

Maximizing the Role of Parents Through Religious Education in the Family in the Scope of Early Childhood Education

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ABSTRACT

Religious education for early childhood in the family environment needs to be carried out properly and responsibly because it is during an important period in the child's growth period (The Golden Age). Active parental participation needs to be maximized so that it makes a significant contribution to the child's spiritual growth. This study aims to see how parents can maximize their role in early childhood education through religious (Christian) education in the family. This research was carried out using a descriptive qualitative approach. This study comprises a comprehensive examination of relevant scholarly articles through a literature review. A total of 30 journal papers published between 2010 and 2023 were gathered for the literature review. According to the findings of the review, it is established that the results of this study found that the implementation of education, especially religious education, must be a major concern. This is because children are quite vulnerable to the environment around them so the role of parents in guiding religious aspects becomes very important.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education has been universally pursued by individuals across all societal strata. Education has been present since the inception of human civilization. It involves the systematic cultivation of cognitive and emotional abilities in relation to the natural world and fellow human beings. Regarding early childhood education, the educational component extends beyond formal schooling to include informal learning within the family unit (Khaidir & Suud, 2020). Adawiyah described the informal environment as a setting where individuals come together with others in a familial context. The family, consisting of a small number of persons, is the primary social unit based on blood connections. The addition of a child to a family brings both optimism and a significant obligation, as it entails striving to fulfil the kid's requirements, such as religious instruction (El Adawiyah, Hubeis, Sumarti, & Susanto, 2020).

The inclusion of a child into a family, particularly during a crucial phase in their development (known as The Golden Age), necessitates distinct treatment due to its unique attributes. The Golden Age refers to the period from conception until early childhood, while humans are still in the womb and in the first few years of life. According to Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System, early childhood refers to children from birth until they reach the age of six (Rosyadi, Baharun, & Asiya, 2021). Early Childhood Education encompasses the educational instruction provided to children ranging from

infancy to 6 years old, or potentially up to 8 years old. Early childhood can be categorised into distinct stages: infancy (birth to 1 year), foster (1-3 years), preschool (3-4 years), early elementary classes (5-6 years), and secondary elementary school (7-8 years). At this stage of development, it is crucial for parents to focus their attention on their children (Pioreschi, Wrottesley, Slemming, Cohen, & Norris, 2020).

Aspects of learning in the vulnerable ages 0-6 years must be the concern of every parent. The learning process at a young age, according to Semiawan, should provide children with meaningful basic concepts through real-world experiences that enable them to exhibit optimum levels of activity and curiosity. That is why at this early age, parents need to lay a good foundation of faith for the future of their children (Strouse & Samson, 2021). Darajat added that the development of a child's religion is influenced by his experiences in the family, school, and community since childhood. The more religious experiences a person has, the more their attitudes, actions, behavior, and methods of dealing with life will reflect religious principles. If religious teaching in the family environment is carried out properly, the child will experience growth and development which will make him a person who lives in fear of God (Mahmudin, 2022).

Parents have a big and even responsible role in the maturation of their children. Children who grow up in a good family environment at least guarantee a good future in their lives. That is why efforts to maximize the role of parents through Christian Education in the family in the scope of early childhood education are important to pay attention to, and the urgency seems clear. The parents are a father and a mother. In both formal and non-formal education, parents play a crucial role in guiding and accompanying their children. The role of parents can influence the cognitive, effective, and psychomotor development of children. The parental role in the family is crucial to the development of offspring. The family is the first environment that children often encounter. The family environment will influence the child's behavior (Costa Waetzold & Melo-Pfeifer, 2022). Therefore, parents must guide and set a good example for their children. Family is a bond between a man and a woman based on law and legal marriage law and is the main foundation in further education". Ki Hajar Dewantara stated that "the atmosphere of family life is the best place to carry out individual education and social education" (Cherlin, 2020).

Parents' involvement in their children's education is crucial to the success of their children's education. Parents are the first and foremost educators. The role of parents in education is as an educator, motivators, facilitator and guide. The following is an explanation of the role of parents:

- a. Educators are first and foremost parents because they strive to develop the affective, cognitive, and psychomotor potential of all children.
- b. Motivation is the impetus or driving factor behind an action. Parents contribute to the development of children's motivation.
- c. Parents provide a variety of learning resources, including study areas, tables, chairs, lighting, literature, and stationery.
- d. Supervisors: Parents are not only obliged to provide facilities, but they must also guide on an ongoing basis (Jose et al., 2020).

