



## The role of teachers in developing noble character in early childhood education

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### Abstract

**Background:** Early childhood education plays a vital role in the formation of noble moral character, as this stage strongly influences children's attitudes, behaviors, and value internalization. Character development in early childhood is not formed through instruction alone, but through consistent habituation, role modeling, and meaningful social interaction. Teachers therefore hold a strategic position as educators and moral exemplars. However, empirical studies that specifically examine teachers' everyday roles in shaping children's noble moral character remain limited.

**Aims:** This study aims to describe the roles of teachers in the development of noble moral character among early childhood learners, focusing on teachers' functions as educators, role models, developmental planners, and consultants and mediators.

**Method:** This study employed a descriptive qualitative research approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation involving teachers at an early childhood education institution. Data analysis was conducted through data organization, description, and interpretation to obtain an in-depth understanding of teachers' roles in character development.

**Results:** The findings indicate that teachers play four main roles in developing noble moral character: educators who integrate moral values into learning activities, role models who demonstrate positive behavior, developmental planners who design character-oriented activities, and consultants and mediators who guide children in resolving social and emotional challenges. These roles are implemented through habituation, daily interaction, and collaboration with parents.

**Conclusion:** Teachers play a crucial role in the development of noble moral character in early childhood education. Strengthening teachers' competencies and maintaining collaboration between schools and families are essential to support sustainable character development in early childhood.

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## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education represents a strategic phase in human resource development, as it serves as the foundation for children's cognitive, social, emotional, and moral development. Early investment in education during this period has been shown to generate long-term benefits for individual learning capacity, social behavior, and life outcomes, particularly when educational interventions emphasize both cognitive and non-cognitive skills (Heckman, 2011). Numerous international studies emphasize that educational experiences in early childhood have long-term effects on the formation of individuals' attitudes, values, and behaviors in adulthood (UNESCO,

2021; National Research Council, 2000), especially through environments that integrate care, stimulation, and value transmission (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Therefore, education at the early childhood level is not solely oriented toward academic readiness, but also toward the formation of character and noble moral values as the basis of children's personality development.

The development of noble moral character in early childhood is closely related to the internalization of moral and religious values that is carried out consistently and continuously. From the perspective of moral development theory, children construct moral understanding through social interaction and guided participation within specific social domains (Nucci, 2016). These values are not formed through instructional processes alone, but through behavioral habituation, adult role modeling, and meaningful social interactions within children's learning environments (Lee-Angry, 2024; Payne & Isaacs, 2024). In religious societies, moral character education is often grounded in religious values that function as ethical guidelines for daily life, where moral reasoning and virtue are cultivated through lived examples rather than abstract instruction (Lickona, 1992). As a result, character education in early childhood encompasses moral, social, and spiritual dimensions simultaneously.

Within formal educational settings, teachers play a central role in the process of early childhood character development. Teachers function not only as instructors, but also as role models whose behavior, attitudes, and patterns of interaction are observed and imitated by children. According to social learning theory, children acquire values and behaviors through observation, imitation, and reinforcement provided by significant adults in their environment (Bandura, 1986). Research in the field of education indicates that the quality of teacher-child relationships, moral exemplarity, and behavioral consistency significantly influence children's character development and social regulation (Brown et al., 2022; Zohar & Luria, 2005). Empirical evidence further demonstrates that emotionally supportive teacher-child interactions contribute to children's moral self-regulation and prosocial behavior (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). This highlights the multidimensional nature of teachers' roles in early childhood education, encompassing pedagogical, moral, and relational aspects.

The development of noble moral character in early childhood education is generally implemented through strategies such as the habituation of positive values, behavioral role modeling, and collaboration among schools, parents, and children's social environments. Effective character education emphasizes the integration of moral values into daily routines so that children experience consistent moral messages across contexts (Lickona et al., 1996). The routine practice of positive behaviors helps children gradually construct moral understanding, while teachers' role modeling serves as a concrete example that facilitates children's imitation of expected behaviors (Mulyasa, 2012; Wiyani, 2017). In addition, parental involvement is a crucial supporting factor to ensure that the values instilled at school are reinforced and continued within the family environment, particularly during early childhood when learning is highly contextual and relational (Epstein, 2018).

A number of previous studies have examined character education in early childhood from various perspectives, including curriculum approaches, instructional strategies, and the role of the family environment. Comprehensive reviews of character education research indicate that much of the literature emphasizes policy frameworks and program models rather than the everyday practices of teachers in classrooms (Arthur et al., 2016). However, many of these studies remain focused on conceptual and programmatic dimensions, with relatively limited attention to teachers' everyday practices in fulfilling their roles within early childhood classrooms. Furthermore, studies that specifically examine teachers' roles as educators, role models, developmental planners, as well as consultants and mediators in the formation of children's noble

moral character remain limited, particularly within the context of community-based early childhood education institutions.

