
Empowering Families as Primary Educators in Building Character Foundations in Early Childhood

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Abstract

Character development is one of the pivotal factors in determining a nation's progress, with the quality of its generation playing a crucial role. Thus, cultivating and nurturing strong character from early childhood is essential. Early childhood represents a critical period for shaping foundational thought processes and behaviours, vital components of an individual's personality. Hence, education should prioritize character and personality formation and begin with family. This literature review explores the role of families as primary educators in building character foundations in early childhood based on Islamic values. As the smallest social unit and the first educational institution in a child's life, the family plays a central role. To effectively educate and shape a child's character, families must consider the critical factors of mindset and attitude patterns. The mindset is a primary reference in perceiving various matters, while attitude patterns connect physical needs and instincts to these mindsets. In addition, families should address other essential elements such as religious knowledge, psychology, philosophy, social interactions, and moral education to support a child's character development fully. Moreover, Islam provides comprehensive guidance on meeting these needs, positioning the family as the child's primary motivator. While this study offers valuable insights, it acknowledges certain limitations and encourages further research to expand the understanding of character education and its implementation within an Islamic context.

Keywords: *Character Education, Early Age, Generation, Islam*

1. INTRODUCTION

Children are the next generation and the future of civilization. Children at an early age have the longest life span (Hurlock, 1980). Regarding early age, this age is a critical age for forming personality and the basics of thinking and behavior. The values introduced early will serve as the foundation for their future thinking. Therefore, education is crucial in developing potential and building children's character (Hasanah, 2016). Education is a process of transferring knowledge between educators and students to guide all the natures that exist in children so that they can achieve the highest safety and happiness both as humans and as members of society (Ki Hajar Dewantara). However, in the process or goals of education,

several problems arise, such as intolerance, harassment, especially sexual and bullying, or what is commonly known as bullying. These problems primarily stem from improper relationships. However, prevention of these problems must start with the family. The family is the first place a child undergoes socialization from when the child is born until the child dies, so it is unsurprising that the family is the main driving factor in forming a child's character and behavior.

Character education is an educational approach that aims to cultivate character values in students. It involves instilling in students a sense of will or awareness and guiding them to take actions that align with values, manners, character, and morals. The ultimate goal is to shape students' personalities, enabling them to make sound decisions, exhibit honesty, show respect towards others, and behave appropriately in their daily lives (Putra, 2019). Moreover, the development of the times and rapid technological advances require humans to be intellectually intelligent (intelligence quotient) and have character. Character is a unique personality that is the driving force and what differentiates it from other individuals. On the other hand, personality is a unique pattern of thoughts and attitudes of each individual (An Nabhani, 2016). In addition, the relationship between children and their parents and siblings can influence and shape a child's character (Hurlock, 1980). In other words, a child's character is patterned on home life. Therefore, the family has a vital role in forming a child's character at the beginning of a child's development. Naturally, most of a child's time is spent with the family, where they receive their first education and guidance. Therefore, the family is the children's first and foremost educational environment (Wahy, 2012). Also, a good family education is the key to successful character formation in children (Kobandaha, 2019).

On the other hand, newborn children are pure, and their future condition depends on the parents who educate them (Fatmawati & Sholikin, 2019). Parents' treatment of a child when they are young will influence their early stages of development, and they are most susceptible to internal and external influences on their character (Piotrowska et al., 2015). Therefore, young children must be taught good character to protect them from all dangerous things. However, if there is a lack of parental role in a child's first education, this will give rise to problems for the child. The challenge in family education is parents' lack of understanding regarding how to educate children and harmonious relationships within the family (Wahy, 2012). Besides, technology has also greatly influenced the character education of families. According to Fatmawati and Sholikin (2019), it is not uncommon for family members to become separated because they are more interested in spending time with their digital devices rather than interacting. Sadly, the current conditions can cause parents and children to experience problems with device or gadget addiction. As a result, the role of the family as the foundation of education for children can be divided due to a lack of attention to the formation of good character education in children.

