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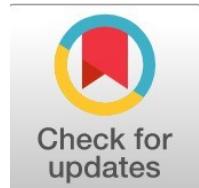
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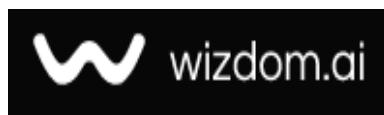
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Instilling Social Care Character in Children Aged 4–5 Years Through the IHF 9 Character Pillars Book

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Abstract

General Background Character education in early childhood is a critical foundation for developing prosocial behavior, particularly helping behavior as part of social-emotional development.**Specific Background** In Indonesian early childhood education settings, many children aged 4–5 years still demonstrate low initiative in sharing, cooperating, and assisting peers, partly due to the absence of structured and systematic learning media. **Knowledge Gap** Although the Indonesia Heritage Foundation (IHF) 9 Character Pillars Book is widely recognized in practice, empirical studies focusing on its use as a single, structured medium to instill the value of helping others remain limited. **Aims** This study aims to analyze the implementation process and outcomes of using the IHF 9 Character Pillars Book to cultivate helping behavior among Group A children aged 4–5 years in a formal early childhood education context. **Results** Using a descriptive qualitative case study approach at RA Al-Falah Tuban, the findings indicate that staged implementation of the IHF book—integrated into daily learning activities—was associated with observable improvements in children's willingness to help, share, and participate in cooperative tasks, with the proportion of children demonstrating spontaneous helping behavior increasing from initial observations to the end of the intervention period. **Novelty** This study provides in-depth evidence on the use of a standardized character education book as a focused medium for instilling helping values in early childhood. **Implications** The findings offer a practical, structured model for teachers to integrate story-based character education into routine classroom practices, while highlighting the importance of consistency between school and home environments.

Highlights:

- Staged classroom integration of character storybooks supported observable growth in children's prosocial actions.

- Teacher-guided reflection and role play facilitated the internalization of care and cooperation values.

- Consistency between educational settings and home practices emerged as a key supporting condition.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Character Education, Helping Behavior, IHF 9 Character Pillars, Storybook Media

Published date: 2026-01-05

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Introduction

Early childhood is a critical period (Golden Age) for the formation of an individual's character, where fundamental values such as helping each other can begin to be established.[1] Helping Behavior (Prosocial Behavior) Not Only Serves as an Indicator of Healthy Social-Emotional Development, but Also Is a Prerequisite for Building Collaboration and Empathy Skills in the Future.[2] In the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language, Helping Means Assisting to Ease the Burden (Suffering, Difficulty, etc.), Helping in Doing Something, Which Can Be in the Form of Assistance of Effort, Time, or Funds. Helping is an Action Aimed at Producing Benefits for Others. Helping Behavior is also Defined as an Action That Benefits Others Without Necessarily Benefiting the Helper Directly, and Sometimes Even Poses Risks to the Helper.[3]

In the context of national education, character strengthening is also emphasized in Permendikbud No. 137 of 2014, where values such as mutual cooperation and teamwork are included within the scope of social attitude development for early childhood. However, the reality in many early childhood education institutions is often far from ideal and expectations.[4] Preliminary observations conducted by the researcher at RA Al Falah in September showed that out of 15 children in Group A, more than 50% still did not show initiative on their own and still needed to be constantly reminded to help tidy up toys after playing, share toys, and help the educator clean up food crumbs after eating their meals. These symptoms are apparent from their minimal initiative to share toys, reluctance to help friends who have fallen, and difficulty participating in group activities.[5]

Teachers acknowledge that efforts to instill character values so far have been sporadic and lack support from systematic learning media. Addressing this gap requires appropriate educational interventions, one of which is through learning media. Early childhood cognitive development theory emphasizes that children learn most effectively through stories and concrete simulations.[6] In this context, storybook media specifically designed for character education has become a necessity. The book "9 Pillars of Character" developed by the Indonesia Heritage Foundation (IHF) emerges as a potential medium and an ideal alternative. The book "9 Pillars of Character" developed by the Indonesia Heritage Foundation (IHF) serves as a potential medium; it not only presents interactive stories but is also curated based on nine pillars of universal values integrated with Indonesian local wisdom, tailored to the needs of shaping the character of the nation's children, including the points I will highlight within it, namely the values of care and helping others.[7]

