

The Role of Fathers in Religious Education for Children Age 5-6 Years

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ABSTRACT. This study aims to explore the forms, meanings, and impacts of father involvement in the religious education of early childhood, specifically among children aged 5–6 years at TK Nilasari. It also analyzes the factors that either support or hinder such involvement. A qualitative case study approach was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews with fathers, mothers, and teachers, as well as documentation of children's religious activities. Data analysis was conducted using NVivo software to organize and identify key themes systematically. The findings reveal that father involvement is manifested in various religious activities with their children, including guiding prayers, performing congregational prayers, reading prophetic stories, modeling religious practices, and utilizing Islamic digital media as educational tools. Supporting factors for father involvement include personal religious awareness, harmonious communication with the mother, enthusiastic responses from the child, flexible work schedules, and a supportive family environment. Conversely, inhibiting factors include work-related busyness, traditional gender norms that limit paternal roles in caregiving, limited understanding of religious pedagogy, and the lack of school initiatives to involve fathers in children's spiritual activities. Father involvement is shown to have a positive impact on the development of children's religious character and social skills. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on paternal roles in early childhood religious education, a topic that remains underexplored.

Keywords: *early childhood, father involvement, NVivo, religious education*

ABSTRAK. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan bentuk, makna, serta dampak keterlibatan ayah dalam pendidikan agama anak usia dini, khususnya di TK Nilasari pada kelompok usia 5–6 tahun. Penelitian ini juga menganalisis faktor-faktor yang memperkuat maupun menghambat keterlibatan tersebut. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus, di mana data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam dengan ayah, ibu, dan guru, serta dokumentasi aktivitas keagamaan anak. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan perangkat lunak NVivo untuk mengorganisir dan mengidentifikasi tema-tema utama secara sistematis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keterlibatan ayah tercermin dalam aktivitas keagamaan bersama anak, seperti membimbing doa, melaksanakan shalat berjamaah, membacakan cerita nabi, memberi keteladanan dalam beribadah, dan memanfaatkan media digital Islami sebagai alat bantu pembelajaran. Faktor-faktor yang memperkuat keterlibatan ayah meliputi kesadaran religius pribadi, komunikasi yang harmonis dengan ibu, respons antusias dari anak, fleksibilitas waktu kerja, serta dukungan lingkungan keluarga. Di sisi lain, faktor-faktor penghambat mencakup kesibukan kerja, norma gender tradisional yang membatasi peran ayah dalam pengasuhan, kurangnya pemahaman pedagogis keagamaan, dan minimnya inisiatif sekolah dalam melibatkan ayah dalam kegiatan spiritual anak. Keterlibatan ayah terbukti memberikan dampak positif terhadap pembentukan karakter religius dan perkembangan sosial anak. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada perluasan kajian mengenai peran ayah dalam pendidikan agama anak usia dini yang selama ini masih jarang diteliti.

Kata kunci: *Keterlibatan Ayah, Pendidikan Agama, Anak Usia Dini, NVivo*

INTRODUCTION

Religious education during early childhood plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's personality, moral values, and spiritual identity from an early age. Young children possess remarkable learning capacities and heightened sensitivity to the values imparted to them, making this period highly suitable for instilling religious teachings (Masdul et al., 2024). In this context, the father's involvement is not only essential as a role model but also as an active companion in establishing the child's spiritual foundation. Although mothers are traditionally perceived as the primary figures in child-rearing, recent studies emphasize the equally significant role of fathers, particularly in fostering children's religious development. The father's presence adds an important dimension to religious education, encompassing not only spiritual but also emotional and social aspects (Purwani & Hasanah, 2023). Fathers contribute not only by teaching prayers or reciting the Qur'an but also by demonstrating the application of religious values in daily life, such as performing prayers, sharing with others, and modeling respectful behavior.

The father's presence in children's religious activities also has a positive impact on their psychological well-being. Children who feel valued and spiritually guided by their fathers tend to exhibit greater self-confidence and a stronger sense of belonging within the family. Activities such as accompanying children in Qur'anic recitation, narrating stories of the prophets before bedtime, or discussing moral values strengthen the emotional bond between father and child. This bond serves as a crucial foundation for developing a strong religious identity and fostering a harmonious, loving home environment. However, modern life challenges such as demanding work schedules, technological advances, and urban lifestyles often limit fathers' active participation in their children's lives. Many fathers work full-time to meet family needs, leaving limited time for interaction with their children. Consequently, religious education responsibilities frequently fall solely on mothers, resulting in an imbalance in parenting roles. Therefore, a more equitable distribution of responsibilities is needed, along with shared awareness that religious education is the joint responsibility of both parents.

