



# The Strategy of Religious-Based Character Education in Early Childhood Education

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Character education is very important in early childhood because children are valuable assets for the nation and are the future of the Indonesian people. This study aims to determine and describe the religious-based character education strategy in the Integrated Islamic Early Childhood Education Sabial Muhtadin in Banjarmasin. The study uses descriptive qualitative methods by collecting data using interview techniques, observation, and documentation studies. The data was validated for the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In this research, the foundations used by the school are Al-Qur'an, As-Sunnah and Pancasila which aim to develop individual students who believe and devote to Allah SWT and have characters that follow the teachings of Islam. The strategies used include assignment, direction, habituation, role models and environmental conditioning.

**Keywords:** *Strategy, Character Education, Religious Character, PAUD Islam Sabial Muhtadin*



## Introduction

We are now in an era of globalization marked by the development of science and technology. The flow of information and increasingly fierce competition also develop a civilization. The era of globalization is the era of human capital (Cabrillo, Grubic Nestic, & Mitrovic, 2014) and besides being marked by the development of science and technology, it is also marked by convenience and the capacity for instantaneous response which can have a positive impact on the progress of a nation (Fleming, 2017). However, in reality, what is currently occurring is that the Indonesian Nation and State are experiencing a downturn. This is not only apparent from the economic crisis but also the moral crisis which reflects a decline in the character of the Indonesian Nation (Arthur & Carr, 2013; Mahfud, Prasetyawati, Agustin, Suarmini, & Hendrajati, 2019).

The five thinking abilities needed for the future or the global era, are called the Five Minds for the Future (Peer, 2014). These are: (1) The Disciplined Mind, namely the ability to study a particular field so that it is attached to him. (2) The synthesizing mind, namely the ability to collect, understand and integrate various information needed to increase the degree of life. 3) The creating mind, namely the ability to use information that is understood to find solutions and solve problems or produce something useful for himself and his environment. (4) The respectful mind, which is the willingness to appreciate the difference in the way of thinking and acting with one's self. (5) The ethical mind, which is the willingness to uphold universal ethical values. Point no (1) is related to cognitive abilities, while points no (2) to (5) are related to a person's character. Therefore, in the opinion of Gardner indicates that character education is very important for future generations.

The decline in the character of the Indonesian nation is evident in current realities (Mahfud et al., 2019; Manoppo, Janis, & Wuwung, 2019). The Indonesian nation claims to be religious, but in reality, the behavior and attitudes of its people are not following the teachings of God Almighty (Abdurrahman, 2016; Hasanah, Gustini, & Rohaniawati, 2016; Mazaya & Ainissyifa, 2018). This can be seen from the shifting of ethical values in a variety of countries and states, the values of Pancasila which are no longer internalized, and the weakening of the nation's independence (Muttaqin, Raharjo, & Masturi, 2018). These conditions do not escape our young generation.

The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) revealed that currently, the number of children as perpetrators of crime and violence has increased. From the data obtained by KPAI in 2014, there were 67 cases in which children became criminals. In 2015 that number increased to 79 cases where children became perpetrators of violence. Further other data confirms that in 2016 there were 530 children as perpetrators of violence, while 477 children were victims. The



Chairman of KPAI Susanto, in a discussion on Jalan Wahid Hasyim Jakarta, stated that in the first semester of 2018 KPAI handled 504 cases of Children Facing the Law (ABH) including perpetrators of theft and drug use to immoral cases. From this data, it can be concluded that our young generation is experiencing a crisis of character, where children are no longer victims of crime but rather as perpetrators of crime.

