

Character Education Management in Early Childhood Education

Irfan Kuncoro^{1*} , Annisa Putri Yuniar² , Salma Adib Sungkar³ , Ade Imun Romadan⁴ 

^{1,2,3}Islamic Education, Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Publisistik Thawalib Jakarta, Indonesia

⁴Islamic Religious Education, Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Al-Khairiyah Citangkil Cilegon, Indonesia

¹irfan_kuncoro@staithawalib.ac.id , ²annisaputriyuniar@gmail.com ,
³salmasungkar2003@gmail.com , ⁴adeimun1994@gmail.com 

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

The importance of character education from an early age lies in its role in shaping children's personality, morality, and social behaviour as the foundation for holistic development. As the first formal educational institution, Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays a strategic role in instilling these values through various methods and family support. This study aims to analyse the effectiveness of character education management strategies in ECE and to identify the challenges faced in their implementation. The research employs a qualitative case study approach using interview techniques, active and passive observation, and documentation. Data were analysed through source and technique triangulation to ensure the validity and credibility of the research findings. The results show that PAUD-TK ABABILS Sukoharjo designed an Islamic education management strategy by integrating the national curriculum with Islamic character values, employing methods such as nature contemplation (*tadabur alam*) and experiential learning. The implementation of this strategy includes the development of a vision, learning modules, reinforcement of Islamic values, as well as the development of human resources and infrastructure. Challenges identified include limited teaching staff and diverse student backgrounds. Evaluation is conducted periodically through observations, parent questionnaires, and teacher performance assessments, involving all stakeholders. This evaluation process ensures the program's effectiveness and continuous improvement to foster children's moral and spiritual character from an early age in a holistic manner. Conclusion: An integrated Islamic education management strategy that involves multiple stakeholders is effective in fostering children's character development from an early age through careful planning, implementation, continuous evaluation, and enhancement of educational quality and stakeholder collaboration.



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A. INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education plays a strategic role in shaping children's character during the golden age (0–6 years), when the ability to absorb moral values is at its peak (Zahra & Kuswanto, 2021). Early Childhood Education supports socio-emotional development through learning based on warm relationships and interactive environments (Blewitt et al., 2021). Furthermore, it serves as a critical foundation for developing children's character, mindset, and life skills, and prepares them for primary education through interactive and digital approaches (Vatamaniuk et al., 2024). Its benefits extend to society by fostering responsible citizens and promoting social inclusiveness (Om, 2022). Early Childhood Education also serves diagnostic and therapeutic functions, such as holistic developmental assessments and therapeutic play activities that help children express themselves (Tuyen & Oanh, 2025; Anis et al., 2024). However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure (Devanny Gumulya & Ryan Adiputra, 2020) and insufficient teacher training (Salha et al., 2025) must be addressed through a holistic approach and high-quality services to achieve effective character education in early childhood (Baidowi & Widyaningsih, 2022).

Character education in early childhood institutions is essential to support the holistic development of children, encompassing cognitive, socio-emotional, and moral aspects, so that children not only gain knowledge but also acquire the skills and attitudes needed to apply it in real life (Meydan et al., 2024). In Japan, moral and personality education is directed toward fostering courage, independence, and social responsibility (Mulyadi, 2020). The role of parents significantly influences character education, where parental knowledge strongly correlates with the effectiveness of children's character development, although active parental involvement shows a weaker correlation (Hendrowibowo & Kristanto, 2024). Teachers also play a crucial role by modelling positive behaviour and creating an environment that supports character development through evolving discipline, positive guidance, and play-based learning (Zahra et al., 2024). Moreover, using digital media in character education can enhance learning engagement and the effectiveness of value transmission in the digital era, particularly when face-to-face interaction is limited (Machmudah et al., 2023).

Character education in PAUD involves a variety of strategies to instil religious and moral values in young children, despite challenges such as limited resources and inadequate teacher training (Oktari et al., 2025). Parental involvement in the learning process significantly influences the formation of children's character, attitudes, and positive values from an early age (Mawardi et al., 2024). Modelling techniques, such as demonstrating helpfulness and politeness, effectively shape children's moral and social character (Fadilah et al., 2024). In addition, guidance and counselling services assist in developing behaviour, emotions, and character in early childhood settings (Nasution et al., 2023). The implementation of discipline is also central to character education in PAUD, as it helps form positive habits (Alhan & Supriani, 2023). Preventing bullying is essential in fostering empathy, tolerance, and positive social behaviour, reflecting the school's systemic character management (Uzliva et al., 2025).

