

The Implementation of “Project Approach” By Lilian G. Katz To Improving Religion And Moral, Also Language Development

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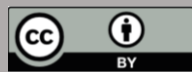
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ABSTRACT

Early childhood education plays an important role in the formation of religious and moral values, as well as language development. However, there is a decline in morals and language difficulties in children due to various factors, including the influence of digitalization. "Project Approach" offers a learning method that involves out-of-class activities to enhance children's real experiences. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of "Project Approach" in improving religious values, morals, and language development of early childhood through a project visit to a fish farming location in Gajahwong, Yogyakarta. This study used a mixed-methods design with the CERMAT instrument to assess eight basic moral values and children's language skills. The results of this study showed an average increase of 11% in moral values, with the largest increases in self-confidence (14.8%), discipline (14.1%), and concern (13.6%). Language skills also increased by an average of 11.4%, especially in the ability to express opinions (12.8%) and tell stories (11.4%). "Project Approach" significantly supports the development of religious, moral, and language values of early childhood by involving them in out-of-class exploration activities. This shows that a project-based learning approach can create a more interactive and applicable learning experience for early childhood.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a child who is at the vulnerable age of 0-6 years, who has unique characteristics, and is different from adults. Age 0-6 years is the early period of a child's life, because at that age a very important process is taking place, namely growth, development, refinement and maturation. This event is often known as the golden age (Aprida & Suyadi, 2022). Early childhood is someone who is facing a very rapid growth and development process, at this early age it is often called a developmental leap. Several aspects of development in the PAUD curriculum include: aspects of moral and religious values, physical-motor, cognitive, language, social-emotional, and art.

Education of religious moral values in the PAUD program is a solid foundation and its existence is very important, and if it has been embedded well in every person from an early age, it is a good start for the education of the nation's children to undergo further education. The Indonesian nation highly upholds religious moral values. These noble values are also desired to be a spiritual motivation for this nation in order to implement other principles in

Pancasila (Safitri et al., 2019). Instilling religious and moral values (NAM) in childhood is very urgent and must be done as a way to create a dignified, moral, civilized and religious society in line with the various values that Islam teaches.

Children who enter the community environment must adapt to the norms that apply in it. The source of moral values that become social norms can come from religious values and can also come from the experiences of previous generations of humans (Syamsudin, 2012). Some of these moral values are universal, meaning they apply to all humans, all generations, all places, and all times. However, there are also moral norms that are local and only apply to people in certain environments. Social and cultural norms can be stimulated in early childhood with the hope that Indonesian children will embody their identity, be tolerant of various differences (ethnicity, customs, race, and religion), and behave nobly.

We often find that morals and religion in society, especially early childhood, are declining in terms of attitudes, religion and behavior. This is also supported by the opinion that the morals of the Indonesian nation are not good (Natari & Suryana, 2022). This can be seen from the many children who do not speak politely, children always hit and force their will. In addition, children who are influenced by the digital world and the attitudes of adults make children behave badly. Habits that are starting to disappear from within children, such as not wanting to shake hands with older people, not saying hello when entering a house or class, not wanting to attend a flag ceremony, not memorizing the lyrics of the Indonesian national anthem, forgetting to say "thank you", "sorry", and "please". Habits that are considered normal but have an impact on children's lives in the future.

In addition to moral decline, there are also oral language disorders in children, such as unclear pronunciation of words or sentences, speaking with long pauses, not being good at telling stories, and not being able to tell stories coherently. Oral language disorders can result in disruption of the acquisition of the basics of early literacy and then result in the obstruction of advanced formal literacy teaching in elementary schools (Christianti, 2021). The most effective strategy to improve children's literacy is to ensure accurate early identification of children who have difficulty in acquiring early literacy skills. Teachers must be sensitive in detecting disorders in children's literacy acquisition as early as possible so that they can help children's failure to acquire these skills later on. Teachers' efforts in designing learning that supports literacy development intensively help stimulate children's literacy so that literacy disorders can be avoided.

