

## An Integrative Approach to Early Childhood Education: Learning from Nature and Religion Values

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### **Abstract:**

*Early childhood education is critical for building a strong foundation for children's holistic development. Exploring the integration of nature-based and religion-based learning in Desa Petengan, Bandung, Indonesia by using the case of Yayasan Al Anbiya wal Mursalin, it addresses two questions: (1) how is the combination between learning from nature and religious values applied in early childhood education? (2) why is it important to integrate nature-based and religious-based learning early education setting? The study examines the implementation of nature-religion integrated learning in early childhood education, and its significance for children's holistic development. A descriptive-explorative qualitative design is employed with data collected through classroom observations, interviews and documentation analysis. Findings reveal that integration of nature and religion not only enriches learning experiences but also fosters cognitive, socio-emotional, moral, and ecological awareness among children. These findings indicate that contextual learning grounded in local wisdom and spiritual values strengthens the sustainability of early childhood in rural communities. The study provides valuable implications for policy makers, educators, and researchers seeking to promote sustainable and value-based early education. Combination between learning from nature and religious values in early childhood education shows two learning domains, they are environmental (nature) and spiritual (religious). The combination is directly examined the process and practice of integration. Moreover, it answers and explores community response and impact by understanding why the model gains social legitimacy. It connects the outcome of integration (trust, satisfaction) with the value-based learning model. Model of pedagogical implementation and social validation combine natural and religious learning there.*

**Keywords:** *Early childhood education, Holistic learning, Nature-based learning, Religion-based education, Parental trust*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Desa Petengan has one private childhood education institution under Yayasan Al Anbiya wal Mursalin, which currently serves 43 students. The relatively high enrollment rate reflects parents' growing awareness of the importance of Holistic Integrative Early Childhood Education and the transition for early childhood to kindergarten (*Taman Kanak-Kanak*). Parents perceive this institution not only as a place for introducing children to literacy, numeracy, and peer socialization, but also as an environment socialization to that nurture's moral development (*akhlakul karimah*) and ensures holistic child growth.

Existing research has extensively discussed the importance of holistic learning, parental involvement, and cultural relevance in early childhood education. However, limited attention has been given to how nature-based learning can be integrated within religious and

rural Indonesian contexts. This study addresses that gap by examining how Yayasan Al Anbiya wal Mursalin in Desa Petengan combines environmental exploration with Islamic values to support holistic-integrative early education with localized practices rooted in faith and nature. The study position in Desa Petengan as a case not only aligns with but also expands international debates on sustainable, inclusive, and values driven early childhood education.

The growing trust of parents toward Yayasan Al Anbiya wal Mursalin illustrates how local communities value early education that harmonizes faith, nature, and holistic child development, an integration that this study seeks to examine in depth. The research problem, therefore, lies in exploring the determinants of parental trust toward *Yayasan Al Anbiya wal Mursalin*, particularly regarding (1) the role of holistic-integrative education in preparing children for academic readiness, and (2) the integration of religious values in shaping moral development. Investigating this aspect will provide insight into how local communities conceptualize community early education and how such trust contribute to the sustainability of religious based early childhood education institutions.

The research focuses on two interrelated dimensions. First, it explores how holistic-integrative education prepares children prepare for academic readiness by combining cognitive, social, and emotional development. Second, it examines the educational significance of integrating nature-based and religious learning as a unified model for moral and spiritual formation. Rather than merely describing institutional practices, this study seeks to explain why such integration is essential for cultivating balance between intellectual growth and value-based character development. This analytical focus offers a deeper understanding of how local communities conceptualize meaningful early education and why such eco-religious approaches can ensure the sustainability of religious-based educational institutions in rural Indonesia.

Early childhood education is universally acknowledged as the foundation of a lifelong learning and holistic development, encompassing cognitive, emotional, social, and moral dimensions (UNESCO, 2021). Scholars consistently argue that early interventions can foster resilience, adaptability, and academic readiness (Heckmen, 2011; Shonkoff & Philips, 2000). Internationally, frameworks emphasize the importance of inclusive and culturally relevant approaches to ensures equitable educational outcomes (Siraj, 2021). These global perspectives provide the backdrop for analyzing localized practiced such as those in Desa Petengan, where education combines nature, religion, and parental trust.

