

Religious Understanding among Foster Children through Social and Spiritual Guidance Programs at the Aisiyah Orphanage, Matur, West Sumatra

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the need to understand the level of religious understanding among foster children in carrying out social and spiritual guidance activities, as reflected in their behavior and their ability to comprehend and apply what they learn. Education is not only acquired through formal institutions but also through informal settings, such as activities conducted in orphanages, which serve as compulsory supplementary educational programs for foster children. This study aims to analyze the religious understanding developed through social and spiritual guidance activities at the Aisiyah Matur Branch Orphanage. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach. The informants consist of foster children, caregivers, and administrators within the orphanage environment. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The theoretical framework used in this study is Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism theory, particularly the AGIL (Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration, and Latency) scheme. The findings indicate that the level of religious understanding among foster children varies. Some foster children demonstrate a low level of religious understanding in participating in social and spiritual guidance activities, as evidenced by behaviors such as joking with peers, sleeping during activities, or not participating at all. These conditions are influenced by factors such as busy schedules, boredom, and less engaging learning methods. However, other foster children are able to internalize and apply the religious values they learn, enabling them to demonstrate positive behavior and compete with children outside the orphanage environment.

INTRODUCTION

Religion plays an important role in human life because it provides motivation for living, serves as a means of self – development, and functions as a tool for self – control. Religion regulates human relationships, both among individuals and within society, by fostering harmony, balance, and order in life, enabling individuals to achieve material progress and spiritual happiness. Religion also serves as the foundation of value systems and plays a decisive role in the development and cultivation of humanity. Therefore, correct and proper religious understanding and experience are essential to creating national unity (Daradjat 2008).

Religious understanding refers to the extent to which an individual is able to recognize, comprehend, and internalize religious values that contain ancestral and moral teachings, as well as practice these values in attitudes and behavior. This understanding can be seen in a person's ability to comprehend, appreciate, and apply the religious values they adhere to in daily life (Kholid 2011). Religious understanding is important to instill from an early age, because when children grow into adulthood, they will regard religion as an essential part of their lives. Fundamentally, an individual's character is shaped by education, experience, and

training acquired since childhood. The more religious knowledge and experiences—especially those aligned with Islamic teachings—are internalized, the more religious values will influence one's attitudes, actions, behavior, and way of facing life (Daradjat 1993).

The implementation of religious understanding for children is the responsibility of all parties, including parents, religious teachers, the community, leaders, and especially the individuals themselves. Children need guidance and religious experience, ideally from their families. However, not all children are fortunate enough to grow up with complete parental care. Some children are orphans, half-orphans, orphans of both parents, from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, or even without families at all.

Social orphanages, commonly known as orphanages, function as substitutes for family roles and responsibilities, including providing moral guidance to foster children. Orphanages are tasked with offering guidance and services to orphans, half-orphans, children from underprivileged backgrounds, and neglected children, so that their potential and learning capacity can be restored and developed naturally (Masyhur 2018). Considering the diverse backgrounds of foster children when they enter an orphanage, each orphanage has its own policies and approaches in carrying out parental roles, particularly in fostering religious understanding. This is realized through the provision of social welfare services, including physical, mental, and social care, enabling foster children to gain broader opportunities for personal development. It is hoped that these children will grow into noble individuals and realize their aspirations to contribute to national development and serve as positive examples within society.

The Aisyiyah Matur Branch Orphanage is a social welfare institution established in 1976 and remains active to this day. Its objective is to form Muslim individuals with noble character, competence, self-confidence, and usefulness to society. Based on preliminary observations conducted by the researcher at the Aisyiyah Matur Branch Orphanage, the implementation of religious understanding among foster children is carried out through structured routine activities held every evening, known as social and spiritual guidance activities. These activities involve foster mothers, religious teachers invited from outside the orphanage, and internal orphanage staff. The activities are conducted daily from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. and include learning Qur'anic recitation rhythms, fiqh, tajwid, Muhammadiyah studies, *muhadharah* (speech practice), rebana (Islamic music), and *wirid* (religious gatherings) at nearby mosques and prayer halls. These activities take place both inside and outside the orphanage environment.

Initial interviews with the orphanage caregiver, Mrs. Zur Rahmi—who resides permanently with the foster children at the Aisyiyah Matur Branch Orphanage—revealed that she supervises all scheduled activities in the children's daily routines. One of the core routine activities is social and spiritual guidance, conducted every evening from after Maghrib prayer until Isha. These activities are not limited to guiding spiritual matters but also address worldly concerns, such as shaping

children's behavior and attitudes in interactions with caregivers, peers, and teachers during evening study sessions. Values instilled include honesty, politeness, and mutual respect, given the children's diverse regional, familial, and social backgrounds (Sari 2023a). Caregivers and administrators also make efforts to provide advice, motivation, and increased discipline in implementing these activities.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research approach. Descriptive qualitative research aims to describe phenomena and provide analytical explanations in the form of words rather than numerical data. In this study, the researcher presents data as found in the field without adding new interpretations beyond the observed findings (Salim 2010).

