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Analysis of Religious Character in Children Aged 5–6 Years at PAUD Al-Islam

Trya Enzelina Ermawati[1], Hanifa Tazkiyyatun[2], Mega Diana Kamila[3], Khairunnisa Shafwa Raidatul Haq[4], Tepi Mulyaniapi[5]
[12345]Islamic Early Childhood Education Study Program, Institut Agama Islam Persis Bandung, Indonesia, Tryaenzel99@gmail.com[1], tazkiyyahaniifa@gmail.com[2], megadianna1122@gmail.com[3], khairunnisashafwarh@gmail.com[4], mulyaniapi.tepi@gmail.com[5]

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the implementation of religious habituation activities and the attainment of religious character among children aged 5–6 years at PAUD Al-Islam, as well as to identify the obstacles faced by teachers and the strategies they use in shaping children's religious character. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through semi-structured interviews and observations. The observation subjects were five children aged 5–6 years, while the research informant was the classroom teacher. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña through data reduction, coding, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results show that religious habituation activities are carried out through ablution (wudu) and Duha prayer practice every Friday, memorization of short surahs every Tuesday, and daily muraja'ah (review of memorized verses). The observation results show that the children's average religious character achievement was 2.63, which falls into the Developing as Expected (DE) category, with one child reaching the Developing Very Well (DVW) category, one child Developing as Expected (DE), and three children Beginning to Develop (BD). The indicators with the highest achievement were politeness and greeting, with a score of 3.40 (DVW), while the lowest achievement was found in worship practice and honesty, each with a score of 2.00 (BD). The obstacles identified include insufficient repetition of memorization at home, unstructured communication between school and parents, differences in worship procedures, and limited recording of daily developmental progress. The teacher's strategies include role modeling, the use of storybooks and videos, and meetings with parents. This study indicates that shaping children's religious character requires more consistent and sustained habituation, as well as harmonious cooperation between school and family.

Corresponding Author: ***Hanifa Tazkiyyatun, tazkiyyahaniifa@gmail.com***

INTRODUCTION

Ages 5–6 years are a crucial*golden age*for shaping children's personality, including instilling the foundations of morality and religious character. At this stage, children are highly receptive and very sensitive to environmental stimuli and to the figures they observe every day. Religious character at this stage is not adequately taught through theoretical explanations or

verbal memorization, but needs to be trained and internalized through introduction, practice, and consistent, structured, and sustained*habituation*(Pamuji et al., 2024; Syihabuddin et al., 2023).

However, amid the dynamics of the modern era, instilling religious character in early childhood faces increasingly complex challenges. Nikmah (2023), through a literature review and a Qur'anic perspective, warns that children with a strong foundation of religious character are better protected from the adverse effects of technology, and recommends habituation and role modeling as ways of instilling character from an early age. Field findings show a similar pattern: harsh speech among five-year-old children is influenced by unsupervised exposure to digital content and inconsistent rule enforcement at home (Putri et al., 2026), and parents tend to leave the habituation of polite language to schools and find it difficult to control the use of gadgets (Muthie et al., 2025). On the other hand, Zulkarnain et al. (2023) and Farisia (2024) emphasize that this weakening of control over manners and morals is rooted in a lack of consistent spiritual habituation and weak role modeling in the child's immediate environment.

A framework that can be used to understand children's religious behavior is Thomas Lickona's (1991) comprehensive concept of character education, which holds that the formation of whole character encompasses three main elements:*moral knowing*,*moral feeling*, and*moral action*(Hafizallah, 2024; Suroso & Husin, 2024). Furthermore, indicators of religious character in early childhood are mapped using Mulyasa's (2012) indicators and recent literature (the last five years), which cover aspects of belief/aqidah (recognizing God's creations), involvement in simple acts of worship through habituation, and cultivated moral conduct (akhlak) such as speaking politely and respecting others.

In the educational ecosystem, teachers play a central role as a*role model*and as facilitators who guide children through daily habituation. Meanwhile, parents remain the primary foundation for forming moral and religious values in the family environment (Ananda, 2017; Kase & Amseke, 2024). Previous research emphasizes that teacher role modeling and religious habituation work as a hidden curriculum in shaping children's moral character (Dwistia & Mutiara, 2026), and that cooperation between parents and educators is essential in introducing these moral values (Saleh, 2022).

