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# A Comparative Study of Moral Values Education in Public and Religion-Based Kindergartens in Yogyakarta

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## Abstract

Integrating moral values into early childhood education remains a critical issue for educators and policymakers worldwide. This study explores the implementation of moral values education in public and religion-based kindergartens in Yogyakarta. Using a descriptive quantitative approach, data were gathered through surveys and interviews from a sample of 20 kindergartens, ten public and ten religion-based, across five districts. The research focuses on how core moral values such as politeness, honesty, responsibility, and cooperation are taught and incorporated into daily learning activities. Results indicate that both public and religion-based kindergartens emphasize similar core values, though religion-based institutions place added importance on religious practices like daily prayers. Storytelling is more frequently employed in religion-based kindergartens to teach moral values. In contrast, public kindergartens utilize more diverse strategies, including group activities and discussions. Teachers in public kindergartens often encounter challenges with inconsistency between home and school environments regarding moral education, while those in religion-based kindergartens report difficulties managing children during religious activities. The findings underscore the need for improved home-school collaboration in public kindergartens to ensure consistency in moral education. In contrast, religion-based kindergartens could benefit from adopting more interactive and reflective teaching methods to foster critical thinking in children. Teacher training programs should focus on equipping educators with culturally sensitive strategies for moral education. Although this study offers valuable insights, its findings are geographically limited to Yogyakarta, and future research should broaden the scope to include different regions and assess long-term impacts on children's moral development.

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## Introduction

Moral education in early childhood plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' character and societal cohesion. As children develop, early educational experiences provide the foundation for future ethical behaviors, fostering empathy, responsibility, and integrity (Dewantara, 2017; Sumanto, 2014). Global interest in early childhood education (ECE) has grown, with moral values increasingly seen as vital for preparing children to engage positively in diverse societies (Özel, 2023). Institutions worldwide are tasked with integrating moral education into curricula to cultivate well-rounded individuals who can navigate the complexities of modern social and cultural environments (Diananda, 2018; Febriana & 'Aziz, 2019). The importance of early moral development is thus recognized for the individual child and broader societal stability and moral progress (Hidayat et al., 2021).

Prior studies have demonstrated that early childhood education institutions play an essential role in developing moral values (Asyahidah et al., 2021; Herlinawati et al., 2022). Formal, nonformal, and informal educational settings provide moral development opportunities

through structured curricula and social interaction (Fitzpatrick et al., 2020). A core focus of ECE is instilling moral standards that define right and wrong, which become the framework for children's ethical decision-making (Shaffer, 1994). In particular, teachers in early childhood settings are pivotal in providing stimuli for moral development, including through daily routines and specific learning activities (Ananda, 2017; Perdana & Ngadiman, 2019). Thus, moral education in early childhood is well-documented as foundational to personal and social growth (Hidayati, 2022).

Moral development has been the subject of considerable theoretical exploration. Theories from cognitive development (e.g., Piaget) and moral development (e.g., Kohlberg) have significantly influenced pedagogical approaches in general kindergartens (Daniel et al., 2014). These theories suggest that children's moral understanding evolves through stages, implying the necessity of age-appropriate interventions (Febriana & 'Aziz, 2019). Educators, therefore, tailor moral instruction to these stages, reinforcing universal values such as honesty, respect, and cooperation (Sumanto, 2014). In contrast, faith-based kindergartens incorporate universal moral values and religious teachings, emphasizing virtues like sincerity, piety, and obedience, particularly within Islamic contexts (Hibana, 2021). This dual approach in faith-based settings seeks to harmonize moral development with religious instruction, fostering a holistic moral framework for children (Batu Bara & Afriani, 2021).

Several studies have examined how kindergartens apply specific pedagogical strategies to teach moral values. In kindergartens, these strategies include storytelling, role-playing, and daily practices like greeting rituals and group activities that encourage cooperation (Komalasari et al., 2023). Similarly, faith-based kindergartens use prayer, memorization of religious texts, and moral storytelling to reinforce moral and spiritual values (Margaretha & Haryono, 2024). Consistent moral education in early childhood, whether in secular or religious settings, is essential for building moral competence that persists into later life stages (Perdana & Ngadiman, 2019). However, despite these efforts, challenges remain in ensuring that moral values are deeply internalized and applied in children's everyday actions (Hidayat et al., 2021).

