

The Integration of Aswaja NU Values and Kohlberg's Theory as the Foundation of Early Childhood Moral Education in Indonesia: A Conceptual Study

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Abstrak: Artikel ini mensintesis teori perkembangan moral menurut Lawrence Kohlberg dengan nilai-nilai Aswaja NU dan praktik bimbingan-konseling (BK) sebagai model konseptual pendidikan moral anak usia dini di Indonesia. Tujuan dari makalah ini adalah untuk merumuskan kerangka integratif yang menggabungkan rasionalitas moral (Kohlberg) dengan dimensi spiritual-budaya Aswaja NU melalui media pelaksanaan pelayanan BK di PAUD dan sekolah dasar. Metode yang digunakan adalah tinjauan sistematis berdasarkan PRISMA 2015–2025 pada basis data bereputasi, dilanjutkan dengan penyaringan, penilaian kualitas, dan analisis konten dengan pengkodean tematik 35 artikel jurnal dan 5 bab buku yang relevan. Hasilnya menunjukkan: (1) tahap prakonvensional anak menjadi landasan penalaran moral yang perlu dirangsang melalui pengalaman sosial-reflektif; (2) Nilai-nilai Aswaja (tawassuth, tawazun, tasamuh, i'tidal, amar ma'ruf nahi munkar, rahmah) melengkapi bias individualistis-sekuler dalam kerangka Kohlberg; (3) layanan BK klasik, kelompok, dan individu efektif dalam menginternalisasi nilai-nilai melalui dialog, contoh, pembiasaan, dan penguatan perilaku. Kesimpulan: Integrasi Kohlberg–Aswaja–BK menghasilkan model "Konseling Moral Berbasis Aswaja" yang holistik, kontekstual, dan aplikatif yang holistik, kontekstual, dan aplikatif untuk memperkuat pendidikan karakter dan moderasi beragama pada anak usia dini di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: *Pengembangan Moral, Aswaja NU, Bimbingan Dan Konseling, Anak Usia Dini, Pendidikan Karakter*

Abstract: This article synthesizes the theory of moral development according to Lawrence Kohlberg with the values of Aswaja NU and the practice of guidance-counseling (BK) as a conceptual model of early childhood moral education in Indonesia. The purpose of the paper is to formulate an integrative framework that combines moral rationality (Kohlberg) with the spiritual-cultural dimension of Aswaja NU through the medium of implementing BK services in PAUD and elementary schools. The method used is a systematic review based on PRISMA 2015–2025 on reputable databases, followed by screening, quality assessment, and content analysis with thematic coding of 35 journal articles and 5 relevant book chapters. The results show: (1) the child's preconventional stage becomes the foundation of moral reasoning that needs to be stimulated through social-reflective experiences; (2) Aswaja values (tawassuth, tawazun, tasamuh, i'tidal, amar ma'ruf nahi munkar, rahmah) complement the individualistic-secular bias in the Kohlberg framework; (3) classical, group, and individual BK services are effective in internalizing values through dialogue, example, habituation, and behavior reinforcement. Conclusion: Kohlberg–Aswaja–BK integration produces a holistic, contextual, and applicative "Aswaja-Based Moral Counseling" model that is holistic,



contextual, and applicative to strengthen character education and religious moderation in early childhood in Indonesia.

Keywords: Moral Development, Aswaja NU, Guidance And Counseling, Early Childhood, Character Education

Introduction

"A student of the Vocational High School in Lamongan Regency, East Java, was desperate to end the life of his close friend from one school. This murder was motivated by rejected love." (TV, 2025). Data from the Cyber Investigation Directorate of the Metro Jaya Police in ("The Rise of Child Pornography Content, KPAI Urges Parents to Be Vigilant and Play an Active Role," 2025) found as many as 1237 content containing pornography and 689 of them containing child pornography with an age range between 5 and 12 years. Other examples of (McLoughlin & Kristjánsson, 2025) In his research, it was revealed that the current moral condition of children requires a deeper understanding in order to support their overall well-being. This finding shows the weak internalization of character values in the midst of the rapid flow of digitalization of the lives of children and adolescents. This incident is not just an ordinary crime, but reflects a moral crisis and failure in emotional control in adolescents. This phenomenon shows how weak the values of empathy, compassion, and the ability to solve problems wisely are among the younger generation.

The research entitled "Moral and ethical crisis among the young generation in Indonesia in the perspective of teachers" (Aisyah & Fitriatin, 2025) also arouses our conscience, at least this is also a Takeline which shows that the morale of the generation in Indonesia is not good. In addition, "According to Wijayanti and Abdurrahman (2025), the moral crisis experienced by the young generation of Indonesia is a reflection of the failure of the education system in shaping human beings with character" (Benu, 2025). The statement emphasized that education has not fully succeeded in instilling strong moral values and character in the younger generation. This phenomenon can be seen from the increase in deviant behavior among adolescents such as the cases above and the low level of social empathy, consumptive behavior, verbal violence on social media, as well as decreased respect for parents and teachers.

Various studies show that moral and character education should start from an early age because the pre-school period to the beginning of elementary school is a crucial period in the formation of values, empathy, and self-control. For example, research in Indonesia by (Rukiyati et al., 2020) shows that in early childhood in kindergarten institutions in the Yogyakarta and Central Java regions, there are nine moral values that develop through daily habituation (religiosity, honesty, discipline, tolerance, social concern, respect, patience, confidence, and independence) through methods such as examples, stories, dialogue, and social visits.

