

The Roles of Family In Strengthening Children's Religious Characters

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the roles of family in strengthening children's religious characters, particularly in Islamic perspective. A qualitative approach with descriptive analysis was used as the main methodology. The research was conducted by interviewing ten families of the students at Daarul Qur'an Boarding School, Tangerang, Indonesia. The results showed that family has a significant role in children's characters. The findings of this study revealed several factors stated by the parents, including their inability to guide, time constraints, and socio-economic status. The development or strengthening of the character of students in school will work well if the family or parents can play an active role in support. The end result desired through the active role of the family in character education for children, as expressed by the Ministry of National Education, is to become a human being who is faithful, pious, noble, tough, independent, creative, innovative, work ethic, loyal friends, and care about the environment can be accomplished well. Based on the interview sessions, all parents in this study agreed that they should have an active role in their family. In this case, parents have a very important role in the development and fostering of good character in their children. Among the roles of the family as expressed by the parents are as an educational institution for children, a source of love, motivation, and role models. Consequently, this study implies that the role of family in strengthening children's characters should be in line with Islamic teaching as shown by the Prophet SAW through his good characters (akhlak al-karimah).

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasingly uncontrolled development of children's behaviors, especially adolescents today, shows the importance of character education. The implementation of character education should not focus only on teaching values, but it would have significant impacts if followed by exemplary models by educators, especially parents.

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The formation or development of a child's character is influenced by family treatment (Gunawan et al., 2020). A person's character is formed from an early age; hence, the role of the family is very influential. In this case, it can be said that strengthening the character of students in schools will work well if parents (family) can play an active role in supporting their children at home (Jhon et al., 2021; Kristjánsson, 2020).

In Indonesia, the problem of youth violence has worsened because of the country's economic downturn, unemployment, and weaker state institutions. Additionally, lack of income and shattered aspirations have had an impact on young people. As a result, young gangs have arisen, seeking to earn economic money as well as identity and confidence for their members. Furthermore, juvenile delinquency has led to many underage adolescents becoming smokers, taking narcotics, engaging in casual intercourse, and committing crimes. More violent acts, such as murder, are frequently linked to drugs and/or gangs. Media also reported that female gangs warring in high schools around the country (Hidayat et al., 2022; Marzuki & Samsuri, 2022).

Internalizing character values in virtual learning requires special care because it has an impact on character instillation (Jerome et al., 2022). Previously, character education was implemented through face-to-face meetings at schools (Ammatulloh et al., 2022). However, during the Covid-19 phase, learning is switched to a virtual-based learning environment (Sangsawang, 2020). Hence, character education faces several challenges due to this transition. Because there is no face-to-face interaction, character qualities imparted by the teacher through a role model are difficult to realize in virtual learning (Riyanto et al., 2022).

Character education is becoming increasingly important as more students engage in immoral and unethical behaviours. Students also lack cognitive freedom (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). This problem appears to affect not only Indonesia but also other countries. Dempster (2020), for instance, did research on student and youth-related crimes in general. The research was carried out in Jamaica, which is a developing country like Indonesia today. The findings indicated that the best way to limit the number of crimes committed by students is to consistently enhance character education through moral and religious principles rather than imposing punishments that may have a deterrent impact. According to McGrath et al. (2022), the use of punishment as a deterrent is ineffective.

The family serves as a vehicle for bringing up children, providing for their needs, and integrating them into society. It also helps each member of the family develop the skills necessary to perform their roles in society, gives them a sense of fulfilment and a healthy environment to create a prosperous family, and helps mould the character of children, especially in the formative years of human development (Anwar, 2018). Children's education, socialisation, and imprinting of values are greatly influenced by their families. Children will develop character if they grow up in a home where moral values are valued, allowing each child's innate holy nature to flourish (Zulhaini, 2019).

This suggests that the family unit is the primary and most efficient setting for delivering welfare, education, and health care. The most important and foremost

source of character instruction is the family. It is difficult for others to make corrections and improvements if families do not educate their children. The youngest members of the family should receive character education first. Character education can be introduced into the home as soon as possible, but not before the kids get used to living in a happy environment. Praying, giving, and speaking politely and honestly are all examples of excellent attitudes and values that parents and household members should set (Gunarta, 2016).

