



FESTIVAL ANAK SHOLEH AS A STRATEGY FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF CHARACTER EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS AND MADRASAS

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Abstract :

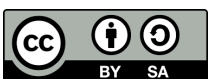
Character education is a central objective of Indonesian national education, particularly in strengthening students' religious values. This study analyzes the implementation of the "Festival Anak Sholeh" as a strategic approach to improving the quality of character education in elementary schools and madrasahs. The research employed a qualitative descriptive design through community-based educational activities held at Baituttaqwa Mosque. Participants consisted of 40 children from early childhood education and elementary levels. Data were collected through participatory observation, documentation, informal interviews, and team reflection, and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. Findings indicate that competitive-educative activities such as adhan competitions, daily prayer memorization, and mosque coloring effectively enhanced students' religious participation, self-confidence, and internalization of Islamic values. The mosque functioned not only as a place of worship but also as a community-based character education center. The study concludes that Festival Anak Sholeh represents a replicable model for strengthening character education quality in elementary schools and madrasahs through experiential and participatory strategies.

Keywords: Character Education, Religious Values, Elementary School, Madrasah, Community-Based Education

INTRODUCTION

Character education is the primary mandate of national education as emphasized in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which states that the goal of education is to develop the potential of students to become human beings who have faith, are devoted to God Almighty, and possess noble character. This normative formulation asserts that education is not only oriented toward academic achievement but also toward the formation of a holistic personality. Thus, the religious and moral dimensions become the main foundation in building the quality of Indonesian human resources characterized by integrity, ethics, and responsibility.

In a theoretical perspective, character education according to Thomas Lickona emphasizes three main stages: knowing the good, feeling the good, and doing the good. These three stages demonstrate that character education is not merely a cognitive process but a holistic one that integrates moral knowledge,



emotional appreciation, and real practice in daily life. In the context of Elementary Schools and Madrasahs, the integration of these three aspects must be adapted to the developmental characteristics of children who tend to learn through concrete experience, role modeling, and habituation.

However, the practice of character education in various educational units still faces several challenges. Value learning is often delivered in the form of lectures or normative instructions without providing sufficient space for students to experience, feel, and practice those values directly. Consequently, the internalization of values has not run optimally because it is not accompanied by deep emotional and social experiences. Verbalistic character education has the potential to produce conceptual understanding but does not necessarily form consistent habits and attitudes.

Therefore, innovative strategies are needed that can integrate elements of religious habituation, direct experience (experiential learning), and community involvement as a supporting ecosystem. Experience-based approaches provide opportunities for children to learn through real action, while habituation helps form consistency in behavior over the long term. On the other hand, the involvement of the community—particularly mosques and families—expands the space for character education so that it is not limited to the formal school environment alone.

The Festival Anak Sholeh emerges as one of the competitive-educative activity models designed to answer these needs. Through adhan competitions, daily prayer memorization, and creative activities based on Islamic symbols, children gain concrete and enjoyable religious experiences. This activity not only strengthens the cognitive aspect through mastery of religious material but also builds the affective aspect through pride and self-confidence, as well as the psychomotor aspect through the direct practice of worship. Thus, the Festival Anak Sholeh functions as an integrative medium in the comprehensive formation of children's religious character.

Based on this background, this study aims to:

Analyze the implementation of the Festival Anak Sholeh as a character education strategy that integrates competitive-educative approaches, religious habituation, and direct experience.

Identify its impact on the quality of character education in Elementary Schools and Madrasahs, particularly in increasing religious participation, self-confidence, and the internalization of Islamic values.

Explain the role of the mosque as a community-based character education center capable of complementing formal education through synergy between schools, families, and the community.

With this framework of thought, this research is expected not only to provide conceptual contributions to the development of community-based character education theory but also to offer a practical model that is systematic, applicable, and sustainable for replication in a broader social context.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study was designed to obtain an in-depth picture of the implementation of the Festival Anak Sholeh as a community-based character education model. The methodological approach was chosen systematically to record the dynamics of activities contextually, naturally, and comprehensively. Therefore, this study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with an implementative study design, aiming to analyze the program implementation process and its impact on the formation of students' religious character.

Research Approach

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach, which aims to understand social phenomena in depth based on the perspective of participants in a natural setting. This approach is relevant because the research focus lies on the processes, experiences, and meanings that emerge during the activity.

Research Design

The design used is an implementative study, which examines how a program is designed, implemented, and produces certain impacts in a real context. This design allows researchers to analyze the feasibility of the Festival Anak Sholeh program as a community-based character education model.

Research Location and Participants

The research activities were carried out at the Baituttaqwa Mosque in Paku Aji Village, which functions as a center for religious and social activities for the local community. The selection of this location was based on the consideration that the mosque is a strategic non-formal educational space for fostering children's religious character. The participants in this study totaled 40 children.

