



The Importance of Early Childhood Education for Fostering Growth and Development of Children as the Nation's Hopeful Future Generation at PK-AUD Immanuel

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood represents a foundational period for human development, encompassing cognitive, social-emotional, moral, and spiritual growth. Quality early childhood education (ECE) plays a critical role in nurturing these domains, preparing children to become competent, responsible, and socially aware citizens. This study investigates the importance of ECE at PK-AUD Immanuel in fostering children's holistic development as the nation's hopeful future generation. Employing a quantitative descriptive design, the research involved 50 children aged 4-6 and five teachers, selected through purposive sampling. Results indicate that teachers' exemplary behavior-including patience, empathy, enthusiasm, and moral-spiritual modeling-strongly influences children's growth across cognitive, social-emotional, and ethical domains. Children demonstrated increased motivation, cooperation, curiosity, and ethical awareness when engaged in autonomy-supportive, play-based, and spiritually integrated learning activities. Regression analysis revealed that teacher behavior accounted for approximately 58% of the variance in children's developmental outcomes. Qualitative insights further highlighted that teachers' reflective practice, emotional stability, and integration of Christian values are instrumental in modeling positive behaviors that children emulate. These findings underscore the pivotal role of educators as both cognitive instructors and moral exemplars, suggesting that effective ECE extends beyond knowledge transmission to character and value formation. PK-AUD Immanuel exemplifies how holistic, value-driven education cultivates children who are intellectually capable, socially competent, morally grounded, and spiritually aware, serving as a foundation for the nation's future prosperity.

Keywords: *Early Childhood, Growth, Generation*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood represents a critical stage in human development, forming the foundation for cognitive, emotional, social, and moral growth. During this formative period, children acquire essential skills and habits that shape their future learning, behavior, and personality (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). As the first structured environment outside the home, early childhood education (ECE) institutions play a pivotal role in nurturing these developmental domains. PK-AUD Immanuel, a Christian-based early childhood education center, emphasizes holistic development, integrating intellectual, social, and spiritual dimensions. This approach reflects the understanding that education in early childhood is not merely the transmission of knowledge but a formative process that cultivates character, values, and a sense of responsibility toward self and society. The importance of early childhood education has been widely recognized in both global and national contexts. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education, underscore the necessity of ensuring access to early learning opportunities for all children. Research consistently demonstrates that high-quality early education programs improve school readiness, enhance social competence, and contribute to long-term academic success (Barnett, 2011). Furthermore, ECE serves as a critical intervention in reducing educational inequalities, providing children from diverse backgrounds with the cognitive and socio-emotional tools needed to thrive in later schooling and life. At PK-AUD Immanuel, the mission extends beyond academic preparation. The institution prioritizes character formation, moral education, and spiritual guidance, aligning with the principle that young learners internalize values most effectively through modeling and experiential learning. According to Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, children acquire behaviors, attitudes, and emotional responses through observation and imitation of significant adults in their environment. Teachers, therefore, serve not only as instructors but as exemplars of ethical and prosocial behavior. In this context, fostering the growth and development of children encompasses promoting curiosity, perseverance, empathy, and cooperative skills—attributes that lay the groundwork for responsible citizenship and lifelong learning. Early childhood education also addresses the multifaceted dimensions of human development. Cognitive development during these years involves the acquisition of language, problem-solving skills, and basic literacy and numeracy concepts. Social-emotional development focuses on self-regulation, empathy, and interpersonal skills, which are essential for constructive interactions with peers and adults. Moral and spiritual education, especially in faith-based institutions like PK-AUD Immanuel, emphasizes understanding and practicing virtues such as honesty, respect, compassion, and gratitude. Together, these domains contribute to the holistic growth of the child, fostering a balanced personality capable of adapting to complex social and cultural environments. ECE has profound implications for national development. Children educated in environments that nurture critical thinking, creativity, and social responsibility are more likely to become productive and conscientious members of society. As the future generation, they carry the potential to drive innovation, uphold ethical standards, and sustain cultural and national values. In this regard, PK-AUD Immanuel serves as a microcosm for societal investment in human capital, emphasizing that quality education

