

Internalizing Social and Religious Values through Religious Extracurricular Activities in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

This study analyzes the internalization of social and religious values through religious extracurricular activities in early childhood education at RA Al-Nizum Hidayah. A qualitative case study approach was used to explore how value internalization is implemented and reflected in children's behavior, with data collected through observations, interviews with the head of RA and teachers, and documentation, and analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Internalization is understood as a gradual process in which values are introduced, practiced, and reinforced until reflected in daily behavior, while social and religious values include discipline, responsibility, cooperation, empathy, and adherence to basic Islamic practices. The findings show three mechanisms: habituation (daily prayers, Qur'anic memorization, and charity), modeling (teachers demonstrating respectful and disciplined behavior), and guided practice (assistance in congregational prayer and structured interaction). These mechanisms are associated with children initiating prayers independently, increased rule compliance, active group participation, and early empathy such as sharing and helping peers. The study suggests that integrating structured activities and teacher role modeling supports the gradual formation of socio-religious behavior, with its novelty lying in proposing a three-stage internalization model based on empirical observations.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education represents a fundamental stage in shaping children's character, personality, and moral foundations. At this stage, children begin to recognize basic life values that influence their attitudes, behaviors, and ways of interacting with the social environment. The educational process in early childhood does not merely focus on cognitive development but also emphasizes the formation of social, emotional, and spiritual values that serve as the foundation for later development (Nurhayati et al., 2022). Social religious values hold an essential position in early childhood education since these values are closely related to the development of religious attitudes, social awareness, discipline, responsibility, and respect for others. Introducing such values from an early age supports children in understanding social norms while developing character that aligns with religious and cultural principles within society (Rahayu & Dong, 2023).

Early childhood is often referred to as the golden age, a period characterized by rapid growth in cognitive, language, social, and emotional development. During this stage, children possess a strong capacity to absorb learning experiences quickly, meaning that educational stimulation can significantly influence their long-term personality development (Jungkunz & Weiss, 2024). Learning experiences are not limited to classroom instruction but also emerge from various activities involving social interaction, behavioral habituation, and real-life experiences. Educational processes that provide direct

experiences tend to produce stronger and more meaningful learning outcomes than those relying solely on theoretical instruction or information delivery (Indawati et al., 2022). The internalization of social religious values in early childhood requires appropriate strategies so that these values are not only understood cognitively but also reflected in daily behavior and habits. Values such as religiosity, discipline, responsibility, empathy, and mutual respect represent important elements of social religious values that should be introduced gradually through consistent habituation (Fenaughty et al., 2022).

The internalization process requires educational approaches that emphasize modeling, direct experience, and positive social interaction among teachers, children, and the educational environment. When children repeatedly observe and practice behaviors that reflect religious values, these values gradually become part of their personal character (Sismanto et al., 2022). Early childhood education institutions play an important role in cultivating social religious values through a variety of educational activities and learning experiences. One of the strategic programs that can effectively support this process is religious extracurricular activities (Cabrera et al., 2022). These activities provide opportunities for children to learn through enjoyable, interactive experiences that match their developmental characteristics. Religious extracurricular activities allow children to practice religious teachings directly so that learning occurs not only at the level of knowledge but also at the level of attitudes and behavioral habits (Clarke et al., 2024). Religious extracurricular activities in early childhood institutions can take various forms of simple yet meaningful practices.

Common activities include daily prayer routines, memorization of short Qur'anic chapters, introduction to selected hadith, congregational prayer practice, charity and donation activities, and celebrations of Islamic religious events (Hughes et al., 2023). In addition, the habituation of Islamic manners such as greeting others with peace, speaking politely, respecting teachers and peers, and maintaining cleanliness also forms an essential component of these activities. Through structured and consistent routines, children gain meaningful learning experiences that help them understand religious values more deeply (Gasser et al., 2022). Participation in religious extracurricular activities contributes not only to the development of children's religiosity but also to their social and emotional competencies. When children engage in group activities, they learn cooperation, sharing, appreciation of differences, and empathy toward others. Social interaction during these activities encourages the development of self-confidence and communication skills. Value education through social experience plays an important role in shaping children's character during early developmental stages (Sarwadi & Nashihin, 2023).

