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STRENGTHENING RELIGIOUS AND MORAL VALUES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: A STUDY AT SAYMARA KINDERGARTEN

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ABSTRACT

Background: Internalizing religious and moral values, which will guide attitudes and actions, is a crucial aspect at this stage. Religious and moral education not only shapes children's spirituality but also helps them understand the concepts of right and wrong from an early age; **Purpose of the Study:** This study aims to examine strategies for strengthening religious and moral values applied in the practice of early childhood education institutions; **Method:** This study used a descriptive qualitative approach. The research location was Kartasura Kindergarten, Sukoharjo, Central Java, which applies a thematic-integrative approach to learning. The research subjects included two class teachers and four children aged 4–6 years. The research informants were the principal and five parents of students, as part of data triangulation. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data were analyzed using a thematic approach based on the model of Miles et al.; **Results:** The strengthening of religious and moral values at Saymara Kindergarten is reflected in its vision, mission, goals, work programs, and learning activities. These are implemented through unstructured, non-teaching activities, from the moment children enter the school gate until they leave for home. Furthermore, this learning process is further strengthened through both individual and social activities; and **Conclusion:** religious and moral values are instilled through both unstructured non-learning and more structured learning activities. Both are integrated and reinforce each other, providing children with a strong foundation to face the challenging and unpredictable future.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood development is a crucial period as it lays the essential foundation for shaping a holistic individual character in the future. This stage is often referred to as the golden age, characterized by rapid growth in physical, cognitive, and social-emotional aspects, as well as moral and spiritual values (Suyadi, 2015). Hurlock (1978) argued that the initial five years of a child's life establish the groundwork for future growth. During this period, a key focus is the internalization of religious and moral values, which serve as guidelines for attitudes and behaviors. Teaching religious and moral values not only shapes children's spirituality but also helps them understand the concepts of right and wrong at an early age. Besides shaping individual character, these values also guide them in social interactions and ethical decisions later in life (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). The Indonesian national education system emphasizes religious and moral values, as outlined in the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 137 of 2014 concerning National Standards for Early Childhood Education. This regulation highlights the importance of nurturing spiritual and socio-emotional development (Kemendikbud RI, 2014).

Research in Indonesia indicates that approaches rooted in local religion and culture are effective in instilling moral values in early childhood. For example, Karmila et al. (2024) found that using folktales that include Islamic values in early childhood education (PAUD/Kindergarten) enhances children's understanding of moral values and helps develop their social and language skills. Additionally, character education started early has a significant effect on children's social behavior (Rustini, 2018). Research by Aslinda & Pratiwi (2024) revealed that moral value strengthening programs in early childhood education (PAUD) positively impact children's prosocial behaviors, including honesty, responsibility, courtesy, respect, caring, and patience. Nonetheless, challenges such as insufficient teacher training and inconsistent implementation continue to pose obstacles (Ambariani & Suryana, 2022).

Strengthening religious and moral values requires environmental support, as shown in the following research. The development of religious and moral values in children aged 4-5 years does not yet meet the standards due to several environmental factors, including children imitating immoral scenes (Sa'adah et al., 2024) and the impact of the environment on early childhood religious and moral development (Juita, 2024). Moral growth in children can happen through direct education, imitation, experimentation with close adult figures (Khaironi & Yuliastri, 2017), and parental attention in teaching religious and moral values to children (Margaretha, 2020).

The research identified three key findings: so far, value-based learning for early childhood has involved understanding religious symbols, routine worship practices, and daily prayers, while moral development is fostered through fairy tales that promote good values. Understanding and strengthening religious moral values in early childhood are carried out in different ways depending on each school's needs. This study also highlights some weaknesses in teaching religious and moral values to early childhood. These include routine activities that may obscure children's understanding and a lack of enthusiasm caused by unsuitable approaches that do not align with their ages and psychological growth. Using teaching methods that do not consider children's psychology can result in a distorted and superficial grasp of religious and moral values. To teach these values effectively and sustainably, a comprehensive and varied approach

is necessary that addresses each child's unique needs and characteristics (Istiyani et al., 2024).

Research shows that, in some countries, moral education employs various methods. In the United States, Lickona (1991) proposed a character education model based on three elements: moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral actions. In Singapore, moral education is incorporated into a values-based curriculum, such as respect and responsibility, taught through practical activities (Tan & Wong, 2010; Wei & Chin, 2004). However, this approach is often secular, with little focus on religious aspects, unlike countries with strong religious values.

Research findings differ across Asian countries. In Malaysia, emphasizing religious and moral values in preschoolers helps establish a religious self-identity and develop moral values, which aligns with Kohlberg's initial stage of moral judgment: acting out of fear of punishment and avoiding upsetting adults, particularly parents (Karim, 2022). Research in Iran identified a different model that integrates traditional Islamic teachings with modern programs. This approach fosters a collective commitment to holistic development and supports early childhood well-being, allowing children greater freedom and autonomy while remaining aligned with religious principles (Irvani & Daneshmand, 2025).