In line with the above notion, excessive self-actualization, which is not founded on moral values recognized in social life, is a major issue for the young in numerous countries. Thus, schools that promote character education can help children build their moral character. For that reason, character education should be delivered depending on student development. Teaching moral-character qualities is a solution to the problem of the student's moral deterioration (Hermino & Arifin, 2020; Peterson, 2020). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to describe how parents internalize and apply character education in their homes by giving good examples and moral conduct. Consequently, the current study aims to answer the following research questions: What are the roles of family in strengthening children's characters?; How is the development of children's character in the perspective of Islamic religious education?

Family and Character Education

A family is a group of people with marital ties, born blood ties and adoptions that aim to create, maintain culture and improve the physical, mental, emotional and social development of each family member. In this notion, family is a blood bond, marriage or adoption in one house which is a culture of regular interactions (Bensaid, 2021). It can be said that family is the basic unit of relatives consisting of husband, wife and children. In the view of Islam, the family has no small value. In fact, Islam pays great attention to family life by laying down wise principles to protect family life from disharmony and destruction. Islam is concerned with this matter because it cannot be denied that the family is the first brick as the foundation for building a Muslim community, especially as a faith that is expected to produce new generations of Muslims who can elevate the words of Allah on earth (Arfat, 2013; Islam, 2015).

The concept of family in Islam is that the family is a school (madrasah) where the children study. From there they learn noble qualities, such as loyalty, mercy and compassion, positive jealousy (ghirah) and other good characteristics. Happiness will arise in the household if it is based on piety, relationships that are built on conversation and mutual understanding, and affairs that are carried out in deliberation between husband, wife, and children. All family members feel comfortable solving problems by promoting open feelings and minds (Nurjanah & Nur, 2022). If there is a dispute, in any case, the place of return is based on consensus and religion because the Sharia acts as a separator. An ideal family consists of two individuals who play important roles, namely the role of the father and the role of the mother. In general, the roles of these two individuals are to fulfil biological and physical needs and care for the family patiently, affectionately and consistently, educate, regulate and control children, become examples and role models for children,

a source of love and security, a protector or a firm figure, wise and loves for family members (Rehan, 2013).

In the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, Article 3, it is mentioned that the main purpose of education is to shape character in behaving like a person who believes and has a devotion to God Almighty, with noble character. Character can be defined as virtue values (knowing the value of virtue, wanting to do good, and having a good life) that are embedded in oneself and manifest in behaviour. Furthermore, character coherently emanates from the results of thinking, heart exercise, feeling and intention, which contain values, abilities, moral capacity, and toughness in facing difficulties and challenges (Boyle, 2006). Thus, there are six main characteristics of an individual, namely honesty and responsibility, intelligence, creativity, toughness, and caring. Therefore, character is understood as a good personal quality, in the sense of knowing kindness, being willing to do good, and behaving well, which coherently radiates as a result of thinking, exercising, and a combination of feeling and intention, which contains elements of goodness.

In terms of strengthening character education, it is believed that the development or strengthening of character is necessary and important for schools and their stakeholders to become a foothold in the implementation of character education in schools. The purpose of character education is basically to encourage the birth of good human beings (Insan Kamil). The growth and development of good character will encourage students to grow with the capacity and commitment to do the best things, do everything right, and have a life purpose (Gunawan et al., 2020). Hence, strengthening children's character is an effort or action that is carried out efficiently by children to shape behaviour, traits, habits, skills and psychophysical elements which include morals, values, and ways of thinking in daily activities to adapt to the surrounding environment.

Family has a big role in shaping children's characters because educational interactions take place within the family, school, community and work environments. Therefore, the maximum success of the implementation of education in an educational unit will be greatly influenced by these factors since they are related to one another and each influences one another. Students or children have unique and complex characteristics (Arfat, 2013). They have talent and maturity thanks to external influences such as family, society, socioeconomic status, level and type of parent's work, and cultural influences, thus forming a personal child becomes complex.