Another study examining early childhood moral development through a project-based curriculum that integrates theories such as Lawrence Kohlberg's, shows that groups of kindergartners who implement project-based learning report significant improvements in aspects of empathy, justice and social responsibility (Leonía & Candra, 2025).

This condition is important because if moral education is not cultivated from an early age, then when adolescence can occur, such as the murder case at vocational schools that I mentioned at the beginning. They are prone to failures in self-control, empathy and thoughtful conflict resolution. In addition, in the Indonesian context, the integration of religious and cultural values in moral education is still limited, so many early childhood children have not received deep and contextual value stimulation. For example, Margaretha & Haryono's (2024) research on family planning in Bengkulu shows that daily habituation 15-20 minutes before learning is very helpful in internalizing moral and religious values in early childhood (Margaretha & Haryono, 2024).

The moral crisis is actually rooted in the process of character education that does not start early. This reflects the weak process of internalizing moral values, The moral crisis is actually rooted in the process of character education that does not start early. (Lickona, 1991) explains that effective moral education should include three aspects: knowing the good, loving the good, and doing the good. Without the integration of the three, values such as empathy, responsibility, and compassion only stop at the level of knowledge, not become a habit of life. (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009) emphasizing that morals will not develop optimally without emotional involvement and social habituation from childhood.

Research conducted by (Ferdian Utama & Leli Fertilian Dea, 2023) shows that consistent habituation and moral example in the family from an early age play a major role in shaping children's character. This is in line with the opinion conveyed by (Nurjamilah, 2024) which states that the application of the values of honesty, responsibility, and compassion in learning activities in Kindergarten has a significant effect on children's moral development. Other research conducted by (Muallim Rifat Eğitim Fakültesi & Yalçın, 2021) which states that 4-5 year olds have already begun to have a perception of moral values such as compassion and responsibility, and they begin to practice these values in their family and social environment. Similarly (Shih, 2022) in her research in Taiwanese preschool states that preschool is a crucial period in which teachers can instill moral values and social empathy through story methods, image media, and behavioral examples. Therefore, if children are not guided consistently from an early age in recognizing moral values such as honesty, empathy, responsibility, and good manners, then in the future they have the potential to face difficulties in controlling behavior and understanding the boundaries of social ethics. As explained by (Lickona, 1991) a moral education framework that begins at an early age that teaches not only "knowing the good" but also "loving and doing good". By placing moral education from an early age as a foundation, this is in line with the direction of writing this research article directing children aged 4-6 years as a key phase of character formation.

In the context of national education, character strengthening cannot be separated from local religious and cultural values. Character education rooted in religious values and local wisdom has proven to be more effective in fostering sustainable social morality (Suyadi, 2024). (Tilaar, 1999) also emphasizes that education in Indonesia must return to the cultural and religious roots of the community, because that is where the moral strength of the nation lies. Considering the awareness of the importance of moral formation from an early age as the main foundation of character, the effort that needs to be made is to develop character education that is rooted in local (cultural) religious and cultural values.

Education based on religion and cultural wisdom is able to provide a deep meaning because these values have been firmly rooted in the social life of the Indonesian people. Research conducted by (Isom et al., 2021) shows that almost all PAUD institutions in 33 provinces in Indonesia have implemented religious education that is integrated with moral learning, where activities such as joint prayer, sharing, and daily manners are effective means of internalizing children's character values. Similarly, research (Sulastri, 2024) It was found that religious culture in schools such as the habit of greetings, shared worship activities, and affection-based social interaction contribute positively to the development of early childhood spiritual and social character.

In addition to religious values, the local culture-based approach also strengthens children's moral identity by making the social values of the community as a learning context. Study (Palenewen & Rozie, 2024) emphasized that the practice of character education in the Banjar community that instills the values of religiosity, tolerance, and mutual cooperation through local cultural activities is effective in shaping the character of children aged 4-6 years. Meanwhile, internationally, (Shih, 2022) emphasized that the integration of moral values and cultural traditions in Taiwanese preschools has been proven to help children understand and emulate social empathy and responsibility through storytelling, cultural arts, and simple religious practices. Thus, character education based on religious and cultural values not only forms good moral behavior, but also fosters a sense of identity, spirituality, and social attachment that is the foundation of a moral life in the future.

Although Western theories of moral development such as those of Kohlberg and Piaget have made important contributions to moral education by providing a systematic framework of the stages of moral development, this model was developed in the context of Western philosophy, where they tend to be secular, emphasizing aspects of rationality and justice, as well as individualism, so that they often lack account for the spiritual, cultural, and social collectivity dimensions in the the context of a religious society such as Indonesia. For example, it highlights that Kohlberg's theory has cultural bias and ethnocentrism, because its moral definitions and assumptions are heavily influenced by Western values, and it does not explain moral excellence and character development holistically. (Nurhayati, 2006). In the Indonesian context, research (Cholimah et al., 2024) It found that faith-based educational institutions place additional emphasis on religious practices (such as daily prayer) and moral value stories, while public institutions use more discussion and group activities without a religious basis, so there is a gap in the internalization of moral values between the two. Other research (Nurjamilah, 2024) It also shows that the internalization of values such as honesty,

responsibility, and compassion is greatly influenced by habituation methods, examples/examples, and religious activities in early childhood education. Therefore, Western moral theories need to be complemented by a moral approach that incorporates religious and cultural values to be more relevant and effective in Indonesian society.

