
Teacher' Leadership in Developing Character of Early Childhood in Kindergarten

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to describe the role of teacher' leadership as a model for early childhood character development, as well as the difficulties in developing children's character. The study uses a qualitative approach in describing situations from social reality. Data was obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using data reduction, data display, verification, and conclusion. This study showed that the teacher's leadership role can shape the childhood independent character. *Firstly*, the role of teacher' leadership in learning as a model of childhood independence for habituation. *Secondly*, there are childhood independent characters in daily activities. The finding of the study also described some difficulties faced by teachers in realizing independent characters for children. This study recommends that teachers need to be given leadership reinforcement in early childhood character development so that they can develop optimally.

Keywords: Teacher's leadership; childhood; character.

How To Cite: Rusmini, R., & Samsu, S. (2023). Teacher's Leadership and Developing Character of Early Childhood: Case Study at Harapan Bunda Kindergarten, Jambi City. *Al-Ta'lim Journal*, 30(1). doi:<https://doi.org/10.15548/jt.v30i1.813>

Article info: Submitted: 09th September 2022 | Revised: 16th February 2023 | Accepted: 28th February 2023

INTRODUCTION

Talking about early childhood, there are around 32.96 million early childhood children in Indonesia in 2020. In terms of place of residence, 45.12% of early childhood are in rural areas and 54.88% in urban areas. As for gender, men were 51.02%, and women were 48.98%, while based on the age group <1 year as many as 14.39%, age 1-4 years as many as 56.43% and age 5-6 years as many as 29.19% (Anonymous, 2020).

Early age for children is a golden phase for children's growth with brain capacity to develop well, especially the intellectual, emotional and social dimensions. Early childhood development is recognized as a major investment for the development and development of human character in Indonesia. However, the involvement of parents (Irma, 2019), management patterns (Botutihe, 2020), children's education (Dini, 2021), and learning management (Hadiati, 2019) are not sufficient to support the development and character building of early childhood.

The focus of this research is on teacher leadership at Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City in relation to early childhood character development. It is important to raise the issue of early childhood character development because it is the main investment for the development of human character in Indonesia. This study aims to see how the role of teacher leadership in learning as a model for early childhood character development, how the character of children in Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi

City, and how the difficulties faced by teachers in realizing the independent character of children so that early childhood character development can be realized.

Early Childhood Development

Child development is an interactive maturation process in producing the development of perceptual, motor, cognitive, language, socio-emotional, and self-regulation skills (Black et al., 2017). During childhood, children acquire a number of complex functional skills and competencies that can determine a child's academic progress and achievement later in life (Onyango et al., 2021)

In human life, naturally there is always a development that begins while still in the womb until the end of life. Many child development interventions are influenced by their health and mental attitudes. These mental health and attitudes have a direct impact on early childhood development outcomes (Evans et al., 2022). Development is seen as a change in mental attitude that is carried out within a certain time and takes place gradually, from simple to difficult abilities such as attitudes, intelligence, behavior and soon (Kurniasih, 2011). In developing the various potentials of children, various developments are carried out, such as morals, religious values, physical, language, cognitive, socio-emotional, artistic and creative. Relating to the development of various potentials of children, Allah said in the Holy Qur'an, Surah Luqman, 13) that:

وَإِذْ قَالَ لُقْمَنُ لِابْنِهِ وَهُوَ يَعِظُهُ يَبْنِي لَا تُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ

It means: "And remember when Luqman said to his son, when he taught him a lesson: O my son, do not fellowship with Allah, verily fellowship (Allah) is a great tyranny".

Over the past 20 years, general agreement has been reached globally that Early Childhood Development (ECD) has a strong positive relationship with children's health potential and realization, affecting their well-being, and health (Guo et al., 2021). Black et al.'s research shows that it is estimated that around 250 million (43%) children under five in Low-and Middle-income Countries (LMICs) are at risk of not reaching their developmental potential (Black et al., 2017).

