

Holistic and Spiritual Approaches in Early Childhood Character Education: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation of tawhid-based holistic learning in shaping early childhood character at TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal 75. The research employed a qualitative case study design involving the principal, teachers, and four children as participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and participatory observations of daily learning activities. The findings indicate that the integration of the national curriculum and the Aisyiyah Islamic curriculum was implemented consistently through religious habituation, teacher role modeling, thematic instruction, and play-based learning activities. These practices contributed to children's cognitive, language, socio-emotional, and motor development while fostering character values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, empathy, and politeness. The study also found that children's developmental outcomes were influenced by emotional readiness, family support, and individual developmental differences. In addition, challenges related to inclusive education, parental academic expectations, and teacher welfare affected the effectiveness of the learning process. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of collaboration among schools, families, and policymakers in supporting holistic early childhood education grounded in spiritual and Islamic values

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is foundational for shaping character and holistic development, influencing future quality of life. It plays a role in fostering cognitive, socio-emotional, language, moral, and motor development. Early childhood, often called the golden age, is when brain development accelerates and requires sustainable stimulation (Yusuf, 2023; Amiliya & Susanti, 2024). Therefore, programs should be holistic, enjoyable, and attuned to developmental needs to optimize child development. Adatul'aisy et al. (2023) noted that activities that engage motor skills, encourage creativity, and offer direct experiences greatly benefit developmental outcomes.

In Indonesia, where the majority is Muslim, integrating Islamic values, especially tawhid, in early childhood education is increasingly prioritized. Education is tasked with cultivating not only intellectual growth but also strong spiritual and moral foundations (Durkheim, 2012). Islamic-affiliated institutions like Aisyiyah gain a strategic role in implementing such integration through curriculum and daily practices that internalize Islamic teachings.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of character education during early childhood. Nurkhalizah (2023) found that storytelling activities using Sasak folktales effectively instilled character values such as responsibility, independence, honesty, religiosity, and cooperation among kindergarten children. These findings demonstrate that culturally grounded learning media can be effective tools for character development in early childhood settings. Similarly, Rahmawati (2024) reported that tawhid-based learning models supported by active parental involvement significantly influenced the formation of children's character, with parental support emerging as the most dominant factor in strengthening character education outcomes.

In addition to educational settings, children's development is also closely associated with parenting styles and family environments. Tamwif and Akbar (2023) revealed that democratic parenting practices have a strong positive relationship with the development of children's moral-religious values, socio-emotional competencies, language skills, cognitive abilities, and physical-motor development. This finding indicates that parental involvement through appropriate parenting approaches is essential for supporting children's educational success both at home and in formal educational institutions. Furthermore, Yunita et al. (2022) demonstrated that project-based illustrated storytelling media effectively improved vocabulary mastery among young children with speech delays. This study underlines the importance of multisensory and contextual learning approaches in addressing language development challenges in early childhood.

Despite these advances, implementing early childhood education, including tawhid-based character education, continues to face several challenges. Hazizah et al. (2025) identified that the ability of children aged five to six years to recognize numerical symbols remained relatively low due to limited use of engaging learning media and children's low self-confidence. These findings suggest the need for innovation in teaching methods and instructional media to increase children's motivation and active participation in learning activities.

Although numerous studies have examined character education, tawhid-based learning, and early childhood development separately, few explore how tawhid values are comprehensively integrated into daily learning practices in early childhood education institutions. In addition, research investigating the simultaneous impact of such integration across multiple dimensions of children's development remains scarce. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring in depth the learning practices implemented at TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal 75, an early childhood education institution that has consistently integrated the national curriculum with an Islamic-based curriculum since its establishment.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the implementation of holistic learning integrated with tawhid values in shaping the character of early childhood students at TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal 75. The study also seeks to identify best practices for supporting children's cognitive, language, socio-emotional, and motor development, while exploring the challenges the institution faces in carrying out its educational mission, particularly in supporting children with special needs and managing parental expectations. It is expected that this research will contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of holistic early childhood education models grounded in spiritual and Islamic values.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in depth the implementation of holistic learning and character development practices at TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal 75. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables researchers to understand complex educational phenomena within their natural settings (Creswell, 2017). The case study design was used to examine the learning practices implemented in the institution comprehensively and contextually (Yin, 2018).

The research was conducted at TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal 75, an early childhood education institution under the Aisyiyah Muhammadiyah organization. The site was selected purposively due to its distinctive integration of the national curriculum with Islamic-based education grounded in tawhid values. Research participants consisted of the principal, teachers, and four children who became the focus of participatory observation.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and participatory observation. Interviews with the principal and teachers were conducted to obtain information regarding the institution's educational vision, curriculum implementation, teaching methods, and challenges in early childhood education practices. Participatory observations were carried out to examine daily learning activities, teacher-child interactions, and children's developmental behaviors in various educational settings, including classroom learning, religious activities, and play-based activities.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques following the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Alhojailan & Ibrahim, 2012). Interview data were transcribed verbatim, while observation results were documented in field notes. The researcher then

conducted coding processes to identify emerging themes related to the integration of tawhid values and holistic learning practices in early childhood character development.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and institutional documentation. In addition, the findings were interpreted and discussed in relation to relevant theories and previous studies on early childhood education, character education, and Islamic-based learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal 75 implements a holistic learning approach that systematically integrates tawhid values into early childhood education practices. The integration is reflected not only in the formal curriculum structure but also in daily routines, teacher-child interactions, and the overall school culture. The institution combines the national curriculum with the Islamic curriculum developed by Aisyiyah, enabling children to develop cognitive, language, motor, and socio-emotional competencies while simultaneously strengthening their spiritual and moral character.