Previous research had been conducted to determine parents' responsibilities in children's education and the factors that influence children's education (Makhmudah, 2018). Besides, the parent's role in character education for children was to set an example, provide opportunities to practice, give responsibility, supervise, and direct children to be selective in socializing (Puspytasari, 2022). The following research examined the impact of family

transformation on early childhood character education from the perspective of Bandura's social cognitive theory (Sakti, 2023). In addition, recent research showed that the family, as one of the three educational centers, was responsible for cultivating beneficial habits, which served as a solid basis in informal education with strong character and strong faith and Islamic values (Parianto & Kalsum, 2024).

However, previous research has focused on one aspect: general or Islamic. It could not combine the both to make character education align with Islamic values and examine the needs of the current era. In addition, research on effective practical strategies to empower families to support character education at home based on the Islamic way is still limited. Therefore, this research aims to analyze how family empowerment can influence character development in early childhood based on Islamic values integrated with the general and prepare young children regarding skills in living today's modern life. Also, this study is intended to provide insight into best practices in empowering families and provide information for policymakers and educators about how to improve the role of families.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative approach with a descriptive and critical analysis. A literature review was chosen as the method for collecting data (Knopf, 2006). The purpose of this study was to examine, assess, and integrate existing research related to the topic under investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This method elucidated how the concept of empowering families as primary educators in building character foundations in early childhood is based on Islamic values and relates to the requirements of the era's growth. The stages encompassed by this study are as follows:

- a. Topic identification: Identifying the subject and scope of the relevant literature for research purposes.
- b. Literature search: Search for related literature using sources such as the Quran, hadith, books, notes, scientific journals, electronic databases, and other information sources related to the research subject.
- c. Source evaluation: Assessing the chosen sources based on the quality, validity, and reliability.
- d. Literature analysis: Thoroughly examine the selected literature by identifying significant discoveries, recurring themes, and developing patterns.
- e. Literature synthesis: Integrating the conclusions from the examined literature to understand the study subject comprehensively.
- f. Report writing: Create a comprehensive literature review report based on the research and analysis.

Once the adequacy of the gathered data was established, it was subjected to analysis, and ultimately, a conclusion was made. This research can provide a complete summary of the research topic by adopting this technique and pulling from existing literature on the issue.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

a. Concept of Family as Primary Education

Children are mandated by Allah SWT (The most glorified, the highest) to their parents. Therefore, parents must guard and maintain that trust. This is in the words of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), "Every child is born in a state of nature. Both of his parents turned him into a Jew, Christian or Magian." (HR. Bukhari and Muslim). This hadith reminds parents not to waste this trust and to use it as a reference in developing and forming their children's faith. The aim is to create children with superior personalities and a high level of maturity in faith and piety. Therefore, parents, as representatives of the family institution, are an essential part of children's education.

Therefore, the family is the first institution in a child's education. In other words, the family environment is the first and foremost educational environment for children because a child will receive guidance for the first time. The family is the smallest social unit, vital in forming national character (Ramdani et al., 2023). Of course, a child will receive social lessons from the family before becoming acquainted with the outside world (Taubah, 2015). Every human child born must be in a family and receive education first from the family before other educational institutions. The family is also called the leading institution in children's education because the family plays the most crucial role in the education of children born compared to other institutions. In addition, the family provides a solid foundation for how children shape themselves. Through the personality formed in the family, the human soul and mentality, both in the short and long term, will be formed and leave an impression on their long-term life (Fauziah & Nurlaeli, 2022).

Furthermore, the family is one of the three pillars of education apart from school and society (Adrian & Syaifuddin, 2017). In other words, the family is one of the starting points for a child's development. Therefore, the role of parents is vital in educating children to be intelligent, healthy, and have character. The achievements and character achieved by students in their education are not only due to the success of the school or madrasah as a formal educational institution but also because of the profound role of the family in educating children in everyday life.

Social experiences within the family will significantly influence the child's future development. The family is an environment that will color a child's life, behavior, character, and daily habits. The family is also where a child gets his first forging, which determines the good and bad of his subsequent societal life (al-Abrasjy, 1970).

