



Development of an Imtaq Project-Based Program to Enhance Early Childhood Faith and Piety

Dzulfikar Sauqy Shidqi¹, Ulfah Susilawati², Indy Ari Pratiwi³

Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program, Faculty of Education, UIN Sunan Kudus, Indonesia¹

Arabic Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, UIN Salatiga, Indonesia²

Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program, Faculty of Education, UIN Sunan Kudus, Indonesia³

Jl. Conge Ngembalrejo Bae Kudus Jawa Tengah, Indonesia

E-mail: dzulfikarsauqy@iainkudus.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

The suboptimal implementation of religious and moral values in early childhood learning has created a gap between curriculum planning and classroom practice. This study aims to develop an "Imtaq" (Faith and Piety) project-based learning program designed to strengthen religious and moral values in early childhood education. The research involved 48 early childhood learners and four teachers from RA Matholiul Ulum and BA Danurejo 1. The study employed the ADDIE Development model, consisting of the stages of Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation. During the Development stage, expert validation was conducted by two specialists in Early Childhood Education and learning program Development. The validation results were analysed using descriptive statistics and a paired-samples t-test. The findings indicated that the calculated t-value was 3.408, while the Sig. (2-tailed) The value was 0.001, which is lower than 0.05. This demonstrates that the program effectively integrates core religious values such as honesty, tolerance, and empathy into children's daily learning experiences. Overall, the results indicate that project-based learning centred on faith and devotion can strengthen children's religious concepts while fostering the comprehensive Development of religious and moral values.

INTRODUCTION

Today, children are increasingly vulnerable to negative social influences, mainly because they are permitted to access and use social media from an early age. Although social media offers certain positive benefits, its negative impacts tend to be more prominent. One of the most concerning effects is the decline in manners and ethical behaviour among young users. Among the components of religious and moral values that must be nurtured alongside children's developmental domains is the value of ethics, or proper conduct (Daryanto & Ernawati, 2024). Values and ethics are two inseparable concepts that are frequently referenced in both societal and national life (Djarhum et al., 2023). This connection is well-founded, as both possess abstract qualities and are closely tied to ideals, aspirations, and beliefs.

Religious and moral values are currently not fully and holistically incorporated into classroom learning activities (Hidayah et al., 2024). In many early childhood settings, religious instruction is limited to memorising short surahs, the pillars of Islam, and daily prayers (Novita et al., 2025). Educators rarely design learning programs that are intentionally structured to nurture religious and moral values, such as introducing age-appropriate concepts of divinity, fostering honesty, encouraging respectful



behaviour toward parents and elders, and cultivating a sense of responsibility for one's actions (Muzakkir & Muhammad, 2024).

Moreover, there is a lack of structured, empirically tested project-based programs specifically created to integrate *Imtaq* values into everyday classroom activities (Rizaldi et al., 2024). Research on community partnerships in which educators, parents, and local stakeholders collaboratively support children's moral Development is also limited, despite its importance for sustainable educational change (Ali Masykuri et al., 2024). These gaps highlight the need for a comprehensive and contextually relevant model that supports both conceptual and practical understanding of religious and moral values through active learning. In this study, theories of community engagement and Development are also essential, as the project is designed to empower educators and parents within the community to play an active role in their children's moral and ethical Development (Nurjamilah, 2024).

Community engagement theory suggests that sustainable change in educational practices requires active involvement from local stakeholders, including families, educators, and religious institutions (Muhammad Nurrahman & Sri Marmoah, 2025). This study aligns with that theory by involving community members in both the Development and evaluation phases of the project. Through workshops, focus group discussions, and collaborative planning sessions, educators and parents are equipped with tools and strategies to guide children's moral Development.

Project-based learning, especially in early childhood education, is a crucial approach that has been increasingly recognised for its ability to develop key skills, including critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity (Namaskara et al., 2023). This study explores the Development and implementation of a project-based learning program called "*Imtaq*" (Faith and Piety) aimed at strengthening religious and moral values in young children. The research is conducted as part of a community engagement initiative involving early childhood education institutions. This initiative seeks to address growing concerns about the erosion of moral and ethical values among children due to early exposure to digital media and the shifting dynamics of family and social life (Ningsih et al., 2024).

