

Indonesian Journal of Islamic Education



Indonesian Journal of Islamic Education Volume 1

(1) 1 – 11 Juni 2026

ISSN: In Process

The article is published with Open Access at: <https://journal.maalahiyah.sch.id/index.php/ijie/index>

THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN BUILDING A QUALITY GENERATION

Mutia Ikhsan Siregar, Syahada State Islamic University, Padangsidempuan
mutiaikhsan08@gmail.com

A. Nashir M. Tuah Lubis, Syahada State Islamic University, Padangsidempuan
ahmadnaashir@uinsyahada.ac.id

abstract

Early Childhood Education (Early Childhood Education/PAUD) is an educational stage that plays an essential role in supporting children's overall development. Early childhood is widely recognized as the golden age of development, as brain growth and character formation occur optimally during this period. This article aims to examine the importance of early childhood education in developing a high-quality generation through a library research approach. Data were collected from various sources, including books, scientific articles, educational journals, and related documents on early childhood education. The findings indicate that PAUD has a significant influence on the development of children's cognitive, social, emotional, moral, language, and motor aspects. Education provided at an early age can establish positive habits, enhance learning readiness, and instill character values that serve as the foundation for future life. Furthermore, the quality of PAUD implementation is influenced by teachers' competencies, family support, learning facilities, and government policies. Therefore, optimizing early childhood education is a strategic step toward creating superior, well-characterized, creative human resources who are capable of facing the challenges of modern development.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Quality Generation, Child Development, Character Education, PAUD

Introduction

Education is a basic human need that plays a vital role in determining the quality of life for both individuals and society. Through education, humans acquire knowledge, skills, moral values, and the ability to adapt to changing environments. A good education doesn't just begin when someone enters formal school; it needs to be instilled from an early age as the primary foundation for character formation and child development. Therefore, Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is a crucial stage in the process of developing a quality generation.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a developmental effort aimed at children from birth to age six through the provision of educational stimulation to foster physical and spiritual growth and development, ensuring they are prepared for further education. Early childhood is often referred to as the golden age because brain development is rapid. During this period, children experience significant development in language, social skills, emotional development, motor skills, and thinking skills. Every stimulation a child receives during this period will significantly impact their future development.

The importance of early childhood education is inseparable from children's need to obtain appropriate learning experiences according to their developmental stage. Early childhood has unique characteristics such as a high curiosity, active movement, love to imitate, and have the ability to learn through play. Therefore, education at this stage needs to be designed in an interesting, enjoyable, and oriented to the needs of children. A positive learning environment can help children develop their potential optimally so they can grow into confident, creative, independent, and responsible individuals. In the context of national development, early childhood education is a long-term investment that determines the quality of human resources in the future. A quality generation is not only measured by the level of intellectual intelligence, but also social, emotional, spiritual abilities, and good character. Education instilled from an early age plays a vital role in forming positive habits, instilling moral values, and increasing children's readiness to face the next level of education. Conversely, a lack of attention to early childhood education can hinder the

development of children's potential and impact the quality of future generations.(Dr. M. Fadlillah, 2020)

However, the implementation of early childhood education in Indonesia still faces various challenges. Some frequently encountered issues include limited facilities and infrastructure, a lack of teacher competence, low parental understanding of the importance of early childhood education, and disparities in access to education across regions. These conditions demonstrate that optimizing early childhood education requires collaboration between families, schools, communities, and the government to ensure optimal child development.

Research methods

This research employed a library research method with a qualitative descriptive approach. A library study is a research method that involves collecting, reviewing, and analyzing various written sources relevant to the research topic. Data sources used in this study include books, scientific journals, research articles, official government documents, and various academic references related to Early Childhood Education (PAUD) and the development of a quality generation.

Data collection techniques were conducted through a systematic literature search from various reliable sources. The obtained data were then selected based on the appropriateness of the theme, the credibility of the sources, and its relevance to the research objectives. The literature used primarily discusses the basic concepts of early childhood education (PAUD), the characteristics of early childhood development, the role of early childhood education in child development, and its contribution to shaping a quality generation.

The data analysis technique used was content analysis. The collected data was classified based on specific themes, then analyzed, compared, and synthesized to gain a comprehensive understanding of the importance of early childhood education in developing a quality generation. The results of the analysis were then presented descriptively to provide a systematic overview of the role, benefits, challenges, and efforts to improve the quality of early childhood education in Indonesia.

Through this literature study method, the research is expected to provide in-depth information and strengthen understanding regarding the importance of Early Childhood

Education as the main foundation in the formation of superior human resources, with character, and ready to face the challenges of modern development.