The number of participants consisted of 20 participants for the Adhan competition (Elementary level/Boys), 8 participants for short surah memorization (Elementary level/Boys), 6 participants for short surah memorization (Elementary level/Girls), 4 participants for Qur'an Tartil (Elementary level/Boys), and 6 participants for Qur'an Tartil (Elementary level/Girls).

Participants were selected based on active participation in the Festival Anak Sholeh activities. In addition to children as the primary subjects, supporting data were also obtained from the organizing committee, parents, and mosque administrators as additional informants.

Data Collection Techniques

To obtain comprehensive data, this study used several data collection techniques as follows:

1. Participatory Observation: Researchers were directly involved in the activities to observe the implementation process, participation levels, social interactions, and participants' emotional responses.
2. Documentation: Includes activity photos, participant lists, event schedules, and technical notes. This documentary data serves as empirical evidence and supports the analysis.
3. Informal Interviews: Conducted in an unstructured manner with participants, parents, and the committee to explore perceptions, experiences,

and evaluations of the activities.

4. Team Reflection: After the activity, the implementation team conducted reflective discussions to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, and impacts of the program.

Data Analysis

Data analysis used the interactive model developed by Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña. This model includes three main stages occurring in a cyclical and interactive manner:

1. Data Reduction: The process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming raw data into information relevant to the research focus.
2. Data Display: Organizing data in the form of descriptive narratives, matrices, or tables to facilitate the drawing of meanings and patterns.
3. Conclusion Drawing/Verification: The process of interpreting data meaning and testing the consistency of findings through re-checking against field data.

Data Validity

To maintain the validity and credibility of the findings, this study applied triangulation of methods and sources. Method triangulation was done by comparing results from observation, interviews, documentation, and team reflection. Source triangulation was done by comparing information from participating children, parents, and the organizing committee.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Increased Religious Participation

The participation of 59 children across all competition categories demonstrates not merely numerical engagement but a meaningful collective response from the community toward a structured character-education initiative. The high level of involvement indicates that the Festival Anak Sholeh successfully addressed a latent social demand: the need for a religious educational space that is pedagogically appropriate, emotionally engaging, and developmentally aligned with early childhood and elementary learners.

From a character education perspective, participation is a critical indicator of program effectiveness. Active engagement reflects not only behavioral involvement but also affective connection and cognitive investment (Samani & Hariyanto, 2017). In this case, participation functioned as both a process and an outcome. As a process, it allowed children to immerse themselves in structured religious activities; as an outcome, it signified growing awareness and ownership of religious identity.

Qualitatively, children displayed enthusiasm, preparedness, and persistence throughout the competition stages. This suggests the emergence of intrinsic motivation engagement driven by internal satisfaction rather than external compulsion (Kompri, 2016). Intrinsic motivation is essential in religious character formation because sustainable religious behavior cannot rely solely on reward or fear-based mechanisms. Instead, it must grow from internalized conviction and emotional attachment to values.

Furthermore, the participatory structure of the festival encouraged social interaction, peer learning, and cooperative atmosphere rather than purely competitive rivalry. This balance between competition and collaboration strengthened social bonds and reinforced communal religious consciousness. The festival thus functioned not only as an event but as a formative social experience that nurtured collective religiosity.

Strengthening Self-Confidence and Religious Competence

The Adhan competition provided a structured performative setting that significantly contributed to children's psychosocial development. Public performance requires emotional regulation, courage, and self-control competencies closely linked to self-efficacy development (Desmita, 2017).

Many participants initially exhibited signs of nervousness, including hesitation and vocal instability. However, through encouragement from parents, peers, and organizers, they gradually demonstrated improved confidence. This transformation reflects the mechanism of mastery experience, a key determinant of self-efficacy formation. When children successfully complete challenging tasks, they reconstruct their self-perception as capable individuals.

Beyond psychological growth, the competition strengthened religious competence at a technical level. Participants practiced proper makhraj articulation, tajwid accuracy, rhythm, and voice modulation. These competencies represent foundational worship skills that require repeated practice and corrective feedback. The structured competition setting provided both motivation and evaluative standards that encouraged skill refinement.

Experiential learning theory emphasizes that skills develop most effectively when learners engage directly in real-life tasks (Mulyasa, 2017). In this context, the Adhan competition transformed theoretical knowledge of prayer calls into embodied practice. Children did not merely understand the significance of Adhan cognitively; they experienced its spiritual and social meaning through performance. This integration of affective, cognitive, and psychomotor domains reflects holistic character education.

Importantly, the confidence gained through religious performance carries broader developmental implications. Public speaking courage, emotional resilience, and disciplined preparation are transferable competencies that benefit academic and social life beyond religious contexts.

Internalization of Values through Prayer Memorization

Daily prayer memorization functioned as a central mechanism for contextual value internalization. Unlike abstract doctrinal instruction, daily prayers are directly embedded in routine activities before eating, sleeping, studying, or entering sacred spaces. This contextual relevance strengthens the associative link between value and behavior.