The decision to focus on "*Imtaq*" stems from several critical observations. Based on reports from educators and community leaders, many children exhibit behaviours suggesting a lack of understanding and internalisation of religious values. This issue is particularly concerning in an age when access to technology and social media is nearly universal, shaping children's behaviour and social interactions at an early age. Furthermore, religious values are integral to the character Development of young children, forming a foundation for ethical and moral decision-making throughout their lives (Sari et al., 2024).

The theoretical foundation of this research draws on the principles of project-based learning (PBL), which emphasises student-centred inquiry, collaborative learning, and real-world problem-solving (Yupeni et al., 2025). Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing cognitive and social skills. However, there is a notable gap in research specifically addressing its impact on religious and moral education.

Despite the growing body of literature on PBL, most studies emphasise academic domains such as STEM, language Development, and creativity, with minimal attention given to its application in fostering spiritual understanding, ethical conduct, and character formation in early childhood (Aisyah et al., 2025). Existing research on religious education, meanwhile, relies heavily on traditional instructional methods such as rote memorisation, repetition, and storytelling, which may not support meaningful experiential learning (Syamsul Aripin & Nana Meily Nurdiansyah, 2022). Consequently, these approaches often fall short of helping children deeply internalise moral and religious values, especially amid modern challenges such as widespread exposure to digital media and the erosion of respectful behaviour.

The urgency of this research is reinforced by increasing reports of children demonstrating disrespect toward elders, engaging in unethical behaviour, and being influenced by harmful online content (Imran et al., 2023). Current educational practices in many early childhood institutions do not fully address the need for integrated moral and religious education. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by developing a structured "*Imtaq*" project-based program that can be replicated and adapted in various educational settings. The study is expected to contribute to the field of early childhood education by providing a practical model that integrates religious values into everyday learning activities.

The Development of project-based learning is supported by the advantages of this model,



including increased motivation to learn, enhanced ability to perform meaningful tasks, and a sense of appreciation (Nirmayani & Dewi, 2021). Furthermore, this model enhances problem-solving skills, makes students more active in addressing complex challenges, improves collaboration, and encourages them to develop and practice communication skills. Project-based learning provides complex learning experiences involving students and is designed to align with real-world contexts (Rehman et al., 2024).

Religious values emerge and mature within children through educational experiences beginning in early childhood. Thus, early childhood education plays a critical role in nurturing these values and shaping children into individuals who are faithful, morally grounded, and guided by religious principles. Teaching religious and moral values to young children is crucial in shaping their character and morals from an early stage (Rodiyah, 2023). This process allows children to construct knowledge and values through social interaction, play, and exploration (Munawarsyah et al., 2024). Children actively engage in learning, building their understanding of religious and moral values through direct experiences and reflection (Chandra Asri Windarsih & Komala Komala, 2025). The impact of such learning is evident in their character Development, as they demonstrate improved understanding of values such as honesty, tolerance, and compassion. They also develop positive attitudes, including respect, empathy, and cooperation (McNulty & Politis, 2023). In instilling religious values in young children, teachers must be skilled and mindful of the children's developmental stages. One practical approach is using a suitable learning model, such as Project-Based Learning with an "IMTAQ (Faith and Piety)" approach. This model encourages children to participate in play-based activities actively, positioning them at the centre of learning. At the same time, the teacher serves as a motivator and facilitator, providing scaffolding to support their Development (Ndlovu et al., 2023).

