

Acculturation of religious values in early childhood: Central Sulawesi Educational Institutions



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Background: Early Childhood Education Institutions (ECEIs) require a model for the cultivation of religious values from an early age. Religion encompasses fundamental values that strongly instil belief in the existence of God and promote harmonious relationships among individuals. This study examines the role of ECEIs in fostering religious values in early childhood.

Aim: This study aims to explore the cultivation of religious values in early childhood, which includes philosophy and models of the cultivation of religious values.

Setting: This research was conducted in Palu, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Methods: Researchers chose five early childhood educational institutions with 30 participants, teachers, and managers of early childhood educational institutions. The analytical approach used is the *Discovering Cultural Themes* model.

Results: The spirit of 'Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo, Ing Madya Mangun Karso, and Tut Wuri Handayani' serves as the philosophy guiding teachers to act as role models, inspire enthusiasm, and recognise the potential of young children. This philosophy is broken down into four main themes: 'I Love the Earth', 'I Love Indonesia', 'Playing and Cooperating/We Are All Brothers', and 'My Imagination and Creativity'. The cultivation model includes introduction, habituation, and exemplary actions by parents and teachers.

Conclusion: Philosophical values are cultivated through recognition, habituation, and example. The acculturation model starts from the identification of religious and cultural values followed by institutionalisation and encouragement by teachers and parents.

Contribution: The role of early childhood educational institutions in the acculturation of religious values is a vital characteristic of schools managed by the government and foundations in Indonesia.

Keywords: acculturation; religious values; educational institutions; early childhood; merdeka curriculum.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental need in human life, especially Islamic education itself (Khaidir & Suud 2020). Education aims to mature individuals wholly (physically and mentally), whether by others or by oneself, guiding the students to have the freedom to think, feel, speak, and act confidently and responsibly in their daily lives (Mardiah 2023; Nuryana 2022). Education contains the meaning of actions or methods (Ichsan 2019). Religious education aims to produce religious people (Dinham & Shaw 2017). It is not enough to provide knowledge about religion. However, education should emphasise on *attributable feelings, personal ideals*, and belief activities (Zinnbauer et al. 2015).

Education should aim at the holistic development of an individual's potential, including physical, intellectual, and moral growth (Azis 2021; Pring 2021). Moreover, its goal is to prepare individuals to live together in society, performing work or developing expertise chosen according to their talents, readiness, inclinations, and potential (Handayani & Suyadi 2019). Goals are values, and if seen as valuable and desired, they can be achieved (Markman & Brendl 2000). It serves as a criterion in the educational process (Mogensen & Schnack 2018).

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Education is an effort to mature a person as a whole (both physically and mentally), both by others and by oneself, by providing guidance so that students have the freedom to think, feel, speak, and act and are confident with a complete sense of responsibility in every action and daily life behaviour (Mardiah 2023; Nuryana 2022). Education contains the meaning of actions or methods (Ichsan 2019). Religious education aims to produce religious people (Dinham & Shaw 2017). It is not enough to provide knowledge about religion. However, more emphasis is placed on attributable feelings, personal ideals, and belief activities (Zinnbauer et al. 2015).

Education must be directed at developing all potential towards perfect physical, intellectual and moral development (Azis 2021; Pring 2021). Moreover, its goal is to prepare individuals to live together in society, performing work or expertise chosen according to their talents, readiness, inclinations, and potential (Handayani & Suyadi 2019). Goals are values, and if seen as valuable and desired, they can be achieved (Markman & Brendl 2000). This goal is a criterion for starting the educational process (Mogensen & Schnack 2018).

Value indicators in Islamic education are different from the concept of Western education, which is rooted in secularism by separating science and religion, only prioritising the physical and not thinking about the spiritual (Nurrohmah & Syahid 2020). It also embraces liberal principles allowing freedom to do anything liked, yet remains directed by the learned knowledge (Pasiska 2019). Another feature is pragmatism, focusing on specific goals in thought processes, leading to structured efforts to achieve them maximally (Samsudin 2017). In addition, materialism focuses solely on good academic results and material aspects (Syihabuddin 2017).