Teaching religious and moral values to early childhood faces inevitable challenges. Globalization and modernization frequently introduce new values that may conflict with religious teachings (Pulungan, 2024). Factors such as a consumerist lifestyle, digital media, and limited parental attention can obstruct this educational process (Steiner-Adair & Barker, 2024).

Furthermore, there is still a gap in the integrated approach that combines religious and moral learning in a contextual and holistic way. Therefore, early childhood education programs need to emphasize religious and moral values early on through a practical and engaging method. This article aims to outline strategies for enhancing religious and moral values in early childhood education institutions.

B. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method. The research took place at Kartasura Kindergarten in Sukoharjo, Central Java, which implements a thematic-integrative approach to learning. The subjects were two classroom teachers and four children aged 4–6 years. The principal and five parents acted as informants for data triangulation.

Data were gathered through participatory observation of religious and moral learning activities and teacher-child interactions. Direct observations took place during these activities to see how strategies were applied in the classroom. In-depth interviews with teachers and parents were conducted to examine the strategies, supported by documentation such as learning materials, Lesson Plans (RPPH), Religious and Moral Values (NAM) curriculum guides, and media used in religious and moral activities. Three data collection methods were used simultaneously as part of a framework for triangulation.

Data were analyzed using a thematic approach, following the Miles et al. (2014) model, which encompasses data reduction, presentation, and conclusion. The validity

of the data was enhanced by triangulating sources (teachers, principals, and parents) and methods (interviews, observation, and document analysis).

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Saymara Inclusive Early Childhood Education (PAUD), also known as Saymara Kindergarten (TK Saymara), is situated in Ngabeyan, Kartasura, Sukoharjo, Central Java. This school is situated in a residential neighborhood, making it easily accessible to the local community. The area is also rapidly growing due to several commercial and residential developments, making it an ideal location for various educational facilities, including an inclusive kindergarten. It is approximately 2 kilometers from the supermarket, terminal, and Kartasura district office. The inclusive kindergarten is equipped with facilities that are friendly to children with special needs and support the development of children with diverse abilities.

Saymara Kindergarten was established to meet the increasing need for schools catering to children with special needs in the Kartasura area, particularly, and Sukoharjo in general. This is reflected in its founding vision, explained as follows.

The vision is to establish Saymara Inclusive Kindergarten as a recognized educational institution, fostering the growth and development of young children with Islamic character, intelligence, innovation, creativity, and independence, preparing them to face the next level of education. The vision is outlined in the following five missions:

1. Organizing character education for early childhood to instill Islamic values, noble morals, patriotism, and an entrepreneurial spirit.
2. Organizing multiple intelligence-based educational programs to enhance children's intelligence based on their interests for optimal early childhood growth and development.
3. Providing quality education for children with special needs that is tailored to the child's talents and abilities to ensure their equal right to education.
4. Organizing early childhood education to develop socio-emotional aspects and independence to prepare them for education at the next level.
5. Providing holistic and integrative Early Childhood Education Services (D-1).

The vision and mission above can be related as shown in the following table.

No.	Keywords of Vision	Missions
1.	Islamic character	Organizing character education for early childhood to instill Islamic values, noble morals, patriotism, and an entrepreneurial spirit.
2.	Intelligent	Organizing multiple intelligence-based educational programs to enhance children's intelligence based on their

		interests for optimal early childhood growth and development.
3.	Innovative	Providing quality education for children with special needs that is tailored to the child's talents and abilities to ensure their equal right to education.
4.	Creative	Providing holistic and integrative Early Childhood Education Services.
5.	Independent	Organizing early childhood education to develop socio-emotional aspects and independence to prepare them for education at the next level.

Table 1 shows that Saymara Kindergarten establishes missions in accordance with the keywords in its vision. The operational dimensions of the missions align with the established vision.

The goals of Saymara Kindergarten are as follows:

1. Producing a generation with Islamic character, noble morals, patriotism, and an entrepreneurial spirit.
2. Producing students with optimal growth and development, supported by multiple intelligences according to their talents and potential.
3. Producing students with special needs who have independent characters, achieve optimal growth according to their interests and talents, and receive their rights like other normal children.
4. Producing creative and innovative students through early childhood education programs that align with child development needs, contemporary trends, and societal demands.
5. Producing students with independent character, good socio-emotional development, and readiness to continue their education at the next level. (D-2)

Those goals can be related to the vision of the school, as outlined in the following table.

Table 2. Relation of Vision and Goals of Saymara Kindergarten		
No	Keywords of Vision	Goals
1.	Islamic character	Producing a generation with Islamic character, noble morals, patriotism, and an entrepreneurial spirit.
2.	Intelligent	Producing students with optimal growth and development, supported by multiple intelligences according to their talents and potential.
3.	Innovative	Producing students with special needs who have independent characters, achieve optimal growth according

	to their interests and talents, and receive their rights like other normal children.
4. Creative	Producing creative and innovative students through early childhood education programs that align with child development needs, contemporary trends, and societal demands.
5. Independent	Producing students with independent character, good socio-emotional development, and readiness to continue their education at the next level.