On the other hand, according to Fuad Ihsan (1997), as cited in Wahy (2012), educational responsibilities by both parents include:

1. Maintain and raise it. This responsibility is a natural impulse that must be carried out, such as giving food and drink to sustain life.

2. Protect and ensure the child's health, both physically and spiritually.
3. Educate children with various knowledge and skills that are useful for life with an expectation that when children are adults, they can stand on their help to others and carry out their caliphate.
4. Making children happy in this world and the hereafter by providing them with religious education by Allah SWT (The most glorified, the highest) demands the ultimate goal of a Muslim's life.

b. The Role of the Family in Education

According to Abu Ahmadi (1982) as cited in Sutrisno (2003), a role is a form of claim by a human being regarding how individuals are required to behave and act based on their status and social capabilities in certain situations. Meanwhile, the family is the leading social group where individuals belong and want to know many important things directly through parenting and guidance from parents, older members, and even every group member (Maulana, 2018). On the other hand, education is an effort to guide and develop human personality spiritually and physically through feedback between educators and students (Maulana, 2018). Hence, the role of the family in education is the parents' efforts to shape their children's character to prepare them to face life in society. Of course, the role of the family certainly has a significant role in shaping a student's character. In addition, human survival is primarily determined by the education they receive. In other words, a good education will produce something suitable to meet each individual's needs for survival (Napis, 2017).

Furthermore, activities in developing good habits for a child often experience obstacles. This cannot be separated from external environmental influences, bad shows, and unusual words that a child often hears. To overcome this, parents need to pay attention to their children and take actions that show a good direction. Children will imitate the habits of the adults they see. Therefore, here are more in-depth points to understand the role of the family in education.

1. Provide a religious basis

In Indonesia, there are various religions and cultures. The importance of religious teaching given to children from an early age is to form or instil religious knowledge in their future lives. Parents should educate their children religiously. This can protect children from illicit actions such as stealing, cheating, and so on.

In Islam, this role is clear in the Qur'an and the Hadith. In Surah At-Tahrim verse 6, Allah SWT (The most glorified, the highest) says, "O believers! Protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones, overseen by formidable and severe angels, who never disobey whatever Allah orders—always doing as commanded." In addition, it was narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Every child is born in a state of

fitrah (the natural state of man, i.e., Islam), then his parents make him into a Jew or a Christian or a Magian.”

This excerpt dwells on individuals' duties, especially parents, to comply with Islamic rules. In Islam, the Qur'an and Hadith emphasize the importance of guiding families against evil influences. Adherents are given explicit directions by Surah At-Tahrim (66:6) on how to keep themselves and their families from the results of iniquities, including hellfire. Therefore, this implies that one should be proactive in creating an environment that fosters adherence to Islamic values and practices.

Also, it is written in a Hadith of Prophet Muhammad [PBUH] about the very nature of babies when they are born. It is called "fitrah," which stands for a state of being clean and pure by birth. Additionally, Hadith highlights the significant role played by parents in determining their children's religious paths as diverse as Judaism, Christianity or Magian. This also portrays how parents play a crucial role in shaping their children's spiritual and moral growth.

In academic circles, this idea shows how crucial early childhood parenting is in shaping a person's beliefs and moral compass. The text also highlights a key theme in Islamic teachings: the need for people to take charge of their faith and those they look after in their families. This duty goes beyond just showing up for religious events. It involves building a complete set of moral and ethical guidelines based on Islamic principles.

Therefore, it is also necessary to consider providing the following basic teachings:

- a. Introducing children to the creator
- b. Introducing religious teachings
- c. Obedience to religious rules (Haq/Truth and Batil/Falsehood)
- d. Fostering moral values and tolerance
- e. Teach about the truth
- f. Be fair
- g. Teach about polite behaviour

2. Introducing the social world

The family also plays a vital role in educating children on how to behave or communicate widely with others. Children are not only given an understanding of religion and culture but also need to be prepared for children's ammunition so that children can become humans who respect every other. This is also regulated in Islam. Islam is not only a theoretical religion but also a religion with practical applications in life. Islam has ordered how a Muslim should be in social life. The things that can be considered in introducing social life are:

- a. Train children to always be grateful for everything they have.

