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# Refraction of Alms in Forming Empathetic Character in Early Childhood in RA Raudhatul Jannah

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to describe the application of habituation methods and teachers' efforts to foster empathy in young children through the Almsgiving Friday Alms program at Ra Raudhatul Jannah, Purwakarta City. This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach, with the results showing that the habit of Alms Friday Blessings can foster an attitude of empathy in children, so that schools can sustainably implement this activity. So, based on the results of the research conducted, it can be concluded that the teacher's efforts to foster an empathetic attitude in children at RA Raudhatul Jannah, Purwakarta City through the habituation method and the teacher's efforts to increase the empathetic attitude in children carried out by directly involving children in the Alms Friday Blessings activity succeeded in changing the child's mindset from not caring to caring.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is the main factor determining success in national development. Efforts to make the nation smarter through a national education system that covers all levels of society and includes various types of knowledge and skills need to be taken into account in realizing an independent education system as stated in UU RI No 20 Tahun 2003 (n.d.) concerning the National Education System Chapter II article 3: National Education functions to develop abilities and shape the character and civilization of a dignified nation to educate the nation's life to create the potential of students to become human beings who believe and are devoted to God Almighty. have noble character, be healthy, knowledgeable, creative, independent, and be a democratic and responsible citizen. Early childhood (PAUD) is the generation that will continue their life. Early childhood is a human resource asset that will bring progress and benefits to the life of the nation and state. Early childhood is when children can develop all their potential, because during this period, children's development will be more rapid (Thompson, 2001). Early childhood education (PAUD) is a form of education that focuses on laying the foundation for physical growth and development which includes (fine and gross motor coordination), intelligence which provides for (thinking power, creativity, emotional intelligence, spiritual intelligence), social emotional which provides for (attitudes and behavior as well as religion), and language that is appropriate to the uniqueness and stages of development that young children go through (Wahyuni et al., 2023).

One aspect of child development that is very important is the aspect of emotional intelligence (Kanesan & Fauzan, 2019; Nugraha et al., 2017). One of the social-emotional developments of early childhood is a sense of empathy, an important life skill for children to have, so that someone can connect with others. Some experts state that empathy has two types: affective and cognitive. Affective empathy is found in actions aimed at helping, while cognitive empathy refers to changes in attribution patterns towards other people's behavior. These two components of a person's mental process have their own differences, namely that empathy is now understood as a motivational construct. Meanwhile, developing empathy from an early age becomes the initial basis for prosocial behavior, which includes a sense of justice and moral considerations. From an early age, children react in response to stress experienced by their mothers or other adults they observe in the natural environment.

Instilling an empathetic attitude in children is very important because it can be a child's way of relating to others, getting along with friends, and being a social provision when they grow up. One way to foster empathy in children can be done through habituation by giving alms. Meanwhile, giving alms is one way a servant can get closer to Allah; by giving alms, a person obtains special happiness that cannot be felt in other forms of worship. By giving charity, apart from being loved by Allah, humans will also be loved by others. Charity strengthens ties of brotherhood and increases feelings of love for others.

Based on the discussion of empathetic attitudes, research has found several children whose empathetic attitudes have not yet developed, such as children who do not want to share toys and food, children who make their friends cry for no particular reason, children who steal their friends' toys, children who do not respect other people and children who are indifferent to the surrounding environment. This research aims to improve and foster empathetic character through the refraction method and teacher efforts in cultivating empathetic attitudes in young children through the Alms Friday Blessings program.

## **2. METHODS**

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. What is meant by qualitative methods is research based on the philosophy of positivism used to examine natural objects, where the researcher is the key instrument and data collection is triangulated (combined), data analysis is inductive and qualitative, and the research results place more emphasis on meaning than generalization (Huberman & Miles, 2002). This qualitative research went through stages of interview, observation, and documentation, which researchers at RA Raudhatul Jannah, Pasawahan, Purwakarta carried out. So that researchers can find out whether the Friday Blessing almsgiving program can foster empathy in children. The objects of this research were 13 young children, 13 parents, and one teacher.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1. A Glance at the Character of Empathy and the Habit of Almsgiving**

According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary, characters are psychological traits, morals, or manners that differentiate a person from others (Moeljadi, 2016). Meanwhile, according to the Islamic perspective, theoretical character education has existed since Islam, strengthened by the sending of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, to improve and improve human morals (character). Islamic teachings contain systematic teachings that emphasize faith, worship, and muamalah. This character education must be taught to children as early as possible to create good character and good morals in children.