Aswaja NU (Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah Nahdatul Ulama) is a moderate and contextual paradigm of Islamic ethics in Indonesia, rooted in the Sunni religious tradition that emphasizes the balance between adherence to the text of *sucu* and only being an internal doctor of the *pesantren*, but also pretending to be an inclusive social ethics, encouraging harmony, tolerance, and social justice. The core values are *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuth* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *I'tidal* (justice), these have become the social glue in a pluralistic society, as well as the foundation in combating extremism and radicalism (Haq et al., 2024). in line with the statement expressed by (Burhani, 2012) In Indonesia, ethical values rooted in moderate and cultural Islamic traditions are found in the paradigm of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja NU). Based on the research "Al-Tawassuṭ wa-l I'tidāl: The NU and Moderatism in Indonesian Islam", values such as *tawasuth* (moderation), *tawazun* (balance), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *i'tidal* (justice) became the pillars of social ethics developed by NU.

The Aswaja NU paradigm emphasizes the *fiqh al-waqi'* (understanding of reality) approach that allows the reinterpretation of religious values according to the modern context such as in the issues of pluralism, gender justice, and national life. In the critical interpretation of religious texts, Aswaja NU is able to develop active tolerance (dialogical tolerance) and dynamic morality, not only accepting differences, but also building a space for dialogue between religious communities. This is in accordance with the principles of the Republic of Indonesia and Pancasila which is recognized as *dar al-'ahd wasyaksiah* (the state of agreement and agreement), so that love for the homeland becomes part of faith (*Hubbulwathan minal Faith*) (Soemantri et al., 2024).

The implementation of Aswaja NU's values in the life of the nation is reflected in five principles: divinity, sovereignty, justice, equality, and deliberation, which are in line with the spirit of democracy and nationality. NU through its Aswaja consistently encourages a commitment to nationalism, non-violence, and local cultural accommodation, as formulated in the religious moderation indicator by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. With a cultural and educational approach, Aswaja NU continues to be a moral foundation in building a moderate society, not only in doctrine, but also in the practice of daily life (Haq et al., 2024). Another study on "Aswaja based local curriculum" by (Raffa'i et al., 2025) found that Aswaja values are practiced through routine habituation activities and integration in the character curriculum in Indonesian schools.

Guidance and Counseling (BK) plays a strategic role as an implementive path to internalize moral values and character in the school realm. BK services that are proactively designed and integrated with school programs can facilitate individual and group interventions that foster empathy, ethical awareness, and self-regulation skills, all of which are essential components in the moral formation of children and adolescents. Evidence from systematic studies shows that classroom-based interventions are effective in improving students' social-emotional competence and character values so that school counselors have a central position in value education programs in schools (Slaten et al., 2024).

In this context, guidance and counseling (BK) has the right position as an effective means to internalize moral values that are in line with the principles of Aswaja NU. If Aswaja has a role in instilling values through cultural and socio-religious approaches, then BK plays a role in instilling values through interpersonal processes that are reflective and transformative. BK helps individuals in recognizing, evaluating, and internalizing noble values that become guidelines in acting both in the personal, career, learning and social realms. Through the interaction of counselors and counselees, this process not only forms a cognitive moral understanding but also encourages the formation of ethical habits in daily life. Thus, BK can be a vehicle for contextual moral development, namely grounding religious and national values into the concrete experience of individuals and communities as the spirit of Aswaja which balances spiritual, rational, and social dimensions.

In the perspective of another view on the book (Cottone et al., 2021) Explain that counselors must be able to guide counselees in an effort to recognize and evaluate the values they believe in. In addition, values are an inseparable element in the counseling process in understanding deeply the content of the problems faced by the counselee and how the counselee chooses the right approach to counseling intervention and these values will influence their decisions and behaviors in the future.

In another perspective, morality counseling is the foundation of ethical counseling practices that affect the process of taking ethical putics. Counselors must integrate a moral orientation into their practice to ensure ethical decisions are made with the client's well-being and the broader implications of their actions in mind (Levitt & Aligo, 2013).

Counselors are encouraged to adopt a moral vision that emphasizes realistic well-being rather than an individualistic approach. This shift can help address the complexity of global interdependence and relational dynamics (Schuhmann, 2016). In a more in-depth analysis, we also need to consider the role of culture in guidance and counseling as in the journal (Xing & Zheng, 2025) highlighting the challenges counselors face in understanding and respecting their clients' cultural values. Counselors need to have a deep understanding of the client's cultural background and how it affects their values and decisions.

In a study conducted by (Teng, 2021) states that guidance and counseling play a crucial role in the moral development of individuals especially students. During a critical developmental period for young students, counselors play an important role in providing moral guidance. Likewise, character development, which includes moral standards and practices is fundamental in shaping behavior that is acceptable to society. School-based prevention models aimed at Character and moral education provide guidance for teachers and instructors that encourage healthy social communication, attitudes and values (Miller, 2023).

Mentorship and counseling is not just about providing solutions or advice but also about creating space for individuals to explore and discover their own values. In line with what was conveyed by (Ruppert, 2022) which emphasizes the importance of psychological assistance in helping individuals find meaning, hope and direction through reflective and creative processes. So that guidance and counseling are not just a means of solving problems but a means of forming the character and morality of individuals who are able to live ethically and contribute well to society. So that guidance and counseling have a great contribution in instilling moral values personally and socially. Through this process individuals not only learn about the values that are important to them but also how to apply them in their daily lives. With the right approach counselors can help their clients to become more ethical, responsible individuals and contribute positively to society. This process is not only beneficial to the individual but also to society as a whole which will ultimately create a better and more equitable environment.

