

Internalization of Islamic Moral Values in Early Childhood Through the Exemplary Model of Prophet Muhammad at Early Childhood Education Centers in Central Bengkulu

Silvia

Universitas Islam Negeri Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, Indonesia
silvia16via@gmail.com

Alfauzan Amin

Universitas Islam Negeri Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, Indonesia
alfauzan_amin@mail.uinfabengkulu.ac.id

Ramedlon

Universitas Islam Negeri Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, Indonesia
abahramedlon@gmail.com

Evi Selva Nirwana

Universitas Islam Negeri Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, Indonesia
Selvanirwana@gmail.com

Abstract: This study was motivated by the importance of internalizing Islamic moral values from an early age to build children's character based on Islamic teachings. The research problems focused on the forms of internalization of Islamic moral values through habituation based on the exemplary conduct of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the supporting and inhibiting factors at PAUD Kasih Bersama Central Bengkulu. This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The results showed that the internalization of Islamic moral values was carried out through habituation activities such as greetings, smiling, daily prayers, honesty, politeness, compassion, and helping others based on the example of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Supporting factors included consistent habituation, interesting learning methods, and a conducive school environment. Inhibiting factors included the influence of gadgets, differences in parenting styles, and differences in children's characteristics. Habituation based on the exemplary conduct of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had a positive impact on children's moral development.

Keywords: *Internalization; Islamic Moral Values; Early Childhood; Habituation; Exemplary Conduct of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini dilatar belakangi oleh pentingnya internalisasi nilai akhlak Islami sejak usia dini untuk membentuk

karakter anak yang baik sesuai ajaran Islam. Rumusan masalah penelitian ini adalah bagaimana bentuk internalisasi nilai akhlak Islami melalui pembiasaan berbasis teladan Nabi Muhammad Saw serta faktor pendukung dan penghambatnya di PAUD Kasih Bersama Bengkulu Tengah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa internalisasi nilai akhlak Islami dilakukan melalui pembiasaan salam, senyum, sapa, doa harian, sikap jujur, sopan santun, kasih sayang, dan tolong-menolong berdasarkan teladan Nabi Muhammad Saw. Faktor pendukung meliputi pembiasaan yang konsisten, metode pembelajaran yang menarik, dan lingkungan sekolah yang kondusif. Faktor penghambat meliputi pengaruh gadget, perbedaan pola asuh keluarga, dan karakter anak yang berbeda-beda. Pembiasaan berbasis teladan Nabi Muhammad Saw memberikan pengaruh positif terhadap perkembangan akhlak anak usia dini.

Kata Kunci: Internalisasi; Akhlak Islami; Anak Usia Dini; Pembiasaan; Teladan Nabi Muhammad Saw.

Introduction

Early childhood education plays a fundamental role in shaping children's character, personality, and moral identity. The early years, often referred to as the *golden age* of development, represent a critical period during which cognitive, emotional, social, and moral capacities develop rapidly. Experiences acquired during this stage substantially influence children's future behavior and value systems. Consequently, early childhood education extends beyond cognitive development to encompass the cultivation of ethical values, religious awareness, and positive social behaviors. In Indonesia, this educational mission is reinforced by the National Education System Law (Law No. 20 of 2003), which emphasizes the development of learners who possess spiritual integrity, self-control, noble character, intelligence, and the competencies necessary for responsible participation in society (Pujawardani, 2019).

Rapid technological advancement and globalization have transformed children's social environments and patterns of interaction. Although digital technology offers valuable educational opportunities, excessive exposure to digital media has also been associated with declining interpersonal communication, reduced empathy, diminished

respect for parents and teachers, and increasing dependence on electronic devices. These emerging challenges highlight the urgent need for effective moral education that enables children to develop ethical judgment, self-discipline, compassion, and social responsibility from an early age. Moral education during early childhood is therefore increasingly recognized as an essential foundation for preparing children to navigate contemporary social and cultural changes.

