

Enhancing Early Childhood Character Education Through Role Modeling and Care: A Case Study at Tadika Al-Fikh Orchard Port Klang Malaysia

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A B S T R A C T

Responsible and honest personality Mostly formed through early character education. The paradigm of character education that emphasizes affection and role model is one of the most effective approaches to instill moral values in children. This study aims to investigate how kindergarten educational institutions use care and role model to implement the concept of character education. The research methodology used is a qualitative approach that utilizes the process of recording, interviews, and observations at Tadika AlFikh Orchard Port Klang Malaysia. Early character education plays a crucial role in shaping responsible and honest personalities. An effective paradigm for character education involves fostering affection and providing positive role models, helping children internalize moral values through observation and imitation. This study aims to explore how kindergarten educational institutions implement character education by emphasizing care and role modeling as key strategies. The research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing interviews, observations, and documentation at Tadika Al-Fikh Orchard, Port Klang, Malaysia. The results of the study showed that role models from teachers and parents. Children tend to imitate the behavior they see from adult figures around them, especially in terms of honesty, responsibility, and concern for others. In addition, concern can also be developed through social activities and interactions that involve cooperation and empathy in the learning environment. However, there are several obstacles and constraints faced, including the lack of cooperation from mothers and fathers and the various characters of children.

Keywords: *Character Education, Early Childhood, Role Model, Caring.*

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INTRODUCTION

A person's potential in terms of intelligence, morality, skills, self-control, personality, spirituality, and religion can be explored through education, which is a directed and structured effort to create a dynamic learning environment. The educational path is the answer to this problem. A better generation and successor will be born from education. Institutions must emphasize character education to develop civilization, which is needed to address the urgency of this problem (Ranam et al., 2021). The goal of education is to help students change their attitudes and actions to improve themselves as individuals. Instilling a sense of self-care, environmental awareness, and empathy in students is the goal of education. In accordance with the goal of education, namely empowering students to actively discover their potential through deliberate and organized learning activities. It takes more than just educators to instil character education in children from an early age; parents, who are the primary role models for their children, also need to set positive examples (Devianti et al., 2020).

To uphold Indonesian values, education must foster traits such as self-control, leadership, discipline, cooperation in time and collaboration, emotional intelligence, the ability to handle any situation, the nature of service, the ability to collaborate, negotiate, create and sell products, and the ability to respond and adapt (Setyowati, 2020). In reality, many adults and children litter, do not know how to queue, are bored, and do not even care about their parents or teachers. There are also disputes between students, bullying, and even bigotry in schools. So is it in society. Moreover, the millennial generation is growing, which affects the thought process of society, such as the slowness of socialization and international interaction, and the existence of things that are all fast, while all other processes, such as hard work, discipline, focus, and patience, are difficult to understand (Setyowati, 2020).

It is undeniable that education plays an important role in helping people develop their attitude and action skills because education provides a safe space for them to grow and develop (Bali, 2019). Children start school at a young age because that is when their brains are still very plastic and open to learning new things. It is important to note that humans experience rapid change, growth, and development during childhood (Bali & Chairunniza', 2020). The goal of national education is to make humans have noble character. Morals have a strong correlation with different characters in each individual. Efforts to form noble morals require a long process, therefore it must start from the most difficult phase (Fepriyanti & Suharto, 2021).

Character education is a deliberate effort to instil positive moral values, attitudes, and behaviours in children, shaping them into responsible and empathetic individuals. Theoretically, character education is rooted in Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development, which emphasizes the progression of moral reasoning from obedience and self-interest to social norms and principled conscience. Additionally, Bandura's Social Learning Theory highlights the importance of modelling, where children learn by observing and imitating significant figures around them, such as parents and teachers.

In early childhood, these theories become particularly relevant due to the plasticity of young children's brains, which makes them highly receptive to new behaviors and values (Bali & Chairunniza', 2020). According to Lickona (1991), character education in early childhood should integrate three essential components: moral knowing (understanding values), moral feeling (developing empathy and emotional intelligence), and moral action (demonstrating positive behavior).

