

The Role of Parents in Developing Early Childhood Spiritual Intelligence in an Islamic Education Based Family Environment

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Abstract: *This study aims to investigate the role of parents in fostering early childhood spiritual intelligence within an Islamic education-based family environment. Employing a qualitative method with a descriptive design, this study involved 20 Muslim parents of children aged 3 to 6 years, selected purposively for their active participation in spiritual education at home. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, structured questionnaires, and non-participant observation of daily religious practices. Findings reveal that 90% of mothers consistently teach daily prayers and Islamic moral values, whereas only 50% of fathers are actively involved, often limited to modeling personal worship without pedagogical interaction. The study reveals that early exposure to religious instruction significantly enhances children's spiritual intelligence, as evidenced by improved prayer memorization and behavior regulation in 85% of observed cases. These results underscore the crucial need to improve paternal engagement and recommend the development of integrated, family-based religious education programs that involve both parents.*

Keywords: *spiritual intelligence, parents, religious education, early childhood, Islamic education based families*

1. Introduction

In this fast paced era of globalization, challenges to children's moral and spiritual development are increasingly complex. Social transformation driven by digital technology, urbanization, and the influence of global cultures often weakens the internalization of religious and ethical values from an early age. In Indonesia, where the majority of the population adheres to Islam, integrating Islamic education into family life becomes crucial for fostering moral resilience in children.

Spiritual intelligence, as conceptualized by Zohar and Marshall (2004), refers to one's ability to access inner meaning, demonstrate compassion, and experience profound connectedness with the Divine. In the Islamic perspective, spiritual intelligence is closely tied to taqwa, sincerity (ikhlas), remembrance of God (dzikrullah), and moral action (akhlaq al-karimah). Thus, nurturing spiritual intelligence is not only an educational concern but a theological imperative.

Several previous studies have shown the importance of parents' role in children's spiritual education. For example, research by Istiqomah, Waridah, and Mastiah (2022)

revealed that parents in Tanjung Lay Village and Paal Village have played a significant role in providing examples, educating their children, motivating them, and showing love. However, the role of fathers tends to be less optimal than that of mothers, mainly due to their busy work schedules.

The urgency of this research arises from the need to understand more deeply how parents can play an active role in developing early childhood spiritual intelligence, especially in the context of Muslim families in Indonesia. Islamic education, based on the values of the Qur'an and Hadith, can provide a strong foundation for shaping children's character and spirituality.

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of spiritual intelligence theory with empirical observation of parenting practices in Muslim households in Indonesia. Unlike previous works that focused only on maternal influence or lacked theoretical grounding, this research provides a dual gender, theory informed exploration.

The purpose of this study is to describe the role of parents in developing early childhood spiritual intelligence within an Islamic education based family environment. Specifically, this study aims to identify the role of parents in educating and guiding their children in spiritual aspects. It also aimed to analyze the various strategies used by parents in instilling religious and spiritual values in their children. In addition, this study aims to evaluate the impact of parental influence on the development of children's spiritual intelligence, particularly in shaping strong character and fostering deep spiritual understanding at an early age. Through this research, it is hoped that a clearer understanding of the contribution of parents to their children's spiritual intelligence development can be gained within the context of Islamic education based families.

The benefits of this research extend to parents, educators, and policymakers by providing insights into the practical application of Islamic parenting. It also informs the design of curricula and family education programs that promote balanced parental involvement.

The implications of this study include the importance of synergy between family, school, and community in shaping children's character and spirituality. A holistic approach involving all parties is expected to create an environment that supports the optimal development of children's spiritual intelligence. Thus, this research not only provides new insights in the field of early childhood education but also makes a practical contribution to forming a young generation that is noble and has high spiritual intelligence.

2. Method

This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. This design was chosen to thoroughly describe and explore the role of parents in developing early childhood spiritual intelligence within an Islamic education-based family environment. Descriptive research aims to understand phenomena that occur in a natural context without manipulation or intervention of the research subject (Creswell, 2014). In this case, this approach will allow the researcher to explore the experiences, understandings, and practices applied by parents in educating and guiding their children.