The Indonesian educational context offers a unique case for examining moral education, as the system is divided between public and faith-based kindergartens. Public kindergartens, accounting for approximately 70% of the total, emphasize universal moral values derived from theories of child development with a flexible approach that adapts to diverse social and cultural contexts (Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). Conversely, faith-based kindergartens, representing around 25,000 institutions, focus on integrating religious teachings with moral education (Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023). These institutions adopt a more structured, religion-centered curriculum that teaches children moral values and fosters spiritual development (Hibana, 2021). Both systems share a common goal of instilling solid ethical values in children, yet differ significantly in methodology and philosophical grounding (Batu Bara & Afriani, 2021).

Despite extensive research on moral education in early childhood, several gaps still need to be addressed. Most notably, there is limited comparative analysis of how public and faith-based kindergartens approach moral development, particularly within diverse cultural and religious contexts like Indonesia (Wahidah & Maemonah, 2020). Existing studies have focused on either public or faith-based institutions in isolation without a detailed comparison of the different pedagogical methods and their efficacy in fostering moral behavior (Özel, 2023; Poblete Núñez, 2020). Moreover, while much is known about theoretical approaches to moral education, there is less empirical data on the long-term impact of these methods, particularly in diverse, pluralistic societies (Herlinawati et al., 2022). This study seeks to address these gaps by offering a comprehensive comparison of public and faith-based kindergartens, focusing on their strategies for teaching moral values.

This study aims to analyze the implementation of moral education in public and faith-based kindergartens in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. By comparing these two educational settings, the research seeks to identify how differing approaches, secular versus religious, affect the

development of moral values in early childhood. Additionally, the study will explore the challenges educators face in both settings and how they address the unique moral needs of children from various cultural, religious, and social backgrounds. The findings of this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of early childhood education in moral development and offer valuable insights into how different pedagogical approaches can be adapted to foster ethical behavior effectively in diverse societies.

## Methods

The method used in this study is descriptive quantitative, and interviews were conducted with school samples from public kindergartens and faith-based kindergartens. Descriptive quantitative is used in this research to describe the problem of a topic (Siedlecki, 2020): early childhood moral development in schools. This research was conducted to discover the differences in developing early childhood moral values in public and faith-based kindergartens. Data were collected using surveys and interviews. The sampling technique used in this study was random sampling from 5 districts/cities in D.I Yogyakarta, which resulted in 2 samples of public kindergartens and two samples of faith-based kindergartens from each district/city with a total of 20 respondents. The research process consists of the following key components.

The research sample consisted of 10 general or public kindergartens with diverse students from various religions and ten faith-based schools with heterogeneous religious nuances (especially ABA kindergarten). The sampling method used in this study was random sampling, which included five districts of the Special Region of Yogyakarta.

Table 1. Criteria for Public and Faith-Based Kindergarten Samples in D.I. Yogyakarta

General criteria	Specific criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Public kindergartens in D.I. Yogyakarta from each district/city</b></li> <li>• <b>Faith-based kindergarten in D.I. Yogyakarta from each district/city</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• two public kindergartens that have students from diverse religious backgrounds and always internalize moral values in daily activities from each district/city</li> <li>• two faith-based kindergartens that have students with Islamic religious backgrounds (especially ABA kindergartens) and always internalize moral values in daily activities from each district/city</li> </ul>

Data collection involves two main methods, namely surveys and interviews. The survey obtained quantitative data on implementing early childhood moral value development in schools. The in-person interview was conducted in stages and divided into several points. Interview indicators were made in advance, and seven indicators representing questions about implementing moral value development were used in schools. Then, the interview was recorded with the consent of the participants and processed into a transcript for further analysis. This study used seven open-ended questions, which include: moral values that are important to teach for early childhood, methods used in early childhood moral learning, obstacles in moral education, utilization of technology (IT) in moral learning, intensity of reading storybooks related to moral values, habituation of moral values carried out at school and home, and moral problems in early childhood.

This research used data analysis techniques in the form of descriptive statistics. Quantitative data from the survey was analyzed using Microsoft Excel to obtain descriptive statistics and identify patterns and trends related to stimulating children's moral value development in school. The results of the data analysis obtained using descriptive statistics are presented in the form of tables, graphs, and summary statistics. Qualitative data from the interview results were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. Transcripts are coded and categorized into themes and subthemes to identify repetitive patterns and central ideas related to understanding the implementation of early childhood moral values in schools. This qualitative data is used to complement and reinforce quantitative data obtained to make the data more complete.