Several Islamic scientists have formulated several models and approaches in the acculturation of religious values; for example, Ibn Khaldun has implemented the following educational methods: Application Method (*Tadarruj*), Repetition Method (*Tikran*), Compassion Method (*Al-Qurb Wa Al-Muyannah*), Method Review of Age Maturity, Method of Physical and Psychological Adjustment of Students, Method of Suitability to the Potential Development of Students, Method of Mastering One Field, *Widya Wisata* Method (*Rihlah*), Method of Exercise (*Tadrib*), Method of Avoiding Book Summarization (*Ikhtisar At- Tuuk*) (Pasiska 2019).

Acculturation of religious values early on is very important for families and schools. Children are taught how to embrace religion strongly, but on the other hand, they will not be easily influenced by radical teachings, quickly blame others, or spread hate speech (Muallifatul Khorida Filasofa, Prayogo & Khasanah 2021). This strengthens the principles of accepting and appreciating the rich diversity of our world's cultures and forms for expression and way of being human (Muallifatul Khorida Filasofa et al. 2021). Early Childhood Education Institutions (ECEIs) must identify various ways to interact with children, peers, educators, and all components to implement religious character from an early age.

The question is whether the role of early childhood educational institutions in fostering religious values supports or hinders them. From previous research, as stated by Rasyid et al. (2023) a congruence was achieved between the roles of parents and tribal chiefs in designing the form of religious value acculturation in children by teaching ethics and manners in interacting with the tribal chief or respected elders. This was achieved through habituation and exemplification (Dini 2022), as well as through various strategies such as singing, storytelling, and animation (Husna & Mayar 2021). Family and school are the causal factors because children learn all actions and behaviours from their families, including walking, talking, self-confidence, and morality (Akrim & Junaidi 2021), so they can control their emotions and make stable decisions (Chang et al. 2019). Several research results also show that early childhood is the right time to provide a foundation for religious and moral values (Azizah 2022), and education is the most appropriate instrument in making a inculturalisation mark (Dini 2022). In addition, natural and cultural resources, including religion, can be identified and used in an integrated manner (Zama & Mashiya 2022).

After identifying previous research gaps, this study focuses on how ECEIs cultivate religious values, often hindered by parents' perfectionism (Kawamoto, Furutani & Alimardani 2018), which eventually obstructs education but can be mitigated by strengthening trust in God and religion (Elizabeth Barnes et al. 2021). Here, strategic early childhood educational institutions formulate models for the acculturation of religious values in schools.

This research identifies and explores how acculturation models exist, starting with religion in early childhood. This is very important and interesting because Indonesian society emphasises the importance of faith in God. As many as 96% of the population believes faith in God is necessary to cultivate morality and good values and emphasise ideological principles applied to state administration (Mu'ti & Burhani 2019). Thus, it is very strategic to strengthen early childhood educational institutions.

Methodology

This research is part of a roadmap carried out by an independent research team, which aims to investigate the role of early childhood institutions in acculturation, maintaining and developing religious values in early childhood. The data sources are subjects from whom data can be obtained (Arikunto 2013; Moleong 2007). Participants were also identified using purposive and snowball sampling. The number determined is five early childhood educational institutions in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Settings

The research was conducted in Indonesia, a developing country known as a megadiverse nation with diverse biodiversity, ethnicities, and religions (Von Rintelen, Arida & Häuser 2017), having thousands of tribes and sub-tribes, hundreds of languages, various religions and levels of

pluralism in all its dimensions (Pajariato 2022a). The participants were educators at early childhood educational institutions in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, an area with a multicultural background, as the area meets various ethnicities and religions.

Data collection

Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews and observations at the research locus to collect data. Subsequently, the interviews were grouped according to themes, transcribed, and coded for analysis. The data-collection period lasted from early April to early July 2023.

Data analysis

Data analysis was ongoing from the start of data collection, using the Discovering Cultural Themes model to understand characteristic phenomena from previous analyses. This analysis gathers themes, cultural foci, values, and cultural symbols present in each domain (Spradley 1980). The data were analysed in three stages: data reduction, data display, and data presentation, following Miles and Huberman's data analysis theory. Triangulation was used to detect data by comparing data obtained from each information source. The data analysis process occurred simultaneously with data collection, following the recommended flow of data reduction, data display, and conclusion or verification (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña 2018).

Data reduction was used to select data relevant to the research needs. Data display occurred after reduction and selection stages. Subsequently, relevant conclusions were verified and drawn based on the research themes. Conceptualisation, categorisation, and description were developed based on incidences obtained in the field.