The primary objectives of this study are threefold. First, the study aims to develop a project-based learning program that systematically integrates religious and moral values into early childhood education. Second, it seeks to assess the feasibility and appropriateness of the developed program through expert validation and practitioner feedback. Third, the study aims to evaluate the program's effectiveness in improving young children's understanding and practical application of religious and moral values in their daily experiences

METHOD

The research method used by the researcher is developmental research, also known as Research and Development (R&D), as it aims to develop a product called "Project Iman dan Taqwa (IMTAQ) in the Development of Religious Values and Noble Character." The Development model refers to the research and Development model proposed, which is the ADDIE model. This model consists of five stages: Analysis (analysing), Design (designing), Development (developing), Implementation (implementing), and Evaluation (evaluating) (Martatiyana et al., 2023). In developing the learning program, the researcher applied all five stages, from needs identification to program evaluation.

The ADDIE model involves several stages, starting with Analysis (Needs Identification). In this stage, researchers analyse the importance of developing a Project-Based Learning Program focused on Imtaq (Faith and Piety) for early childhood education. They identify the requirements for this program through several steps, including interviews with educators at Raudhatul Athfal (RA) schools in Kudus Regency to understand the challenges faced during the teaching process. Additionally, observations are conducted to analyse the difficulties early childhood learners encounter in implementing Project-Based Learning with Imtaq. Researchers also analyse the curriculum, formulating learning objectives aligned with the Basic Competencies (KD) and Core Competencies (KI) outlined in the Kurikulum Merdeka.

The second stage, Design (Program Formulation), involves creating an initial Development plan for the project-based program. Researchers select appropriate media, tools, and module formats and draft the initial module. Key steps include developing evaluation instruments, such as expert validation sheets and feedback questionnaires for teachers and learners and selecting suitable learning media to meet the needs of early childhood learners. The content is systematically organised to ensure clarity and avoid confusion. Initial designs include drafting the Imtaq Project-Based Learning Program's structure, including usage guidelines, cover, introduction, content, and closure sections, as well as outlining the Imtaq project using pencil and paper. The third stage is Development (Program Development), where researchers validate the program's Design to ensure it meets its objectives. Media and content experts



assess aspects such as design, size, and content relevance, providing feedback through validation questionnaires. Based on this feedback, researchers refine the initial product design to address any identified shortcomings.

The fourth stage, Implementation, involved conducting a small-scale trial of the validated IMTAQ project to assess its applicability and effectiveness for early childhood learners, using Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis. Evaluation was carried out during both the Development and implementation stages through formative assessments to gather feedback and improve the product's quality. Validation was conducted by media experts, material experts, teachers, and learners to determine the program's practicality and relevance. This study was carried out in Central Java, specifically in Kudus (RA Matholiul Ulum Jekulo) and Magelang (BA Danurejo 1). These institutions were selected due to their unique and engaging implementation of project-based IMTAQ programs. Using purposive sampling, the researcher selected 48 early childhood learners and four RA teachers as trial participants. Two types of data were collected: quantitative data obtained from Likert-scale questionnaires (4 = Very Good, 3 = Good, 2 = Fair, 1 = Poor), and qualitative data in the form of suggestions and comments from validators. The data collection instruments included validation sheets for media and material experts, as well as response forms for teachers and learners. All instruments were validated by academic supervisors prior to use to ensure their appropriateness. Data analysis was conducted to determine the program's effectiveness, measured using a t-test, with a focus on assessing the validity of the IMTAQ project and its alignment with the developed content and media

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The *Imtaq* (Faith and Piety) program was developed through a systematic project-based learning approach designed to integrate religious and moral values into early childhood education. The Development process began with a needs analysis through observations and interviews with educators to identify challenges in fostering religious values. This was followed by the design stage, which involved creating *Imtaq* project activities, selecting appropriate learning media, and preparing evaluation instruments. During the Development phase, the program design was validated by media, content, and practitioner experts to ensure alignment and feasibility. After validation, the program was pilot-tested on a small scale to assess its effectiveness in enhancing children's religious understanding and behaviour. Feedback from the trial and expert reviews was used to refine the program, resulting in a structured, feasible, and effective *Imtaq* learning model suitable for implementation in early childhood education settings. The Development of the "Imtaq" project-based learning program is divided into the following stages:

Analysis (Needs Identification)

