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ORIGINAL

Transforming Learning in Raudhatul Athfal: Development of Innovative Teaching Materials and Symbolic Modeling Techniques to Enhance Manners in the Golden Generation

Transformando el Aprendizaje en Raudhatul Athfal: Desarrollo de Materiales Didácticos Innovadores y Técnicas de Modelado Simbólico para Mejorar los Modales en la Generación Dorada

Muslam[1] ✉, Mustakimah[1], Hilyatul Karimah Azzahra[1], Lidia Marva Wahyu Triani[1], Muh Syauqi Malik[2]

[1]Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia.
[2]Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia.

ABSTRACT

Introduction: this study explores the phenomenon of decreased manners in early childhood caused by the influence of a hostile social environment and the dominance of gadgets.
Objective: this study integrates visual symbols as an effective etiquette learning tool for early childhood. Using a symbolic modelling approach, this study created a more concrete manner of material following children's understanding.
Method: the integrated development method in Raudhatul Athfal's classroom environment involves needs analysis, designing symbols, making teaching materials, and trials. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and etiquette comprehension tests before and after applying symbolic modelling.
Results: the results showed that this approach significantly improved children's understanding and application of manners. Visual symbols help them understand abstract concepts more easily while stimulating active participation through an engaging and colourful approach.
Conclusions: this research guides the development of an engaging and practical curriculum in teaching etiquette values in early childhood and encouraging the use of visual methods in learning.

Keywords: Early Childhood; Manners; Symbolic Modelling Techniques.

RESUMEN

Introducción: este estudio explora el fenómeno de la disminución de los modales en la primera infancia, causado por la influencia de un entorno social hostil y la dominancia de los dispositivos electrónicos.
Objetivo: este estudio integra símbolos visuales como una herramienta efectiva para el aprendizaje de la etiqueta en la primera infancia. Utilizando un enfoque de modelado simbólico, se creó un material de modales más concreto, acorde con la comprensión de los niños.
Método: el método de desarrollo integrado en el entorno del aula de Raudhatul Athfal implica un análisis de necesidades, diseño de símbolos, elaboración de materiales didácticos y pruebas. Los datos se recopilaron a través de observaciones, entrevistas y pruebas de comprensión de modales antes y después de aplicar el modelado simbólico.
Resultados: los resultados mostraron que este enfoque mejoró significativamente la comprensión y aplicación

de los modales en los niños. Los símbolos visuales les ayudan a entender conceptos abstractos más fácilmente, al tiempo que estimulan la participación activa a través de un enfoque atractivo y colorido.
Conclusiones: esta investigación guía el desarrollo de un currículo atractivo y práctico para la enseñanza de los valores de etiqueta en la primera infancia, fomentando el uso de métodos visuales en el aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: Primera Infancia; Modales; Técnicas de Modelado Simbólico.

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions bear several fundamental responsibilities, encompassing not only the enhancement of students' academic capabilities but also the cultivation of their character.[1] Cunningham posits that the character imparted within educational settings is an extension of the character, morals, or values that are prevalent and esteemed within society, a concept referred to as normative social character.[2,3]

Conversely, Lickona asserts that good character encompasses understanding, empathy, and behavior that aligns with fundamental ethical principles. Thus, character education plays a pivotal role in assisting students and the broader school community in comprehending and embodying these values.[4,5]

The cultivation of universal values and the development of national character should commence at an early age. Early childhood represents a period of rapid development across various dimensions, including religious, moral, social, intellectual, and emotional aspects. Character education tailored for young children must align with their moral development. According to Piaget, moral development unfolds in three stages: premoral, moral realism, and moral relativism.[6] Kohlberg further delineates moral development into three levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional.[7]

For children in Playgroup and Raudhlatul Athfal, their moral development typically resides within the premoral and moral realism stages. At this juncture, children are often unfamiliar with numerous rules, ethics, and norms, which they have yet to comprehend fully. Consequently, character education within Raudhlatul Athfal is primarily focused on the introduction and habituation to behaviors that align with established norms, ethics, and regulations. One effective approach to instilling character is through the introduction and reinforcement of the value of manners among students.