in early childhood is not only a matter of individual development but a strategic imperative for the nation's long-term progress. Issues such as curriculum quality, teacher competence, family involvement, and access to resources significantly influence the outcomes of early education (OECD, 2017). At PK-AUD Immanuel, these challenges are addressed through carefully designed pedagogical approaches, integrating play-based learning, moral instruction, and spiritual engagement. Teachers are trained to observe individual differences, scaffold learning experiences, and foster intrinsic motivation, ensuring that each child's growth trajectory aligns with their developmental potential. Early childhood education at PK-AUD Immanuel plays a vital role in fostering the growth and development of children as the nation's hopeful future generation. By integrating cognitive, social-emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions, the institution provides a holistic learning environment that prepares children not only for academic success but also for ethical and responsible citizenship. Recognizing the formative power of these early years, this study explores how structured educational practices, teacher guidance, and moral-spiritual modeling contribute to nurturing children who are intellectually competent, emotionally resilient, and morally grounded, thus serving as the foundation for the nation's future prosperity and well-being.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to investigate the role of early childhood education at PK-AUD Immanuel in fostering children's growth and development as the nation's future generation. The purpose of this design was to systematically measure the influence of educational practices, teacher guidance, and moral-spiritual modeling on multiple developmental domains of children, including cognitive, social-emotional, and moral-spiritual growth. Quantitative methods were chosen to allow objective analysis and statistical validation of observed relationships between educational interventions and developmental outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research population comprised all students aged 4 to 6 years enrolled at PK-AUD Immanuel during the academic year. Using purposive sampling, a total of 50 children were selected to ensure representation across different age groups and developmental stages. Inclusion criteria required children to have attended the institution for at least six months, ensuring familiarity with the school environment and its educational practices. Additionally, all teachers ($n = 5$) responsible for these students participated in the study, providing insight into pedagogical strategies, moral modeling, and spiritual guidance. A structured observation checklist was used to assess teacher behaviors and classroom interactions. This checklist evaluated dimensions such as instructional quality, engagement in play-based learning, moral-spiritual modeling, responsiveness to students, and emotional support. Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "never demonstrated" (1) to "always demonstrated" (5). Then, a child development rating scale measured students' growth in cognitive skills, social-emotional competence, and moral-spiritual understanding. Observers recorded children's participation, problem-solving abilities, cooperation, empathy, and application of learned values in daily activities. Last, semi-structured interviews with teachers were conducted to complement quantitative data, exploring teachers' perceptions of their role in nurturing holistic development, challenges encountered, and strategies implemented to foster children's

intrinsic motivation and ethical behavior. Descriptive statistics summarized mean scores and standard deviations for teacher practices and child development indicators. Inferential analysis employed Pearson correlation coefficients to examine relationships between teacher behaviors, educational strategies, and children's developmental outcomes. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate that early childhood education at PK-AUD Immanuel significantly contributes to the growth and development of children as the nation's hopeful future generation. Quantitative analysis using descriptive statistics revealed that teachers consistently exhibited behaviors aligned with high-quality early childhood education principles, including patience, empathy, enthusiasm for teaching, and moral-spiritual modeling. Observational data indicated that the mean score for teacher engagement in classroom activities was 4.6 out of 5, suggesting that teachers were highly proactive in facilitating learning experiences that fostered both cognitive and socio-emotional growth. Likewise, children's development scores, measured across cognitive, social-emotional, and moral-spiritual domains, averaged 4.2, reflecting substantial progress in key areas of holistic development. These findings indicate that when educators engage actively and model positive behaviors, children respond with heightened motivation, curiosity, and cooperative behavior. Analysis of teacher-child interactions highlighted the role of relational dynamics in promoting intrinsic motivation and developmental progress. Teachers at PK-AUD Immanuel employed a combination of structured learning activities, guided play, and individualized attention, creating an environment that nurtured autonomy, competence, and relatedness—core principles of Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory. For example, during art activities, teachers allowed children to select their own materials and determine the sequence of creative tasks. Observers noted that children expressed satisfaction and pride in their work, demonstrating increased attention, perseverance, and problem-solving skills. These findings align with prior research emphasizing that autonomy-supportive learning environments enhance intrinsic motivation and cognitive engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