According to Gottman and DeClaire (1997), empathy is an individual's ability to put oneself in another person's position and respond accordingly. Empathy can also make someone try to see and feel something like how the other person sees and feels it. Empathy is a desire to feel something that someone would think if they were in that person's position, because empathy makes people use their feelings effectively in other people's situations, with the encouragement of their emotions as if they were experiencing that situation. It is essential to instill this empathetic attitude in children because it can be a way for children to relate to other people, socialize with friends, and be a provision for society when they grow up.

The explanation above shows that it is essential to instill an empathetic character in children as early as possible because instilling an empathetic attitude can make them socialize well and always pay attention to their environment, including people in need and others. Alms come from the word *ash-shidq*, which means "righteous" from *shidqon*, which means honesty, telling the truth. Alms is a person's gift to another person, spontaneously and voluntarily, without being limited by time or amount. Almsgiving is also one of the keys to opening the door to good fortune. The greater the alms given, the greater the door of sustenance opened by Allah SWT.

Definition of alms according to experts in (Anita et al., 2024):

- 1) Sayed Mahmudun Nasir, alms are given, namely giving part of one's wealth to poor and needy people because of Allah.
- 2) Amir Ali, alms means a gift to obtain Allah's approval or a future reward. By giving charity, we show that Allah loves and cherishes us.
- 3) According to Muhammad Sanusi, the types of alms are divided into material alms, namely alms through property, and non-material alms (potential), namely alms that are not in material form.

Therefore, empathy is essential in teaching children to give alms; in this case, parents and teachers must be able to provide examples and role models and understand this attitude, so

that students can immediately imitate what their parents and teachers do. The habit of giving alms that is carried out continuously can form an empathetic character in young children by providing an understanding of the dangers of loving the world too much and giving confidence that alms does not make people poor because it carries out one of Allah's commands and makes us human beings with noble character in the eyes of Allah SWT.

### 3.2. Message from the Qur'an regarding the habit of giving alms and the character of empathy in AUD

Thomas Lickona mengemukakan bahwa karakter adalah *"a reliable inner disposition to respond to a situation in a morally good way"*. Furthermore, Lickona adds "Character so conceived has three interrelated parts: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior" (Lickona, 1992). Character includes moral knowledge which includes having moral understanding, understanding moral values, having opinions, having moral reasons, making decisions, having experience and also having feelings that always prioritize conscience, self-confidence, empathy, liking good things. , can manage oneself, be humble, and always do good deeds, that is, can do good, can do good, and have the habit of doing good. The application of all Islamic teachings becomes an example of the character of a Muslim who refers to the example of great morals, especially the character and morals of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, who shows the characteristics of sidiq, tabligh, amanah, and fathana. Meanwhile, the basic sources of law are the Al-Quran and Sunnah. So the habit formation method is very effective in instilling positive values in students, both cognitively, emotionally, and psychometrically.

Character education concerns all groups: family, school, school environment, community, nation, and state. According to Lickona, character education includes three main elements, namely knowing the good (knowing the good), loving the good (desiring the good), and doing good (doing the good). In line with Lickona, Pala defines character education as, *"A national movement creating schools that foster ethical, response, and caring young people by modeling and teaching good character through an emphasis on universal values that we all share"* (Pala, 2011). Education and character formation will not be successful if the educational environment is not sustainable and harmonious. With continuity and harmony throughout the group, the formation of the child's first character will be maximized, and in accordance with the expectations of both parents and the community in their environment.

The Insan Kamil character is a complete human with physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual abilities and the intelligence to solve life's problems. Empathy is the ability to feel someone's emotions before they express them. Rogers first defined empathy in 1959, as stated below (Rogers, 1995).

