

Character Education through Social Action Activities in Improving Student Morals at Al Iqra Kindergarten in Mataram

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ABSTRACT

Character education is a fundamental aspect in shaping a generation with noble character, empathy, and social responsibility as mandated in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. In response to this, Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten developed the Friday Alms activity as a concrete effort to instill social care values through action-based learning. This study aims to describe and analyze the process of internalizing social care values in children through these activities. Using a qualitative case study approach, this study involved the principal, teachers, parents, and students as subjects. Data were obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using an interactive analysis model including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing with triangulation of sources and techniques to maintain data validity. The results showed that social care values were internalized through three main stages, namely (1) habituation through routine sharing activities every Friday, (2) teachers' exemplary behavior in showing empathy and helpfulness, and (3) reflection through storytelling and discussion after sharing activities. These three stages enabled children to learn firsthand about the meaning of sharing, empathy, and the joy of helping others. The Friday Almsgiving activity has proven to be effective in fostering children's social awareness, cooperation, and religious attitudes, while also strengthening a character-building and humanistic school culture.

INTRODUCTION

Character education is a fundamental pillar of Indonesia's national education system. The objectives of education as stated in Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System are to develop the potential of students to become people who are faithful, pious, noble, healthy, knowledgeable, skilled, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens. Character values are at the core of the development of the whole Indonesian person, which not only emphasizes cognitive aspects, but also affective and psychomotor aspects in a balanced manner. Character education is expected to shape a generation that is not only academically intelligent, but also has high morality and social sensitivity in community life (Kemdikbudristek, 2022).

The dynamics of globalization and technological advances today have an ambivalent impact on the character development of the younger generation, including early childhood. The development of internet technology today has made teenagers and even children more active in using social media (Fakhrunnisak et al. 2025). This can have a double impact on the moral and religious values of early childhood if the use of technology is not balanced with guidance, as it can weaken the internalization of morality in children (Hardiana et al, 2024). On the one hand, technology opens up access to a wide range of knowledge, but on the other hand, it gives rise to symptoms of individualism, consumerism, and a decline in social empathy among children (Wulandari & Pramuditya, 2021). Children aged 3-4 years old use gadgets for an average of 4-5 hours per day, children aged 5-6 years old are allowed to play with gadgets for an average of 5-6 hours per day, and children aged 7-8 years old are allowed to use gadgets for up to a whole day (Hadi & Sumardi, 2025). This phenomenon requires educational institutions to not only focus on academic aspects but also instill social values such as empathy, cooperation, and concern for others from an early age. Instilling a caring social character is very relevant amid rapid social change so that children can grow into individuals who are not only intelligent but also have a strong social conscience.

Early childhood is the most crucial phase in the formation of values and morals. Basic moral reasoning structures begin to develop strongly between the ages of 3 and 7, and environmental stimuli such as interactions with adults, role models, and consistent routines have a significant influence on the formation of children's moral behavior (Killen & Smetana, 2015). At this stage, children are in a sensitive period where their social, emotional, and moral abilities develop rapidly. Therefore, character education in early childhood should not be done through lectures or verbal teaching alone, but through concrete habits and direct experiences (Handayani & Puspitasari, 2020). Through real activities, children can learn to understand the meaning of sharing, helping, and feeling empathy for others. According to Baeti (2025), instilling social care values in children will be more meaningful if done through fun, routine activities that involve children's active participation, such as charity activities, mutual cooperation, or sharing with friends. Character education must be integrative, carried out through modeling, habituation, and value reinforcement (Fayruz, 2023). In the context of early childhood education institutions, teachers and principals play an important

role as role models and facilitators of character building by creating an environment that stimulates positive social behavior in children. Simple social activities carried out regularly will strengthen the internalization of social care values in children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

One concrete form of teaching social care values is the “Friday Alms” activity, which is a collective and regular sharing activity carried out by students. This activity not only instills the value of generosity but also trains children to actively participate in social activities that benefit the community. Through this activity, children learn that sharing is not only a religious obligation but also a form of compassion and social responsibility. Children's involvement in planned and meaningful social activities can increase empathy and moral awareness from an early age, as children directly witness the positive impact of their actions on others (Sari & Yuliani, 2022).

Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten, as one of the early childhood education institutions in Mataram City, has been conducting regular “Friday Alms” activities as part of its character building program. Nine classes participate in this activity, with each child enthusiastically bringing alms money every Friday. The money collected from each class is then pooled at the end of each month by the principal to purchase rice and basic necessities, which are distributed to the poor, orphans, and the elderly in the school's neighborhood. Based on initial observations, this activity not only fosters a spirit of sharing among students, but also instills a sense of empathy, responsibility, and togetherness among them.

The “Friday Alms” activity at Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten is a concrete example of how character education can be implemented through real social actions that are contextual and religious. Children are not only taught to understand the value of social care in theory, but also to experience it through daily activities. This is in line with the views of Lestari and Harun (2023) that experiential learning has a greater impact on character building in children than cognitive-based learning alone. Based on this background, this study focuses on “Character Education through Social Action Activities in Improving Student Character at Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten.” The purpose of this study is to describe in depth how social action activities in the form of the “Friday Alms” program can shape and strengthen the social care character of early childhood. The results of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of character education models at the early childhood education level and provide practical inspiration for other educational institutions in instilling social care values through simple but meaningful real action activities.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type, as it aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how the “Friday Alms” social action activity is implemented as a means of shaping social awareness in early childhood at Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten. The qualitative approach allows researchers to obtain a rich and contextual picture of children's social behavior in

real activities and to reveal the meaning behind these actions based on the perspectives of the parties involved (Sugiyono, 2022). Meanwhile, the case study type was chosen because the research focused on one location and a specific phenomenon in depth, namely the implementation of the "Friday Alms" activity at Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten, which is a distinctive practice in shaping the social care character of students.

The research was conducted at Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten, which has nine active classes. This school was chosen because it has a regular social and religious habit formation program. The research subjects consisted of the principal, classroom teachers, parents/guardians, and students. The principal and teachers were the main sources of information about the implementation of the almsgiving activity, while the parents provided their views on changes in their children's behavior at home after participating in the activity. Data was collected through three main techniques, namely:

1. Observations were made directly during the Friday Almsgiving activities in each class. The researcher observed how the children participated, how the teachers guided them, and how the activities were enthusiastically followed by all students.
2. Interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, and several parents to find out their views on the benefits of Friday Almsgiving activities for character building in children.
3. Documentation was used to supplement the results of observations and interviews. The documents collected included photos of the activities, teachers' notes, and reports on the collection and distribution of alms to beneficiaries.

The data obtained in this study were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and simplified data relevant to the research focus, namely how Friday Alms activities can foster children's social awareness at Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten. Next, the reduced data was presented in narrative form based on the main themes that emerged from the observations, interviews, and documentation. From this presentation, the researcher then interpreted the meaning of the data to draw conclusions about the impact of social action activities on the formation of children's social care values.

To ensure data validity, this study used source, technique, and time triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from school principals, teachers, and parents. Technique triangulation was conducted by combining the results of observations, interviews, and documentation to make the results more objective. Meanwhile, time triangulation was conducted by conducting observations and interviews on several different Fridays to ensure data consistency. In addition, the researcher also conducted member checking by confirming the findings with informants to ensure that the data and interpretations were in line with the actual conditions in the field.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Friday Almsgiving at Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten

The implementation of Friday Almsgiving at Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten is a tangible form of character education integrated with daily learning. This activity is carried out routinely every Friday morning before teaching and learning activities begin. Each child brings alms money from home according to their respective abilities, without coercion or a predetermined amount. In each class, teachers provide a special alms box as a means for children to distribute their donations with joy and awareness. After the activity, the teacher invites the children to count the money collected together, not only as a simple academic activity, but also as a means of learning responsibility, honesty, and cooperation.