Teachers as role models in schools are responsible for the process and content of education in general and the learning process in particular, are very vulnerable to problems that may arise if the initial plan for this learning process is not planned carefully and wisely, this will have an impact on the learning process (Juhriati & Rahmi, 2021). In this case, to shape a child's personality, teachers are not enough to just give advice, because more important for children is the essence of behavioral development in conveying the advice. So no matter how much advice is given without guidance, it will be something meaningless.

Jean Piaget explained that children's moral development occurs in two stages, namely heteronomous morality and autonomous morality. In the heteronomous morality stage, children obey the rules because of pressure from external authorities, such as parents or teachers. Children see rules as something absolute and unchangeable. However, as they grow

older and interact socially, children begin to understand autonomous morality. Children begin to understand that rules can be negotiated or changed based on the principle of justice. In this autonomous stage, children obey the rules because they understand and agree with the principles behind the rules. Piaget believed that interactions with peers play an important role in encouraging children towards a more mature understanding of morality. In this case, children learn to appreciate the perspectives of others and develop a sense of responsibility for their actions (Piaget, 1964).

Lawrence Kohlberg developed Piaget's theory by introducing more detailed stages of moral development. Kohlberg divided morality into three levels, namely pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. At the pre-conventional level, children obey rules to avoid punishment or gain rewards. The conventional level is characterized by obedience to rules in order to maintain social relationships and approval from others. While the post-conventional level involves critical thinking about universal moral principles, such as justice and human rights. Kohlberg emphasized that this moral development does not occur automatically, but requires stimulation through discussion and value-based learning (Kohlberg, 1963; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977).

Meanwhile, Martin L. Hoffman emphasized the importance of empathy in children's moral development. He explained that the ability to feel the emotions of others encourages children to act prosocially. Hoffman divides empathy into several stages, starting from global empathy in infants to more complex empathy at school age. Children who develop with good empathy tend to have a sense of caring for others and act to reduce their suffering. He also emphasized the importance of a supportive environment, such as family and school, in developing children's empathy. With empathy as a foundation, children not only understand moral values but also feel encouraged to practice them in everyday life (Hoffman, 1996). Therefore, moral education must include activities that strengthen children's empathy and social relationships.

Jonathan Haidt expands the understanding of morality through the theory of social intuition. According to Haidt, moral decisions are often influenced by emotional intuition before logical reasoning occurs. He identified five main dimensions of morality, namely caring, fairness, group loyalty, authority, and sanctity. These dimensions form a framework of moral intuition that varies across cultures but has a universal basis. The social environment plays an important role in shaping this moral intuition, including the influence of parents, peers, and local culture. By utilizing social intuition, children can more easily understand abstract moral values (Haidt, 2013). In early childhood education, the introduction of moral values can be done through a project approach.

The project approach is a learning method that emphasizes in-depth exploration of a topic through active involvement of children. This approach involves structured investigations in which children independently or together explore questions relevant to their lives. This process involves observation, data collection, and representation of knowledge developed through activities such as discussions, field trips, and experiments. The project approach helps children understand various knowledge logically, tangibly and in an active way (Katz et al., 2014).

At the PAUD level, the project approach can be applied through various activities such as exploration, experiments, and field visits. Projects emphasize the active participation of children in planning, developing, and evaluating their own work. Project topics in PAUD are taken from the child's environment and are based on the child's interests and curiosity (Katz et al., 2014). For example, for children living in rural areas, project topics can be plants, gardens, rice fields, and so on. The project approach stage begins with the determination of the project topic by the child and teacher. Next, children share initial experiences related to the topic by asking questions and making predictions. The teacher helps prepare the initial plan, including determining the data sources needed. Next, the project implementation stage by carrying out activities such as field visits and literacy games to obtain new information related to the topic (Christianti, 2021). The final stage is to reflect on what has been learned by sharing findings through displays, exhibitions, and presentations. "Project Approach" learning is expected to be able to improve the development of language as well as religious and moral values in early childhood. Providing moral and religious values to early childhood can contribute to the formation of a dignified and civilized society (Safitri et al., 2019). The importance of methods that focus on behavioral development to support the moral development of early childhood has a very vital role (Juhriati & Rahmi, 2021). Interaction with peers through play can increase children's moral commitment and empathy, so that children have an attitude that cares about their peers (Hashim et al., 2021). Based on the gap of previous research using projects, but not based on the theory of Lilian G. Katz. Then, there is also research that applies project-based learning to improve cognitive understanding, and interaction with peers in social terms. There has been no research that measures the influence of the project approach by Lilian G. Katz which uses 5 steps, namely: topic identification, project plan, investigation, representation, presentation and reflection. Then there has also been no research on the influence of the project approach in terms of religious and moral values and language of early childhood. So the purpose of this study is to determine the influence of the implementation of the project approach based on Lilian G. Katz's theory in the development of religious and moral values and language of early childhood.