During early childhood, children undergo rapid cognitive, emotional, and social development. This period is critical for laying the foundation of character traits such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, and respect. When children consistently observe and experience positive role models – both at home and in educational settings they internalize these behaviors. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory further supports this, explaining how children's development is influenced by their immediate environment, including family, school, and community. In the context of multicultural environments, such as Tadika Al-Fikh Orchard, Port Klang, Malaysia, character education becomes even more essential. It not only fosters self-confidence and positive behaviour but also promotes multicultural values, helping children appreciate diversity and build social harmony (Desmila & Suryana, 2023). Thus, implementing character education in early childhood is not merely about teaching good behaviour. it's about shaping lifelong values and creating a compassionate, resilient future generation.

Multicultural education is important because it helps children develop self-confidence and self-behavior. In addition, it is also important to consider multicultural values. One form is not being selfish, and his group is better than others. If a child can understand and appreciate

all the differences and diversity of groups, then he will understand how to handle and analyze emotions (Desmila & Suryana, 2023). Researchers conducted field observations related to the character model used to build caring and exemplary character in Taadika Port Klang Malaysia students by teachers showing commendable attitudes that can be emulated by children.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative methodology that included documentation, interviews, and observation methods. Teachers and children from Tadika AlFikh Orchard in Port Klang, Malaysia, participated in this study. Direct observation was used to conduct this study, by observing the surrounding environment and students' actions both inside and outside the classroom. Interviews, documentation, and observations of various programs, activities, and procedures for each student at Tadika AlFikh Orchard Port Klang, Malaysia, were used to collect data. To collect information about the early childhood character education model, especially through the exemplary and caring approach, educators were interviewed. "Naturalistic qualitative" or "naturalistic research" is a term used to describe qualitative education, where scientists report field conditions in their natural state. The process of collecting data or phenomena is carried out from the real world. In the field, researchers are seen. (Yakin, 2023).

One method of data collection is field research. One of the research techniques that examines events in their natural conditions is called Dedy Mulyana. One of the qualitative research techniques is field research, which involves observing and interviewing individuals in their natural environment. Field data is the main source of information for this, so that the information collected can accurately reflect the reality of events that occur in the field.

The study employed observation as a key method to gather insights into the implementation of early childhood character education at Tadika AlFikh Orchard in Port Klang, Malaysia. This involved closely monitoring teacher-student interactions both inside and outside the classroom, using the human senses—especially sight—as the primary tool (Pahleviannur et al., 2022). Observations focused on teachers' behaviors, particularly how they modeled caring and exemplary attitudes, as well as students' responses and imitative behaviors. By documenting daily routines, social interactions, and the surrounding environment, the researcher was able to capture authentic moments that contribute to character development. Field notes were taken in real-time to preserve the natural flow of events and emotional expressions, ensuring a faithful representation of the observed behaviors and contexts.

In addition to observations, interviews were conducted to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the character education process. An interview with Teacher Nurul Fathin Binti Jainuddin provided valuable insights into her strategies for instilling positive values, such as responsibility, empathy, and honesty, through role modeling. The discussion also explored the challenges she faced in implementing these practices and her perspectives on their effectiveness in shaping young children's moral development. By combining observational data with in-depth interview responses, the research offered a well-rounded view of how character education is practiced and perceived within the preschool setting.