Discussion

Philosophy of religious value cultivation in early childhood

Forming positive character, commonly known in Islam as noble character, is not easy, so teachers or lecturers must develop their methods and models so that the learning results can be as desired or planned. Each educational institution or school has its method of introducing Islamic values and forming a child with a noble character. In Indonesia, there is a potent discourse regarding the educational concept of Ki Hajar Dewantara as a figure of education whose philosophy has become a spirit in the acculturation of religious values in early childhood educational institutions.

Table 1 presents the implementation of educational philosophy as observed and gathered through interviews in the study. The table outlines three main philosophies and their corresponding implementations within the educational setting.

The first philosophy, 'Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo', emphasises setting an example by practicing discipline, carrying out

worship, showing respect for elders, demonstrating compassion for students, and greeting them warmly. This philosophy was observed to be practiced by participants numbered 1, 3, 8, 10, 11, and 8.

The second philosophy, 'Ing Madyo Mangun Karso', focuses on providing encouragement to students. Teachers are seen to encourage students in various aspects, pray with them in times of sickness, praise their efforts, and occasionally offer gifts. Participants 6, 7, 12, 15, and 16 were noted to follow this philosophy.

Based on interviews with teachers at early childhood educational institutions, it was found that the application of these three philosophical values was strengthening. Currently, the education policy in Indonesia is to equip teachers by strengthening the philosophy 'Ing Ngarso Sing Tulodo, Ing Madya Mangun Karso, and Tut Wuri Handayani', a dynamic (Hermawan & Tan 2021). This was confirmed by the informant, who stated:

'Teachers are facilitators who must pay attention to students' fundamental values and character, especially those from religion and culture. We as teachers are taught to appear as role models, ignite enthusiasm, and encourage all the potential of students, whoever and whatever religion, without discrimination. We are currently intensively participating in various capacity training to strengthen the character of Pancasila students.' (Interviews, informants: 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9)

In Indonesia, there is currently a massive movement to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students to protect noble cultural and religious values from an early age. In Early Childhood Education, there are four significant themes in the Independent Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum allows teachers to choose formats, experiences, and essential materials suitable for achieving learning goals. Meanwhile, students can have as much space as possible to express themselves uniquely. The Merdeka Curriculum provides equal opportunities for all children with any character and family background to grow and develop.

In Figure 1, there are four significant themes that can be used as a forum for the acculturation of religious values. Firstly, I Love the Earth aims to introduce young children to environmental issues and foster concern for nature as a manifestation of love for the creation of Almighty God. Secondly, the theme I Love Indonesia aims to enable young

TABLE 1: Implementation of educational philosophy.

No	Philosophy	Implementation	Participants
1	Ing Ngarso Sung Tulodo/In Front provides an example	An example of discipline at school Carry out worship at school Respect your elders Shows compassion for students Say hello to students	1, 3, 8, 10, 11, 8
2	Ing Madyo Mangun Karso/In the middle of giving encouragement	Teachers encourage students in all things Pray with students if a teacher or friend is sick Give praise to students Sometimes give gifts	6, 7, 12, 15, 16
3	Tut Wuri Handayani/behind push	Motivating students Facilitate student potential Not discriminatory	4, 13, 1, 2, 14, 15

children to know the identity and characteristics of the country's cultural diversity so that they understand their identity and are proud to be Indonesian children. Thirdly, the Play and *Working Together / We are Brothers* theme encourages young children to interact with peers, respect differences, and be willing to share and work together. Fourthly, the theme *My Imagination and Creativity* invites students to learn to recognise their world through imagination, exploration, and experimentation:

'Every teacher's efforts to implement or change something for the better, let alone forming character in humans, is not easy. Therefore, we experience many obstacles as educators. However, we must not give in to these obstacles because if we give in, the end of education will be destroyed, and the morality of the younger generation will be destroyed. We integrated the content of religious values into the four major themes of the independent curriculum in early childhood education.' (Interviews, informants: 7, 10, 11, 13, 16, datalink)

The data from these interviews with educators in ECEIs, serving as the locus of this study, underscore various obstacles. The integration of religious values into the curriculum emerges as a crucial phase undertaken by teachers. Educators comprehend that the philosophy of instilling religious values in early childhood is very crucial in a child's development. Educators at early childhood educational institutions, which are the focus of this research, are not free from various obstacles in educating, especially in implementing the educational methods that have been determined.