Table 2 illustrates the connection between the vision and the institution's goals. The goal is to establish Saymara Kindergarten as a non-formal educational institution that emphasizes the development of Islamic values, intelligence, innovation, creativity, and independence in children. It aims to enhance children's growth and development and nurture each child's multiple intelligences from an early age. This will produce a generation of future leaders who are well-prepared and adaptable to current advancements, ready to face the next level of education.

The vision emphasizes optimizing children's growth and development, as well as enhancing their multiple intelligences from an early age, as outlined in two of the four missions.

- a) Organizing multiple intelligence-based educational programs to enhance children's intelligence based on their interests for optimal early childhood growth and development.
- b) Providing quality education for children with special needs that is tailored to the child's talents and abilities to ensure their equal right to education.

The goal is to establish Saymara Kindergarten as a non-formal educational institution that emphasizes the development of Islamic values, intelligence, innovation, creativity, and independence in children, optimizing their growth and fostering multiple intelligences in early childhood. This aims to produce the next generation of the nation who are qualified according to current developments and prepared to continue their education at the next level.

The goal of Saymara Kindergarten is to develop a new generation with the following skills: (1) self-confidence and independence in creativity, and (2) concern for the environment. These two objectives are achieved through learning activities that promote religious values and morals, which include practices such as daily prayer, keeping the environment clean (tidying up after playing, community service for cleaning the environment, etc.), disposing of trash properly, and cultivating good manners.

The relationship between the institution's missions and goals is provided in the following table.

Table 3. Relation of Missions and Goals of Saymara Kindergarten

No	Missions	Goals
1.	Organizing character education for early childhood to instill Islamic values, noble morals, patriotism, and an entrepreneurial spirit.	Producing a generation with Islamic character, noble morals, patriotism, and an entrepreneurial spirit.
2.	Organizing multiple intelligence-based educational programs to enhance children's intelligence based on their interests for optimal early childhood growth and development.	Producing students with optimal growth and development, supported by multiple intelligences according to their talents and potential.
3.	Providing quality education for children with special needs that is tailored to the child's talents and abilities to ensure their equal right to education	Producing students with special needs who have independent characters, achieve optimal growth according to their interests and talents, and receive their rights like other normal children.
4.	Organizing early childhood education to develop socio-emotional aspects and independence to prepare them for education at the next level	Producing creative and innovative students through early childhood education programs that align with child development needs, contemporary trends, and societal demands.
5.	Providing holistic and integrative Early Childhood Education Services.	Producing students with independent character, good socio-emotional development, and readiness to continue their education at the next level.

Table 3 shows a relationship between the institution's mission and objectives. Achieving these objectives is reinforced in the Teaching Module, which addresses Identity as follows.

- a. Show behavior that demonstrates independence.
- b. Comply with the rules that apply at home, school, and in the community.
- c. Producing students with special needs who have independent characters, achieve optimal growth according to their interests and talents, and receive their rights like other normal children.
- d. Producing creative and innovative students through early childhood education programs that align with child development needs, contemporary trends, and societal demands.

In short, the synchronization of the vision, mission, and objectives can be seen in the following table.

Table 4. Supporting power between Keywords in Vision, Missions, and Goals

Keywords in Vision	Reflection of the Missions	Reflection of the Goals
Optimizing the growth and development of early childhood		Producing students with optimal growth and development, supported by multiple intelligences according to their talents and potential.
Islamic Character	Organizing character education for early childhood to instill Islamic values, noble morals, patriotism, and an entrepreneurial spirit.	Producing a generation with Islamic character, noble morals, patriotism, and an entrepreneurial spirit.
Intelligent	Providing quality education for children with special needs that is tailored to the child's talents and abilities to ensure their equal right to education.	
Innovative	Organizing innovative and creative education programs for early childhood that aligns with child development needs, contemporary trends, and societal demands.	Producing creative and innovative students through early childhood education programs that align with child development needs, contemporary trends, and societal demands.
Creative	Organizing an innovative and creative education program for early childhood that aligns with child development needs, contemporary trends, and societal demands.	Producing creative and innovative students through early childhood education programs that align with child development needs, contemporary trends, and societal demands.
Independent		Producing students with special needs who have independent characters, achieve optimal growth according to their interests

		and talents, and receive their rights like other normal children.
Ready to face the next level of education	Organizing early childhood education to develop socio-emotional aspects and independence, to prepare them for education at the next level.	Producing students with independent character, good socio-emotional development, and readiness to continue their education at the next level.

