

Implementation of Religious Habituation in Enhancing Worship Skills and Noble Character of Early Childhood Children

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the implementation of holistic learning based on Islamic habituation and the Montessori method at TPA Az-Zahra. A holistic approach in early childhood education emphasizes the integrated development of all aspects of children's growth, including spiritual, moral, cognitive, socio-emotional, language, and motor skills. Islamic habituation is applied through routine activities such as daily prayers, simple worship practices, daily manners, and the internalization of noble moral values. Meanwhile, the Montessori approach is implemented through a structured learning environment, the use of sensorial learning materials, freedom for children to choose activities, and child-centered learning. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data were collected through observation, interviews with teachers and the school principal, and documentation of learning activities. The results show that the integration of Islamic habituation and the Montessori method creates a conducive learning environment that fosters independence, discipline, and religious character in children while encouraging meaningful participation in learning activities appropriate to their developmental stages.

Keywords: Religious Habits, Ubudiyah Skills, Noble Character, Early Childhood Education, SKUA.

I. Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) serves as the fundamental foundation for shaping children's character, personality, and overall development in later stages of life. The early years of a child's life, often referred to as the "golden age," represent a period of rapid cognitive, socio-emotional, language, moral, and spiritual growth (Smith & Jones, 2021). During this critical phase, the instillation of religious values becomes essential as it forms the basis for a child's faith and ethical behavior in everyday life. Early exposure to spiritual and moral education has been linked to enhanced social competence, emotional regulation, and a stronger sense of personal responsibility (Rahman & Ali, 2020). Religious education for young children cannot be limited to conventional methods such as lectures or mere cognitive instruction. Instead, it must be implemented through habitual practices that are conducted consistently and continuously. Habit formation has been proven effective in instilling religious values because children learn best through repetition, modeling, and direct experience (Ahmad & Farid, 2022). For instance, religious routines including memorization of short Quranic chapters (*surah*), brief hadiths, daily prayers, the recitation of Asmaul Husna,

intention (*niyyah*) for ablution, intention for prayer, and the actual recitation of prayer form a crucial part of internalizing spiritual values and cultivating virtuous character (*akhlakul karimah*) in children.

Competence in *ubudiyah* (acts of worship) and *akhlakul karimah* constitutes an integral aspect of the Standard for Ubudiyah and Akhlakul Karimah (SKUA), which serves as a benchmark for the success of religious education in early childhood institutions such as Raudhatul Athfal (RA) (Nasution & Lubis, 2021). The *ubudiyah* dimension includes the child's ability to understand and practice basic acts of worship in accordance with their developmental stage, while *akhlakul karimah* relates to the cultivation of commendable attitudes and behaviors in daily interactions. Research indicates that structured religious routines positively impact both dimensions, contributing to children's moral awareness and social competence (Khalid, 2022). RA AL AZHAR, as an Islamic-based early childhood education institution, has implemented morning religious routines prior to formal learning sessions. These activities include memorization of short Quranic chapters, brief hadiths, daily prayers, recitation of Asmaul Husna, and practical exercises in forming the correct intentions and reciting prayers. The purpose of these activities is twofold: first, to introduce the significance of religion in daily life, and second, to foster children who embody *akhlakul karimah*, consistent with established educational standards. Early familiarization with religious practices has been shown to improve attention, discipline, and positive behavioral patterns among young children (Syafri et al., 2021).

However, in practice, variations in children's enthusiasm and engagement are often observed. Some children may struggle to maintain focus during memorization exercises and remain more attracted to play activities. This diversity in attention is consistent with developmental research showing that young children possess short attention spans and require learning activities that are engaging, multisensory, and contextually meaningful (Hidayat & Sari, 2020). Nevertheless, through habitual and consistent practice, children gradually become accustomed to listening, following instructions, and participating in religious activities. This observation underscores the fact that internalizing religious values in early childhood is a process that requires time, appropriate approaches, and strategies tailored to the developmental characteristics of children. The importance of early religious habituation extends beyond ritualistic practices. It contributes to the holistic development of a child's personality, helping them build a framework for ethical decision-making, empathy, and moral reasoning. When children regularly engage in structured religious activities, they begin to internalize spiritual principles that influence their social interactions and behavioral choices (Hasanah & Putra, 2022). Moreover, integrating religious routines into early education has been associated with enhanced cognitive skills such as memory retention, concentration, and language acquisition due to the repetitive and rhythmic nature of recitation exercises (Farhan & Rahim, 2021).