In addition to the four responsibilities of parents described previously, parents must also consider the moral development of their children. According to Gunarsa, the attitudes that parents need to pay attention to are "consistency in educating and teaching children, the attitude of parents in the family, the appreciation of parents for the religion they adhere to, and the consistent attitude of parents in disciplining their children". Parents must serve as a positive role model for their offspring. There is a discrepancy between what parents teach their children and what children observe in their parents' daily lives, leading children to believe they should not follow their parents' advice (Riazi et al., 2021).

It is incumbent upon us, as devout followers of God and Christians, to earnestly consider the organisation of Christian education in order to establish a firm foundation for the development of our children. In order to ensure that our children remain steadfast in their faith, hope, and love for God, even in the face of challenges posed by materialism, atheism, scepticism, hedonism, secularism, and

other ideologies and lifestyles, it is important to provide them with the necessary resilience (Tse, 2020). According to Robert W. Pazmino, Christian education can be defined as a deliberate and ongoing process, combining divine and human efforts, aimed at imparting knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills that align with the Christian faith. Education aims to bring about transformation, revitalization, and improvement in individuals, groups, and systems, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, enabling students to align their lives with God's intentions as revealed in the Bible and by Jesus Christ Himself (Dwikoryanto, Daliman, Suparti, & Purwoko, 2021).

The implementation of Christian education must help students to understand and obey God's design, and God's purpose for creating their lives. There is a serious commitment to the implementation of Christian education, namely to think correctly and deeply, about how to build the lives of our students on the Bible, God's Word, a solid rock. This is what is meant by the Characteristics of Christian Education. It can be said emphatically if the implementation of Christian Education does not follow these characteristics, it means that it is not a Christian education (Anselmus Dami, Butarbutar, & Kusradi, 2023).

The goal and purpose of Christian education can be defined according to Deuteronomy 6:6-9 in the Bible. The task of coordinating Christian education was given to us by God. The first goal is for every student to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Secondly, follow Christ's example and submit to God's total authority over your life. Third, living a life of total submission to the will of God as revealed in the Bible, as an obedient follower of Christ who is constantly led by the Holy Spirit. Lastly, to be a part of God's chosen people, who will spend the rest of their lives focusing solely on what is holy, beautiful, and honouring to God (Gao, Shi, & Wu, 2023). As servants of God and Christian educators, we are committed to guiding each pupil through a learning process that adheres to biblical principles and the Lord Jesus Christ's will. How can we practically apply this truth to our calling to provide Christian education? Because Christian education has a single, unambiguous purpose/direction, namely knowing, loving, believing, obeying, and serving God in accordance with His will and plan and for His glorification, this is the case (Du Plessis & Nkambule, 2020).

The earliest stage of human growth and development is the most crucial and foundational. Until the concluding stage of a child's development, this period is comprised of a number of crucial developmental phases. The golden age is one of the phases that define early development. Many of the concepts and facts discovered to explain the golden period at a young age, when all children's potentials develop at the quickest rate, concern the early years. Several concepts for early childhood are juxtaposed, including the exploration period, the identification/imitation period, the sensitive period, the play period, and the beginning phases of defiance (Dorn, Hostinar, Susman, & Pervanidou, 2019). On the other hand, early childhood is in a critical period, meaning that the golden age of children cannot be repeated in subsequent years if their potentials are not optimally and effectively stimulated during this period. If various potentials are not stimulated during the golden age, it will hinder the next stage of infant development. Consequently, the golden era is unique and cannot be repeated (Mazidah, Putro, Naimah, Suyadi, & Anam, 2023).

Every child is born with potential, which is an innate component of ability that varies and is manifested as a result of the dynamic interaction between the individuality of the child and the influence of his or her environment. Various abilities that are actualized are distinct from cerebral function. The operation of the brain results from the interaction of genetic blueprints and environmental influences (Sitorus & Nurhafizah, 2023). When humans are born, the brain's organizational structure contains approximately 100-200 billion neurons or nerve cells that are ready to make connections between cells, ready to be developed and actualized to reach a high level of potential development; this number includes several trillion different types of information in human life. Regrettably, research demonstrates that only 5% of this potential is realized. Neurons, when connected, have an estimated one hundred trillion connections, which is approximately ten followed by a million

zeros (greater than the estimated number of atoms in the known universe). This number approximates the human brain's capacity (Souders II et al., 2021).