Table 4 displays the Islamic keywords found in the Vision, Missions, and Goals, with details included in the work program, covering both learning and non-learning aspects. The vision and mission demonstrate that the kindergarten strives to cultivate students with faith and good character. To accomplish this, the institution implements a curriculum on Religion and Noble Morals based on the provisions of the Ministry of National Education, outlined in Regulation of the Minister of National Education No. 58, concerning Early Childhood Education Standards. The head of Saymara Kindergarten stated, „The curriculum used by this institution refers to the Regulation of the Minister of National Education on Early Childhood Education Standards, and a curriculum that is local content.“ (W-KS.1)

The achievement of the vision, missions, and goals is supported by resources with a total of 7 teachers with the following details:

Table 5. Condition of Teachers and Staff at Saymara Kindergarten of Kartasura

No.	Name	Educational Background	Title	Certification Status
1	Sri Rejeki	S-I PAUD	Headmaster	Current
2	Ika Dewi Istinganah	S-I PAUD	Teacher	Current
3	Nesya Diah A.S.	S-I PAUD	Teacher	Current
4	Diyah Rahmawati	S-I PAUD	Teacher	Current
5	Ratih shofi	S-I PAUD	Teacher	Current
6	Amelia Rahmawati	S-I Community Health	Teacher	In Progress
7	Anisa Siti Rochani	S-I PAUD	Teacher	Current
8	Ambarsari	D3- Therapy	Special Class Teacher	In Progress
9	Januari Iswati	S-I PAUD	Teacher	Current
10	Gina Dwidya	S-I Psychology	Teacher	Current
11	Hanifah Nitasari	S-I PAUD	Teacher and Admin	Current
12	Tri Pudyastuti	SMA	Chef	Not-Current
13	Joko	SLTP	Security Guard	Not-Current

Table 5 shows the educational background of teachers at Saymara Kindergarten, which reveals that 9 out of 10 teachers have bachelor's degrees, with details of 8 having a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education (PAUD), 1 having a bachelor's degree in Community Health (SKM), 1 having a bachelor's degree in Psychology, and 1 having a diploma 3 in Occupational Speech Therapy. Furthermore, 9 teachers have obtained professional educator certificates, which means they meet the national standards.

Unstructured Non-Learning Religious and Moral Values

Religious Habits. Enhancing religious and moral values is achieved through activities such as religious habituation, teacher role models, storytelling, prophetic journeys, Values-Based Group Activities, and simple worship practices. Documents related to religious habits are included in the SOP for daily routine habits, where the school conditions students by playing murattal (religious recitation) through the sound system (D2). Children are welcomed with smiles and greetings, as a handover from parents to teachers. The illustration is as follows.



Figure 1. Teacher Welcomes Children at the Gate

Figure 1 shows that the first on-duty teacher outside picks up students who get off their vehicles with their parents and guides them to the school gate. Then, the children are received by the second on-duty teacher and guided to the classrooms (O-1, O-2, O-3). Children are used to saying hello. When entering the school gate, the children are greeted with a smile and a handshake by the on-duty teacher, who then guides them to their classrooms. When they enter the classroom, the children remove their shoes and place them neatly on the shoe rack. The morning on-duty teacher then guides the children into the classroom. After placing their bags and shoes properly, the children play with their friends.

During the morning welcome, students are accustomed to listening to the murattal via the sound system while waiting for the other children to arrive (O-4, O-5).

Teacher Exemplary in Promoting Good Behavior. Teachers act as role models by demonstrating politeness, honesty, and patience. Children mimic how teachers speak and resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner. Teachers intentionally model positive behavior, showing patience and fairness in their interactions with students. Interviews with school principals indicated that role-modeling training is an integral part of professional development for teachers in all three kindergartens. Children tend to imitate teachers' actions, such as praying before meals or greeting them politely.

During the observation on Thursday, March 2025, teachers always showed cheerful and smiling faces to greet the children. They also shook hands when welcoming the children and greeted them (O8). Teachers also consistently used the right feet when entering the class and saying a greeting cheerfully (O9, O10). When eating and drinking, teachers used their right hand and sat (never in a standing position) (O11, O12).

Unlike on other days, when a student felt moody after their parents dropped them off at kindergarten, the teacher tried to calm them down and reassure them that their parents would come back after school.

To educate teachers on always behaving and speaking well, they are equipped with knowledge through coaching and halal bihalal sessions, with the theme "Emulating the morals of the Prophet Muhammad SAW," which was held on Tuesday, April 7, 2025. This theme is to strengthen and motivate teachers to always do good for their students (O8).

Stories containing moral and religious themes. The stories are shared through storytelling activities, including Islamic tales, stories of prophets, and animal stories with moral lessons. Teachers incorporate stories from holy texts, such as the story of the Prophet, as well as local folklore, to teach values like honesty, compassion, and responsibility. To encourage children to enjoy praying, teachers tell a story titled "The First Row Becomes a Ticket to Heaven" (O9).