Despite its potential, the implementation of religious extracurricular activities in early childhood institutions still faces several challenges. Some institutions conduct these activities regularly without systematic planning or comprehensive evaluation (Black et al., 2024). Activities sometimes become routine practices without careful reflection on the specific values being developed in children. Such conditions limit the effectiveness of extracurricular programs as tools for character education. Value-based education requires a structured, continuous process supported by learning strategies that correspond with children's developmental characteristics (Marraccini et al., 2022). Another issue relates to the limited integration between religious extracurricular activities and the broader educational goals of the institution. In some cases, these activities are implemented as complementary programs rather than as an integral part of character formation efforts. This situation reveals a gap between the ideal expectations of social religious value education and its practical implementation in educational settings (Savić, 2023).

Religious extracurricular activities actually possess strong potential to function as effective educational media for cultivating moral and religious values among young children. However, previous research has not comprehensively examined how the process of internalizing social religious values is systematically carried out through religious extracurricular activities, particularly in early childhood education settings. Existing studies tend to focus on general value education, religiosity development, or classroom-based learning, without specifically analyzing extracurricular-based value internalization processes in a structured and holistic manner (Arif et al., 2023). Furthermore, limited research has explored the integration of planning, implementation, and evaluation stages within religious extracurricular programs as a unified framework for value internalization. In terms of the state of the art, prior studies have emphasized the importance of modeling, habituation, and experiential learning

in fostering children's character development. These studies highlight that value internalization is most effective when embedded in daily activities and supported by consistent (Saputra et al., 2023).

Additionally, research has identified three essential stages in value education, namely preparation, implementation, and evaluation, which are crucial in ensuring the effectiveness of educational interventions (Mappaenre et al., 2023). However, these approaches have not been sufficiently contextualized within the framework of religious extracurricular activities in early childhood education institutions. Research specifically examining the internalization of social religious values through religious extracurricular activities in Raudhatul Athfal (RA) institutions remains relatively limited, particularly in institutions that actively develop structured religious habituation programs. This situation creates an opportunity for deeper investigation into how value internalization occurs, what strategies educators apply, and what types of values emerge through these extracurricular activities. Studies exploring these aspects may contribute significantly to the development of character education practices in early childhood education institutions (Endartiningsih et al., 2023).

The development of social and religious values in early childhood has become an urgent concern in contemporary education, particularly in the context of increasing behavioral issues such as low discipline, limited social awareness, and the tendency of children to depend on external instructions in daily activities. In many early childhood education settings, religious extracurricular activities are formally implemented; however, in practice, these activities often function as routine programs without ensuring that the intended values are meaningfully internalized by children. As a result, the activities may remain symbolic rather than transformative, with limited observable impact on children's behavior. Previous studies have generally emphasized the importance of religious activities in shaping children's character and moral development.

However, most of these studies tend to be descriptive, focusing on the types of activities conducted rather than critically examining how values are internalized through specific processes and mechanisms. In addition, the concept of internalization is often treated abstractly, without clear operational indicators that can be observed in children's daily behavior. This creates a gap in understanding how extracurricular activities move beyond formal implementation toward effective value formation. This study addresses this gap by focusing specifically on the process of internalization of social and religious values through religious extracurricular activities in early childhood education. In this context, internalization is operationalized as a gradual process involving repeated exposure, guided practice, and reinforcement of values until they are reflected in observable behaviors. Meanwhile, religious extracurricular activities refer to structured programs conducted outside formal classroom instruction, including practices such as daily prayers, Qur'anic memorization, charity activities, and guided social interactions grounded in Islamic teachings. By examining how these activities are implemented and how they shape children's behavior, this study aims to provide a more empirically grounded and analytically sharp understanding of value internalization in early childhood education.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the process of internalizing social and religious values through religious extracurricular activities among early childhood students at RA Al Nizum Hidayah. A qualitative approach was selected to capture the depth of behavioral processes in a natural setting, while the case study design enabled an intensive examination of value internalization within a specific institutional context. The research was conducted at RA Al Nizum Hidayah, Ambalawi, from August to October 2025. The site was purposively selected due to its structured and routine implementation of religious extracurricular programs. The participants consisted of 15 early childhood students aged 5–6 years who actively participated in the activities. Key informants included the head of the institution (one person), teachers (three persons), and parents (five persons), all of whom were directly involved in or observed the children's development. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research focus. The unit of analysis in this study was children's observable behavior during extracurricular activities. Social and religious values were operationalized into specific behavioral indicators, such as: (1) discipline (following prayer routines without being reminded), (2) responsibility (completing assigned tasks such