As a critical component of the educational framework, schools play an essential role in shaping students' manners through the character education they provide. According to Supriyanti, one significant aspect of student manners in the school context involves fostering respectful relationships with teachers. This includes behaviors such as demonstrating obedience and submission to teachers, engaging in positive actions, communicating in a soft and polite manner, praying for the health and resilience of teachers in their educational endeavors, upholding the esteemed reputation of the school, showing respect towards teachers, greeting them warmly upon encounters, and exemplifying good behavior.[8,9]

However, the current reality reveals a concerning trend: a decline in manners among early childhood students towards teachers, peers, and other members of the school community. Increasingly, students exhibit diminished respect and courtesy, largely influenced by a detrimental social environment and the pervasive use of gadgets that are accessible to nearly every child today. A notable example of this decline in etiquette is observed when children request assistance; they often neglect to use polite expressions such as "please" and instead resort to impolite language. Furthermore, children frequently disregard their parents when engaged in mobile phone activities, indicating a waning attitude of respect towards elderly people. Observations conducted by researchers indicate that several students enter the classroom without greeting their teachers or performing customary gestures, such as kissing the teacher's hand during prayer. Additionally, some children continue to converse with their peers during these moments, further illustrating the erosion of respectful behavior.

If this phenomenon remains unaddressed, it poses a significant threat to one of the primary objectives of Indonesian national education: the cultivation of noble character and moral integrity. The social fabric among individuals may deteriorate, leading to a lack of mutual respect and making it increasingly difficult to foster harmonious relationships within the community.

To address this issue, it is essential to explore strategies for enhancing manners among students, one of which is the technique of symbolic modeling. This modeling technique is a pedagogical strategy that facilitates learning through the observation of models, resulting in behavioral changes that stem from imitation. The behaviors demonstrated by models serve to establish new behaviors in students while reinforcing those that have already been developed. In this context, teachers can exemplify appropriate behaviors, utilizing various forms of models, including audio, physical, or live demonstrations, which students can observe and emulate.[10]

Raudhatul Athfal plays a pivotal role in laying the foundation for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development during the early stages of life. A critical aspect of education at Raudhatul Athfal is the cultivation of manners, which encompasses the social norms, values, and ethics that govern individual behavior in social

interactions. However, imparting the concept of manners to young children presents challenges due to their limited capacity for abstract thinking and the complexity of the concept itself.[11]

Conversely, the use of visual symbols has been shown to be effective in facilitating understanding and learning among children. Visual symbols can bridge communication gaps and enhance children's comprehension of information. Therefore, the development of symbolic modeling techniques to teach manners to Raudhatul Athfal students represents an innovative and effective solution.[12]

To date, research on the application of visual symbols in teaching manners at the Raudhatul Athfal level remains limited. There is a pressing need for comprehensive studies that examine how the development of visual symbols can transform the approach to teaching manners among Raudhatul Athfal students. Additionally, efforts to leverage young children's inclination towards visual recognition and concrete representations in learning present untapped potential that warrants further exploration.[13,14]

This study explores the phenomenon of decreased manners in early childhood, significantly influenced by a hostile social environment and the pervasive dominance of gadgets. Given the critical importance of social etiquette in early development, it is essential to address these challenges. The justification for this work lies in the urgent need to foster better social behaviors among young children, as these foundational skills are crucial for their future interactions and overall development. The objective of this study is to integrate visual symbols as an effective tool for teaching etiquette to early childhood learners. By employing a symbolic modeling approach, the research seeks to create a more concrete and relatable manner of presenting material that aligns with children's understanding, thereby enhancing their learning experience and promoting better social behaviors.

METHOD

This research employs a developmental research approach aimed at integrating the creation of teaching materials with their implementation in the Raudhatul Athfal classroom environment. The universe and sample for this study consisted of Raudhatul Athfal students aged 3 to 6 years, selected through a purposive sampling method from various institutions in the Ngaliyan District of Semarang City. The participants were chosen based on their low to medium scores on a manners assessment scale, ensuring a focus on those who would benefit most from the intervention. The sample included 18 students from grade B-3 and 18 from grade B-4 at RA Musiarti, along with 11 students from grade B-1 and 12 from grade B-2 at RA Al-Hidayah. Expert validators, including early childhood education specialists and selected teachers, were involved in the development and validation phases, ensuring the research's credibility and relevance.

