
THE ROLE OF PARENTS AS ROLE MODELS IN CHILDREN'S MORAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse the role of parents as role models in moral education for children, especially in forming character and moral behaviour from an early age. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study relies on primary data obtained through interviews with parents and secondary data from literature studies and related documents. Data collection techniques were carried out through direct observation and in-depth interviews with subjects who were parents of children in early childhood. Data analysis was carried out descriptively by examining the patterns of parental roles and providing examples of noble morals. The study results showed that parental behaviour greatly influences children's moral development; children tend to imitate the actions and attitudes of their parents, both positive and negative. The success of this process is primarily determined by religious knowledge, the quality of interaction within the family, and collaboration with a positive educational and social environment. This confirms that parental exemplarity is the primary foundation in children's moral education.

Keywords

Children; Morals; Moral Education; Parenting; Role Parents.



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INTRODUCTION

Moral education is a fundamental aspect in shaping the character of a quality and civilised child. Ideally, this educational process takes place in a family environment, where parents play the role of the leading and first educators. In the Islamic view, moral education forms good individual behaviour and becomes the path to true happiness, both in this world and in the hereafter (Bahri, 2022). Children learn from what they see, hear, and feel in their immediate environment, especially from the behaviour of both parents (Bradley, 2019). Therefore, the role of parents as role models is vital in forming children's personalities. Parents who consistently display honesty, responsibility, compassion, and good manners will be a moral mirror that their children naturally imitate daily.

However, these ideal conditions are often not in line with the reality in the field. There are many cases where parents are not aware of the importance of their role in moral education, and often even show behaviour that is not appropriate for children to imitate. Parents' busyness at work, lack of religious insight, and lack of quality time with children are the main obstacles to moral home education. In addition, technological developments, exposure to social media, and a hostile social environment further weaken moral control that should be instilled from an early age (Fathallah et al., 2020). Children who do not get positive role models from their parents tend to experience moral confusion and, in the long run, have the potential to grow up to be individuals who experience identity crises and value degradation (Koburtay et al., 2020).

Seeing these problems, this research was carried out to analyse the role of parents as role models in children's moral education. This study also aims to uncover the methods or strategies parents use in providing examples of commendable morals and identify various factors that support and hinder the success of these roles. The emphasis on the exemplary aspect is the primary focus of this research, because from there, internalising moral values takes place naturally and sustainably (Huda & Sos, 2023). Thus, the study results are expected to provide a complete picture of the importance of the active contribution of parents in shaping the personality of children with noble character, as well as provide strategic recommendations for efforts to improve family-based moral education.

Some previous research has discussed the role of parents in moral education, but most still focus on roles in general or emphasise more formal aspects such as parental involvement in school activities. For example, Birhan et al (2021a), Hidayati et al. (2020), Jeynes (2019), and Snook (2024) show that moral education carried out at home has a significant influence on the formation of

children's personalities, while Anggraeni et al. (2021), Cinantya et al. (2018), Ningsih (2020), and Pusparini et al. (2022) highlight the importance of the role of parents as facilitators in children's character education. However, there has not been much research that specifically and in-depth highlights the exemplary method as the primary strategy in moral education. This research is here to complete this gap by paying special attention to how parents' real behaviour and attitudes in daily life become an effective means of shaping children's morals.

The novelty of this research lies in its approach that emphasises example as the primary method in moral education, with a broader exploration of the form of example that can be applied in the context of today's family. In addition, this study also explores the relationship between parental role models and the effectiveness of children's character formation in real-life situations, including the influence of external factors such as the social environment and media. This study provides a new perspective on how examples complement other educational methods and are a core element that can touch children's spiritual and emotional aspects more deeply.

This research is important because the moral challenges children face today are increasingly complex. Amid the rapid flow of globalisation and technological development, children are very vulnerable to external influences that are not in line with the moral values they are supposed to have. Without the active role and real example of parents, the noble values that should be instilled from an early age will be easily eroded. Therefore, this research is not only academically important, but also has strategic value for forming future generations who are intellectually intelligent and morally and spiritually strong.