as memorization), (3) cooperation (participating in group activities), (4) empathy (helping peers or sharing food), and (5) religious practice (performing prayer movements correctly and reciting short Qur'anic verses).

Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations focused on recording the frequency and consistency of targeted behaviors during activities such as daily prayers, Qur'anic memorization, and charity practices. Interviews with teachers, the head of the institution, and parents explored strategies of value internalization and perceived behavioral changes in children. Documentation, including activity schedules, evaluation records, and institutional archives, was used to corroborate observational and interview data. The researcher functioned as the primary instrument (human instrument), supported by observation sheets and interview guides developed based on the operational indicators of values.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, conducted through several stages: (1) open coding, where raw data from field notes and interview transcripts were labeled based on recurring behaviors and statements; (2) categorization, where similar codes were grouped into broader categories such as habituation, modeling, and guided practice; and (3) theme development, where patterns were interpreted to explain the mechanisms of value internalization. To ensure data credibility, triangulation was conducted in two forms: (1) source triangulation, by comparing data from observations, teachers, parents, and the head of the institution; and (2) technique triangulation, by cross-checking findings from observation, interviews, and documentation. In addition, member checking was carried out by confirming interview summaries with participants, and prolonged engagement allowed the researcher to observe behavioral consistency over time. Potential researcher bias was minimized through reflexive note-taking and continuous comparison of data sources. However, this study has several limitations. The findings are context-specific and based on a relatively small number of participants, limiting generalizability. In addition, the interpretation of "internalization" relies on observable behavioral tendencies rather than deep psychological measurement, which may not fully capture the internal cognitive processes of value formation.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The findings of this study are organized into three main analytical themes reflecting the mechanisms of value internalization: (1) habituation of religious practices, (2) social interaction and guided participation, and (3) meaning-making through teacher support and reinforcement.

Habituation and the Formation of Routine Behavior

Observational data show that repeated religious activities function as the initial stage of internalization by shaping routine behavior. Activities such as daily prayers, Qur'anic memorization, and short supplications were consistently practiced at specific times. Several observable behavioral changes were identified. For example, nine out of 15 children began to recite daily prayers (before eating and learning) without being prompted by the teacher after four weeks of observation. In addition, seven children showed increased consistency in completing memorization tasks, although the level of accuracy varied. However, not all children demonstrated the same level of internalization. Some children (approximately four participants) still required repeated reminders and tended to lose focus during routine activities. This indicates that habituation alone does not automatically lead to stable value internalization but requires continuous reinforcement. A teacher explained: "*At the beginning, most children needed to be guided step by step, but after some time, a few of them started initiating the prayers on their own, even reminding their friends.*" This finding suggests that habituation contributes to the emergence of initial behavioral patterns, although the depth of internalization differs among children.