Results and Discussion

Based on the results of a review of various literature, it was found that Early Childhood Education (PAUD) plays a crucial role in supporting children's comprehensive development. Education provided during this early age influences cognitive, language, social-emotional, and moral development, as well as children's readiness for primary education. Furthermore, PAUD also contributes to character formation and the improvement of future human resources.

Table 1. The Role of Early Childhood Education in Child Development

Development Aspects	The role of PAUD	Impact
Cognitive	Introducing numbers, letters, colors, shapes and simple problem solving	Improve thinking skills and creativity
Language	Practice speaking, listening and communicating	Improve communication skills
Social Emotional	Teaches cooperation, sharing and emotional control	Helping social adjustment
Morals and Character	Instilling discipline, responsibility and honesty	Forming positive character
Motoric	Practicing fine and gross motor skills through play	Supporting children's physical development

A. Understanding Early Childhood Education (PAUD)

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is the initial level of education provided to children from birth to age six through various educational stimuli to foster physical and psychological growth and development, ensuring they are prepared for further education. Education during this period focuses not only on academics but also on

character development, social skills, and the development of a child's overall potential.(Aisyah, 2022)

Early childhood education (ECUD) is a crucial phase in a child's life because brain development occurs rapidly during this period. Experts refer to early childhood as the golden age, a period when children's thinking skills, habits, behaviors, and character development develop rapidly. Children who receive appropriate educational stimulation tend to develop better than those who do not receive optimal early childhood education.(Hasanah, U., & Nurhayati, 2023)

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is generally implemented through playful learning activities. Learning methods are designed to suit the characteristics of young children who are active, enjoy exploration, and learn through direct experience. Therefore, the learning environment must be safe, comfortable, and enjoyable, while also stimulating children's curiosity.

B. Goals and Characteristics of Early Childhood Education

The primary goal of early childhood education is to support optimal growth and development so that children are ready to enter primary education. Furthermore, early childhood education aims to shape character, enhance social skills, foster independence, and foster creativity from an early age.

The characteristics of early childhood education differ from those of other levels of education. At this stage, the learning process emphasizes direct experience rather than formal instruction. Early childhood children are highly curious, readily imitate their surroundings, enjoy playing, and tend to be active. Therefore, teachers and parents need to understand their children's learning needs to ensure an effective educational process. Early childhood education also serves as a means of introducing moral and religious values. Instilling good habits such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, respect for others, and practicing polite behavior are essential components of early childhood education. These habits form the primary foundation for shaping a child's personality as an adult.(Madyawati, 2021)

The study results show that early childhood education is a long-term investment in human resource development. Children who receive early childhood education

services are better prepared to learn when they enter primary education than those who do not receive optimal early childhood education.

Table 2. Contribution of Early Childhood Education to a Quality Generation

Indicator	PAUD Contribution
School Readiness	Improve adaptability and learning abilities
Character	Forming discipline, responsibility, and honesty
Social Skills	Improve communication and collaboration skills
Creativity	Develop creative thinking skills
Independence	Train children to make simple decisions

Based on the table, it can be understood that PAUD not only prepares children academically, but also forms the character and social skills needed in community life.

C. The Role of Early Childhood Education in Child Development

Early childhood education plays a significant role in a child's development across various aspects, including physical, cognitive, language, social, emotional, and moral-spiritual development. These developments are interconnected and influence a child's ability to navigate daily life.

In terms of cognitive aspects, early childhood education helps children recognize colors, shapes, numbers, letters, and develop simple logical thinking skills. Learning activities conducted through educational games can enhance children's thinking skills, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, early stimulation can help improve concentration and memory. In terms of language, early childhood education helps children develop speaking, listening, understanding instructions, and expressing thoughts. An active learning environment encourages children to interact with teachers and peers, thus optimally developing communication skills. (Mulyasa, 2022)

From a social and emotional perspective, early childhood education teaches children how to interact, cooperate, share, respect others, and manage their emotions. Children learn to understand rules, appreciate differences, and build healthy social relationships. These skills are crucial for helping children adapt to society. Furthermore, early childhood education plays a role in character development. The values of honesty, responsibility, discipline, empathy, and self-confidence are instilled through various learning activities.

The results of the study show that there are still various challenges in implementing PAUD in Indonesia.

Table 3. Challenges of Early Childhood Education in Indonesia

Challenge	Impact
Limited facilities and infrastructure	Decreasing the quality of educational services
Uneven distribution of educator competencies	Suboptimal learning
Low parental awareness	Lack of educational stimulation at home
The influence of digital media	Reduced social interaction of children
Regional disparities	Unequal access to early childhood education

These findings indicate that improving the quality of PAUD requires support from the government, schools, families, and the community so that educational services can be provided equitably and with quality.