The first stage involves conducting surveys and interviews with teachers, parents, and experts in Islamic education. The purpose of this survey is to understand the challenges and opportunities of integrating faith and piety into daily learning activities. In schools, the implementation of activities related to religious values and character Development remains very limited. Religious instruction tends to be ritualistic and memorisation-based, such as merely reciting the *syahadat*, the pillars of Islam, the pillars of faith, and short Qur'anic surahs without any explanation of their meanings or their relevance to the children's daily lives. This condition indicates that learning has not yet reached the stages of understanding, internalisation, and value appreciation, leaving children unable to connect religious teachings with fundamental attitudes and behaviours in everyday situations.

Design (Program Formulation)

After identifying the needs, learning objectives are formulated along the dimensions of faith (belief in God and practice of religious teachings) and piety (good character, adherence to worship, and care for others). These objectives are translated into measurable outcomes, such as: (a) Children being able to recite daily prayers correctly, (b) Children being able to recognise good and bad actions, (c) Children being able to perform congregational prayers orderly.

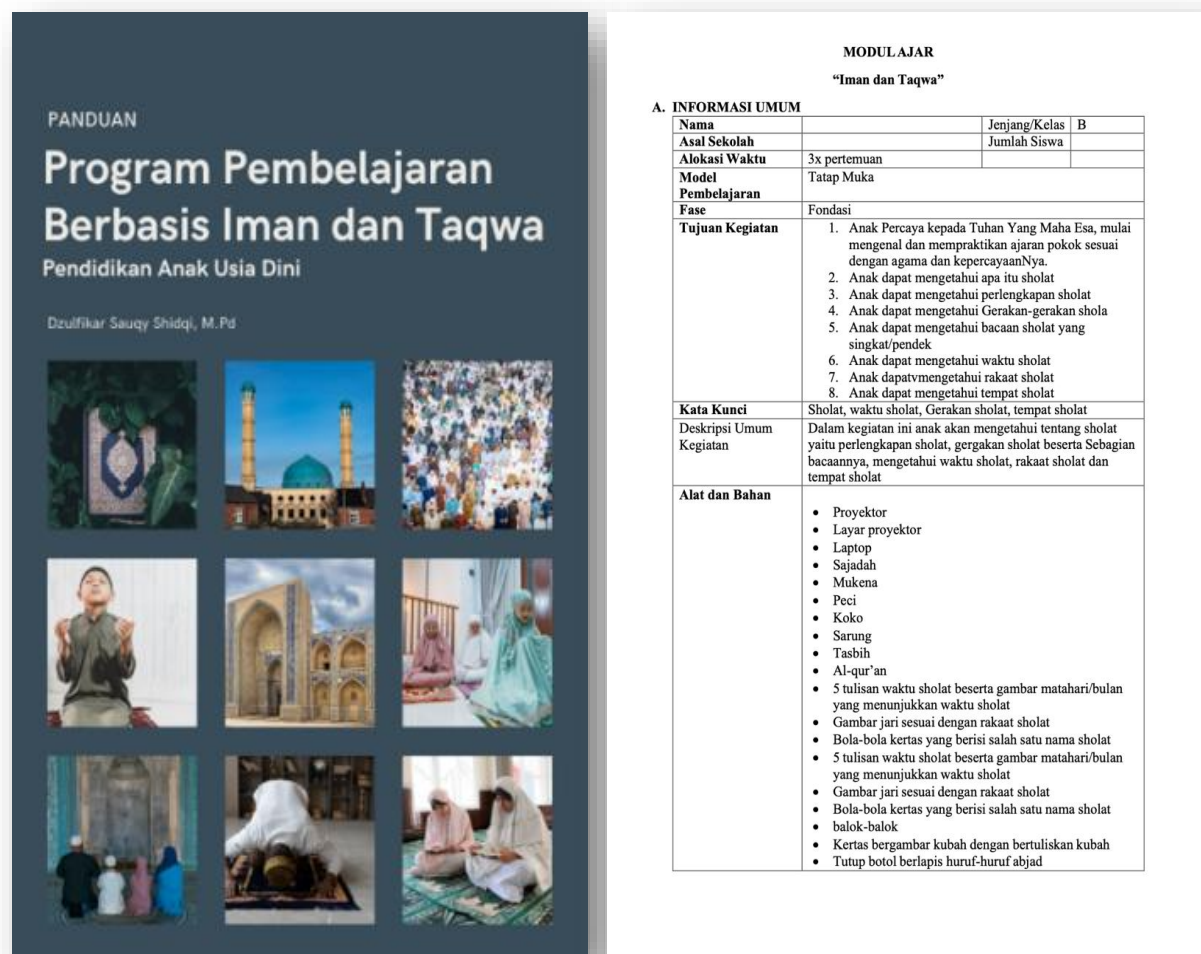


Figure 1. The Guideline Book for Implementing a Learning Program Grounded in Faith and Piety

The Imtaq program guidebook is designed as a comprehensive reference to support the effective implementation of faith- and piety-based learning in early childhood education. It includes clear usage guidelines to help educators understand and apply the program systematically. Figure 1, illustrates that the guidebook outlines the structure and objectives of the Imtaq program, accompanied by detailed teaching modules that integrate religious and moral values into daily learning activities. In addition, it includes structured plans for program activities that cover learning objectives, implementation steps, and required resources. The guidebook also provides well-defined assessment procedures and instruments to evaluate children's Development in religious values and character, ensuring that learning outcomes can be measured accurately and consistently.

Development (Program Development)

The teaching module developed for this program includes various worksheets, project guidelines, and evaluation tools. Each module is designed to guide teachers in providing clear instructions to students while also allowing children to explore and internalise values related to faith and morality. The module includes Project Activity Sheets That Detail the steps of project execution, including preparing tools and materials, the process itself, and reflections after the activity. Behavioural Observation Sheets: Teachers use these sheets to observe the children's spiritual Development throughout the project, including honesty, cooperation, and independence.