*"The state of empathy, or being emphatic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the 'as if' condition. Thus, it means to sense the hurt or the pleasure of another as he senses it and perceive the causes thereof as he perceives them, but without ever losing the recognition that it is as if I were hurt or pleased and so forth. If this "as if" quality is lost, then the state is one of identification."*

The keyword in the definition above is "as if" or "if only". In empathy, we see ourselves as another person, who must be able to feel the suffering or joy experienced by that person without losing our identity. Through empathy, people use their emotions effectively in other people's situations by encouraging their feelings as if they were experiencing the problem.

As social creatures, humans must be able to interact with humans and other creatures. As for humans, Allah SWT appointed them to be caliphs on this earth. In these relationships, you must have good character or behavior to balance life. The Koran clearly shows the formation of human personality to become caliphs on this earth, including the character of empathy, where someone can understand other people's thoughts and feelings without having to really relate to those feelings and thoughts.

As for empathetic character education, in the Al-Qur'an, it is found in Surah An-Nisa verse 8 as follows:

وَإِذَا حَضَرَ الْقِسْمَةَ أُولُو الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينُ فَأَرْزُقُوهُمْ مِنْهُ وَقُولُوا لَهُمْ قَوْلًا مَعْرُوفًا

"If relatives, orphans, or poor people are present during the distribution, give them (just enough) and say good words to them" (Qomari, 2007).

Alms means a gift given by someone as a virtue that hopes for the pleasure of Allah SWT and a reward alone (Amalia, 2014). Meanwhile, the general meaning of alms is to include all good deeds and abandoning evil deeds. This shows the truth of submission to Allah and is also proof of the believer's faith in the truth of his faith. The meaning of alms has a vast scope, starting from the simplest things, such as a smile, kind words, greetings, and good deeds to others, all of which are worth alms. If the habit is about giving alms, the teacher should be diligent in giving alms, to provide an example for students; we must be diligent and explain to students the benefits of giving alms. Teachers collaborate with parents to raise awareness, provide similar examples, and support activities. In this way, students' souls will be anchored in the truth that giving charity is a good thing to do anytime and anywhere. Then the habit will become one that grows in the student's soul. They will diligently give alms whenever and wherever without any coercion from anyone.

### **3.3. Habituation Method in Cultivating Children's Empathy at RA Raudhatul Jannah**

The method teachers use to foster a sense of empathy in children is the habituation method. The habituation method is an activity that is done regularly and continuously to train children to have certain habits, which are explained from an Islamic perspective. Seven character values can be internalized in children. The seven-character values include empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance, and justice Eisenberg & Mussen (1989). The habits carried out at RA Raudhatul Jannah involve teaching children always to say sorry, please, and thank you, sentences such as thayyibah (Bismillah, Alhamdulillah, Subhanallah, Masyaallah, etc.). According to Ulfah et al. (2019) in his research, when the prayer is finished, the child goes home to meet his people (usually his parents and grandfather or grandmother) by smiling, saying hello, and greeting them. When you want to go home by vehicle, don't forget that the teacher directs the child to pray while riding. Another habit that schools implement to foster empathy senses that children are taught to want to share lunch with friends who don't bring food, to take turns playing, to queue and wait patiently for their turn. This case also shows that teachers can be student role models. In line with Syakir & Hasmin (2017), instilling character education values will be meaningful if these values can be implemented in everyday life. Therefore, the values of character education place greater emphasis on children's habits of doing positive things and the role models or examples set by teachers. These habits and examples will then become a character that makes an impression and is embedded in the child's soul.

In this case, it is known that there are aspects of social-emotional development that need to be developed in early childhood, including: prosocial behavior, including the ability to play with peers, understand feelings, respond, share, and respect the rights and opinions of others, cooperative, tolerant, and behave politely. If this is instilled from an early age, then

in the future the child will become someone with good character, morals, noble character, and able to understand the feelings and sadness of other people. It is essential to instill an empathetic attitude in children. This attitude can be developed through good habits carried out deliberately and repeatedly because habits will impact children to think, act, and pretend as expected in the future (Ulfah et al., 2019).

