

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT FOR THE CHILDREN OF INDONESIAN MIGRANT WORKERS IN JOHOR, MALAYSIA

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Abstract. Character development in Islam is significant among Muslims in order to fulfill the notion of acting with good conduct and righteous deeds. This notion is stated as one of the fundamentals of Islam, whereby Mahmudah morality, which represents the good attitudes based on al-Quran and as-Sunnah, is stated as an important aspect of character development. The aim of this study is to know what the activities are to develop a good character for children of Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) in Indonesia Community Centre (ICC) Muar, Johor. This study uses a case study as a qualitative method through interviews, observations, and document analysis involving eight informants. The results of the study found that the activities carried out by ICC Muar to form a good character for PMI children are through the worship approach, such as learning to perform ablution, praying, reading the Qur'an, following religious talks, helping each other, helping friends in distress and cultures ingrained which relates to the character development in the community center.

Keywords: *character development, children of Indonesian, migrant workers, activities*

Introduction

Character development in Islam is significant among Muslims in order to fulfill the notion of acting with good conduct and righteous deeds. This notion is stated as one of the fundamentals of Islam, whereby Mahmudah morality, which represents the good attitudes based on al-Quran and as-Sunnah, is an important aspect of character development. Mahmudah's morality in Islam is functional in fostering positive behavior, which would lead to the cultivation of good conduct among Muslims. The concept of morality in Islam is described as the root of every action done, be it good conduct or even misconduct. Thus, Mahmudah morality is crucial to ensure that every activity done by an individual will always align with the notion of Islamic good conduct for Muslims. The Muslims in question do not only involve adult Muslims but also the generation of youths as well as children. Therefore, it is undeniable that the best age for Muslim children to start implementing good conduct is 7 to 12 years old, as suggested by Makmur (2020). This age range is where the memory and imagination development phase occurs so that the knowledge of Mahmudah's morality could be imparted to these children. Besides that, the other phases of development can be used and referred to so that proper guidance can be given to Muslims regarding the good conduct of Islam. These guidances could be conceptualized with the term character development.

Character development is necessary for all Muslims, especially children, to form a positive attitude in obtaining Mahmudah's morality. As Muhtadi (2017) explained, character development should focus on mental development among younger generations to build positive traits and proper manners (Muhtadi, 2017). With the context of developing the characters of Muslim children, the aim of this notion is the prevention of juvenile delinquency and hedonistic acts done by the current generation of Muslims.

This notion is also supported by Mydin et al. (2020), whereby the usage of Mahmudah morality as the means of character development would provide the much-needed guidance to determine, evaluate as well as compare the virtuous and the immoral acts in life (Mydin et al., 2020). The claim further proves the undeniable significance of character development, particularly for Muslim children for a guaranteed future in the long run. As for Muslim children who are Indonesians, it is compulsory for them to participate in character development. This statement is as declared in Article 19 of the Laws of the Republic of Indonesia No. 23, 2002 on Child Protection. From this Article, it is stated that all Indonesian children are obligated to “respect parents, guardian, and teachers; love his family, communities, and care for friends; love the motherland, country and nation; worship in accordance with religious teachings; and practice ethics and possess noble morals” (Laws of Republic of Indonesia No. 23 on Child Protection, 2002). These obligations had signified the importance of character development for all Indonesian children, especially to Muslims. With respect to the said Article, the Indonesian children in question include the children of Indonesian migrant workers currently living outside of their home country. It is highly significant for these children to undergo character development with the emergence of a case reported in Malaysia among the so-called illegal children of Indonesian migrant workers. According to the news reported by Chou and Gooch (2016) in Al Jazeera, Lu, a fisherman from Tawau shared the dire situation where these Indonesian migrant workers’ children are involved in various social problems had arised (Chou and Gooch, 2016). The absence of a platform to receive any form of guidance led to the involvement of these children to turn into severe drug addicts, which in turn prompted them to commit crimes like robbery and thievery.