One day, a friend met Rasulullah SAW to seek advice, asking, "*O Rasulullah, is there an easy deed that can lead me to heaven?*" The Prophet replied, "*Yes.*" The friend then asked, "*What is that, O Rasulullah?*" Rasulullah responded, "*Be a muadzin who calls people to pray together at the mosque.*" The friend asked again, "*Are there other practices? I feel my voice is not good enough for the call to prayer,*" he said. Rasulullah advised, "*Be a prayer leader for your community.*" The friend replied, "*I'm not ready to be a prayer leader, O Rasulullah.*" Rasulullah then suggested, "*Be among those who lead the first row in every congregational prayer.*" The friend said, "*For the last option, I will try.*" After the teacher shared this story, the teacher asked the children who was praying at home. They responded together, "*Me.*" The teacher then asked who liked to recite the adhan. Some children answered, "*Me,*" as they raised their hands. The teacher inquired again, "*Who often becomes the imam at home?*" All the children responded, "*Me,*" because at school they had learned to pray and take turns leading, so they knew how to do it. The teacher said, "*Good job! Keep learning—how to pronounce the adhan, pray, and enjoy praying together.*" Observations show children are more enthusiastic and grasp moral lessons better when they are shared through stories.

Teachers always share stories before starting learning activities. Every day, they tell stories on various themes and stories about the Prophet that highlight positive characters, taking turns. This activity is supported by inviting outside storytellers to participate in the *Shafari Bercerita* event every two months. On March 7, 2025, the event aimed to strengthen religious morals in *Shafari Bercerita* by presenting *Kak Rachmat* as a storyteller in preparation for Ramadhan 1446 H (O10). To prepare for Ramadhan, *Kak Rachmat* shared stories about prayer to encourage children to pray (*shalat*) in the front or first row. He explained the virtue of being in the first row, as even adults sometimes avoid it. This activity also involved parents, encouraging and motivating them to guide their children to sit in the front.

Score-Based Group Activities. Activities such as role-playing, singing, and collaborative activities are designed to teach the values of cooperation and respect. This activity was carried out through "sharing food supplies and humanitarian donations" in November and December 2024 (O11, O12). This humanitarian activity was carried out in the context of caring for our brothers and sisters in Gaza, Palestine. The school hosted a program to promote caring for others, featuring Sheikh Muhammad Bin Adel Saleem, at a Grand Recitation attended by students, parents, and the community. The presence of the Palestinian ustadz as a resource speaker aims to increase understanding and empathy for Gaza children suffering from bombings. What made this event interesting was that the speaker had a limited Indonesian vocabulary, which helped inspire interaction with the children and encouraged them and their parents to donate money and goods to the children of Gaza. These activities could help raise funds, which include donations from children regularly giving charity every Friday. The collected money from this event, along with donations from the children's weekly charity, is distributed through DPU Darul Tauhid to be sent to Palestine as support for projects such as providing clean water (D2, O13).

Another activity, called "*Jum'at Berbagi*" or "Friday of Sharing," takes place every Friday. Children learn to donate money, and after three months of collecting, the funds are donated to special needs schools (SLB) and orphanages in the Solo Raya area (O14). This activity intensifies during the fasting month of Ramadan.

At the end of Ramadan, children share staple foods like rice and cooking oil. Each child must bring at least one kilogram of rice, though more is allowed (O15). The school will then supply extra cooking oil and sugar (O16). The image can be seen below.



Figure 2. *Saymara Berbagi Ramadhan Ceria*
(Saymara Shares a Cheerful Ramadan)

Figure 2 shows children giving alms, accompanied by teachers, to those in need. This activity helps children develop a caring attitude by sharing nine basic necessities (*sembako*) with the community around the school. A statement from one of the accompanying teachers further emphasizes this point, namely, “*Sharing during Ramadan teaches children to care for others in need.*” (w.pdpg-1)

In addition to these activities, several Ramadan events are included in *Syafari Berbagi Ramadhan Ceria* (Syafari Shares Cheerful Ramadan). This takes place at the end of Ramadan, when children are on holiday before Eid al-Fitr. The activities begin at 8:00 AM, starting with various religious activities, such as reciting prayers, reading the Qur'an (*murottal*), and reading hadiths, depending on the children's interests. The storyteller intentionally encourages children to come forward and read short prayers, hadiths, or memorize short surahs; those who do so will receive a book from the storyteller. Many children enthusiastically come forward to read prayers, hadiths, or memorize short surahs to win book prizes. This is evident in the following picture.



Figure 3. *Saymara Ber cerita Ramadlan Ceria*
(Saymara Tells a Cheerful Ramadan Story)

Figure 4 shows children listening to a storyteller about "The Beauty of Sharing." The storyteller cheerfully moves around, engaging the children with different voices that match the puppet's character. He walks through the group of children, sometimes standing in front of and behind them, creating a classroom-like atmosphere that centers on the story and the storyteller. Occasionally, the storyteller engages in dialogue with the children, adapting the puppets they hold to match their characters, allowing them to interactively participate by asking, "*How much pocket money do you have?*" and then asking for it to be donated. This interaction involves the children in the story, encouraging them to share their wealth. Some children spend Rp5,000, others Rp2,000, and some, depending on the amount they bring during the activity. The children willingly share. This series of activities during Ramadan reinforces the importance of caring for and sharing with others.