An anthropological study conducted in Wonolelo, Bantul, reveals that patriarchal cultural perceptions still dominate, positioning fathers primarily as financial providers and disciplinarians while limiting their direct involvement in children's daily lives (Mashar et al., 2024). The study emphasizes the need to enhance fathers' roles, particularly in religious activities, to strengthen both spiritual and emotional family bonds. The success of religious education is also strongly influenced by effective collaboration between families and early childhood educational institutions. Research by Utari, Arifin, and Putra (2023) at TKIT Baitul Izzah demonstrates that parent gathering activities significantly enhance children's religious character. In such programs, active participation from both fathers and mothers greatly contributes to children's spiritual development. Such initiatives need to be expanded to reduce the existing imbalance in fathers' roles.

Ideally, religious education for young children should be implemented holistically through synergy between parents, educators, and the religious-social environment (Rozinah et al., 2024). This comprehensive approach includes activities such as play, storytelling, joint worship, and moral discussions consistently led by both fathers and mothers. With fathers actively involved in both the spiritual and emotional dimensions of child development, children not only acquire religious

knowledge but also observe how these teachings are applied in daily life. To optimize fathers' roles in religious education, support from various stakeholders is essential. Social environments, educational institutions, and even government policies should contribute to creating opportunities for greater father involvement. Schools and early childhood education centers can offer father-focused parenting programs, while religious leaders and community organizations should promote the importance of fathers' spiritual roles in the family. Government initiatives, such as paternity leave and parenting training for prospective fathers, may also facilitate this involvement.

Children who regularly observe their fathers consistently practicing religious rituals are more likely to internalize religious values, not merely through instruction but through role modeling. This aligns with social learning Theory, which posits that children's behavior is largely shaped through observation of significant adults, particularly parents (Bandura, cited in Masdul et al., 2024). Thus, fathers' involvement in religious education should no longer be seen as an optional supplement but as an essential component in nurturing a generation of morally upright individuals. Programs such as fatherhood training, family-based parenting initiatives, and school schedules designed to accommodate fathers' participation warrant serious attention. Public policy support and active father involvement in school religious activities can serve as effective solutions to address this role imbalance. At Nilasari Kindergarten, for example, there exists a notable gap between mothers' and fathers' roles in educating children, particularly in religious aspects. Mothers often bear the primary responsibility for childcare and education, while fathers are less involved due to work obligations or traditional role perceptions. This imbalance may hinder children's cognitive, spiritual, and emotional development. Children who lack spiritual attention from their fathers often exhibit lower self-confidence. However, father involvement has been shown to correlate positively with children's cognitive development and school readiness.

Although numerous previous studies have emphasized the importance of religious education in early childhood and the general role of parents, the majority of these studies have predominantly focused on mothers as the primary agents of spiritual development. In contrast, the role of fathers has often been overlooked or discussed only marginally. This presents a significant research gap: the lack of in-depth investigations specifically exploring the forms, meanings, and impacts of fathers' involvement in early childhood religious education, particularly within the context of modern family life, which is characterized by time constraints, evolving parenting dynamics, and increasing use of technology. This study aims to examine the specific forms of father involvement in supporting the development of religious values in children, both through daily home-based activities and participation in religious events involving the child. Furthermore, the research seeks to identify the factors that strengthen or hinder fathers' level of engagement and to analyze the impact of this involvement on children's spiritual and moral development. The novelty of this research lies in its exclusive focus on fathers' roles in guiding 5–6-year-old children within the setting of Nilasari Kindergarten. Using a qualitative case study approach supported by NVivo software, the study analyzes not only the frequency of involvement but also the quality of spiritual interactions, role modeling, and the use of digital media as tools for religious learning. The findings aim to enrich the body of literature in early childhood education by offering a fresh perspective on the importance of father involvement in fostering religious character. Additionally, this study provides a foundation for developing educational policies that more inclusively recognize the roles of both parents in spiritual upbringing.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of fathers' roles in early childhood religious education, specifically within the context of Nilasari Kindergarten in Makarti Jaya Village, focusing on children aged 5–6 years. The primary subjects of the research were two fathers who were purposively selected based on their active involvement in their children's educational processes, both at home and at school. To enrich the perspectives and enhance data credibility, additional informants were included—namely, the child's mother and the class teacher. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and documentation. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing informants to freely express their experiences and insights while remaining within the scope of the research topics. Supporting documents, such as activity logs, photographs, and school archives, were used to complement the primary data. To ensure the validity of findings, the study applied both source triangulation and methodological triangulation. Source triangulation was carried out by cross-referencing information obtained from fathers, mothers, and teachers.