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of character education in schools often encounters obstacles in the form of a discrepancy between school and home, known as the*school–home gap*. Various previous studies (e.g., Abid Al Faqh & Sirait, 2026; Agustina et al., 2026; Anwar & Cholimah, 2023; Maulida et al., 2026) generally report habituation programs in institutions with integrated daily activities and already good results (Ferdiyani et al., 2026; Kholila & Khadijah, 2023; Muslimah et al., 2025; Sa'diyah & Achadi, 2026). In these studies, the issue of children's inconsistent behavior at home is usually treated only as a passing obstacle or a recommendation.

In contrast, conditions at PAUD Al-Islam reveal a unique and complex phenomenon. Based on a preliminary study, dedicated daily worship activities at PAUD Al-Islam are scheduled only once a week (worship practice on Fridays and memorization on Tuesdays), with children's achievement still varied and several indicators not yet developed. The school–home gap in this institution appears in concrete forms: memorization is not repeated at home, there are differences in worship procedures (*furu'iyah*) between school and family, there is no structured communication medium such as a daily liaison book apart from the WhatsApp group, and some children still speak harshly to their parents or grandmother. In addition, in terms of evaluation, assessment at PAUD Al-Islam is still limited to semester report cards

without structured daily notes, unlike the findings of Putra & Anhusadar (2025) regarding the use of daily assessment in other early childhood education institutions.

These various problems demonstrate the*research novelty*of this study. This study fills the*research gap*in the literature by analyzing the formation of religious character in an early childhood education institution that trains worship on a weekly basis, detailing the concrete forms of school–home discontinuity, and mapping the achievement of children aged 5–6 years on each Mulyasa indicator through a combination of interviews, observations, and a coding matrix.

Based on this background and gap, the research questions in this study are: (1) how are religious habituation activities implemented, and what is the level of religious character achievement among children aged 5–6 years at PAUD Al-Islam based on Mulyasa's indicators; and (2) what are the obstacles and strategies of teachers in shaping the religious character of children aged 5–6 years at PAUD Al-Islam, including forms of cooperation with parents and the assessment system.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach, with the research location at PAUD Al-Islam. The observation subjects were selected using *purposive sampling*, namely five children aged 5–6 years (with the initials AN, FZ, KH, MR, and SY) so that the recorded behavioral data would be more representative, while the adult informant was the classroom teacher, Mrs. Karlina, who was interviewed in depth on Thursday, October 29, 2026.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 questions and an observation sheet containing eight indicators of religious character. Each indicator was assessed on a four-level scale: Not Yet Developed (NYD, score 1), Beginning to Develop (BD, score 2), Developing as Expected (DE, score 3), and Developing Very Well (DVW, score 4). Average scores were categorized according to the following ranges: NYD 1.00–1.75; BD 1.76–2.50; DE 2.51–3.25; and DVW 3.26–4.00. The reference framework for the religious character indicators refers to E. Mulyasa's concept in the book *Manajemen Pendidikan Karakter* (Character Education Management) and is supported by recent literature.

The interview data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña through a data analysis matrix: verbatim quotations were reduced and coded according to the categories of Mulyasa's indicators, namely KIB (Worship Discipline), SSH (Politeness), KMR (Religious Moral Obedience), KPL (Caring), HMB (Obstacles), STR (Strategies), and EVL (Evaluation), and the status of developmental achievement was determined before conclusions were drawn. The observation results were recapitulated by calculating the average score per indicator and per child. Finally, data validity was tested using technique triangulation by comparing the results of direct classroom observations with the in-depth interview data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research results are presented in two parts. The first part describes the findings of the interview with the classroom teacher and discusses them alongside research from the last five years. The second part presents a recapitulation of the observations of the five children (Table 1) along with their interpretation and discussion.