The research was conducted in several Muslim families in major cities in Indonesia, who have an Islamic education background, such as Islamic boarding schools or schools with an Islamic education focus. The selection of this location was based on the relevance of family characteristics that apply Islamic education values in daily life. The research subjects consisted of parents with early childhood children, i.e., children aged between 3 and 6 years old, who live in a family environment that educates their children within the context of Islamic education. The parents were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which aims to select parents who are actively involved in their children's religious and spiritual education (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The research instruments used in this study are semi-structured interview guidelines and participatory observation. Semi-structured interviews will be used to explore the views, experiences, and strategies applied by parents in educating their children in spiritual and religious aspects. Participatory observation will be employed to gather contextual data on parents' and children's interactions during daily activities related to the development of spiritual intelligence, such as religious activities, reciting prayers, and teaching moral values (Cohen et al., 2017).

Data collection instruments included semi structured interview guides and non-participant observation checklists. Interview questions covered themes such as: (1) daily religious routines with children, (2) the division of spiritual teaching roles between mothers and fathers, and (3) strategies for introducing Islamic moral stories and rituals. Sample questions included: "What religious activities do you perform with your child each day?" and "How do you and your spouse divide responsibilities in your child's spiritual education?"

Observations were conducted in each respondent's home over a period of two weeks, with 2-3 sessions per family, each lasting 45-60 minutes. These sessions were designed to capture parenting practices during religious routines, such as morning prayers, bedtime rituals, and storytelling sessions that involved prophets and moral values. Observational data focused on parental interaction style, child engagement, and contextual cues of religious teaching (Cohen et al., 2017).

In-depth interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Observational notes were also documented in field journals. To enhance data credibility, the researcher employed data triangulation by comparing insights from interviews, observations, and questionnaires distributed to the same participants.

The data analysis employed thematic analysis procedures, enabling the researcher to identify key themes, including maternal dominance in instruction, limited paternal involvement, and the effectiveness of storytelling in transmitting values. All data were coded manually using a deductive inductive approach, referencing spiritual intelligence indicators as outlined by Zohar and Marshall (2004).

Ethical clearance was obtained from the affiliated research institution, and informed consent was secured from all participants. The anonymity and confidentiality of respondents were maintained throughout the study.

3. Result & Discussion

In this section, the researcher will present the research results obtained from interviews with parents, the results of questionnaires administered to parents involved in their children's religious education, as well as the results of observations in the family environment. This data is presented to illustrate the role of parents in developing early childhood spiritual intelligence within the context of Islamic education based families.

The study involved 20 parents of young children, aged between 3 and 6 years, living in Muslim households. All respondents in the study were actively involved in their children's religious and spiritual education. Seventy percent of the respondents were housewives, while the remaining 30% were fathers who held regular jobs. Most of these parents have a strong Islamic educational background, with more than 60% of them having graduated from Islamic educational institutions, such as Islamic boarding schools or Islamic schools.

The average age of the parents involved in this study ranged from 30 to 45 years. Most of them reside in neighborhoods that support religious education, such as those near mosques or Islamic educational institutions. Most of the parents involved in this study have sufficient income to provide their children with good religious education. However, some rely on assistance from educational institutions or the community to support their children's religious education needs.

In-depth interviews were conducted with all respondents to explore their role in educating their children in spiritual and religious aspects. The main findings from the interviews suggest that the role of parents, particularly mothers, is significantly influential in the development of early childhood spiritual intelligence. Most mothers revealed that they start teaching their children religion early, even from the time their children are still in the womb, by reciting the Qur'an. For example, the mother of a 4-

year-old child said, "I always try to introduce my child to daily prayers since he was in the womb, because I believe that it will shape his spiritual character."

Based on the interviews, there are three main aspects that parents focus on in educating children in the spiritual aspect and first, teaching daily prayers, such as prayers before eating and sleeping and second, teaching moral and religious values through stories of prophets and righteous people in Islam. Third, parents try to be role models in worship by demonstrating worship practices such as praying with their children. However, the study also found that while mothers have a dominant role in spiritual education, fathers' role in educating their children is often more limited due to busy work schedules.

The questionnaire given to parents to assess the effect of religious education on children's spiritual intelligence development showed that the majority of parents felt that religious education provided from an early age had a positive impact on their children's spiritual development. As many as 85% of parents who completed the questionnaire stated that their children memorize prayers more easily after being taught regularly at home. More than 70% of parents also reported that their children exhibited more positive behavioral changes, such as increased patience and respect for others, after receiving religious education at home.