Character education management in early childhood institutions involves integrating character values into daily activities through various strategies and institutional support. In some institutions, such as Integrated Islamic Early Childhood Education in Banjarmasin, character education is based on the teachings of the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and Pancasila, using approaches

such as assigned tasks, habituation, exemplary behaviour, guidance, and environmental structuring to foster faith and adherence to Islamic principles (Cinantya et al., 2019). Play-based learning, such as the traditional game *Engklek*, has proven effective in instilling children empathy, discipline, self-control, and tolerance (Kristanto & Wibowo, 2023). A service-learning approach also strengthens character education by connecting the curriculum with community needs, enhancing children’s socio-emotional skills (Winterbottom & Schmidt, 2022). Cultural arts programs such as *wayang kulit* (shadow puppetry) can serve as media for character education with the support of educational and cultural institutions (Junaidi et al., 2024). Effective Early Childhood Education management requires specialised knowledge, including curriculum management, staff training, and financial administration (Moloney & Pettersen, 2016).

Several previous studies have discussed character education in Islamic-based Early Childhood Education institutions. Rozi (2019) found that integrating Islamic values in teaching is often suboptimal, while Najib and Wiyani (2016) highlighted the lack of professionalism in institutional management as a significant barrier. In contrast, Hidayat (2020) focused more on children’s moral development without addressing the managerial aspects. Thus, there remains an opportunity to explore further Islamic education management strategies that can comprehensively integrate Islamic values within early childhood education. Early Childhood Education Ababils Sukoharjo presents a relevant case study to examine the application of Islamic education management strategies in developing children’s character. The institution’s social environment, management approaches, and internal dynamics provide a foundation for understanding how Islamic-based character education can be effectively designed and implemented in Indonesia.

B. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using a case study method. This approach was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of Islamic education management strategies, particularly in planning, implementation, and evaluation at Early Childhood Education Ababils Sukoharjo. The case study method enables researchers to thoroughly explore the institution's context, processes, and real-life experiences. The research site was Early Childhood Education Ababils Sukoharjo, an early childhood education institution integrating the National Curriculum with a school-based curriculum emphasising Islamic character. This location was chosen because its unique and relevant educational management practices aligned with the study’s focus. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation, as described in the following table:

Table 1. Data Collection Techniques

Research Phase	Data Collection Technique	Data Source	Description/Instrument
Strategy Planning	Interview	Principal, Teachers, Foundation Supervisors, Consultants, Parents	To understand the process of designing the vision and mission, the Islamic character-based curriculum, and stakeholder involvement
	Observation	School environment	To observe the physical and social environment as part of the nature-based and character-based educational design
	Documentation	Vision and mission documents, curriculum, and	To collect and analyse planning documents as evidence of strategy implementation

Strategy Implementation	Observation	modules Learning processes, children's activities	To observe the implementation of the curriculum and Islamic value-based learning activities such as monotheism (tauhid), morality (akhlak), and worship (ibadah)
	Interview	Teachers, Principal, Other Staff	To explore the implementation of management strategies and the challenges encountered in the field
	Documentation	Modules, Lesson Plans, Learning Schedules, Activity Photos	To support implementation data with visual and administrative archives
Strategy Evaluation	Observation	Learning activities and children's behaviour	To observe character development in children's daily activities
	Interview	Teachers, Principal, Consultants	To assess the effectiveness of the strategy and the educator's performance
	Documentation	Monthly teacher reports, internal evaluation results	To gather data from institutional internal evaluation reports

The data analysis summarised key information from observations, interviews, and documentation. Subsequently, triangulation was conducted to verify data accuracy. The analysis concluded by drawing conclusions explaining Islamic education management strategies in shaping children's character. The validity of the data was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from various informants and documents, while technique triangulation involved comparing interview results with observational data. These techniques aimed to ensure the validity and credibility of the collected data.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Designing Islamic Education Management Strategies at Early Childhood Education Ababils to Establish Early Character Foundations