Therefore, to overcome the current national problem, the government must make character education one of the main programs of national development. This is implicitly emphasized in the 2005-2025 Long-Term Development Plan. Character education is used as a foundation or basis for realizing the vision of national development, namely "Creating a noble, moral, ethical, cultured, and civilized society based on the Pancasila philosophy". With regard to character education at the heart of the RPJPN, it has also been embodied in the function and purpose of national education, namely in the Republic of Indonesia Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System which states "National education functions in developing and shaping the character and civilization of a dignified nation." In order to enhance the life of the nation, the aim is to develop the potential to become a believer and to be responsible to the One True God, to be honorable, healthy, knowledgeable, talkative, creative, independent and to be a democratic and irresponsible citizen ”.

There are three components of good character (Arthur & Carr, 2013; Muttaqin et al., 2018). (1) Moral knowledge, including moral awareness, understanding of moral values, perspective-taking, moral reasoning, decision making, self-knowledge. (2) Moral feelings which include: conscience, self-esteem, empathy, loving the good, self-control and humility. (3) Moral action, namely competence, will, and habit. Based on this, it can be seen that character education is underpinned by the values of good and noble behaviors, taught to shape one's character.

Character education is very important or early childhood because children are valuable assets for the nation that determine the future of the Indonesian people (Abodunrin, Oni, Dosunmu, & Isaac-Phillips, 2014; Mahfud et al., 2019; Manoppo et al., 2019). To realize the expected formation of character education, it is necessary to manage character education in an appropriate domain, especially in early childhood education, as this instill character values for later daily life and the formation of character learners (Fakhri & Faujiyah, 2019; Kim & Cho, 2018). Children are valuable assets and are the next generation of the future and the age of 0-6 years is a golden period in a child's life, called the golden age, as that time is a decisive period for their development and growth. Therefore, all parties need to understand the importance of early childhood to optimize child growth and development (Abodunrin et al., 2014).



To investigate the role of character education in early childhood education in this study, researchers chose one of the PAUD educational institutions that teach religion, namely Islamic Sabibal Muhtadin PAUD Banjarmasin. The school implements Islamic education as a basis for learning so that not only the academic aspects of the child are developed but also the mental and spiritual aspects of the child through worship activities and applying attitude values that are compatible with the teachings of the Islamic religion. Thus, the focus and formulation of this research is designed to investigate how the religious-based character education strategy in the Integrated Islamic Early Childhood Education Sabibal Muhtadin in Banjarmasin City functions.

## **Method**

The research approach used is qualitative research. The purpose of this research is to identify and describe the elements and models of the implementation of religious value-based character education in the implementation of religious values-based PAUD. This study tries to focus both on the process and the elements associated with the implementation of religious value-based character education models in the institution. This research was carried out at the PAUD institution namely Integrated Islamic PAUD Sabibal Muhtadin, located at Jl. Jendral Sudirman no. 1 Kec. Central Banjarmasin, Banjarmasin.

Data collection techniques were conducted through observation, interviews and documentation studies. In qualitative research, the presence of researchers in the field is highly prioritized because researchers act as the main instrument (key instrument) as well as collecting research data (Creswell, 2012). To determine the validity of the data, researchers used the following criteria: the degree of trust (credibility), transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Palinkas et al., 2015). In this case, the data analysis technique used by the researchers consist of (1) data reduction, (2) data presentation, (3) concluding/verification.

## **Results**

### **General description of Integrated Islamic PAUD Sabibal Muhtadin**

Sabibal Muhtadin Integrated Islamic PAUD Banjarmasin is under the auspices of the National Education Ministry and is organized by the Banjarmasin Sabibal Muhtadin Islamic Institute Foundation. PAUD Integrated Islamic Sabibal Muhtadin Banjarmasin organizes formal education, namely Toddler (age 2-3 years), Play Group (age 3-4 years), Kindergarten A (age 4-5 years) and Kindergarten B (ages 5-6 years) and has a vision that is, "The realization of integrated Islamic high-quality PAUD, highly competitive and rooted in the community". Whereas the mission is 1) Organizing high-quality education, 2) Organizing education that can compete in the world of education, 3) Organizing education with character and moral values, and 4) Organizing



education that gives satisfaction and is rooted in the community. In addition to the vision and mission, PAUD Integrated Islamic Sabial Muhtadin has goals, among others: 1) Believers and Devotion, 2) Charity, 3) Physical and Spiritual Health, 4) Smart knowledgeable and skilled, 5) Personal and independent Responsible for the development of the people and the nation. To achieve this vision, mission, and goals, PAUD Sabial is supported by educational staff who have academic qualifications summarized as: 2 Masters teachers, 20 Masters and 2 Teachers, who are currently completing the PAUD Education Undergraduate program. at the University of Lambung Mangkurat Banjarmasin.