All collected data were analyzed using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software that facilitates systematic organization and interpretation of narrative data through coding. The analytical process began with verbatim transcription of the interview recordings, which were then imported into NVivo for open coding—an initial stage where relevant data segments were labeled with codes aligned with the research focus. This was followed by axial coding, where related codes were grouped into broader categories. Finally, selective coding was employed to identify and refine key conceptual themes that represent the overall patterns of fathers' involvement.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Based on interviews and document analysis, it was found that fathers' involvement in early childhood religious education at Nilasari Kindergarten took various forms, influenced by their educational backgrounds, occupations, and personal awareness of the importance of early religious education. The two main fathers interviewed demonstrated active involvement, though with differing intensity and approaches. The interview data were analyzed using NVivo software, as detailed below.

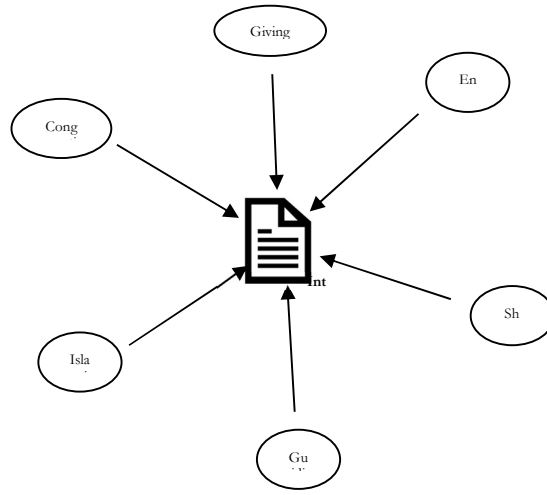


Figure 1: Coding Results for Informant 1

From the NVivo analysis of Informant 1, several main themes emerged regarding fathers' involvement in early childhood religious education: religious activities at home, role modeling, and motivational support. The theme of *religious activities at home* included sub-themes such as guiding children in prayer, teaching short Qur'anic verses, and utilizing digital religious media.

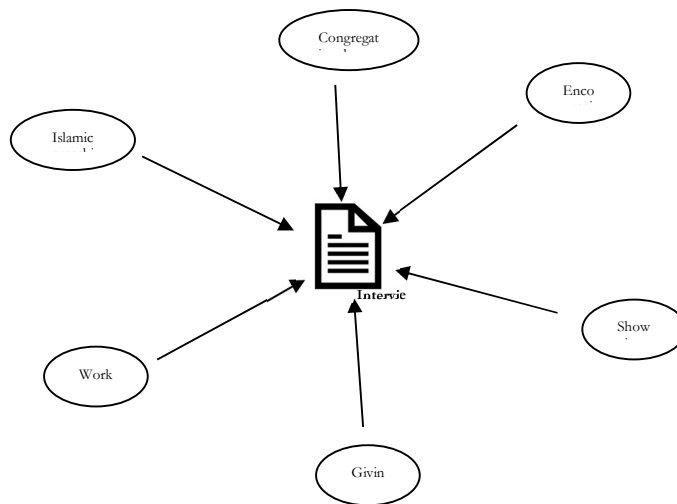


Figure 2: Coding Results for Informant 2

The data for Informant 2 similarly revealed that *religious activities at home* dominated with the highest frequency, especially in the codes related to guiding prayers and performing congregational worship. This indicates that religious activities performed jointly by fathers and children at home are the most frequent forms of involvement. The theme of *role modeling* also appeared prominently, emphasizing the importance of fathers' exemplary behavior in shaping children's religious character. Although emotional support, motivation, and the use of digital learning media appeared less frequently, they still contributed to the effectiveness of early religious education.