The emerging social problems in Malaysia are usually taken care of with the implementation of character development programs in various schools across the country. However, this method can only be used for children who are recognized as legal citizens of Malaysia. Thus, a different case can be observed for the Indonesian migrant workers staying in other countries, particularly Malaysia. Due to their status, these children cannot participate in the same programs as Malaysian children. The status in question would refer to the action of their parents to work as an immigrant in Malaysia for a long time to the point of getting involved with getting married and conceiving children. This incident is also seen in Johor, Malaysia. It is a proven fact that there are no reports of any misconduct committed by these children of Indonesian migrant workers in Johor. However, it is undeniable that the probability of misbehavior could still arise, especially with the significant usage and influence coming from unsupervised social media consumption and promiscuity among the younger generations. These arising issues, combined with the concerns coming from the Indonesian migrant workers acting as parents, had become the main factors of the need for character development for these children. This study aims to identify and describe the activities currently implemented by the Indonesia Community Centre (ICC) in Muar, Johor, to support the character development of these children in order to prevent future social problems. The activities covered in this study will be thoroughly investigated and documented to provide a comprehensive understanding of ICC's approach to character development. Therefore, this study will focus on the programs and initiatives that ICC has implemented to foster positive values and behaviors in these children.

Research objective

This study examines and analyses the problems stated in the problem statement. In addition, this paper covers several objectives that must be achieved as: (1) Identify the activities implemented by ICC to support the character development of the children of Indonesian migrant workers (PMI); and (2) Describe the positive values and behaviors fostered from ICC's approach to character development.

Literature review

The Islamic Welfare Association Malaysia (PERKIM, 2021) defines the concept of morality as a trait born deep within the soul of an individual that leads to either good conduct or misconduct without the need for deliberation (PERKIM, 2021). For a Muslim, good morality is essential as a means for attaining blessings in this world and the hereafter. Thus, every Muslim is encouraged to look up to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as an example in order to practice good morality. This statement is further supported by Mydin et al. (2020). Their research highlights how the best example of good morality is the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which all Muslims are recommended to follow theoretically and practically. Mydin et al. (2020) regarding morality in Islam in the same study. According to Islamic beliefs, the concept of morality is always guided by the revelation and the religious law, which refers to the sources of the Quran and Hadith. This statement qualifies as strong evidence for all Muslims to practice good morality, whereby they would be able to obtain proper guidance from the holy Quran as well as purify their souls at the same time.

To further support the claims of Mydin et al. (2020), Kawangit (2013) extensively explained the concept of morality in Islam (Kawangit, 2013). According to Islamic beliefs, the concept and application of morality is the most noble due to its importance in human life. The fact remained that a Muslim possessing a strong level of good morality would also possess a high level of Islamic faith and belief. This originated from the sense of shame that arises when an individual has the intention to commit sins, which then further motivates the said individual to act based on good conduct as much as possible. Therefore, several studies on character development methods among Muslim children who are registered as legal citizens of Indonesia have been reviewed. The habituation method was used in the character development of Muslim children in her study. This method is observed in the daily activities done by the children, whereby they have good morality, worship, and faith towards themselves, teachers, and society. This method is also approved by Nareswari (2024) who stated that habituating good morality repetitively for Muslim children is the core of the said method (Nareswari, 2024). Ramadhani and Sari (2022) conducted an extensive study on the character development methods implemented for Muslim children in Indonesian schools (Ramadhani and Sari, 2022). They listed five methods integrated into various activities conducted for Muslim children from their observations, which were exemplary behavior, advice, special attention, habituation, and punishment. These methods, as outlined by Ulwan (2012), were essential for effective character development (Ulwan, 2012).

First method: Exemplary behaviour

Exemplary behavior, as defined by Ulwan (2012), is the method possessing the most impactful effect on the character development of Muslim children. The behaviors

showcased as an example for the children to follow include the good conduct of speech as well as the good conduct of action. Therefore, the example shown is appropriate to imitate and practice as a Muslim child.

Second method: Advice

According to Ulwan (2012), advice can be utilized as a method for developing the character of Muslim children. This method aligns with the actions of Luqman Al-Hakim, who had advised his children by providing detailed guidance on the actions of good morality. Ramadhani and Sari (2022) added that the advice given to Muslim children should include a description of actions and their consequences in order to deepen the children's understanding.

Third method: Special attention

Regarding character development for Muslim children, special attention refers to the observation as well as the tracking of the progress of Muslim children in developing their good character. Aside from monitoring their social and spiritual development, several questions about their physical and spiritual well-being could be inquired as part of this method.

Fourth method: Habituation

According to Ulwan (2012), families commonly use habituation to foster good morality in Muslim children. The concept of habituation lies in the different practices conducted by the children, which should align with the desirable morality of a Muslim. Over time, this leads to the development and growth in acquiring good morality for Muslim children.

