

Parents' Experience in Instilling Prayer Habits Among Adolescents: A Phenomenological Study in Vocational School

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ABSTRACT: This study explored parents' experiences instilling prayer habits in their adolescents within the family environment, particularly among SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Batu students. Using a phenomenological approach, the study focuses on how the structure of parental experiences is formed and the meanings embedded in parenting styles, habit-forming strategies, and challenges in Islamic religious education. This research employed a qualitative and phenomenological approach involving three purposively selected students' parents. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed using phenomenological procedures, including narrative transcription, identification of significant statements, data reduction, and the formulation of textural and structural descriptions. Data validity was ensured through member checking and triangulation techniques. The findings indicate that authoritative parenting fosters discipline and responsibility in performing prayers more effectively than permissive parenting. Clear rules, routine congregational prayers, and advising through a dialogical approach contribute to adolescent's internalization of religious values. However, challenges such as adolescent's busy schedules, technological influences, and unsupportive social environments highlight the need for more flexible and adaptive religious education strategies. The study concludes that religious education within the family should be conducted consistently, integrating role modeling, open communication, and early habit formation. This research contributes to the literature on Islamic education by revealing parents' subjective experiences and offering insights for developing more contextualized and experience-based religious education models.

KEYWORDS: Prayer Habit; Parenting Style; Islamic Religious Education; Phenomenology; Internalization of Religious Values.

I. INTRODUCTION

Prayer is one of Islam's pillars. It embodies the dimension of worship and has spiritual, social, and educational aspects. Prayer is a primary indicator of an individual's religiosity because it shapes personality, morality, and spiritual responsibility (Filasofa, 2021). In this context, instilling the habit of prayer from an early age is crucial to ensure that worship does not merely become a ritual routine but also helps form the child's religious character.

As the first and foremost educational institution, the family plays a vital role in instilling religious values, including the habit of performing prayer. Religious education within the family is not merely a supplement to formal institutions; it constitutes the primary foundation for shaping a child's mindset, attitudes, and religious behaviour (Zulhaini, 2019). This concept is reinforced by the Prophet Muhammad's saying, which emphasizes that every child is born with an innate disposition (fitrah) and that parents are responsible for guiding the direction of the child's religiosity. Ruswandi (2021) also asserts that families that neglect religious values tend to raise children far removed from religious practices and are more influenced by a materialistic lifestyle.

However, the habit of prayer in the family currently faces several challenges. In the modern era, the flow of digital technology, a permissive lifestyle, and increasing parental busyness act as factors that hinder the internalization of worship in children. As a result, many children perform prayer only due to external pressure—such as directives from schools or parental supervision—rather than from an intrinsic spiritual awareness. In this regard, Kamali (2022) emphasizes that instilling religious values requires a continuous process, patience, and an approach that aligns with the child's psychological development.

Parenting style becomes a decisive factor in the success of instilling prayer habits. Baumrind (1991) categorizes parenting styles into four types: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and indulgent. The authoritative style is the most effective in fostering a child's religiosity. This style combines firmness in establishing rules with emotional warmth and open communication. Children raised under such a style tend to exhibit high self-awareness, independence, and responsibility in performing acts of worship.

In addition to parenting style, strategies for Islamic religious education within the family also play a significant role. Muhammad Quthb (1993) proposes four primary strategies for Islamic education at home: role modelling, habit formation, advice, and

Parents' Experience in Instilling Prayer Habits Among Adolescents: A Phenomenological Study in Vocational School

punishment. Role modelling is essential because children learn by observing what they see. Habit formation is continuously practised so that prayer becomes an integral part of the child's life, while advice and punishment are administered proportionately to educate rather than to instil fear. These four strategies must be applied consistently and adapted to the child's developmental stages.

Previous studies provide a comprehensive overview of the roles and strategies that parents implement to consistently instil religious values in children from an early age. These studies highlight the importance of family education as the primary foundation for forming religious character through instilling prayer habits and describe the diverse approaches used to achieve this goal.

Shofiyati et al. (2023) state that the education of religious and moral values in children can be implemented in three main stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation. In the planning and implementation stages, activities such as habit formation, role modelling, and supervision serve as vital instruments for instilling the habit of prayer. The evaluation stage is carried out by providing rewards and motivation, which are communicated courteously. This approach underscores the importance of aligning education strategies with continuous evaluation to ensure children deeply internalize worship values.

Meanwhile, Filasofa (2021) reveals the application of the Prophet Muhammad's methods in teaching prayer from an early age through a qualitative descriptive approach. The study shows that the Prophet not only instructs children to perform prayer but also instils the value of justice in implementing discipline. The instructions regarding the age limit to begin performing prayer and the sanctions administered if not followed reflect a strict yet fair approach adopted in religious instruction from childhood. This historical approach provides a solid foundation for religious education within traditional and religious values.