Data Analysis

According to Herdiansyah (2009) one of the methods used in qualitative research to obtain a picture from the subject's point of view is by conducting a documentation study. Documents and educational and teaching materials, one of which is about the early childhood character education model through exemplary behavior and concern at Tadika AlFikh Orchard Port Klang Malaysia, then analyzing the data through data analysis software that will be used to help manage and categorize the data. The collected data underwent thematic analysis to identify patterns and key themes related to exemplary behavior and care. Field notes, interview transcripts, and documents were coded manually and with the support of

qualitative analysis software, aiding in categorizing data and ensuring reliability. This process helped interpret how character education practices emerged naturally within the learning environment, aligning with the naturalistic qualitative framework (Yakin, 2023).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study investigates how early childhood character education is enhanced through role modeling and care at Tadika Al-Fikh Orchard, Port Klang, Malaysia. The findings are organized into three key themes: Role Modeling, Caring, and Social Interactions, reflecting the interconnected processes shaping children's character development.

Role Modeling as a Foundation for Character Building

The study emphasizes the crucial role of teachers as primary role models in early childhood character education, aligning with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which posits that children learn by observing and imitating others. Through daily interactions, teachers at Tadika AlFikh Orchard consistently modeled key values such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy. They demonstrated honesty by openly acknowledging mistakes and encouraging children to do the same, modeled responsibility through diligent classroom management and care for the learning environment, and expressed empathy by comforting upset children – behaviors that were visibly mirrored by the students. These observations underscore the powerful influence of teacher behavior in shaping young learners' moral and social development.

The interviews confirmed that teachers consciously embody these values, recognizing that children are highly impressionable. Teacher Nurul Fathin Binti Jainuddin emphasized that “children watch and copy everything we do, so we must be the person we want them to become.” However, challenges emerged, particularly when children encountered conflicting behaviors at home, highlighting the need for greater parental involvement.

Fostering Care through Everyday Practices

Caring emerged as a pivotal approach in promoting emotional and social development among children. The study found that teachers integrate caring behaviors into daily activities, creating a nurturing environment where children feel valued and secure – essential for early character formation.

Caring strategies observed included: 1) Personal attention: Teachers addressed students by name, asked about their feelings, and acknowledged their efforts, fostering a sense of importance and belonging. 2) Collaborative activities: Group tasks encouraged children to help one another, reinforcing the value of cooperation and mutual support. 3) Conflict resolution: Teachers guided children to express their feelings calmly and resolve disagreements respectfully, promoting emotional regulation and empathy.

Documentation analysis showed that these caring practices aligned with the school's educational guidelines, which prioritize emotional well-being as a foundation for academic and moral development. However, teachers noted that while most children responded positively to caring approaches, some exhibited individual resistance due to diverse parenting styles at home. This finding supports the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory, emphasizing the influence of family environments on children's social behavior.

Social Interactions and Character Development

The study observed that **peer interactions** play a vital role in reinforcing character education, particularly when guided by teacher role models. Children learned not only from educators but also from observing and interacting with their peers.

Key observations included: 1) Sharing and cooperation: Activities such as group art projects and outdoor play encouraged children to share materials and work together. Children who initially refused to share often adapted after observing peers cooperating. 2) Emotional support: Children demonstrated care and empathy by comforting friends who were upset,

echoing the compassionate behavior modeled by teachers. 3) Moral reasoning: During group discussions led by the teacher, children began to verbalize moral judgments, such as identifying unfair behavior and proposing solutions (e.g., "It's not fair if he takes two turns, we should all get one turn").

Interviews with educators emphasized that social interactions provided real-life opportunities for children to apply the values they observed. However, teachers acknowledged that managing conflicts between children required patience and consistent reinforcement of positive behavior

Tadika AlFikh Orchard, located in Port Klang, Malaysia is an educational institution that fosters moral values and compassion in the development of students' characters. Students develop healthy attitudes and behaviors by applying these concepts in their daily lives. Applying moral principles such as honesty, tolerance, compassion, mutual assistance and environmental awareness are the main emphasis in students' daily lives (Akib, 2023).

Table 1. The selection is based on the qualities possessed by the students, such as:

Table 1 Characteristics of Students Studied

Characteristics of Students Studied	
1 Love each other Students show empathy and affection for their friends.g kepada teman-temannya.	1 Independent After eating and drinking, students are accustomed to washing plates and glasses alternately and regularly.
2 Honesty Students have the ability to tell the truth.	2 Caring for fellow friends Students have a high sense of caring for their friends.
3 Helping each other Students are taught to be cooperative.	3 Concern for the environment They impulsively tidy up the classroom and throw away trash in its place.