The Islamic education management strategy designed by Early Childhood Education Ababils Sukoharjo has been implemented for four months during the learning process. This strategy aims to strengthen the foundational character of children from an early age through a systematic and structured approach. A key aspect in designing this strategy is establishing the institution's vision, mission, and goals, which align closely with Islamic values. In its implementation, Early Childhood Education Ababils integrates the national curriculum mandated by the government with an internal curriculum based on Islamic character and *tahfidz* (Qur'anic memorisation) comprehensively. This combination ensures coherence between national education policies and the institution's unique needs. The results of this integration are manifested in the form of learning modules that serve as operational guidelines for teachers at the school and parents at home, thereby facilitating a synergistic character education process between the school environment and the family.

Early Childhood Education Ababils applies learning methods grounded in naturalistic and contextual approaches to support the Islamic education management strategy's success. The concept of a nature school serves as the primary foundation in the learning process, with key methods including *tadabur alam* (reflection on nature) and natural learning. *Tadabur alamenables* students to explore the creation of Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala as part of developing spiritual and moral character. This activity provides direct experience in observing the greatness of Allah through the universe, serving as an effective method in character education (Hidayat, 2017). Meanwhile, natural learning, which refers to the methods of the

Prophet Muhammad SAW, emphasises children's engagement in real activities and events occurring around them, both planned and spontaneous. A supportive learning environment is crucial to the success of this approach, as the strategy developed must be internalised by the children and broadly accepted by the community.

The design of the Islamic education management strategy at Early Childhood Education Ababils is not conducted unilaterally but involves the active participation of various internal and external stakeholders. The stakeholders include the foundation's supervisors and administrators, the principal, educational consultants, teachers, parents, the school committee, and the surrounding community. Each party's role is adjusted according to their responsibilities and contributions in supporting the achievement of educational goals, namely the development of children's fundamental character. The foundation is the central guiding body to ensure the strategy aligns with the institution's vision and mission. The principal holds operational responsibility for formulating and implementing the strategy together with all teaching staff. Educational consultants provide professional input to ensure the strategy remains relevant to government regulations and local needs. Collaboration among these parties is essential to guarantee that the formulated strategy possesses legitimacy, acceptability, and effectiveness in its implementation within the educational environment.

The design of Islamic education strategies for early childhood begins by integrating religious principles derived from the Qur'an, Hadith, and the values of Pancasila to establish a strong character foundation. Task assignments, guidance, and habituation instil values through consistent repetition and reinforcement (Cinantya et al., 2019). Sufi practices such as weekly *dhikr* (remembrance of God), social services, and stories of the prophets also contribute to developing spiritual and ethical character (Hasibuan et al., 2025). Moreover, moderate Islamic values emphasising tolerance and diversity are integrated through the curriculum and inclusive teacher recruitment (Ma'arif et al., 2024).

2. Implementation of Islamic Education Management Strategy at Early Childhood Education Ababils Sukoharjo

The implementation phase represents a crucial stage in the educational management cycle, marking the transition from planning to execution. At Early Childhood Education Ababils Sukoharjo, the previously designed Islamic education management strategy is implemented to systematically and structurally establish a foundational character in children from an early age. At this stage, the institution ensures that all strategy components operate effectively through continuous supervision and periodic evaluation. The implementation begins with the development and internalisation of the institution's vision, mission, and objectives as the foundation of the curriculum. The national curriculum combines an Islamic character- and *tahfidz*-based curriculum, which is then formulated into practical thematic modules. These modules include annual, monthly, and weekly learning indicators, covering cognitive, motoric, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects. The synergy between planning and implementation enables the optimal achievement of character education objectives through a holistic approach relevant to early childhood learners' needs.