In terms of variables, the primary focus was on the understanding and application of manners among early childhood students, assessed through various data collection methods. Information collection involved observations of student interactions with visual symbols, interviews with teachers implementing the symbolic modeling techniques, and assessments of manners comprehension before and after the intervention. Participatory observations provided in-depth insights into student behavior, while qualitative data analysis was conducted through content analysis of interviews and observations. Additionally, a comparative analysis of manners comprehension test scores was performed. The data collection instruments, including questionnaires, observation checklists, and interview guidelines, utilized a Likert scale to gauge student attitudes and perceptions. Ethical standards were upheld throughout the research process, ensuring informed consent from parents and guardians, and maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. This comprehensive methodology highlights the effectiveness of symbolic modeling techniques in enhancing students' understanding of manners, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data analysis.

RESULTS
Description of the Research Subjects

The subjects of this study comprised Early Childhood Education students from two Raudhatul Athfal (RA) institutions located in the city of Semarang, specifically RA Musiarti and RA Al-Hidayah. The total number of research participants was 59, distributed across four classes: 18 students from class B-3 and 18 from class B-4 at RA Musiarti, as well as 11 students from class B-1 and 12 from class B-2 at RA Al-Hidayah. This research involved students with diverse characteristics that reflect the heterogeneity inherent in early childhood education.

The characteristics of the students included variations in cognitive development levels, language proficiency, and social interaction skills. Some students exhibited differing levels of attention, while others demonstrated varying degrees of comprehension and fine motor skills. This diversity is crucial for understanding how symbolic modeling methods can be effectively adapted and applied within the context of early childhood education.

Despite the differences in characteristics among the students, this study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the potential of symbolic modeling techniques to enhance the understanding of manners among Early Childhood Education students. Given this diversity, the research is anticipated to contribute to the development of instructional methods that can be tailored to meet the specific needs and characteristics

of Early Childhood Education students. Furthermore, this research presents an opportunity to explore how symbolic modeling techniques can be implemented inclusively, accommodating the varied characteristics of students within Early Childhood Education classrooms.

Initial Trial: Understanding Manners Before Symbolic Modeling

Initial trials aimed at assessing students' understanding of manners were conducted through systematic observations focused on various aspects of student behavior during interactions with parents and teachers. The findings from these observations served as the foundation for designing symbolic modeling materials that are both appropriate and relevant to the students' needs in comprehending manners. Key aspects observed included communication style, attitudes towards teachers, completion of assignments, and interactions with peers.

In terms of communication style, observations indicated that most students spoke softly when engaging with parents and teachers. Conversely, instances of speaking in a loud tone occasionally resulted in feelings of guilt among students. Additionally, some students exhibited the habit of addressing parents or teachers while facing away, whereas others demonstrated the practice of maintaining eye contact with their interlocutors. Furthermore, students tend to seek discussions with parents or teachers when confronted with challenges.

Regarding attitudes towards teachers, most students displayed respectful greetings; however, some only extended greetings within the school environment. Students also exhibited polite behaviors, such as nodding as a sign of respect. Moreover, students' preferences for certain subjects and teachers appeared to influence their enthusiasm and engagement during lessons.

The aspects of students' social interactions were also considered, particularly in relation to sharing with peers and their responses to friends' mistakes. Students generally exhibited friendliness and a willingness to share with peers, especially when they had additional provisions. However, when friends made mistakes, there was a noticeable tendency for students to remain silent and discuss the issue privately with other peers.

