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THE ROLE OF TEACHER EXEMPLARY IN FOSTERING RELIGIOUS SPIRIT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Nurtiara Yusro[1], Desi Mayanti[2], Khairani Hayat Situmorang[3]

[1,2,3]Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini Fakultas Tarbiyah,
Institut Agama Islam Daar Ulum Asahan
Email: [1]nurtiarayusro@gmail.com, [2]desymayanti2012@gmail.com,
[3]hayatkhairanisitumorang@gmail.com

Keywords:
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Abstract

Instilling religious values in early childhood requires more than verbal instruction; it demands authentic modeling by teachers. This study aims to examine the role of teacher exemplary in fostering religious spirit in early childhood. Library research was employed with a descriptive qualitative approach, synthesizing findings from national journals (2020-2025) and supporting theoretical works. The results reveal that teachers function as living curriculum, agents of value internalization, and shapers of spiritual atmosphere. Implementation of exemplary includes shared worship habituation, noble character modeling, moral storytelling, and simple reflection. Supporting factors are teacher consistency and parental synergy; inhibiting factors are limited school time and low parental involvement. The study concludes that teacher exemplary is the most effective method for cultivating religious spirit, integrating Bandura's social learning theory and Fowler's faith development theory.

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Keywords:
Keteladanan Guru, Semangat Keagamaan, Anak Usia Dini

Abstract

Menanamkan nilai-nilai keagamaan pada anak usia dini memerlukan lebih dari sekadar instruksi verbal; hal tersebut menuntut keteladanan yang autentik dari para guru. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji peran keteladanan guru dalam menumbuhkan semangat keagamaan pada anak usia dini. Penelitian pustaka (library research) digunakan dengan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, mensintesis temuan-temuan dari jurnal nasional (2020-2025) dan karya-karya teoretis pendukung. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru berfungsi sebagai kurikulum yang hidup, agen internalisasi nilai, dan pembentuk suasana spiritual. Penerapan keteladanan meliputi pembiasaan ibadah bersama, pemodelan akhlak mulia, cerita moral, dan refleksi sederhana. Faktor pendukungnya adalah konsistensi guru dan sinergi orang tua; sedangkan faktor penghambatnya adalah keterbatasan waktu sekolah dan rendahnya keterlibatan orang tua. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa keteladanan guru adalah metode paling efektif untuk membina semangat keagamaan, dengan mengintegrasikan teori pembelajaran sosial Bandura dan teori perkembangan iman Fowler..

INTRODUCTION

The early childhood period (0-6 years) constitutes an irreplaceable golden age in which the foundations of character and personality are laid. Religious values (religious spirit) cultivated during this window form a moral compass that guides future development (Fatikhah et al., 2024). However, young children learn not through verbal instruction alone but primarily through observation and imitation of trusted adults (Sholihah et al., 2025). In preschool settings, teachers are central figures after parents, making their conduct a critical factor in value internalization. A gap exists between the acknowledged importance of teacher exemplary and actual practice. Many teachers emphasize rote memorization yet fail to model the behaviors they teach. A teacher who instructs prayer without praying solemnly, or demands politeness without practicing it, undermines the religious message (Fitriyah, 2020; Majidah, 2024). This inconsistency obstructs the formation of genuine religious spirit. Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of teacher exemplary but remain fragmented. Fitriyah (2020) showed success in developing moral-religious values at TK Al-Muhsin through modeling. Majidah (2024) identified exemplary methods, habituation, and creative media as key strategies at PAUD Al-Arbain. Odo et al. (2025) described the multidimensional roles of teachers. However, these studies have not integrated learning theory with faith development theory to explain why modeling works. This research addresses this gap by developing a comprehensive framework integrating Bandura's social learning theory and Fowler's faith development theory. The objectives are to clarify teachers' strategic roles, describe implementation methods, and identify supporting and inhibiting factors.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Background theory

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory posits that most human behavior is acquired through observation and modeling. Four processes—attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation—govern observational learning. In the classroom, teachers as live models significantly influence children's behavior when they are perceived as warm and consistent. Fowler's (1981) faith development theory places early childhood in the intuitive-projective stage, where faith is shaped by imagination, stories, and emotional interactions with authority figures. The concept of religious spirit in early childhood is defined as the gradual growth of inner faith, expressed through love of God, moral discernment, and positive habits (Kemendikbud RI, 2015)