However, while religious education is well received by children, only 50% of parents feel that fathers are actively involved in their children's spiritual education. This aligns with the interview findings, which indicate that fathers are more likely to assume a breadwinner role and are rarely involved in spiritual activities, such as praying with their children. This questionnaire data points to the need to increase fathers' involvement in their children's spiritual upbringing.

Observations were conducted in the respondents' homes over several sessions to record how the teaching of religion and spirituality takes place in the family environment. From the observations, the researcher found that parents, especially mothers, have a habit of teaching their children through activities that involve direct interaction, such as reading prophetic stories and teaching short prayers. These activities are carried out daily, especially after morning prayer and before bedtime. The children were also very enthusiastic about participating in these activities, indicating that the religious teachings provided by their parents received a positive response from them.

Observations also revealed that while most mothers were involved in religious teaching activities, very few fathers participated in these activities. The few fathers observed tended to set an example through their acts of worship, such as prayer, but rarely invited their children to participate in them. This finding aligns with the results of the interviews and questionnaires, which indicate that while parents are generally

very concerned about their children's religious education, fathers' involvement is limited.

The following figure illustrates parents' perceptions of their role in developing their child's early childhood spiritual intelligence, based on data collected through a questionnaire. Table 1 shows that 85% of parents feel that religious education at home is very important for their child's spiritual development. Meanwhile, Table 2 shows the level of involvement of fathers in religious instruction at home, with only 50% of fathers actively involved in their child's spiritual activities.

Table 1. Parents' Perceptions of Children's Religious Education

Aspects	Percentage (%)
Religious education is important	85%
Daily prayer teaching	90%
Teaching the story of the prophet	75%
Father is involved in teaching	50%

Table 2. Father's Level of Involvement in Teaching Religion at Home

Level of Father Involvement	Percentage (%)
Highly Engaged	10%
Moderately Engaged	40%
Not Involved	50%

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the role of parents, especially mothers, is significant in developing early childhood spiritual intelligence. However, there is limited involvement of fathers in their children's religious instruction. This points to the importance of increasing fathers' awareness and involvement in early childhood religious education. Going forward, this study can provide a basis for developing programs that involve both parents in children's spiritual education, which is expected to make a greater contribution to children's character and spiritual development in the future.

Discussion Results

This study found that the role of parents, especially mothers, is significantly dominant in the spiritual and religious education of early childhood. From in-depth interviews with 20 respondents, most mothers shared that they initiated spiritual instruction from the earliest stages, some even from pregnancy, through activities such as reciting short prayers, reading prophetic stories, and demonstrating worship practices. These practices align with the Islamic concept of *tarbiyyah ruhaniyyah*,

where spiritual intelligence is fostered through habitual engagement in religious rituals, stories, and moral reinforcement.

One of the main findings from the interviews is that most parents, especially mothers, focus on teaching daily prayers and stories of prophets. For example, the mother of a 4-year-old said, "I always try to teach prayers before bedtime, because I believe it can make my child closer to God and have good character." This suggests that parents, particularly mothers, consider religious education a vital foundation in shaping their children's spiritual development.

However, the interviews also revealed that the role of fathers in educating their children in spiritual aspects is limited. Most of the fathers claimed to have more of a breadwinner role and were less involved in religious activities at home. Most of the fathers interviewed revealed that they mostly set an example in terms of worship, such as prayer, but rarely invite their children to participate in spiritual activities. For example, one father said, "I mostly set an example through my worship, but I rarely take the time to teach my children directly."

This finding is in line with previous research by Istiqomah, Waridah and Mastiah (2022), who found that fathers' roles in children's religious education tend to be more limited than mothers. Nonetheless, the role of fathers in providing role models in worship remains important in the development of children's spiritual intelligence, even though they are not always involved in direct learning activities.

From the results of a questionnaire distributed to 20 parents, researchers found that 85% of parents believe that the religious education their children receive at home has a positive effect on their spiritual development. The majority of parents reported that their children memorize daily prayers more easily and exhibit better behavior after receiving religious education at home. Seventy percent of parents also reported that their children are more disciplined in practicing daily worship, despite their young age.