The research was conducted at the Aisyiyah Matur Branch Orphanage, located in Dusun II, Jorong Lawang Tuo, Kenagarian Lawang, Matur District, Agam Regency, West Sumatra Province. Informants in this study include orphanage administrators, caregivers, and foster children. Data collection techniques consisted of observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis followed the model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data validity was ensured through prolonged observation and triangulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious Understanding in Spiritual Guidance Activities

Several spiritual guidance activities are implemented at the Aisyiyah Matur Branch Orphanage as routine programs aimed at enhancing foster children's knowledge and religious insight. These activities provide continuous, systematic, and directed assistance to help foster children develop their potential or *fitrah* optimally, enabling them to live and fulfill their roles in accordance with the guidance of the Qur'an and Hadith. Foster children are informed of all activities and rules to ensure that scheduled programs run as expected. The forms of spiritual guidance activities implemented include (Nurdell Indah Sari 2023b):

1. Learning Qur'anic Recitation Rythm

This activity focuses on the art of Qur'anic recitation and is taught by Ustad Salman, a teacher invited from outside the orphanage and an active member of the Muhammadiyah organization. The instruction is provided equally to foster children from elementary to senior high school levels and is conducted every Monday evening. Proper breathing is a crucial element in Qur'anic recitation; however, not all foster children possess the ability or confidence to perform it well, resulting in a lack of seriousness among some participants. Despite these challenges, this activity offers significant

opportunities for foster children to become *qari* or *qari'ah* and contribute positively to society (Sari 2023c).

2. English Language Learning

English learning aims to enhance communication skills and interaction, particularly because visitors and donors occasionally come from abroad, such as France. The instructor for this activity is Mr. Donison, a teacher at the madrasa attended by the foster children (Sari 2023d).

3. Participation in Religious Gatherings (*Wirid*)

Foster children attend religious gatherings held at nearby prayer halls or mosques from Maghrib until Isha. These activities aim to enhance religious knowledge, faith, and piety. Participation also helps foster children develop confidence to appear in public, socialize, and build relationships with the surrounding community. However, some children remain inattentive during lectures, engaging in conversations, joking, or even falling asleep, which limits their understanding of the content delivered.

4. Tajwid and Muhammadiyah Studies

These activities are conducted after Maghrib prayer until Isha and are led directly by orphanage administrators. Tajwid instruction is emphasized to ensure correct Qur'anic recitation. While Muhammadiyah studies are not conducted regularly, tajwid lessons remain routine. Foster children take turns reciting assigned verses and are corrected when mistakes occur. Nonetheless, repeated errors still occur due to a lack of attention and concentration. Children who fail to participate properly receive direct admonition and advice from caregivers.

5. *Muhadharah* and *Rebana* Training

Muhadharah activities involve public speaking practice conducted alternately with rebana training. Foster children are assigned various roles such as moderator, Qur'an reciter, or speaker, which change weekly. This activity aims to build confidence and public speaking skills. Rebana training focuses on teamwork and musical coordination, with senior children mentoring juniors under caregiver supervision.

6. Tahfiz Learning

Tahfiz learning aims to improve Qur'anic memorization and is conducted outside the orphanage at TPQ Darul Qur'an in a local prayer hall. Foster children attend sessions every Sunday morning. Some participants have memorized up to two *juz* and have completed tahfiz graduation ceremonies (Sari 2023e).

Religious Understanding in Social Guidance Activities

Social guidance aims to help individuals overcome social problems and adapt to their environment. Within the orphanage, social guidance activities are essential for fostering moral character, responsibility, and problem-solving abilities. These activities encourage foster children to develop positive social interactions and effective communication skills.

1. Psychological Guidance

Psychological guidance is conducted every Tuesday and led by orphanage administrators. Foster children are trained to understand their emotions and behavior, develop problem-solving skills, and enhance personality development. Caregivers provide advice and motivation to help children manage self-control and prevent conflicts among peers.

2. Leadership Training Activities

Psychological guidance is conducted every Tuesday and led by orphanage administrators. Foster children are trained to understand their emotions and behavior, develop problem-solving skills, and enhance personality development. Caregivers provide advice and motivation to help children manage self-control and prevent conflicts among peers.

3. Entrepreneurship Guidance

Entrepreneurship guidance has been implemented for a long time, including training in sewing, embroidery, handicrafts, crocheting bags, making prayer garments, and basic salon skills. Foster children are trained to develop entrepreneurial skills and economic independence, enabling them to create job opportunities in their hometowns.

Structural Functional Theory Analysis (Talcott Parsons)

Based on the discussion above, religious understanding in social and spiritual guidance activities at the orphanage can be analyzed using Talcott Parsons' structural functional theory. This theory emphasizes that a system functions effectively only when all its subsystems perform their respective roles. If one subsystem fails, the entire system is affected, preventing the achievement of intended goals (Turama 2020).

Within the orphanage system, administrators, caregivers, and foster children each have rights and responsibilities that support the functioning of social and spiritual guidance activities. Parsons' AGIL framework explains system functions as follows:

- a. **Adaptation** – Foster children must adapt to the orphanage environment, including rules, activities, teachers, and peers.

- b. **Goal Attainment** – After adaptation, foster children are directed toward achieving goals, particularly obedience and compliance with orphanage regulations.
- c. **Integration** – The system must regulate relationships among its components to ensure harmony among subsystems.
- d. **Latency (Pattern Maintenance)** – The system maintains motivation and cultural patterns through supervision, advice, and reinforcement provided by caregivers.

CONCLUSION

Based on field research findings, religious understanding among foster children at the orphanage varies significantly. Some foster children exhibit relatively low levels of religious understanding, as reflected in suboptimal participation in religious activities and limited application of religious values in daily life. However, many foster children demonstrate strong religious understanding and are able to practice religious teachings effectively, as evidenced by their achievements in school and community settings. These children are also able to compete positively with peers who receive direct parental education and care. As part of the guidance process, foster children who violate rules receive advice and motivation to improve their behavior, while those who demonstrate good conduct or achievement receive simple forms of appreciation, such as verbal praise, as positive reinforcement.

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