Congregational Prayer Guidelines: Simple instructions for performing prayers suitable for young children, with visual depictions of easy-to-understand movements.

Three main projects are designed to be implemented over one semester. Each project is crafted to involve spiritual, social, and real-life experiences relevant to children's world. Specifically, in Group B1, several routine programs are being implemented. These programs can be categorised into three areas: worship practices, environmental responsibility, and personal cleanliness, each with specific activities. This program is a continuation and an integral part of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Table 1 Development of Faith and Piety Activities Program

No	Habitual Practice Program	Activities
1	Worship Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ablution (Wudhu)- Dhuha Prayer- Dhikr after prayer
2	Personal Hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Brushing teeth- Nail cutting- Hand washing
3	Responsibility in the Classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Organizing toys- Arranging shoes and bags on the rack- Cleaning the classroom before leaving

Table 1 presents the activities children should undertake as part of implementing the Imtaq program. The religious practice program is conducted every Monday to Friday in the morning before the learning activities begin, aiming to train the children's sense of responsibility towards religious practices as outlined in the CP. This helps children recognise and practice the values and obligations of their religious teachings. Additionally, personal hygiene activities are carried out on different days. Brushing teeth takes place on Wednesdays and Fridays, nail trimming is done every Friday, and hand washing is a routine every Saturday after the children complete their exercise session or walk around the school.

The third program at the schools focuses on environmental responsibility. This includes activities such as tidying up toys, arranging shoes and bags on the provided racks every day, and cleaning the yard every Saturday after exercise or walking. The personal hygiene and classroom responsibility programs align with the CP's goals of helping children embody religious values in their interactions with others and with nature (plants, animals, and the environment). This is crucial because when children are taught from an early age to be responsible for their personal cleanliness and the cleanliness of their surroundings, they are practising religious values, as cleanliness is an important aspect of faith. Furthermore, they learn to interact and help each other while tidying up toys or cleaning the classroom.