The analysis of questionnaire responses revealed that students' reactions to statements regarding manners were predominantly positive, as indicated by the observation grid included in the research appendix. Out of a total of 45 respondents, the questionnaire, which contained 32 statements, yielded the following data:

Table 1. Observations		
Number	**Statement**	**Statement Score**
		Positive Questionnaire	**Negative Questionnaire**
1	Agree	443	10
2	Agree	418	26
3	Disagree Less	56	136
4	Disagree	15	178
5	Strongly Disagree	6	131

This analysis provides a comprehensive overview of students' understanding of manners prior to the implementation of symbolic modeling techniques. The findings derived from this initial assessment will serve as a benchmark for measuring changes in knowledge following the application of extended modeling techniques in manners education at a subsequent stage.

Development of Children's Storybooks

In response to the identified need for etiquette education among Raudhatul Athfal children, researchers have developed a series of children's storybooks. These books encompass two primary themes: "The Polite and Courteous Child" and "Salsa and Her Twins." Both narratives are specifically designed to convey positive messages regarding etiquette values, emphasizing the importance of using expressions such as "please," "sorry," and "thank you".

The development of these storybooks adheres to writing conventions that align with the developmental needs of young children. The narratives are crafted in an engaging and accessible manner, ensuring that they are easily comprehensible for early learners. Each story is set within familiar everyday situations encountered in the Raudhatul Athfal environment, where the protagonists exemplify polite and courteous behavior in their daily interactions.

Through these narrative stories, researchers aim to impart moral lessons regarding the significance of helping others, offering apologies, and expressing gratitude in everyday life. It is anticipated that this children's storybook will serve not only as a source of entertainment but also as an effective educational tool for fostering character development and promoting positive manners among Raudhatul Athfal children. Consequently, this study contributes positively to the advancement of moral literacy and etiquette in early childhood education.

Below are some screenshots illustrating the results of the children's storybook development prior to revision:

Figure 1. Commendable Storybook Before Revision

The subsequent phase involved convening material and media experts from Raudhatul Athfal Al-Hidayah and RA Musiarti for a Group Discussion Forum. This forum generated a variety of constructive feedback regarding the development of children's storybooks.

The first piece of feedback emphasized the importance of focusing on a specific event within the story, suggesting that if two narratives are included, the titles should be clearly differentiated. Additionally, it was recommended to incorporate "text balloons" within the illustrations to enhance children's engagement. While the language used was generally deemed appropriate, some vocabulary was identified as not aligning with the developmental level of the target audience.

The second set of feedback addressed concerns regarding the storyline's length, which was considered excessive. Recommendations included the use of the phrase "ask for help" and improving the coherence of the narrative. Furthermore, the depiction of parental characters was noted to appear overly aged. Although the illustrated stories were well-received, certain phrases were found to be grammatically incorrect. The assessment of the front cover was positive; however, it was suggested that the national flag of Indonesia replace the existing front flag for greater relevance.

Further revisions were recommended to refine grammatical aspects, align images with the storyline, and enhance the overall narrative flow. Specific suggestions included replacing the illustration of Salsa riding a bicycle on the highway, as it was deemed inappropriate for the target age group and lacked the depiction of safety gear, such as helmets. The final evaluation highlighted the need for careful wording in sentences, alignment of images with the storyline, and the necessity for a smooth narrative transition.

The final suggestion underscored the importance of including page numbers and ensuring that each illustration is distinct, avoiding repetition. It is essential that the children's storybooks undergo testing with the proposed revisions to enhance their quality and suitability for the early childhood audience.

Below are some screenshots illustrating the results of the children's storybook development following the revisions.

Implementation of Symbolic Modelling Techniques

The implementation of symbolic modeling techniques involved providing stimuli to students in the form of videos that depict children practicing polite expressions such as "please," "sorry," and "thank you," as well as demonstrating acts of kindness towards parents. Researchers verbally articulated the significance of these behaviors within the framework of social manners and ethical conduct.