In addition to its religious orientation, Yayasan Al Anbiya wal Mursalin also adapt a learning approach that utilizes the surrounding natural environment as an active learning source. Desa Petengan is located in highland area surrounded by tea plantation and forested landscapes, which provide abundant opportunities for experiential learning. Teachers often introduce concepts of growth, gratitude and responsibility through direct interaction with nature, such as observing plants, maintaining school gardens, and reflecting on environmental stewardship from an Islamic perspective (*kehalifah fil ardlh*). This combination of learning from nature and religious values creates a contextual learning model that connects scientific curiosity with moral consciousness, aligning with the principles of eco-religious education and holistic-integrative early learning (UNESCO, 2021).

This research employs a descriptive-explorative qualitative approach, focusing on Yayasan Al Anbiya Wal Mursalin as a single case study. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi structured interviews with teachers and parents, and documentation analysis. This design enables an in-depth understanding of how natural and

religious elements are integrated withing the learning process and how these practices influence parental perceptions and trust.

### **Holistic and Integrative Approaches**

Holistic-integrative models of early childhood education emphasize that children development must encompass not only literacy but also nutrition, health, socio-emotional well-being, rather academic skills (Patiruhu, Makulua, Thalib and Elizar, 2023) highlight that integrative strategies in Indonesia are vital to ensuring children's readiness for lifelong learning, while, Epstein (2014) asserts that whole-child approaches form the foundation for early development. Studies in Indonesia demonstrate that embedding local wisdom and religious values within holistic learning enhances children's identity formation and moral grounding (Sholihah, 2022; Zamroni, 2023). Research across Southeast Asia also indicates that community-based education which integrates local wisdom can improve both participation and sustainability (Suryadi dan Hadisaputra, 2020). These perspectives align with the Indonesian government's Holistic-Integrative Early Childhood Education (PAUD-HI) policy, which encourages collaboration between schools, families, and communities, to support children overall well-being. However, empirical understanding remains limited regarding how religious and cultural values are embedded within holistic early childhood frameworks, especially in rural contexts. This gap provides the rational for examining the practicing of Yayasan Al Anbiya wal Mursalin in Desa Petengan, where learning from nature is integrated with Islamic moral values to foster, cognitive, moral, and ecological awareness in young learners.

### **Parental Trust and Engagement**

Parental trust is a recurring theme in early childhood education. Hornby and Blackwell (2018), strong-parent school partnerships significantly enhance learning outcomes. In rural Indonesia, Yulindrasari and Nurzaman (2022) found that parental involvement is directly linked to higher enrolment and stronger educational outcomes. Parents' trust in Yayasan Al Anbiya wal Mursalin reflects not only academic concerns but also the desires for moral and spiritual development, echoing global calls for education that integrates values with academics (Goodman et al, 2015). This position parental trust as both cultural factors and determinant of institutional sustainability.

Parental trust and engagement remain vital components in sustaining community-based early childhood education. When parents perceive that an institution reflects, their moral, cultural, and spiritual values their sense of belonging and commitment strengthens (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). In Desa Petengan, this trust is closely linked to the school educational model, which combines experiential learning from nature with Islamic moral education. Such integration allows parents to see not only academic benefits but also the cultivation of gratitude (*syukur*), responsibility (*amanah*), and care for the environment (*khalifah fil ardh*). As a result, the relationship between the institution and the community becomes mutually reinforcing, ensuring the long-term sustainability of religious-based early education.