### **The Strategy Implementation of Religious- Based Character**

Based on interviews, documentation studies and observations while at the schools, it was found that there were 18 religious character values implemented including respect, honesty, quality, clean, compassion, patience, gratitude, sincerity, discipline, responsibility, solitude, diligence, positive thinking, friendly, humble, qanaah, taqwa and istiqomah. To instill the values of religious character involves the participation of the entire academic community in the Integrated Islamic Education Sabial Muhtadin consisting of Foundations, Principals, Teachers, Staff employees, and Parents. The strategies used in implementing religious-based character values in the integrated Islamic PAUD Sabial Muhtadin Banjarmasin are as follows.

#### **Assignment**

From the results of interviews and field observations, it is known that the assignment of tasks is one of the strategies carried out in the Integrated Islamic Early Childhood Education Sabial Muhtadin Banjarmasin. This strategy is not only carried out by the teacher to students but also carried out by the foundation and the principal to teachers at this school. One of the methods used by the teacher assignment strategy is to give students assignments to bring prayer equipment and toothbrush equipment to school. The aim is to teach and get students accustomed to always praying and keeping their body (teeth) looking. This is a form of the implementation of the values of religious character taqwa, solemn, diligent, clean and disciplined.

The assignment strategy is also integrated into the center's learning activities, namely by giving freedom to students to choose the desired learning source from several learning resources provided by the teacher, who remains at the center. The teacher provides stimuli for students to carry out activities as per the instructions given and the rules set. Thus it will make students learn to be disciplined, independent and responsible when learning activities take place. The assignment strategy was also carried out by the Principal supported by the Foundation by assigning some Teachers to carry out an internship program at the Al Falah school in Jakarta.



The purpose of this program is to increase the knowledge and experience of teachers in integrated Islamic PAUD Sabial Muhtadin, to have broader insights, especially those relating to religious-based character education. Thus, the teacher is not only able to give assignments, but also able to give examples through behavior supported by knowledge, experience, and expertise that are constantly honed and deepened.

The assignment strategy also sometimes involves the role of the student's parents. One way to do this is by giving a manual to all parents of students. The aim is to outline the learning activities during school and parents are expected to continue learning while at home. Thus the implementation of religious-based character education is not only achieved while at school but continued at home, thereby making the values of religious characters more strongly embedded in students.

### **Briefing**

The strategy of assigning tasks in the inculcation of religious-based character values is closely related to the briefing because the assignment of tasks, of course must be initiated by a good and appropriate briefing. The briefing is delivered intentionally through the rules of implementing activities and the delivery of learning material and also is done spontaneously. What is meant by spontaneous is that this is an activity out of the ordinary. Suppose a child hits his friend, then the teacher tells him that hitting his friend is not good. We have to love friends and make our friends comfortable and from here the teacher can work to instill these characteristics with the child.

The briefing strategy is also carried out by the school to parents of students through parenting activities. Parenting activities at the Islamic Early Childhood PAUD Sabial Muhtadin are carried out routinely at the beginning of the semester before learning begins and in the middle of the semester. The aim is not only to equate the views on the goals of children's education, which is to focus on the development of the child's religious character, but also to increase the knowledge and insight of parents about the religious character.

### **Habituation**

Instilling of religious value-based characters in PAUD Sabial Muhtadin's Integrated Islamic School is carried out every day and at any time. The goal is that children are accustomed to being judged by their religious character because inculcation of character can not be achieved through one or two experiences but must be continuous.



