

Integrating Spiritual and Ecological Education in Early Childhood through an Outing Class Program at RA Yaa Bunayya Papua

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze spiritual and ecological education for early childhood through an outing class program at RA Yaa Bunayya. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design, involving semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation as data collection techniques. Data were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, with source and method triangulation to ensure validity. The findings indicate that the outing class effectively instills spiritual values through the appreciation of Allah's creations and fosters ecological awareness through hands-on plant care activities. The program also enhances contextual learning, develops social character, independence, and responsibility, while introducing children to the functions of government institutions, community professions, and modes of transportation. These results suggest that outing classes serve as a holistic, engaging, and effective learning strategy for cultivating early childhood individuals who are faithful, environmentally conscious, and responsible.

1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is the golden age in individual development, which is very crucial in determining the formation of personality in the future. At this stage, children have extraordinary potential to absorb values, knowledge, as well as to shape attitudes and habits that will later become the foundation of their personality. Therefore, education at this stage must be holistic, covering all dimensions of child development, including spiritual and ecological aspects.

Spiritual education from an early age is important as the main foundation in shaping children's identity and character. Azman et al. (2012, as cited in Zannatunnisya et al., 2024) state that spiritual education helps children to know themselves, to know their God (Allah SWT), and to understand His creations. Spiritual awareness instilled at this stage will shape individuals with noble character, responsibility, and empathy for others and the environment. This is in line with Nurhalisa and Jahrah (2024), who emphasize that Islamic philosophy provides a strong foundation for the formation of children's spirituality, allowing their morality and ethics to develop from an early age. Furthermore, Akmal (2023) asserts that Islamic spiritual intelligence instilled since childhood is an important provision for facing life's challenges. Peradila and Chodijah (2020) also add that daily religious

guidance can strengthen children's spiritual intelligence, while Masruroh et al. (2023) show that children's involvement in social care activities fosters empathy, responsibility, and concern for others as well as the environment. Thus, spiritual education not only strengthens children's relationship with Allah SWT but also develops their social and emotional intelligence.

In line with this, ecological education in early childhood also holds high urgency. This period is a strategic time to instill environmental values, behaviors, and habits that will last into adulthood. Merrick and Braus (2013, as cited in Safira & Wati, 2020) emphasize that early childhood is a crucial stage in instilling environmental literacy, which not only emphasizes understanding but also fosters positive attitudes toward nature. Adawiyah (2022) adds that environmental education should be provided through direct experience so that children can interact with their environment in real terms. This view is reinforced by Kusumawardani and Kuswanto (2020), who developed the concept of ecopedagogy to instill ecological awareness deeply, not just as a transfer of knowledge. Najmina et al. (2022) also emphasize the importance of nature-based learning in building ecological awareness, as direct interaction with the environment helps children understand the interrelationship between humans and nature.

One of the learning methods that supports the integration of spiritual and ecological values is the outing class. This method provides real outdoor learning experiences, so that children not only memorize information but also understand and apply knowledge in everyday life (Asrowi, 2024; Kernan & Saia, 2006). Utami's (2020) research shows that outing class positively influences the development of naturalist intelligence in early childhood. Similar findings were revealed by Pujiati and Wulansari (2023), that farming activities in outing classes based on local wisdom effectively instill naturalist intelligence as well as cultural values. Zahro et al. (2025) add that outing class also significantly contributes to improving children's cooperation skills, as collaborative outdoor activities encourage healthy social interactions. Research by Margaretha et al. (2024) further emphasizes that outdoor learning positively affects independence and responsibility in early childhood.

With these various advantages, outing class becomes an effective approach to instilling spiritual and ecological values in early childhood. Through direct experiences, children can feel the beauty of nature as God's creation, understand the importance of protecting the environment, and learn to socialize. In this context, RA Yaa Bunayya becomes an interesting case to study, as it successfully integrates spiritual and ecological education through outing class as a strategy to build children's character based on love and care for nature.

2. METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design, aiming to describe in depth the process of implementing outing class as a medium for spiritual and ecological education in early childhood. This approach was chosen because it can reveal meanings, values, and educational processes in a natural context, as well as enable the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subjects studied (Sugiyono, 2019). The research methods used are:

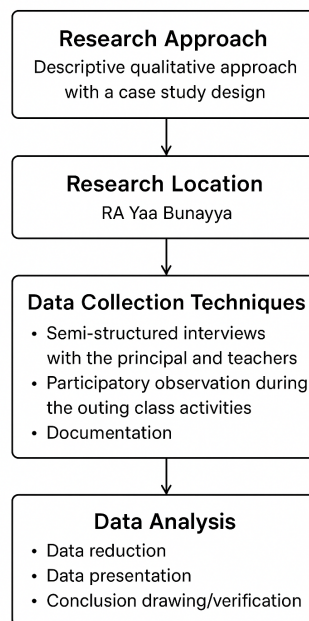


Figure 1. Research Methods

The research location was RA Yaa Bunayya, purposively selected because it has implemented outing class activities integrated with the teaching of spiritual values and environmental awareness. Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews with the principal and teachers of RA Yaa Bunayya, participatory observation during the outing class activities, and documentation of various activities and learning resources used. These three techniques were employed to obtain comprehensive and complementary data. The data analysis process was carried out through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification, in accordance with qualitative research procedures. To ensure data validity, this study applied source and method triangulation, namely by comparing and combining the results of interviews, observations, and documentation in order to obtain valid, consistent, and scientifically accountable data (Sugiyono, 2019).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned in the introductory discussion, spiritual and ecological education is very important to be instilled from an early age, as it forms the foundation for children's character to be faithful, caring, and responsible. Through outing class activities, children are not only invited to learn

outside the classroom but also directly experience various real situations that can nurture noble values in life. At RA Yaa Bunayya, the outing class program to the Forestry Office is a concrete example of how outdoor learning can serve as an effective strategy in conveying spiritual and ecological values holistically and joyfully. This is in line with the opinion of Ade Z.M. (2024), who states that experiential learning plays an important role in expanding students' knowledge, enhancing skills, strengthening values, and shaping individual abilities to contribute actively in social life.

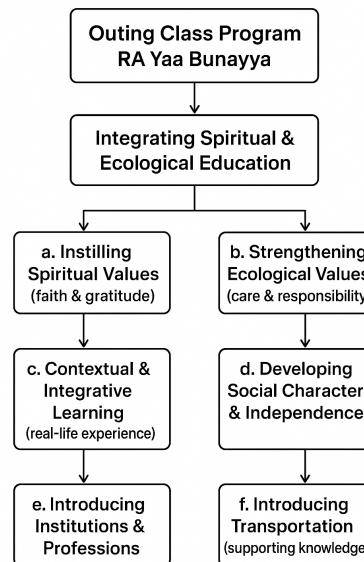


Figure 2. Results and Discussion

3.1. Instilling Spiritual Values

One of the main findings is the instillation of spiritual values through direct interaction with nature. In the outing class to the Forestry Office, children were introduced to various creations of Allah, such as ornamental plants, medicinal plants, and various trees. The children expressed amazement and curiosity toward God's creations, which became the foundation for gratitude and love for the greatness of Allah SWT. This activity proves that spiritual education through an experiential learning approach can foster children's inner connection with their Creator. This is in line with the concept of spiritual intelligence in early childhood, namely the innate potential that can be nurtured through the cultivation of religious values such as aqidah, faith, and ihsan, as emphasized in the perspective of the Qur'an (Halim, 2022).

The spiritual experience arising from interaction with nature aligns with Montessori's view in Mata-McMahon et al. (2024), which emphasizes that children's spirituality is a "life force" that acts as a catalyst in the learning process. Spirituality is seen as a primary domain equal to physical and cognitive development. This means that when children are introduced to the beauty of Allah's creations through direct experiences, they not only learn intellectually but also activate an internal spiritual force that encourages curiosity, empathy, and meaningful connections with their environment.

The integration between the concept of spiritual fitrah in Islam and spirituality as a life force according to Montessori shows that instilling spiritual values through real activities such as outing class does not merely increase religious knowledge but also builds the inner foundation for children to grow into faithful, caring, and strong-charactered individuals.

3.2. Strengthening Ecological Values through Caring and Responsibility for the Environment

In addition to spirituality, this activity also successfully instilled ecological values. Children not only learned about plants but also actively participated in planting seedlings, recognizing fertilizers, and learning to care for plants. Through this involvement, children learned that caring for the environment is a shared responsibility that must begin with small actions. This process fosters ecological awareness from an early age and builds concrete habits of caring for nature.