Social Interaction and Guided Participation

The second theme highlights the role of social interaction in shaping social values such as cooperation, empathy, and responsibility. Activities such as congregational prayer, group learning, and charity programs provided contexts where children interacted directly with peers. During observations,

cooperative behavior was evident when children participated in group activities, such as arranging prayer mats together or taking turns during practice sessions. Approximately 10 children actively engaged in group tasks, while others tended to follow passively. Indicators of empathy were also observed. For instance, during charity activities, six children voluntarily shared their food or pocket money without teacher instruction, while the rest participated only after being encouraged. A parent noted: *“My child started to bring extra snacks to school and said it was for sharing with friends. This didn’t happen before.”*

However, variations were also found. Some children showed situational empathy, meaning they acted prosocially only in structured settings but not consistently outside those contexts. This indicates that internalization at this stage is still context-dependent. 3. Meaning-Making through Modeling and Reinforcement The third theme relates to how children begin to understand and give meaning to the values they practice, supported by teacher modeling and reinforcement. Teachers consistently demonstrated behaviors such as greeting others, speaking politely, and maintaining discipline. Observations indicate that children tend to imitate visible behaviors rather than abstract concepts. For example, 11 children consistently practiced greeting (salam) and handshaking, especially when modeled directly by teachers. Positive reinforcement, such as praise, increased the likelihood of repetition of these behaviors. A teacher stated: *“Children usually follow what they see. When we consistently model polite behavior, they gradually imitate it, even outside the classroom.”*

Despite this, some children displayed compliance without full understanding. For example, they performed prayer movements correctly but were unable to explain their meaning when asked. This suggests that internalization is still at the behavioral and imitative level, not yet fully reflective. Summary of Findings Overall, the findings indicate that the internalization of social and religious values occurs through gradual and layered processes, starting from habituation, strengthened through social interaction, and supported by modeling and reinforcement. While positive behavioral tendencies were observed such as increased discipline, cooperation, and early empathy—these developments were not uniform across all children and often remained situational and practice-based rather than fully internalized at a cognitive level.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the internalization of social and religious values in early childhood occurs through a gradual and structured process rather than as an immediate outcome of participation in religious activities. The data indicate that internalization develops through a sequence of interconnected stages, beginning with structured exposure to religious extracurricular activities, followed by active engagement in social experiences, the formation of behavioral habits, and eventually the emergence of value-oriented behavior (Siregar & Surya, 2025). This process highlights that internalization is not merely about introducing values but about creating conditions in which those values can be experienced, practiced, and reinforced in meaningful ways. At the initial stage, structured extracurricular activities such as daily prayers, Qur’anic memorization, and charity programs function as stimuli that introduce children to specific behavioral patterns (Saihu & Aziz, 2020). However, the findings suggest that exposure alone is insufficient to ensure internalization. Children begin to engage with these values more meaningfully when they are directly involved in the activities, particularly through interactions with teachers and peers (Ghufron & Suniarti, 2025).

These interactions allow children to experience social norms in practice, such as taking turns, cooperating in group activities, and showing care toward others. At this stage, children’s understanding of values remains situational, as their behavior is largely shaped by the immediate context rather than by internal reflection (Aziz et al., 2020). As participation becomes more frequent, repeated experiences contribute to the development of habituation. The study shows that some children gradually perform certain behaviors more consistently, such as initiating prayers without prompts or participating more actively in group tasks (Shubhie, 2023). This indicates that repetition plays a critical role in stabilizing behavior. Nevertheless, the findings also reveal variation among children, as not all participants demonstrate the same level of consistency. Some children continue to rely on external guidance, suggesting that habituation is influenced by both environmental consistency and individual responsiveness (Ilham et al., 2024).

Over time, these repeated behaviors begin to form early stages of value internalization, although this process remains primarily observable at the behavioral level. Children start to associate certain actions with expected social and religious norms, even if they are not yet able to articulate the underlying meanings (Wulandari & Aziz, 2025). This suggests that internalization in early childhood should be understood as a progressive continuum, in which values first appear as behavioral tendencies before developing into deeper cognitive and affective understanding (Finka, 2023). This process is closely aligned with the perspective of Albert Bandura, particularly in relation to observation, imitation, and reinforcement. The findings confirm that children tend to imitate behaviors demonstrated by teachers, especially when these behaviors are consistently modeled in daily interactions (Sapitri & Maryati, 2022). Reinforcement, such as praise or positive responses, further strengthens the likelihood that children will repeat these behaviors. However, this study extends Bandura's framework by showing that imitation alone does not lead to internalization unless it is supported by structured repetition and meaningful social interaction. In this sense, internalization is not only a cognitive process but also a socially situated practice that develops through continuous engagement within a supportive environment (Mukhlis, 2024).