At the end of each month, all the alms from the nine classes are collected by the principal and used to buy basic necessities such as rice. The alms are then distributed to the poor, orphans, and elderly people in the school's neighborhood. This process is carried out openly and involves teachers and student representatives so that children can see the results of their actions firsthand. Thus, this activity is not only a religious routine but also a vehicle for social learning that connects moral values, empathy, and the concrete experience of sharing with others.



Figure 1. Collection of Friday Alms

This Friday Almsgiving activity received full support from the entire school community. The principal acted as the main driving force and guarantor of the program's sustainability, while teachers acted as facilitators who guided the children to understand the meaning of each social action they took. Parents also contributed by instilling a spirit of sharing at home and encouraging their children to participate wholeheartedly. Based on observations and interviews, the children showed great enthusiasm for this activity. Every Friday, they were excited to bring their charity money, even reminding their friends not to forget to bring charity from home. Some children also took the initiative to bring more than what was asked for, as a form of social awareness that grew from within them. This phenomenon shows that social care values have begun to be internalized through repeated and meaningful positive habits. These findings are in line with the results of Baeti's (2025) research, which confirms that concrete

and routine activities such as sharing food, storytelling, and simple social actions can increase empathy and prosocial behavior in early childhood. Early childhood tends to learn from direct experiences through activities that are real and emotional, not just verbal explanations. In addition, Lestari (2024) also explains that character learning based on experiential learning will strengthen the internalization of values, because children are able to connect feelings, actions, and the social meaning behind these activities.

The Friday Alms activity at Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten also reflects the concept of contextual character education, which is learning that is relevant to children's social lives and is carried out in an integrative manner between religious values and humanitarian values. According to Rahman and Sari (2022), the implementation of religious-based social activities in schools can strengthen children's spiritual and socio-emotional dimensions, because children learn that worship is not only in the form of rituals, but also caring for others. Thus, this activity is part of the school's efforts to build a school culture based on religious and social values, where children learn to be empathetic, sharing, and responsible from an early age. Overall, the implementation of Friday Alms at Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten is not just a routine activity, but a systematic and continuous character learning strategy. Through this activity, the school has succeeded in creating an educational ecosystem that fosters social empathy, strengthens emotional bonds among school members, and instills noble values that are in line with the national education goal of shaping Indonesians who are faithful, pious, and noble in character.

Children's Responses and Behavior at Al-Iqra Mataram Kindergarten

The implementation of the Friday Alms activity at Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten has had a tangible impact on the social and emotional development of the children. Based on observations and interviews, it was evident that the children responded very positively to this activity. Every Friday morning, they arrived enthusiastically, bringing alms money from home, and eagerly putting it into the box provided. Often, some children reminded their friends not to forget to give alms, and some even helped friends who did not bring money by giving them some of their own. This attitude shows the emergence of empathy, mutual cooperation, and moral awareness from an early age. Teachers and the principal revealed that this activity has brought about significant behavioral changes in students. Children have become more sensitive to the conditions of others, more willing to help friends in need, and more polite in speaking and interacting. They have also begun to understand that sharing does not have to wait until one is rich, but can be done sincerely according to one's ability. This process shows that repeating sharing activities regularly can form positive social habits that are embedded in children's daily lives. This is in line with the theory of habit formation in character education, which emphasizes that moral values will be strongly instilled if they are continuously practiced through habituation and real experiences (Suryani & Ningsih, 2023).

The findings of this study are also in line with the results of Fayruz's (2023) study, which explains that simple sharing activities such as giving alms, sharing

food, or helping friends can significantly increase empathy and caring in early childhood. Fayruz emphasizes that children's empathy grows through social interactions that involve positive emotions, such as the joy of giving and seeing others happy. In this context, the Friday Alms activity at Al Iqra Kindergarten is an effective means of fostering empathy because children directly experience the meaning of sharing in real situations. In addition, the results of research by Rahman and Sari (2022) show that religious-based social activities can foster altruistic behavior or the desire to help selflessly. This altruistic behavior arises because children internalize moral values obtained from direct experience and the example set by teachers. Prosocial behavior in early childhood, such as empathy and generosity, can emerge when children internalize moral values through the example set by teachers and consistent practice in the educational environment (Alfiani, Khunaifi, & Mursid, 2024). In the Friday Alms activity, teachers play an important role as models of prosocial behavior. Children learn from what they see when teachers participate in giving alms, express gratitude, and explain the benefits to others; they imitate these actions with awareness and happiness.