Given these considerations, it is crucial to conduct an in-depth study of how the implementation of religious habituation at RA AL AZHAR can enhance *ubudiyah* competence and *akhlakul karimah* among young children. Understanding the mechanisms of this implementation can provide valuable insights for designing effective models of religious habit formation in early childhood education. Furthermore, it can serve as a reference for other early childhood education centers (PAUD) in optimizing the formation of religious character from an early age. Research in this domain also aligns with global educational priorities that emphasize character education and moral development as integral components of quality early childhood programs (UNESCO, 2021). Previous studies have highlighted that consistency, role modeling by educators, and the provision of meaningful experiences are key factors in successfully inculcating religious and moral values in young children. For example, Ahmad and Farid (2022) emphasize that children learn best when educators themselves exemplify the behaviors they wish to instill. Similarly, Rahman and Ali (2020) argue that combining play-based learning with spiritual routines can enhance engagement and retention among preschoolers, thereby reinforcing both cognitive and moral development.

Despite the promising outcomes, challenges remain in aligning the routines with each child's individual needs and attention span. Some children may show slower progress in memorization or practice due to differences in developmental readiness, interest, or prior exposure to religious activities. Therefore, strategies must be flexible, developmentally appropriate, and culturally sensitive to maximize the effectiveness of religious habituation (Khalid, 2022; Syafri et al., 2021). In conclusion, early childhood

represents a pivotal period for nurturing both religious and moral competencies. Implementing consistent, engaging, and developmentally appropriate religious routines can enhance children's *ubudiyah* competence and *akhlakul karimah*, providing a foundation for lifelong ethical behavior and spiritual understanding. By exploring and documenting the practices at RA AL AZHAR, this research aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on effective religious education models for young children. It is hoped that the findings will inform educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in designing holistic early childhood programs that integrate spiritual, moral, and cognitive development from the earliest stages of life.

II. Literature Review

A significant body of research underscores the importance of integrating religious habituation into early childhood education as a means to promote moral and spiritual development. Early childhood represents a unique window of opportunity for character and value formation, particularly within Islamic educational settings where religious practices are embedded into daily routines. Many scholars emphasize that habitual religious activities do not merely transmit knowledge but actively shape character and social behaviors. Several recent studies focus on religious habituation as an educational model in Islamic early childhood contexts. For example, Hafidz et al. (2025) describe a Religious Education Model that employs structured habituation of Islamic values such as greetings, prayer, and memorization showing positive outcomes in honesty, responsibility, and respect among preschool children. Similarly, Hanipudin and Munawaroh (2023) report that consistent implementation of religious material habituation, guided by planned daily programs, improves student behavior, highlighting the importance of educator continuity and repetition for effective internalization. Educational inequality in Indonesia remains a significant challenge, particularly in terms of access to quality learning and educational innovation (Nurfadila et al., 2026).

The role of structured curriculum in supporting religious and moral acquisition has also been examined. Rahayu et al. (2025) identify that Islamic religious education curricula emphasize not only worship practices such as ablution and prayer, but also moral conduct, integrating them into thematic, holistic learning that is centered on the child's lived experience. The study by Az-zahra et al. (2024) further affirms that an Islamic curriculum enhances social, moral, and cognitive development by harmonizing religious values with academic learning, suggesting the strength of integrated faith-based education for early childhood. Beyond structural models, habituation has been shown to affect aspect of discipline and character formation. Research by Tiwuk et al. (2025) reveals that daily memorization of short Quranic surahs contributes to significant improvements in discipline, including punctuality, responsibility, and self-regulation among preschool students. These findings indicate that religious routines can reinforce behavioral self-management, an outcome relevant to character education frameworks.

Another dimension of early childhood religious education involves the role of family and parenting. Studies show that family involvement enhances the quality of Islamic religious education and supports character formation. Research by Jazuli (2025) demonstrates that parental exemplification, religious guidance, and home reinforcement contribute substantially to children's understanding and practice of Islamic values, suggesting that synergy between families and educational institutions strengthens religious internalization. In line with this, Rozinah et al. (2024) argue for a holistic approach in which parents actively collaborate with schools to integrate Islamic values with children's social and cognitive development. Daily implementation of Islamic values through teacher modeling and school environments also plays a key role. Febrian et al. (2025) show that habituation of Islamic values supported by teacher role models and structured religious settings positively shapes children's religious behaviour and moral conduct. Likewise, research from Unisba Preschool reveals that Islamic value implementation in childcare settings fosters *akhlakul karimah*, despite practical challenges such as limited religious understanding among educators and insufficient parental engagement.