This situation indicates a research gap between the conceptual discourse on character education and the empirical practices of teachers' roles in early childhood education contexts. Teacher professional learning literature emphasizes the need to examine how educators translate values and beliefs into daily pedagogical actions (Korthagen, 2017). There is a need for research that provides an in-depth description of how teachers enact their roles in daily learning activities and how these roles contribute to the development of noble moral character in early childhood.

Based on this background, the present study aims to describe the roles of teachers in the development of noble moral character among early childhood learners at TK Dharma Wanita Tunas Harapan Mongging. Specifically, this study examines how teachers perform their roles as educators, role models, developmental planners, and consultants and mediators within the learning process and daily interactions with children.

This study is expected to offer several important contributions. Theoretically, it enriches the body of knowledge on early childhood character education by providing empirical insights into teachers' roles in fostering noble moral character within early childhood education settings. It also extends the discourse on character education by emphasizing teachers' everyday practices rather than focusing solely on conceptual or policy-level discussions. Practically, the findings are expected to serve as a reference for teachers and early childhood education administrators in designing more effective learning strategies oriented toward character development. In addition, the results may inform policymakers in early childhood education by reinforcing the role of teachers as key agents in the development of noble moral character from an early age.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at understanding and describing social phenomena in depth based on descriptive data in the form of written and spoken words obtained from research participants, as well as directly observable behaviors. This approach allows researchers to interpret meanings, contexts, and processes that occur naturally within the research setting without manipulating the variables under investigation. Descriptive qualitative research is considered appropriate because it provides a comprehensive portrayal of social reality as it occurs, particularly within the context of early childhood education.

In line with Creswell's perspective, qualitative research is a process of understanding human or social problems by constructing a holistic and complex picture, presented in narrative form and conducted in a natural setting (Creswell, as cited in Zakariah, 2020). Therefore, a descriptive qualitative approach is regarded as relevant for examining teachers' roles in the development of noble moral character in early childhood. Systematically, the research process began with the determination of the research focus, followed by the selection of the research design, identification of the research site and participants, data collection, data analysis, and the drawing of conclusions. All of these stages are visually presented in the form of a research flowchart in Figure 1, which illustrates the sequential and integrated relationship among the research stages.



**Figure 1.** Flowchart of the qualitative descriptive research procedure.

Figure 1 illustrates the systematic stages of the research process, beginning with the determination of the research focus, followed by data collection, analysis, and the formulation of conclusions.

The participants in this study were teachers directly involved in the learning process and in the development of children's character at TK Dharma Wanita Tunas Harapan Mongging. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on the consideration that teachers possess primary roles and direct experience in instilling noble moral character values in early childhood learners. Accordingly, the data obtained were expected to be in-depth, relevant, and aligned with the objectives of the study.

Data collection in this study was conducted through interviews, observations, and documentation. The interviews were semi-structured in nature, allowing flexibility and avoiding rigid adherence to predetermined questions, thereby enabling the researcher to explore teachers' perspectives, experiences, and practices in developing noble moral character among early childhood learners more deeply. Observations were carried out to directly examine learning activities, teacher-child interactions, and the forms of character value internalization implemented within the school environment. Documentation served as supporting data, including instructional plans, school activity records, and other documents relevant to the research focus.

Data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis. The analysis process involved organizing the data, describing the findings, and interpreting their meanings based on actual conditions observed in the field. This analysis aimed to achieve a comprehensive understanding of teachers' roles in the development of noble moral character in early childhood. The findings were then presented in a systematic narrative form to provide information that is current, contextual, and relevant to the focus of the study.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Education has a primary goal of guiding younger generations to develop their potential and achieve their aspirations in the future. In this process, parents play an important role in encouraging children to identify and pursue their aspirations without diminishing their motivation. Nevertheless, parents also remain responsible for instilling moral values so that children not only develop intellectually, but also demonstrate respect, politeness, and noble moral character in social life. Education grounded in the Qur'an and Hadith as guidelines for daily interactions serves as an essential foundation for the formation of *akhlaqul karimah* from an early

age. Through moral character education, children are directed to develop positive personalities by internalizing values such as honesty, justice, humility, wisdom, and good deeds in everyday life.

In the context of formal education, teachers play a highly strategic role in encouraging students to integrate moral judgment, proper conduct (*adab*), and positive cultural values in order to achieve the formation of *akhlaqul karimah*. Teachers function not only as transmitters of knowledge, but also as motivators who inspire students to consider moral values in every aspect of their behavior. According to Mustafa (2020), a role refers to an action that has a significant impact on individual behavior, as it regulates actions, influences social interactions, and enables individuals to adapt their behavior to their social environment. In line with the definition of teachers as educators, teachers are understood as adults responsible for providing guidance and support for students' physical and mental development so that they may achieve maturity, independence, and fulfill their responsibilities as servants of God in the world. Therefore, teachers are often regarded as second parents who serve as companions and bridges for children in developing their potential and abilities optimally.