Therefore, families have a fundamental (central) position in children's education, including in developing good character. So in educational matters, the family is the first environment where educational interactions occur. Thus, family plays a strategic function in education, including character education for children at home. The family environment has an important role, considering that children are not only a gift but also a mandate from God. Because children are a mandate, the family or parents have the central responsibility in matters of children's education.

Parenting from the Islamic Perspectives

There are three important pillars in the world of education, namely family, school and community. The three pillars of education must support each other in building good character. Specifically, parents should be role models for their children. They should be able to accompany their children so that they can grow and develop in the monitoring of values that are believed to be true. Additionally, parents should be able to guide and set an example for their children to grow and develop according to expectations. More importantly, parents should be able to educate their children to develop into a generation with good character.

From the Islamic perspective, education aims to form a personality as the caliph of Allah and prepare human beings for the final goal, namely to believe in Allah and submit and obey Him totally (Ibn Al-Qayyim, 2010). According to Al-Ghazali (2019), there are two main objectives of Islamic education, namely, to form a full-fledged human being who can eventually get closer to Allah SWT. And form a full person to obtain happiness in the world and the hereafter. Islamic religious education aims to cultivate and increase faith through the provision and cultivation of knowledge, appreciation, practice, and experience of students about the Islamic religion so that they become Muslim humans who continue to develop in terms of faith, piety, nation and state, and to be able to continue at a higher educational level. The final goal is the desired goal so that students become perfect human beings (*insan kamil*) (Ibn Al-Jawzi, 2011).

Islamic education in the family is a process of shaping the Islamic personality in children. The role and responsibility of parents as primary educators is needed in educating children properly. In addition, the existence of educators' examples is one way of influencing the child's self. Parents are the first generation of educators, but this is not yet fully felt by the majority of Muslim families today. Therefore, it is very important to re-optimize the role of parents in the family so that an exemplary crisis does not occur. Exemplary education is an effective method or way of preparing children from a moral, mental and social perspective. The examples that are taught include aspects of worship, law and morals (Ammatulloh et al., 2022). This has been exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad SAW. In education, modelling shows honesty, justice, affection for children, exemplary attitudes and adherence to the Islamic way (*manhaj*) in daily ethics. Parents as first educators must provide good examples by teaching and practising the teachings of Prophet Muhammad SAW.

The main target of education in Islam is morality or character. This can be seen from several hadiths of the Prophet which explain the virtues of moral education. For instance, narrated by Imam Muslim that the Prophet SAW said, "Teach your children kindness, and educate them" (Ulwan, 2004). In another hadith, Prophet SAW reminded:

Do good by you to your mother and father, surely your children will also do good to you (H.R. Al-Thabrany)

Additionally, characters or morals have an important position and are considered to have a vital function in guiding people's lives (Scourfield et al., 2013). Allah SWT says in Qur'an Surat An-Nahl (16): 90 as follows:

Indeed, Allah instructs (you) to be just and do good, to provide assistance to relatives, and He prohibits (from doing) heinous acts, evil, and enmity. He teaches you so that you can take lessons (Q.S.16:90)

Character education in Islam is intended for humans who long for happiness in a true sense, not false happiness. Islamic character is a character that maintains human existence as an honourable creature according to his nature (Beshir & Beshir, 1998). In this sense, Islam is a perfect religion so every teaching that exists in Islam has a rationale, as for the basis of character or moral education is Al-Quran and Al-Hadith. From this understanding, it can be summarized that character-building starts with individuals at home. It is then projected to spread to other individuals, then after the number of individuals who are enlightened in character or morally becomes large, it will automatically colour society. Further character development is carried out in a family environment and must be done as early as possible so that it affects the growth and development of children (Cook & Malkawi, 2010). Through character building for each individual and family, a peaceful and prosperous civilization will be created.