Collectively, the literature suggests that religious habituation in early childhood is most effective when it combines planned curricular elements, consistent daily routines, family involvement, and role modeling by educators. These components create a supportive ecosystem that facilitates not only religious

knowledge acquisition but also the internalization of moral and spiritual values, discipline, and socially desirable behaviors. These findings align with developmental theories that emphasize the role of repetitive practice, meaningful experiences, and ecological support systems in value formation during early childhood (Holistic Character Education Theory; *see below*). In summary, recent empirical and conceptual studies reveal that Islamic religious habituation enhances children's moral, social, and spiritual competencies, supporting the notion that religious practice can be effectively integrated into early childhood programs to foster enduring character development and *ubudiyah* competence.

III. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design to explore the in-depth implementation of religious habituation practices in enhancing worship skills (*ubudiyah*) and noble character (*akhlakul karimah*) among early childhood learners at RA Al Azhar. Qualitative descriptive research allows for a rich, contextual understanding of educational phenomena from the perspectives of the participants and was selected because it captures real-life experiences, processes, and meanings beyond numerical data (Ananta & Rizky, 2025). In this context, the approach enabled the researchers to document how religious routines were enacted in daily learning activities and how these routines influenced children's spiritual and moral development. The research was conducted during the odd semester of the current academic year at RA Al Azhar, where structured religious habituation activities form a central part of the institution's early childhood education program. The subjects of the study included the school principal, class teachers, and children in Group B (typically aged five to six years), chosen through purposive sampling. This sampling technique was used to intentionally select participants who were directly involved in planning and implementing religious habituation practices, thus ensuring relevant and meaningful insights into the topic.

Data were collected using three interrelated techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Direct observation was integral to understanding the lived implementation of morning routines such as short surah memorization, daily prayer practice, *dhikr* (remembrance), and recitation of *Asmaul Husna*. Through these observations, the researcher could witness how children engaged in worship practices and how teachers facilitated and modeled these activities. This method aligns with recent studies highlighting that habituation of religious practices significantly contributes to early childhood spiritual discipline and moral consistency (Tiwuk et al., 2025). In addition, semi-structured interviews with the principal and teachers provided insights into the planning, execution, and evaluation of religious activities revealing challenges, pedagogical decisions, and educator philosophies that shape how religion is taught and internalized (Firdaus, Sitika, & Rukajat, 2025). Documentation was gathered in the form of photographic evidence of activities, habituation schedules, and the Standards of *Ubudiyah* and *Akhlakul Karimah* (SKUA) documents, offering institutional context and corroborative material to support observational and interview data.

The analysis of data followed an interactive model of qualitative data analysis, composed of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, information was systematically organized and filtered to focus on patterns relevant to religious habituation and character development. The presentation phase involved the construction of descriptive narratives that captured the essence of the observed processes, thereby making the findings accessible and meaningful. Finally, analytic interpretation facilitated the drawing of conclusions grounded in participants' expressions and observed behavior. This model of analysis is supported by educational research that underscores its effectiveness in qualitative field studies (Ananta & Rizky, 2025; Tiwuk et al., 2025). To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research, triangulation of sources and techniques was employed, comparing data from observations, interviews, and documentation to validate findings and reduce bias. Triangulation is widely recommended in qualitative studies to achieve depth, coherence, and reliability (Firdaus et al., 2025). In sum, this methodological framework allowed the study to systematically capture how religious habituation is experienced and enacted

within the RA Al Azhar early childhood environment and how it influences the development of both worship competencies and moral character.

IV. Result and Discussion

The implementation of religious habituation at RA Al Azhar demonstrates a systematic integration of planning, execution, and assessment aimed at enhancing both *ubudiyah* competence and *akhlakul karimah* among early childhood learners. Within Islamic early childhood education, religious habituation goes beyond rote memorization; it involves consistent, repetitive engagement with spiritual routines that significantly contribute to children's holistic development. Research has shown that habituation through structured daily routines fosters not only behavioral habits but also cognitive, emotional, and moral foundations for young learners (Hafidz et al., 2025; Rahman & Ali, 2021). The morning habituation routines at RA Al Azhar, scheduled consistently before core academic activities, include recitation and memorization of short Quranic chapters, daily prayers, short prophetic traditions, the recitation of *Asmaul Husna*, and practical exercises such as performing *wudhu* and *shalat dhuha*. This structured approach aligns with principles in both Islamic pedagogy and early childhood education theory, including routine, modeling, experiential engagement, and reflective practice (Ahmad & Farid, 2022; Syafri et al., 2021). Learning activities embedded within daily routines have been shown to enable children to internalize religious values more effectively than isolated instruction (Hadi et al., 2025; Hasanah & Putra, 2022).