The habituation is a focus in every learning center and daily activities. One example of habituating religious character education is by hand washing before eating. Through this activity, children are taught to queue up neatly in line waiting for their turn to wash their hands, pray before washing their hands, and wash their hands in the right way. By completing these activities, the child will get used to discipline, be patient when queuing, and always maintain a clean body. Thus, the values of the religious character of discipline, patience, and cleanliness have been instilled and accustomed to students in the Integrated Islamic Education Sabial Muhtadin Banjarmasin.

### **Example**

Teachers as educators and employees in Sabial Muhtadin Integrated Islamic PAUD Banjarmasin must set an example of how to behave by the character desired as based on religious values. So, the teacher cannot just tell the child to be kind if the teacher himself cannot behave well in front of his students. For example, when washing hands, teachers can not only convey the rules of handwashing verbally, but the teacher must also give examples of practice in front of children.

Another example in instilling religious character values through example is the teacher participating in lunch activities with students. This aims to exemplify for students real behavior from their teachers about how rules and good eating habits in accordance with the teachings of Islam, starting from sitting neatly, praying before eating, taking the cutlery neatly and taking turns, taking only a sufficient amount of food, eating with the right hand, praying after eating and ending with cleaning supplies each. Therefore, students not only listen to commands or directives from the teacher but also see concrete examples of the proper behavior, easing understanding of appropriacy.

### **Environmental conditioning**

To carry out the inculcation of religious values-based characters there is a need for supporting environmental conditions. For example, to instill clean character, then the condition of the school environment must also always be clean and all school members encouraged to maintain cleanliness. Every corner of the room has a trash can and mounted pictures or posters that read an appeal to maintain cleanliness. Further there are also appeals to parents or anyone who will enter the school area to use Muslim / Muslim clothing because the Islamic PAUD Integrated Sabial Muhtadin school is an Islamic area. This is maintained so that children are accustomed to behaving istiqomah, obedient to the teachings of the Islamic religion, one of which is to dress according to religious law.



Another example is the welcome to school activity when the child enters the school environment such that the teacher welcomes the child with a smile and greeting. Children also respond/respond to greetings and greetings from the teacher and this creates a culture of hospitality and respect in schools evidenced when the children meet with older people and demonstrate friendly respect.

Environmental conditioning is closely related to the availability of facilities and infrastructure. From the results of observations in the field, it is found that the facilities and infrastructure available at the Integrated Islamic Early Childhood Education Sabial Muhtadin are very adequate and supportive in the process of implementing religious-based character education. This can be seen in the availability of sufficient classrooms, with bathrooms/toilets in each class, adequate worship equipment, water tap for ablution and sufficient hand washing, shelves and storage cabinets, playgrounds and a large field and pictures and posters that support the religious character education process. In every corner of the classroom and school environment, some pictures/posters remind the schoolchildren to throw trash in the appropriate place and always maintain cleanliness. Further, trash bins and cleaning equipment such as brooms and napkins are also provided in each group/class. Posters in the school gate area are also installed, appealing to anyone who enters the school area/environment to wear Muslim / Muslimah clothing.

## **Discussion**

### **Assignment**

From the above findings, it is found that one of the strategies used in the inculcation of religious character values in the Sabial Muhtadin Integrated Islamic PAUD Banjarmasin is through assigning tasks. The assignment of assignments can be interpreted as a form of interaction in the teaching and learning process that is marked by the assignments given by the teacher then completed by students at school or home, individually or in groups. The assignment method is a methodology used by the teacher in presenting learning materials where the teacher gives certain assignments so that children complete learning activities (Brookfield, 2015; Lee, 2016). Based on the opinions of some experts, it can be concluded that the assignment is a way that teachers make children active in learning both at school or home. Giving assignments can increase the mastery of the material and learning experiences for children (Slentz, 2008).