### **Nature-Based and Value-Based Learning**

Research on holistic early childhood education increasingly highlights the integration of natural and moral learning environment as essential to children's development. Learning through nature has been shown to enhance creativity, problem solving, and socio-emotional growth (Elliott & Årlemalm-Hagsér, 2019; Sobel, 2014). Similar findings in Indonesians rural contexts also emphasize that nature-based learning shapes ecological awareness and emotional balance among children (Setyowati & Nurhayati, 2020; Maulida, 2021). Studies in

Scandinavian contexts demonstrate that outdoor and forest-school models foster independence, environmental awareness and ecological responsibility among young learners (Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2013). Complementarily, value-based education promotes empathy, social cohesion and moral reasoning, thereby shaping, children's ethical understanding and community sense (Lovat, Toomey, & Clement, 2010).

Furthermore, integrating Islamic values in early childhood setting strengthens moral consciousness, especially when supported by communities-based institutions (Istiqomah, 2018; Rahmawati, 2019). Together, these strands of research suggest that learning experiences grounded in both ecological interaction and moral reflection nurture the "whole child", uniting cognitive, emotional, and spiritual growth. Building upon this framework, the Desa Petengan model combine nature-based and religion-based learning by situation early education within local natural settings while embedding Islamic values. This fusion offers a contextually grounded form of eco-religious learning that remains under explores in early childhood education literature, particularly within Southeast Asian and rural Indonesian contexts. The Desa Petengan model merges these traditions by situating early education within natural settings while embedding Islamic values, offering a unique approach not widely documented in early childhood education literature.

### **Positioning the Current Study.**

Existing research has extensively addressed the importance of holistic learning, parental involvement, and cultural relevance in early childhood education. However, few studies have specifically examined the integration of nature-based learning within rural Indonesia contexts. By exploring parental trust in *Yayasan Al Anbiya wal Mursalin*, this study contributes a novel perspective that bridges global discourses on holistic early childhood education with localized practiced rooted in faith and environment. It positions Desa Petengan as a case study that both aligns with and expands international debates on sustainable, inclusive, and values-driven early childhood education.

## **DISCUSSION**

Education in Desa Patengan, *Kecamatan Rancabali*, Kabupaten Bandung includes early childhood education (*Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, or the acronym is PAUD), Elementary School (SD), Junior High School (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama*, or SMP). Village Office often conduct socialization at Elementary School (SD) to support education and environmental cleanliness. Education in Desa Patengan, *Kecamatan Rancabali*, Kabupaten Bandung includes early childhood education (*Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, or the acronym is PAUD), Elementary School (SD), Junior High School (*Sekolah Menengah Pertama*, or SMP). Village Office often conduct socialization at Elementary School (SD) to support education and environmental cleanliness.

This village has one private early childhood education under *Yayasan Al Anbiya wal Mursalin*. According to the data given by village apparatus, there are 43 students. It is because *Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini Holistik Integratif*, and the transition from early childhood level to kindergarten (*Taman Kanak-Kanak*, or TK). This finding emerges from one of the community participants (Sunday, 7/11/2025). It indicates that a high-level parental awareness to trust the Yayasan, to educate the children introducing reading, writing, and arithmetic, and socialization with their peers as well. Moreover, parents trust that by sending their children to religious educational institution, they will develop good morals (*ablakul karimah*), and ensure an environment that support optimal child growth and development. These two (2) reasons are the novelty of this writing.

Islam teaches muslim to educate children well since early years with *adab* and moral is more important than giving charity. Rasulullah Muhammad SAW said that, “A person educating his child is better for him than giving him one sha in charity everyday”. Integrative holistic learning is a process of giving full attention to early childhood to improve the quality and ability of children which includes providing nutritional health education services, protection, care, and welfare (Patiruhu, Makulua, Thalib, Elizar, 2023:333) wrote, that

*The importance of providing holistic and integrative learning education requires all relevant roles such as parents, teachers, and the central government. Because of the importance of providing holistic and integrative learning a teacher must have the ability of holistic and integrative learning strategies in early childhood education. Great educators are educators who can be sensitive to the needs of their students. Greatness in early childhood education is because it is a good reference for the future.*