Early childhood is directed to prepare children to develop well, and is oriented to broad aspects, not only concerning the development of intelligence, but also physical, motor, cognitive, language, moral and religious values, socio-emotional, artistic and creative aspects. Mansur, 2011). This opinion is in line with Ho who stated that it is not only related to the mental and physical development of children, but is also urgent to a nation's development. Thus, teachers of early childhood should exercise leadership skills to bring about a warm, happy, and healthy (Ho, 2015).

First, Physical and Motoric Development. Physical development is important to know because it affects the behavior of children. Both to his skills in moving, as well as his views in assessing himself and others. The development of gross motor skills is needed in order to move and balance the body. There is a tendency in early childhood to enjoy simple movements such as running or jumping. In addition, fine motor development functions to carry out more specific body movements such as folding, writing, stringing, buttoning and others. Second, Cognitive Development. Cognitive development is a

process in an effort to increase an individual's ability to use his knowledge. Cognition is understood as a mental function that includes perceptions, symbols, thoughts, reasoning, and even problem solving (Abdurrahman, 2003). For Flavell, children aged 5-7 years have had a deep appreciation through thinking, even understanding mental conditions. In middle and late childhood, they view the mind as a constructor of knowledge and an active processing center (Santrock, 2011).

Third, Language Development. Language development for children usually follows a predictable sequence in general, although it has variations in use for each child, language development aims to encourage the development of children's ability to communicate. In general, language development for children begins with crying in expressing attitudes towards various stimulants. Subsequent language development, children begin to repeat meaningless sounds repeatedly, followed by starting to learn one word, such as "maem" which means want to eat. In general, children learn the names of objects before other words are spoken or understood. In addition, language development also aims to hone children's ability to communicate. In the age range of 3-4 years, children learn to compose interrogative sentences and negative sentences, and children at the age of 5 years have accumulated approximately 8,000 vocabularies, in addition to having mastered almost all basic forms of grammar (Mansur, 2011); fourth, Moral and Religious Values Development. Moral is a value that guides behavior. Moral development in early childhood is still relatively limited. Generally, children have not been able to understand abstract values such as right or wrong or good or bad about something. Piaget in Fadlilah stated that the introduction and pattern of value levels at first were still coercive for children, and their meaning was not yet known. However, along with their intellectual development, children slowly try to implement various applicable provisions, which are limited to the scope of the family, then expand to the scope of society and the state (Fadlillah, 2012). Physically and psychologically, all children are born with weak conditions. However, children have a latent innate potential. This potential requires guidance and care for early childhood. A number of experts say that children are not born as religious beings, because children are seen in terms of form, not psychology. However, other opinions also say that children carry religious nature from birth, then function after going through the process of guidance and ethical training at the maturity stage (Mansur, 2011).

Fifth, Socio-Emotional Development. Aspects of socio-emotional development, especially in early childhood, are expected to have the ability, competence, and learning outcomes in order to have the ability to recognize the natural environment, social environment, community roles, and appreciate social and cultural diversity, be able to develop self-concept, positive attitude, have self-control, as well as a sense of empathy for others (Sanan, 2013); Sixth, Art and Creativity. Creativity is the ability to create new combinations based on existing data, information, or elements. Creative thinking creativity or divergent thinking is a data-based ability by finding many possible answers to a problem, the emphasis is on quantity, efficiency and diversity of answers (Mansur, 2011). In his view, behavior that reflects natural creativity for early childhood can be recognized through several existing characteristics, namely happy exploring the environment, observing and holding things, expansive and excessive exploration, curiosity, likes to ask questions without stopping, spontaneously expresses thoughts and feelings, likes adventure, always wants to get new experiences, likes to experiment, disassemble and try out various things, rarely feels bored, and has things to do (Mansur, 2011).

Childhood Character

Talking about character can be physical, mental, facial, and etc. Facial character in the form of facial emotions, for example, are critical social cognitive abilities that help in interpreting and predicting children's behavior. This process refers to the process of visually detecting a relevant stimulus (face). During social interaction, however, faces are processed in relation to additional contextual information about the individual child. For example, the moral character of early childhood can help anticipate the child's actions and intentions (Bigelow et al., 2022).