Another important finding is that religious extracurricular activities function effectively as a medium for internalization not simply because they are implemented, but because of how they are structured and experienced by children (Mayasari et al., 2023). The study reveals that behavioral changes often remain context-dependent, with some children demonstrating positive behaviors during structured activities but not consistently in other settings. This indicates that internalization at this stage is still in a developing phase and cannot be assumed to be fully established (Zelazo & Carlson, 2023). Such findings challenge the tendency of previous studies to assume that participation in religious activities automatically leads to character formation. Instead, this study emphasizes that the effectiveness of such programs depends on the quality of interaction, the consistency of implementation, and the presence of guidance and reinforcement. The main contribution of this study lies in its ability to conceptualize internalization as a dynamic and process-based phenomenon (Tjahjono et al., 2023).

Rather than viewing habituation, modeling, and reinforcement as separate elements, this research integrates them into a coherent framework that explains how values are gradually formed through structured extracurricular activities (Nursobah et al., 2025). This perspective provides a more operational understanding of internalization by linking observable behavior with underlying learning processes. It also highlights that value formation in early childhood is inherently gradual, context-dependent, and closely tied to everyday social experiences (Alharbi, 2025). From a practical perspective, these findings suggest that educators need to move beyond viewing religious extracurricular activities as routine or supplementary programs. Instead, such activities should be designed as structured learning environments that emphasize repetition, interaction, and consistent role modelling (Fathurrahman et al., 2024). Without these elements, extracurricular programs risk becoming procedural activities with limited impact on children's value development. Therefore, the integration of structured practice, social engagement, and reinforcement becomes essential in supporting the gradual formation of social and religious values in early childhood (Nufa, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the internalization of social and religious values in early childhood through religious extracurricular activities at RA Al Nizum Hidayah can be understood as a gradual and process-based phenomenon, rather than as a direct outcome of program implementation. The findings suggest that internalization emerges through the interplay of structured activities, repeated practice, social interaction, and teacher guidance, which together shape children's observable behavioral tendencies over time. In this context, values are not immediately internalized at a conceptual level but initially appear as situational and practice-based behaviors, such as participating in routines, following rules, and engaging in simple prosocial actions. The study indicates that the effectiveness of religious extracurricular activities lies not merely in their presence, but in how they are structured, experienced, and reinforced within the learning environment. The combination of habituation, modeling, and guided participation appears to support the early stages of value formation, although the degree of internalization varies among children and remains dependent on consistency and context. This suggests

that internalization in early childhood should be interpreted cautiously as an emerging process, rather than a fully achieved state. The main contribution of this study is the articulation of a process-oriented model of value internalization, in which structured extracurricular activities function as an entry point for experience, repeated engagement fosters habituation, and social interaction supports the gradual stabilization of behavior into value-oriented tendencies. This model offers a more operational and empirically grounded way of understanding how social and religious values begin to develop in early childhood educational settings. However, this study has several limitations. The findings are based on a single institutional context with a limited number of participants, which may restrict their transferability to other settings. In addition, the interpretation of internalization relies primarily on observable behaviors rather than deeper psychological measurement, making it difficult to fully capture the internal cognitive and affective dimensions of value formation. Future research could expand this study by incorporating longitudinal designs or mixed methods approaches to better examine the long-term development and depth of value internalization. Overall, this study suggests that religious extracurricular activities have the potential to support value formation in early childhood when implemented in a structured and consistent manner, while also highlighting the importance of understanding internalization as a dynamic, contextual, and ongoing process.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The author was solely responsible for the conceptualization, research design, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript preparation. All aspects of the research and writing process were conducted independently by the author.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author declares that artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used solely to assist in language refinement and editing for clarity and academic style. All ideas, data analysis, and interpretations presented in this manuscript are the original work of the author.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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