### 3.4. Teachers' Efforts to Cultivate Empathy in Children at RA Raudhatul Jannah

At RA Raudhatul Jannah, several efforts made by teachers to foster empathy in children include:

#### 3.4.1. Teaching children to save sincerely

The teacher's effort to teach children to save sincerely is so that children will set aside their pocket money at home and take it with them every Friday during the Dhuha prayer activities (see **Figure 1**), and then put the money in a box. Each child has their own savings box, which is kept at school. When saving, children are taught to intend to give the money to people experiencing poverty. After the savings are collected, they will be distributed to people experiencing poverty around the RA Raudhatul Jannah neighborhood at the end of the month. The distribution of the savings money takes the form of providing food to the poor in the Alms Friday Blessings school program.

Etymologically, sincerity can mean clean (clean, clear, pure from mixtures and pollution, both material and immaterial). Meanwhile, terminologically, sincerity means honesty of a servant of His in self-confidence or beliefs and actions directed only to Allah. Allah and not because he expects personal gain (internal or external) from him. There are several opinions of scholars regarding the definition of sincerity:

- 1) In the opinion of Abu Talib al-Makki, quoted by Chizanah (2011), sincerity means purifying religion from desires and deviant actions, actions from potential diseases and imperfections, speech from useless words, and the personality by doing what Allah wills.
- 2) Al-Ghazali (1989) believes that pathological actions are carried out in the hope of receiving a reward from heaven. In fact, charity only wants the face of Allah SWT. And that is a sign of a person's genuine sincerity (al-siddiqiin), especially absolute sincerity.

According to the definition above, sincerity is a pure heart in worship or charity to reach God. Sincerity is an atmosphere of obligation that reflects the inner motivation to worship Allah and purifies the soul from the tendency to carry out actions that do not lead to Allah. In the sense of sincerity, it means sincerity in the intention to act purely for the benefit of Allah. A person is said to be sincere when acting is always motivated by the intention to serve God and the form of the action. The truth of the act itself can be accounted for based on Sharia law. This kind of nature always manifests itself in the dimensions of thought and action. In connection with the concept of sincerity in early childhood, young children need to be introduced and given an understanding of the concept of sincerity, so that when children help their peers, help teachers, and the people around them, they do not expect anything in return but are sincere because of Allah SWT.



**Figure 1.** Children are setting aside their pocket money.

### **3.5. Teaching children about the importance of sharing with other people who need it and being tolerant of their surroundings**

The teacher's effort to teach children about the importance of sharing with others in need is through the Alms Friday Blessings school program. The Blessing Friday Alms Program is one of the flagship programs at RA Raudhatul Jannah. This program started from the school's concern for underprivileged residents around RA Raudhatul Jannah. The Blessing Friday Alms Program can run thanks to the sincere savings of RA Raudhatul Jannah's children. The savings are turned into rice boxes cooked by parents of students who are active and willing to spend their time in this activity.

The children distributed the rice box packages directly to underprivileged residents. They went to the homes of old widows, older people, orphans, and other needy people around RA Raudhatul Jannah and handed over aid from their own savings. This aims to enable children to see the situation of underprivileged residents so that a sense of empathy and concern for their shortcomings arises. Another goal is for children to understand and interpret that the sincere savings they make daily provide blessings to other people in need. With this activity, RA Raudhatul Jannah's children realize that sharing with others is rewarding.

Nugraha et al. (2017) also conducted similar research on Early Childhood Empathy Abilities. The study was conducted at the PGRI SID Sartika Kindergarten, Cineam District. In their research, (Nugraha et al., 2017) discussed children's empathy abilities in the aspect of children's concern and sensitivity towards the surrounding environment, namely the emphasis on tolerance and sensitivity. Children's concern is being able to comfort a friend who is sad/crying, asking about the sadness their friend is experiencing, and trying to cheer them up. Tolerance in children's attitudes in terms of having awareness of the consequences of an action, apologizing when they make a mistake, apologizing when their friends make a mistake, accepting the consequences when they make a mistake or being right, being able to see that friends are the same, and sharing food with friends without choosing. Children's tolerance attitude is respecting friends' opinions, listening to friends' views, and respecting or appreciating friends' work (Nugraha et al., 2017).