"And 'remember' when your Lord proclaimed, 'If you are grateful, I will certainly give you more. But if you are ungrateful, surely My punishment is severe'" (Surah Ibrahim verse 7)

- b. Train the children' self-confidence level.

"Do not falter or grieve, for you will have the upper hand, if you are 'true' believers." (Surah Al-Imran verse 139)

- c. Provide examples of good communication, such as to older people, peers and younger people.

"Let him who believes in Allah and the Last Day either speak good or keep silent" (Hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari)

- d. Respect their self and others

"He who is not merciful to others, will not be treated mercifully" (Hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari number 6013)

3. Become a motivator

Every child must have their desires. However, not a few children, when they are adults, have to fail in achieving what they want. We already know that family is a bond or primary group that has become a place to have fun, be sad, happy, and so on. As a result, when a child falls short of expectations, the family must remain the primary motivator for the child to get up again. This is what the saying goes: "If today I fail, then tomorrow there is still a chance to improve," it reminds us that in every success, there must be failure.

On the other hand, the family must be able to rekindle the child's enthusiasm for achieving the desired ideals by instilling an iron mentality so that the child will become a winner. If a child no longer knows the word "give up," then they will be used to accepting defeat. In addition, children must also be introduced to the term "risk" because every step they take will reap risks, but every risk must be resolved in a good and proper way. As a result, a child will become a strong person and not easily fall.

4. Explain about culture

It is undeniable that wherever we live, everyone has their own culture. Culture is a person, group, and even a country characteristic. In Indonesia, there are many different cultures and religions. This diversity provides evidence that Indonesia is a multi-cultural and multi-religious country. Given that foreign cultures do not follow the image of Indonesia and religion, introducing culture to early childhood is necessary, including instilling an understanding that religion is a benchmark in dealing with existing cultures.

The things that need to be considered to instil cultural attitudes in children are as follows:

- a. Introducing the history of the country and the existing cultures.

- b. Providing explanations and practices regarding national and religious culture.
- c. Teach children about tolerance to others.
- d. Teach children to respect others.

5. Provide an economic foundation

Providing a foundation in economics is also an essential thing in educating children. If children are not given knowledge about economics, then they will not know how difficult it is to meet the needs of life. From this, it is necessary to teach economics to prepare a child to live independently so they do not always depend on their parents. Here are some things to consider in instilling knowledge about economics in children:

- a. Educate children to use something according to their needs.
- b. Educate children not to be extravagant.
- c. Teach children about the benefits of time.
- d. Teach children how to manage money or prices well.

On the other hand, according to Hasbullah (2003), the family has a massive role in the growth and development of a child, both in terms of intellectual, moral, and religious growth. Parents play the following roles:

1. Guaranteeing the child's emotional needs

Through family education, the child's emotional needs or the need for affection can be met and can grow well. Emotional needs are a significant factor in developing a child's character or personality. As a result, parents must create a conducive atmosphere by expressing affection.

2. Instilling the foundation of moral education

Instilling the basics of morals for children in the family is usually reflected in the attitudes and behaviour of the parents themselves. Children will tend to follow their parents' behaviour patterns, such as how they speak and act. Thus, good behaviour from parents will birth to identification symptoms for children, namely self-identification with the person being imitated.

3. Establishing a religious foundation

A person's religion is determined by the education, experience, and training that they went through in childhood. Someone who has not received religious education since childhood then, when he grows up, does not feel the importance of religion in his life. Unlike people who have been introduced to experiences since childhood, both his parents are religious.

c. Type of education developed in the family

The material or curriculum that will be taught in the family should be adjusted to the goals and needs of education itself. The principles or basis of educational material given to children should be based on religious, philosophical, psychological, and social principles.