In Greek Charassein, the word character means to engrave. It is interpreted as scratching or carving. Relating to this, character is often correlated with morals, ethics, personal behavior or personality. The definition of character is an individual personality attribute or behavior that can respond to situations and conditions in a good way (Lian, 2020). Planting characters can be grouped into four stages are (1) value planting, (2) model values, (3) value facility, and (4) value skills (Lian, 2020).

The characteristics of early childhood development begin with general characteristics, special characteristics, namely: 1) general characteristics are marked at the age of 3 years, generally children are increasingly independent and try to introduce themselves to their peers. At this stage, children are aware of what they feel and do (Sujiono, 2004). The pattern of children's play activities has also changed because it has entered the parallel play stage. This play activity is not infrequently colored by conflict, but it is temporary.

At the end of the age of 4 years, children are in the associative play stage, which is a game in which group play interaction occurs, sometimes accompanied by disputes to the stage of cooperative play. As for the cooperative play stage, children can listen and respond to peers and begin to be able to work together in completing group assignments. The character of children aged 3-4 years is based on the dimensions of physical development, namely children aged 3 years are able to walk alone without assistance, run faster, have bigger jumps, can climb stairs step by step, while at the age of 4 years they walk and run more swiftly. and more skilled than children aged 3 years (Porcher, 1992).

The general characteristics of children in the age range of 3-6 years include children at that age showing enthusiastic, charming behavior, and at the same time looking rude at certain times, children begin to try to understand the world around them even though they are still difficult to understand. distinguish between fantasy and reality, in certain situations children appear very charming and can cooperate with friends and other people but at other times they become controlling and demanding children, children are able to develop language skills quickly, they are often seen talking alone loudly when they solve problems or complete an activity, physically, children have great energy but short concentration spans so they tend to move from one activity to another (Coughlin, 2000).

In the special Characteristics, there are characteristics that mark the behavior patterns of children in the age range of 3-6 years which are included in early childhood, namely happy to ask questions about what they see, hear or feel, often rebel, show stubbornness, find it difficult. regulated, disobedient, resisting, often angry for no apparent reason, likes to play without stopping such as being tireless, likes to explore, marked by a situation where the child is never silent, moves here and there to find out the

state of his environment, observes an event can occur, and they are very sensitive to changes that occur in the environment, children as master imitators, at this age range the process of imitating children of everything around them is increasing, and likes to fantasize, imagination is closely related to the ability to imagine and fantasize in a child. From the characteristics of the growth and development of children aged 3-6 years, a kindergarten teacher needs to develop a play activity program that is appropriate to the situation and condition of the child.

In this context, to successfully control the child's social environment requires the ability to encode memories of previous social interactions and restore those memories in guiding behavior simultaneously (Murty et al., 2020). The formation of adolescent character later, begins in childhood and continues throughout life. The formation of the child's character is associated with psycho-social development and is very important because it will be a strong foundation for personality when they become adolescents and adults (Sugiarti et al., 2022), even a systematic ability to integrate computational thinking in early childhood education is even needed (Su et al., 2023).

Leadership and Teacher's Leadership

Discourse on leadership and leader problems is something that is never empty of discussion from time to time (Zuhdi, 2014). Leadership is often defined as a person's ability to gain respect, recognition, trust, obedience, and loyalty to lead his group in life together towards goals. Leadership in Islam is said to be those who come from leaders who are strong and trustworthy in carrying out their duties, as affirmed in Qs. Al-Qashash, 26:

إِنَّ خَيْرَ مَنِ اسْتَأْجَرْتَ الْقَوِيُّ الْأَمِينُ

It means: "Indeed, the best person you take as a worker (to us) is a strong and trustworthy person".

Leadership is a subject that has been of interest to scientists and the general public for a long time. Leadership contains the connotation of a powerful personal image and has dynamically succeeded in leading educational institutions, controlling education, or directing educational goals in line with state goals. In general, leadership is behavior that aims to influence the activities of educators to achieve common goals designed to provide individual and organizational benefits, so that in an institution, leadership becomes a very important factor in directing the achievement of goals set by the institution (Rivai, 2013).