Character education in early childhood aims to instill basic moral and ethical values. According to Lickona (1991), ch Character education involves deliberate efforts to develop virtues that are beneficial for individuals and society. Helping each other, as a form of prosocial behavior, is a core component. It emphasizes that early childhood is a sensitive period for developing empathy and prosocial tendencies, which form the foundation of helping behavior. In Indonesia, this aligns with the mandate of the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 137 of 2014 concerning the National Standards for Early Childhood Education, which includes social attitudes such as cooperation and helping each other.[9]

Although the IHF curriculum and philosophy are well known in the field of early childhood education, academic studies specifically exploring the implementation and effectiveness of IHF books as a single tool for instilling specific values, such as helping others, are still very limited. Most previous research tends to discuss character education in general or the effectiveness of storytelling methods without focusing on standardized media. Therefore, this study was conducted to fill that gap by taking the IHF 9 Character Pillars Book as the main object of study to analyze in depth its implementation in instilling the value of helping others in early childhood. This study is expected to provide empirical evidence and practical models that can serve as references for early childhood education practitioners. The focus of this research is to analyze the effectiveness and implementation process of the '9 Pillars of Character' book media from the Indonesia Heritage Foundation (IHF) as a means to instill the character value of helping (cooperation and helpful behavior) in early childhood (ages 4-5) within a formal education setting (kindergarten/RA).

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. This design was chosen to obtain a comprehensive and in-depth picture of the implementation process, challenges, and observed outcomes when using the IHF 9 Character Pillars Book in a real classroom setting (Group A, RA Al-Falah Tuban). This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach aligns with understanding phenomena holistically in a real context. The case study design allows an in-depth exploration of the process of implementing the IHF book media in the specific context of Group A at RA Al-Falah, Tuban. Furthermore, the subjects of this study are children in Group A (aged 4-5 years) at RA Al-Falah, Tuban, East Java, totaling 15 children. This study was conducted over a three-month period in the odd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The selection of this subject is based on the consideration that early age is a critical period for character formation, allowing researchers to observe the development and changes in children's behavior continuously.[10]

Learning media, especially storybooks, play a vital role in early childhood education. They state that stories help children understand the world, develop language, and internalize values. Picture books with colorful illustrations and narratives close to the child's world make abstract moral concepts more concrete and easier for young children to understand.[11] The use of books specifically designed for character education, such as the IHF 9 Pillars of Character Book, provides a structured and systematic framework for teachers, going beyond merely telling sporadic stories.

Data collection techniques were carried out using triangulation to improve the validity and reliability of the data. Triangulation was carried out by combining several data collection techniques as follows:

Passive Participant Observation: The researcher acts as an observer involved in the research setting but does not fully or directly intervene in all learning activities. Observation is conducted in a structured manner using an observation sheet containing indicators of helping behavior, such as spontaneity in helping friends, sharing toys, and following cooperation instructions. The initial phase of the research begins with observing the environment and children's behavior to identify habits and specific problems targeted for intervention.

In-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Group A class teachers and the RA principal. The purpose was to explore their perceptions, experiences, and challenges faced during the implementation process of the IHF book, as well as their views on changes in children's behavior. In-depth interviews were also conducted with parents to further investigate the challenges of inconsistencies between habits in the school environment and habits at home.

This technical documentation study is used to collect supporting data from various documents such as activity photos, video recordings of role-playing sessions, children's work (portfolios), and Daily Learning Implementation Plans (RPPH) that have integrated the values of mutual assistance from the IHF book. The implementation strategy is designed systematically and integrated into daily learning activities. The IHF storybooks used are selected through a strict selection process, where the stories that most strongly highlight the value of mutual assistance and are considered most potential for classroom problem-solving are chosen as the main stimulus.