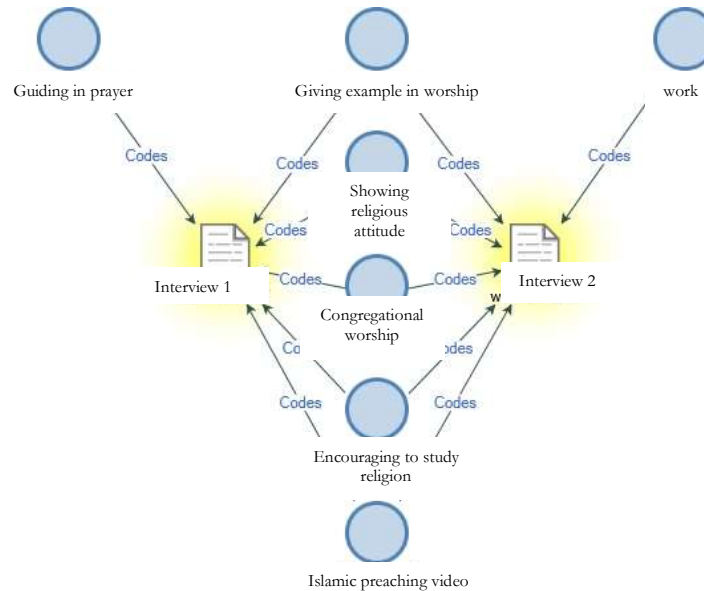


Figure 3: Thematic Relationship Between Informant 1 and Informant 2

The theme of religious activities at home encompasses activities such as assisting children in memorizing prayers, participating in congregational prayers, and reading religious stories together. This category emerged as central to fathers' involvement. The role modeling theme highlights how fathers demonstrate consistent religious practices and behaviors, which are then imitated by their children. The motivational support theme involves the encouragement and positive reinforcement that fathers provide to make religious learning enjoyable for their children. Finally, the use of digital learning media indicates that some fathers incorporated videos, songs, or digital applications to supplement religious education at home.

In addition to interviews with fathers, supporting data were obtained from interviews with mothers and teachers.

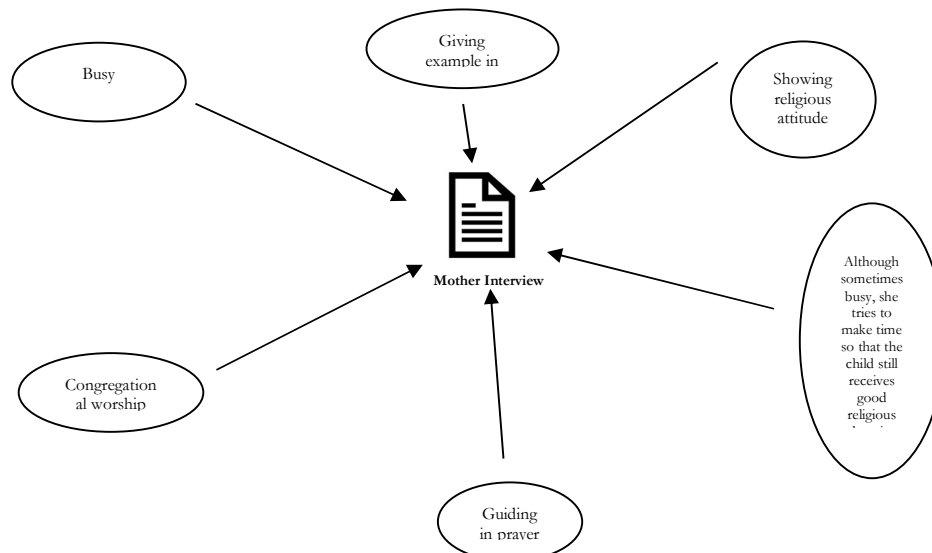


Figure 4: Interview Results for Informant 3 (Mother)

To complement the data, the researcher also interviewed the classroom teacher. The interview findings are presented in Figure 5.