Finally, through this research, it is hoped that a more comprehensive understanding of the importance of parents as role models in children's moral education can be produced. The findings in this study are expected to be evaluation material for parents, educators, and policymakers in designing family-based and exemplary character education programs. This research also makes a scientific contribution to the development of literature in child development psychology, family education, and Islamic education. By strengthening the role of parents as real moral models, greater opportunities will open up to create a harmonious family environment and support the growth and development of children as a whole.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, which aims to describe and analyse in depth the phenomenon of the role of parents as role models in children's moral education (Ardyan et al., 2023). This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the subject's meaning, experience, and perception comprehensively and contextually, especially in the personal and emotional family education. The data sources in this study consist of primary data and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with parents of early childhood, who were purposively selected based on criteria of active involvement in the child's education in the family environment. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from literature studies, documents, and literature relevant to the research theme, including books, scientific journal articles, and the results of previous research that discussed moral education and the role of parents.

This research was carried out in Medan Baru District, Medan City, especially in the sub-districts of Babura, Darat, Merdeka, Padang Bulan, Petisah Hulu, and Titi Chain, which have the character of urban communities with heterogeneous social backgrounds. This location was chosen because it represents the role of parents as role models in children's moral education in urban environments. The research lasted for three months, from October to December 2024. Data collection techniques were carried out through participatory observation and semi-structured interviews to understand the interaction pattern between parents and children in moral formation. Interviews are conducted in person using open-ended question guidelines so that respondents can freely explain their views and experiences. The data that has been collected is analysed using thematic analysis techniques, which involve grouping data into relevant main themes, then reducing, categorising, and interpreting narratively (Butler-Kisber, 2018). The analysis is carried out continuously from data collection to the final stage to ensure the validity and consistency of interpretation. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation techniques of sources and methods, as well as re-checking the results of interviews with respondents (*member checking*) to ensure the validity of the findings.

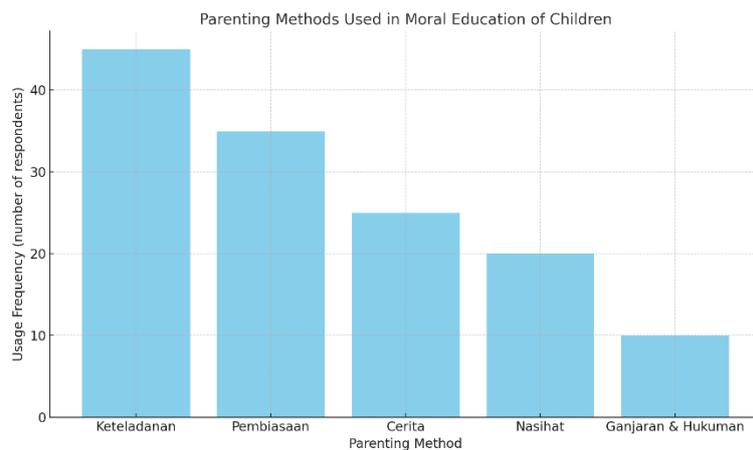
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The study results show that moral education in early childhood is greatly influenced by the family environment, especially the role of parents as the main role model. Children tend to imitate

the behaviour of those closest to them, especially parents, so that example is the most effective method in instilling moral values. Parents who show good manners, discipline, responsibility, and affection in daily life are prominent examples of children shaping their character. In addition to examples, parents also use habituation methods, stories, advice, and rewards and punishments to educate children's morals. The exemplary method is considered the most effective because children are more likely to imitate the behaviour that they see firsthand. Habituation is carried out through daily routines such as greetings, sharing, apologising, and helping parents at home. Stories, especially the stories of prophets and role models, are used to convey moral values in a fun way. Although advice is still used, its effectiveness depends heavily on how it is delivered and the emotional closeness between parent and child.