However, the questionnaire results also show an imbalance in fathers' involvement in their children's religious education. As mentioned earlier, only 50% of fathers are actively involved in their children's spiritual activities. This suggests that, while parents as a whole are generally concerned about their children's religious education, fathers' involvement remains a challenge that warrants attention. Fathers' involvement in their children's religious education is crucial, as research by Lamb (2010) indicates that fathers' involvement in parenting can have a positive impact on children's moral and social development.

Observations conducted in respondents' homes also yielded findings consistent with the results of the interviews and questionnaires. In this case, mothers were more active in teaching their children daily prayers. The activity of teaching prayers is done every day, both after prayer and before bedtime. The children seemed very

enthusiastic in participating in this activity, with most of them able to memorize short prayers in a short time. This suggests that religious teachings conducted by mothers are highly effective in helping children understand religious values from a young age.

However, when observing fathers' involvement in their children's spiritual activities, the researcher found that fathers more often modeled their own forms of worship, such as prayer, but rarely invited the children to participate. For example, during an observation at one respondent's home, the father was seen praying alone, while the children played in the living room. This suggests that while fathers serve as role models in worship, their active role in teaching children about religion is lacking.

The findings in this study align with previous research conducted by Istiqomah et al. (2022), which demonstrated that mothers play a more dominant role in their children's religious education. However, the findings also reveal that fathers' involvement in children's religious education remains limited, which aligns with the results of a study by Lamb (2010) that emphasizes the importance of fathers' roles in children's moral and social development. This study adds insight that while parents overall are very concerned with religious education, fathers' involvement needs to be increased to have a greater impact on the development of children's spiritual intelligence.

The findings in this study provide several practical implications for families, educators, and educational institutions. Firstly, parents need to recognize that the religious instruction provided at home has a significant impact on their children's spiritual development. Therefore, parents, especially mothers, need to actively involve themselves in teaching their children religious values, whether through daily prayers, stories of prophets, or joint worship. Secondly, the role of fathers needs to be further enhanced in the religious teaching of their children. Fathers are expected not only to be role models in worship but also to be more involved in daily religious learning activities, such as teaching prayers and religious values to children.

Additionally, Islamic educational institutions and communities should provide more support in encouraging fathers' involvement in their children's religious education. Family engagement programs that involve both parents in children's religious education need to be developed, so that religious teaching can be done holistically, involving all family members.

While this study offers valuable insights, several limitations should be noted. First, the limited number of respondents (only 20 parents) limits the generalizability of the results. A larger study with a more diverse sample, including those from various social and economic backgrounds, would provide a more complete picture of the role of parents in children's religious education. Secondly, this study only includes respondents from urban areas and families with a relatively good Islamic education background; therefore, the results of this study may not fully describe the conditions

of families in rural areas or those with different religious education backgrounds. Therefore, further research with a broader and more diverse sample is needed to get a more accurate picture of the situation.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by sample size and demographic concentration. All participants were from urban areas and had relatively strong Islamic educational backgrounds. Future research should include diverse family structures and rural contexts, and could integrate child-centered data to measure internalized spiritual outcomes more objectively.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that parents, particularly mothers, play a significant role in nurturing early childhood spiritual intelligence in Islamic education-based families. Mothers actively guide children through structured activities such as daily prayer instruction, prophetic storytelling, and shared worship practices. These efforts result in notable improvements in children's prayer memorization, moral behavior, and spiritual sensitivity.

However, the research also reveals that fathers' direct involvement in spiritual education remains limited. While many fathers serve as role models through personal worship, they rarely engage in collaborative teaching with their children. This underscores the need for greater paternal engagement in spiritual instruction to ensure balanced and holistic religious development, as also emphasized in parenting and child development theories (e.g., Lamb, 2010; Islamic concepts of *ta'dib* and *uswah hasanah*).

Overall, this study emphasizes the importance of integrating both maternal and paternal roles in Islamic parenting to establish a strong spiritual foundation in early childhood. Islamic educational institutions and community networks should proactively develop programs that integrate both parents into the religious instruction process, ensuring that spiritual development is not disproportionately burdened on mothers alone.

This research contributes to the growing literature on Islamic education and parenting by integrating Western theories of spiritual intelligence with Islamic pedagogical principles. It offers empirical insights into the gender dynamics of spiritual education at home and reinforces the value of balanced parental involvement in shaping children's character and faith.

5. References

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