Previous studies

Fitriyah (2020) found that at TK Al-Muhsin, teacher modeling in dhuha prayer, polite speech, and greeting rituals effectively developed 4-5-year-old children's moral-religious values. Majidah (2024) reported that teachers at PAUD Al-Arbain used exemplary methods, habituation, and creative media to instill religious values, though time constraints and lack of parental involvement posed challenges. Odo et al. (2025) identified multiple teacher roles—instructor, guide, motivator, and model—in internalizing religious values at TKK Bunga Bangsa Ratogesa. Sholihah et al. (2025) confirmed that teacher exemplary in Islamic education positively impacts children's emotional, social, and cognitive development. Fatikhah et al. (2024) emphasized that teachers must embody Islamic values in every interaction to effectively build Islamic character.

Conceptual framework (optional)

The conceptual framework posits that teacher exemplary functions as the primary input. Through the four processes of Bandura's modeling, children observe and imitate the teacher's religious behaviors (prayer, noble character, storytelling, reflection). This process, situated within the intuitive-projective faith stage (Fowler), leads to internalization of religious spirit (love of God, moral goodness, gratitude, and religious habits). The process is moderated by supporting factors (teacher consistency, parental synergy) and inhibiting factors (time limitations, low parental involvement). The outcome is a solid religious character foundation in early childhood.

METHODOLOGY

Data

This study employed secondary data from national scientific journal articles published between 2020-2025. Articles were selected based on relevance to teacher exemplary, early childhood religious development, and Islamic character education. Supporting data were also drawn from official government guidelines (Kemendikbud RI, 2015) and seminal books on educational psychology and faith development (Bandura, 1977; Fowler, 1981).

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Model Development

A conceptual-descriptive model was developed synthesizing Bandura's observational learning processes with Fowler's intuitive-projective faith stage. The model illustrates the transformation of teacher exemplary into children's religious spirit through attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation, all occurring within a supportive, spiritually rich environment.

Method

This research used library research with a descriptive qualitative approach (Zed, 2014). Data collection was conducted through documentation, selecting, reading, and annotating relevant literature. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (2014) model: data reduction, data display in narrative form, and conclusion drawing/verification. Credibility was ensured through source triangulation—comparing findings across multiple independent studies to guarantee consistency and dependability of synthesized results.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Results

The literature synthesis revealed three key findings. First, teachers hold a strategic role as living curriculum, value internalization agents, and shapers of spiritual atmosphere (Fatikhah et al., 2024; Majidah, 2024). Second, implementation methods include shared worship habituation, noble character modeling, moral storytelling, and simple reflection (Fitriyah, 2020; Majidah, 2024; Kemendikbud RI, 2015). Third, supporting factors are teacher consistency and parental synergy, while inhibiting factors are limited school time and low parental involvement (Majidah, 2024; Sholihah et al., 2025).

Endurance test

The trustworthiness of findings was tested through source triangulation. For instance, the finding that teacher exemplary effectively cultivates religious character was consistently reported by Fitriyah (2020) in TK Al-Muhsin, Majidah (2024) in PAUD Al-Arbain, and Odo et al. (2025) in TKK Bunga Bangsa Ratogesa. This convergence of results across different settings strengthens credibility.

Analysis

The results align with Bandura's (1977) theory that children learn through modeling. Teacher religious behaviors capture attention, are retained, and are reproduced when motivated by a warm, supportive environment. Furthermore, Fowler's (1981) claim that children in the intuitive-projective stage absorb faith through emotions and actions of trusted adults is confirmed. Inhibiting factors threaten the continuity of modeling, highlighting the need for strong school-home partnership. The integrated

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model demonstrates that teacher exemplary must be holistic, consistent, and collaboratively reinforced at home to produce lasting religious spirit.

Conclusions

Teacher exemplary is the most fundamental and effective method for fostering religious spirit in early childhood. Teachers serve as living curriculum, value internalization agents, and spiritual atmosphere shapers. Through consistent modeling, shared worship, noble character, and reflective storytelling, children observe and internalize religious values. The process depends on teacher consistency and parental synergy while being challenged by time constraints and low parental engagement.

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