Results and Discussion

A. Characteristics of Children in Group A Aged 4-5 Years

Children aged 4-5 years, who are included in group A, are at a unique stage of social-emotional development, characterized by the transition from parallel play to more complex cooperative interaction.[12] The main characteristics in this phase include a still prominent egocentrism, a short attention span, and a strong curiosity about their social environment children at this age are in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where prosocial abilities such as sharing and helping can be optimally developed through guidance from adults or more competent peers. At RA Al-Falah, initial observations show that the majority of children still tend to engage in solitary play and demonstrate limitations in the initiative to help, share, and regulate emotions when facing conflicts. This aligns with findings from previous research at RA Darul Hidayah, which stated that early childhood children have characteristics such as a love for fantasy, strong curiosity, but also show egocentric behavior.[13] This condition serves as an important foundation in designing interventions that are appropriate for the child's developmental stage.

B. Challenges in Implementation

Based on initial observations and interviews, several fundamental obstacles in developing orderly habits have been identified:

1. Challenges in the Aspect of Children's Socio-Emotional Development: The majority of students are still in the individual play phase (solitary play) and show limitations in prosocial skills, such as sharing, helping, and cooperating with friends or teachers.

2. Contextual Constraints (Environmental Inequality): There is a significant disparity between parenting patterns in the school environment and those at home. At school, rules are established participatively through mutual agreement, whereas at home, consistent structure and limit-setting are generally not applied. This condition makes children more compliant with teachers than with their parents.

3. Level of Achievement of Initial Orderly Habits: Out of 15 subjects, only 5 children (33.3%) have met the indicators of orderly habits. These indicators include the ability to share, show empathy, and regulate emotions well, such as not displaying anger (tantrums) when their desires are not fulfilled. On the other hand, the remaining 10 children (66.7%) still predominantly engage in solitary play, have not shown social concern, and continue to experience difficulties in managing emotions and impulses.

C. Planning and Implementation of the IHF 9 Character Pillars Book in the Concept of Helping Each Other

The implementation planning is carried out systematically through the integration of the value of helping each other into the Daily Learning Implementation Plan (RPPH), referring to the planning model that has been applied at RA Darul Hidayah Book 9 of IHF Character Pillars, particularly the fifth pillar 'Generous, Helpful, and Cooperative,' which is used as the core medium. The operational stages applied are: (1) Introduction of the story and characters; (2) Storytelling using expressive techniques to build empathy; (3) Reflection and Discussion to connect the story with real experiences; (4) Hands-on Practice through role play and collaborative tasks; and (5) Reinforcement with praise and positive reinforcement whenever children demonstrate helping behaviors.[14] Implementation is carried out using a habit formation method integrated into the classroom routine, such as encouraging children to tidy up toys together, help friends who have fallen, or share snacks. This approach aligns with research at RA Darul Hidayah, which emphasizes the importance of programmed habits and teacher role modeling in instilling character values. Teachers act as facilitators and role models who consistently demonstrate and guide helpful behaviors in daily interactions.

D. Indicators of Success for Group A Children According to the IHF Book 'Helping Each Other'

The implementation of instilling the character of helping others in early childhood through the media of the 9 Character Pillars book from IHF aims to develop empathy and care for others. The achievement indicators are measured based on the child's ability to apply the values of helping others in various social situations involving interactions with friends, teachers, and people around them. The following is a description of the level of success of the implementation with the established achievement indicators:

1. Children can comfort friends who are sad: Success Level: The child demonstrates the ability to provide emotional support to a friend who is feeling sad. This is achieved by observing the child actively trying to make their friend feel better, for example by speaking gently or inviting them to play to distract the sad friend by engaging them in play.