Leadership shows a universal phenomenon that is very important in organizations, whether business, educational, political, religious, or social. Without leadership, an organization is only a number of people or machines that experience confusion (Badeni, 2013). From the above definition, leadership is seen as the ability, art or process of an activity carried out to influence others to behave in a certain way. From this understanding, leadership becomes something that can be trained and learned in developing someone to become an effective leader.

In the context of education, educational leadership is a branch of leadership science. Educational leadership is a central issue for efforts to advance education (Samsu, 2014). All the basic principles of leadership science theory also apply to educational leadership (Wirawan, 2013). Konz and O'Donnel in Boedi explain about leaders and

leadership, there are several things that need to be considered in leadership, namely: (1) power and authority, namely the ability to move people to follow the leader's will to achieve goals, (2) authority, namely the superiority of a person. leader compared to other leaders. These advantages cause other people to be obedient and willing to carry out the desired activity, (3) ability, namely overall power, both social skills and technical skills that exceed others (Saefullah, 2014). Educational leadership is a system. Many experts and educational leadership associations have created educational leadership models, one of which is the association of school principals in Australia formulating the Apapde's Educational Leadership Model (AELM) leadership model (Arifin, 2021) which can be described as follows:

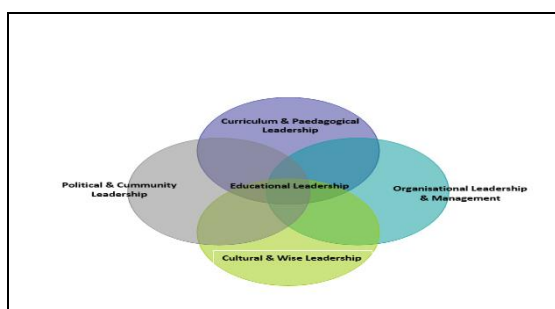


Figure 1. Apapde's Educational Leadership Model (AELM)

This model states that educational leadership must have a number of leadership competencies, namely curriculum and pedagogical leadership, namely *firstly*, providing an optimal learning environment to respond to national and global trends and issues that are in accordance with trends that occur and are evaluated on an ongoing basis. Although recent research reveals that no concept of pedagogical leadership is generally understood to be applicable to early childhood education and care (Heikka et al., 2020). However, pedagogical leadership is understood as the overall pedagogical activity of staff at an educational institution (Douglass, 2019). Likewise, pedagogical leadership is not only as a link and support for children's teaching and learning, but also as the development of the professional capacity of early childhood education, as values and beliefs about education held by society at large (Heikka et al., 2011). Formally and informally, teacher leadership is recognized as beneficial for schools in engaging teacher leaders (Liu, 2021), although the concept of teacher leadership itself is ambiguous (Harris, 2003).

Nevertheless, experienced PAUD teachers show that self-awareness, expectations and realistic abilities can be organized and facilitated flexibly in maintaining work balance and professional continuity (Kilgallon, 2008). In the context of teachers, teacher leadership needs to master the theory and application of curriculum and pedagogy to carry out the learning process. *Secondly*, teacher leadership must have a vision and be able to develop a common goal cooperatively. *Thirdly*, teachers as educational leaders understand and recognize the cultural values of society, act ethically, reflect beliefs, practices and behavior. *Fourthly*, teachers as educational leaders must have the ability to negotiate with the system, and various sectors such as parents, teachers, and community members towards school welfare. *Fifthly*, the purpose of teacher leadership is to create synergies to optimize the learning and growth of students (Wirawan, 2013). Such leadership is needed to bring about constructive change through teaching programs that

are in line with the values and goals of decision makers (Qomar, 2007). In line with that, teacher leadership in learning is a form of educational leadership that is needed in realizing the development of early childhood character, especially so that early childhood has happiness at their age.