Acculturation of religious values in early childhood involves a deep understanding of the importance of building moral and spiritual foundations from an early age. Religious education in early childhood plays a crucial role in shaping children's character, attitudes, and behaviour (Salmiati & Zaman 2021). Firstly, sensitivity to moral values. This philosophy emphasises introducing positive moral and ethical religious values to children early on. Religious education aims to provide a solid basis for developing sound character (Muzakki & Nurdin 2022; Sarbini et al. 2021). Respecting the Uniqueness of Each Child: Children have unique and different personalities (Brandt et al. 2021). This philosophy teaches that religious education must be adapted to the individual characteristics of each child, recognising their differences in learning and understanding religious values. Secondly, holistic education. Religious education is not only limited to theoretical knowledge about religious

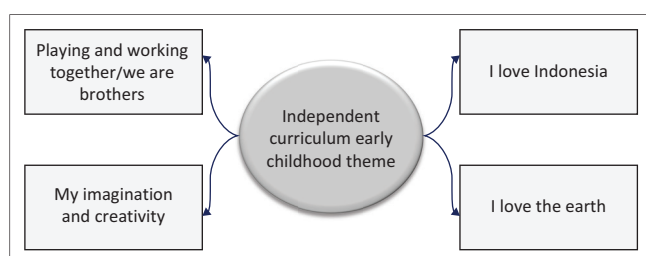
teachings but also involves practical and spiritual aspects (Demirel Ucan & Wright 2019; Filipson 2009). This philosophy encourages holistic development, covering children's cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects. Children must be encouraged to develop spiritual connections (Harris 2007; Huitt & Robbins 2003). This philosophy emphasises the importance of giving children opportunities to reflect, pray, or pursue other spiritual activities to personally feel close to religious values. Thirdly, introduction to religious diversity. This philosophy teaches children to respect and understand religious diversity. Introduction to the values of other religions can help form attitudes of tolerance and respect for differences (Almond 2010; Suradi, Kenedi & Surahman 2020).

Religious values must be integrated into children's daily lives (Esih 2020; Sumadi et al. 2019). This philosophy emphasises linking religious values to daily activities, making them relevant and applicable in various contexts. Through applying these philosophies, it is expected that children can grow into individuals with a solid moral foundation, respect religious values, and apply them in their daily lives.

Model of cultivating religious values in early childhood

Apart from parents, schools also have ways to develop children's character in a conditioned way rather than following the rules. During early childhood children are likelier to imitate what their parents have done so far (Syuraini et al. 2018), resulting in the acculturation of virtuous values in early childhood (Jaedun & Manaf 2020). This is supported by the results of previous research, which found that when break time arrived at school, one of the young children brought their food, and then through teacher facilitation at school, they sometimes distributed the food to their friends (Sumadi et al. 2019). The informants in this research were all Muslims who had and lived with young children in their families. The pattern of parenting in Muslim families emphasises guidance and direction with a complete understanding of what the child does, gently and lovingly (Thaib & Syah 2019), and having a robust relationship (Meron 2021) until they reach the stage of marriage. The process of acculturation values is further continued by the school.

Figure 2 depicts the frame of cultivation model framework of this study. The first process begins with identifying and strengthening religious and cultural values, mainstreaming education characters who are factually able to provide strength to the student's character (Gunawan & Gunawan 2019; Purwanto, Mukharrom & Rahmah 2021). This policy becomes the vision of an institution that wants to integrate local wisdom. In several studies, local wisdom is a noble value that strengthens the character of students in Indonesia (Pajarianto 2018, 2022a, 2022b; Pajarianto & Junaidi 2020; Pajarianto & Muhaemin 2020; Pajarianto, Pribadi & Sari 2022). Parents and teachers in early childhood institutions are involved in this process.



Source: <https://www.paud.id>

FIGURE 1: Big themes of the Merdeka curriculum of early childhood education.