Islamic education places moral development (*akhlaq*) at the center of its educational philosophy. The ultimate purpose of Islamic education is not merely the transmission of knowledge but the formation of individuals with noble character who embody Islamic ethical principles in everyday life (Harahap & Sutrisno, 2026). Within this perspective, Prophet Muhammad serves as the perfect model (*uswah hasanah*) whose exemplary conduct provides comprehensive guidance for personal and social behavior, as emphasized in the Qur'an (Qur'an 33:21). His exemplary qualities—including honesty (*ṣidq*), trustworthiness (*amānah*), responsibility, compassion, patience, humility, discipline, justice, and respect for others—constitute universal moral values that remain highly relevant in contemporary education (Radjendra et al., 2025). Since young children naturally learn through observation, imitation, and repeated practice, the Prophetic model provides a pedagogically appropriate framework for fostering Islamic moral values during early childhood.

The internalization of moral values is a gradual educational process through which external norms become integrated into children's beliefs, attitudes, and habitual behaviors (Syafri et al., 2025). Within early childhood education, this process is facilitated through consistent modeling, daily routines, positive reinforcement, storytelling, and meaningful interactions between teachers and children. Unlike conventional moral instruction that primarily emphasizes cognitive understanding, value internalization seeks to transform moral knowledge into sustainable behavioral dispositions (Ayu & Khairunnisaa, 2026). Educational activities such as greeting others politely, reciting daily prayers, demonstrating honesty, respecting teachers and peers, maintaining cleanliness, and helping others become practical expressions through which Islamic moral values are embedded in children's daily experiences. The effectiveness of

this process largely depends on the consistency of educators in serving as moral exemplars and on the creation of a supportive learning environment that reinforces desirable behaviors (Aziz & Makruf, 2025).

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated the positive contribution of role modeling and habituation to children's moral development. Research has shown that integrating Islamic values through routine religious practices, teacher exemplarity, and Prophetic storytelling enhances children's religious commitment, honesty, discipline, responsibility, empathy, and prosocial behavior (Abdillah & Rohma, 2026). Despite these findings, most existing studies primarily examine teacher role modeling, religious habituation, or character education independently. Limited attention has been given to investigating how Islamic moral values are systematically internalized through the integrated application of the exemplary model of Prophet Muhammad within early childhood education institutions that intentionally incorporate Islamic values into their educational practices. Moreover, empirical evidence explaining how Prophetic exemplarity is translated into daily pedagogical activities and how contextual factors influence the internalization process remains relatively scarce (Azzaro et al., 2026).

Early Childhood Education Centers in Central Bengkulu provide an important context for examining this educational process. Several institutions have integrated Islamic values into classroom routines through daily prayers, Islamic greetings, Qur'anic recitation, storytelling about Prophet Muhammad, simple worship practices, and teachers' consistent demonstration of Islamic ethics in their interactions with children. Initial observations indicate that these practices contribute positively to children's moral development. Nevertheless, variations remain in children's consistency in demonstrating discipline, responsibility, honesty, and respect during daily activities, suggesting that the internalization process continues to encounter practical challenges that warrant further investigation (Kurniyah, 2025).

This study aims to explore how Islamic moral values are internalized in early childhood through the exemplary model of Prophet Muhammad in Early Childhood Education Centers in Central Bengkulu. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the educational practices employed to internalize Islamic moral values and to analyze the

supporting and inhibiting factors influencing this process. The findings are expected to contribute to the advancement of Islamic early childhood education by providing empirical evidence regarding the implementation of Prophetic exemplarity as an effective pedagogical approach for strengthening children's moral character in contemporary educational settings.

Method

The study was conducted at PAUD Kasih Bersama, Central Bengkulu, Indonesia. The research participants consisted of the school principal, two Class B teachers (B1 and B2), children enrolled in the institution, and one parent. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the criterion that they possessed direct knowledge and experience of the process of internalizing Islamic moral values implemented within the institution.

Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted to examine firsthand the daily habituation activities designed to foster Islamic moral values, while in-depth interviews explored the forms of value internalization, as well as the supporting and inhibiting factors influencing its implementation. Documentary evidence, including photographs of learning activities, institutional documents, and instructional materials related to Islamic character education, was used to complement and verify the primary data. Data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, data credibility was established through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and time triangulation.

Finding & Discussion

Internalization of Islamic Moral Values Through the Exemplary Model of Prophet Muhammad

The findings revealed that the internalization of Islamic moral values at PAUD Kasih Bersama, Central Bengkulu, was systematically implemented through daily habituation practices inspired by the exemplary character of Prophet Muhammad.

Rather than relying on direct moral instruction, the school integrated Islamic values into routine learning activities, allowing children to experience and repeatedly practice desirable behaviors in authentic contexts. Observations and interviews with the school principal and classroom teachers indicated that the internalization process began when children arrived at school and continued throughout the entire learning day. This continuous exposure enabled moral values to become part of children's daily routines rather than merely theoretical concepts (Rohima, 2020).

One of the most prominent practices was the habituation of Islamic greetings accompanied by smiling and courteous interaction. Every morning, teachers welcomed children at the school entrance by offering *salam*, smiling warmly, and greeting them politely. Children were encouraged to respond to the greeting, respectfully kiss their teachers' hands, and greet their classmates in a friendly manner. Classroom observations showed that most children carried out these practices independently, although several still required occasional guidance from teachers (Aini, 2025). These daily interactions reflected the noble character of Prophet Muhammad, who consistently demonstrated kindness, humility, and respect in his relationships with others. The consistency of teachers in modeling these behaviors allowed children to learn through observation and imitation, supporting the proposition of Social Learning Theory proposed by Albert Bandura that young children acquire social behaviors by observing significant role models within their environment.

Another important aspect of the internalization process was the consistent practice of daily prayers. Teachers guided children to recite prayers before and after learning activities, before meals, and when entering or leaving the classroom. Interview data indicated that these routines were implemented every school day, enabling most children to memorize and practice the prayers independently. Beyond developing religious routines, these activities cultivated gratitude, spiritual awareness, and children's dependence on Allah in their daily lives (Rafsanjani & Razaq, 2019). The integration of worship into classroom activities illustrates that Islamic moral education addresses not only interpersonal relationships (*hablum minannas*) but also the relationship between humans and Allah (*hablum minallah*). This finding reinforces the

primary objective of Islamic education, which seeks to nurture balanced spiritual and moral development from an early age (Ismayyah & Maulidah, 2023).

The study further found that values such as politeness, honesty, compassion, responsibility, and mutual assistance were internalized through continuous opportunities for children to practice these behaviors in everyday situations. Teachers consistently encouraged children to use polite language, ask permission before acting, express gratitude, apologize after making mistakes, tell the truth, return belongings that did not belong to them, and help classmates who needed assistance. Rather than merely explaining these values verbally, teachers demonstrated them through their own actions, allowing children to imitate appropriate behavior naturally. This approach reflects the educational principle of Prophet Muhammad, whose moral excellence was conveyed through exemplary conduct rather than instruction alone (Afrini et al., 2026).

The findings indicate that repeated habituation transformed Islamic moral values from cognitive knowledge into observable behavioral patterns. Children not only understood what constituted appropriate behavior but also demonstrated these values during classroom learning and social interactions. This finding supports the character education framework developed by Thomas Lickona, which emphasizes that effective moral education integrates moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The educational practices observed at PAUD Kasih Bersama illustrate that these three dimensions were developed simultaneously through the integration of daily habituation and the exemplary model of Prophet Muhammad. Consequently, Islamic moral values became embedded within children's everyday behavior, demonstrating that Prophetic exemplarity constitutes an effective pedagogical approach for fostering moral character during early childhood (Gunawati, 2026).