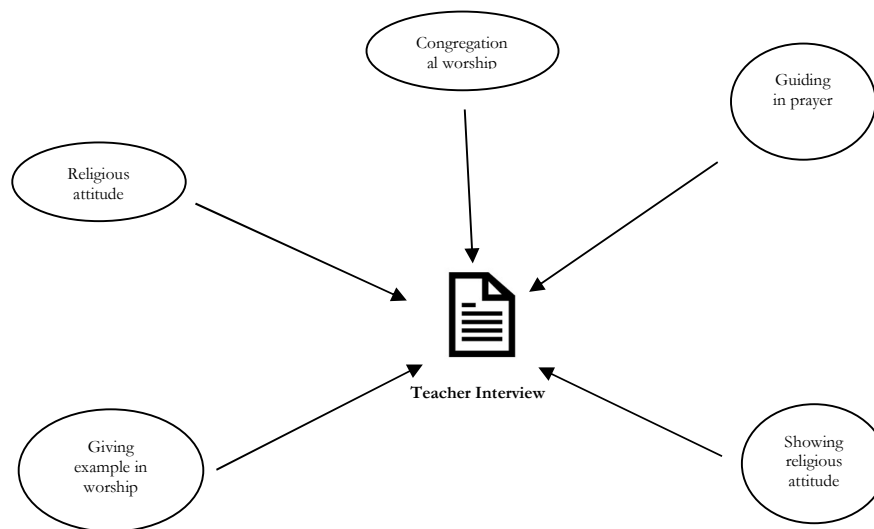


Figure 5: Interview Results for Informant 4 (Teacher)

Based on the observations and supporting information obtained from both the mothers and the classroom teachers, it was found that the children of the two participating fathers demonstrated promising religious development appropriate for early childhood. These included the ability to recite short daily prayers, a basic understanding of religious rituals, and the emergence of positive religious attitudes such as politeness, respect toward parents, and empathy for peers. Teachers reported that these children were active participants in school religious activities, such as salat dhuha and prayer memorization. The fathers' involvement in these areas was found to be influenced by several key

factors, including personal awareness of the importance of religious education, effective communication with their spouses, and support from the school environment. Nonetheless, time constraints due to work obligations emerged as the most significant challenge limiting their capacity for deeper engagement.

Further analysis revealed that fathers' involvement had a substantial impact on the development of their children's religious character, especially within the specific context of Nilasari Kindergarten for the 5–6-year-old age group. This involvement, characterized by guiding children in prayer, engaging in communal worship, modeling religious practices, and utilizing digital resources such as Islamic educational videos, served as a powerful stimulus for children to internalize religious values. Children who consistently received spiritual guidance from their fathers demonstrated greater regularity in religious observance at school, higher interest in religious subjects, and more visible moral behaviors such as honesty, discipline, and respect. Teachers also noted increased confidence among these children during religious activities, as well as more stable academic performance. The presence of a father figure during religious learning at home instilled a sense of security and pride in the children, reinforcing their spiritual identity and sense of belonging. However, these benefits were most evident when the father's involvement was continuous and supported by warm, communicative interactions. Occasional or symbolic participation, on the other hand, had a limited impact on the depth of religious internalization.

Several factors were identified as contributors to more consistent and meaningful paternal involvement in early childhood religious education. First, internal motivation and religious awareness were central, as fathers with a strong sense of spiritual responsibility were more proactive in incorporating religious practices at home, such as prayer and storytelling. Fathers with religious education backgrounds or active roles in community religious life were particularly engaged. Second, good communication between spouses played a reinforcing role. When mothers acknowledged and supported the father's participation in religious education, this created a more collaborative and motivating family environment. Third, children's positive responses to religious learning encouraged fathers to remain involved and supportive. Fourth, flexible working conditions allowed some fathers to dedicate more time to spiritual interactions with their children. Finally, the use of digital media—including Islamic videos, songs, and learning apps—proved to be an effective tool for engaging children in religious content in a way that was both enjoyable and developmentally appropriate.

On the contrary, several inhibiting factors were also identified. These included time-consuming work schedules, a lack of knowledge or confidence in delivering religious instruction to young children. These cultural beliefs designate religious education as primarily the mother's role, limited access to religious learning media, and insufficient institutional support from the school. These obstacles often resulted in minimal or irregular involvement, which in turn weakened the potential impact of fathers on their children's spiritual development.

Overall, despite the diversity in form and intensity, fathers' involvement in early childhood religious education was found to contribute positively to children's spiritual and moral development. Although fathers may not be involved as intensively as mothers daily, their role remains significant in shaping the religious identity of young children. This underscores the need to promote father engagement as a critical and complementary element of holistic religious upbringing.