Muslim spiritual parenting is ingrained in several foundational ideas, including the unity of God (tawhid), innate human nature (fitrah), self-purification (tazkiyah), reform (islah), stewardship (khilafah), service to God ('ubudiyah), success (falah), and the good life (hayat tayyibah). The oneness of God is regarded as the most fundamental premise, which promotes children's curiosity and imagination about life and the cosmos (Al-Qabisi, 1986). Parents often turn to the concept of tawhid to answer their children's inquiries regarding the idea of the Creator, the mysteries of life, and the nature of the cosmos. Islam also exhorts parents to entertain their children's inquiries and responses that pertain to dialogue, wisdom (hikmah), and delightful exhortation (maw'idah al-hasanah) when speaking to family members and other people (Ibn Khaldun, 1967). This piece of parenting advice is regarded by Ibn Miskawayh (d. 1030 AD) as a strong incentive for raising moral and spiritual kids (Bensaid, 2021)

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The current study was conducted with a qualitative approach using descriptive analysis. 10 (ten) families or parents of the students were purposively selected as samples. These students (known as Santri) are currently studying at Pondok Pesantren Daarul Qur'an, Tangerang, Banten, Indonesia. This Islamic boarding school educational institution is under the Daarul Qur'an Education Directorate with the flagship memorizing Qur'an program (Tahfizh Qur'an) integrated with the official national curriculum of education in Indonesia. The various levels of education in Daarul Qur'an are divided from school preparation to higher education. This choice of this school was in line with the main objective of this study to see the roles of parents in strengthening the characters of their children. As graduates of this institution, students are expected to have good moral conduct and strong character in the Islamic religion.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned earlier in the introduction, the current study aims to answer two research questions related to the family's roles in strengthening children's characters and the development of children's characters from the Islamic perspective. Hence, the discussion will follow these two sub-headings.

Family's Roles in Strengthening Children's Characters

In general, most of the families or parents interviewed in this study expected to fully educate their children at the Islamic Boarding School. The reality in the field is that parents leave the matters of their children's education to the school or Pesantren or teachers. There are several factors that can encourage such parenting attitudes. The findings of this study revealed several factors stated by the parents, including their inability to guide, time constraints, and socio-economic status. Some of the parents expressed and mentioned the following:

As a parent, I feel that I cannot fully guide my children's education, because I only have a low level of education ... especially because I live in rural or remote areas (Parent 1)

I generally work and have various activities to fulfil for my family life and needs. Maybe because of that I do not have enough time to provide education to my children (Parent 2)

That the situation and conditions of my family have a very big influence on emotions, social adjustments, interests, attitudes, goals, discipline, and actions of my students, both in the school environment and in the community environment. If the family situation and conditions are not supportive, the child experiences symptoms of no harmony (Parent 3)

Realizing this, the success of character-reinforcing students will also greatly depend on these factors, especially the family, school and community environment. The creation of interactions with sufficient frequency and good quality is something that must be considered and maintained in the management of parent-child relationships (Yu et al., 2023). From this process, children can learn and gain valuable experiences that can become provisions for future success and provision for interacting with their community. The first key that meetings between parents and children at home are of genuine quality is good communication (Liu et al., 2022; Meindl et al., 2018).

From the above description, it can be concluded that the development or strengthening of the character of students in school will work well if the family or parents can play an active role in support. The end result desired through the active role of the family in character education for children, as expressed by the Ministry of National Education, is to become a human being who is faithful, pious, noble, tough, independent, creative, innovative, work ethic, loyal friends, and care about the environment can be accomplished well (Sipayung & Cheng, 2023).

Fostering good characters in each household is the realization of a good generation in society. Most of the informants in this study agreed that they want to be

good role models for their children and the surrounding society. They expressed their points of view:

I want to always provide good role models for my children, both in terms of psychology or personality, on the practice of religious teachings, as well as in the social aspect of society and so on (Parent 4)

What I can do is ... cultivate affection and discipline in accordance with the development of my children (Parent 5)

Not spoiling children because indulgence will lead to unfavourable and unhealthy development or growth in the future. In my opinion, children who are always spoiled by their parents are less creative (lazy), because they get whatever they want from their parents, in other words; spoiled child only knows what it is (Parent 6)

Based on the interview sessions, all parents in this study agreed that they should have an active role in their family. In this case, parents have a very important role in the development and fostering of good character in their children. They believed that from a small family, generations will emerge with children who are capable of facing the challenges of this era of globalization. Among the roles of the family as expressed by the parents are as an educational institution for children, a source of love, motivation, and role models.