Further empirical studies and meta reviews by (Merlin-Knoblich et al., 2025) emphasizing that the role of counselors is not only reactive (handling problems), but also proactive through value learning curricula, habituation activities, and prevention programs that instill daily moral norms. This kind of intervention is relevant to be applied alongside Aswaja NU's values (e.g., moderation, tolerance, balance), because BK facilitates reflective dialogue and collective practices that connect normative understanding with students' moral experiences. Thus, the integration of theoretical (Kohlberg) and cultural-religious (Aswaja NU) frameworks is most realistically implemented through the role of programmed BK at the PAUD and elementary school levels

This study was made with the aim of synthesizing the theoretical between Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of early childhood moral development, the values of Aswaja Nahdatul Ulama (NU) and the practice of guidance and counseling (BK) in the context of moral education and early childhood character formation in Indonesia. Kohlberg's theory of development in research (Nurhayati, 2006) emphasizes that the moral development of the individual takes place through cognitive stages that involve the ability to think rationally and reflective of universal moral principles such as justice and responsibility. Meanwhile, the values of Aswaja NU emphasize the importance of a balance between spiritual, rational, and social dimensions to form a moderate (tawasuth), tolerant (Tasamuh), and fair (I'tidal) personality. The integration between the two frameworks is relevant in the practice of guidance and counseling because counselors act as facilitators who help individuals interpret, understand and internalize moral values in the context of personal and social life. Through this research, it is hoped that it can find a conceptual foundation that strengthens the role of guidance and counseling as a forum for moral formation that is not only oriented towards moral rationality as explained by Kohlberg but also instills religious and cultural values that live in Indonesian society through the perspective of Aswaja NU.

Based on the above conceptual framework, this study seeks to answer the following questions: (RQ1) How can Kohlberg's theory of moral development be integrated with the values of Aswaja NU in early childhood education?; (RQ2) What are the most relevant values of Aswaja NU to shape the

character of early childhood in Indonesia?; (RQ3) How can guidance and counseling be an implementive medium of the integration of the two moral frameworks?

Method

This study applies the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to review relevant literature on the integration of Aswaja NU values and Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development in the context of early childhood moral education. Referring to the PRISMA guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018), this process is designed to identify the most relevant scientific articles to the research theme through systematic search, screening, and quality assessment.

The initial stage was carried out by searching literature on several reputable databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and Garuda, using a combination of keywords: "Aswaja NU", "Nahdlatul Ulama", "moral development", "Kohlberg", "Islamic values", "guidance and counselling", and "character education". The implementation of Boolean operators ("AND", "OR") is used to combine these key terms resulting in a more comprehensive search scope.

The search was conducted in the range of 2015–2025, including publications in Indonesian and English to ensure a representation of the latest research. The initial search yielded 55,309 documents related to the theme of Aswaja NU, 307 documents related to Kohlberg's theory of moral development, and 134 documents related to early childhood guidance and counseling.

The screening process is then carried out by narrowing down the types of documents in the form of scientific articles and academic books, the field of social sciences and psychology, and publications that have passed the "final publication" stage. The results of the screening yielded: 15 final articles for the theme of Aswaja NU and value education, 20 articles for the theme of Kohlberg's theory of moral development, and 19 articles for the theme of early childhood guidance and counseling. All selected articles were then re-evaluated based on the strength of evidence indicators, including the reputation of the journal (indexed by Scopus/Sinta), methodological clarity, topic relevance, and conceptual contribution to the development of moral education and counseling guidance. Articles that do not meet these standards are excluded from the analysis process.

The final data that has gone through the inclusion and exclusion stages is entered into a systematic worksheet (data extraction sheet) to be further analyzed using a content analysis approach with thematic coding techniques. The entire process is done in a transparent and documented manner, allowing this research to be replicated and verified by other researchers in the future. The PRISMA approach used in this study ensures that the results of the literature synthesis are transparent, measurable, and scientifically accountable, thus supporting the validity of the conceptual model prepared.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram (Literature Selection Process)