## Result

The findings from this study reveal the implementation of moral values in general and religious-based kindergartens. Four key insights were identified: the teaching of essential moral values in early childhood and their integration into learning activities; the methods used to teach morals in early childhood education; challenges teachers face in delivering moral education; and issues children encounter during the learning process.

### The Teaching of Core Moral Values in Early Childhood and Their Integration into Learning

Moral values, including character and ethics, are taught in general kindergartens by reinforcing positive behaviors. These values encompass politeness, expressions of gratitude, seeking help and forgiveness, honesty, helpfulness, respect, and responsibility. For example, children are encouraged to dispose of trash properly, wait their turn in line, and embrace tolerance for differing beliefs.

This approach was highlighted in an interview with a teacher from State Kindergarten 1 Sleman:

*"Important moral values we teach in early childhood at TK N 1 Sleman include politeness, helping others, honesty, respect, responsibility, proper trash disposal, queuing, and using polite phrases like 'thank you,' 'please,' and 'sorry.'"* (R1)

The interview findings were echoed by a teacher at Suryodiningratan Kindergarten:

*"We emphasize character education to instill good morals in children, such as practicing good manners, saying 'thank you' and 'excuse me,' and fostering responsibility and independence."* (R4)

Moral education follows a similar structure in religious-based kindergartens but strongly emphasizes religious principles. In addition to teaching common values like honesty, helpfulness, respect, and responsibility, these schools emphasize religious practices, such as prayer. Figure 1 illustrates the difference in the implementation of moral education between general and religious-based kindergartens.

An interview at ABA Jetis Kindergarten, for instance, revealed the importance of prayer in daily routines to help cultivate moral values:

*"In ABA Jetis Kindergarten, key moral values include daily prayer, such as praying together before and after activities and performing dhuha prayers together. Character education also focuses on discipline, self-confidence, orderliness, queuing, patience, and responsibility, such as returning toys after play. Additionally, values like asking for help, thanking others, and apologizing are emphasized."* (R11)

Similarly, daily prayers were highlighted in interviews with ABA Mlangi and ABA Jongke kindergartens. The teachers there mentioned that children are accustomed to reciting daily prayers, practicing good manners, and developing other positive behaviors:

*"We encourage habits like reciting daily prayers, speaking kindly, sharing, and showing respect."* (R17)

*"Children are taught good manners, to greet teachers and friends respectfully, to pray before and after meals, and to maintain a positive attitude towards both teachers and peers."* (R12)

Beyond the prayer routines, the interviews from these three kindergartens revealed a broader emphasis on fostering positive behavior, such as respect, responsibility, and general kindness.

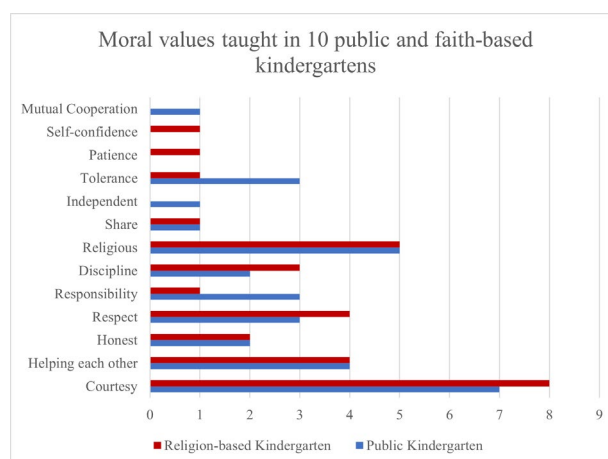


Figure 1. Comparison of taught values

The chart compares the moral values taught in 10 public and faith-based kindergartens. Courtesy is the most commonly taught value across both types, followed by helping others and religious values, with the latter being more prominent in faith-based kindergartens. Tolerance is emphasized more in public kindergartens, while values like discipline, respect, and honesty are taught equally. Additionally, faith-based kindergartens tend to focus more on developing self-confidence, patience, and cooperation compared to public kindergartens, with a clear emphasis on religious values integrated into their curriculum.