Discussion

The data analysis using NVivo software on Informant 1 revealed three major themes concerning the father's involvement in early childhood religious education: religious activities at home, role modeling, and motivational support. Among these, religious activities at home emerged as the most prominent aspect. Sub-themes under this category include assisting children in reciting prayers, teaching short Qur'anic verses, and utilizing digital media for religious instruction. These forms of spiritual interaction within the home play a vital role in instilling religious values, which align with the developmental characteristics of early childhood that emphasize learning through repetition and direct experience (Krisnawati & Rohita, 2021). Further analysis of Informant 2, as illustrated in Figure 2, supports these findings. Religious activities at home, particularly guiding children in prayer and engaging in congregational prayers, were the most frequent forms of paternal involvement. This suggests that fathers' religious engagement is most evident in daily spiritual routines shared with their children. These findings affirm that parental involvement in worship practices and consistent role modeling significantly shape children's spiritual awareness and adherence to religious norms (Yasin et al., 2024).

Another notable theme is the father's role as a moral and religious role model. Fathers not only provide verbal guidance but also exhibit consistent religious behaviors, such as performing the five daily prayers and demonstrating noble character in daily life. This highlights role modeling as an effective medium for transmitting religious values. Ramadhani et al. (2024) affirm that children are more likely to internalize moral values through direct observation of their parents' behavior rather than through verbal instruction alone. Emotional support and motivational encouragement also constitute an essential dimension of fatherly involvement. Fathers provide verbal affirmations, encourage children during prayer memorization, and create an enjoyable and relaxed learning atmosphere. Such involvement positively influences children's interest in religious activities. Andhika (2021) states that children who receive positive reinforcement from parents tend to demonstrate greater enthusiasm in practicing religious rituals.

The final theme identified is the use of religious learning media. Some fathers actively incorporate tools such as children's Islamic videos, religious songs, or prayer memorization apps as part of religious instruction at home. Although this theme was less dominant, it reflects parents' adaptability to contemporary needs. Fauzi et al. (2024) found that digital media can serve as an effective educational aid in religious learning for children, particularly when accompanied by parental guidance. Figure 3 clearly illustrates that religious activities at home form the core of paternal involvement, which intersects with themes of role modeling and motivational support. Practices such as congregational prayers or storytelling about prophets are not merely routines but serve as channels for embedding religious and emotional values into children's daily lives. This aligns with the findings of Ramadhanti et al. (2021), who emphasized that paternal involvement in family settings strengthens emotional bonds between father and child.

The link between fathers' involvement and the development of children's religious character is both strong and multifaceted. According to Putri (2022), father involvement—manifested through positive communication, modeling, habituation, and warm interactions—plays a crucial role in nurturing children's religious character, including diligence in worship, honesty, and empathy. These findings resonate with the Theory of religious socialization, which asserts that religious values are transmitted through modeling and habituation, especially when father-child interactions are consistent and meaningful.

The empirical findings from the TK Nilasari case study reinforce this relationship. Children who regularly receive spiritual guidance from their fathers—such as through congregational prayers, daily supplications, and storytelling of prophetic traditions—demonstrate greater development in religious character compared to peers whose fathers are less involved. This supports Arisya'bani's comprehensive study, which identified a positive correlation between parental (especially paternal) involvement and children's religious knowledge and behavior. The integration of theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence thus highlights that paternal involvement is not merely symbolic, but rather foundational in building moral and spiritual identity from an early age. The father's involvement in religious education at TK Nilasari can be interpreted through the lens of religious socialization Theory, which identifies three key mechanisms: modeling, habituation, and religious discourse. Fathers who consistently participate in religious activities such as praying together, reciting prayers, and narrating prophetic stories function as "credibility-enhancing displays," providing tangible evidence that reinforces religious messages and facilitates value internalization in children (Conway et al., 2023). Empirical findings also reveal that a father's level of religiosity significantly influences the effectiveness of religious socialization, particularly in homogenous family environments, where the father's moral and spiritual example strongly resonates. Therefore, promoting father involvement through an emphasis on modeling and active spiritual interaction can significantly impact the development of children's religious character.

Additional insights were obtained through interviews with Informant 3 (the mother), as presented in Figure 4. The mother observed that after receiving regular spiritual support from the father, the child showed positive behavioral changes, such as increased enthusiasm for worship and improved receptivity to values like patience, respect, and responsibility. This finding emphasizes the importance of synergy between paternal and maternal roles in laying the foundation for religious upbringing.

This was further supported by the classroom teacher (Informant 4) as shown in Figure 5. Teachers noted that children receiving consistent spiritual guidance from their fathers at home exhibited greater participation in school-based religious activities—such as dhuha prayer, prayer memorization—and displayed positive social behaviors, such as empathy and politeness. These observations affirm the influence of paternal involvement on both the spiritual and social dimensions of child development, particularly in school contexts.