The lesson of sharing is also emphasized during Eid al-Fitr. Children learn to care for and share with others through sharing activities at *Halal Bi Halal* (gathering). When children return to school after the Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr holidays, they bring a variety of small and large snacks—whatever is still available at home, based on their families' means. Some bring half a jar of cookies, others bring a full jar, and some bring other kinds of snacks. A few even bring neatly sealed snack packages. A picture of this is shown below.



Figure 4. *Saymara Berbagi saat Halal Bi Halal*
(Saymara Sharing at Halal Bi Halal)

Figure 4 shows students bringing a variety of snacks placed in the center of the classroom. They are permitted to select snacks different from what they brought from home, provided they ask their friends for permission.

Sharing during Eid al-Fitr gatherings has successfully increased children's awareness of empathy and kindness. Teachers reported that the children exhibited positive behavioral changes, such as asking permission more often from others, consistently expressing gratitude, and apologizing without being asked.

Festival. The school organizes group activities where students play music and sing religious songs. For example, one child plays a darbuka while another sings or recites the Prophet's prayer. These activities teach children teamwork, build courage and leadership, and help them speak confidently through the words of the Prophet's prayer and other song lyrics. They are performed during children's stage shows. A child who plays the darbuka performs on stage with others, while students who do not play the darbuka sing religious songs and recite prayer lyrics together. This activity took place before the *Shafari Berkisah* on Tuesday, March 7, 2025.

Structured Religious and Moral Values in Learning

At the beginning of class, students line up in front of the classroom, greet each other, and recite prayers before and after class. This is reflected in the lesson plan (RPPH), which states that teachers train students to memorize prayers and recite them correctly. An interview with one of the teachers confirmed this practice.

“We teach our students early on to regularly recite prayers for themselves, their parents, their teachers, and those around them. Even if they make mistakes, we will correct their recitation and consistently update their parents on their progress at school so they can follow up at home or with their families.”

At 8:00 a.m., the class teacher starts the session by mentioning one of the Quran's surahs, "Ummul Kitab Al-Fatihah," and then recites it with the students. The teacher then pronounces the *syahadat*, and the children recite it together. Afterwards, led by the teacher, the children recite the morning prayer, learn its meaning, and perform it as a group. The prayer is as follows:

رَضِيتُ بِاللَّهِ رَبًّا، وَبِالْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا، وَبِمُحَمَّدٍ نَبِيًّا وَرَسُولًا، رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا، وَارْزُقْنِي فَهْمًا

Rodhitu billahi robba, wabil islami dina, wabimuhammadin nabiyya warosula, robbi zidniilma, warzuqni fahma.

Meaning: *“I am pleased with Allah as my Lord, with Islam as my religion, and with Muhammad as my Prophet and Messenger. Oh Allah, increase me in knowledge and grant me understanding.”*

During each prayer, all the children responded loudly and enthusiastically to each other. When there were mistakes, the teacher corrected the children's reading (O-6, O-7, O-8).

According to the KS, this prayer is used to strengthen the children's core religious beliefs about God, the religion, and the Prophet they follow, and to affirm that the One who provides knowledge and understanding is Allah, their Lord (W-KS).

This is supported by KYS's statement that the habit of praying at Saymara Kindergarten aims to strengthen children's faith and Islam so they can remain consistent at home (W-KYS).

The two statements above were affirmed by one of the parents, who stated that the habit of praying and good habits at school were communicated by the school through the Communication book so that they could also be practiced at home (W-WM).

The three statements indicate that the good habits established at school are being maintained by families at home, ensuring consistency and a shared responsibility between home and school.

The class discussion focused on practicing the Dhuha prayer. To ensure the validity of the prayer, purification or ablution is required. Before performing ablution, the teacher told the girls to remove their headscarves and asked the boys to fold up their long-sleeved trousers.

“Come on, boys, fold up your pants and sleeves, and girls, take off your headscarves.” The children followed the teacher's instructions. (O-9, O-10).

After all the students have followed the teacher's instructions, the teacher then sings a song and claps the ablution sequence, with the children imitating. The verse is as follows.

Tepuk wudhu (Ablution clap)

Baca bismillah lalu cuci tangan (Say bismillah and then wash your hands)

Kumur-kumur basuh hidung basuh muka (Gargle, then wash your nose and face)

Tangan sampai ke siku (Hands up to the elbows)

Kepala dan telinga (Head and ears)

Terakhir cuci kaki lalu doa (Last, wash your feet and pray)

After completing the Ablution Clap song, the students exited the classroom one by one and then headed for the ablution area in the bathroom at the front of the classroom. There was only one faucet, so everyone lined up to perform ablutions and enter the bathroom one by one.



Figure 5. Children Queue to Practice Ablution

Figure 5 shows children patiently waiting in line for their turn to practice wudhu with the teacher (O-11, O-12).