Tolerance and being tolerant are narratives that circulate and are taken up by the children in the "inclusive" classroom (Watson, 2017). Being tolerant is viewed positively as a shared and beneficial storyline for inclusiveness in the school. However, when examined more closely and critically, tolerance can, and does, function in many other ways. Tolerance is often typically conceived of as an individual virtue, producing a degree of integrity for the tolerator and, in contrast, a position of deviance for the tolerated (Brown, 2006). Although tolerance has multiple and fluid definitions, the term implies a magnanimous act or capacity for enduring something or someone in this paper. The practice of tolerance blends goodness and generosity with judgment and aversion. It can articulate one's identity and one's

difference as well as one's belonging and marginality (Brown, 2006). Tolerance is an exercise of power and a political practice enacted by the unmarked children. Tolerance does things. The exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome".

### **3.6. Obstacles Experienced by Teachers in Fostering Empathy in Children at RA Raudhatul Jannah**

According to Hurlock (1970), empathy is a person's ability to understand other people's feelings and emotions and imagine oneself in someone else's place. Then, according to Ministerial Regulation Number 137 of 2014 concerning National Standards for Early Childhood Education, children show empathetic attitudes, play with peers, understand friends' feelings naturally, share with others, respect others, and show tolerance. Therefore, the role of parents and teachers is vital in developing empathy in young children. If there is a problem with a child's empathy, it must be evaluated as early as possible so that the child grows up as a prosocial human being, not antisocial.

The implementation of the Alms Friday Blessings program, which aims to foster empathy in children at RA Raudhatul Jannah, was initially questioned by parents. This is because they object to contributing every month to this program. So, schools and teachers try to provide explanations and motivations in Islamic teachings regarding the benefits of alms. In the teachings of Islam, there are 3 (three) benefits of giving alms, namely:

- 1) Children do not have stinginess,
- 2) Children want to help lighten other people's burdens,
- 3) Children have a sincere nature.

Meanwhile, Friday in Islamic teachings is also called "sayyidul ayyam," meaning the leader of the day or a special day by Allah SWT. With the explanation and motivation provided by the school, parents finally opened their hearts and minds. Hence, they decided to participate and cooperate in cooking rice box packages for the Friday Blessing Alms program. To see the success of the Friday Berkah Alms program activities, researchers created a questionnaire, which was given in an interview session with parents at RA Raudhatul Jannah. From the results of these interviews, data was compiled that the Blessing Friday activities held at the school received a positive response. All correspondents stated that they agreed to this program. They agree that this program has many benefits, including: helping people experiencing poverty and orphans, fostering children's sense of caring and empathy for other people, and children learning to share their sincerity from the sincere savings program. Parents (correspondents) were happy because their children saw changes in their attitudes to be better and more caring towards others after implementing this program; therefore, they hoped this program could continue with broader targets.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

It is essential to teach children the character of empathy as early as possible because instilling an empathetic attitude can help children socialize well and make children always pay attention to the environment around them, including people in need and others. So, based on the results of the research conducted, it can be concluded that teachers' efforts to foster an empathetic attitude in children at RA Raudhatul Jannah, Purwakarta City, through habituation methods and teacher efforts to increase empathetic attitudes in children are carried out by directly involving children in the Friday Blessing Alms activities and succeeded in changing the child's attitude from not caring to caring. Empathetic attitudes emerge and develop well in early childhood at RA Raudhatul Jannah. So, the effect is that children

positively influence parents' attitudes and perspectives towards the Alms Friday Blessings program at school. Parents are the prominent supporters in this program by cooking food for the rice box packages distributed to underprivileged residents during the Friday Blessing Almsgiving.

From the results of the research that has been carried out above, the researcher would like to provide several suggestions that can be taken into consideration in forming an empathetic attitude in early childhood at RA Raudhatul Jannah, namely that teachers can create other social activities, such as inviting them to orphanages, or bringing in a community of street children, so that the reach of distribution of aid from children can provide wider benefits.

## **5. AUTHORS' NOTE**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article and confirm that the paper is free of plagiarism.

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