METHODS

This study used a mixed-methods design embedded simultaneously (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) to examine how the Project Approach affects children's language, moral and religious development through a project to Gajahwong fish farming in Yogyakarta. To assess children's moral development, this study used the CERMAT application developed by Syamsuddin et al. (2021). This instrument was specifically selected because it has been validated to measure moral values in early childhood education in the Indonesian context, with a reliability coefficient of 0.89. CERMAT evaluates eight basic moral values: adaptability, discipline, honesty, self-confidence, caring, politeness, responsibility, and tolerance. These values are further described into 32 indicators that are very important for the moral development of early childhood and are in line with the objectives of project-based learning. Meanwhile, to assess language development, it will focus on several indicators such as telling learning experiences, having opinions about something that is liked, and telling events according to what the child sees.



Figure 1. CERMAT Application

The decision to use CERMAT was based on several important considerations. First, the instrument has been specifically designed and validated for the context of early childhood education in Indonesia, making it culturally appropriate for the study population. Second, its comprehensive coverage of eight moral values provides a framework for observing children's moral development during project activities. Third, the instrument's high reliability coefficient (0.89) ensures consistent and reliable measurement across different observation periods and contexts. In addition, the structure of CERMAT allows for systematic observation of children's behavior in a natural setting, making it very suitable for project-based learning activities such as visits to Gajahwong fish farming and subsequent activities. The CERMAT application also contains indicators to measure early childhood language skills both before and after carrying out the "Project Approach" activity.

Qualitative data collection was the primary method, while quantitative data collection through CERMAT was conducted during the same implementation period. The study was conducted at ABA MUSHOLLA Kindergarten, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, involving 11 children aged 4-6 years in Class B. The integration of CERMAT into the project approach allowed for systematic observation and documentation of children's moral and language development. During the project implementation, CERMAT was used to assess children's moral and language development through structured observations before the project, ongoing observations during project activities, and post-project evaluations. Each of the 32 specific behavioral indicators outlined in the CERMAT framework was observed in depth. The use of CERMAT complemented qualitative observations by providing a standard framework for assessing moral and language development. CERMAT offers a structured approach to measuring specific behaviors and their development over time. This combination of methods allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how the Project Approach influences early childhood moral and language development.

Data collection involved daily observations using the CERMAT checklist, alongside more detailed qualitative field notes, photographs, and video recordings of key moments. Researchers directly used CERMAT to ensure consistent and reliable observations across project activities. The instrument's clear behavioral indicators helped maintain objectivity in assessing children's moral and language development, while still allowing for the rich contextual data that is a hallmark of project-based learning. Data analysis followed a two-pronged approach: quantitative analysis of CERMAT scores to track changes in moral and language development, and qualitative analysis of observational data to provide context and depth to these measures. Integrating both types of data during analysis provided a more

complete picture of how the project approach impacted children's moral and language development, with CERMAT providing a structured framework for measuring specific moral and language or vocabulary behaviors, while qualitative data provided insight into the processes and contexts that facilitated these developments.