Relating to the inculcation of religious-based character values, the provision of well-designed and appropriate tasks can develop religious character in students (Abdurrahman, 2016; Chou, Tu, & Huang, 2013). Assignments that are well-designed, precise and proportional will provide an increase in children's learning. In completing the allocated task, the child will be guided to complete the task so that the child will get reinforcement in the material while being able to



correct learning errors. Thus, the child will be more skilled, more smooth at work and focused on achieving goals.

Allocating assignments gives students experience to work independently and or in groups. This can instill and be able to develop, the religious character values of independence and responsibility of children (Löfdahl & Hägglund, 2012). The assignments given by the teacher to children, when they complete their tasks well, will instill independence and responsibility for completing their tasks properly. The assignment of tasks also gives children experience that will become their habit in taking responsibility for the tasks allocated to them (Gurses, Dogar, & Gunes, 2015).

### **Briefing**

Directing can also be done through the method of storytelling and role-playing (Papacharissi, 2016). The method of storytelling, using pictures and role-playing, will make it easier for students to understand and absorb the information provided by the teacher regarding the value of religious character. The pictorial story method and effective role playing to instill the values of honesty, patience, and worship observance is effective because by playing roles, children not only get verbal directions but also are allowed to take concrete action (Singer, 2013; Van Hoorn, Monighan-Nourot, Scales, & Alward, 2014).

As the findings above indicate, the direction strategy to instill the value of religious character is not only from the teacher to their students but also parents of students through parenting activities (Abodunrin et al., 2014; Hidayati & Diana, 2018; Lin, 2018). In line with this, a child psychologist named Seto Mulyadi stated that the example set up in the family environment through both parents plays a very important role in children's behavior. This is not just about giving orders or lecturing children, it is about parents giving appropriate examples in the family environment (Arthur & Carr, 2013) so that children are interested in doing what their parents teach because they see these characteristics exemplified by their parents.

### **Habituation**

Based on the findings, habituation is one of the strategies used in the cultivation of religious-based character values. Habituation is defined as certain behavior that is carried out automatically without a plan and is done without thinking about it (Arthur & Carr, 2013; Baehr, 2017). So, when a good character value is accustomed to being demonstrated by the child, then that characteristic will always be demonstrated by the child. For example, if children are



accustomed to greetings when meeting with others, then until adulthood children will do this as a form of respect and courtesy to others.

Habituation is one way that can be used to implement character values in the curriculum (Fakhri & Faujiyah, 2019). That is, if you want to instill the values of the character well, this need to be done consistently and continuously in everyday life. This habit is also integrated with classroom learning both during learning centers and daily activities at school. Class activities become very important when they include learning about character values because learning that contains character values cannot be taught only theoretically, but also must be taught through class activity (Arthur & Carr, 2013).

The habituation strategy is closely related to setting an example and necessitates demonstration, training and assignment methods (Gurses et al., 2015; Ritchie, 2014). When learning activities are at the center of natural materials, children are assigned to choose their play equipment then the teacher gives direction (assignments) as well as giving examples, without neglecting to also convey the rules at the center (Hasanah et al., 2016; Ritchie, 2014). Thus, familiarizing children with desired character values cannot be separated from the other set of strategies.

The habituation method has a very close relationship with exemplary adult modelling because the habits of a child are closely related to the figure who is a role model (Abodunrin et al., 2014). When at school the child is accustomed to doing the actions as exemplified by his teacher, while at home the child is accustomed to behaving by the examples of the parents (Hidayati & Diana, 2018; Lin, 2018). Therefore, 4 conditions using this habituation method must be considered: (1) habit starts as a baby, because every child has a strong record of receiving influence from the surrounding environment. (2) The habit should be carried out continuously and programmed or scheduled so that eventually it will form a habit that is whole, permanent and consistent. (3) The habit should be monitored closely, consistently and firmly. Teachers and parents should not allow children to break the habits that are instilled. (4) Habits that are initially mechanical, should be gradually changed into habits that are accompanied by the child's own will without the need for verbal guidance first. Usually, this can happen as a child's age or when Sudha's good character is attached to the child's self.

