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Parents and Teachers Perceptions of the Internalization of Religious Behaviors in Early Childhood: A Phenomenological Study in Kampung Naga, Tasikmalaya

Yuli Salis Hijriyani*
Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari Ponorogo
Universitas Negeri Jakarta
email: yulisalis34@gmail.com

Asep Supena
Universitas Negeri Jakarta
email: asupena@unj.ac.id

Sri Indah Puji Astuti
Universitas Negeri Jakarta
email: sriindah@unj.ac.id

Saprialman
Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang
email: saprialman.fai@unsika.ac.id

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***Correspondence Address:**
yulisalis34@gmail.com

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Abstract

The internalization of religious behavior in early childhood is a fundamental aspect of character formation, particularly within indigenous communities that integrate religious values and local traditions. This study aims to examine parents' and early childhood teachers' perceptions of the internalization of children's religious behavior in the indigenous community of Kampung Naga, Tasikmalaya. Employing a qualitative fenomenology approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation involving parents, early childhood educators, and the surrounding socio-cultural environment. The findings reveal that the internalization of religious behavior occurs through role modeling, habituation, and children's active participation in religious and customary practices consistently implemented within families and the community. Both parents and teachers perceive the harmonization of Islamic values and indigenous traditions as a key strength in fostering children's religiosity. The study concludes that collaboration among families, early childhood institutions, and indigenous communities plays a significant role in supporting contextual and sustainable religious behavior development in early childhood.

INTRODUCTION

The formation of religious behavior in early childhood constitutes a fundamental process in the development of sustainable character, particularly within societies that possess strong value systems transmitted across generations (Lickona, 2012; Berkowitz & Bier, 2015). In various national education policies, early childhood education is positioned as a strategic phase for instilling moral and spiritual values in an integrated manner through children's lived experiences (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). However, contemporary social dynamics indicate a weakening of religious value internalization due to the fragmentation of roles among families, educational institutions, and the broader social environment (Putnam, 2015; Nucci et al., 2018).

Amid these conditions, indigenous communities present a unique context in which the continuity of values, practices, and religious role modeling is relatively well preserved in everyday life. One such community that consistently represents the harmonization of Islamic values and local traditions is the Kampung Naga indigenous community. In this community, religiosity is not merely symbolic but is embodied as a way of life, internalized from early childhood through parenting patterns, educational practices, and socio-cultural activities (Suryalaga, 2013; Rosyid, 2019).

A growing body of research over the past decade has demonstrated that the internalization of religiosity in early childhood is strongly influenced by the quality of adult role modeling and the consistency of habituation within family and school contexts (King & Boyatzis, 2015; Hardy et al., 2019). Studies on religious character education emphasize that parents and early childhood teachers play a pivotal role in shaping children's understanding of religiosity through meaningful daily interactions (Ulwan, 2012; Mulyasa, 2018). Other research highlights the importance of the social and cultural environment as a supportive ecosystem for religious value internalization, where values are not merely taught verbally but are directly experienced by children (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Super & Harkness, 2015).

Within tradition-based communities, ethnopedagogical studies suggest that local cultural practices can strengthen the internalization of religious values because they are contextual, repetitive, and rich in symbolic meaning (Alwasilah, 2014; Hidayat, 2020). These findings indicate that children's religiosity develops optimally when religious values are integrated into living social practices within the community. Nevertheless, empirical studies that specifically explore parents' and early childhood teachers' perspectives on the internalization of children's religious behavior in indigenous communities remain limited. Most previous research has focused on models of religious character education in formal institutions (Suyanto & Jihad, 2017), measurements of children's levels of religiosity (Sari & Mulyadi, 2021), or general descriptions of indigenous cultural practices (Iskandar, 2016). Research that integrates the perspectives of key educational actors—namely parents and early childhood teachers—within an indigenous socio-cultural context has not yet been sufficiently developed. Moreover, many studies position indigenous communities merely as cultural backgrounds rather than as active and sustainable social education systems that shape children's religious behavior from an early age (Rosyadi, 2022).