The findings from Desa Petengan underscore the importance of contextualizing early childhood education within the sociocultural and religious realities of a community. Unlike standardized models that often emphasize academic preparation alone, the approach in Desa Petengan demonstrates how learning can be enriched when nature and religion are integrated into daily educational practice. This aligns with UNESCO’s (2021) recognition that culturally rooted and locally adapted early childhood education fosters more sustainable learning outcomes because it reflects the lived experiences of children and their families. When children learn in environments that combine natural exploration and moral instruction, their development extends beyond cognitive skills to encompass values, empathy, and responsibility toward their surroundings. To know how is the combination of learning from nature and religion values, the data taken from the processes, first, needs of analysis. It is conducted by gathering the questions to be then answered by the teachers, parents, the manager of Yayasan. Second, observation done to see the bonding between community, teachers, and the manager of Yayasan. Third, teaching practice to six (6) students, who are assisted by their parents, and three teachers of early childhood education. In the classroom, they are all sit together listening to the explanation, about:

The benefit of storytelling. The researcher explains that parents can transfer the values of religion based on nearest environment, in other way, the place where we live. For example, nearby, there is tea plantation. The plant is very wide. We can see a lot of leavy plants, that are majority tea leaf. We can pick tea leave, dry them in the sun, after that, we can boil the dried tea leaf and make a cup of tea. The sample of short story above, can be practiced both by parents at home, where home is the first place for children gain the first education from their first model, called as mother. In other word, storytelling presents a precise media to transfer religious and cultural values by placing or studying in the context of the parents within the child’s immediate the environment. As the first educators at home, parents especially mothers play as the role models to bring the children into moral lessons to familiar, daily experiences. For example, an oral story about a nearby tea plantation can illustrate not only environmental awareness but also a value of gratitude, leadership, a full understanding of a natural resources’ situation. By guiding children to observe the tea plants, understand the process of harvesting and drying the leaves, and at last, a cup of tea, parents embed abstract values into concrete, relatable, practices. Such narratives transform ordinary setting into pedagogical spaces, reinforcing the principle that the home is the first child’s school, and storytelling functions as bridge between live experiences, moral formation, and early education.

In school, teachers strengthen the valuable that have been introduced by the parents of early childhood students. As the second parents, teachers face the early childhood students

directly. Teachers play as the planner, instructional designer, and even both. Teachers are one of the main shapers of future citizens. They are the main facilitator at school who's function to explore, develop, optimize, the potencies owned, so that the early childhood students become a part of a civilized human beings.

There are some techniques that teachers use to instil moral value, among them are: first, teachers give example. The behaviours of teachers, parents and the environment are the most effective examples for forming children's moral behaviour. When parents, teachers, or people around show negative emotion, such as angry, antisocial, antipathy, and so on, early childhood students are easy to imitate. It will harm children's character if embed on children. Second, distract attention is one of the ways to divert child's attention by directing their activity and behaviour as a substitute for their original activities, for example, if a child is active with a hobby of scribbling on the classroom walls with chalk, the teacher can give them a pencil and a piece of paper, then ask them to scribble or draw on a blank paper. Third, to give praise. Praising children demonstrates admiration for the values and development of moral behaviour they demonstrate. Rewarding children with praise psychologically reinforces desired behaviour. Praise is a sign and comment intended to impress and develop the true value of their actions. Praise can be delivered verbal and non-verbal. Verbal praise involves words or phrases such as "that's a smart student", "great boy", "you are a pious girl", and so on. Non-verbal praise, on the other hand, involves facial expression and body gestures, such as giving a thumbs-up, smiling, clapping, and more. The purpose of reinforcement is to ensure that positive behaviour is repeated and ingrained in the child's character. Forth, persuasive technique is given to influence children to do something by arousing their emotion, feelings, and aspirations, as well as their thoughts or intellect. Teachers can do this in schools by explaining the positive aspects of the action. For example, this job is interesting and easy to do". Moreover, teacher also can explain in impressive way. To inform the children about the fact is not enough. Therefore, it needs an extra effort to stimulate their emotion and feeling of a certain action, for example, teacher explain that quarrel is not a good action, and posting notices that fighting is bad. A great character is a child who likes to help others. This is reflected in the legends in Rancabali such as The Legend of Kian Santang and Princess Rengganis. Help one another is the value of a Sundanese character and Indonesian people.