RESULT

Data on children's moral and language achievement were processed using the Cermat application with 32 indicators that were scored from 1-10 for each indicator, the achievement indicators include: 1) Children greet friends, 2) Children respond to greetings from friends, 3) Children shake hands with friends, 4) Children play with friends, 5) Children express feelings of happiness, 6) Children carry out activities according to teacher's instructions, 7) Children obey class rules, 8) Children come to school on time, 9) Children throw garbage in its place, 10) Children are willing to listen to the teacher's explanation, 11) Children are willing to queue according to their turn, 12) Children give something using their right hand, 13) Children receive gifts using their right hand, 14) Children listen to advice from parents, 15) Children speak kindly to peers, 16) Children offer help to friends, 17) Children are willing to share something with friends, 18) Children pick up scattered garbage, 19) Children help friends when they are in trouble, 20) Children are willing to tell about today's learning experiences, 21) Children are willing to express their opinions about something they like, 22) Children put something in its place, 23) Children tidy up toys after use, 24) Children wash their hands after activities, 25) Children clean the playground after use, 26) Children play with friends without being picky, 27) Children appreciate their friends' work, 28) Children borrow their friends' belongings with their permission, 29) Children tell events according to what they see, 30) Children eat and drink without help from others, 31) Children urinate and clean themselves, and 32) Children can take care of themselves. The achievement of children's moral values and language skills was then analyzed statistically using SPSS 23, the following analysis results were obtained:

Table 1. Results of Moral Value Measurement Using the CERMAT Instrument at ABA MUSHOLLA Kindergarten Yogyakarta (N=11)

Moral Value	Pre-Project	During Project	Post-Project	Change (%)
Adaptability	70.1	73.4	80.1	+10.0
Discipline	70.2	75.9	84.3	+14.1
Honesty	69.9	72.4	78.6	+8.70
Self-Confidence	64.6	71.2	79.4	+14.8
Caring	68.5	70.4	82.1	+13.6
Courtesy	73.1	75.8	80.7	+7.60
Responsibility	68.5	70.4	77.4	+8.90
Tolerance	69.8	72.8	79.9	+10.1
Average	68.5	72.2	79.5	+11.0

Table 2. Results of Language Ability Measurement Using CERMAT Instrument Indicators at ABA MUSHOLLA Kindergarten Yogyakarta (N=11)

Language Skill	Pre-Project	During Project	Post-Project	Change (%)
Having an opinion about something they like	69.1	72.7	81.9	+12.8
Telling today's learning experience	71.4	76.5	82.8	+11.4
Telling stories based on observations	67.8	71.2	79.8	+12.0
Average	69.0	73.0	80.4	+11.4

At ABA Musholla Kindergarten, the project theme focused on fish, which began with children's interest in the food they eat. Teachers used this moment to develop discussions about fish, with children sharing personal experiences, such as feeding fish or seeing them in the pond. The project continued with a visit to the Gajahwong fish tourism site, which allowed children to see various types of fish directly and learn more about their way of life. The interaction between children, where they shared knowledge and experiences, enriched the learning process. Here, the Project Approach was applied to explore the topic in a fun way, motivating children to ask more questions and develop their curiosity. Children also developed social, communication, and problem-solving skills, which also supported their moral development through cooperation and appreciation of others' perspectives.

DISCUSSION

Preschool children have intention-oriented moral values. Moral values are directed towards family members primarily. Children demonstrate moral values in relationships with older individuals. Children associate moral values with nature and plants (Yalçın, 2021). Peer interactions encourage communication, negotiation, and empathy among children (Hashim et al., 2021). Games encourage commitment and adherence to rules among players. Children help each other in completing game tasks.

The implementation of project learning through the Gajahwong fish farm visit project showed a significant positive effect on children's moral and language development, as evidenced by an overall increase in all eight moral values measured by the CERMAT instrument. Quantitative data in Table 1 shows an average overall increase of 11.0% from pre-project to post-project assessments, with self-confidence showing the highest increase (14.8%), followed by discipline (14.1%) and caring (13.6%). This systematic increase validates the important role of the early years in forming basic understandings of right and wrong. The findings also support that project learning not only improves cognitive skills but also fosters moral values through hands-on activities and real-world problem solving. When

analyzed through Piaget's theory of moral development, this increase reflects children's development from heteronomous morality to autonomous morality.