The teacher guides the students through the steps of ablution. They start by washing their hands, gargling, rinsing their nose, washing their face, then their hands up to the elbows, followed by washing their head and ears, and finally their feet before praying. The image illustrating this process is shown below.



Figure 6. Teacher Observes Children's Ablution Order

Figure 6 illustrates how the teacher supervises the children's sequence, movements, and manner during ablution. When there is an error, the teacher corrects it immediately.

Once all the children have finished ablution, the teacher leads the prayer.

أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ، وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ اللَّهُمَّ
اجْعَلْنِي مِنَ التَّوَّابِينَ وَاجْعَلْنِي مِنَ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

Asyhaduanlailaha ilallahu wahdahu la syarika lahu, wa ashhadu anna muhammadan abduhu wa rasuluhu. Allahummajalni minattawwabina wajilni minalmutatohirin.

Meaning: "I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, alone without any partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and messenger. O Allah, make me one of those who turn to You in repentance and make me one of those who are purified." (O-13, O-14).

After everyone finished their ablution (*wudu*), they went to the prayer room to perform the Dhuha prayer together. One of the children recited the Adzan (Islamic call to prayer), guided by the teacher. One child said the call to prayer, "Allahu Akbar... Allahu Akbar," and then the teacher repeated, "Allahu Akbar," to encourage the others to follow, as one of their classmates, the muezzin, recited the call to prayer.

The teacher mimics the sound of the call to prayer until it is finished. After the call to prayer is finished, the teacher guides the children in reading the prayer (after the call). Not long after, the muezzin chants the iqomah, which says, "Allahu akbar Allahu akbar ashadu an la ilaha ilallah wa ashadu anna muhammadar rasulullah hayya 'ala shalah hayya 'ala-falah, Qad qomatish shalah, qad qamatish-shallah, Allahu Akbar Allahu akbar, la ilaha illah." Then, all the children stand to begin the Dhuha prayer

together. The children imitate the movements and recitations of the prayer until it is finished.

At the end of the lesson, the children, led by the class teacher, recite a prayer about what they have learned, along with its meaning, and imitate it together. The prayer is as follows.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ، تَوَكَّلْتُ عَلَى اللَّهِ، لَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ

Meaning: “In the name of Allah, I trust in Allah, there is no power and no strength except with Allah.” (HR. Abu Dawud & At-Tirmidzi).

It is continued with the closing prayer for the assembly of knowledge, as follows:

سُبْحَانَكَ اللَّهُمَّ وَبِحَمْدِكَ أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ أَسْتَغْفِرُكَ وَأَتُوبُ إِلَيْكَ

Meaning: “Glory is to You, O Allah, and praise is to You. I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship but You. I seek Your forgiveness and repent to You.”

After the prayer, the children greeted their teachers as they left the classroom to go home (O6, O7). There are many ways children greet their teachers. Some simply shake hands, some kiss the palm of the hand, and others do different gestures (O6, O7). From the moment they enter school, children are conditioned to be familiar with good reading materials, greeted with cheerful faces by teachers, and taught about religious and moral values in class. There is harmony between direct and indirect teaching methods in reinforcing religious and moral values in children.

Analysis/Discussion

Religious and moral values in early childhood are more complex. This complexity stems from the abstract nature of religion and morality, but students need to learn about them in concrete ways. Dale (Lee & Reeves, 2007) states this, as shown in the following figure.

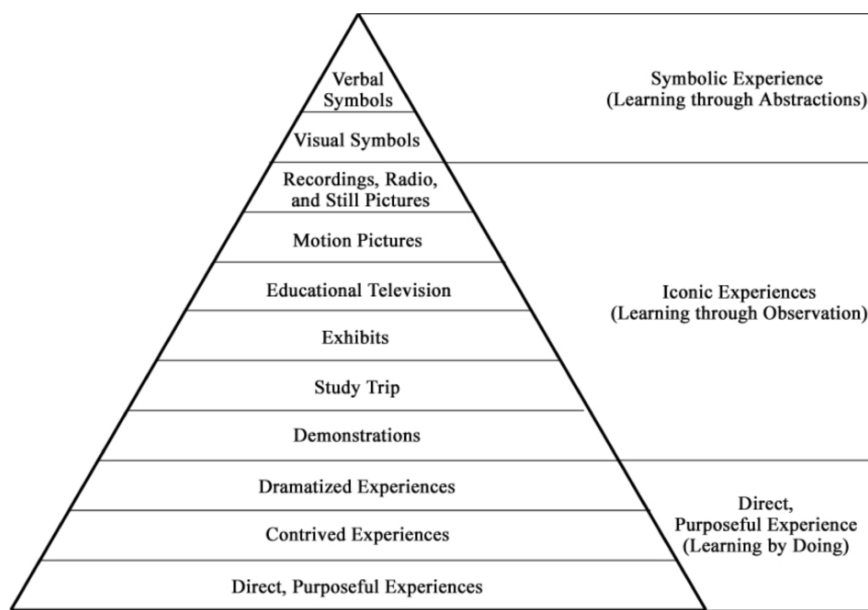


Figure 6. Dale's Pyramid of Experience

Figure 6 shows that kindergarten age is suitable for direct learning and meaningful experiences.