Another identified gap lies in the limited exploration of the harmonization between Islamic values and local customs from the perspectives of early childhood education actors. Previous studies have tended to examine the relationship between religion and culture from normative or historical viewpoints (Geertz, 2013; Azra, 2017), without adequately investigating how this relationship is perceived, interpreted, and practiced by parents and teachers in the processes of childrearing and early learning. In fact, actors' perceptions play a strategic role in shaping role modeling patterns, habituation strategies, and pedagogical decisions that directly influence the internalization of children's religious values (Ajzen, 2011; Pajares, 2014). The absence of this perspective results in a partial and less contextualized understanding of the processes through which children's religiosity is internalized within indigenous communities.

Based on these gaps, this article establishes its novelty through three main contributions. First, it focuses its analysis on the perceptions of parents and early childhood teachers as key actors in the internalization of children's religious behavior, rather than solely on children or cultural systems in general. Second, it positions the Kampung Naga indigenous community as a living ecosystem of religious education, in which Islamic values and local customs are practically integrated into children's everyday lives. Third, this study contributes to the enrichment of early childhood education scholarship by offering empirical insights into how children's religiosity is constructed through the simultaneous and sustained collaboration of families, early childhood institutions, and indigenous communities (Hidayah dan Salis, 2021).

The urgency of this research is further heightened by the challenges of globalization and modernization, which have the potential to erode religious values and local wisdom among younger generations (UNESCO, 2015; Parker & Raihani, 2019). On the one hand, formal education is expected to systematically instill religious values; on the other hand, children's social environments often fail to provide consistent support for such efforts. Indigenous communities offer an alternative model of religious value internalization grounded in role modeling, habituation, and lived experiences. Therefore, examining the perceptions of parents and early childhood teachers within this context is important not only for academic purposes but also as a conceptual reference for developing more contextualized and culturally grounded early childhood education policies and practices (Salis Hijriyani, 2022).

Accordingly, this article aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of parents' and early childhood teachers' perceptions of the processes through which children's religious behaviors are internalized within the Kampung Naga indigenous community of Tasikmalaya. This study is expected to reveal how religious values are understood, practiced, and transmitted to young children through the synergy of families, early childhood education institutions, and indigenous communities. From an academic perspective, this study seeks to contribute to the advancement of early childhood education research, particularly in the field of children's religiosity within local socio-cultural contexts. Furthermore, the findings are expected to serve as a conceptual reference for educators, researchers, and policymakers in formulating sustainable, contextual, and culturally rooted strategies for early childhood religious education.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design, aiming to develop an in-depth understanding of the meanings embedded in the experiences and perceptions of parents and early childhood education teachers regarding the internalization of religious behaviors in young children within an indigenous community context. The phenomenological approach was selected because the study focuses on participants' subjective experiences in interpreting religious practices that are lived and transmitted to children in everyday life. This approach enables the researcher to explore the essence of social experiences as perceived by actors directly involved in the educational process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 2014).

The research was conducted in Kampung Naga, an indigenous community that has consistently maintained its religious value system and local traditions. Kampung Naga was selected as the research site due to its socio-cultural characteristics, which represent a sustained integration of Islamic values and customary practices in everyday life, including in parenting and early childhood education. This context is particularly relevant for examining the internalization of religious values as lived practices rather than as merely normative constructs (Rosyid, 2019; Hidayat & Wibowo, 2020).

The research participants consisted of parents of young children and early childhood education teachers who were directly involved in childrearing and educational processes within the Kampung Naga community. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, based on their active involvement in early childhood education, their understanding of local religious and customary values, and their ability to reflect verbally on their experiences. A total of 18 participants were involved in this study, comprising 12 parents and 6 early childhood teachers. The number of participants was determined based on the principles of data adequacy and saturation, whereby data collection was concluded when information became repetitive and no longer yielded significant variations in meaning (Guest, Namey, & Saldaña, 2014).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews served as the primary data collection technique to explore participants' perceptions and experiences related to the internalization of children's religious behaviors. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, using open-ended questions that allowed participants to narrate their experiences and interpretations in depth. This technique was chosen because it is effective in capturing subjective meanings and personal reflections in phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participant observation was employed to directly observe children's religious practices within their natural settings, including family environments, early childhood education institutions, and community spaces. Observations focused on religious habituation, forms of adult role modeling, children's social interactions, and children's involvement in religious–customary activities. The researcher assumed the role of a limited participant observer, maintaining reflective distance to avoid intervening in ongoing social dynamics. This approach enabled a contextual understanding of children's religious behaviors as lived social practices (Spradley, 2016).