The following is a bar graph that illustrates the frequency of use of various moral education methods by parents based on the results of interviews. This graph shows that the exemplary method is the most commonly used, followed by habituation, storytelling, advice, reward and punishment.



Graph 1. Frequency of Use of Various Methods of Moral Education by Parents

The results of the interviews showed that the role of mothers was more dominant in educating children, while fathers gave more advice or discipline. When both parents play an active role in harmony, children's moral education is more effective, especially if it is supported by emotional closeness. Factors that support success include parental educational background, religious social environment, and cooperation with educational institutions. The obstacles include parents' busyness, lack of understanding of children's development, and the influence of digital media. Overall, the role of parents as role models is vital in shaping children's morals, and support from educational institutions and the community is needed for the success of sustainable moral education.



Figure 1. Interviews with Parents of Children

Discussion

Moral education in early childhood is crucial for shaping the character and behaviour of children as they grow (Alwi et al., 2022). It is significant in laying the foundation for a child's future social interactions and decision-making. The research findings indicate that the family environment, particularly the role of parents, profoundly impacts the development of children's morals. Children naturally imitate what they observe and hear, especially from the individuals they view as role models, primarily their parents (Kamila, 2023). According to Albert Bandura's social-cognitive theory, children learn behaviours through observation and imitation. This theory emphasises the importance of role models in a child's learning process. Therefore, parents who demonstrate good manners, discipline, responsibility, and compassion provide invaluable examples that help children internalise moral values (Grusec & Davidov, 2019). These actions align with Bandura's concept of observational learning, where children adopt behaviours they observe in those they look up to.

The research also revealed that the method most commonly used by parents to teach their children moral values is through example, followed by habituation, storytelling, advice, and rewards and punishments. The example method is the most effective because children are more likely to absorb moral values when they see them demonstrated directly in daily life rather than simply being told what to do. This method resonates with the idea that actions speak louder than words; children learn best when they observe their parents living out the moral principles they wish to impart. Habituation is another vital approach, teaching childrens everyday behaviours such as greeting others, sharing, apologising, or helping around the house. These habits, learned early on, form the foundation of a child's moral character. Moreover, storytelling, especially tales of prophets or exemplary figures, is crucial in making moral lessons engaging and easy for children to understand. These stories act as vehicles for transmitting values in a way that resonates with children's imaginations and emotions (Azizeh, 2021a, 2021b; Lusianti et al., 2025; Yulianti, 2023).

Counselling, although also used by many parents, has a varying degree of effectiveness. Its success is highly dependent on the emotional bond between the parent and the child, which is explained by John Bowlby's attachment theory. According to this theory, a strong emotional connection between the child and the parent fosters a secure base, allowing the child to feel safe and open to accepting guidance and moral teachings (Musawamah, 2021; Roghidah et al., 2024). This secure attachment allows children to internalise the values their parents wish to impart. A warm, emotionally supportive relationship enhances a child's receptivity to the lessons of morality being taught. The emotional connection, therefore, is important for the development of affection and a foundational element in a child's moral education (Chowdhury, 2018; Denham & Liverette, 2019).

The role of both parents in moral education is another crucial aspect highlighted by the research. It was found that mothers often take the lead in teaching children's moral values in daily life, while fathers tend to focus more on providing advice and discipline. However, when both parents engage actively and harmoniously in moral education, the results tend to be more positive. The collaborative efforts of both parents create an environment where children feel emotionally secure and supported. This balance strengthens the child's ability to understand and accept moral guidance (Almaghfiroh et al., 2024; Sanusi, 2024). Attachment theory emphasises the importance of such emotional security, suggesting that the quality of the parent-child bond greatly influences a child's moral development. Furthermore, social role theory comes into play as children learn societal roles and moral expectations through their interactions with their parents, who serve as their primary educators in the home environment (Anglin et al., 2022; Birhan et al., 2021b).

