 2022). However, this also calls for careful curation and pedagogical guidance to ensure that digital content remains aligned with educational values (Undheim, 2022).

Equally important, the results emphasize teachers' recognition of the need for strong collaboration with parents in moral education. The home environment plays a critical role in reinforcing values learned at school. When parental guidance and school practices are inconsistent, children may struggle to form stable moral understanding (Hafizallah, 2024; Monica & Sipayung, 2024; Solichah et al., 2024). Therefore, routine parenting programs and shared evaluations between teachers and parents are essential to create value alignment across learning environments.

The teachers' emphasis on their own role as moral exemplars highlights the foundational principle that moral education in early childhood begins with modeling (Fiyul, 2025). According to Bandura, the behaviour of parents, teachers, or peers whom children admire will become role models for children to imitate (Ginting et al., 2025; Khadka, 2024; Maryani et al., 2025). Teachers understand that children learn not only from what is taught but from what they observe daily. Strengthening teachers' personal integrity, reflective awareness, and consistency between words and actions becomes a vital component of character education.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the cultivation of moral values in early childhood at school has been implemented through habituation, modeling, and classroom routines, with respect, responsibility, honesty, discipline, and empathy as the main focus for character formation. However, challenges remain, particularly in children's limited concentration, behavioral diversity, and lack of family support, which require more adaptive, engaging, and developmentally appropriate learning approaches.

This study contributes to strengthening character education in early childhood by emphasizing the innovation of game-based learning, storytelling, and the use of educational technology. Practically, it highlights the need for continuous, practice-oriented teacher training and stronger school – family collaboration to ensure consistent and contextual moral development. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its small sample size and focus on one regional context, which may not fully represent diverse early childhood settings. Future research should involve broader samples and explore the effectiveness of specific moral education strategies through experimental or longitudinal designs.

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