According to Piaget, early childhood students are in the preoperational stage of cognitive development (2-7 years old), characterized by children beginning to use symbols and language but struggling with logical thinking. They tend to be egocentric, meaning they find it hard to see things from another person's perspective (McLeod, 2025). Moral development occurs in the Heteronomous Morality stage between the ages of 4 and 8. During this stage, children believe that societal rules are the same for everyone. They also think that rules are made by authority figures. Additionally, children in this stage believe that breaking rules is wrong and should be punished (Esmeralda & Julyan, 2025).

At Saymara Kindergarten, the teaching of religious and moral values occurs through both unstructured (unintentional) and structured (intentional) methods. These strategies are used because solely relying on structured teaching can cause children to simply absorb learning materials without applying them in daily life. Consequently, consistency across both structured and unstructured activities outside the classroom is essential, ensuring they are integrated and complementary. This approach helps children understand that religion and morals should be an inherent part of their everyday lives.

Figure 1 shows that the teacher greets the child's arrival at the school gate by approaching and holding the student's hand, with a bright face, which demonstrates non-verbal communication to show acceptance towards the student. This acceptance, in theory (Rakhmat, 2007), is expressed non-verbally through facial expressions (mimics), gestures involving movement of body parts, and overall body posture.

All three express teachers' immediacy toward students, showing their equal status with students and responding positively emotionally to the environment. These findings support research suggesting that religious and moral values are actually more influential when conveyed outside of face-to-face learning (Rossouw & Frick, 2023). This

is because religious and moral values are suitable for teaching through the hidden curriculum, as Jackson (1968) explained, who described the hidden curriculum as the unpublished aspects of school life. According to research by Matorevhu and Madzamba (2022), this hidden curriculum provides an alternative way to develop non-cognitive attitudes, values, and skills, including politeness, honesty, hard work, cooperation, and tolerance among students. Moreover, research by Mao et al. (2025) suggests that the hidden curriculum influences student learning through interactions with existing norms, rules, and rituals, thereby shaping a learning environment that has either a positive or negative impact on student outcomes. However, the hidden curriculum must be supported by structured activities in teaching religious and moral values to ensure ongoing learning. This continuity will reduce the negative effects of the hidden curriculum.

A structured approach in the classroom is outlined in the school's vision, mission, and goals, and reflected in the learning program. The learning program is documented in the Lesson Plan (RPPH) to foster a culture of religious and moral values in each child at school and at home. This finding reinforces the research by Puteri and Prihantini (2020), which states that school culture can be formed when there is synchronization between the school's vision, mission, goals, and daily program. The school's daily program is intentionally implemented during face-to-face learning or unintentionally outside of it, but it can be conditioned daily.

Tables 1, 2, and 3 illustrate the relationship between Saymara Kindergarten's vision, mission, and goals, reflected in both face-to-face and non-face-to-face learning. Additionally, they show the operational aspects of the goals and missions in line with the established vision. This aligns with findings (Gurley et al., 2015) that the organization's mission, vision, values, and goals are aligned and highlights the powerful impact of their articulation, widespread adoption, and alignment on the school improvement process. The vision should serve as a guide when developing a vision to ensure the organization operates effectively in achieving its goals (Daniel et al., 2024). The missions guide the development of the organization's strategic plan (McHatton et al., 2011).

Figures 2, 3, and 4 show that children are willing to care for and share with others when teachers or mentors provide stimulation that encourages them to practice the habit of sharing. In this case, the mentor, the storyteller, tells a simple story about the virtues of sharing to help children share their pocket money every Friday, provide basic necessities at the end of Ramadan, and share snacks during halal bi halal gatherings. The external storyteller motivates children to share through simple stories. The storyteller offers content that can teach children useful life skills by presenting "imitations of life" and expanding their horizons, thereby fostering beneficial sharing values. This research differs from the findings of Fikri and Rukiyati (2022), which depend more on teachers to stimulate sharing.

Figure 5 shows children patiently lining up for their turn to practice wudhu with the teacher. This finding aligns with that of Supriyadi et al. (2023), which found that fostering a queuing culture significantly strengthens children's character, particularly in areas such as handwashing, picking up stationery, and playing. Queuing culture also helps build social systems (Mann, 1969).

Figure 6 shows that the teacher observes the sequence, movements, and manner in which the children perform ablution. When they make mistakes, the teacher

promptly corrects them. This finding aligns with behaviorist learning theory, which states that immediate correction helps students identify their errors and fix them quickly (Driscoll & Burner, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research, it can be concluded that religious and moral values are instilled through both unstructured non-learning and more structured learning activities. Both are integrated and reinforce each other, providing children with a strong foundation to face the challenging and unpredictable future.

This study recommends that the formation of religious and moral values in early childhood should focus more on classroom learning with experimental research so that the most important determining variables can be measured.

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