Despite the critical role of parents, several factors hinder the process of moral education at home. One significant obstacle is the busyness of parents, which limits their ability to interact meaningfully with their children. Parents often have limited time with their children in today's fast-paced world, resulting in missed opportunities to model positive behaviours (Syahroni, 2017). This lack of time makes it difficult for parents to provide consistent examples of good moral conduct (Firmansyah, 2020). Additionally, many parents lack a deep understanding of child development, which can affect their ability to teach moral values in an age-appropriate way. Not all parents are equipped with the knowledge of how to approach moral education at different stages of a child's growth. Moreover, the influence of digital media and peer environments introduces another challenge (Hardian et al., 2025). Children are increasingly exposed to content that may not align with the moral values their parents wish to instil. This issue aligns with Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological

systems theory, which underscores the role of a child's broader environment, including digital media and social interactions, in shaping their development. The content children encounter in these environments can often contradict or undermine the teachings they receive at home.

The research also highlights the importance of supporting factors that can enhance the effectiveness of moral education. Parents with strong educational backgrounds are more likely to understand and apply effective methods of teaching morality to their children. (Chen et al., 2020). A positive social environment further strengthens the process by providing children with consistent moral cues from various sources, including teachers and community members. The partnership between parents and educational institutions, such as schools or religious centres, can also help reinforce moral values. When schools and families work together, the moral lessons taught at home are complemented by those reinforced in educational settings, ensuring a more comprehensive and consistent approach to moral development (Iksal et al., 2024).

However, there are still several challenges to overcome. The pressures of modern life, such as work commitments, have made it difficult for many parents to devote enough time to interact with their children. This lack of time for direct interaction reduces the opportunity for role modelling and weakens the emotional connection between parent and child (Sanders & Turner, 2018). Parents who struggle with balancing work and family life often find it challenging to foster the secure attachment crucial for effective moral education. Additionally, there is a need for greater awareness among parents about the developmental stages of children and how to adapt their moral teachings accordingly (Meints et al., 2018). Without this understanding, parents may inadvertently use methods unsuitable for the child's current stage of development, making it harder for the child to grasp the moral lessons being imparted.

Moral education in early childhood plays a pivotal role in shaping children's future behaviour and character (Malik & Sugiarto, 2021). The study has shown that parental involvement, primarily through example and emotional support, is central to successful moral education. Methods such as habituation, storytelling, and counselling contribute significantly, though the emotional closeness between parent and child influences their effectiveness (Cowling & Anderson, 2023). Factors like a strong educational background, a positive social environment, and collaboration with educational institutions are all key to ensuring that moral education is effective and sustainable. Nonetheless, challenges such as parental busyness, limited understanding of child development, and the impact of digital media must be addressed for moral education to truly thrive in today's

world (Morelli et al., 2018). Ensuring that both parents and educators are equipped to guide children through moral development requires a collective effort, underscoring the need for a supportive and cooperative approach to the moral education of children.

CONCLUSION

The role of parents in educating children's morals is vital as the primary foundation in forming children's character. Parents who set a good example, accompanied by affection, and apply religious and moral values from an early age greatly influence the formation of children's morals. Cooperation between parents, schools, and the community can strengthen these values. Supporting factors facilitating children's moral education include adequate parental education and a positive social environment. However, several inhibiting factors, such as a lack of religious understanding in parents, negative influences of children's social environment, and limited time with children, can reduce the effectiveness of moral education. Weaknesses in the study included a lack of parents' understanding of the importance of their roles, the negative influence of the media and the environment, and the limitations of researchers in terms of time and resources. For this reason, it is recommended that parents better understand the stages of children's development, increase their religious knowledge and explore appropriate ways to educate. In addition, educational institutions and the community need to work together to strengthen moral education sustainably.

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