Habits are behaviors that are instilled early on in children (Ritchie, 2014). When we reinforce a positive habit, the children will be happier doing it. Eventually, something that is done repeatedly will become a habit without coercion. Therefore, when good behavior has become a habit for children, then the attitude becomes attached to their character and is difficult to change (Guntama & Ningrum, 2019). The chains of habit are generally too small to be felt until they are too strong to be broken.



## **Exemplary**

To be exemplary is to show an example, both directly through the creation of conditions of close relationships between school personnel, educational behavior and other education personnel that reflect the noble character, as well as treat illustrations through stories that serve as examples. The teacher has a role as an educator to provide insight, assignments, and direction as well as setting an example/example (Arthur & Carr, 2013; Fakhri & Faujiyah, 2019; Gurses et al., 2015). 90% of the learning process occurs through what we say and do and based on that, it can be seen that students more easily understand the material provided through verbal guidance, by being given examples that can be seen directly and which children can also practice. Through this method, character planting will be more attached and embedded in children's memories and thoughts. As stated by Joseph Joubert "Children need models more than they need critics." That is, children need examples more than reprimands or criticism.

## **Environmental conditioning**

In religious-based character values education, a conducive school climate is needed because the climate and the supportive atmosphere of the school will influence students to behave with good character values (Abdurrahman, 2016; Mahfud et al., 2019; Yasin, 2019). To create a conducive school environment, involves various activities incompleting everything related to supporting the formation of students' character, such as syiar, facilities and infrastructure. There are several criteria that need to be considered to create a positive school environment, including 1) the attractive physical condition of the school, 2) the school has an effort to build, and maintain caring relationships, mutual respect, support and collaboration between school staff members, students, and families, 3) students participate in decision making, 4) students consider rules to be clear, fair, and not too hard, 5) schools are safe for students, families, and teachers, 6) learning services are available, 7) schools have high academic and behavioral levels and provide support for the achievement of objectives, 8) have efforts to develop social and emotional abilities of all students, 9) teachers as models in maintaining attitudes, 10) views parents and community members as valuable resources, and they are encouraged to be actively involved in school (Sheras & Bradshaw, 2016).

So the strategy carried out in the inculcation of religious-based character values involves assignment, direction, habituation, exemplary and environmental conditioning (Guntama & Ningrum, 2019; Yasin, 2019). These strategies are interrelated and integrated with learning activities in schools, both central learning and daily activities at school. To carry out religious-based character education does not necessitate explicit statement and notation in the learning plan, but is implicitly contained in every student activity in school (Baehr, 2017). Learning is