The findings from interviews with teachers at both general and faith-based kindergartens reveal that moral values such as politeness, honesty, helpfulness, respect, responsibility, and patience are taught in both types of schools. However, faith-based kindergartens strongly emphasize religious practices, such as daily prayers and worship, while general kindergartens focus more on values like tolerance and cooperation. Despite differences in focus, both types of schools prioritize character education and the development of positive behaviors in children, with politeness and helpfulness being the most commonly taught values across both settings.

### Methods Used in Early Childhood Moral Learning

The methods used to teach moral values in early childhood education are similar across general and faith-based kindergartens. These include habit formation, storytelling, question-and-answer sessions, and literacy activities. While there are differences in classroom settings, these distinctions often lead to good practices where children learn to find solutions together. Figure 2 compares the methods used in early childhood moral learning.

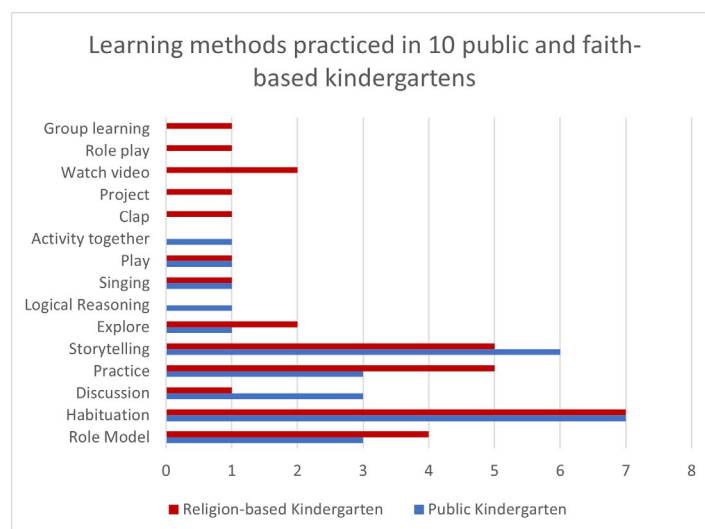


Figure 2. Comparison of Methods in Teaching Moral Values

Storytelling for fostering moral values varies significantly between general and faith-based kindergartens. In some schools, storytelling is done daily; in others, it is only a weekly or bi-weekly activity. This variation can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3 shows that faith-based kindergartens incorporate storytelling for moral development almost daily. Meanwhile, the frequency varies in general kindergartens, with some schools doing it daily and others 1-2 times per week. However, some faith-based kindergartens use storytelling infrequently in their moral education programs.

The success of storytelling as a tool for moral instruction is also influenced by the availability of books related to ethical values. Table 2 shows the number of moral-related books available in general and faith-based kindergartens.

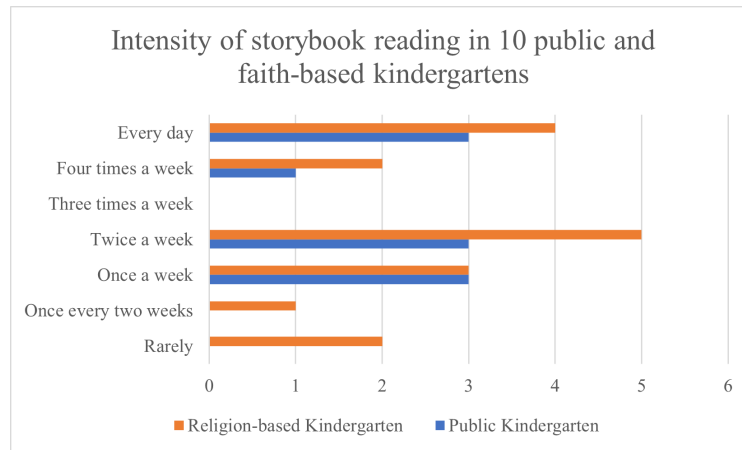


Figure 3. Comparison of the intensity of reading a storybook

Table 2. Number of moral books owned

Indicators	General Kindergarten	Religion-based kindergarten
The number of moral books owned	Have an average of 9-10 moral books	Have an average of 14-15 moral books However, some schools do not have books at all

However, some schools report not having any moral books at all.

Table 1 highlights that the number of moral-related books in these schools is relatively limited, with most schools having fewer than 50 books. Beyond books, the role of teachers is crucial in shaping good moral character in young children. While at school, children are encouraged to adopt the moral values modeled by their teachers.