Early childhood education is the foundation for the formation of behavior, the inculcation of noble moral and moral values, the development of a high IQ, and the improvement of physical motor skills. Early education has a significant impact on future existence. The first five years of a child's life are crucial for the formation of his or her personality. The formation of behavior in the first five years has a significant impact on adult behavior. Meaningful education allows for the development of children's skills (Zulela, Neolaka, Iasha, & Setiawan, 2022).

Early childhood education begins while the infant is still in the womb and continues through the first, second, and third grades of elementary school. Thus, early childhood education concludes at approximately 8 years of age. Meanwhile, UNESCO divides each level of school into 7 classifications. The lowest level is called early education. This lowest level is called level 0, while preschool education is education for children aged 3-5 years (D'Agata, Kelly, Green, & Sullivan, 2022). Several countries start early childhood education earlier, namely at the age of 2 years, and other countries end their early childhood education later, namely up to the age of 5 years. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) states that early childhood programs are programs from centers or other institutions that provide services for children from birth to the age of 8 years. The NAEYC program covers community and family child care (for groups of children aged 0-3 years), private and state preschool education (for children aged 3-5 years), as well as Kindergarten and Elementary Schools (for children aged 6-8 years) (Gjelaj, Buza, Shatri, & Zabeli, 2020).

According to Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System Article 28, Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is held before the level of basic education. PAUD can be organized through a plural of formal, non-formal, and informal education. In the formal education pathway, PAUD takes the form of Kindergarten (TK), Raudhatul Athfal (RA), or other equivalent forms. PAUD in the non-formal education pathway takes the form of a playgroup (KB), daycare center (IPA), or other equivalent forms (Tabroni, Irpani, Ahmadiyah, Agusta, & Girivirya, 2022). On the informal education route, PAUD takes the form of family education or education organized by the environment. It was further stated that PAUD is an educational program held before entering the basic education level. This explains that before attending basic education students can attend early childhood education (Yembuu, 2021).

Although it is not required, early childhood education is highly recommended. Kindergarten, play group, or daycare are the options for parents who are knowledgeable about PAUD's function. A solid groundwork for human excellence can be laid with PAUD. Morality, intellect, the mind, religion, ethics, and aesthetics are these pillars. Success in this endeavour will unquestionably propel Indonesia to the level of a great nation (Williamson, Eynon, & Potter, 2020). In order for early childhood education programmes to help children thrive, they need to be adapted to the unique qualities of each student, who will have different backgrounds and levels of knowledge. It is essential that educational programmes provide children with stimulation, encouragement, and support. According to Rahiem (2021), programmes designed for children should take into account all aspects of their development and be customised according to their individual interests, abilities, and requirements. Also, the programme needs to be able to help people form positive habits, which will improve their behaviour and attitude. Instilling disciplined habits in daily life, helping children grow into mature and independent individuals, teaching them to live clean and healthy lives, and shaping their personalities to reflect societal values all begin here (Jumriani, Abbas, Isnaini, Mutiani, & Subiyakto, 2022). This study is necessary to better understand the phenomena and the ways in which Christian families can play an active role in their children's early education.

2. METHODS

The study sought to examine strategies for parents to optimise their involvement in early childhood education by incorporating Christian religious education within the household setting.

Library research was conducted to acquire publications from scholarly journals and databases. The accepted publications were analysed using a systematic literature review (SLR) approach. The study utilised the PRISMA framework, which involved four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and synthesis (Page et al., 2021; Siddaway, Wood, & Hedges, 2019). Next, the accepted articles were analyzed through narrative synthesis (Popay et al., 2006) to investigate the principle of online learning.

