

## **Strengthening Religious Character through Positive Reinforcement: Analysis of Ramadan Worship Monitoring Books for Intermediate Students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Strengthening religious character in early childhood requires systematic pedagogical instruments specifically structured monitoring tools that facilitate the transition from formal obedience to intrinsic habituation. This study aims to analyze the roles of the Ramadan checklist book as a monitoring medium in internalizing worship habits among first-grade students at SDIT Ar-Raayah. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with teachers and parents, and documentation. Subjects were selected using a purposive sampling technique involving 28 students and 7 key informants. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Results: The findings reveal that the Ramadan checklist book serves as a psychological reinforcement that triggers a shift from extrinsic motivation to a stable religious disposition (*malakah*). Students demonstrated high initiative in completing their worship records, which evolved into a sense of self-accountability and integrity (*hayā*). This process indicates that worship has transitioned from a formal obligation into an internal spiritual necessity. The synergy between systematic monitoring and parental guidance through this checklist creates a solid educational ecosystem, ensuring the sustainable internalization of religious values in early childhood.

**Keywords:** *Early Childhood, Internalization, Islamic Education, Ramadan Checklist, Worship Habits.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Islamic Education (PAI) at the elementary school level faces significant challenges, particularly in ensuring that students not only understand but also consistently practice worship in their daily lives. In the context of early childhood, a common phenomenon is the "practice gap," where students can memorize prayer movements and fasting rules in the classroom but struggle to implement them independently at home without constant adult supervision (Ma'arif dkk., 2022; Syahbudin dkk., 2023). This challenge is further complicated by the transitional period of seven-year-old children, identified in Jean Piaget's theory as the concrete operational stage (Piaget, 2011), where they remain

heavily dependent on physical objects and directly observable activities to process abstract values. In the psychology of religion, children at this age occupy the "Realistic Stage" (Harms, 1944), where concepts of divinity and obedience must be manifested through formal, visible, and measurable rituals. Therefore, the absence of a concrete monitoring tool often results in inconsistent worship habits, as children at this stage require tangible feedback to transform abstract religious obligations into stable daily practices (Akhmad, 2022; Yamin dkk., 2025).

In the realm of Islamic education, this behavioral development is manifested through *riyādhah* (repetitive practice), where a monitoring book serves as a cognitive bridge between daily routines and the formation of a religious identity. This aligns with the prophetic tradition which emphasizes the age of seven as a critical starting point for formal instruction, as narrated in the hadith:

مُرُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ بِالصَّلَاةِ وَهُمْ أَبْنَاءُ سَبْعِ سِنِينَ، وَاضْرِبُوهُمْ عَلَيْهَا وَهُمْ أَبْنَاءُ عَشْرِ سِنِينَ، وَفَرِّقُوا بَيْنَهُمْ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ

*"Command your children to perform prayer when they are seven years old, and beat them for (neglecting) it when they are ten, and separate them in their beds"*

This hadith was narrated by Abu Dawud (No. 495) and Ahmad (No. 6650) from the path of Amru bin Shu'aib, from his father, from his grandfather (Abdullah bin 'Amr bin al-Ash). In an educational context, this tradition signifies that the seven-year-old period is the essential phase for persuasive guidance and systematic habituation, justifying the use of tools like the Ramadan checklist to monitor progress before more rigorous accountability is required at age ten (Abu Dawud, 2009).

To understand this transition, it is essential to look through the foundational principles formulated by classical Muslim scholars. (al-Ghazali, 1968) emphasizes that character (*akhlāq*) can be cultivated through *Riyādhah*, while (Miskawayh, 2011) posits that education must prioritize the formation of good habits until they become a stable disposition (*malakah*).

An interesting phenomenon was found at SDIT Ar-Raayah, where the use of a simple instrument, the Ramadan Worship Monitoring Book or checklist, serves as an extraordinary stimulant for the worship motivation of first-grade students. Psychologically, every check-mark placed in the book functions as a positive reinforcement that provides a sense of personal satisfaction for the child. Field facts indicate that the use of physical monitoring media can significantly increase children's worship consistency (Hidayat, 2016). Research by (Mulyadi, 2018) However, previous studies have not specifically examined how monitoring tools function as psychological reinforcement in shaping religious character among early-grade students. This research gap is crucial to address, as every check-mark placed in the book functions as a positive reinforcement that provides a sense of personal satisfaction and self-achievement for the child. By focusing on this psychological dimension, this study aims to reveal how a simple checklist can bridge the gap between formal instruction and the internalisation of religious values during a child's formative years.