The integration of tawhid values is implemented through daily habituation activities such as prayer practices, memorization of daily supplications, introduction to the pillars of Islam and faith, and Islamic storytelling. Rather than relying solely on verbal instruction, teachers internalize these values through repetition, role modeling, and consistent practice in children's everyday experiences. This approach supports the argument proposed by Supiyardi et al. (2024), which emphasizes that effective character education should involve moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral actions within real-life contexts. The findings also support previous studies indicating that tawhid-based learning provides a strong foundation for character formation when implemented consistently in early childhood settings (Sutiana & Nugraha, 2025; Kaputra et al., 2022).

Learning activities at the institution are designed based on the principle of learning through play. Thematic learning is delivered through educational games, art activities, environmental exploration, and fine- and gross-motor activities (Suherman et al., 2021). These activities not only stimulate children's cognitive development but also encourage cooperation, empathy, discipline, responsibility, and communication skills (Nelsen, 2011). Through collaborative play and guided interaction, children learn to regulate emotions, take turns, and respect others. These findings are consistent with those of Valdez et al. (2024), who highlighted the effectiveness of experiential and story-based learning in fostering character development among young children.

The study also identified variations in children's developmental progress. Children who demonstrated better emotional regulation and received adequate support from their family environments tended to show more optimal development across cognitive, social, language, and motor domains. These children were generally more active in classroom participation, capable of following instructions, and able to interact positively with peers and teachers.

This finding reinforces Tan et al. (2025) argument that parenting style and family involvement strongly influence children's developmental outcomes.

In contrast, children who experienced difficulties in emotional regulation and concentration struggled to maintain attention during classroom activities and to manage impulsive behaviors. Although some children demonstrated adequate cognitive potential, emotional and behavioral difficulties affected their participation in learning activities. This finding indicates that emotional readiness plays an important role in successful early childhood learning processes (Blair, 2002). Therefore, educational approaches in early childhood settings should not focus solely on academic achievement but also prioritize emotional and social development.

Another important finding concerns the challenges associated with supporting children with special needs. Teachers attempted to provide individualized guidance, sensory-motor stimulation, and intensive assistance to children experiencing developmental delays. However, limited access to professional services, administrative barriers, and socioeconomic constraints among families reduced the effectiveness of intervention efforts. These findings align with Kelly and Phillips (2022), who emphasized the importance of multisensory learning approaches and systemic support in addressing developmental and language barriers in early childhood education.

The study further revealed parental pressure regarding children's early literacy and numeracy abilities. Some parents still perceive educational success primarily in terms of children's abilities to read, write, and count, rather than through broader developmental readiness and character formation. This situation creates tension between developmentally appropriate educational practices and parental expectations. In reality, early childhood education should prioritize holistic child development rather than emphasizing academic achievement prematurely (Black et al., 2017).

The role of teachers emerged as a central factor in the successful implementation of holistic learning based on tawhid values. Teachers function not only as educators but also as emotional facilitators, moral role models, and developmental companions for children (Maharani et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the findings also highlighted concerns regarding teacher welfare. Heavy workloads combined with limited financial compensation may affect teachers' psychological well-being and professional sustainability. This condition demonstrates that the quality of early childhood education cannot be separated from structural support and policies that promote teacher professionalism and welfare.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that integrating tawhid values into holistic learning practices positively contributes to children's character formation and overall development. However, the effectiveness of implementation is influenced by multiple factors, including children's individual readiness, family support, institutional capacity, and teacher welfare. Therefore, holistic early childhood education grounded in spiritual values requires continuous collaboration among schools, families, communities, and policymakers to ensure sustainable and meaningful educational outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal 75 has implemented a holistic learning approach with tawhid values in early childhood education. Islamic values are integrated into daily activities, school culture, and teacher-child interactions. This approach contributes to children's cognitive, language, socio-emotional, motor, and character development. Character values like honesty, discipline, responsibility, empathy, cooperation, and politeness developed through habituation, role modeling, play-based learning, and religious activities.

The findings also demonstrate that holistic learning in early childhood education is most effective when supported by positive emotional development, family involvement, and consistent educational practices. Children who received adequate support from both school and family environments showed better developmental outcomes than those experiencing emotional or developmental difficulties. This indicates that early childhood education should emphasize balanced development rather than focusing solely on academic achievement.

However, the study identified several challenges in implementing holistic, tawhid-based education, particularly in supporting children with special needs, managing parental expectations regarding early academic skills, and addressing limitations in teacher welfare and access to professional services. These challenges highlight the importance of strengthening collaboration among educational institutions, families, communities, and policymakers in order to create supportive and inclusive learning environments for young children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed for educational institutions, teachers, parents, and policymakers to strengthen holistic early childhood education grounded in tawhid values. Early childhood education institutions should integrate spiritual values into daily activities through consistent habituation, play-based learning, and meaningful teacher-child interactions. Schools must create inclusive learning systems that address individual developmental differences, including children with developmental or emotional challenges. Provide teachers with ongoing professional development in holistic learning, classroom management, emotional support, and inclusive education. Strengthening teachers' competencies ensures that learning supports children's academic, socio-emotional, and moral growth. Third, parental involvement should be strengthened through active communication and collaboration between schools and families. Parents need to be encouraged to support children's emotional, moral, and social development at home rather than focusing primarily on early academic achievement, such as reading, writing, and counting skills. Consistency between school and family environments is important for optimizing children's developmental outcomes. Policymakers must provide more institutional and financial support for early childhood education, especially to improve teacher welfare, professional services, and inclusive facilities for children with special needs. Implement policies that sustain and improve holistic early education programs. Future research should examine the long-term impact of tawhid-based

holistic learning on children's character and development across educational settings and sociocultural contexts. Study larger participant groups and multiple institutions to gain broader insights into spiritually grounded early childhood education.

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