Ruswandi (2023) further emphasizes the active role of parents in instilling prayer through a qualitative descriptive approach. The study shows that consistent worship practice and open communication between parents and children contribute significantly to the development of moral and spiritual character. These findings reinforce the argument that intense interaction and parental role modelling are crucial to successfully forming habitual worship within the family.

In addition, Kumaidi et al. (2024) utilize a descriptive quantitative approach to examine the influence of parenting styles on children's discipline in performing the five daily prayers. The results indicate that the systematic implementation of rules, rewards or punishments, and consistent parental attention are key drivers in maintaining children's discipline in worship. These findings further emphasize the importance of parents acting as the primary agents in religious education within the family.

Studies conducted by Aslindah (2023), Juanda (2022), Ruswandi et al. (2023), and Zr et al. (2024) also provide additional insights into the factors influencing the habit formation of prayer in children, including aspects such as motivation, parental role modelling, as well as various obstacles encountered in its implementation. Overall, these studies' findings show that religious education's success regarding prayer significantly depends on the synergy between a firm yet loving parenting style, continuous habit-formation strategies, and a supportive environment. Collectively, these results provide robust empirical and theoretical foundations for developing more adaptive Islamic educational models that correspond with the dynamics of modern life.

Based on the literature review, a significant research gap exists in that there is a lack of in-depth understanding of how parenting styles—from authoritative to permissive—influence the consistency of prayer practice within the family. Many previous studies identify the roles of rules and discipline as critical factors in shaping children's religious habits. However, no study has explicitly explored how variations in parenting styles are implemented in instilling prayer and how modern challenges such as technological influence and parental busyness interact with the applied habit formation strategies. Therefore, a qualitative phenomenological study is needed to capture parents' nuanced subjective experiences and provide a holistic view of the efforts in forming prayer habits within the family.

The novelty of this research lies in its approach that foregrounds the structure of parental experiences as the central analytical framework. By focusing on how parents perceive, interpret, and apply nurturing values in instilling prayer at home, this study seeks to uncover the psychological dimensions that have remained underexplored. The primary focus of this research is to understand how the essential structure of these experiences is formed and what meanings it holds, particularly about parenting styles, educational strategies, and the challenges faced in Islamic religious education.

This research qualitatively explores the perceptions, interpretations, and interaction dynamics in parental nurturing practices through a phenomenological approach. In doing so, it contributes new insights into developing a more humanistic and contextual Islamic educational model—one in which emotional aspects and everyday life realities are placed at the centre of analysis. The findings are expected to enrich the body of literature on Islamic religious education and to provide practical recommendations for educators and practitioners in optimizing the role of family in holistically shaping children's religious character.

The research questions addressed in this study are: How is the structure of the experiences of parents of SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Batu formed in instilling prayer habits in their children within the family environment, and what meaning do these experiences hold concerning parenting styles, nurturing strategies, and the challenges in Islamic religious education?

II. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method to explore the subjective experiences of parents in instilling prayer in their adolescents. The primary focus of the phenomenological approach was to understand the meaning of

Parents' Experience in Instilling Prayer Habits Among Adolescents: A Phenomenological Study in Vocational School

everyday life experiences within the context of parenting styles and Islamic religious education strategies in the family (Creswell, 2016).

As a field study, data were collected directly from the natural environment using flexible and open interviews, which enabled an in-depth exploration of the realities experienced by the informants (Giorgi et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2018). The main participants consisted of three individuals who were purposively selected based on the following criteria: (a) they were parents of students at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Batu; (b) they had genuine experience in instilling prayer habits in their children from early childhood to adolescence; (c) they possessed the ability to articulate their experiences verbally; and (d) they were willing to participate in this study. In addition to the main participants, the study also involved the principal of SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Batu, Islamic religious education teachers, and students as supporting participants. In the phenomenological approach, the number of informants was not strictly predetermined; instead, it was determined by the depth of the data obtained until information saturation was reached (Giorgi et al., 2017; Amien et al., 2022).

Data were collected using various techniques to obtain rich and in-depth information. The methods employed included: (a) semi-structured in-depth interviews, which allowed for an extensive exploration of the subjective experiences of parents regarding the instillation of prayer habits; the interviews were conducted flexibly with an open guide to accommodate the perspectives of the informants; (b) observation, during which the researcher directly observed family interaction patterns related to prayer practice, including parental behaviour, religious routines, as well as environmental factors that either supported or hindered the practice of worship by the children; and (c) documentation, which comprised family records, household rules, and various recordings of religious activities that supported the phenomenological analysis.