Findings from the Interview with the Classroom Teacher

Scheduled religious activities and children's enthusiasm

The classroom teacher explained that worship activities at PAUD Al-Islam are scheduled on specific days. Worship practice in the form of wudu and the two-rak'ah Duha prayer is carried out every Friday, while memorization of short surahs is carried out every Tuesday; during the week of the interview, the children were memorizing the surahs An-Nas and Al-Falaq up to Al-Lahab. Muraja'ah is carried out every day after praying. According to the teacher, children's enthusiasm for prayer is still low: children still play when invited to pray and are not yet orderly when lining up, queuing, and performing ablution. The teacher suspects that this is because worship practice has only been running for about three months, from July to October.

These findings indicate that worship habituation in the institution is still at the stage of introduction and practice. Pamuji et al. (2024) explain that religious values are instilled gradually through introduction and practice before becoming habituation, and Syihabuddin et al. (2023) examine habituation as a method of religious character education in early childhood. In contrast to institutions that report good results from routine programs, such as the daily religious program at RA Al-Fatih (Sa'diyah & Achadi, 2026) and the Duha prayer scheduled Monday through Thursday, with 17 of 20 children in the DE category (Lutfiyah & Ulum, 2024), worship at PAUD Al-Islam occurs only once a week. This low frequency is presumed to be the reason the children are not yet accustomed to being orderly and enthusiastic, which is in line with the teacher's own suspicion. Other institutions report worship habituation integrated into routine curricular activities (Muslimah et al., 2025), so that repetition occurs without depending on one particular day. The children's condition while preparing for worship practice in the prayer room (musala) can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Children standing with their hands folded in front of the chest in the prayer room during worship practice

Thayyibah phrases and manners (adab)

The teacher stated that the habituation of greetings is already underway because the rule is firm: children who forget to say salam upon arrival are asked to go back. Children also begin to say istighfar when angry, although they sometimes still need to be reminded. The utterance of bismillah has become so habitual that it is even said in inappropriate places, such as the bathroom. In terms of manners, children are considered respectful toward teachers, but some still speak harshly to their parents or grandmother, which, according to the teacher, is picked up from the surrounding environment.

Greeting has become the strongest habit because there are clear rules and immediate consequences. This pattern is in line with the findings of Indrania et al. (2025) that shared rules set by teachers, accompanied by reinforcement, form queuing habits in children aged 5–6 years. Bismillah uttered in the wrong place shows that children have memorized the expression before understanding its context. This is consistent with Muthie et al. (2025), who found that children tend to imitate vocabulary without understanding its meaning, and with Lickona's framework (Hafizallah, 2024; Suroso & Husin, 2024): moral action has appeared, but moral knowledge does not yet accompany it. Rahmah and Wahyudi (2023) reported that the habituation of thayyibah phrases among Group A children at RA Al-Amin improved through teacher role modeling and illustrated story cards, which can serve as a way to introduce the context of these expressions to children. The habituation of greetings when children arrive at school can be seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2. The teacher welcoming children as they arrive at school during the habituation of greetings and manners

Good manners toward teachers but harsh speech toward family show that children's behavior differs between school and home. Putri et al. (2026), in a case study of a five-year-old child,

found that harsh speech was influenced by exposure to an older sibling and a cousin, as well as by unsupervised digital content, with inconsistent rule enforcement at home. Muthie et al. (2025) also reported that parents tend to leave the habituation of polite language to schools. Because the teacher only suspects the causes, the exact factors behind children's harsh behavior toward family cannot be determined without data from parents.

Honesty, sharing, and caring

According to the teacher, children are not yet brave enough to admit to something when asked directly, but they are willing to be honest after the teacher or a friend sets an example first. In terms of sharing, children are already accustomed to sharing food, and the teacher facilitates this by providing a shared plate.

Children's honesty emerges after an example has been given, not spontaneously. Febriani et al. (2023) emphasize the role of parents and teachers in cultivating honesty in early childhood through concrete role modeling, simple rewards, and warm communication, and Dwistia and Mutiara (2026) view teacher role modeling as a hidden curriculum of moral education. The findings at PAUD Al-Islam reinforce this: an approach that does not corner the child, namely a teacher or friend who sets the example first, appears to be more successful than questioning the child directly. Sharing has become a habit because the teacher provides the structure, namely a shared plate, so that the behavior is facilitated by the environment and does not depend solely on the child's own impulse. This is in line with Indrania et al. (2025), who emphasize the role of teachers' rules and reinforcement in forming social habits in children aged 5–6 years.