D. The Importance of Early Childhood Education in Building a Quality Generation

A quality generation is one that possesses a balance of intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and social intelligence. Early childhood education plays a significant role in

creating such a generation because fundamental life values are instilled from childhood. Children who receive early education are generally better prepared to learn when they enter elementary school. They adapt more easily to the learning environment, are able to follow rules, have good communication skills, and are more confident in interacting with others. This demonstrates that early childhood education can improve the quality of a child's education in later life. (Sujiono, nd)

In addition to providing academic readiness, early childhood education is also a crucial tool in preventing various social problems in the future. Children who are accustomed to character education tend to have positive behaviors and develop good self-control. Therefore, early childhood education can be viewed as a long-term investment in developing quality human resources. In the competitive era of globalization, the quality of the next generation is a determining factor in national progress. Countries with superior human resources will be better able to navigate social, economic, and technological changes.

E. Challenges of Early Childhood Education in Indonesia

Despite the significant benefits of early childhood education, its implementation in Indonesia still faces various challenges. One major issue is the lack of equitable access to education, particularly in remote areas. Many children do not receive early childhood education services due to limited facilities and teaching staff. Furthermore, the competence of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers is also a significant challenge. PAUD teachers are required to understand child development, develop creative learning methods, and create a conducive learning environment. However, in practice, many educators still lack adequate training.

Parents' lack of awareness of the importance of early childhood education is also a barrier. Some people still consider early childhood education unimportant, believing children have learned enough by the time they enter elementary school. However, educational stimulation at an early age is crucial for a child's future development.

Social change and technological advancements have significantly impacted the growth and development of early childhood. The presence of digital media offers benefits as a learning tool, but unsupervised use often leads to various developmental

issues. Children spend more time interacting with screens than playing with peers. This situation can impact communication skills, emotional management, and social skills. Passive behaviors also risk diminishing children's creativity, as time for exploration of their environment becomes increasingly limited.(Suryana, nd)

Another issue arises from the disparity in education quality between urban and rural areas. Educational institutions in certain areas have complete facilities, competent teaching staff, and adequate learning media. Conversely, other institutions still experience limitations in learning spaces, educational play equipment, and even the number of teachers. This situation creates inequality in early childhood education services, thus limiting opportunities for quality learning. Low family involvement is also a serious challenge. Some parents hand over the entire educational process to schools without providing learning support while their children are at home. Yet, cultivating good behavior requires continuity between family and school education.

F. Efforts to Improve the Quality of Early Childhood Education

Improving the quality of early childhood education requires collaboration from various parties, including the government, schools, communities, and families. The government needs to increase access to education, improve infrastructure, and provide training to educators to improve the quality of learning. Schools also need to create a safe, comfortable, and enjoyable learning environment for children. The use of play-based learning methods needs to be continuously developed to make the learning process more effective and engaging. The role of parents is also crucial in supporting early childhood education. Parents need to provide attention, affection, and learning stimulation at home to ensure optimal child development. Good cooperation between teachers and parents will help children gain consistent learning experiences.

Improving the quality of early childhood education requires concrete steps to strengthen the quality of educators. Early childhood education teachers need to be highly creative to ensure engaging and accessible learning for children. Regular training, educational seminars, and professional competency development are essential tools for improving learning quality. Competent teachers are able to create a fun learning environment that makes children feel safe, comfortable, and enthusiastic about participating in activities.(Wiyani, 2022)

The use of creative learning media also plays a crucial role. The use of educational toys, visual media, illustrated stories, children's songs, and interactive games can increase interest in learning and foster thinking skills. Learning activities through play provide opportunities for children to explore their surroundings, develop courage, foster self-confidence, and develop motor skills.

Collaboration between schools and families also requires ongoing strengthening. Intensive communication between teachers and parents can help monitor children's development more optimally. Aligning positive habits, both during the learning process and in the home environment, significantly influences positive character development. This approach is expected to produce a generation that is intelligent, independent, and creative, with positive personalities to prepare them for future challenges.

Closing

Early Childhood Education is a crucial stage in developing a quality generation. Early childhood is a golden period for child development, requiring appropriate educational stimulation to ensure optimal physical, cognitive, social, emotional, linguistic, and moral growth. Early childhood education focuses not only on academic abilities but also on character development, independence, creativity, and readiness for the next level of education.

Early childhood education plays a crucial role in developing superior human resources capable of facing the challenges of modern development. Despite persistent challenges such as limited access to education, the quality of teaching staff, and a lack of parental awareness, ongoing efforts to improve the quality of education are essential. Through collaboration between the government, schools, communities, and families, early childhood education is expected to provide a strong foundation for building a generation that is intelligent, characterized, and qualified.

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