Data validity was tested using member checking, a verification process in which the interview results were confirmed with the participants to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the data obtained (Sugiyono, 2012). Triangulation was performed by comparing the outcomes of observations, interviews, and documentation to ensure that each piece of information had strong validity.

Subsequently, data were analyzed according to the procedure developed by Hasbiansyah (2008), which included several main stages: (1) Narrative Transcription – all interview data were transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity of the information provided by the participants; (2) Identification of Significant Statements – the data obtained were analyzed to identify statements with essential meaning related to the instillation of prayer habits; (3) Data Reduction – this process aimed to filter relevant information and eliminate data that were not related to the focus of the study; and (4) Formulation of Textural and Structural Descriptions – this analysis was used to gain a deeper understanding of the informants' experiences from both factual (textural) and interpretative (structural) perspectives to illustrate the parenting styles and Islamic religious education strategies within the family.

The phenomenological approach used in this study allowed for the exploration of experiential dimensions that were not only descriptive but also provided a deeper understanding of how parents perceived and applied the instillation of prayer habits within the family. Consequently, this study developed a more effective and applicable family-based Islamic educational model.

III. FINDINGS

A. Essential Structure of Parental Experience in Instilling Prayer Habits in Adolescent

The findings of this study illustrated the essential structure of parental experiences in instilling prayer habits in adolescents within the SMK Muhammadiyah I Batu family environment (Figure 1).

The essential experiences of the participants indicated that the success of instilling prayer habits in adolescents correlated strongly with how parenting styles combined firmness, communication, and consistent habit formation. On the one hand, the approach of firmness and clear rules proved effective in fostering discipline and responsibility, while on the other hand, a non-coercive and supportive approach created space for the growth of internal motivation in adolescents. These differences in strategies emphasized that the family context—whether in terms of values, economic factors, or cultural background—played a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of the religious education being implemented. The findings provided a holistic view of the challenges and potential strategies for instilling prayer habits. They underscored the need for an integrated role between the family and educational institutions to achieve deep internalization of religious values in adolescents.

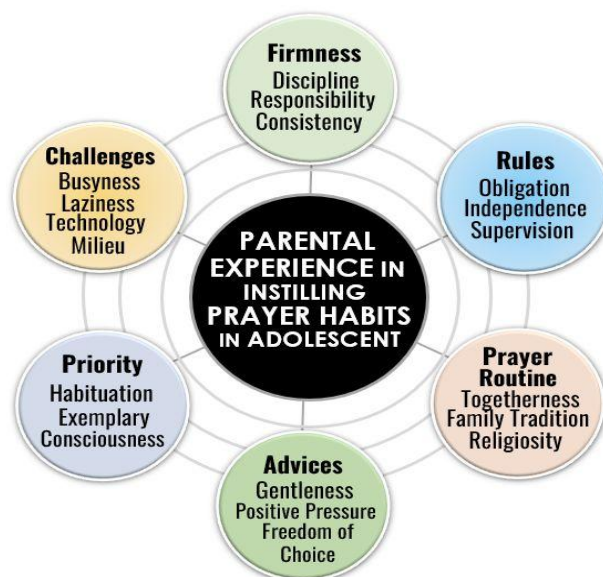


Figure 1. Essential Structure of Parental Experience in Instilling Prayer Habits in Adolescents

B. Description of the Components of Parental Experience in Instilling Prayer Habits in Children

Firmness

The data showed that parental firmness was important in shaping adolescent's prayer habits. The first participant applied an authoritative parenting style, combining firmness with an approach that provided attentive care and emotional support. They established strict, non-negotiable prayer rules, so the adolescents became accustomed to performing them without constant reminders. Consistency in enforcing these rules helped build discipline and a sense of responsibility toward religious obligations. In contrast, the second participant preferred a persuasive approach focused on raising awareness and cultivating understanding through open communication and discussions regarding religious values rather than direct instructions or coercion. Unlike the previous two approaches, the third participant exhibited a permissive parenting style in which the responsibility for performing prayer was entirely delegated to the child and the school. It was done because the parent-focused primarily on fulfilling the family's economic needs, which limited direct involvement in instilling prayer habits. These results demonstrated that parental firmness contributed to establishing discipline, responsibility, and consistency in performing prayer.