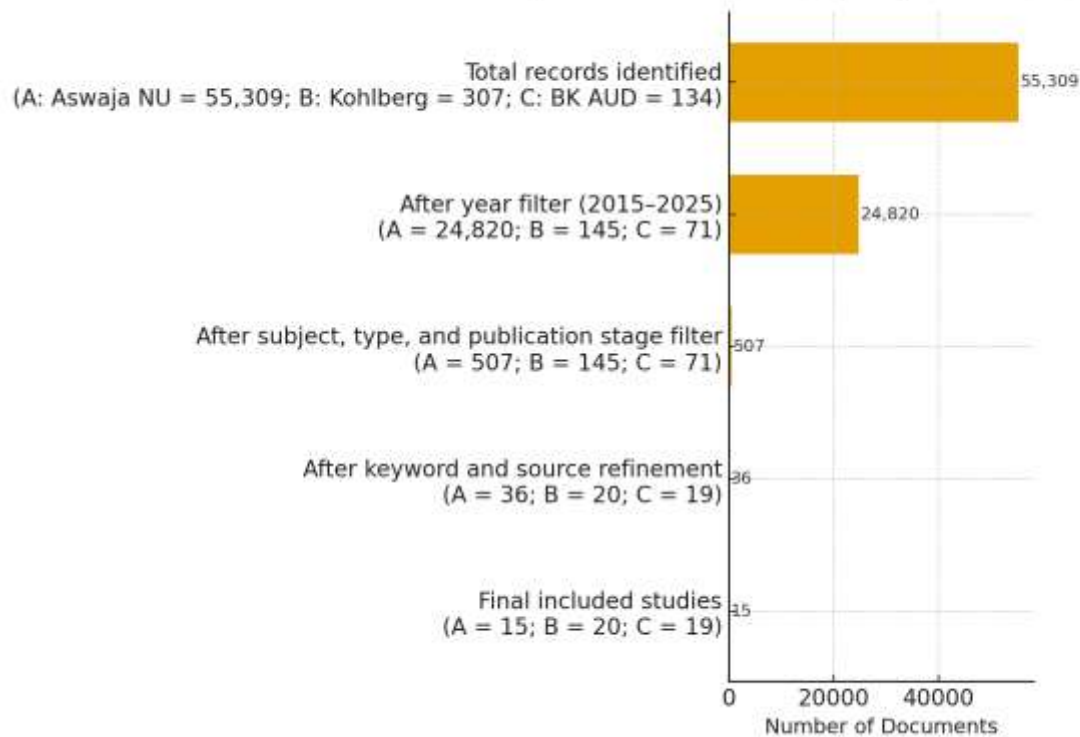


Fig 1. The PRISMA Flow Diagram shows the process of identification, screening, and selection of literature based on three main study focuses: the values of Aswaja NU, Kohlberg's theory of moral development, and early childhood counseling guidance.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of a literature synthesis conducted on 35 journal articles and 5 book chapters that are relevant to the theory of moral development, the ethical values of Aswaja Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and the practice of guidance and counseling (BK) in the context of early childhood education in Indonesia. The main purpose of this discussion is to integrate the three frameworks in order to build a conceptual model of moral education based on moderate Islamic values that is contextual with Indonesian culture.

The discussion was prepared to answer the following three research questions (RQ): (RQ1) How does Kohlberg's theory of moral development describe the formation of moral reasoning in early childhood?; (RQ2) Which of the values of Aswaja NU is the most relevant to be internalized in early childhood education?; (RQ3) How can the practice of guidance and counseling function as a medium of integration between moral theory and Aswaja values in the early childhood education environment?

To answer this question, this section is broken down into four main subthemes. The first subtheme examines Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development and its relevance to the formation of early childhood moral reasoning. The second subtheme discusses the values of Aswaja NU as the foundation of moderate Islamic ethics that can be adapted into the context of education. The third subtheme reviews the role of guidance and counseling as a medium for internalizing moral and spiritual values in early childhood learning. Finally, the fourth subtheme presents a conceptual synthesis that integrates the three approaches to form a holistic and distinctive Indonesian moral education framework.

Moral development according to Lawren Khalrberg in (R. Craig, 1974) view that children's moral reasoning is formed gradually along with their cognitive and social development. Kohlberg divides moral development into three main levels, namely pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. In the pre-conventional stage, children judge moral actions based on immediate consequences, such as rewards or punishments. This stage usually appears in early childhood (4–6 years), where the thinking pattern is still concrete and egocentric. This stage becomes an important foundation for the formation of higher moral reasoning in the future (Kohlberg, 1981). In the early stages, i.e. the pre-conventional level, children understand morality through the direct relationship

between actions and consequences True means praise or reward, while wrong means punishment (Bernard & Terjesen, 2021). This process is egocentric and concrete, but it is the initial foundation for the development of higher moral reasoning. The second is that the conventional resistance of social norms, group rules and human relationships begins to play a role in moral reasoning. So morality is determined by the desire to be accepted, to be a "good person" by the standards of the group. At the post-conventional level, individuals begin to think based on abstract principles such as justice, human rights, humanity and not just follow the rules because of the regulations (Ma, 2013).

Several contemporary studies reinforce this view. (Sinclair et al., 2019) It was found that social interactions such as shared reading practices can accelerate children's ability to understand moral values because children learn to recognize the meaning of actions through example and empathy. Similarly (Vandermaas-Peeler et al., 2019) asserts that parental guidance in household activities helps the child develop moral curiosity ("why something is good or bad") — which is in line with Kohlberg's version of the early-stage moral reasoning process. Moreover (Ponzetti, 2015) It shows that experiential moral education is more effective than normative teaching, because it stimulates children to reason about moral causes and effects independently. This view is also reinforced by (Uchitel et al., 2022) which emphasizes the importance of collaboration between educational institutions and families in ensuring optimal child development — including its moral and social dimensions.

The theory of moral development according to (Kohlberg, 1981) asserts that the moral development of individuals takes place through cognitive stages that develop from simple to complex, where early childhood moral understanding is at a pre-conventional stage (G. J. Craig & Dunn, 2010). In the context of early childhood education in Indonesia, a study by Evaluating Kohlberg's Theory in the Context of Indonesian Preschool Moral Learning (Arifiyanti, 2024) shows that although this theory is relevant, its application is not yet fully aligned with the practice of moral learning in Indonesian PAUD.

International research supports that shared experiences between parents/teachers and children (such as reading together) have a positive effect on a child's social-emotional development and self-control skills (Jimenez et al., 2019) For example, Jimenez et al. (2019) found that reading together at the age of one to three was associated with a reduction in harsh parenting practices that often triggered children's disruptive behaviors. Other studies such as (Lyons, 2024) suggests that structured play activities in the classroom also support the development of early childhood social-emotional competence, which is an important part of the early moral reasoning category.

The literature studies mentioned above show that Kohlberg's theory describes the formation of early childhood moral reasoning as a gradual process rooted in social experience and cognitive reflection. Children do not just imitate good behavior, but begin to build a rational understanding of values and rules through interaction with their parents, teachers, and social environment. This suggests that the pre-conventional stages in Kohlberg's theory can be seen as the initial foundation for moral education at an early age that emphasizes dialogue, empathy, and the real consequences of action.