The study further revealed that moral-spiritual modeling is a distinctive feature of PK-AUD Immanuel's educational approach. Teachers consistently integrated Christian values such as honesty, kindness, gratitude, and responsibility into daily classroom routines. Through actions such as praying before lessons, demonstrating empathy toward children's challenges, and modeling ethical decision-making, educators provided tangible examples of moral conduct. Observers reported that children mirrored these behaviors, displaying cooperative problem-solving, polite communication, and empathetic interactions with peers. This aligns with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which emphasizes that children acquire behaviors through observation and imitation of role models. In the context of Christian early childhood education, these findings suggest that the teacher's character is as impactful as formal instruction in shaping children's moral and spiritual development. A notable outcome of this study was the interplay between cognitive development and socio-emotional growth. Children who received consistent guidance from teachers demonstrating both academic proficiency and emotional warmth exhibited

higher levels of curiosity, attention, and persistence in tasks. During a numeracy activity, for instance, children were observed enthusiastically counting, sorting, and comparing objects while their teacher offered encouragement and problem-solving prompts. Those children whose teachers modeled patience and reinforcement of effort, rather than immediate correction, displayed fewer frustrations and greater willingness to attempt challenging tasks. This supports Vygotsky's (1978) theory that social interaction and scaffolding are essential for cognitive and emotional development, particularly when mediated by caring, attentive adults. Quantitative analysis using Pearson correlation confirmed a strong positive relationship between teacher behavior and children's developmental outcomes ($r = 0.76, p < .05$). This indicates that higher levels of teacher engagement, moral modeling, and supportive interactions are strongly associated with enhanced cognitive, social-emotional, and moral-spiritual development. Regression analysis further revealed that teacher behavior accounted for approximately 58% of the variance in children's overall developmental scores ($R^2 = 0.58$). These results corroborate previous studies (Hamre & Pianta, 2006; Wentzel, 2002) emphasizing the pivotal role of teacher-child relationships in early learning environments. The data indicate that positive teacher modeling not only improves observable skills but also nurtures intrinsic motivation and adaptive behaviors that contribute to long-term development. Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews reinforced these findings by providing contextual insight into teachers' approaches and philosophies. Teachers described their work as a form of ministry, emphasizing that fostering children's growth involves both professional skill and spiritual commitment. One teacher stated, "Every interaction with a child is an opportunity to teach not only knowledge but also love, patience, and respect. Our goal is to raise children who are capable and also morally grounded." Another teacher emphasized the importance of modeling perseverance: "When a child struggles, I show them how to try again patiently. They learn to trust themselves and feel supported." These reflections illustrate that the moral and spiritual dimensions of teacher behavior are deliberately integrated into pedagogical practice, creating an environment where cognitive and socio-emotional learning are inseparable from ethical and spiritual formation. Observations also revealed the significance of play-based learning as a conduit for holistic development. Teachers actively participated in both structured and free play, using these moments to model social norms, problem-solving strategies, and collaborative behaviors. During a block-building activity, teachers guided children in negotiating space, sharing materials, and resolving conflicts, demonstrating patience and fairness. Children responded by mirroring these behaviors, negotiating solutions independently, and offering assistance to peers. This "living curriculum" approach aligns with Knight's (2006) perspective on moral education, which stresses that ethical and cognitive development is most effectively transmitted through daily, observable actions rather than verbal instruction alone. The integration of Christian values into learning further strengthened children's moral and spiritual growth. Teachers employed practices such as gratitude prayers, group reflections on actions, and daily expressions of kindness to embed ethical reasoning into routine activities. Children demonstrated internalization of these values by initiating helping behaviors, expressing concern for peers, and reflecting on right and wrong choices. This approach exemplifies Smith's (2016) concept of "liturgical education," in which repeated, value-laden actions cultivate habits of virtue and moral awareness. Such findings suggest that early childhood education at PK-AUD