Clear Rules

The study showed that early systematic and consistent implementation of clear prayer rules was key to forming religious awareness among adolescents. The first participant applied explicit regulations regarding the timing of prayer, accompanied by daily supervision and evaluation. With these firm and continuous rules, the adolescent learned that prayer was not merely a religious duty but a spiritual necessity that had to be performed without constant reminders. In contrast, the second participant adopted a more flexible approach by delegating most of the process of habit formation to the school, as the parents felt that their religious knowledge was limited; thus, they entrusted the child's religious education to the school. The third participant did not enforce direct supervision over the performance of prayer, relying entirely on the school as the institution for religious guidance. This component of the experience underscored that enforcing clear and consistent rules within the family contributed to developing a sense of duty, independence, and sustained parental oversight in adolescent's worship practices.

Congregational Prayer Routine at Home

The practice of congregational prayer within the family played a crucial role in forming worship habits and strengthening spiritual values in the lives of adolescents. The first participant committed to incorporating congregational prayer into the daily family routine, particularly at Maghrib and Isha. This practice served as a form of religious habit formation and a moment of togetherness that strengthened family bonds. In contrast, the second participant conducted congregational prayer only during specific occasions, such as during Ramadan or on holidays, as daily busyness posed a significant obstacle in establishing a routine. Meanwhile, the third participant did not engage in congregational prayer at home because the adolescents spent most of their time outside working and attending school. This experience component indicated that adolescent's involvement in religious activities at home, such as congregational prayer, gradually formed their religious character, fostered family unity, and maintained the continuity of spiritual traditions.

Provision of Advice

The data showed that providing advice was one of the strategies used to remind adolescents to perform prayer. The first participant employed a gentle and firm approach in reminding the adolescent about the obligation to pray. They linked the

Parents' Experience in Instilling Prayer Habits Among Adolescents: A Phenomenological Study in Vocational School

performance of prayer with blessings in life and provided a deep understanding of the value of worship in daily life. This strategy aimed to build the adolescent's spiritual awareness and help them understand the urgency of prayer as part of their religious identity. The second participant provided advice more flexibly, reminding the adolescent only when at home without coercion, based on the belief that intrinsic motivation was more effective in forming prayer habits than direct instructions or pressure from parents. In contrast, the third participant tended to be passive in offering advice regarding prayer, believing that the adolescents would eventually find their way to perform worship as they matured. These findings indicated that a parenting style oriented toward providing advice manifested in various forms, from gentle, positively reinforcing approaches to more permissive ones that allowed the adolescent to determine their attitude toward the obligation of prayer.

Priority Choice

The results revealed that the priorities set by parents in religious education directly affected the instillation of prayer habits in adolescents. The first participant treated prayer as a fundamental aspect of family education, instilling spiritual values through role modelling and early habit formation. With this strategy, adolescents learned that prayer was not merely a duty but an indispensable part of life. In contrast, despite having limited religious understanding, the second participant still endeavoured to provide basic religious education as an important asset to help adolescents better comprehend their religious responsibilities. The third participant, however, prioritized the family's economic needs over religious education, which resulted in reduced emphasis on prayer as a primary focus in home education. This component underscored that the priorities established by parents contributed significantly to their focus on educating adolescents in religion, including instilling prayer habits.

Challenges

The study showed that instilling prayer habits in the family faced various challenges, such as children's busy schedules, the influence of technology, laziness, and unsupportive social environments. The first participant addressed these challenges by actively monitoring the adolescent's activities, communicating via telephone when the adolescent was outside, and limiting electronic devices during prayer time. The second participant recognized that external factors such as media and peer influences significantly affected the adolescent's prayer habits; however, they did not implement specific strategies to overcome these challenges. Conversely, the third participant regarded these challenges as inherent aspects of life that could not be avoided and chose not to focus on enhancing worship habits at home. This component demonstrated that challenges in instilling prayer habits arose not only from internal factors of the child but also from external elements, such as social dynamics, technological influences, and the limited time and role of parents in religious education.

IV. DISCUSSION

The study shows that parental firmness in instilling prayer plays an important role in shaping adolescent's discipline and responsibility. This firmness does not merely mean enforcement but consistency and clarity of rules applied within the family (Juanda, 2021). This approach aligns with the behaviorist concept in religious education, which emphasizes the importance of habit formation through positive reinforcement and environmental control (Skinner, 1957). In this context, parental firmness is reinforcement that helps adolescent internalize worship practices as part of their daily routines.

The study is reinforced by Ruswandi (2023) and Filasofa (2021), who stress the importance of open communication and a caring parenting method in instilling worship in adolescents by the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). The Prophet sets an example of how to guide adolescents without coercion but with role modelling and constructive motivation, as reflected in the hadith regarding the obligation of prayer for children at seven. This approach corresponds with the social learning theory, which states that adolescents learn through observation and imitation of the behaviour of their parents or other adults in their environment (Bandura, 1977; Goyen & Chepyator-Thomson, 2024). Thus, parents who consistently demonstrate firmness in performing prayer tend to be more successful in forming religious habits in their adolescents than those who do not set clear rules (Jurasíńska et al., 2019; Cherish, 2023).