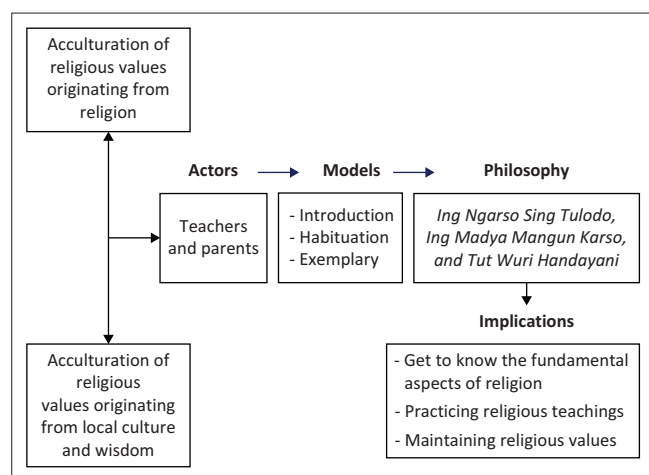


FIGURE 2: Cultivation model framework.

Meanwhile, in the context of early childhood, the assimilation of religious values hinges on the introduction, habituation, and example. Firstly, in the introduction phase, teachers acquaint students with various aspects of Islamic values, such as the significance of wearing the Peci, headscarf, reading the Qur'an, and performing prayers. This enables students to develop a comprehensive understanding of these aspects, facilitating their integration into daily practices. Secondly, habituation involves incorporating Islamic values into students' daily activities within the school environment, such as greeting teachers respectfully, maintaining cleanliness by disposing of rubbish properly, and participating in communal prayers such as Dhuha. Cultivating behaviours of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence during childhood positively influences their adult lives, fostering harmony in various settings, including educational institutions catering to early childhood education (Amala, Reswari & Iftitah 2022), so the harmonisation process can be carried out in all spaces, including in educational institutions containing early childhood (Fajriyah & Riswandi 2022). Lastly, teachers serve as exemplars for students, encouraging emulation of their behaviour. Consequently, students exhibit improved conduct, discerning between right and wrong based on the examples set by their educators, leading to heightened respect and admiration for their teachers (Lian et al. 2020).

Acculturation of religious values in early childhood is imperative for establishing a robust moral and spiritual framework. Several strategies and principles can be adopted to cultivate a culture of religious values among young children. Firstly, parents must demonstrate exemplary behaviour, serving as role models for children to emulate religious values in their daily lives. Additionally, exposure to revered religious figures and narratives of their lives can inspire children towards virtuous conduct. Secondly, regular religious activities such as communal prayers and storytelling sessions can render religious teachings more engaging and comprehensible for children. Thirdly, providing children with a conducive religious education environment can deepen their understanding of religious principles. Lastly, involving children in charitable endeavours can bolster their

religious identity. Sustainable acculturation of religious values necessitates cultural internalisation, wherein shared religious values are jointly formulated and practiced by all members of the school community. By institutionalising religious traditions within the school environment, members collectively uphold religious teachings, fostering a sense of commitment and loyalty towards shared values.

Conclusion

The study's findings reveal three philosophical values, namely: 'Ing Ngarso Sing Tulodo, Ing Madya Mangun Karso, and Tut Wuri Handayani'. These three values serve as philosophies that drive teachers as role models, ignite enthusiasm, and encourage the potential of early childhood. Meanwhile, the cultivation model is carried out through introduction, habituation, and exemplification by parents and teachers, implemented within four major themes: I love the earth, I Love Indonesia, play and cooperate/we are all brothers, and imagination funds and my creativity. The cultivation model begins with the identification of religious and cultural values embraced by early childhood, then continues with institutionalisation, and is driven by teachers and parents as the key part of early childhood. The contribution of this research can strengthen efforts to cultivate religious values, which are currently a major challenge in educational institutions worldwide, where early childhood is already facing various obstacles that can hinder their growth and development.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

M.R.M. contributed to conceptualisation, methodology, analysis, and investigation; H.P. contributed to the process of formal analysis, administration, validation, and funding. R. Rajindra was involved in the process of writing the original draft, visualisation, and validation. J.A. contributed to the process of supervision and writing the original draft. K.K. performed validation and writing, review, and editing. R. Rahmawati contributed to the process of visualisation of the study and determining the software used.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the University of Muhammadiyah Palu. (No. 034/10/II.LPPM/O/I/2024).

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Data availability

Data sharing does not apply to this article because no new data were generated or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

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