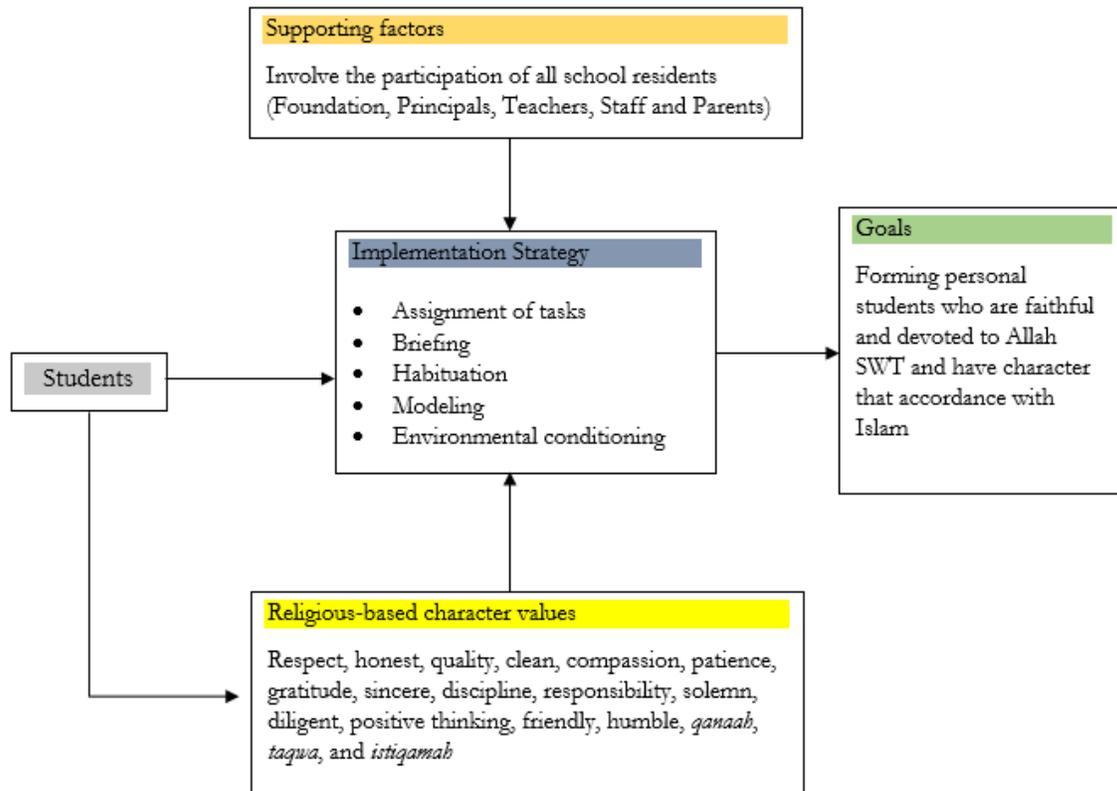


known as the hidden curriculum and from a philosophical perspective, moral and character educators have a major role in the moral development of students through a "hidden curriculum" which is realized in the interpersonal environment of schools and classrooms (Lapsley & Yeager, 2012; Lynch, Smith, & Menter, 2016).

The five strategies are not only carried out by teachers, principals and staff in schools, but also involve the role of parents. The goal is that parents also have a role in shaping the character of children, especially when in the home environment. Parents not only give directions or commands but at the same time give examples and make the home environment more conducive and supportive for implementing religious character values to children (Lau & Power, 2018; Mahfud et al., 2019). Being accustomed to listening to directions, seeing examples from parents, and experiencing support via environmental conditions that cultivate good character values, will further strengthen the planting of religious character values in children. The child will get used to and will automatically behave following the values of a religious character in everyday life. So there is a need for good communication between the school and parents of students to synergize the vision and mission of learning for children. The strategy of character building by involving parents is through effective communication and joint supervision of students while at school and home (Chen, 2013; Kim & Cho, 2018; Kristjánsson, 2013).

So the pattern of character education based on religious values that can be achieved in schools involves good role modelling; motivating children; working together to form character both at school and at home; generating internal student motivation; providing a peaceful and harmonious society and opportunities for students to practice moral behavior (Baehr, 2017; Ecclestone, 2012; Liu, 2014). From the findings and discussion above the flow of religious-based character education strategies in the Integrated Islamic Education Sabilal Muhtadin in Banjarmasin is summarized as follows in Figure 1 below:

**Figure 1.** The Strategy of Implementation Religious-Based Character at Islamic PAUD Sabibal Muhtadin in Banjarmasin



## Conclusion

Based on the results of the discussion above, it can be concluded that the strategy used in the implementation of religious-based character education in the Integrated Islamic Sabibal Muhtadin PAUD Banjarmasin is through assignment, direction, habituation, exemplary behaviour and environmental conditioning. All of these strategies support one another and are integrated into all learning, both central learning and daily activities at school. The implementation of religious character values is also carried out in the "hidden curriculum", meaning that not only is it explicitly stated and written into the learning plan, but also that it is implicitly contained in every student activity at school.



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