For example, moral habituation in public kindergartens is evident in an interview with a teacher from Suryodiningratan Kindergarten, who shared the following:

*"Honesty is encouraged—when a child makes a mistake, they are expected to admit it. Sharing is also important; for instance, when some children forget their lunch, others share. Children also learn responsibility and independence, such as tidying up toys after play."* (R4)

In faith-based kindergartens, the process of moral habituation is similar to that in general kindergartens but with the addition of religious practices. An interview with a teacher from a faith-based kindergarten illustrated this point:

*"Children are taught to pray five times a day, practice group prayer, perform ablution, use polite speech, display good manners, show respect when walking in front of elders, and use phrases like 'sorry,' 'thank you,' 'excuse me,' and 'please.' They also learn from books on ethics, morals, and religion."* (R13)

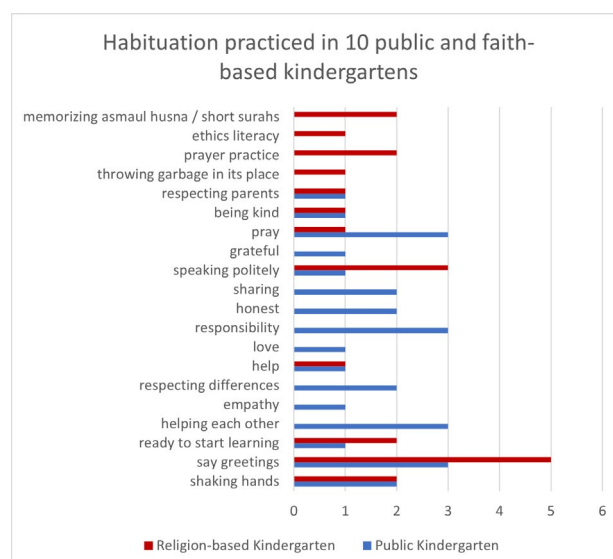


Figure 4. Comparison of Moral Habituation Practices in Schools

In addition to habit formation, technology plays a supporting role in developing moral values in early childhood education. This is reflected in interviews with teachers from both general and faith-based kindergartens:

*"We use laptops, cell phones, storybooks, and projectors to show videos for group viewing."*(R17)

*"Cell phones, laptops, and televisions are used as part of the learning process."* (R3)

Both general and faith-based kindergartens use cell phones and projectors to display videos sourced from their institutions or social media to support moral learning. Figure 5 compares the technological tools used in these schools for moral development.

#### Use of IT for Moral Education in 10 General and Faith-based Kindergarten Institutions

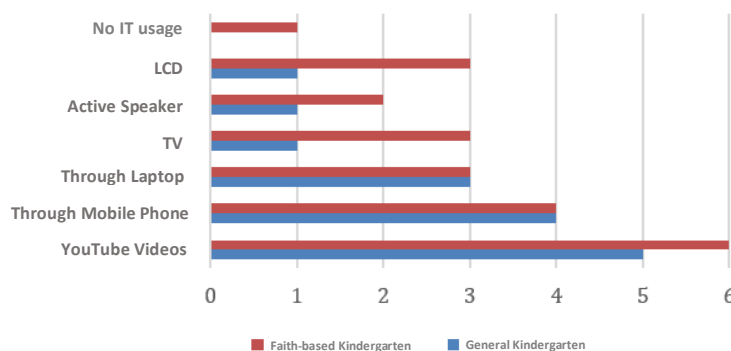


Figure 5. Comparison of Technology Use for Moral Learning in Schools

The findings reveal that early childhood moral education in both general and faith-based kindergartens employs similar methods, including habit formation, storytelling, Q&A sessions, and literacy activities. While general and faith-based schools share these approaches, the frequency of storytelling differs, with faith-based schools often incorporating it daily. In contrast, general schools vary from daily to weekly sessions. The success of storytelling is closely tied to the availability of moral-related books, with faith-based schools generally having more, though some schools lack these resources entirely. Teachers play a pivotal role in moral development, modeling values like honesty and responsibility, while faith-based schools emphasize additional religious practices. Technology, such as laptops and projectors, is also used in both settings to enhance moral instruction through video-based learning.