The learning modules applied at Early Childhood Education Ababils Sukoharjo reflect an integrative approach between child development and Islamic values. In the cognitive and motor domains, children are engaged in educational and physical activities appropriate to their

developmental stages. Islamic values are taught contextually through daily activities that reinforce focus, emotional regulation, and social and language skills. Four languages, Indonesian, English, Arabic, and Javanese, are introduced early to support cross-cultural communication abilities. Islamic values are integrated into five main pillars: *tauhid* (the oneness of God), *akhlak* (morality), *ibadah* (worship), *tahfidz* (Qur'anic memorisation), and *hadith* (Prophetic traditions). Strengthening *tauhid* is conducted through the introduction of the concept of God's unity via stories of the prophets; *akhlak* is taught through daily etiquette practices; *ibadah* is introduced with an educational and enjoyable approach; *tahfidz* emphasises memorisation and understanding of the Qur'an; and *hadith* is taught through memorisation and the application of values in real life. This integration forms a strong spiritual and moral foundation for children from an early age.

The success of implementing the Islamic education strategy at Early Childhood Education Ababils is also supported by the enhancement of human resources and infrastructure. Human resource development is carried out through ongoing training for teachers to enable them to design creative, innovative learning activities that align with early childhood development. Teachers are trained to prepare weekly Lesson Plans and regularly evaluate learning achievements. Furthermore, educational infrastructure development includes improvements to classrooms, play areas, and the provision of technological media to support interactive learning. The roles of the principal, foundation supervisors, and administrators in monitoring the strategy's implementation are critical to ensure alignment with the institution's objectives. Teachers also serve as role models, making it essential for them to upgrade their pedagogical and spiritual competencies continuously. With the strengthening of these internal aspects, the strategy's implementation can be effective and adaptive to the changing needs and dynamics of the educational environment.

Despite well-planned and carefully implemented strategies, Early Childhood Education Ababils faces several challenges during implementation. Limited teacher availability results in high workloads, reducing the individual attention given to students. Additionally, children's diverse backgrounds affect the speed and effectiveness of character value assimilation. A lack of parental participation in supporting school programs is also a significant obstacle. Some stakeholders resist the new strategy, especially following evaluation and revision processes. Nevertheless, implementing this strategy remains crucial in modernisation, where children are exposed to various negative influences that could weaken their character. Therefore, Early Childhood Education Ababils is committed to maximising the potential of the golden age of childhood to instil moral values, faith, and self-identity. This aligns with the view that character strengthening during childhood is a long-term investment in shaping generations that are intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually intelligent (Inawati, 2017).

Character education in early childhood requires a creative and contextual learning approach. The "Power of Two" strategy enhances active collaboration between teachers and students to understand moral values through discussion and shared responsibility (Masturin, 2024). Multicultural education is also applied with contribution, enrichment, transformation, and problem-based learning to foster understanding and appreciation of cultural and religious diversity (Suri & Chandra, 2021). Through these strategies, Islamic education becomes dynamic and inclusive, equipping children with spiritual values and social skills.

3. Evaluation of Islamic Education Management Strategy at Early Childhood Education Ababils Sukoharjo

Evaluation represents the final stage in implementing the Islamic education management strategy at Early Childhood Education Ababils Sukoharjo, aiming to assess the effectiveness of the character-building program for early childhood. This evaluation encompasses two main approaches: process evaluation (formative control) and outcome evaluation (summative), highlighting the importance of evaluation as a tool to determine competency achievement and monitor program implementation (Syahmial, 2023). The evaluation is conducted systematically through direct observation, activity documentation analysis, and the distribution of questionnaires to parents. Evaluation functions not only as a measurement tool but also as a basis for objective and accountable decision-making. Furthermore, it enables the institution to identify strengths and weaknesses in program implementation and provides a foundation for continuous improvement. This planned evaluative approach ensures that every step in building children's character aligns with the institution's vision and mission and the demands of contemporary development.

At Early Childhood Education Ababils, evaluation is based on measurable indicators covering character-building activities, educator performance, and parental involvement. The first indicator assesses the effectiveness of character education activities designed within thematic modules. The second indicator evaluates educator performance, vital in delivering material and fostering character development. Teacher assessment includes planning, implementation, and guidance toward students. The third indicator evaluates parental engagement in supporting home-based learning (Dewi & Suryana, 2020). The family environment significantly influences character formation through parenting styles, attitudes, and psychosocial conditions (Prihatiningsih, 2017). The fourth indicator focuses on implementing character values in children's daily lives, evaluated by observing attitudes and behaviours during classroom interaction and social activities. These four indicators provide a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of the implemented strategy in supporting early childhood character development.