2. A child can help a friend who has fallen: Level of Achievement: The child shows a quick and appropriate response by providing physical assistance to a friend who has fallen. A child who successfully meets this indicator helps by fetching medicine, betadine, or a bandage when a friend falls.

3. Children can help friends who are sick: Level of Achievement: Children show a caring attitude when their friends are feeling unwell. Children who meet this indicator are able to demonstrate care through simple actions, such as bringing baby oil to the school health unit (UKS) or accompanying a friend in the UKS.

4. Children can help their younger siblings Success Level: The child shows willingness to assist their younger sibling with light tasks, such as accompanying and watching over them while they play. A child who meets this indicator demonstrates a sense of responsibility towards their sibling and often exhibits more patience when helping.

5. Children can help teachers in the classroom: Level of Success: Children show concern for classroom tasks by assisting teachers in daily activities, such as distributing books, organizing stationery, or helping to maintain classroom cleanliness. Success is achieved when children actively participate in activities that support the smooth running of the teaching and learning process.

6. Children can help carry items: Success Level: Children show a helpful attitude by assisting in carrying items, whether they belong to friends or teachers. This is achieved when children demonstrate a willingness to offer help without being asked and do so sincerely.

7. Children like to share cakes or snacks with friends: Success Level: The child is able to share food or snack cakes with friends happily, without being told by the educator.

8. Children like to share cakes or snacks with friends: Success Level: The child is able to share food or snack cakes with friends happily, without being told by the educator.

E. Research Progress Evaluation

Developmental evaluation is conducted continuously through the triangulation of observation, interview, and documentation study techniques. In the initial observation, only 5 out of 15 children (33.3%) demonstrated spontaneous helping behavior indicators. After three months of intervention, there was a significant increase, with 12 children (80%) showing progress in aspects such as willingness to help friends, readiness to share, and participation in group activities. Data were collected through anecdotal notes, portfolios of children's work, and structured observation reports. The evaluation also involved feedback from teachers and parents through in-depth interviews, which revealed increased children's awareness of the value of helping others, although consistency between school and home environments is still needed. These findings are consistent with the evaluation system at RA Darul Hidayah, which uses observation, conversation, performance, and anecdotal notes to assess the internalization of values.

The findings of this study confirm Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory, which emphasizes that children's social abilities develop through interactions with more competent social environments. Individual play constraints and low prosocial skills indicate that many children have not yet entered the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) for orderly, collaborative behavior. Furthermore, the disparity between parenting patterns at school and at home clarifies Bandura's (1997) findings on the importance of consistent models and rules in social learning. This inconsistency hinders the process of internalizing norms and generalizing behavior. The low percentage of children who are disciplined (33.3%) in the initial observation reflects the complexity of building a disciplined character, which requires an integrated approach involving cognition, emotion, and social context. The success observed in a small number of children indicates that the indicators used (sharing, emotional regulation) have been valid and can serve as measurable intervention goals. Therefore, the strategies implemented must be multidimensional, not only targeting behavioral changes at school but also involving parents to create a synergistic home environment that supports the consistent application of rules to optimally shape the character of early childhood children.[15].

Conclusion

The development of orderly habits in Group A children faces multidimensional challenges, stemming from internal factors

related to the child's socio-emotional development (individual play phase, low prosocial skills) and external factors in the form of inconsistency in parenting patterns between the structured school environment and the permissive home environment. The initial achievement of orderly habits is in the low category, with only 33.3% of subjects meeting the indicators. The majority of children, 66.7%, still require systematic intervention to develop self-regulation skills and social awareness. The success demonstrated by the minority group of 5 children proves that the established success indicators. The ability to share and control emotions is an appropriate and essential construct as a foundation for orderly behavior. This also confirms that the behavioral target can be achieved within this age group. The theoretical and practical implications of this study emphasize the need for a collaborative and ecosystemic approach. The success of programs to develop orderly habits requires the integration of school-based pedagogical strategies focused on guided social interaction with parenting education programs to create continuity and reinforcement of disciplinary values in both caregiving environments.

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