The positive emotional response that arises also shows that this activity not only has an impact on social aspects but also on children's spiritual and emotional development. Children feel inner happiness for having done a good deed, as explained by Lestari (2024) that social activities at school can improve children's emotional well-being, namely feelings of satisfaction, happiness, and worthiness because they can contribute to others. In the long term, this experience shapes a sustainable mindset and character of social care. Thus, it can be concluded that the Friday Alms activity at Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten is not just a ritualistic religious activity, but an effective means of character education. Through this activity, children learn to understand the value of sharing, feel empathy for others, and consistently develop positive social behavior. Regular practice, supported by the example set by teachers and the participation of parents, makes this activity an important foundation in shaping a socially caring character in early childhood.

The Process of Character Internalization Through Friday Almsgiving

The process of internalizing social care values at Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten is carried out systematically through three main stages, namely (1) habituation, (2) exemplification, and (3) reflection. These three stages form a unity in instilling social values in early childhood in a gradual, repetitive, and meaningful manner. This process emphasizes not only cognitive aspects (knowledge of values) but also affective aspects (appreciation of values) and psychomotor aspects (manifestation of values in actions).

1. Habituation Stage

The habituation stage is the foundation in the process of shaping children's moral behavior. At Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten, habituation is realized through the "Friday Sharing" or Friday Alms activity, which is carried out regularly every week. In this activity, children are invited to bring pocket money

to be donated to the poor and orphans around the school at the end of the month. Teachers direct the activity in a warm and cheerful atmosphere, so that children feel that sharing is a fun and valuable activity. Repeated habits with a positive emotional atmosphere will form prosocial behavior patterns that are ingrained in children. The habit of sharing activities on a regular basis has been proven to foster prosocial behavior in early childhood, including empathy, caring, and generosity (Lestari & Wulandari, 2022). According to Kohlberg's theory (1981), early childhood is at the pre-conventional stage, where good behavior is done because of direction, reinforcement, and habits from the environment, not because of full moral awareness. Therefore, habituation functions as moral conditioning, which is repeated practice that guides children from directed behavior to internally conscious behavior.



Figure 2. Distribution of Friday Alms

In addition, habits play a role in developing children's social-emotional aspects, such as empathy, sympathy, and responsibility. Through activities carried out with friends, children learn to interact, appreciate differences, and understand other people's feelings. Habitual social activities such as sharing food or giving alms in early childhood education settings significantly increase children's empathy, helping behavior, and social responsibility (Putri & Safitri, 2022). Furthermore, Rahmawati (2023) emphasizes that habits associated with positive emotional atmospheres, such as cheerful activities, games, and rewards, can strengthen the meaning of social behavior because they create feelings of satisfaction and happiness after doing good deeds. The habit of sharing, which was carried out consistently for six months in a kindergarten in Medan, increased children's tendency to help without being asked (spontaneous helping behavior) (Yuliani & Harahap 2024). This shows that habits that are designed to be routine, simple, and meaningful can be the basis for the internalization of strong social values. Thus, the Friday Alms activity at Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten is not just a routine activity without meaning, but a character education strategy that is consciously designed to shape social caring behavior in a gradual, systematic, and sustainable manner.

2. Role Modeling Stage

The role modeling stage is a key aspect in the process of internalizing values because early childhood learners learn primarily through observation and

imitation. Teacher role modeling has been proven effective in internalizing religious and moral values in early childhood (Hernawati, Sadaruddin, & Fitri, 2025). Teachers and educators at Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten are the main moral models who display empathetic, polite, helpful, and respectful behavior towards others. When teachers donate money, help children in need, or speak kindly, children directly imitate these actions. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1986) asserts that most human social behavior is learned through observation of models that are considered influential. In implementing character education, all elements can also be involved, both within the school community and outside the school community but responsible for character education in this case, such as parents of students and related stakeholders (Apriwandi et al, 2020).