Another important value is religion values. Both teacher and parent can introduce the values to children by showing role model. Early childhood aged around 2-3 years can imitate the model. The nearest model are their parent and teacher. The technique used are exemplary method and habits. Firstly, exemplary method or role model and education are the most effective and successful method in preparing children in terms of morals, forming their mental and social aspects. It is because teacher as educator are role models or idols in the eyes of children and good examples in their eyes. Children will imitate their good morals, words, and actions, and this will be ingrained with them.

Secondly, teaching habits technique is another method to introduce religion values to early childhood. It has been stipulated in Islam law that children are created from birth in a state of pure monotheism, noble morals, a noble soul, and straight Islamic ethic. Both teacher and parent can explain in a simple language and show how to be a pious child. A pious child use to do "*sholat*" or pray five (5) times a day, good student must study as Rasulullah SAW teaches *muslim* to study from the cradle until die. It is expected that through habit method children can process directly with environment and education taught.

Thirdly, the advice technique. This is an effective method for shaping a child's faith, moral, mental, and social development. This is because advice has a significant influence in helping children understand the essence of things and instilling awareness of Islamic principles. The advice based educational method provides children with a sound education so that they imitate and implement what their educator and parents do. The function of advice method is to show the goodness and the badness, because not everyone can catch the value of goodness and badness.

Fourthly, attention or supervision technique. Both teacher and parent do the attention and supervision to children. Likewise, both continue to monitor their physical and intellectual development. Islam with holistic and timeless principles, encourages parents and other educators to always pay attention to and supervise their children in all aspects of their lives and education, as they ensure the child is always under the supervision of educators, from their movement, words, and actions, to their orientation, and tendencies.

Fifthly, punishment method. The punishment contained in Islamic law encompass holistic principles containing essential matters that human cannot live without. Scholars or *ijihad* and *ushul fiqh* summarize these principles into five matters called the five primary matters or *al-khuliyat al-khams*, namely, safeguarding religion, life, honour, intellect and property. They state that the laws or principles contained in Islam aim to safeguard these five primary matters. This technique can be applied by gentle and coving care, maintain the wrong habit of using punishment. It is supposed to apply gradually from the lightest to the heaviest. Rasulullah SAW said, “*Order your children to perform the five daily prayers at any time they are seven years old, hit them for (leaving) the (five daily) prayers if they (have been) ten years old, as well separate their beds*”. This hadith shows that it is permissible to hit a child educate them if they do acts that violate the *Sharia* if a child has reached that age allowing him to take hit and take the lessons from it and this is usually in ten years old, but the condition is, a blow. It's not too harsh and isn't on the face.

The role of parental trust is also central to sustaining the effectiveness of holistic education models. In Desa Petengan, the preference for *Yayasan Al Anbiya wal Mursalin* indicates that parents perceive religious-based institutions as trustworthy not only for their capacity to deliver academic knowledge but also for ensuring the moral safety of their children. Research suggests that parental involvement and trust significantly influence the success of early childhood programs, especially in rural contexts where education is closely tied to social cohesion and communal values (Yulindrasari & Nurzaman, 2022). Therefore, the confidence parents place in this institution represents both a cultural affirmation and a form of social capital that strengthens community engagement in education.

Moreover, the integration of natural learning and religious values can be seen as a localized response to global educational priorities, inclusivity and responsiveness contextual responsiveness are reciprocal approach that guarantee everyone are respected and sustained by their specific environment. Learning process linked to the daily life will give a valuable and concrete experience (Kartika, 2025:273). Early childhood students will get impressed and remember for a long time, to be then practiced the experience by doing it. Along with the Desa Petengan offers an illustration of how these principles can be practically implemented. Nature-based learning, as documented in international literature, promotes creativity, ecological awareness, and socio-emotional regulation (Elliott & Årlemalm-Hagsér, 2019). When coupled with religious instruction, it supports moral development and fosters a sense of belonging and respect within the community. This dual approach suggests that educational

models grounded in both tradition and innovation may be more resilient and adaptable to changing social conditions.