Fifth method: Punishment

Punishment is considered a method of character development, according to Ulwan (2012). This stems from the intention of the punishment itself, which is to inform Muslim children that certain actions are wrong indirectly. However, punishment is given only when the child breaches rules or has conducted actions that can be deemed immoral (Mazmumah Morality). Since this method aims to develop character, the punishment is never physically harmful. Rahmanatasari et al. (2023) highlighted communication as a key method of character development for Muslim children in their study. This method emphasizes verbal communication to explain the concepts of good and bad morality, with examples given through words or actions. This type of character development is rather suitable for younger children to build an understanding of the concept of morality in Islam.

Materials and Methods

A case study is typically used to study an individual, a group of people, or a community. This method allows the researcher to have "a deep holistic view of the research problem," which involves describing, understanding, and explaining the research problem (Baskarada, 2014). In order to conduct this study, this method was able to capture every method of character development experienced by the children of

Indonesian migrant workers as described by their parents. Therefore, the primary data collection involved interviews, observations, and document analysis. These data collection methods were conducted on the Indonesian migrant workers to learn about their views of the character development programs joined by their children and their children's participation in the programs mentioned by the informants. Aside from primary data collection, this study utilized data collection from secondary sources. These sources originated from information already processed, such as books, journals, academic articles, reports, and trustworthy websites. This method is also used to further support the theories used throughout this study.

Results and Discussion

The character development approach applied in ICC for the children of Indonesian migrant workers in Johor

Findings from the study conducted showed that the ICC Muar had displayed an Islamic approach to the notion of character development through the activities executed for the children of PMI. These activities include learning to perform ablution, praying, reading the Quran, following religious talks, helping each other, helping friends in distress, and other activities included in the integrated culture of the community center. By incorporating religious teachings and practices into character development, ICC Muar was able to promote positive values and behaviors in PMI children. During the weekly prayers (salat) practice at ICC Muar, PMI children are taught how to perform ablution (wudu) correctly. The instructor explained in detail the importance of performing ablution before performing the prayers and the steps involved in performing ablution. The children are guided on properly rinse the mouth, nose, face, forearms, and legs as the steps of performing ablution. They are also advised to refrain from using excessive water during ablution to avoid wasting water. The instructor closely monitors and supervises the PMI children to ensure they perform ablution correctly and thoroughly, even as practice. In addition to the instructional aspect, the instructors also simulated the accurate execution of ablution to help the PMI children understand the action better. In order to do so, the instructor acted out the steps of ablution while explaining them and then instructed the PMI children to imitate the steps themselves. By seeing someone perform ablution beforehand and then trying it themselves, the PMI children can demonstrate the correct way to perform ablution, which can help them to perform it correctly during their own prayers. After performing the ablution practice, the children would move on to the next part of the weekly routine. The prayer practice session is commonly conducted in a systematic and structured manner. The session starts with a short explanation by the instructor on the importance of performing salat and the steps involved in performing it correctly. Like ablution, the instructor would also provide a simulation on how to perform salat, including demonstrating the proper movements and reciting prayers. The PMI children are then asked to imitate the instructor and perform the salat. The instructor closely monitors and guides the PMI children to ensure they perform the salat correctly and understand the meaning behind each step.

The practice session is considered as an important part of the character development program at ICC Muar as it helps to foster positive values and behaviours in PMI children. The PMI children were able to learn the correct technique for performing salat and develop a sense of discipline, focus, and respect for Islamic practices. The prayer

practice session was also a platform for the PMI children to practice interacting with each other and building good relationships with their peers and instructors. The usual character development program in ICC Muar follows a schedule of five days a week from Sunday to Thursday. Every morning, the program starts with a daily recitation class that ensures the PMI children receive regular exposure to Islamic teachings from the Qur'an and Iqra. In addition to the recitations, the teachers' close supervision and guidance played a role in ensuring that the PMI children could develop proper pronunciation and understanding of the Surah they are currently reciting. From there, the teachers can identify and rectify any mistakes made by the PMI children. There is also a weekly session of communal recitation on Thursdays where PMI children and the teachers gather in the main hall to recite Surah Yasin while sitting in a large circle on the floor. After that, one of the teachers would hold a short religious talk session to educate the students on the importance of reciting this specific Surah based on several Hadiths. This activity aims to build a sense of group cohesion and foster a love for the Quran. Aside from that, it provides an opportunity for PMI children to learn from and support each other in their knowledge of the Quran. Other than religious talks, ICC Muar also collaborated with Sekolah Indonesia Johor Bahru (SIJB) in holding various online talks so that the PMI children there can join the activity organized by SIJB as well. The online classes offered are designed to provide additional study materials to boost the understanding of Islam among these PMI children. Various Islamic-related subjects like tafsir, Quranic recitation, and tajwid, as well as the history and teachings of Islam, are taught via Zoom and Google Meet. As a result, the knowledge imparted can positively impact the PMI children's character development by instilling moral values and teachings based on Islamic values.