Table 2. Habits that are done every day

No.	Habitation
1.	Dhuha prayer
2.	Ice breaking and prayer
3.	Entering class and reciting Al-Quran
4.	Independently

Character education continues to be developed in the education system as a normative reference that is set in a complete framework. Character education is highly respected in formal schools. Related to attitudes, behavior, words and actions, character education is applied fairly and consistently. 1). Ensure that students have a positive personality; 2). Improve academic achievement; 3). Help students develop strong characters elsewhere; 4). Prepare students to live in a diverse society and respect others; 5). Address the root causes of social problems, such as violence, rudeness, dishonesty, and violations of social norms; 6). Prepare students to face behavior in the workplace; and 7). Learn cultural values that are part of civilization efforts. Superior character is related to loving goodness (doing good) and understanding goodness (understanding goodness). One of the most important elements of character education in this school is morality and social skills (Musyawir, 2022).

Among the activities carried out to understand Islam and its teachings are reading verses of the Qur'an, praying for parents, educators and students and attending congregational Dhuha prayers (Taulabi, 2019). Students are taught to respect and behave well to peers, parents, and teachers in addition to adhering to the values of justice, diversity and honesty. In addition, the school promotes social projects and environmental awareness. Students plan social gatherings, participate in environmental efforts, and give to those in need (Ismail, 2021). The results of the investigation are presented along with an analysis or explanation of the

findings. Test results, questionnaires, interviews, papers and other field data were used to gather important information for the research conclusions.

Exemplary Character and Caring

Regardless of differences in religion, nationality, skin color or views, people around the world are taught to live together and socialize in this era (Zain, 2020). To promote the social development of early childhood has been involved in a number of initiatives. PAUD is a school that teaches children how to participate in the social life of society (Nurhaelina et al., 2021). To achieve the goals of education or child development, teachers must be knowledgeable and skilled in various strategies used by providing experiences or examples to students. An excellent role model strategy discussed here is an illustration of commendable behavior that can serve as an instructional resource for Islamic education (Agus et al., 2021).

The importance of using examples of morality to teach children, especially during the early years when they are very susceptible to what they see, hear and feel. This shows how sensitive young children are to imitate and record what they hear or see without thinking about it, regardless of whether it is good or bad. A teacher, who is an important participant in this positive learning process, is responsible for this. As stated in the proverb, "if teachers are the main leaders in schools in terms of teaching and learning, and if they behave correctly, their students will follow them (Jannah, 2019). Teachers who use this model approach are very important for the educational process. According to Putri & Taqiudin (2020), in terms of children's self-development, the involvement of parents as role models is very important. An important factor in developing children's moral and social character is their observation of others. Parents who are consistent in providing examples of good behavior will help children develop positive attitudes and strong characters.

Character education plays an important role in the educational process in schools, especially in maximizing the quality of each individual, such as nature, behavior, character and noble morals. To maximize character education, the guidance of a teacher is very important. The most important aspect of a teacher's job is role modeling. A good teacher must be able to provide good advice to his students. Role models in character education are very important because character education is not only based on theories from literature or explanations, but also on real actions. Teachers must be able to explain the principles of character education through their writings so that they can be concrete examples for students (Salsabilah et al., 2021).

Activities such as sharing, helping and working together with peers are often associated with the development of caring in early childhood. Some strategies that have been developed to support this activity are cooperative games. For example. Research shows that games such as "slide ball" can help children interact and work together, which helps them develop their ability to be patient and support their parents. The role of the teacher as a facilitator is very important in creating an environment where these activities can develop (Fitria et al., 2020).