Finally, the experience of Desa Petengan contributes to wider debates on the future of early childhood education in Indonesia and beyond. While globalization pushes toward standardized education benchmarks, the evidence from Petengan suggests that integrating local wisdom and spiritual values strengthens both relevance and sustainability. Patel, Murray, and Cowling (2025) argue that socio-emotional well-being must be prioritized alongside academic readiness. The Desa Petengan model not only responds to this imperative but also offers a pathway for policymakers to develop frameworks that respect local identity while aligning with global standards. By situating parental trust, community participation, and integrative pedagogy at the heart of early childhood education, Desa Petengan provides a blueprint for culturally grounded yet forward-looking educational innovation. The Conceptual Framework of the Integration of Nature, Religion, and Parental Beliefs in Holistic Early Childhood Education in Petengan Village is presented in Figure 1.

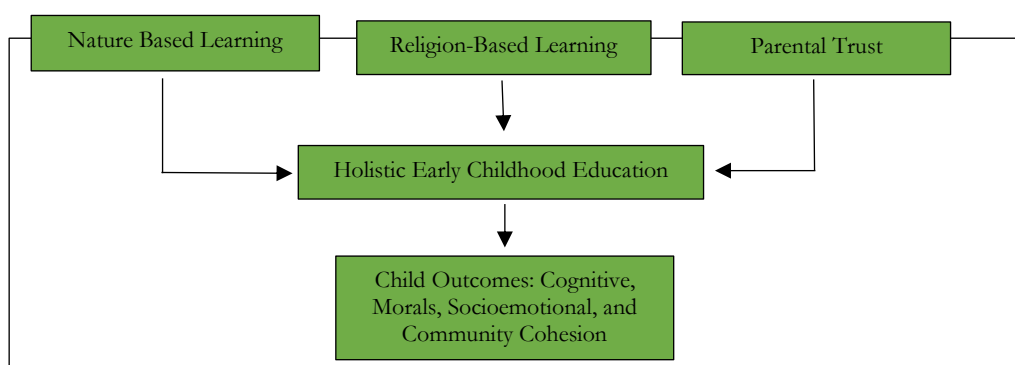


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Integration of Nature, Religion, and Parental Trust in Holistic Early Education in Desa Petengan

## CONCLUSION

The case of Desa Patengang illustrates the significance of integrating cultural, natural, and religious dimensions into early childhood education. By combining nature-based learning with Islamic values, *Yayasan Al Anbiyaw al Mursalin* provides a holistic model that extends beyond academic instruction to encompass moral formation, socio-emotional development, and ecological awareness. This integration resonates with international frameworks, such as those of UNESCO, which emphasize inclusivity, contextual responsiveness, and sustainability in early education.

Parental trust emerges as a central factor in sustaining this educational approach. The strong confidence placed by families in religious-based institutions demonstrates that education is not only perceived as a means of preparing children for school but also as a moral and spiritual responsibility. This trust, functioning as a form of social capital, strengthens community engagement and creates a supportive environment for children's growth. Moreover, the Desa Petengan model affirms that localized practices can serve as valuable contributions to global educational discourses. While international standards provide guidance, effective early childhood education must be grounded in community realities. Integrating local wisdom, religious values, and natural environments ensures that early learning is both meaningful and sustainable. In conclusion, Desa Petengan's experience provides policymakers, educators, and researchers with insights into designing culturally grounded yet globally relevant early childhood education models. By prioritizing parental

trust, holistic pedagogy, and contextualized learning, communities can foster future generations who are not only academically competent but also morally responsible, socially empathetic, and ecologically conscious.

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