Childhood happiness is an indicator of quality of life. The meaning of happiness for children in childhood is characterized by positive affection, activities, receiving something, achieving achievements, and positive physical conditions. The events that produce happiness are when children perform activities, when receiving something, when there is affiliation, when doing religious activities, and when they are on special days and events (Ayriza et al., 2022). In fact, changing people's psychological perceptions is very difficult, but teachers' perceptions can determine how to change their teaching practices (Lassonde et al., 2016).

METHOD

This type of research is descriptive qualitative research. This research is used to describe various conditions, situations, or phenomena of social reality that exist in the community that is the object of research, and tries to draw that reality as a way, characteristic, nature, model, sign, or description of a condition, situation or phenomenon. (Bungin, 2008). The setting of this research was carried out in 2021 at Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City, involving the head of the kindergarten, teachers, and students.

The research uses a qualitative approach. Qualitative design begins with the stage of determining the problem that is to view teacher's leadership role in shaping the childhood independent character, and to find the difficulties faced by teachers in realizing independent characters for children. At the stage of determining the title was done through determining the theme/variable, determining the theory of teacher's leadership, early childhood character, and teacher's leadership, beside determining the flow of research thinking (Samsu, 2017). The research subjects were 27 people with details of the head of the kindergarten 1 person, 6 teachers, 20 students. The subjects of this study used the total population, namely 1 kindergarten principal, 6 teachers, 20 kindergarten students at Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City, namely B2 class students aged 5-6 years in the 2020/2021 school year.

The data was analyzed by using flowchart analysis from Miles-Huberman, they are data reduction, data display, verification, and conclusion. In the step of display data, the data was collected from observation, interviews, and documentation, for data reduction, data was simplified by taking data relevant to the study conducted. In the step of verification, the data was crosscheck by looking at the completeness of the required data. After these steps, conclusion was done.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data obtained, analyzed, and presented in accordance with the research focus, the following research findings can shape the independent character of children at Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City, namely: *firstly*, the role of teacher leadership in learning as a model of independence for children for habituation, where in this activity, children are taught to take care of themselves, starting from wearing their own clothes, wearing their own shoes, and eating by themselves. There is class

independence, namely independent children in kindergarten such as putting their shoes on their own shoe rack, putting toys in their place, as well as environmental independence, namely being independent in cleanliness such as cleaning up leftovers by themselves. *Secondly*, the formation of children's independent character in daily activities is due to the habituation carried out by teachers as models in Harapan Bunda Kindergarten, Jambi City. *Thirdly*, there are difficulties faced by teachers in realizing independent character for children, characterized by the presence of children who bring different backgrounds and characteristics from where they live, as well as the basic abilities possessed by children.

Discussing the findings above, the first finding shows that children's habituation to form their character can continue to be carried out, strengthened, and developed through teacher leadership in learning activities. Because learning activities with the application of habituation make teachers a model for children in giving birth to their independence, both in classroom activities, in kindergarten, and even later will be carried away in their environment when they grow up and mature. Carrying character values is expected to prevent negative influences on the child's future and the growth of good character shoots from an early age. The carrying of character values through habituation is in line with the opinion of Wahyunianto (2019), as well as Batubara (2015) in his research proving that in the implementation of habituation the principle of habituation is needed, and this one of them can be obtained through the character habituation model in teachers.

The findings of these two studies prove that with habituation, the child's independent character can be formed in daily activities at Harapan Bunda Kindergarten, Jambi City, and this is also in line with the evidence conducted by Batubara (2015) that habituation requires the principle of habituation, and this can only be realized by teachers through good leadership from teachers to instill character continuously.

In the third finding, this study proves that the difficulties faced by teachers in realizing independent character for children are caused by children who bring different backgrounds and characteristics from where they live, as well as the basic abilities possessed by children. Therefore, it is necessary to habituate new characters by teachers who continue to be fostered so that good and ideal characters can be realized, the function of kindergarten is to facilitate children with good character such as habituation in fun, educational, and functional ways. This opinion is in line with Mudjib (2022) who said that there is a need for ways to train children, so that they really understand and do things without experiencing difficulties.