1. Religious

Education based on religion will shape children to have strong faith in Allah SWT (The most glorified, the highest), shaping a pious and noble personality. Religious education is the primary education that must be given to children from an early age, considering that the child's personality is still easy to shape.

2. Philosophical

Philosophy-based material means content that contains spiritual values, natural values, humanitarian values, realistic values, change values, and utility values.

3. Psychological

Psychology-based material means that the education provided should be adjusted to the stage of development, growth, talents, interests, and character of the child.

4. Social

Social-based material means content that contains ideal values, skills, ways of thinking, customs, traditions, arts, and other social elements of society.

On the other hand, according to Langgulung (1985), children are mandated by their parents to accept all kinds of carvings and lean towards everything taught. However, the success or failure of a child's education is determined by the parents' knowledge and the right child education methodology. To educate children, it is essential to understand their phases. In Islam, how children are educated is adjusted to the level of their growth and development phase. Based on their growth and development, children are divided into two stages: pre-puberty and post-puberty. Early childhood is included in the pre-puberty age, so education is directed toward pre-puberty education (Ramadhan, 2004).

Furthermore, according to Langgulung (1986), six areas of education can be developed by parents in the context of family education, namely:

1. Providing physical and health coverage

The family has a vital role in children's physical growth, development, and function. The family's role in maintaining a child's health can be done before birth, namely maintaining the mother's wellness and providing her with nutritious food during pregnancy. Once the baby is born, the family's responsibility for the child's health must be prepared more thoroughly.

2. Intellectual education

Even though particular institutions have carried out intellectual education, the role of the family is still important, especially parents who have responsibilities before their children enter school. The family's task in intellectual education is to help their children discover talents, interests, and potential.

3. Psychological and emotional education

Through psychological and emotional education, families can educate children and other family members to create healthy emotional growth, create emotional calm following correct beliefs, foster noble human emotions such as love for others, love the weak, love the poor, and establish harmony with others.

4. Religious and spiritual education

Religious education grows and develops in the family, so the role of parents is vital. Religious and spiritual education entails awakening children's instinctive strength and spiritual willingness, accompanied by religious ceremonial activities. Providing children with knowledge of Islamic religion and culture according to the child's age in the fields of faith, muamalah, and history accompanied by religious practices.

5. Moral education

Morals are procedures for behaving with norms and rules derived from customs, state, or religion. Religious morals are behaviours that measure religious values and rules that are considered good according to religion, and evil is considered harmful by religion. Families must teach their children morals such as honesty, sincerity, patience, affection, generosity, forgiveness, help, modesty, and so on.

6. Children's social education

Children's social education involves guidance on social, economic, and political behaviour to increase faith and piety towards Allah SWT (The most glorified, the highest). Islam always teaches us to be fair to others, to give love, and to put the interests of others first. Islam also teaches children to help each other, to be loyal friends, to love their country, to be polite, not to be arrogant, to be humble, and so on.

Furthermore, according to Ramadhan (2004), children at pre-puberty age are considered not yet able to use their minds to determine good and evil. They are not yet burdened with carrying out sharia teachings. So that students are educated by providing as much information as possible, repeated training, and treatment through engaging presentation media that is in line with their age. At that age, children cannot use their minds ideally. The information absorbed by the brain is not much; the senses are not fully functioning. As a result, children cannot absorb facts perfectly, let alone judge whether a fact is right or wrong.

Educational experts classify children at this early age as being in the fantasy realism phase or pre-operational phase. At this age, children think egocentrically and cannot yet think perceptually, emotionally-motivationally, or conceptually to translate their

knowledge into work and other activities. Therefore, educating children is directed at forming children's behaviour through habituation and developing their basic abilities (Yusanto, 2018).

d. Formation of Character Education through the Family

Character is a crucial factor in determining a nation's progress. Quality character needs to be formed and fostered from an early age. Early age is a critical period for forming a person's character. Freud said that failure to instil an upbeat personality early would form a problematic person in adulthood. Parents' success in guiding their children in overcoming personality conflicts at an early age dramatically determines the child's success in social life in adulthood (Muslih, 2018).