Meanwhile, in the language ability indicator, there were also some improvements. First, the ability of children to express their opinions about something they like got a percentage of 12.8%, second, telling events according to children's observations of 12.0% and third, telling today's learning experience of 11.4%. Through the "Project Approach" learning, children have better language skills and come up with new vocabulary. This can be seen from the following description:

Table 3. Description of Children's Language Ability through Lilian G. Katz's "Project Approach"

No	"Project Approach" Stages	Descriptions
1.	Topic Identification	Topic Identification The children actively discussed with the teacher about their interests. Some mentioned liking colors, food, and fish. At that time the children agreed to discuss further about the topic of fish.
2.	Project Planning	Project Planning Teachers and children discuss together regarding the project to be implemented such as: resource persons, location of the visit, transportation to the location, and anything else they want to know.
3.	Investigation or Inquiry	Children's and teacher visited the Gajahwong fish farming location located not far from the school. Children have high curiosity about fish food, what types of fish, what colors of fish, how to care for fish. Children asked directly to the manager of the place.
4.	Representation	After visiting, children represent their new experiences and knowledge through their work. Children decorate the fish aquarium in groups. There are 3 groups consisting of 3 people, and 4 people in 1 group.
5.	Presentation and Reflection	Children present their work. Before the project, children were very shy when asked, but after participating in the

"project approach" learning, children had the courage and ability to speak. Children were able to explain the results of the fish aquarium work that they had completed.

Next, the teacher and children reflected on feelings, interests, and development of learning activities.

Children have a sense of responsibility to complete this project activity from start to finish. Responsibility can be defined as awareness of one's own behavior or any kind of circumstances within one's authority and bearing the consequences of one's actions and deeds. In addition, people are expected to take moral and legal responsibility for their own actions and circumstances within their authority. Responsibility is an active aspect of morality. The concept of responsibility is demonstrated by caring and concern for oneself and others, fulfilling obligations, participating in social processes, trying to alleviate suffering, and striving for a better world (Glover, 1972). The subjects of the study demonstrated behavior about the value of responsibility with actions such as cleaning up equipment after finishing being creative at school, keeping their classrooms clean and tidy, and returning items and toys to their places.

Children's religious and moral values (NAM) data can be analyzed through Jean Piaget's theory of moral development, which consists of heteronomous and autonomous stages (Piaget, 1964). In the heteronomous stage, children see rules as absolute and follow them without understanding the context. These children tend to obey the rules without understanding the meaning or value behind them, so their understanding of moral concepts such as honesty and empathy is still limited. In contrast, in the autonomous stage, children begin to understand that rules can be flexible and consider the intention and impact of actions. They show a deeper understanding of moral and religious values, and are able to apply them in everyday life by considering the impact on others. It appears that many children are in transition from the heteronomous to the autonomous stage. These children begin to understand moral values, but still need support to internalize them better. Education plays an important role in children's moral development. As emphasized by Piaget, social experiences and interactions are very important in supporting moral development. Interactive and experience-based educational strategies, such as role-playing, storytelling, or hands-on practice, can help them progress from the heteronomous to the autonomous stage. Teachers and parents need to collaborate to improve children's NAM achievements. Teachers can provide an individual approach and guide children according to their needs, while parents are expected to apply the values taught in school consistently at home. This approach will support children's holistic and sustainable moral development.

Kohlberg's moral development theory includes three levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional (Kohlberg, 1963; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Based on children's Religious and Moral Values (NAM) achievement data, their moral development can be mapped according to Kohlberg's three levels of moral theory: Pre-Conventional,

Conventional, and Post-Conventional. At the Pre-Conventional level, children tend to obey rules to avoid punishment or gain rewards. They may learn not to break religious rules because they fear negative consequences or because they want to get praise from adults. Their understanding of morality is still shallow, because the values underlying the rules are not yet fully understood by them. At the Conventional level, they begin to internalize moral values and behave well to gain social acceptance from peers or adults. Some children show a deeper understanding of the importance of rules in maintaining social order. These children begin to value religious and moral rules as something that needs to be followed not only to gain social acceptance, but because they understand the importance of contributing to the harmony of society.