### Obstacles in Moral Learning by Teachers

In this study, the efforts made by teachers to stimulate early childhood moral development in schools faced several obstacles. The primary challenges encountered are related to the child's character and the environment in which the child grows. This is supported by the findings from interviews conducted with ABA Perumnas Condongcatur Kindergarten and Puri Bangsa Kindergarten. The following excerpts illustrate these challenges:

*"Children are becoming accustomed to speaking harshly, mainly due to the influence of gadgets given by their parents, affecting their moral behavior. There is limited moral stimulation at home, so the only moral guidance they receive is at school, and even that is quite limited."*(R19)

*"The moral issues we often see at school involve children showing disrespectful behavior and mocking one another. Additionally, we hear vocabulary inappropriate for their age but frequently used by these children."*(R9)

Table 3 compares general and faith-based kindergartens regarding how they address obstacles to teaching moral values.

Table 3. Comparison of barriers to public kindergarten and faith-based kindergarten

General Kindergarten	Faith-Based Kindergarten
Teachers face challenges because the moral guidance provided at school often differs from what children receive at home. This lack of consistency creates difficulties in how children respond to moral instruction at school.	Teachers struggle with managing children's behavior during religious routines. This may be due to the excessive use of gadgets at home, and teachers find it challenging to develop appropriate strategies to address these issues.

The key findings from the study reveal that teachers in both general and faith-based kindergartens encounter significant obstacles in fostering early childhood moral development. In general kindergarten, a major challenge is an inconsistency between the ethical guidance provided at home and school, which needs to be clarified in how children respond to moral instruction. Meanwhile, in faith-based kindergartens, teachers face difficulties in managing children's behavior, particularly during religious routines, often attributed to the overuse of gadgets at home. Across both settings, the influence of inappropriate language and behavior stemming from the home environment is a common issue, making it difficult for teachers to promote moral values effectively.

### Children's Issues in the Learning Process

The obstacles experienced by teachers are closely linked to the problems children face during the moral learning process. In this study, several moral issues among children were identified. The following interview responses further corroborated these:

*"Moral issues in early childhood at school arise when children bring inappropriate language or behaviors from home, influencing their peers to do the same."*(R11)

*"The moral problems we often encounter include children showing disrespectful attitudes and mocking their classmates. There are also words being used that are not suitable for their age."*(R9)

Table 4 compares children's problems in general kindergartens versus faith-based kindergartens.

Table 4. Comparison of Problems of General Kindergarten and Religion-based Kindergarten

General Kindergarten	Faith-Based Kindergarten
Some schools do not report significant issues regarding children's morals, though confident children require reminders about their behavior, likely due to inconsistent moral guidance at home.	Children's behavior is trial and error, requiring ongoing guidance. Teachers aim to improve their competence by fostering a wise and patient approach toward children still learning moral values.



The study highlights vital moral issues faced by children in both general and faith-based kindergartens. In general kindergartens, some children display inappropriate language and behavior, likely due to inconsistent moral guidance at home. These behaviors often require reminders from teachers, though significant moral concerns are not constantly prevalent. In contrast, children in faith-based kindergartens are described as being in a trial-and-error phase with their behavior, necessitating continuous guidance. Teachers in these settings emphasize enhancing their patience and wisdom to support children as they learn moral values effectively.

## Discussion

This research explored the differences in moral values education between public and faith-based kindergartens in Yogyakarta, focusing on how each institution integrates these values into early childhood education. Previous literature indicates that both institutions prioritize moral character development but differ in approach and content (Cakranegara, 2021; Herlinawati et al., 2022). While public kindergartens emphasize values like independence and cooperation, faith-based kindergartens focus on religious values such as patience and confidence (Hovdelien & Sødal, 2022; Poncini, 2023). These distinct focuses are driven by the institutions' foundational philosophies, aligning moral education with either public or religious norms (Devina et al., 2024). This study, therefore, sought to provide an in-depth comparison of these approaches and the methods employed to teach moral values.

The key findings of this study highlight that both public and faith-based kindergartens teach fundamental moral values, such as honesty, responsibility, politeness, and cooperation. However, faith-based kindergartens emphasize religious practices, like daily prayers, which are less prominent in public institutions. An interesting finding is the more frequent use of storytelling in faith-based kindergartens to convey moral lessons, compared to public kindergartens that rely more on structured activities like literacy sessions (Asyahidah et al., 2021). Teachers in both institutions reported challenges in aligning school moral teachings with inconsistent moral guidance at home (Fadhilah et al., 2022). These discrepancies underline the need for more holistic approaches to moral education.