The program for instilling faith and piety is linked to the values of religion and character in the Merdeka Curriculum. Various activities are aligned with these religious and moral values. The religious practice program is carried out every day, as explained by Sri Suminingsih, the principal of BA Danurejo. Initially, religious practices were held only on Fridays, but they proved less effective for the children. Therefore, it is now conducted regularly from Monday to Friday before learning activities begin. The practices include ablution (wudhu), Dhuha prayer, and dhikr (remembrance of Allah) after prayer.

In the Development process of the "Imtaq" (faith and piety) learning program, several revisions were made based on input and suggestions from experts and practitioners. These discussions were held to enhance the program's overall quality and ensure its effectiveness. Expert validation of the measurement instrument for the dimensions of faith and piety indicated that it was adequately validated. The expert assessment yielded a score of 85%, with an average rating of 3.4. This result indicates that the indicator instrument used to measure the Development of the Imtaq program is classified as "Highly Feasible" for implementation.

Consequently, the "Imtaq" learning program is appropriate for early childhood learners and



effective in fostering the dimensions of faith and piety. Furthermore, the validation results of the character measurement instrument showed that each indicator within the assessment framework exceeded the critical threshold. The validity test using correlation analysis showed that all items met the validity requirements, with correlation coefficients exceeding 0.312. This confirms that the instrument is valid and reliable for measuring the dimensions of faith and piety in young children.

Table 2. Results of the Effectiveness Testing of the Program

		Paired Differences				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
					Lower	Upper		
Pair 1	POSTTEST - PRETEST	.694	1.388	.198	.295	1.092	3.408	.001

Based on Table 2, the results of the paired-sample test indicate that the calculated *t*-value was 3.408, with a significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.001. Since the significance value of 0.001 is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that the "*Imtaq*" learning program has a significant effect on the Development of children's faith and piety. Furthermore, the pretest-posttest results indicate an improvement in the character dimensions of faith and piety among the children. After two cycles of field testing, the Development of the "*Imtaq*" learning program reached its final stage. Continuous refinements were made to the learning materials to enhance their appeal to young children. Additionally, supporting media were utilised to facilitate children's understanding of the abstract concept of God by making it more concrete. Child assessment was also strengthened by grounding it in moral and character-based principles.

Implementation (Program Execution)

This program is implemented as part of daily activities over the course of one semester. The implementation process involves teachers acting as facilitators, with children actively participating in the pre-planned projects.



Figure 2. The Execution of the Implementation of a Program Grounded in Faith and Piety.

Evaluation (Program Effectiveness)

Program effectiveness is evaluated through direct observation during the project activities and interviews with teachers and parents. This evaluation measures the Development of children's faith and piety, based on several indicators: Discipline in Worship. Children show improvement in their discipline



in performing congregational prayers. They become more aware of the importance of praying on time and understand its significance in daily life. This is reflected in their increased participation in daily prayers and their ability to memorise short prayers: social Behaviour and Empathy. Through the project on respecting friends during worship, there is an observable improvement in empathy and caring attitudes. Teachers note that the children are more willing to respect others without needing direct guidance, indicating that the value of tolerance has been naturally instilled and that this has increased Confidence and Responsibility. Projects involving practical activities, such as planting trees, provide opportunities for children to take responsibility for small tasks. Children show increased courage in taking initiative and responsibility within their groups, such as caring for plants or helping friends in difficulty. Spiritual Reflection Through discussions and reflections, the children show a deeper understanding of faith concepts. They begin to connect their good actions with religious teachings, such as being thankful to God and taking care of His creation.

Religious values and good character are essential to instil in young children, as this is the stage at which they are first introduced to religion and its teachings while also learning ethics and manners that they will apply in daily life, even into adulthood and within society (Safitri, 2022). At the same time, cultivating good character is equally important to ensure that children behave according to established norms and become accustomed to taking responsibility for their decisions and the tasks assigned to them. If a sense of responsibility is not internalised, it cannot be enacted, as an individual will be unable to be accountable for their own behaviour (Quinn et al., 2024). Therefore, good character must be nurtured from an early age, as it will have long-term effects on children as they grow.