As an educational institution for children, the family is an institution that has the obligation and responsibility to achieve a child's further educational goals because the family is the main basic educational institution for a child. The family as the smallest unit of a society has an important role in human development, either as an individual being or as a social being. This is as explained by Parent 7:

For a child, before he knows the outside world more widely, it is the family environment that he encounters first. Furthermore, the family has a considerable influence on the children for whom the father and mother are responsible. This includes the effect after a child enters a formal education institution. Because these educational values will be used as provisions for a child who will become the next generation in the future (Parent 7)

As a source of love, the implementation of daily family duties and roles is certainly carried out without eliminating the element of love as everything between family members, resulting in a distinctive relationship, namely the relationship between parents and their children that leads to an educational attitude. Every parent tries to maintain the family, so the nature of mutual understanding, respect, love and respect must be manifested in a real way and there is a sense of affection in the family from birth. One of the parents said:

The existence of a sense of affection in the family will provide a sense of peace so that children feel at home in the family environment (Parent 8)

As a source of motivation, parents need to work extra hard. Motivation to learn in children usually does not appear suddenly, but through a long process, which starts when children can communicate with the outside world. The desires and values that are upheld by parents, in general, will affect the motivation to learn in children. At

school we often encounter varied motivations to learn in children, this is based on different backgrounds in family life. Parents 9 affirmed that:

Motivation to learn in children can be developed as early as possible through efforts, including providing games that contain educational elements (education) to stimulate reasoning, emotions, skills and creativity in children. With this effort, it is hoped that it can be an encouragement or motivation for children to study seriously (Parent 9)

As a source of role models for children, parents have a very important role and have responsibility for all family members who are under their responsibility. However, parents are required to comply with the rules and regulations that apply to the family. With the participation of parents in complying with every rule made, it will provide an assessment for the child towards their parents. They will make parents role models in their lives. In line with that, Parents 10 stated:

I totally agree that ... role models. Parents are role models who are always imitated and imitated by their children in every behaviour, either directly or indirectly. The example given by parents to their children in the household will be easier to penetrate the child's soul than through advice (Parent 10)

The Development of Children's Characters from Islamic Perspective

Parents have the responsibility to educate, nurture and guide their children to reach certain stages that lead the child to be ready for social life. More importantly, parents (family) are the first personal coaches in the child's life. The personality of the parents, their attitudes and way of life are elements of education that will automatically enter into the person of the growing child. From family life, a father or husband cultivates the character of courage and tenacity to defend their relatives and make them happy in life and the Hereafter. Thus, a family is the smallest unit that becomes the support and generator of the birth of the nation and society. Allah SWT commands in the Qur'an, Surat At-Tahrim (66), Verse 6:

Oh (whom to) you who believe! Protect yourself and your family from hellfire (Q.S.66:6)

From the above verse, we can understand that Allah SWT has ordered parents to protect their children. For this reason, parents should give all their efforts always pay attention to their mistakes, and get them used to doing good. Thus, parents can be called leaders, nurturers and protectors for their children in this life. From the above understanding, it can be inferred that parents are leaders who must foster, guide, provide for and save the family from physical and mental disorders (Sarwadi & Nashihin, 2023). In connection with the understanding of parents above, of course, it cannot be separated from the understanding of family, because parents are part of a large family which has been largely replaced by the nuclear family consisting of a father, mother and children (Karim et al., 2023).

Family is a school where children study. From there they learn the noble qualities, such as loyalty, compassion, passion and so on. In addition, parents should always guard themselves against bad deeds and teach their children to have noble characters wherever and whenever they are (Subaidi, 2020). This is important because

parents are role models for the people around them, especially for their children. In the formation of the child's personality, parents are very much needed because the child's personality cannot be perfect unless it is directed, nurtured and guided from all aspects, which include faith ('*aqidah*), worship ('*ibadah*), and moral (*akhlaq*) (Arif et al., 2023). In this case, polishing characters is an effort to shape the morals of their children so that they are good, and have a moral personality and noble character.