Additionally, the researchers analyzed students' attitudes during the video screening by observing their responses and reactions to the presented content. Following the video presentation, the concept of symbolic

modeling was further reinforced through supplementary explanations, encouraging students to integrate these positive behaviors into their daily interactions.
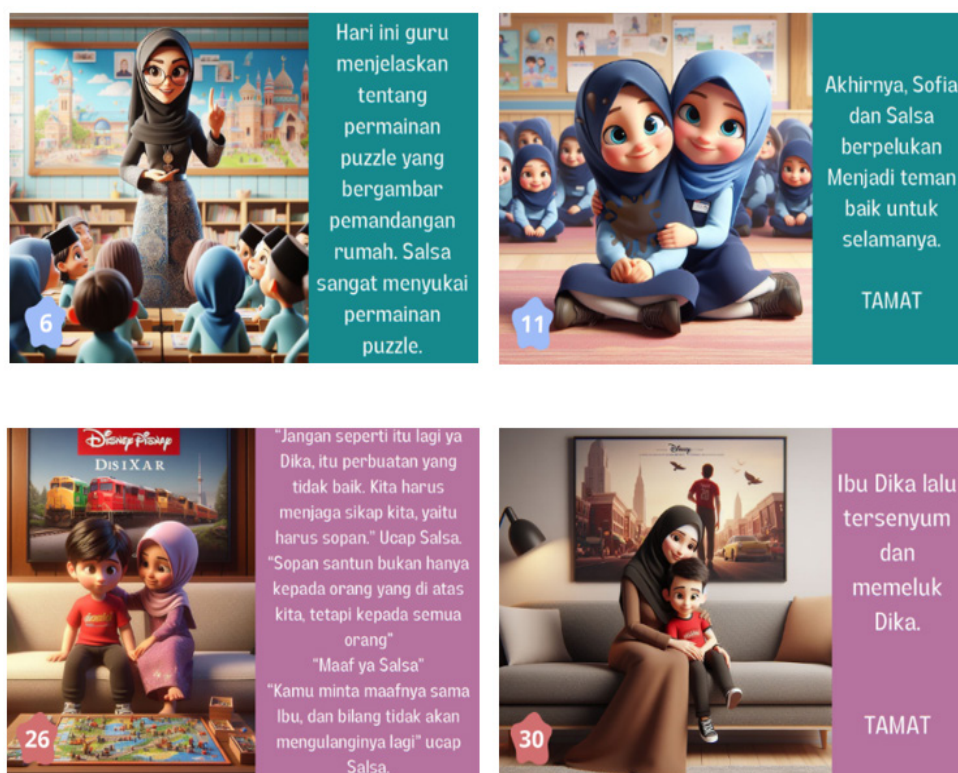

Figure 2. Commendable Storybook after revision

Figure 3. Video Playback in RA Al-Hidayah

Students were encouraged to articulate their opinions regarding the videos they had viewed. During this session, discussions were facilitated to stimulate further inquiries and enhance understanding related to the manners depicted in the video content. Students were guided to identify real-life situations in which polite behavior could be applied. This approach aims to ensure that students not only grasp theoretical concepts but also effectively relate them to their personal experiences.

Figure 4. Video Playback at RA Musiarti

Furthermore, each student is encouraged to actively engage in role-playing activities to demonstrate the application of the manners concepts that have been learned. Students are prompted to interact with one another by employing polite expressions and performing acts of kindness, as illustrated in the video. This process is conducted continuously, allowing for gradual adjustments and reinforcement of the concepts.

Figure 5. Opportunity to actively participate

Researchers conducted observations of student interactions, focusing on the understanding and application of manners. Particular attention was given to the interactions between students and teachers, emphasizing the importance of teachers providing positive feedback and reinforcement regarding desired behaviors. Following the implementation session, students engaged in reflective practices to evaluate their comprehension of the concepts and to identify concrete strategies for applying them in their daily lives.

After the implementation session, a comprehensive evaluation was conducted to assess the impact of symbolic modeling techniques on students' understanding and application of manners. The evaluation methodology involved direct observation of student behavior over several sessions post-implementation. Students were afforded opportunities to interact within their Early Childhood Education environment, and their responses to various situations were systematically recorded.

Observations concentrated on whether students could effectively apply the concepts of manners learned in diverse interaction scenarios, both with peers and teachers. Continuous positive reinforcement and feedback were provided to encourage the repetition of desired behaviors. Additionally, teachers involved parents in the evaluation process to gain further insights into the impact of implementing symbolic modeling techniques beyond the school setting.