Fostering religious values and good character in children is a process that begins with a clearly identified starting point that serves as a reference for subsequent Development (Alamsyah et al., 2024). At school, teachers can instil character by nurturing children's sense of responsibility through various activities or programs. At the same time, at home, parents can begin cultivating it from early childhood and reinforce school initiatives by consistently practising them. Implementing prayer routines with young children is not easy and certainly requires time; therefore, teachers model the practice directly so that children can imitate and learn more quickly (Zaenatul Iza et al., 2024). In the B1 class, prayer is conducted daily, with one child serving as the imam and another reciting the iqamah. This process underscores the crucial role of teachers in guiding children to perform prayer—an effort that requires time, patience, and consistency (Nazaruddin, 2024). Such activities cannot be carried out only once but must be reinforced continuously and regularly.

Accordingly, the inculcation of religious values and good character can proceed effectively and achieve the desired outcomes. Beyond routine activities such as prayer, handwashing, and maintaining cleanliness, religious and character education in early childhood can also be implemented through Project-Based Learning (PjBL) (Bulkis et al., 2025). Research has shown that PjBL is effective in shaping character through meaningful and contextual learning experiences. PjBL connects learning to real-life situations, enabling children to internalise values through hands-on practice (Fatihah et al., 2025). In the context of religious education, project-based approaches provide opportunities for children to understand values of faith and moral conduct not only through verbal explanations but also through concrete experiences and structured collaborative activities.

A PjBL can stimulate children's independence and foster responsibility by directly involving them in planning, implementing, and reflecting on project activities (Namaskara et al., 2023). When applied to strengthening faith and piety, projects such as the Prayer Corner, Personal Hygiene Project, or Daily Charity Project provide opportunities for children to learn religious values in tangible ways (Zahroh & Afrianingsih, 2024). For example, in the Daily Charity Project, children prepare a charity box, take turns contributing to it, and later deliver the collected items to those in need. This activity not only nurtures empathy and compassion but also reinforces moral values such as honesty and kindness, aligning with the assertion that direct practice and habituation are essential components of faith and worship education in early childhood (Zahro Azhari et al., 2023).

Furthermore, PjBL helps children develop social virtues such as cooperation, discipline, and respect through collaborative activities that foster positive peer interactions (Nailul et al., 2025). This aligns with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasises meaningful, contextual, and child-centred learning. Through well-designed projects, children not only learn about religious and



moral values but also experience, enact, and reflect on their meaning (Ramadhani & Nurhidayah, 2025).

In relation to the Merdeka Curriculum, the faith and piety programs are highly relevant to one of the curriculum's core elements: religious values and noble character. When children are taught to perform prayer, they are simultaneously taught that prayer is a responsibility they hold as Muslims (Utsany, 2023). The same applies to activities such as handwashing, toothbrushing, and nail trimming, through which children learn early responsibility for personal hygiene. One of the learning objectives within the religious values and good character strand is maintaining classroom cleanliness, which serves as an early effort to cultivate faith and piety (Solihin et al., 2020). Briefly, Project-Based Learning represents an effective strategy for instilling religious values and character in early childhood education, as it provides authentic experiences that strengthen the internalisation of faith, piety, and noble character from an early age.

CONCLUSION

The research and Development process followed the ADDIE model: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation to construct and assess a faith- and piety-based (Imtaq) learning program for young children. The findings indicate that the Imtaq program positively contributes to strengthening children's religious values and character Development, demonstrating its suitability for early childhood education settings. This study contributes to the field by offering a systematic, project-based instructional model for integrating religious and moral values into early childhood education, as well as a set of valid assessment instruments to measure the dimensions of faith, piety, and character. Based on these results, it is recommended that the program be implemented more broadly across early childhood institutions, supported by ongoing teacher training, enhanced parental involvement, and further Development of the program, including potential digital adaptations, to ensure sustained internalisation of religious and moral values in young learners.

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