Documentation was used as a supplementary data source to strengthen the findings derived from interviews and observations. The documents examined included early childhood education activity records, visual archives of religious and customary activities (with participants' consent), and oral traditions related to children's religious education. The use of

documentation aimed to provide a broader historical and social context for the observed practices (Bowen, 2009).

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection and continued through the conclusion-drawing stage. Interview data were transcribed verbatim and repeatedly reviewed to achieve a holistic understanding. Subsequently, the data were analyzed through open coding and the clustering of meaning units into major themes that represented patterns in the internalization of children's religious behaviors. This analytical process followed the principles of qualitative thematic analysis, emphasizing the inductive identification of meaning patterns without imposing theoretical categories at the outset (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Data trustworthiness was ensured through source and method triangulation, member checking, and researcher reflexivity. Triangulation was achieved by comparing data from parents and early childhood teachers as well as across interviews, observations, and documentation. Member checking was conducted by sharing summaries of the findings with selected participants to confirm the accuracy and resonance of interpretations. Researcher reflexivity was maintained through systematic documentation of the researcher's assumptions, positionality, and experiences throughout the research process, ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in participants' perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

Performance benchmarks in this study were not expressed in quantitative measures but were formulated as qualitative indicators reflecting the processes of children's religious behavior internalization. These indicators included the consistency of religious habituation in daily life, the quality of parental and teacher role modeling, the level of children's engagement in religious–customary practices, and the alignment of perceptions between parents and early childhood teachers. These indicators served as an analytical framework for assessing the meaningfulness and sustainability of religious value internalization within the indigenous community context (King & Boyatzis, 2015; Hardy et al., 2019).

All stages of the research were conducted in accordance with ethical principles of qualitative research. Participants were informed about the study's objectives and procedures, as well as their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained, and participants' confidentiality was ensured through the use of codes or initials. This study did not aim to evaluate or judge the correctness of religious practices within the community but rather to understand and describe participants' experiences in an academic and reflective manner (Tracy, 2020).

Through this design and set of procedures, the research method is expected to yield credible, contextualized, and meaningful findings in explaining parents' and early childhood teachers' perceptions of the internalization of children's religious behaviors within the Kampung Naga indigenous community. This methodological approach also provides a strong empirical foundation for advancing early childhood education research grounded in religiosity and local wisdom.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Research Finding

The research findings were obtained through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation involving parents and early childhood education teachers within the Kampung Naga indigenous community. The data presented in this section represent processed and reduced field data rather than raw data and are organized based on thematic patterns that emerged consistently across data sources. The primary focus of the findings is directed toward the forms of children's religious behavior internalization, the roles of educational actors, and the surrounding socio-cultural context.

Overall, the findings indicate that the internalization of religious behaviors among young children in Kampung Naga occurs through processes that are natural, repetitive, and integrated into children's everyday activities. Religious values are not transmitted through instructional or verbalistic teaching but are embedded through adult role modeling, collective habituation, and children's active involvement in religious–customary practices that are embedded in family and community life.

Forms of Children's Religious Behavior Internalization

The results of interviews and observations reveal that the religious behaviors of young children in Kampung Naga are internalized through several primary forms. First, daily religious habituation is reflected in practices such as participating in congregational prayers, reciting prayers before and after daily activities, and introducing values of propriety and manners (adab) in social interactions. Children are directly involved in these practices without coercion, as religious activities are embedded in the daily rhythms of family and community life. Second, the internalization of religious behaviors occurs through socio-cultural practices that carry religious meanings, particularly children's involvement in religious activities rooted in local traditions. Through direct experiences, observation, and imitation of adult behaviors, children gradually absorb religious values as part of their lived experiences. Third, the internalization of religious values is manifested in children's social behaviors, such as showing respect toward parents and elders, adhering to customary rules, and maintaining appropriate speech and conduct in everyday interactions.