At the Post-Conventional level, they not only obey religious rules but are also able to view moral values contextually. They understand that rules can change to reflect fairness and individual rights. Some children even show the ability to apply universal moral principles such as fairness and equality, although this stage is generally more common in adolescence or adulthood. Overall, the results indicate that most children are in transition between the Conventional and Post-Conventional levels. Children need supportive educational interventions to move from the Pre-Conventional to the Conventional level. By providing guidance that focuses on understanding deep values and forming positive social experiences, children can develop a morality that is not only based on obedience, but also reflects a higher appreciation of universal ethical and universal moral.

Children's moral development according to Hoffman's theory includes three main stages: early emotional responses, development of empathy, and deeper moral understanding (Hoffman, 1996). In the first stage, children show basic emotional responses to the suffering of others, such as feeling uncomfortable seeing a sad friend, but do not yet understand how to help. The second stage, development of empathy, is marked by children's ability to feel and understand the feelings of others, and realize the impact of their actions on others. In the third stage, namely deeper moral understanding, children are able to consider the perspectives of others and apply more complex moral principles. The majority of children are in the transition from the development of empathy to deeper moral understanding. Children in the low category need more attention to move from the stage of early emotional responses to the development of empathy through interactive, relevant education supported by parental involvement. This is important to help children understand and internalize moral values consistently.

Jonathan Haidt's moral theory includes five moral foundations, namely caring, justice, authority, sanctity, and loyalty (Haidt, 2013). The foundation of caring is reflected in empathy and attention to friends. The foundation of justice is seen in situations that begin to evaluate situations based on the principle of justice and try to act fairly. In terms of authority, children tend to obey rules based on authority without deep understanding. The foundation of sanctity involves respect for religious values, which may develop along with the level of moral understanding of the child. Meanwhile, the foundation of loyalty is reflected in children who show solidarity with their groups, such as friends and communities, through participation in social activities that strengthen group ties. These data indicate that children's

moral development reflects social, cultural, and educational influences in accordance with the moral foundations proposed by Haidt.

CONCLUSION

The study showed that the learning project had a significant impact on the moral development and language skills of young children, as evidenced by a comprehensive increase in eight moral values and 3 language skills indicators as measured by the CERMAT instrument, with an overall average increase of 11.0%. The highest increases were observed in self-confidence (14.8%), discipline (14.1%), and caring (13.6%), supporting and extending the existing theoretical frameworks of Piaget, Kohlberg, Hoffman, and Haidt. The study revealed that the learning project made a significant contribution to children's religious development, facilitating the development from basic to deeper religious understanding through the context of authentic experiences, as evidenced by an increase in adaptability and tolerance (10.0%) and responsibility (8.90%). Improvements were also shown in language development indicators such as having an opinion about something they like (12.8%), telling stories based on observations (12.0%) and telling today's learning experiences (11.4%). Several key factors influence the success of project learning in fostering these values, including internal factors such as structured and collaborative classroom activities, learning opportunities, and external factors such as involvement and environmental context

Research shows that project-based learning, when carefully implemented with attention to the cognitive and emotional aspects of development, creates an optimal environment for integrated moral, religious and language development in early childhood education, going beyond traditional theoretical boundaries and offering a more nuanced understanding of how structured learning experiences can systematically enhance the moral, spiritual and language growth of young children.

Project Approach By Lilian G. Katz is different from usual project learning, where in stage 3 (investigation) it is emphasized to visit the learning source directly, so that children can interact and gain in-depth knowledge. In schools, projects are usually carried out with teachers, or by bringing in resource persons only. This study proves that by coming directly to the learning source (outside school/outside the classroom) can develop religious and moral values and language in early childhood.

DECLARATIONS

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