To create unique and different characters from one another, it is important to consider how something that is carved will react to the strength of the object being carved. Every child has unique characteristics and potential to behave positively and negatively, or that may not be in accordance with the values taught in school. Therefore, parents must be kind in providing the environment and resources needed by each child for proper growth. If educators show positive character traits from an early age, then their development will also be positive. From an early age, their development will also be positive. The formation of character from the family or parents, however, has a significant impact on the quality of character education in schools (Badu, 2019). Developing children's character is an important foundation in parenting. Good character will create a law-abiding society. This will create a harmonious and national lifestyle and reduce the risk of crime and violence.

Effective methods for teaching caring and exemplary character

The method used at Tadika AlFikh Orchard Port Klang Malaysia, involves several approaches specifically designed to support children's holistic development. First, this school applies group learning activities. Through this method, children are invited to interact and learn together in small groups. These group activities help children build social skills, such as communicating, sharing and working together. They are invited to help and understand each other, so that they can develop a sense of empathy and tolerance from an early age.

Apart from that, AlFikh Orchard Port Klang also uses storytelling activities as a learning method. Storytelling activities are one of the learning methods. Storytelling activities are very effective in attracting children's attention and making it easier for them to understand the concepts being taught. Through stories, children can learn moral values, increase their imagination, and develop their listening and speaking abilities. The stories told are usually related to daily life, religious values, as well as lessons that teach children to be kind and care about other people.

Furthermore, this school also integrates physical activities that involve movement as an important part of the teaching method. These activities include outdoor play, gymnastics, and games involving body coordination. Through physical movement, children not only learn the importance of maintaining physical fitness, but also develop their motor skills. This physical activity is designed to keep children active, enthusiastic and focused in learning. In addition, through movement they can learn about the concepts of space, balance and body control. With this diverse approach, Hadika AlFikh Orchard Port Klang Malaysia strives to ensure that every child gets a fun, varied and beneficial learning experience to support their overall development, both intellectually, socially, emotionally and physical.

Constraints and Obstacles in Implementing Character Education

The challenges and obstacles in the character education program at Tadika AlFikh Orchard Port Klang include several factors that affect the learning process. Time constraints are the main constraint. Teachers in this era often experience time constraints in running effective education programs, especially when the curriculum is implemented with various activities. This results in challenges to provide a wise perspective to each child that encourages them to examine their own character, such as perseverance, commitment, and teamwork. In addition, the difficulty in dealing with diverse children also causes significant losses. Each child has unique characteristics and traits, some of which are easy to understand, while others may find it more difficult to follow rules or participate in activities. This requires additional information and various teaching strategies so that the character education process can be carried out effectively. Teachers must be able to explain the needs and learning methods of each child to develop character development.

To overcome these constraints, several solutions have been implemented. One of them is by establishing several teacher training workshops. Through this study, teachers can develop new skills in teaching, understand child psychology, and use innovative and interesting teaching methods. These exercises also serve as a platform for teachers to share strategies and insights to overcome the challenges that arise when teaching children with different personalities.

In addition to teachers, Tadika AlFikh Orchard Port Klang encourages parents and guardians to actively participate in school activities, such as weekend activities, student-teacher meetings, and joint projects at home. With the help of parents, children can form a strong community both at school and at home, so that character education can run effectively. This involvement helps create synergy between education at home and at school. Which is very important in determining the character of children from birth. Combining teacher competency enhancement through instruction and student participation can produce an effective approach to character education at Tadika AlFikh Orchard Port Klang.

CONCLUSIONS

At Tadika Al-Fikh Orchard Port Klang, habituation is seen as a pillar of character analysis that focuses on problems that arise from habits. The process of developing relatively permanent attitudes and behaviours is carried out through regular and continuous education, which emphasizes discipline, morality, and responsibility. One example is getting children used to performing the Dhuha prayer in congregation on time. According to this theory, the habituation method is very effective when applied to children because their immature personalities make it easier for them to interact and instill positive habits in their daily lives.

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