The Role of Parents in the Internalization of Religious Behaviors

The findings indicate that parents play a central role in the process of internalizing children's religious behaviors. Parents do not position themselves as formal instructors but rather as primary role models in practicing religious and customary values. Parenting patterns tend to be consistent, collective, and oriented toward habituation rather than verbal instruction. Parents consciously involve children in religious activities from an early age, such as accompanying parents during worship, participating in religious events, and engaging in daily routines imbued with religious values. This role is carried out continuously and is inseparable from the community's social life, allowing children to perceive religious behavior as a natural part of life rather than as an imposed obligation.

The Role of Early Childhood Education Teachers in the Internalization of Religious Behaviors

Early childhood education teachers serve as reinforcers and connectors between the religious values children acquire within their families and communities and their learning

experiences in early childhood education institutions. The findings show that teachers adapt their instructional approaches to align with local religious and customary values, thereby avoiding potential conflicts between school-based values and community norms. Teachers integrate religious values into daily learning activities through habituation, role modeling, and the reinforcement of children's positive behaviors. They also play a role in maintaining value continuity with parents through informal communication and shared understandings of values, ensuring that the internalization of children's religious behaviors remains coherent across home, school, and community contexts.

Synthesis of Research Findings

To clarify and integrate the research findings, a synthesis table is presented below, summarizing the results of the field data analysis.

Table 1. Patterns of Religious Behavior Internalization among Young Children in the Kampung Naga Indigenous Community

Aspect	Form of Findings	Primary Actors
Religious habituation	Daily prayers, collective worship, social manners (*adab*)	Parents
Role modeling	Exemplary religious behavior and adherence to customary rules	Parents and community leaders
Educational reinforcement	Integration of religious values into early childhood education activities	Early childhood education teachers
Social context	Collective religious–customary practices	Community

Discussion

Internalization of Religious Behavior as a Socio-Cultural Process

The research findings indicate that the internalization of children's religious behavior in Kampung Naga does not occur merely as a cognitive process but rather as a socio-cultural process that is directly experienced by children. This pattern aligns with the view that religious values are more effectively internalized through lived experiences and habituation than through verbal instruction alone (King & Boyatzis, 2015). Adult role modeling emerges as a dominant factor in shaping children's religious meanings, as children learn through observation and imitation of the religious behaviors demonstrated by parents and their surrounding environment. This finding reinforces the perspective that value internalization in early childhood is strongly influenced by the quality of a consistent and meaningful social environment (Hardy et al., 2019).

Harmonization of Islamic Values and Customary Traditions from an Early Childhood Education Perspective.

The findings reveal that there is no dichotomy between Islamic values and customary traditions in childrearing and educational practices in Kampung Naga. Instead, these values mutually reinforce one another and form an integrated value system that is transmitted across

generations. This finding strengthens the argument that local culture can serve as an effective medium for religious value internalization when such values are actively lived and collectively practiced (Hidayat & Wibowo, 2020). From the perspective of Islamic education, the internalization of values through role modeling and habituation is consistent with the principles of tarbiyah, which emphasize the formation of moral character through lived practice. This approach is reflected in the Qur'anic guidance found in Surah Luqman (31:13):

يَا بُنَيَّ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ ۖ إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ

"O my son, do not associate anything with Allah. Indeed, associating others with Allah is a great injustice.".

This verse underscores the importance of instilling the value of tawhid from an early age through the everyday relational interactions between parents and children..

The Roles of Parents and Teachers in Theoretical Perspective

The role of parents as the primary agents of religious value internalization identified in this study aligns with the findings of Boyatzis et al. (2013), who emphasize the family as the principal context for children's religious development. Early childhood education teachers function as value reinforcers rather than substitutes for the family's role, thereby ensuring continuity of values between home and school. The findings further demonstrate that teachers' perceptions of children's religious values are strongly influenced by the socio-cultural context of the community. Rather than imposing normative instructional models, teachers adapt their pedagogical approaches to align with local values. This pattern highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity in early childhood education practices (Parker & Raihani, 2019).

Convergence and Divergence with Previous Studies

The findings of this study are consistent with those of Sari and Mulyadi (2021), which indicate that habituation and role modeling are effective strategies for internalizing religious values in early childhood. However, this study extends previous research by positioning the indigenous community as an active ecosystem of religious education rather than merely as a cultural backdrop. Unlike studies that focus on religious education within formal school settings, this research demonstrates that the internalization of religious values in Kampung Naga is more robust due to the alignment of values across family, school, and community contexts. Accordingly, this study contributes novel insights into understanding children's religiosity as a collective and contextually grounded process.