From the discussion above, it shows that teachers are the most important part in the habituation process as character models in Harapan Bunda Kindergarten, Jambi City. Teacher leadership is very influential in this Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City. The teacher is the leader as well as the control holder in carrying out all activities in Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City. The teacher as a leader is a friendly and caring figure in accordance with Ziemek's opinion stating that teacher leadership can also be described as a teacher who has strong skills and personality as a leader. The figure of the teacher as the leader of Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City is a picture for children in carrying out activities or activities in school, especially in shaping the child's independent character (Ziemek, 1986).

The teacher as the leader of Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City has a very big role. Teachers as leaders must be able to become mentors and role models for

children in all things. Teachers are parents and teachers who can educate children so that children can be independent, in accordance with Kartono's opinion stating that a good leader is a teacher who is able to guide, educate, direct and encourage, and move his subordinates to do something. Thus, the teacher is a reflection for the child so that the independent character of the child in Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City can be realized (Kartini, 2008).

Teachers in leading children are always able to be role models for children. In this context, educating and giving can be imitated by what has been implemented by the teacher of the Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City. Bandura stated that subjects who were allowed to observe a series of unusual responses by others as models tended to do the children when placed in the same situation. Children can learn new responses by simply observing what is around them. Children's independence in school will be formed by the way children apply what the teacher has taught at school (Hall, 1993).

The independent character that children develop in Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City can be described, namely: (1) Children in Kindergarten of Harapan, Bunda, Jambi City have their own responsibilities to carry out their obligations without being ordered like a leader. who are independent, (2) The teacher educates children to become a person who has a leadership character who is responsible for all things in Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City. In accordance with his role as a teacher of Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City is no wonder the figure of a teacher has a very big responsibility. As a teacher, stated:

"To be a teacher, beside the early childhood need the trusted figure to us, but also need strong responsibility, because the development of attitude, aptitude, beside the creativity of childhood still need the attention how to obey the rule, and making the interaction with other child without disagree and fight in the kindergarten".

Quoting Rivai's opinion, the leadership of a teacher has a very big role in every decision making, so making decisions and taking responsibility for the results is one of the duties of a leader (Rivai, 2004). Teachers in learning are leaders, including at Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City, they are expected to always apply responsibility to children, so that independent characters are formed in the soul of a child. By applying the nature of responsibility to children, children can carry out activities independently without waiting for orders from a teacher. The difficulties faced by teachers in shaping the child's independent character lie in the background and basic abilities of the child. Different children's backgrounds give rise to different individual characteristics of children. Children tend to carry the nature of their respective places of residence. Rivai states that basically every child observes the way their family and friends behave which can shape their own attitudes and behavior to align with them (Rivai, 2004).

It can be understood that the child's family background is very influential on the nature and behavior of children in schools, including in Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City. Children who are independent in their family environment will definitely have independence in themselves, so that the formation of children's character will be very easy to do. It will be different from children who come from a family environment who always depend on their parents and others, it will be difficult to create children who live independently in Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City. Another inhibiting factor in the formation of a child's independent character is the child's basic ability. Not much

different from the background of the child, the basic abilities possessed by the child are also different. Rivai states that every child has different abilities (Rivai, 2004). There are different abilities that are brought from birth, there are also because of their ability to absorb information from a symptom. Children at birth have different basic abilities. Not all children in Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City have the ability to carry out daily activities.

CONCLUSION

The study proves that the formation of the childhood character at Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City is seen in the role of teacher leadership in learning as a model of independence for children in habituation, where children are taught to take care of themselves, class independence, and environmental independence. There are still difficulties faced by teachers in realizing the independent character of children, such as the presence of children carrying different backgrounds and characteristics from where they live, as well as differences in the basic abilities possessed by children making it difficult for the teacher's role as a learning leader in Kindergarten of Harapan Bunda, Jambi City. This condition causes the role and gait of the teacher's leadership in learning that has not yet shown its maximum application, especially in the growth and development of children.

It is recommended to the head of kindergarten, regarding the need for teachers to be given teacher leadership in learning, as well as strengthening and knowledge about the development and character of early childhood so that children can develop optimally.

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