Moreover, a collaborative reflection session was organized between teachers and students to assess their learning experiences. Students were invited to share their perspectives on the effectiveness of symbolic modeling techniques in facilitating their understanding and application of manners. The feedback gathered from students served as valuable input for the enhancement and adjustment of instructional methods in future iterations.

Figure 6. Reflection with the Teacher

The evaluation results offer insights into how students can translate their understanding of the concept of manners into their daily lives. Observable changes in behavior serve as indicators of the successful implementation of symbolic modeling techniques. It is anticipated that students will not only master the theoretical aspects of

these concepts but will also be able to apply them consistently across various interpersonal contexts.

Figure 7. Reinforcement from Researchers

Furthermore, the data obtained from this evaluation will undergo a comprehensive analysis to identify the factors influencing the effectiveness of symbolic modeling techniques, including individual and situational variables. This analysis aims to yield deeper insights into the development and enhancement of symbolic modeling techniques within the context of early childhood education.

It is hoped that the implementation of these symbolic modeling techniques will enable Early Childhood Education students to more effectively internalize the values associated with manners and apply them in their daily interactions. By fostering an understanding of the significance of polite expressions and appropriate behavior, students are expected to cultivate positive social skills from an early age, thereby creating a learning environment that is conducive to character development.

DISCUSSION

The behaviors of individuals, particularly among children and adolescents, are predominantly shaped and learned through modeling, which involves observing and subsequently imitating the behaviors of others to cultivate new behaviors within themselves. The fundamental procedure of modeling entails demonstrating the behavior of one or more individuals to the subject who is to imitate it. In typically developing children, the imitation process can occur rapidly. However, in individuals with certain conditions, such as autism or cognitive impairments, the ability to imitate existing models may be significantly hindered.

Modeling is understood as a learning process that occurs through the observation of models, leading to behavioral changes because of imitation.[15] Exemplary procedures leverage the learning process through observation, where the behaviors of one or several exemplary individuals serve as stimuli for the thoughts, attitudes, or behaviors of the observing subject.[16] Modeling encompasses learning through observation, which may involve the addition or subtraction of observed behaviors, the generalization of various observations, and the engagement of cognitive processes. It is a learning process that utilizes the behavior of a model as a stimulus for the thoughts, attitudes, or behaviors of other individuals who observe the displayed model.

Symbolic modeling is a method that employs media such as films, videos, and manuals to demonstrate desired behaviors that students are encouraged to adopt. This technique utilizes various forms of media, including films and videos, to illustrate the behaviors that students aspire to emulate.[17]

The efficacy of visual symbols in learning has long been acknowledged as a powerful method for enhancing learners' understanding. Visual symbols can transcend language barriers and provide concrete representations of abstract concepts, thereby making learning more engaging and memorable. In an era characterized by rapid access to vast amounts of information, visual symbols have emerged as a fundamental component of modern education. Visual symbols, including images, diagrams, graphs, and icons, can effectively convey complex messages and concepts in a manner that is easily comprehensible and memorable. The integration of visual symbols in learning has significantly transformed the ways in which information is understood and presented.[18,19]

The primary advantage of visual symbols lies in their ability to attract attention and sustain students' interest. Humans possess an innate capacity to recognize and associate images with meaning, rendering visual symbols powerful tools for communicating complex or abstract concepts. The combination of text and imagery enhances the learning experience, making it more vibrant and engaging, while fostering active participation and establishing connections between the presented information.[20]

Moreover, visual symbols facilitate the comprehension of intricate concepts. Statistical data, for instance,

can be effectively illustrated through charts and graphs, enabling students to identify patterns and trends that may be challenging to discern when presented solely in numerical form. These symbols help mitigate barriers to understanding complex information, paving the way for deeper comprehension and the application of concepts in real-world contexts.[21,22,23,24]

In addition to their effectiveness in conveying information, the use of visual symbols encourages student participation in collaborative learning environments. Within a classroom setting, students can work together to interpret and analyze images or diagrams, assisting one another in grasping concepts that may be difficult to articulate verbally. This collaborative approach fosters cooperation skills and allows students from diverse backgrounds to contribute meaningfully and feel valued in the learning process.[25]