When comparing these findings to previous studies, it is evident that the moral values embedded in public and faith-based kindergartens overlap significantly, particularly in honesty, sharing, and responsibility (Thompson, 2011; Yao & Enright, 2020). However, the additional focus on religious virtues in faith-based settings, such as patience and discipline, aligns with research that emphasizes the role of religious doctrine in shaping moral instruction (Mata-McMahon et al., 2020). Storytelling to instill moral values has also been confirmed in past studies, highlighting its effectiveness in engaging children and making abstract moral concepts more comprehensible (Ardianti, 2024; Safitri & 'Aziz, 2019). These comparisons suggest that, while the methods may differ, public and faith-based kindergartens share the goal of fostering moral growth in young children.

Contradictions with previous findings were also observed, particularly in the challenges faced by teachers. In public kindergartens, teachers reported difficulties stemming from a lack of parental support in reinforcing moral values at home, contrasting with earlier studies that suggested more vital home-school collaboration in public education settings (Lestari, 2019). Furthermore, while storytelling is used more frequently in faith-based kindergartens, public kindergarten teachers prefer structured methods like literacy and discussion sessions (Fehér, 2023; Rahiem et al., 2020). This discrepancy might be attributed to the different curricular emphases between the two institutions, prioritizing religious education or secular character development.

The findings suggest that their institutional philosophies and societal expectations shape the moral education approach in both kindergartens. In faith-based kindergartens, integrating religious practices into the daily routine serves as a vehicle for moral instruction, aligning with the goals of religious education (Selvi, 2020). On the other hand, public kindergartens adopt a

more secular approach, focusing on values like cooperation and responsibility, which are more universally applicable across different cultural contexts (Özel, 2023). These findings highlight the importance of considering educational institutions' cultural and philosophical underpinnings when evaluating their moral education programs.

The reality teachers face can be motivated by the influence of parenting at home, which is different from what is applied at school, so it becomes an obstacle to children's success in teaching moral values. This is needed as a bridge to equalize perceptions in stimulating early childhood so that there is harmony between home and school in implementing moral values in early childhood, such as synergy between teachers and parents (Fadhilah et al., 2022). Parenting programs can be an alternative to adding to the same insight between school and home. This alternative aligns with Lestari's exposure (Lestari, 2019), which states that parenting activities can help improve children's growth and development and support each other with school programs. In addition, communication between teachers and parents regarding habituation and children's moral development (Munastiwi, 2021) at every opportunity can also be a way to connect the habits and methods that parents use regarding children's morals so that they become aligned with the school practices carried out by teachers.

The implications of these findings are significant for both educational policy and practice. For public kindergartens, there is a need to strengthen home-school collaboration to ensure consistency in moral education across different environments. Faith-based kindergartens, meanwhile, could benefit from incorporating more interactive teaching methods that foster critical thinking and personal reflection on ethical issues (Zammit & Refalo, 2021). Moreover, the findings highlight the importance of teacher training in moral education, particularly in developing strategies that are both culturally sensitive and pedagogically sound (Hidayati, 2022). Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how early childhood education institutions can better support the moral development of young children through tailored and thoughtful approaches.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze the implementation of moral values learning in public and religion-based kindergartens in Yogyakarta. The research has revealed several key findings concerning teaching fundamental moral values, the methods employed, and the challenges educators face. Both types of institutions emphasize the importance of teaching values such as politeness, honesty, responsibility, and cooperation, though religion-based kindergartens place additional emphasis on religious practices. Furthermore, storytelling methods are more prevalent in religion-based kindergartens, while public kindergartens tend to adopt more varied approaches. The implications for educational policy and practice suggest that public kindergartens need more vital home-school collaboration to ensure consistency in moral education. In contrast, religion-based kindergartens could benefit from incorporating more interactive teaching methods to promote critical thinking. Teacher training should also prioritize culturally sensitive strategies in moral education. However, the study's limitations include its focus on Yogyakarta, limiting generalizability, and a need for more exploration into children's perspectives or long-term impacts. Future research should consider broader geographical contexts and longitudinal studies to assess the effectiveness of moral education and include children's viewpoints for a more comprehensive understanding of its impact on their development.

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