In terms of family relationships, children have special characteristics. A child sees, hears, feels, and thinks in a distinctive form. Therefore, parents seek to identify children based on the assumption that they are children, who still need nurture and guidance. The family plays a role in the formation of nobility for a child. One of the characteristics of a child with character is always showing a polite and respectful attitude towards his or her parents (Zur Raffar et al., 2021). The noble mind that is attached to everyone does not come naturally but must be created. In other words, the nobility is not a descent but is a product of education in the family, and is a combination of reason, will, and taste. For example, honesty is the most important thing for individuals in living life, and the initial stage of cultivating an honest attitude begins with the family. Cultivating an honest attitude in the family can be started by the behaviour of parents who are always honest and honest (Abubakar et al., 2023). That way, it will be easier for a child to instil an honest attitude in himself because he never feels cheated. In many cases, parents should listen to their children's opinions, because after all communication in the family must continue well.

The main task of a child in its development is to learn the rules of the game or order of life that is cultured or civilized, all aspects that exist in this world, including scientific knowledge of school lessons. Understanding the rules of the game in the life of the world and internalizing them so that they can properly apply these rules of the game in everyday life is the duty of every child in their development (Rahmawati, 2021). The habit of throwing garbage in its place, queuing, not crossing the street and parking carelessly, not harming or hurting others, being independent and other behaviours that show a good understanding of social rules are the result of the development of moral and mental qualities someone called a character booster (Afiatin et al., 2023).

Furthermore, a family is a natural society that in association with its members has specific characteristics. Here education takes place by itself following the social order that applies to it (Dehghani & Andideh, 2022). Family is a school where children study. From there they learn the noble qualities, the qualities of loyalty, compassion, passion, and so on. The relationship between parents and children is an important part of family life. The creation of interactions with sufficient frequency and good quality is something that must be considered and maintained in the management of parent-child relationships (Desiningrum et al., 2023). From this process, children can learn and gain valuable experiences that can become provisions for future success and provision for interacting with their community. The main key to meeting, caring and learning between parents and children at home with genuine quality is exemplary.

In Arabic, exemplary is expressed by the words *uswah* and *qudwah* which means being followed or exemplified. In the Qur'an, the word *uswah* is always associated

with the word *hasanah*, which means good. Hence, the example that is meant here is the attitude or deed of a good parent, with a noble character that should be used as an example so that it should be imitated by their children. In one of the verses of the Qur'an, Allah SWT stated:

Oh (whom to) you who believe! Why are you saying something that you don't do? (It is) very hated with Allah if you say things that you don't do (Q.S. Al-Shaf, 61:2-3)

These excerpts of the Qur'anic verses are only part of the many teachings about good characters (*akhlakul karimah*). Likewise, the family role model in Islam which is based on faith and piety is the most absolute element in making changes in life behaviour. Modelling in the family is a proven process that can shape Islamic personality in children. Exemplary in the family is always related to and imitating what Prophet SAW has taught. The Prophet's guides about the nature of teachers include sincerity, honesty, walking the talk, fairness and egalitarianism, morality, righteousness (*tawadhu'*), courage, healthy spirit, patience, and other noble characteristics.

Finally, carrying out God's commands and staying away from all His prohibitions is a consequence of being cautious. In carrying out this very noble task, it must be accompanied by sincere intentions solely because of Allah, not because of anything other than Him. Carrying out orders and avoiding His prohibitions is for the sake of hoping for His pleasure, not because of our own lust and satisfaction, and not because of any other selfishness (Al-Ghazali, 2019). Prophet Muhammad SAW is an example of a role model in behaviour and attitudes, telling people to always be disciplined in their work, actions, time, worship, and piety to Allah SWT wherever and under any circumstances (Bensaid, 2021). Hence, the behaviour of the parents or family is the key to the success of character education.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has answered two research questions related to the role of family in strengthening children's characters and the development of children's characters from the Islamic perspective respectively. Exemplary models can be imitated by children from other people, especially from parents. The words of parents and family that are good or bad will be imitated by their children. On the other hand, harsh attitudes that are owned by the child's family at home will also form a tough character in the child. In other words, the current example of the family is proven to affect the character of the child and if it is necessary to accelerate the strengthening of a child's character. The current study revealed that in maintaining noble moral behaviour, parents educate or send their children to Islamic educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools or madrasahs. By doing so, they expected that their children would have strong and good characters as Islamic future generations that can serve society as the vicegerent of Allah (*khalifatullah*) in this world.

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