In response to the increasingly complex and rapidly evolving world, modern education continually seeks innovative strategies to prepare future generations. One approach that is gaining prominence is the symbolic modeling approach. This methodology emphasizes not only the dissemination of information to students but also the development of abstract, analytical, and critical thinking skills that are essential for success across various facets of life.[26,27]

Symbolic modeling encompasses the use of symbols, notations, and formal representations to visualize complex concepts and their interrelationships. This approach encourages students to engage in deeper exploration through mathematical representation, logical reasoning, and standardized language. Within an educational context, symbolic modeling fosters the development of abstract thinking skills, enabling students to perceive the overarching framework and identify patterns, even in intricate scenarios.[28]

One of the primary advantages of the symbolic modeling approach is its capacity to facilitate profound and sustained understanding. By analyzing concepts through symbols and formal notation, students can discern causal relationships, fundamental principles, and connections that may be overlooked in traditional learning methodologies. This analytical process aids in establishing a robust foundation for comprehending real-world applications and broader contexts.[29]

In the Indonesian context, "manners" refers to the rules and norms governing behavior that dictate human interactions across various circumstances. More than merely a collection of formal regulations, the concept of manners embodies the essence of culture and civility in communication and interpersonal interactions. It is a construct that honors diversity and contributes to the establishment of harmonious relationships among individuals within society.[30]

Manners encompass customs of courtesy, which include all actions, behaviors, greetings, words, and conversations conducted in accordance with specific rules or norms. Factors influencing behavior associated with manners include the processes of imitation or modeling, which commence with observation and the subsequent acquisition of learned content.[31] According to Pranowo, behavior is also influenced by the language employed in communication. These manners can be reflected in the language used during everyday interactions.[32] Environmental factors, mass media, and daily activities further contribute to the shaping of manners.[33] Students can focus on various aspects of polite behavior in their daily interactions, including manners in relation to parents, teachers, elders, peers, and members of the opposite gender.[34]

CONCLUSIONS

This research highlights the significance of symbolic modeling techniques in enhancing the understanding of manners among early childhood education students. By focusing on the foundational level of education, the study emphasizes the necessity of instilling proper manners early on, which can have lasting effects on children's social interactions and overall development. The use of video stimuli showcasing polite expressions and appropriate behaviors serves as an effective tool for engaging students and facilitating their learning process.

The implementation of these techniques has yielded positive results, as evidenced by the post-implementation evaluation. Students demonstrated a noticeable improvement in their understanding and application of manners, translating theoretical knowledge into practical behavior during everyday interactions. The study underscores the importance of positive reinforcement, teacher feedback, and parental involvement in nurturing and sustaining these positive behaviors, creating a supportive environment for students to thrive socially.

While the findings are promising, it is crucial to acknowledge the individuality of each student and their unique developmental trajectories. Tailoring learning methods to accommodate these differences is essential for maximizing the effectiveness of the educational approach. By recognizing and addressing the diverse needs of students, educators can foster an inclusive learning environment that promotes the understanding and application of manners, ultimately contributing to the holistic development of young learners.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization: Muslam, Mustakimah.
Data curation: Mustakimah, Muslam
Formal analysis: Hilyatul Karimah Azzahra, Lidia Marva Wahyu Triani.
Research: Muslam, Mustakimah.
Methodology: Hilyatul Karimah Azzahra, Muslam, Muh Syauqi Malik.

Project management: Lidia Marva Wahyu Triani, Muh Syauqi Malik.
Resources: Muslam, Hilyatul Karimah Azzahra, Lidia Marva Wahyu Triani.
Software: Hilyatul Karimah Azzahra, Muh Syauqi Malik.
Supervision: Hilyatul Karimah Azzahra, Lidia Marva Wahyu Triani.
Validation: Lidia Marva Wahyu Triani, Muh Syauqi Malik.
Display: Mustakimah, Muh Syauqi Malik.
Writing - original draft: Muslam.
Writing - proofreading and editing: Muslam, Hilyatul Karimah Azzahra, Lidia Marva Wahyu Triani.