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Internalization Process

The findings indicate that the successful internalization of Islamic moral values through the exemplary model of Prophet Muhammad was influenced by a combination of institutional, pedagogical, family, and individual factors. Interviews with the school principal and teachers revealed that the strongest supporting factor was the school's commitment to integrating Islamic values into every aspect of the educational process.

Islamic moral education was not limited to specific religious lessons but was embedded in daily routines, classroom interactions, and school culture. This consistency created a learning environment in which children repeatedly encountered and practiced Islamic moral values throughout the school day, thereby strengthening the internalization process (Rodhiyana, 2022).

Another significant supporting factor was the exemplary role of teachers. The findings demonstrated that teachers consistently modeled the moral qualities of Prophet Muhammad by greeting children warmly, speaking politely, demonstrating patience, showing compassion, maintaining honesty, and treating every child with respect. Such behaviors provided children with concrete examples of Islamic morality that could be observed and imitated in everyday situations. This finding reinforces the argument that young children learn moral behavior most effectively through authentic role models rather than through verbal instruction alone. The consistency between teachers' words and actions also strengthened children's trust and encouraged them to adopt similar behaviors in their interactions with teachers and peers (Putri, 2025).

Collaboration between the school and parents also emerged as an important factor supporting the internalization process. According to the participants, parents who continued the same moral habits at home, such as encouraging daily prayers, polite communication, honesty, and respectful behavior, contributed significantly to the consistency of children's moral development. The alignment between school practices and family education enabled children to experience similar moral expectations across different environments, making the internalization of Islamic values more sustainable. This finding highlights that character formation is a shared responsibility requiring continuous reinforcement beyond the classroom (Purnamasari et al., 2025).

Despite these strengths, several factors were found to inhibit the effectiveness of the internalization process. Teachers reported that children exhibited different levels of emotional maturity, learning readiness, and behavioral development, resulting in varying responses to habituation activities (Sumariati et al., 2024). Some children quickly adapted to the established routines, whereas others required more intensive guidance and repeated reinforcement before consistently demonstrating the expected

behaviors. These individual differences indicate that moral internalization is a gradual developmental process that must consider each child's unique characteristics and pace of learning (Maisaroh, 2017).

The study also identified limited parental reinforcement as one of the primary obstacles to successful internalization. Some teachers explained that Islamic moral values practiced consistently at school were not always reinforced at home because of differences in parenting styles, limited parental supervision, or insufficient attention to children's daily moral habits. Consequently, some children experienced difficulties maintaining consistent behaviors across different environments (Aini, 2025). In addition, the increasing exposure of children to digital media was perceived as another challenge. Excessive use of digital devices tended to reduce children's attention to social interaction, discipline, and opportunities to practice positive moral behaviors in everyday life (Rasti, 2026). These findings suggest that although schools play a central role in fostering Islamic moral values, the effectiveness of the internalization process ultimately depends on the synergy among educational institutions, families, and the broader social environment. Strengthening collaboration among these stakeholders is therefore essential for ensuring that the exemplary values of Prophet Muhammad become enduring aspects of children's character and daily behavior.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the internalization of Islamic moral values among early childhood learners at PAUD Kasih Bersama, Central Bengkulu, is effectively implemented through continuous habituation grounded in the exemplary character of Prophet Muhammad. Islamic moral values, including greetings, daily prayers, honesty, politeness, compassion, cooperation, and mutual respect, are systematically integrated into children's daily learning experiences, enabling them to transform moral understanding into habitual behavior. The success of this process is supported by teachers' consistent role modeling, the school's commitment to fostering a religious learning environment, engaging educational practices, and collaboration between the school and parents. Nevertheless, differences in children's developmental characteristics, inconsistent parental reinforcement at home, and the growing influence

of digital media present challenges to the sustainability of moral value internalization. Overall, the study concludes that the Prophetic exemplary model provides an effective pedagogical approach for strengthening Islamic moral character in early childhood and highlights the importance of continuous collaboration between schools and families to ensure that these moral values become enduring aspects of children's daily lives.

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