The integration of habits, proper conduct, and school culture is directed toward shaping intelligent individuals with strong character who are able to contribute positively to society. This is consistent with the national education objectives stipulated in Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Article 3, which emphasizes that education aims to develop students' potential so that they become individuals who are faithful, pious, and possess noble moral character (Maryatun, 2016). The results of interviews and observations indicate that teachers at TK Dharma Wanita Tunas Harapan Mongging, Pademawu Timur, have implemented four main roles in shaping students' character, namely as educators, role models, developmental planners, and consultants and mediators. These findings are consistent with Wiyani's (2012) view that teachers' roles in character education include being role models, sources of inspiration, motivators, drivers of change, and evaluators.

#### **a. Early Childhood Teachers as Educators**

Early childhood teachers do not merely function as transmitters of knowledge, but also as individuals directly involved in shaping children's attitudes and behaviors. At the early childhood level, teachers design and implement continuous character development plans by adapting to children's natural and contextual learning styles. Therefore, educators must master strategies for early childhood development to ensure that planned activities are implemented in accordance with developmental objectives. In addition, early childhood teachers need to understand children's characteristics based on age, cultural background, and environment, so that the values instilled are closely connected to children's daily lives. This understanding is essential to ensure that the attitudes and behaviors promoted can be observed, imitated, and internalized by children, given that young children have a strong tendency to observe and imitate adults.

#### **b. Early Childhood Teachers as Role Models**

Early childhood teachers are figures who are closely involved in children's daily lives; consequently, every behavior and action demonstrated by educators becomes a model for students. Children are not yet able to critically distinguish which behaviors are appropriate to imitate and which are not, so observed actions are often perceived as correct examples. Therefore, educators must demonstrate behaviors that reflect positive values so that the behaviors imitated by children align with the desired character traits. Character formation through role modeling is one of the most effective approaches, as children learn by observing and imitating. The consistent habituation of positive attitudes in daily activities plays a crucial role in determining the success of character development and contributes to the formation of future national character.

### c. Early Childhood Teachers as Developmental Planners

The formation of children's character requires careful planning to ensure that developmental objectives are achieved optimally. Teachers need to design character development activities that are integrated into children's daily routines, both at school and at home. The planned habituation materials include values such as care, empathy, cooperation, courage, honesty, integrity, independence, self-confidence, patience, pride, respectful behavior, responsibility, and tolerance. These activities can be organized in both individual and group formats, providing children with opportunities to learn and practice character values in diverse situations.

### d. Early Childhood Teachers as Consultants and Mediators

Early childhood educators often become the most trusted figures for children to share the problems they experience. Consequently, teachers serve as consultants and mediators in helping children resolve conflicts. When conflicts arise among children, teachers provide guidance to help them understand the causes of the problem before seeking solutions. This process indirectly instills values such as honesty, courage, and responsibility in children. The teacher's role as a mediator is essential in fostering children's social and emotional skills from an early age.

Overall, teachers play a vital role in the development of children's character education. Teachers act as guides, value transmitters, and character builders through the creation of a safe and supportive learning environment. They introduce values such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy, and facilitate learning experiences that help children understand and apply these values in their daily lives. However, character education is a continuous process that involves multiple stakeholders, including parents and the wider community. This is consistent with the view of Amelia et al. (2023), who assert that teachers function as educators, role models, and figures of identification for students and their surrounding environments.

According to Abdul Mustajib, as cited in Mustafa (2020), the process of forming *akhlaqul karimah* in children involves several stages, namely role modeling (*qudwah*), instruction (*ta'lim*), habituation (*ta'wid*), motivation (*targhib*), and the proportional application of warnings and sanctions (*tarhib*). Interviews with teachers at TK Dharma Wanita Tunas Harapan Mongging revealed that the implementation of noble moral character education is carried out through the creation of a conducive environment, the teaching of moral values, the provision of role models, the involvement of parents and the community, respect for diversity, and the use of active and creative learning methods. This approach supports children in internalizing *akhlaqul karimah* values and applying them gradually and sustainably in their daily lives.

## CONCLUSIONS

Character refers to distinctive patterns of behavior reflected in the ways individuals think, behave, and act, and it should be cultivated from an early age, as much of character formation occurs during childhood. This study aims to examine teachers' roles in the development of noble moral character education among early childhood learners at TK Dharma Wanita Tunas Harapan Mongging. The findings indicate that teachers play a crucial role in shaping children's noble moral character through role modeling, habituation, the management of a positive school environment, and the implementation of learning activities that integrate moral and ethical values. Teachers function not only as instructors, but also as educators, role models, developmental planners, and companions who support children in their daily school lives. The character values developed primarily focus on noble moral traits, such as politeness, discipline, responsibility, and mutual respect, which are consistently instilled through learning activities and social interactions. The implications of this study suggest that the success of early childhood character education largely

depends on the consistency of teachers' roles as role models and the support of a conducive school environment. Therefore, strengthening teachers' competencies and fostering sustained collaboration between schools and parents are essential to ensure the optimal development of noble moral character in early childhood.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All authors contributed substantially to this study. RA, UH, and YAP were responsible for conceptualization, data collection, and initial manuscript drafting. NA contributed to data analysis and interpretation. NAJ assisted in literature review and manuscript revision. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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