Immanuel transcends traditional cognitive goals, emphasizing the formation of character and conscience alongside intellectual development. Another critical factor identified in this study was the emotional stability and self-regulation of teachers. Observers noted that teachers who maintained composure under stress, expressed joy, and approached challenges calmly fostered a similar disposition in children. Students mirrored these emotional cues, displaying patience, resilience, and sustained attention in both individual and group activities. Statistical analysis indicated that teacher emotional stability had the highest correlation with children's socio-emotional outcomes ($r = 0.81$). This aligns with Nouwen's (1975) notion of the "wounded healer," emphasizing that educators' own emotional and spiritual well-being directly influences their effectiveness as moral and cognitive role models. Teachers reported instances of fatigue, administrative burden, and managing diverse developmental needs. However, those engaged in reflective practices, professional mentoring, and faith-based community support demonstrated greater consistency in modeling positive behaviors. These findings suggest that teacher formation programs should emphasize not only pedagogical skill but also moral-spiritual resilience. Institutions like PK-AUD Immanuel, which integrate reflective communities, devotional practices, and peer support, provide an infrastructure that sustains high-quality, character-focused early childhood education. This study confirms that early childhood education at PK-AUD Immanuel significantly fosters holistic development—cognitive, socio-emotional, and moral-spiritual—through the deliberate integration of teacher exemplary behavior, play-based learning, and Christian values. Quantitative and qualitative findings converge to show that teachers' moral modeling, emotional stability, and instructional engagement create a learning environment that cultivates intrinsic motivation, ethical behavior, and problem-solving skills in children. These outcomes underscore the pivotal role of educators as both cognitive instructors and moral exemplars, reinforcing the premise that early childhood education is not merely about knowledge acquisition but about shaping the future generation of morally grounded, capable, and socially responsible citizens.

CONCLUSION

The present study underscores the vital importance of early childhood education at PK-AUD Immanuel in fostering the growth and development of children as the nation's hopeful future generation. Both quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrate that teachers' exemplary behavior plays a central role in shaping not only children's cognitive abilities but also their socio-emotional and moral-spiritual competencies. The strong positive correlation between teacher modeling and children's developmental outcomes indicates that educators' actions, attitudes, and moral consistency profoundly influence children's intrinsic motivation, engagement, and overall readiness to learn. By demonstrating patience, empathy, fairness, and enthusiasm, teachers serve as living curricula, providing children with concrete examples of ethical conduct, problem-solving strategies, and cooperative behaviors. This study highlights that intrinsic motivation among young learners is nurtured when children experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness—core principles of Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory. At PK-AUD Immanuel, teachers effectively foster these dimensions through structured yet flexible learning activities, guided play, and relational interactions. By allowing children to make choices, providing constructive feedback, and maintaining emotionally supportive

relationships, educators create an environment in which children feel competent, respected, and connected. This, in turn, promotes sustained engagement and the development of self-regulatory skills essential for lifelong learning. The integration of Christian moral and spiritual values into daily classroom routines contributes significantly to the formation of children's character. Through consistent modeling of virtues such as honesty, kindness, gratitude, and responsibility, teachers cultivate a moral compass in children that extends beyond academic learning. Observational and interview data reveal that children internalize these values, demonstrating empathy, cooperation, and ethical decision-making in their interactions with peers. This approach aligns with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory and Smith's (2016) concept of liturgical education, emphasizing that children learn best when moral and spiritual principles are embodied in observable, repetitive actions rather than taught solely through verbal instruction. The study also identifies emotional stability and reflective practice as essential components of effective early childhood education. Teachers who maintain composure under stress, approach challenges with calm perseverance, and engage in ongoing professional and spiritual formation are more effective in modeling behaviors that children emulate. This finding resonates with Nouwen's (1975) notion of the "wounded healer," suggesting that educators' emotional and spiritual well-being directly influences their capacity to inspire and guide young learners. Institutional support structures, including peer mentoring, reflective communities, and faith-based practices, further enhance teachers' ability to sustain exemplary behavior. Play-based learning emerges as a critical conduit for holistic development, allowing children to practice cognitive, social, and ethical skills in meaningful, interactive contexts. Teachers' active participation in play, coupled with guidance and moral modeling, fosters cooperative problem-solving, resilience, and social competence. This approach reinforces Vygotsky's (1978) theory that learning is socially mediated and that cognitive and emotional growth are deeply intertwined with interpersonal interaction. Early childhood education at PK-AUD Immanuel is instrumental in nurturing children who are intellectually capable, socially adept, morally conscious, and spiritually grounded. Teachers' exemplary behavior—manifested through moral consistency, emotional stability, pedagogical skill, and spiritual modeling—serves as the foundation for children's holistic development. The findings affirm that effective early childhood education transcends the mere transmission of knowledge; it requires educators to embody values and virtues that children can observe, imitate, and internalize. As such, PK-AUD Immanuel provides a model for cultivating the next generation of citizens who are not only academically competent but also ethically responsible, socially compassionate, and spiritually attuned, fulfilling the institution's mission to prepare children as the nation's hopeful future generation.

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