The evaluation of the Islamic education management strategy at Early Childhood Education Ababils is conducted collaboratively by all stakeholders. Foundation supervisors and administrators participate in monthly evaluations to ensure program alignment with the institution's vision and mission. Educational consultants act as expert evaluators, providing macro-level analyses of strategy implementation. The principal is the manager and leader responsible for managing curriculum, educators, and facilities supporting evaluation activities (Rusmiyati et al., 2019). As the primary executors, teachers actively participate in weekly evaluations through child development observations and learning reports. Evaluation cycles occur weekly, monthly, and annually, utilising digital technology such as online survey platforms to reach parents. This approach broadens data coverage and increases participation, making the evaluation process more inclusive. With the involvement of all parties, evaluation becomes more than an administrative process; it transforms into a collective reflection on the effectiveness of the applied Islamic education strategy.

The evaluation process at Early Childhood Education Ababils is continuous and adaptive. Weekly evaluations conducted by educators cover the achievement of learning

indicators and child character development, while monthly evaluations include teacher performance reports and parental feedback gathered via digital surveys. This evaluation is conducted according to the Education Report Card indicators issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia (2024), encompassing input, process, output, and outcome. During monthly meetings, the school also holds parenting activities involving educational consultants and foundation representatives as resource persons. The feedback collected is specific, constructive, and provided promptly (Putri et al., 2023). Evaluation results serve as material for refining character-strengthening strategies more effectively. With this comprehensive, data-driven approach, the evaluation ensures that Early Childhood Education Ababils' educational program prioritises academic aspects and holistically develops spiritual, social, and moral character.

Teachers and parents play primary roles in shaping children's character. Effective collaboration and communication between school and family are vital, especially when facing modern education disruptions (Nudin, 2020). Teachers also serve as role models in daily behaviour, meaning the school environment significantly influences children's attitudes (Ikhrum et al., 2023). However, challenges such as limited funding for teacher training and technical difficulties in online learning frequently arise. The solution involves actively involving all school staff and enhancing digital learning facilities to ensure the program remains effective (Nuranifah et al., 2022; Riyanto et al., 2023).

D. CONCLUSION

The Islamic education management strategy at Early Childhood Education Ababils Sukoharjo systematically builds children's character foundations by integrating the national curriculum with an internal character and tahfidz program, developed into thematic modules for teachers and parents. Through contextual learning approaches like nature school and tadabur alam, students develop spiritual and moral values via direct environmental engagement. At the same time, the curriculum comprehensively addresses cognitive, motor, social, emotional, and spiritual development through five Islamic pillars: tauhid, akhlak, ibadah, tahfidz, and hadith. The program's success is reinforced through continuous teacher development and infrastructure support, with evaluation conducted via regular observation, documentation, and parental feedback that assesses learning effectiveness, teacher performance, and character implementation. All stakeholders participate in technology-enhanced weekly and monthly evaluations, whose results inform continuous strategic improvements. This approach has successfully cultivated children's discipline, empathy, and memorisation of Islamic values, developing spiritually, intellectually, socially, and morally intelligent individuals, with future research recommended for comparative studies and examining digital parenting's role in strengthening school-family collaboration.

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importance of Islamic education management strategies in shaping children's character from an early age. Hopefully, this study's results will offer meaningful contributions to Indonesia's early childhood education sector.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

- Author 1 : Designed the case study research, developed observation and interview instruments, and coordinated primary data collection involving teachers, the principal, and parents.
- Author 2 : Developed data analysis using the Miles and Huberman model, conducted triangulation of various data sources, and verified data validity through member checking and peer discussion.
- Author 3 : Conducted thematic coding of qualitative data, interpreted observation and interview results based on Islamic education management theories, and systematically compiled the research narrative analytically.
- Author 4 : Designed the research instrument validation procedure, conducted stakeholder interviews, and revised methodology based on academic feedback to ensure accuracy and contextual suitability.

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