This study also identified several factors that enhance father involvement in early childhood religious education. These include personal religious awareness, effective communication with the mother, and institutional support from schools. Nevertheless, time constraints due to occupational demands remain a primary barrier to more intensive involvement. Despite this, some fathers manage to overcome such obstacles by scheduling family worship during weekends or using digital media to supplement their physical presence. Even when daily engagement is not feasible, the quality and consistency of religious interaction still significantly influence children's spiritual development.

Fathers' involvement in early childhood religious education is reinforced by internal factors such as religious consciousness, educational background, and family support. Fathers with strong religious commitment and understanding tend to be more active in guiding their children through practices like prayer, supplication, and storytelling. This is in line with Krisnawati and Rohita's (2021) findings, which suggest that fathers who serve as religious role models have a profound impact on children's spiritual learning. These findings also align with Lamb's Theory of paternal

involvement, which emphasizes three components: direct interaction, accessibility, and responsibility. Direct involvement is evident when fathers spend quality time with their children and actively participate in their daily activities, thereby fostering emotional closeness. Furthermore, access to Islamic digital media and flexible work schedules enable fathers to deliver religious education in engaging and age-appropriate ways (Mutiarasari et al., 2024).

Conversely, several internal and external factors impede paternal involvement. These include occupational demands, lack of knowledge about religious pedagogy for young children, and low self-efficacy. Moreover, social norms that designate mothers as primary religious educators and the lack of institutional policies explicitly involving fathers in religious education further hinder paternal roles. Fazira and Dora (2024) highlighted that unequal gender norms remain a significant barrier to fathers' participation in spiritual caregiving. In patriarchal cultures such as Indonesia, fathers are often perceived primarily as financial providers, while mothers are expected to bear the responsibility of religious upbringing (Purnamasari, 2025).

These limitations are compounded by traditional gender norms that constrain fathers' active roles in the family's religious life. Global studies indicate that fathers with high religiosity and self-efficacy are more likely to engage in their children's religious education; however, rigid gender roles often obstruct their involvement and a lack of inclusive policies (Fitriana et al., 2025). Therefore, it is crucial to design early childhood education programs and policies that explicitly recognize and promote paternal roles in spiritual development. Additionally, early childhood education institutions rarely provide participatory opportunities for fathers in religious activities, leaving paternal involvement largely dependent on personal initiative rather than systemic support. The absence of structured father engagement programs within early education settings further marginalizes their roles. Research in both Indonesia and globally recommends that educational institutions proactively create inclusive spaces for fathers—through school-based activities or parenting modules—to enhance their participation (Rahmah, 2019). Future studies should explore the interplay between educational policy, evolving gender norms, and community support to ensure that paternal roles are supported by an inclusive educational and social system, rather than solely by individual initiative.

In conclusion, this study indicates that father involvement in early childhood religious education significantly contributes to the formation of children's religious character. Whether through shared worship, role modeling, emotional encouragement, or the use of educational technology, fathers play a vital role in the internalization of religious values. Thus, increasing awareness and institutional support for paternal involvement in children's spiritual education is essential for cultivating a generation that is not only intellectually capable but also morally and spiritually grounded.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that fathers' involvement in early childhood religious education significantly contributes to the development of children's religious character. This involvement is reflected in practices such as guiding daily prayers, participating in congregational prayers, telling prophetic stories, and serving as a role model in worship. Fathers with a strong sense of religious awareness, supported by effective family communication and positive responses from their children, tend to be more actively engaged in their children's spiritual development. However, this involvement is often constrained by factors such as work-related time limitations, a

lack of pedagogical understanding of religious education, and prevailing social perceptions that position mothers as the primary figures responsible for children's spiritual upbringing.

From a scholarly perspective, this study offers a valuable contribution to the discourse on father involvement in early childhood religious education. This topic has been largely overlooked in both educational and parenting research. Furthermore, the study enriches the academic field by contextualizing empirical findings within the framework of religious socialization Theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems Theory, providing a more comprehensive approach to understanding paternal engagement. Nevertheless, the study's limitations include its narrow scope as a single case study involving participants from a relatively homogenous socio-cultural background. Therefore, future research is recommended to explore broader contexts and incorporate variables such as socio-economic dynamics and educational policies that influence the role of fathers in the spiritual education of young children.

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