In addition, the external framework of Kohlberg's theory for early childhood education in Indonesia can open up space for integration with local values as developed by Nahdlatul Ulama through the paradigm of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja), which emphasizes the balance between rationality, empathy, and spirituality in the formation of children's character. By understanding how children's moral reasoning is formed cognitively and socially.

By placing moral education from an early age as the main foundation for the formation of the nation's character, the integration between Western theories of moral development and local religious values becomes relevant to be studied in depth. In this context, Aswaja NU's moderate and inclusive values can complement the power of moral rationality in Lawrence Kohlberg's theory, especially in shaping early childhood characters that are balanced between cognitive, spiritual, and social aspects.

Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development explains that morality develops through stages of rational thinking that are oriented towards justice and universal principles (Kohlberg, 1981). However, a number of recent studies have shown that Kohlberg's approach tends to be individualistic and secular, thus taking less into account the spiritual and cultural dimensions (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009). In the context of early childhood moral education in Indonesia, these

limitations need to be balanced with religious values and local wisdom that emphasize the balance between reason and heart.

Key values Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja) which is the basis of Nahdlatul Ulama ethics includes Tawassuth (moderate), Tawazun (balanced), Tasamuh (tolerant), i'tidal (fair), and Amar Ma'ruf is A Man Who Is Unhappy (ethical responsibility) (Staquf, 2020). These values not only emphasize the cognitive mastery of right and wrong but also the internalization of virtue through example and habituation (ta'dib) from an early age. According to (Character Formation Based On The Values Of Ahlussunnah Wal-Jama'ah An-Nahdliyyah In Building Religious Moderation At Raudlatul Muslimin Bojonegoro Islamic Boarding School, 2023) Aswaja's approach places morality as a unity between intentions, actions, and morals. Relevant for children aged 4–6 years as a golden age of intuitive moral development (Santrock, 1994). These values function as a moral framework and ethical compass that directs social and spiritual behavior. Conceptually, Aswaja's principles are in harmony with the universal values in modern moral theory such as justice, empathy, and autonomy, which are also at the core of moral reasoning in moral development theory according to Lawrence Kohlberg.

According to (Akmaliah, 2022) principle Tawassuth and Tasamuh describes the attitude of moderation and tolerance in Islam that is contextual and adaptive to social change. For early childhood, these values can be translated into the practice of empathy, sharing, and respecting the differences of friends, which correspond to the early stages of social-moral development. Next (Arifianto, 2021) and (Wadipalapa, 2021) emphasizes that Tawazun and i'tidal It contains the meaning of balance and social justice, which in children's education can be internalized through activities that foster discipline, responsibility, and a sense of justice. (Maftuhin, 2021) highlighting the inclusive aspect of Aswaja through NU's struggle for the rights of persons with disabilities, relevant to instill the value of acceptance and respect for differences from an early age. On the other hand, (Maghfiroh et al., 2024) introducing the ecological dimension of Aswaja through the Green Pesantren movement that fosters concern for the environment (environmental responsibility)—values that can be introduced from an early age in the form of activities to maintain cleanliness and take care of nature. Meanwhile (Salik, 2019) emphasizing the importance of Rahmah (affection) and the billing approach Wisdom of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) (with wisdom and good advice), which fits perfectly with a gentle pedagogical approach in early childhood education.

Thus, the values of Aswaja NU not only function as a theological guideline, but also as a universal ethical and moral framework that can be internalized in early childhood education. Through the principles of tawassuth, tasamuh, tawazun, i'tidal, amar ma'ruf nahi munkar, and rahmah, children can learn to develop empathy, justice, balance, and moral responsibility in their social lives. Thus, the values of Aswaja NU act as a spiritual and ethical foundation that complements the rational dimension of Kohlberg's theory of moral development so as to form the basis of holistic and Indonesian moral education. Understanding these stages of moral development opens up space for the integration of local and religious values that are able to enrich the moral dimension of children from an early age. The values of Aswaja NU, for example, can provide ethical and spiritual direction for the process of forming moral reasoning.

The understanding of early childhood moral development as described by Kohlberg suggests that moral reasoning is formed through social interaction, cognitive reflection, and adult guidance. In the context of early childhood education in Indonesia, this process of internalizing values not only emphasizes the aspect of rationality, but must also be rooted in the spiritual and cultural values that live in society. This is where guidance and counseling (BK) has a strategic position—as a bridge between the cognitive-theoretical approach (Kohlberg) and the value-spiritual approach (Aswaja NU) in forming a complete child's character.

In the context of early childhood education, guidance and counseling (BK) has a strategic role as a medium for internalizing moral and religious values. According to (Priscilla et al., 2024) BK services function to help individuals develop their potential, including moral and spiritual so that they are able to behave in accordance with applicable norms and values. In line with this (Elmansyah & Sutoyo, 2015) emphasizing that the application of humanistic values is very important in the application of the peer counseling model of the affective dimension of moral learning. Integrated humanistic values include respect, freedom, responsibility, meaning, and the discipline of respecting time. In line with the view of humanism according to (Zainuddin, 2012) which explains that democratic and humanistic values can be applied in Islamic education, especially through the role of

teachers who not only teach but also guide students to know themselves and develop their potential optimally.