There are also instances of the behaviors shown by the PMI children where they would willingly help each other and even help their friends in distress. As explained by the informants, one of the activities that the PMI children had participated in to develop their characters was completing tasks in a group. They are given a collaborative project to work on, which requires them to communicate and cooperate. Through this experience, ICC Muar promoted togetherness and compromise among the PMI children, which in turn developed their character from these positive traits. Another daily activity in ICC Muar would be the PMI children sharing their packed lunches with their classmates during mealtimes. This way, the children could taste their friends' lunches and share their own simultaneously. Sometimes, one of them would forget to bring their packed lunch, and the rest of the group would prepare a lunchbox for them, putting some of their lunches into the lunchbox to eat together. Sharing food from their packed lunches with their classmates can help foster a sense of community and cooperation among the PMI children. It also teaches them the value of empathy, generosity, and thinking of others before themselves. PMI children can develop their characters positively as they share their food with their classmates. Aside from that, the PMI children displayed a huge sense of respect and appreciation for the instructors at ICC Muar. This can be seen from the habit of shaking hands with them whenever the children arrive to the community center and before they head back home. The practice of shaking hands with instructors has been a part of the culture at ICC Muar due to how it quickly became a reflexive action for PMI children. This way, the PMI children could learn about responsibility and politeness in daily interactions. There are several integrated cultures ingrained in ICC Muar among the PMI children. One of them is the culture of reading during their leisure time. A reading corner has been set up to instill

interest in reading among PMI children as well as to strengthen their understanding of various subjects being taught. From the observations, the PMI children have displayed good use of the reading corner. The culture of reading has provided room for them to learn how to make the most of their leisure time persuasively. Through this culture, PMI children could also develop self-discipline and time management as a part of character development skills.

Another culture known in the ICC Muar would be the automatic actions displayed by the PMI children as an act of respect toward their friends. After eating during mealtimes, these PMI children would always form a line to wash their hands, where they would stand in an orderly manner without cutting in line just because they were older than the others. In doing so, they indirectly allow their younger friends to wash their hands first. This proves they are considerate of others and remember to be respectful despite their age differences. Various testimonies from the informants have been received as a part of this study about the positive changes they observed in the children who participated in the character development activities organized in ICC Muar. Some of them had reported that these children had displayed major improvements in their behavior, increased willingness to help them at home, better communication skills, and a more mature thought process. They also specified how their children's ability to differentiate between good and bad behavior, their independence in fulfilling their duties, and their social skills had improved significantly after participating in the character development activities at ICC Muar. One of the informants described how the PMI children had consistently demonstrated good conduct and good grooming as a reflection of high discipline in their lives. They have always actively participated in various events organized by SIJB. In every event these children joined, the PMI children displayed continuous acts that showcased the good morality they possessed, like keeping the cleanliness of the venue, cooperating, and maintaining good behavior as visitors to each venue. This participation only served as more evidence for the character development conducted in ICC Muar.

Conclusion

In conclusion, character development is crucial to instilling good conduct in Muslim children. Mahmudah morality, based on Islamic teachings from the Qur'an and Sunnah, is the core of this notion. For the children of Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) in Johor, the ICC Muar has played a significant role in developing the characters of these PMI children through various religious activities such as performing ablution, prayer, Quran recitation, following religious talks, helping each other, helping friends in distress and others. These programs help nurture the PMI children's important qualities, such as discipline, empathy, respect, and cooperation. The use of methods such as exemplary behavior, advice, and participation in group activities can develop a sense of responsibility and strong social bonds among the PMI children. These then serve to help strengthen their Islamic faith and enhance their cognitive and social skills. Feedback from parents and instructors shows significant improvements in the children's behavior, communication skills, and overall behaviors. By promoting these values through its structured programs, ICC Muar is successfully and effectively contributing to these children's long-term character development, helping them grow into responsible and morally upright individuals in the distant future.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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