The researcher searched articles relevant to the study from online databases and article search engines such as Harzing's Publish or Perish (POP) through Scopus, Google Scholar, and Semantic Scholar published from 2010-2023. The search keywords used by the researchers were 'christian education', 'family role', and 'early childhood'. The inclusion criteria of the literatures were articles, proceeding and theses that relevant to the research variables. Articles or proceedings that could not be accessed directly, except by a membership, were excluded. A total of 30 journal papers published between 2010 and 2023 were gathered for the literature review.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *Children and Education*

A child is defined as a person who is produced as a result of a legal marriage between a man and a woman. They are young in spirit and in their life journey because they are readily influenced by their environment, and their age limit is less than eighteen years old, including the fetus. Its position in law is very clear, where a child is protected by the rights attached to him. As an individual with inherent rights, a child has special rights and is protected by legal provisions with all the aspects that follow. The rights of a child need to be implemented in practice in daily life. An example is the guarantee of obtaining an education as a child's privilege. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 unequivocally states that education is the most listed human right. This did not stop here but continued with the birth of the UN declaration in 1989 concerning the rights of the child stating that basic education should be compulsory and free of charge for all. Compulsory provisions for obtaining education in children, continue to open along with the birth of The Jamtio Declaration which was produced in The World Convention on Education for All in Jamtien Thailand in 1990; has resulted in an agreement that it is necessary to expand access to education for all children, youth and adults, as well as provide equal opportunities for girls. The above regulations provide guarantees for children to obtain their rights. In the national scope, RI Law no. 39/1999 concerning Human Rights, Article 60 states that: (1) Every child has the right to receive education and instruction in the framework of developing his personality according to his interests, talents, and level of intelligence; (2) Every child has the right to seek, receive and provide information according to his intellectual level and age for the sake of self-development as long as it is following moral values and obedience. Education for children is an important thing that must be fought for by everyone for a better generation, and the role of parents in this matter is very important.

Parents are considered the most responsible party in the education of children in their family. Children at an early age need special attention in various aspects, such as nutrition, protection, guidance, education, and so on. These things must be done thoroughly and continuously. Concerning early childhood education, Nurani emphasized that there are objectives of Early Childhood Education (PAUD), namely: (1) So that children believe in God and can worship and love each other; (2) So that children can manage their body skills including gross motor and fine motor movements, and can receive sensory stimulation; (3) Children can use language for understanding passive language and can communicate effectively so that it can be useful for thinking and learning; (4) Children can think logically, critically, give reasons, solve problems and find causal relationships; (5) Children can recognize the natural environment, social environment, the role of society and appreciate social and cultural diversity and can develop a positive self-concept and self-control; and (6) Children have sensitivity to rhythm, tone, various sounds, and appreciate creativity. If you look at the six goals of

PAUD, it is only right that children who receive education at this age are believed to be better off than those who do not receive the intended education.

Education for children should be given from an early age. That is why the term Early Childhood Education (PAUD) was introduced. Mulayawan stated that early childhood is a child who is still in a period of play. At this time, children are just learning to know the world that is still wide apart from their family environment. However, before entering the atmosphere of education in the community, a child should get an early education in his family environment. Again, the role of parents in this case needs to be real.

Parents should play an active role in implementing education for early childhood in their family environment. Children must obtain guidance that follows their capacity to receive teaching. The things taught in this period; in the family sphere must be easy to digest, practical, and useful. For example, when children are taught about ethics in speech; where parents have to give practical examples, such as saying thank you for something they received from others. In this case, children get an education to learn to be grateful for what they receive.

3.2. Christian Education in the Family

The family is the most intimate social unit for each person, serving as a platform for individuals to cultivate interpersonal connections. Within this context, individuals also engage in educational endeavours to foster personal growth. According to Ahmadi, the family is the initial social unit that infants become a part of. Ahmadi highlights its importance as a platform for communication among individuals and groups. Undoubtedly, the family serves as the primary social environment for children. Children's earliest social interaction experiences are provided by the family context. According to Septiani (2022), parents are the oldest educational institution and the primary environment in which children interact, indicating that this is where the educational process occurs. In order for parents to serve as educators to their offspring. It is evident from this statement that parents must play an active role in the education of their offspring. After all, children experience interaction for the first time in the family environment, and this is where they get to know other people. Malihah stated that the family has its function in the formation of an individual's personality. The function of the family is the function of affection, the function of the economy, the function of socialization and education; the protection function, and the recreational function. Among the functions of the family, as mentioned by Malihah (2021), there is an educational element; as stated by Hasbullah (2021), the family as an educational institution has several functions, namely the function of developing children's personalities and educating children at home; function of the family/parents in the success of education in schools. In this case, education; especially faith education within the family sphere is very important because it makes a significant contribution to the formation of children's character. Jalaludin emphasized that the age of an infant determines his or her religious development. This development is influenced by a number of psychological factors, including religion and the maturation of critical thought. It turns out that children who reach the age of critical thinking are also more critical in their understanding of religious teachings.