In this framework, BK services can be an integrative bridge between Kohlberg's theory of moral development and Aswaja NU's values. From Kohlberg, BK adopts a reflective approach that encourages the child to understand the reasons behind right or wrong behavior (Moral reasoning). Meanwhile, from the side of Aswaja NU, BK internalizes the values of Tawassuth (moderate), Tasamuh (tolerance), Tawazun (balance), i'tidal (justice), and Rahmah (affection) in the formation of moral consciousness that unites cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects (Soemantri et al., 2024).

Practically, this integration can be applied through various counseling services in the PAUD environment, including: Classical services where teachers or counselors introduce moral values through stories of role models, role-plays, or light discussions that foster empathy and justice. In the group guidance service, children are invited to practice cooperation, sharing, and respecting differences as a tangible form of the value of tasamuh and tawazun. Then to individual counseling services where this service is provided when the child faces a moral conflict, for example not wanting to share toys or telling the truth, with an empathetic and loving approach (Rahmah). This is in line with the learning method in early childhood (Flynn, 2022) which affirms that Berserita supports success in early childhood learning.

A number of literature supports the importance of this approach, including (Maree & Maree, 2021) that affirms the effectiveness of counselling-based counseling Life-design in shaping children's moral awareness and self-identity. Then research from (Alahmari & Rahma, 2025) It shows that counselling services for children with special needs can be optimized with an approach that integrates cultural and religious values. While explained by (Yubero et al., 2022) emphasizing the importance of moral awareness and empathy in the role of school counselors, which are in line with the principles Rahmah and Amar Ma'ruf is A Man Who Is Unhappy in Aswaja.

This shows that the practice of BK in PAUD can be positioned as a space for value interaction between Western moral theory and Islamic values of Aswaja. BK not only instills moral discipline cognitively as in the Kohlberg framework, but also fosters spiritual, social, and affective dimensions that are typical of Aswaja NU. Through this integration, early childhood moral education in Indonesia can develop in its entirety combining rational reasoning, social empathy, and religious awareness in one humanistic and contextual guidance framework.

Conceptually, guidance and counseling act as a transformative vehicle that unites the strength of modern moral theory and moderate Islamic values of Aswaja NU, forming the foundation of Indonesian moral education that is balanced between intellect, heart, and action.

The conceptual synthesis in this study aims to integrate three main domains, namely Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, the values of Aswaja NU, and the guidance and counseling (BK) approach into a contextual moral education framework for early childhood in Indonesia. First, Kohlberg's theory of moral development emphasizes the process of moral reasoning through three main levels: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional. This theory provides a cognitive basis for ethical growth, in which individuals learn to judge actions based on the principles of justice and moral responsibility (R. Craig, 1974). However, this theory is still considered universalistic and does not pay attention to the cultural context and spirituality (Rest, 1988).

Second, the values of Aswaja NU present a moral-spiritual dimension that complements Kohlberg's cognitive framework. Principles Tawassuth (moderation), Tawazun (balance), Tasamuh (tolerance), and i'tidal (justice), accompanied by Amar Ma'ruf is A Man Who Is Unhappy (ethical responsibility), serves as an ethical compass that directs social and spiritual behavior where these values provide contextual moral direction instilling a balance between rationality, empathy, and spirituality in the formation of children's character (Akmaliah, 2022; Arifianto, 2021; Staquf, 2020).

Furthermore, the third is guidance and counseling (BK) which plays a role as a medium for internalizing and implementing moral values in the early childhood education environment. BK is a forum for children to experience, reflect, and practice moral values through social interaction and empathic guidance (Elmansyah & Sutoyo, 2015; Prayito et al., 2024). Classical, group, and individual services provide opportunities for educators to instill value Rahmah (affection), Tawazun and i'tidal in the context of fun and meaningful guidance.

Furthermore, called the Aswaja-Based Moral Counseling Model, this Aswaja-based counseling model is the result of a synthesis between the stages of cognitive moral development

according to Kohlberg, the ethical values of Aswaja NU, and the implementation strategy in guidance and counseling (BK). This model views that children's moral development is not just a cognitive process but involves spiritual and social dimensions directed through valuable counseling interventions. The model consists of four main stages that are mutually sustainable:

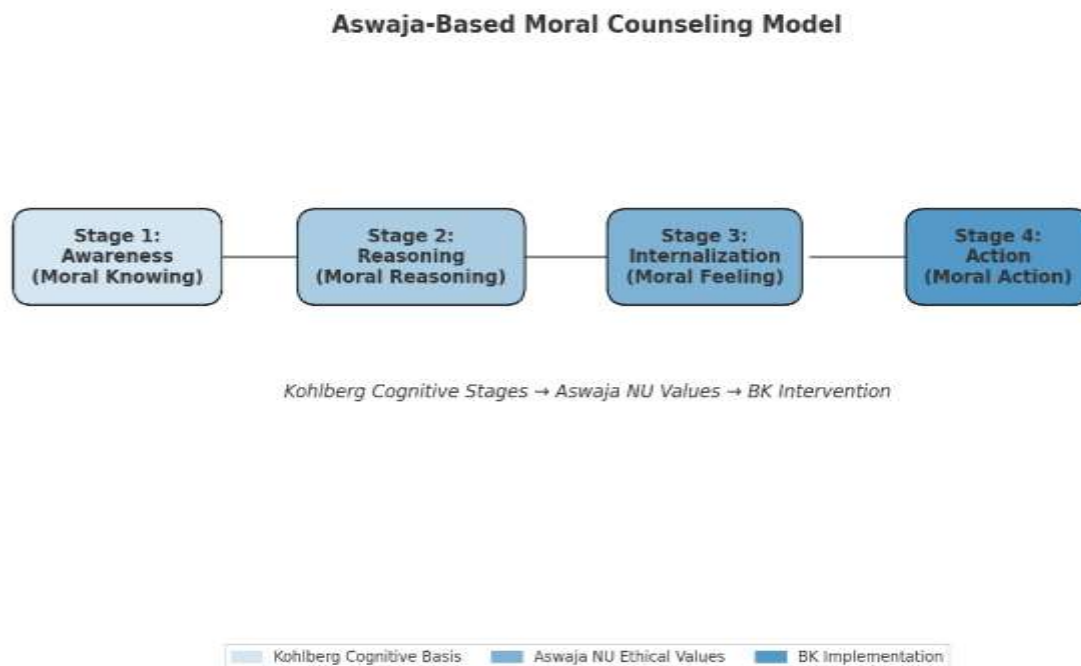


Fig 2. Aswaja Base Moral Counseling Model

Stage 1 Awareness: students are introduced to basic moral values through concrete experiences and simple reflection (moral knowing). This stage is in line with Kohlberg's preconventional stage, in which the child begins to realize the moral consequences of their actions through guidance and example. **Stage 2 Reasoning:** students begin to understand the reasons behind a right-or-wrong action (moral reasoning). At this stage, the counseling approach helps to relate the child's moral logic to Aswaja values such as tawazun (balance) and tasamuh (tolerance). **Stage 3 Internalization:** moral values that have been understood and then lived as part of self-belief (moral feeling). Aswaja values such as i'tidal (justice) and rahmah (compassion) are internalized through reflective activities, group guidance, and empathic interaction with teachers or counselors. **Stage 4 Action:** children show real moral behavior in daily life (moral action). At this stage, counseling serves as a medium for strengthening positive behavior and consistent examples, guiding children to do good consciously and responsibly.

We can see that BK functions to guide students from moral awareness (moral knowing) to internalization and moral behavior (moral action), in line with the principles of tawazun, tasamuh, and i'tidal in the teachings of Aswaja NU where this model emphasizes that effective moral education not only teaches what is right but also fosters the desire and ability to realize it in real action. within the framework of moderate and inclusive Islamic spirituality.

The results of this conceptual synthesis have several important implications, both theoretically, practically, and policyly. Aswaja values such as tawassuth (moderation), tasamuh (tolerance), tawazun (balance), and i'tidal (justice) enrich Kohlberg's model of moral reasoning which originally focused on universal rationality, resulting in a more complete moral synthesis rooted in the moderate Islamic tradition of the archipelago (Muhaimin et al., 2022) Practically, the implications can be seen in guidance and counseling (BK) services in PAUD which can function as a medium for internalizing moral and religious values through participatory, reflective, and empathetic strategies (Nur Fatimah et al., 2022).

Recomendation

This study confirms that Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development provides a cognitive basis for understanding how children's moral reasoning develops through social interaction and individual reflection (Kohlberg, 1981; Gibbs, 2019). Meanwhile, the values of Aswaja Nahdlatul Ulama present an ethical and spiritual direction that emphasizes moderation (tawassuth),

balance (tawazun), justice (i'tidal), and tolerance (tasamuh) as the foundation of contextual and inclusive Islamic morality (Latif et al., 2023; Muhaimin et al., 2022)

On the other hand, guidance and counseling (BK) serves as a pedagogical bridge that connects theory and values into educational practice. Through classical, group, and individual services, BK enables the process of internalizing moral values from moral knowing to real action through an empathic, reflective, and participatory approach (Maree & Maree, 2021; Nur Fatimah et al., 2022)

The integration of these three dimensions results in a holistic model of moral education—rational, spiritual, and contextual—rooted in Indonesia's cultural and religious identity. This model expands the theory of moral development with the perspective of moderate Islam in the archipelago and provides practical direction for strengthening character education and religious moderation policies in schools and madrassas (Akmaliah, 2022; Staquf, 2020)

The integration of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) values within the moral development theory of early childhood offers new directions for developing character education that is contextual, spiritually grounded, and culturally rooted in the Indonesian identity. Therefore, future research should empirically examine the effectiveness of Aswaja-based guidance and counseling (GC) models in shaping children's moral awareness and prosocial behavior. Longitudinal studies, classroom-based interventions, and action research approaches would be valuable for assessing the long-term impact of this model on children's moral growth.

Furthermore, stronger collaboration among educational institutions, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), and religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama is essential to design curricula and counseling modules that integrate the core Aswaja principles of moderation (tawassuth), balance (tawazun), justice (i'tidal), and tolerance (tasamuh). Reflective and participatory approaches in GC should serve as strategic avenues for moral internalization through group counseling, classical sessions, and habituation activities in early childhood education settings. For educators and counselors, this study recommends the development of spiritual-pedagogical competence, enabling them to act as facilitators of values rather than mere transmitters of knowledge. Professional development programs for early childhood counselors should include moral reflection training, case-based learning, and the integration of Islamic ethical values into guidance practices.

At the policy level, both government and higher education institutions are encouraged to provide sustained support and funding for initiatives that promote character education grounded in local wisdom and moderate Islamic values. Such efforts will help the national education system advance toward a holistic moral framework one that harmonizes cognitive reasoning, spirituality, social justice, and cultural identity. Through these strategic efforts, Aswaja-based guidance and counseling can move beyond theoretical enrichment to become a transformative practice-fostering a generation of learners who think critically, feel compassionately, and act justly, embodying the true essence of Rahmatan lil 'Alamin.

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