The purpose of education is directed at the formation of character or personality. The family is important and influential in educating a child's character or personality. In educating character or personality, the family, in this case, parents, must pay attention to aspects that build character or personality.

According to An Nabhani (2016), personality comprises two inseparable factors: mindset and attitude patterns. Mindset is used as an essential reference in perceiving matters. Attitude patterns are rules that link tendencies from physical needs and instincts to mindsets. The formation of this personality must begin by instilling essential thinking (aqidah) in children; for the instillation of this fundamental thinking to be successful, the understanding must be something that can be sensed or reached by reason, especially at the age of children when their minds are not yet perfect. To form their attitude patterns, parents provide habits to children and guide every behaviour to be standardized with their mindset. This is done continuously to form a distinctive mindset and attitude pattern, namely the Islamic personality. This Islamic personality demonstrates a person's noble character and will influence children's life.

Likewise, according to Rohmah (2018), there are three stages in the formation of a child's character, namely the knowledge stage (knowing), implementation (acting), and habit. A person's character is not limited to mastery of knowledge alone. A person who knows goodness is not necessarily able to act or behave according to his knowledge if he is not trained (becomes a habit) to do that goodness. The character also reaches the realm of emotions/feelings and habits.

According to Ramadhan (2004), practical steps for early childhood education refer to the aspects of personality formation (forming thought patterns and attitude patterns) as follows:

1. Provide as much information as possible about visual and audio goodness that is interesting to children.

2. When children can speak, introduce memorization such as the Qur'an and hadith with audio so that children often hear, which they will eventually speak out.
3. Children are introduced to letters so they can read and are given the motivation to add as much information as possible through what they read.
4. After children have enough information, it is time to be given a thinking methodology that will be used as a tool to link the information in their brains. These thinking rules will help children formulate conclusions and train them to think independently.
5. Train children to practice good behavioural habits, such as worship, prayer, gratitude, patience, feeling God's supervision in actions, being responsible, helping each other, and others.

On the other hand, according to Langgulong (1986), practical methods used by families in forming children's character are as follows:

1. Psychological and emotional aspects:
 - a. Know all their psychological and social needs.
 - b. Do not use threats, cruelty, or physical torture.
 - c. Do not hurt the child's feelings with sharp criticism, ridicule, teasing, taking the child's opinion for granted, and comparing your child with others.
2. Religious and spiritual aspects
 - a. Give a good example to children about the power of faith in the creator.
 - b. Get children used to carrying out religious teachings from childhood.
 - c. Guiding children to read about religious values and get used to living religiously.
3. Moral aspects
 - a. Provide a positive example to children by adhering to noble morals.
 - b. Give responsibilities to children according to their abilities.
 - c. Put an interest to the child's interactions.
4. Children's social aspects
 - a. Provide good examples of social behaviour based on religious principles to children.
 - b. Making the house a place for social interaction.
 - c. Getting used to a simple life.
 - d. Get children used to Islamic everyday life, such as eating, drinking, greeting, and others.

4. CONCLUSION

Character is one of the crucial factors in determining a nation's progress. The progress of a country is fully controlled by its generation. Hence, quality character must be formed and fostered from an early age. Early age is a critical age, the age of forming the basics of thinking and behaviour, which are components of personality. Besides, the goal of education must be

directed at the formation of character or personality. In addition, the family is the smallest social unit and the primary and first educational institution for a child's character formation. In educating children's character or personality, families must pay attention to the factors that form the character: mindset and attitude patterns. Mindset is used as an essential reference in perceiving matters. Attitude patterns are rules that link tendencies from physical needs and instincts to their mindsets. In addition to these two needs, families must pay attention to various other needs in supporting the development of a child's character education, such as religious knowledge, psychology, philosophy, interaction with their social life, moral education, and always support children so that the family is the main motivator of a child. All of these needs have been regulated in Islam. As a result, this study is expected to be a reference in educating a child's character education in the family environment. However, this study still has shortcomings, so further research can provide a broader picture of character education and its relationship to Islam or implement it.

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