Research by Oktamarina (2021) supports this view, showing that consistent implementation of green school programs can improve environmental care character in early childhood. The program was carried out through daily routines, starting from children arriving at school, participating in initial activities, engaging in core activities, and closing sessions, which included practices such as farming, watering and caring for plants, and maintaining personal as well as environmental cleanliness. The integration of green school-based activities into early childhood education proves that experiential approaches can instill sustainable ecological awareness from an early age (Oktamarina, 2021).

The findings and perspectives of Oktamarina (2021) confirm that forming ecological values in early childhood is most effective through experiential approaches and daily routines. Children's involvement in farming activities, caring for plants, and maintaining cleanliness not only teaches practical skills but also nurtures a sense of responsibility and care toward nature.

3.3. Contextual and Integrative Learning

Outing class activities also strengthened the subject matter taught in the classroom. By directly observing objects previously only introduced through pictures or stories, children were able to connect theory with reality. Learning became more contextual, enjoyable, and meaningful because children experienced firsthand the material being studied. This shows that outing class plays an important role in forming strong conceptual understanding.

This finding is in line with the results of Sariadi et al. (2025), who studied the effect of outing class-based contextual learning on fifth-grade elementary school students' writing skills. The research showed that through real-life experiences, students could link classroom theory with real situations, resulting in significant improvements in writing skills, ranging from vocabulary mastery, sentence structure, idea coherence, to creativity. The average pre-test score of 61.25 increased to 78.8

in the post-test. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that outing class not only makes learning more enjoyable but also effectively deepens conceptual understanding and academic skills. The direct experiences obtained through these activities enable children to understand concepts comprehensively, integrate prior knowledge, and develop relevant life skills, thus supporting the principles of contextual and integrative learning.

3.4. Developing Children's Social Character and Independence

During the outing class activities, the development of children's social character was evident. They learned to cooperate, be disciplined, obey rules, and show politeness in interactions. Children were also trained to take responsibility for small tasks, such as caring for the plants they planted together. These activities contributed to fostering independence and social ethics, which are essential components of character education.

This finding is in line with the research of Septarina et al. (2022), which shows that outing class not only increases ecological awareness but also encourages the formation of caring and responsible attitudes. After participating in these activities, children became accustomed to throwing trash in its place, distinguishing between organic and non-organic waste, and practicing water-saving behaviors such as turning off taps after use. These behaviors reflect the internalization of responsibility and environmental care values, which indirectly strengthen children's social character and independence in everyday life. Thus, outing class can be regarded as an effective learning strategy for integrating social character, independence, and ecological care simultaneously through enjoyable and meaningful direct experiences for early childhood.

3.5. Introducing the Functions of Institutions and Professions in Society

Another finding is that children were introduced to the social structure and roles of government institutions. During their visit to the Forestry Office, children directly observed the activities of employees and understood the function of the institution in protecting the environment. This serves as an early step in raising awareness that social life involves various professions and institutions that contribute collectively to the common good.

3.6. Introducing Transportation as Supporting Knowledge

Additionally, outing class also enriched children's knowledge about transportation. They were introduced to operational vehicles such as trucks used during the trip to the Forestry Office. This experience broadened children's insights into types of vehicles and their roles in supporting community and governmental activities. Based on the research findings at RA Yaa Bunayya, it can be concluded that the outing class program to the Forestry Office provided rich and meaningful learning experiences for early childhood. This activity not only instilled spiritual values through the introduction of Allah's creations but also strengthened ecological awareness through direct environmental care practices. Moreover, outing class supported contextual and integrative learning,

reinforced conceptual understanding, and encouraged the development of social character, independence, and responsibility. Furthermore, the visit introduced children to the functions of government institutions and community professions, as well as expanded their knowledge of transportation as part of social life. Therefore, outing class has proven to be a holistic, enjoyable, and effective learning strategy in shaping children who are faithful, caring, and responsible.

4. CONCLUSION

The outing class program to the Forestry Office at RA Yaa Bunayya successfully achieved several objectives of early childhood education, including: (1) instilling spiritual values through direct experiences with nature; (2) fostering ecological awareness and environmental responsibility; (3) strengthening contextual and integrative learning; (4) developing children's social character and independence; and (5) introducing the functions of institutions, professions, and transportation facilities in community life. These results affirm that outing class is not merely an outdoor learning activity but also an effective method for shaping the foundational character and skills of children in a comprehensive manner.

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