Theoretical and Conceptual Implications

Theoretically, the findings of this study enrich early childhood education scholarship by demonstrating that the internalization of children's religious behaviors is more effective when it occurs within a consistent value ecosystem. This study underscores the importance of integrating socio-cultural perspectives into the study of children's religiosity, particularly within indigenous community contexts. Conceptually, this research offers the understanding that indigenous communities can be positioned as models of community-based religious value education that are relevant for examination and adaptation within early childhood education contexts in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the internalization of religious behaviors among young children in the Kampung Naga indigenous community occurs as a holistic, contextual, and sustainable process of value education. This internalization does not take place through formal instruction or purely instructional approaches; rather, it is fostered through adult role modeling, consistent habituation, and children's active involvement in lived religious practices embedded within family and community life. Children's religiosity is not understood merely as the acquisition of religious symbols or rituals but as a way of life manifested in attitudes, adab (moral conduct), and everyday social behaviors.

This study further demonstrates that parents play the most central role in the internalization of children's religious behaviors. Parental role modeling in practicing Islamic and customary values serves as the primary source of children's religious learning from an early age. Early childhood education teachers function as reinforcers and custodians of value continuity by integrating Islamic values into learning activities that are aligned with local cultural contexts. The alignment of perceptions and practices among parents, early childhood teachers, and the indigenous community creates a stable and consistent ecosystem of religious education, enabling religious values to be internalized in a natural and meaningful manner.

Moreover, the findings affirm that the harmonization of Islamic values and customary traditions in Kampung Naga is not contradictory but mutually reinforcing in shaping a contextualized system of value education. Customary values function as a social medium that strengthens the internalization of Islamic teachings, while Islamic values provide moral and spiritual foundations for customary practices. This condition illustrates that Islamic education for young children can develop effectively within local cultural contexts without diminishing the substance of Islamic teachings.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, this study offers several strategic recommendations at both the policy and practical levels of Islamic early childhood education. *First*, at the policy level, there is a need to strengthen the paradigm of Islamic early childhood education by positioning families and communities as integral components of the early childhood education system. Early childhood education policies, particularly those oriented toward religious character education, should provide greater space for integrating religious values with local socio-cultural contexts. Overly uniform and formalistic approaches risk weakening the internalization of religious values, which is inherently contextual and grounded in children's lived experiences.

Second, at the level of educational practice, Islamic early childhood education institutions are encouraged to develop learning models that emphasize role modeling, habituation, and the reinforcement of *adab* in children's daily lives, rather than focusing solely on the mastery of religious content. Early childhood teachers should be positioned as role models of religious values and facilitators of moral development, while also maintaining intensive communication with parents to ensure the continuity of values between home and school.

Third, for parents, the findings underscore the importance of consistent, role-model-based religious parenting. Parents are encouraged not to delegate children's religious education entirely to early childhood education institutions, but instead to position the home as the primary space for internalizing Islamic values through daily religious practices, *adab*, and religious attitudes in everyday life.

Fourth, for future researchers, this study recommends the development of similar investigations across diverse community contexts to enrich understanding of the internalization of religious behaviors in early childhood within varied socio-cultural ecosystems. Further studies may also seek to develop community-based conceptual models of children's religious education that are applicable to Islamic early childhood education contexts in Indonesia.

This article makes a significant contribution to the field of Islamic education, particularly within early childhood education studies, by offering a contextual perspective on the community-based internalization of children's religious behaviors. The primary contribution of this article lies in strengthening the understanding that Islamic early childhood education does not operate solely within formal institutional settings, but rather develops effectively within a value ecosystem that simultaneously involves families, early childhood education institutions, and communities. The findings enrich the discourse of Islamic education by affirming that the harmonization of Islamic values and local culture can serve as a strategic pedagogical asset in fostering children's moral character and religiosity. Accordingly, this article not only expands the theoretical discourse on contextual Islamic education but also provides empirical references for the development of Islamic early childhood education models rooted in local values and living social practices.

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