Cooperation with parents and obstacles to habituation

The teacher mentioned three obstacles. First, memorization is not repeated at home, so a single verse can take two to three weeks. Second, communication with parents occurs only through the WhatsApp group, without a daily liaison book. Third, there are differences in worship procedures (*furu'iyah*) between school and family, for example in the procedure of prayer and the intention (niyyah) for wudu, which confuse the children. The school handles these differences with a parent meeting before the school year begins so that parents do not blame the methods taught by the teacher.

These three obstacles converge on one point, namely that habituation tends to stop at school. This finding is consistent with Saleh (2022), who found that some parents at RA Al-Hikmah did not sufficiently supervise their children's moral development at home; with Abid Al Faqh and Sirait (2026), who found that religious behavior among children aged 5–6 years was not yet consistently initiated by the children themselves at home; and with Muthie et al. (2025), who reported that parents leave habituation to the school. Bancin et al. (2025) affirm that families and schools working together in harmony encourage children's honesty, discipline, politeness, and responsibility.

In terms of communication, several studies offer forms of cooperation that are more structured than a WhatsApp group. Latif et al. (2023) reported a monthly parenting program at PAUD Ibnu Hasan that includes moral and religious development, Mutmainah et al. (2024) reported monthly teacher–parent meetings and direct communication at TK Himawari, and Ilham et al. (2022) reported home visits and telephone communication at an elementary school, as well as the obstacle of parents who did not respond because of work. Pamuji et al. (2024) also identify communication between parents and the institution as one of the channels for transmitting religious culture. These forms can serve as alternatives to a liaison book at PAUD Al-Islam.

Regarding differences in worship procedures, Anwar and Cholimah (2023) emphasize aligning perceptions because of differing family backgrounds, so the parent meeting before the school year at PAUD Al-Islam is in line with that recommendation. However, in the literature reviewed, no study was found that specifically analyzes differences in *furu'iyah* between school and family in early childhood.

Teacher strategies and assessment

In teaching, the teacher uses storybooks and videos played on a laptop to introduce the concept of God and the history of the prophets. For assessment, children's religious attitude development is only summarized in the report card every six months, and memorization errors are corrected directly in class without daily notes.

The use of stories and videos is in line with other research. Toboe (2025) reported that among 15 Group B children, most moved from Beginning to Develop (BD) to Developing as Expected (DE) or Developing Very Well (DVW) after using video media, and Lutfiyah and Ulum (2024) used posters, stories, and videos at the introduction stage of the Duha prayer. Regarding assessment, Putra and Anhusadar (2025) reported that 90% of 20 kindergarten (TK) and RA teachers in Kendari said they assess children every day and record it in writing. At PAUD Al-Islam, assessment consists only of six-monthly report cards without daily notes, so each child's development is difficult to monitor over time. The eight-indicator observation sheet used in this study can serve as a reference for an instrument for periodic records. The atmosphere of children's learning activities with creative media in the classroom can be seen in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Children's learning activities with creative media in the classroom

Results of Observations of Children's Religious Character

Observations were conducted on five children based on the eight indicators of Mulyasa's religious character. The recapitulation of each child's scores, the average per indicator, and the achievement category are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Recapitulation of the assessment of religious character indicators of five children aged 5–6 years at PAUD Al-Islam