The institution employs assessment instruments based on the Standard of *Ubudiyah* and *Akhlakul Karimah* (SKUA), which evaluate both a child's cognitive understanding—such as reading and memorizing short surahs and recognizing Arabic letters—and psychomotor abilities, including proper performance of ritual procedures. This dual focus on knowledge and practice corresponds with contemporary early childhood learning frameworks, which emphasize development across cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual domains (Rahayu et al., 2025; Mutia Bustamam, 2024). Integrating religious practice into daily schedules strengthens both memorization and the meaningful application of religious principles in a child's life, supporting identity formation and moral internalization (Pamuji et al., 2024; Tiwuk et al., 2025).

Assessment data indicate that the majority of children meet expected developmental benchmarks for *ubudiyah* competencies. Children demonstrate progress in memorizing short surahs, identifying Arabic letters, and understanding the procedural steps of purification. Observational documentation shows children participating in ritual activities with teacher accompaniment, assuming correct prayer postures, and engaging in group recitation. These practices mirror broader findings demonstrating that early engagement in ritual routines promotes both cognitive familiarity and psychomotor mastery of religious practices (Hanipudin & Munawaroh, 2023; Farhan & Rahim, 2021). Participation in ritual prayers and the direct performance of *wudhu* provides concrete experiences for children, which is critical for internalizing religious values. Experiential engagement allows children to both understand and embody the behaviors associated with worship, strengthening motivational and emotional connections to religious activities (Jazuli, 2025; Hasibuan, 2025).

Beyond the development of *ubudiyah* competence, the morning habituation routines also contribute significantly to the formation of *akhlakul karimah*. Activities such as punctual attendance, orderly seating, attentive listening, and following instructions support the development of discipline, self-control, and respect for others. Research indicates that routines targeting moral behaviors, including respectful listening and orderly transitions, significantly contribute to foundational character traits such as empathy, patience, and social cooperation (Lestari & Aryanti, 2024; Febrian et al., 2025). Teacher role modeling, or *uswah hasanah*, is central to this process, as children learn not only through verbal instruction but also through observing consistent moral and religious behavior demonstrated by educators (Grahmayanuri et al., 2025; Sobah et al., 2023). The teacher's conduct provides implicit yet powerful lessons that shape children's understanding of appropriate social and spiritual behavior.

Despite observable progress, variability in individual responses is common. Some children display lower levels of attention or are more easily distracted during recitation or ritual practice. This pattern is

consistent with research on early childhood engagement, which highlights naturally limited attention spans and diverse motivational profiles. Repeated practice over time is essential for strengthening focus and increasing sustained engagement (Mutia Bustamam, 2024; Harsyi & Mukminah, 2024).

Several supporting factors facilitate the successful implementation of religious habituation at RA Al Azhar. First, the structured and predictable daily schedule ensures that religious habituation is consistently integrated into children's routines. Continuity and regularity reinforce habit formation and establish predictable behavioral patterns, enabling children to anticipate, prepare for, and engage meaningfully with the activities (Hafidz et al., 2025; Rahayu et al., 2025). Second, the use of standardized assessment instruments, such as SKUA, provides clear benchmarks for evaluating developmental progress and informs responsive teaching strategies (Hanipudin & Munawaroh, 2023; Syafri et al., 2021). Third, the active role of teachers as mentors and role models significantly influences the internalization of religious values, as children emulate behaviors modeled by trusted educators (Ahmad & Farid, 2022; Febrian et al., 2025).

Challenges to the habituation program include variability in children's memorization ability, attention span, and developmental readiness. While repetitive recitation and ritual practice form the core of habituation, these activities may not engage all learners equally. Contemporary research advocates for multimodal instructional approaches, including music, storytelling, movement, role play, and visual media, to maintain engagement and cater to diverse learning styles and developmental stages (Harsyi & Mukminah, 2024; Lestari & Aryanti, 2024). Children's linguistic comprehension also varies, highlighting the need for scaffolded instruction tailored to individual readiness. Child-friendly prompts, contextual teaching, and integration of routines into familiar daily experiences enhance understanding and relevance, supporting both cognitive and affective learning outcomes (Pamuji et al., 2024; Jazuli, 2025).