At the same time, clear and consistent rules are important in cultivating a sense of responsibility and independence in worship. Rules provided in a conducive atmosphere—without excessive pressure yet with adequate supervision—act as a bridge between family values and adolescent's religious practices (Sumiyati, 2023; Maharani et al., 2022; Juanda, 2022; Ruswandi, 2023). This finding aligns with the Islamic educational theory, which emphasizes that habit formation and discipline are key factors in developing an adolescent's religious character (Quthb, 1993). The implementation of clear rules can also be associated with Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which shows that adolescents who receive religious education with explicit rule-based approaches tend to understand the concepts of religious duty and social responsibility more quickly (Kohlberg, 1981; Schinkel & de Ruyter, 2017; Nainggolan & Naibaho, 2022).

Conversely, adolescents who do not receive clear guidelines in their worship practices tend to lack a strong framework to perform prayer consistently (Amrulloh, 2016; Anggraini & Raisal, 2024; Žuro et al., 2024). This observation is also supported by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which shows that the family environment is the primary system that shapes adolescent's behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bettis et al., 2020; Fulantelli et al., 2021).

Parents' Experience in Instilling Prayer Habits Among Adolescents: A Phenomenological Study in Vocational School

In addition, engaging in congregational prayer at home strengthens the religious character of adolescents through direct practice and emotional closeness between parents and children. Congregational prayer is a ritual activity and a social, educational forum that instills values of cooperation, order, and responsibility within the family (Juanda, 2021). In Islamic education, praying together follows Kolb's experiential learning approach, where adolescents learn from direct experiences rather than solely through verbal instructions or theory (Kolb, 1984; Miettinen, 2013; Morris, 2020). Participating in family worship practically reinforces spiritual values, making them easier for adolescents to accept and internalize than purely instructional methods.

Furthermore, the provision of advice by parents in instilling prayer functions as an effective form of religious communication when done gently, respectfully, and with space for adolescents' freedom (Sumiyati, 2023; Juanda, 2022; Aslindah, 2023). This method aligns with the dialogical approach in religious education, which asserts that religious understanding becomes more meaningful when adolescents participate actively in discussions and develop their religious consciousness (Freire, 1970). Additionally, this advising process relates to Piaget's constructivism theory, which explains that adolescents do not passively receive information but build understanding through social interactions and personal experiences. Parents who create a conducive communication atmosphere are more effective in fostering a lasting understanding of worship than one-way lecturing methods, which often fall short in developing adolescent's religious awareness.

Challenges in instilling prayer arise from internal factors, such as adolescents' busyness and limited religious knowledge, as well as external factors, like the influence of technology and adolescents' social environment (Filasofa, 2021; Aslindah, 2023). From the perspective of Islamic education, these obstacles relate to Vygotsky's socio-cultural learning theory, which states that the environment and social interactions substantially impact adolescent's religious development. For instance, modern technological influences often disrupt children's routine worship practices. Aslindah (2023) shows that uncontrolled exposure to gadgets decreases worship motivation among adolescents. Consequently, religious education at home needs to adapt new strategies, such as integrating digital media as a more engaging tool for religious education.

Overall, this study's findings reinforce various theories in Islamic education and the psychology of learning, emphasizing the importance of habit formation, modelling, communication, and a supportive environment in establishing adolescent worship practices.

V. CONCLUSION

This study showed that parenting styles, religious education strategies, active involvement in role modeling, and early habit formation greatly influenced the success of instilling prayer habits in the family. The authoritative parenting style proved to be the most effective in shaping discipline and responsibility in adolescents toward worship compared to the permissive style that granted complete freedom. In addition, routines of congregational prayer, advice provided through a dialogical approach, and clear rules contributed to the internalization of religious values in children. On the other hand, challenges such as adolescent's busy schedules, the influence of technology, and an unsupportive social environment indicated that instilling prayer habits required more flexible and contextualized educational strategies.

The implications of this study underscored that religious education within the family should be carried out continuously with an approach that integrates role modeling, open communication, and consistent habit formation. Therefore, parents needed to develop adaptive strategies to address social and technological changes that affected their adolescent's religious practices. Further research could be conducted with a broader scope, involving various educational levels and integrating technology perspectives in religious education. The main recommendation for Islamic education practitioners was to design learning programs that accommodated the role of the family so that the synergy between formal and informal education could holistically strengthen adolescents' religious character.

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