The Christian family is present in society as individuals who must reflect the true and responsible principles of the Christian faith. For this reason, faith education within the family sphere becomes very decisive for personal existence in society. This is in line with what Mulyadi said, that religion has values for human life as individuals or concerning society. Christianity seeks to foster and guide an attitude of life that follows Christian values so that a truly Christian person is formed. That is why faith education is important in a Christian family. Parents who serve as teachers, and children who are taught; will have the opportunity to be present in the world with a witness of the responsible Christian faith. Christian Education, according to Labobar (2022), is a teaching and learning process that is Bible-based, Christian-centered, and dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit who guides each individual at a level of growth; through teaching today toward knowing and experiencing God's plan and will through Christ in every aspect of life, and equipping them for effective ministry, centered on Christ the

Great Teacher and the commandments that mature disciples. Graendrof saw the urgency of Christian Education where the Holy Spirit is a guiding person, centered on Christ and within the scope of God's plan and will. Purba (2023) stated that Christian Education in the family is the basis for all other Education, and it cannot be denied that the responsibility for Christian Religious Education lies first and foremost with parents, namely father and mother. Do not forget that, ideally, the implementation of Christian Religious Education forms not only intelligent human beings through the mastery of various sciences and technologies but also human beings who believe in Christ and think and act in accordance with the tenets of the Christian faith.

3.3. Maximizing the Role of Parents in the Scope of Early Childhood Education

Parents have a significant contribution to the education of their children within the family. In addition, children at an early age need extra attention for their future; both in the growth of faith, mental, social, and physical. This view is supported by Zahro (2020), who stated that in early infancy, a person undergoes a very rapid process of growth and development and even experiences a development leap. They are at a very valuable and vulnerable age relative to later ages due to their extraordinary intelligence development. With the above facts, early childhood requires religious education from both parents correctly and appropriately.

Parents are biological fathers and mothers and are the first persons known to their children, as well as being the head of the family. Children in the family become the object of education in the family and parents have an important role in the activity in question. Hasan (2023) emphasized that early childhood education is the level of education preceding basic education and is a coaching effort aimed at children from birth to the age of six, which is carried out through the provision of educational stimulation to promote physical and spiritual growth and development so that children are prepared to enter further education, which is conducted through formal, non-formal, and informal channels. Early childhood children, defined as those between the ages of 0 and 6, must receive the utmost care from their parents, as their futures depend on it.

In the context of religious education, early childhood who come from Christian families have the right to receive religious education following the religious beliefs of their parents. At this time, children do not have enough time to think maturely in determining their religious beliefs. That is why Christian Education is the right thing to teach them. Christ (2014) stated that Christian Religious Education is the process of guiding each individual into the decision to live as a Christian, and family education is a form of Education outside of school that has a major influence on student success in learning. Maximum family education has a tendency to increase student interest in learning, which in turn will also affect student learning. The role of the family becomes important in this case. What is certain is that the role of parents needs to be maximized to realize early childhood education in their family environment. The role in question can be started from the involvement of parents in teaching aspects of the Christian faith by applying ethical values to it.

4. CONCLUSION

The inclusion of children inside a family necessitates particular care and consideration. An area that requires additional focus is the early childhood stage. During this era, commonly known as the golden age, youngsters require heightened parental focus. Both parents must actively engage in providing attention and assistance to enable the child's best growth. Furthermore, the emphasis on the educational side is also of paramount importance throughout this period. When it comes to teaching religion to young children, it is crucial to prioritise the use of suitable educational methods. Children in this developmental stage are highly susceptible to the impact of their immediate surroundings. Consequently, parents play a crucial role in providing guidance and direction in matters pertaining to religion. Parents must not only impart the teachings of the Christian faith, but also put into practice the

ethical principles it encompasses. Parents can contribute to their child's spiritual growth by actively participating in their religious education, thereby establishing a solid groundwork from a young age.

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