Parental involvement is another critical factor affecting program effectiveness. While the school provides structured religious habituation, family support reinforces routines and values at home. Collaboration between educators and parents ensures that religious and moral values learned at school are reinforced in children's broader social environment. Studies indicate that children exhibit stronger moral internalization and more consistent religious practice when their home environment models and supports behaviors encouraged at school (Hasibuan, 2025; Sobah et al., 2023). Family engagement, including guidance on ritual performance, reinforcement of memorization, and encouragement of reflective discussion about values, complements the school's efforts and strengthens outcomes.

The implications of these findings for early childhood education are considerable. Religious habituation conducted systematically and continuously enhances both practical religious skills and moral character traits. The integration of assessment tools that measure both cognitive and behavioral competencies allows educators to adapt instruction responsively, ensuring that all learners progress in line with their developmental potential. Incorporating creative and interactive strategies alongside traditional routines sustains engagement and promotes deeper internalization of values (Syafri et al., 2021; Hadi et al., 2025). Furthermore, fostering partnerships between families and educational institutions enhances the ecological validity of learning experiences, as children encounter consistent modeling, reinforcement, and encouragement across multiple contexts (Grahmayanuri et al., 2025; Febrian et al., 2025).

In conclusion, the structured and continuous implementation of religious habituation at RA Al Azhar serves as a holistic educational strategy that effectively strengthens *ubudiyah* competence and *akhlakul karimah* in early childhood learners. Embedding religious rituals into daily routines, aligning assessment with developmental outcomes, modeling religious behavior, and engaging families create an educational ecosystem in which children gradually internalize spiritual values as integral components of their identity. While challenges remain, including variability in attention, memorization, and engagement, the integration of creative instructional methods and strong parental collaboration provides avenues for overcoming these obstacles. The RA Al Azhar model demonstrates that religious habituation can function not only as a routine activity but as a strategic, systematic approach to early character education, producing children who are knowledgeable, disciplined, morally upright, and spiritually aware. This approach offers a reference model for other early childhood education institutions seeking to integrate faith-based character development within

their curricula and emphasizes the critical role of routine, role modeling, assessment, creativity, and family partnership in fostering the holistic development of young learners.

The findings of this study can be seen more clearly in the following table.

Aspect	Findings	Implications
Implementation & Learning	RA Al Azhar applies structured, daily religious habituation (short surahs, daily prayers, hadiths, Asmaul Husna, wudhu, Dhuha) combining cognitive memorization, practical worship, play, song, and interactive activities to foster ubudiyah competence.	Early childhood programs can integrate structured daily spiritual routines to develop both knowledge and practical worship skills.
Moral & Social Development	Habituation enhances akhlakul karimah (discipline, responsibility, attentiveness), prosocial behavior (empathy, cooperation), and internalization of religious values through teacher modeling, group prayer, and reflective practice.	Embedding moral and social activities within daily routines promotes virtuous behavior and social-emotional development.
Challenges & Adaptation	Variations in attention, engagement, and memorization require creative strategies such as storytelling, music, visual media, digital tools, and parental involvement to maintain consistent habituation and holistic child development.	Educators should adopt flexible, engaging methods and involve parents to ensure effective habituation and sustained learning outcomes.

V. Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of religious habituation at RA Al Azhar has been carried out in a structured, routine, and sustainable manner through the Ubudiyah and Akhlakul Karimah Competency Standards (SKUA) program. Habituation activities, including memorization of short surahs, daily prayers, brief hadiths, recitation of Asmaul Husna, ablution practice, and Dhuha prayer, have proven effective in enhancing young children’s ubudiyah skills, both in terms of knowledge and practical worship. Furthermore, daily habituation contributes to the development of moral character, such as discipline, orderliness, responsibility, and the ability to follow rules and teacher guidance. Although children exhibit varying levels of concentration and ability, consistent habituation combined with teacher modeling gradually facilitates the internalization of religious values. Therefore, religious habituation at RA Al Azhar is effective in improving ubudiyah skills and shaping virtuous character in early childhood. This program can serve as a model for strengthening religious character education in other early childhood education institutions through a systematic, enjoyable, and developmentally appropriate habituation approach.

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