In the school context, teachers have a very strong role model status because children see that teachers' behavior is valued and becomes a social norm in the classroom. Consistent role modeling will create a process of imitation that is not only behavioral but also emotional and value-based. The empathetic and consistent behavior of kindergarten teachers has a significant influence on the formation of children's positive social attitudes (Fitria & Nurhidayah, 2023). Children who have warm and helpful teachers show higher levels of empathy and prosocial behavior compared to children who do not receive direct role modeling. Furthermore, the results of Setyawan's (2022) research state that teacher role modeling in social activities at school can accelerate the process of internal moralization, which is when social values begin to become part of children's self-awareness, not just the result of repetition. Thus, teachers not only teach kindness but also display kindness as a reality that children can observe and feel every day.

In practice, teachers at Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten apply role modeling in various ways, as follows:

- a. Demonstrating empathy in real ways, such as comforting a crying friend or helping a child who is left behind.
- b. Participating in charity activities so that children see that teachers are also involved in sharing.
- c. Using gentle and loving language, so that children learn to imitate empathetic communication.

3. Reflection Stage

The reflection stage is the process of interpreting values after children have experienced social activities. At Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten, reflection activities are carried out after Friday charity, usually in the form of light discussions, storytelling, or role-playing. Teachers ask children questions such as, "How did it feel after sharing?", "Who was happy to be able to help others?", or "Why do we need to help friends who are in trouble?" Reflective questions like these encourage children to think, feel, and understand the meaning of their actions. Reflection serves to bring together concrete experiences (experiential learning) with an understanding of moral values (conceptual learning).

Through reflection, children internalize values not only because they are directed to do so, but because they understand and appreciate the benefits for

themselves and others. According to Nurgiyantoro (2021), reflection in character education plays an important role in fostering moral awareness, as it encourages students to assess and realize the meaning of good deeds they have done.

Reflection helps children achieve moral feeling, which becomes a bridge to moral action. According to Mutmainnah (2023), reflective activities such as storytelling and post-charity discussions can improve children's ability to recognize empathetic feelings and foster internal motivation to repeat social actions without coercion. Meanwhile, Rachman (2024) emphasizes that reflection conducted using a narrative approach (moral stories and light conversation) is more effective in shaping social awareness than direct advice or punishment. Reflection activities are also in line with the principles of spirituality-based character education, which emphasizes thinking, feeling, heart, and physical exercise (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). Children not only learn to think about goodness but also feel and express it in real actions that touch the heart.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that social care character education at Al Iqra Mataram Kindergarten has been successfully internalized through the "Friday Alms" social action activity, which is carried out regularly, structurally, and meaningfully. The process of internalizing social care values takes place through three main stages, namely habituation, exemplification, and reflection. The habituation stage fosters prosocial behavior in children through enjoyable sharing routines carried out in a positive emotional atmosphere, while the role modeling stage reinforces the process of imitating values through real examples set by teachers as moral models in the school environment. The reflection stage helps children understand and appreciate the meaning of the social actions they have taken, so that sharing behavior does not only arise from instructions, but is born from sincere awareness and empathy. The synergy between teachers, principals, and parents creates an educational ecosystem conducive to the growth of social care values from an early age. The results of this study confirm that character education through simple social action activities such as Friday Almsgiving is able to integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future research should expand this study by employing a longitudinal and mixed-methods design to examine the long-term impact of social action-based character education, such as the Friday Almsgiving program, on children's social, emotional, and moral development across different educational levels. Comparative studies involving multiple kindergartens with diverse socio-cultural and religious backgrounds are also needed to assess the adaptability and scalability of this model. In addition, integrating quantitative measures of empathy, prosocial behavior, and moral reasoning would strengthen empirical evidence and allow for causal analysis. Further research could also explore the role of parental involvement and digital media integration in reinforcing social

care values at home and school, thereby contributing to the development of a more comprehensive and sustainable character education framework.

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