From a pedagogical standpoint, repetition combined with meaningful context accelerates value internalization (Samani & Hariyanto, 2017). Children who repeatedly practice supplications linked to daily activities gradually transform them into habitual behavior patterns. Over time, this habituation

fosters automatic spiritual awareness embedded within routine actions.

Moreover, prayer memorization contributes to moral consciousness development. When children recite prayers that emphasize gratitude, protection, and humility, they are implicitly cultivating attitudes aligned with those expressions. The verbal articulation of values reinforces emotional resonance, thereby moving from knowing to feeling and eventually to doing.

Family involvement further strengthened this internalization process. Parents who supervised or practiced prayers at home extended the educational impact beyond the festival setting. This synergy between non-formal and informal education enhances sustainability of character formation.

Nevertheless, deeper semantic understanding of prayer meanings remains essential for long-term impact. Memorization must eventually be accompanied by reflective comprehension to prevent ritualistic formalism. When children understand the moral and spiritual meanings behind the words, internalization becomes more profound and conscious.

Strengthening Religious Identity through Symbols

The mosque coloring activity was developmentally appropriate for early childhood participants. At the pre-operational stage, children learn primarily through symbolic representation and sensory-motor interaction (Desmita, 2017). Visual activities enable them to engage with abstract religious concepts in tangible ways.

The mosque, as a central symbol of Islamic civilization, embodies worship, unity, knowledge, and community. Introducing this symbol through artistic expression nurtures emotional attachment and symbolic familiarity. Symbols play a crucial role in identity construction because they function as visual anchors for collective meaning (Yaumi, 2016).

Through coloring, children not only practiced fine motor coordination and concentration but also internalized positive associations with sacred spaces. The creative dimension allowed for individual expression while reinforcing shared religious identity. Such symbolic engagement supports early-stage spiritual identity formation in a gentle and non-coercive manner.

In addition, integrating art into religious education broadens pedagogical approaches. It demonstrates that character education is not confined to textual instruction but may also operate through aesthetic experience. Emotional engagement with symbols strengthens long-term attachment more effectively than purely verbal explanation.

The Mosque as a Community-Based Character Education Center

Historically, the mosque has served multifunctional roles within Islamic civilization: as a place of worship, knowledge dissemination, dispute resolution, and social organization. Revitalizing this integrative function within contemporary society represents a strategic educational innovation (Yaumi, 2016).

The implementation of the festival within the mosque environment reactivated its pedagogical role. The mosque became a dynamic learning ecosystem that united children, parents, university students, organizers, and

religious leaders. This multi-stakeholder collaboration exemplifies the principles of community-based character education (Samani & Hariyanto, 2017).

Community-based education strengthens moral formation because it situates learning within authentic social environments. Unlike isolated classroom settings, mosque-based activities embed religious practice within lived communal experience. Children witness adults modeling religious commitment, thereby reinforcing observational learning processes.

Furthermore, the mosque setting enhances spiritual atmosphere, which supports affective engagement. Sacred space influences emotional disposition, making children more receptive to religious instruction. The integration of formal (school), non-formal (festival), and informal (family) educational domains creates a comprehensive character formation ecosystem.

Sustainability of this model depends on institutional continuity and community commitment. When the mosque consistently hosts educational activities, it evolves into a stable character-development hub rather than a sporadic event venue.

Integrative Reflection

Collectively, the findings demonstrate that the Festival Anak Sholeh strengthens religious character development across multiple dimensions: participatory engagement, psychological growth, skill acquisition, symbolic identity formation, and institutional revitalization. The integration of experiential learning, community collaboration, and value habituation establishes a holistic educational model.

Rather than functioning as a ceremonial religious event, the festival operates as a structured pedagogical intervention. It aligns developmental psychology, character education theory, and Islamic moral principles within a coherent practical framework.

Thus, the program illustrates how community-based religious initiatives can effectively complement formal schooling in nurturing confident, competent, and spiritually grounded children in contemporary society.

CONCLUSION

The Festival Anak Sholeh is a form of community-based character education innovation that combines religious, pedagogical, and social approaches in a structured series of activities. This program is not merely oriented toward ceremonial aspects but is designed as a medium for comprehensive child character building through direct experience, habituation, and collective community involvement.

1. **Competitive-Educative Approach:** Successfully creates an enjoyable yet meaningful learning atmosphere that fosters intrinsic motivation.
2. **Experiential Learning:** Provides concrete experiences where religious values are not only understood but practiced.
3. **Structured Habituation:** Helps form worship habits from an early age, supporting the stages of knowing, feeling, and doing.

4. Community Collaboration: Creates a supportive educational environment, proving that character education is a collective responsibility.
5. Mosque Revitalization: Optimizes the mosque as an educative space that complements formal education in schools and madrasahs.

In conclusion, the Festival Anak Sholeh is an integrative, applicable, and sustainable community-based character education model. Its success lies in the integration of four main elements: educative competition, direct experience, structured religious habituation, and community collaboration. These four aspects complement each other in forming a holistic character education ecosystem.

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