No	Religious character indicators (Mulyasa)	AN	FZ	KH	MR	SY	Indicator average
1	Discipline and obedience in reciting daily prayers	DE (3)	BD (2)	DVW (4)	BD (2)	BD (2)	**2.60 (DE)**
2	Performance of worship practices and prayer movements	BD (2)	NYD (1)	DE (3)	BD (2)	BD (2)	**2.00 (BD)**
3	Spontaneous use of thayyibah phrases	DE (3)	DE (3)	DVW (4)	DE (3)	BD (2)	**3.00 (DE)**
4	Obedience to moral rules and religious regulations	DE (3)	BD (2)	DE (3)	BD (2)	BD (2)	**2.40 (BD)**
5	Honesty and courage to admit mistakes	BD (2)	BD (2)	DE (3)	BD (2)	NYD (1)	**2.00 (BD)**
6	Care for the environment and God's creations	DE (3)	DE (3)	DVW (4)	DE (3)	DE (3)	**3.20 (DE)**
7	Politeness, greeting, and polite words	DVW (4)	DE (3)	DVW (4)	DE (3)	DE (3)	**3.40 (DVW)**
8	Tolerance, sharing, and taking turns in queues	DE (3)	BD (2)	DE (3)	BD (2)	BD (2)	**2.40 (BD)**
Total score		23	18	28	19	17	–
Average score per child		**2.88**	**2.25**	**3.50**	**2.38**	**2.13**	**2.63**
Achievement category		**DE**	**BD**	**DVW**	**BD**	**BD**	**DE**

Note: NYD = Not Yet Developed (score 1; average range 1.00–1.75); BD = Beginning to Develop (score 2; 1.76–2.50); DE = Developing as Expected (score 3; 2.51–3.25); DVW = Developing Very Well (score 4; 3.26–4.00). The category for the average of indicator 7 (3.40) follows the DVW range.

Overall, the religious character achievement of the five children falls into the Developing as Expected (DE) category, but the results are not evenly distributed. Only two children reached DE or DVW, while the other three were still at the Beginning to Develop (BD) stage. This picture is lower than the reports of Kholila and Khadijah (2023) and Mulyana et al. (2022),

who found that most children had already developed well, although this comparison serves only as an illustration because the instruments and numbers of subjects differ.

Children stood out most in politeness and greetings, care for God's creations, and the use of thayyibah phrases, that is, habits that are repeated every day and bound by firm rules. Conversely, worship practice and honesty were still the lowest, followed by obedience to rules, sharing, and queuing, that is, behaviors that are trained only once a week or that demand self-control. This pattern is in line with the idea that habituation grows through introduction, practice, and repetition (Pamuji et al., 2024; Syihabuddin et al., 2023) as well as with the role of shared rules and reinforcement (Indrania et al., 2025).

The observation results are consistent with the interviews: greetings and bismillah are strong because the rules are firm, worship practice is weak because the schedule is infrequent, and honesty emerges only after an example has been given. One difference appeared in the habit of sharing. The teacher considered it already a habit, whereas the observation results still placed it in the BD category because the indicator is combined with queuing, which is indeed not yet orderly. In addition, the good manners at school differ from the teacher's report of harsh speech at home, so children's religious behavior still depends on context (Putri et al., 2026; Muthie et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

The implementation of religious habituation activities at PAUD Al-Islam is still limited to weekly and daily programs, such as worship practice every Friday, memorization of short surahs on Tuesdays, and daily muraja'ah. The average religious character achievement of the five children falls into the Developing as Expected (DE) category, but the results are not evenly distributed: two children reached DE or DVW, and three children were Beginning to Develop (BD). The highest achievements were obtained on the indicators of politeness and greeting (3.40, DVW) and care for the environment (3.20, DE). Conversely, the lowest achievements were found on the indicators of worship practice and honesty (2.00 each, BD). Children's religious character was shown to be strong in habits that are repeated every day and bound by firm rules, but tends to be weak in practices that are trained only once a week or that require self-control from the child.

The process of shaping religious character faces several main obstacles, namely insufficient repetition of memorization by children at home, communication between the school and parents that is still limited to the WhatsApp group, differences in worship procedures between school and family, and an assessment system at PAUD Al-Islam that is still limited to semester report cards. To overcome these challenges, teachers apply strategies in the form of using storybooks and videos as media, providing direct role modeling, and holding parent meetings before the school year begins. Shaping children's religious character requires more frequent habituation at school, the provision of a liaison book or periodic meetings with parents, alignment of worship procedures, and the use of daily observation notes.

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