The role of checklist media is often viewed merely as an administrative tool. In fact, there is a profound internalization process of character values embedded within every completed column. In the context of modern Islamic education, the development of interactive and structured media is essential to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, ensuring that students remain engaged in their spiritual journey (Hariyanto dkk., 2025). Therefore, this study aims to analyze how the mechanism of positive reinforcement through worship monitoring books at SDIT Ar-Raayah strengthens the religious character of students through the lens of cognitive developmental psychology and Islamic education.

To provide a robust analytical framework for this phenomenon, this study synthesizes four core theoretical pillars. The first pillar is Jean Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory. In the Concrete Operational Stage, children begin to think logically but remain heavily dependent on physical objects (Santrock, 2010). Specifically, children at this stage require 'visual scaffolding' to organize their thoughts. In the context of Islamic Education (PAI), seven-year-old students are not yet cognitively equipped to deeply construct abstract transcendental concepts such as 'pahala' (spiritual rewards) or the unseen essence of divinity. To make these concepts measurable, the



worship monitoring book at SDIT Ar-Raayah serves as a crucial 'concrete representative' (Damir, 2025). This allows children to apply logical operations like 'classification' and 'counting' to their spiritual activities, transforming a vague religious obligation into a visible, trackable, and completed physical task.

Complementing the cognitive perspective, the second dimension refers to Ernest Harms' Theory of Religious Development. In the "Realistic Stage" as proposed by (Harms, 1944), religious ideas are understood through realistic, formal, and structured activities. God is understood as a concrete authority figure who demands obedience through visible, formal rules. Consequently, the implementation of the Ramadan checklist book is highly aligned with this phase, as children's religiosity is manifested through the fulfillment of measurable ritual symbols rather than abstract inner reflection. To make this stage measurable, the checklist book functions as a physical validation of the child's religious identity. Every check-mark serves as a 'ritualistic milestone' that allows teachers and parents to quantify religious development through the frequency and consistency of recorded deeds (Ummah, 2025).

Furthermore, the mechanism of behavioral change is analyzed through the third pillar, B.F. Skinner's Positive Reinforcement Mechanism. From a behaviorist perspective, the use of the Ramadan checklist book operates under the principle of positive reinforcement, where a pleasant stimulus is provided after a desired behavior appears (Goddard, 2017). The satisfaction of placing a check-mark serves as an effective non-material reward, encouraging the formation of Habituation (Fadilah, 2021). To complement this, modern cognitive psychology views the check-mark as immediate feedback. This is significant because consistent feedback strengthens the synaptic pathways, which are the biological foundations for forming stable habits (Gaschler, 2021).

Finally, all these mechanisms are grounded in the fourth pillar, the Internalization of Character in Islamic Tradition. Value internalization is the process of embedding religious values through *uswah* (exemplary behavior) and *riadhah* (consistent practice) (Nasrul Umam, 2020). Al-Ghazali (al-Ghazali, 1968) defines character (*akhlāq*) as a stable state of the soul (*hay'ah fi al-nafs*) that drives actions without deep deliberation. Similarly, Miskawayh (Miskawayh, 2011) posits that this state is achieved through

repetitive positive actions until it becomes a stable disposition (*malakah*). The monitoring book thus functions as a synchronization instrument between parenting patterns at home and educational targets at school, ensuring value consistency in both environments (Sasmita, 2025).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study method, specifically selected to explore in depth the phenomenon of utilizing Ramadan checklist books in strengthening students' religious character within a real-life environment. According to (John W. Creswell, t.t.), a case study is an effective design for investigating a bounded system through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information. By employing this design, the research systematically addresses the 'what' (the specific types of worship habituation recorded), 'how' (the mechanism of positive reinforcement through the monitoring book), and 'why' (the psychological and theological reasons behind students' behavioral changes). This framework ensures that the findings are deeply grounded in the theoretical pillars of cognitive development and behavioral psychology, allowing for a holistic understanding of the internalization process.

The population of this study includes all first-grade students at SDIT Ar-Raayah for the 2025/2026 academic year approximately 28 students. From this population, the research subjects were selected using a purposive sampling technique, focusing on participants who provide the most relevant and "information-rich" data for the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2019). The subjects consist of 28 first-grade students who actively utilized the Ramadan monitoring media, along with 2 PAI teachers and 5 parents as key informants to obtain comprehensive and valid data through their direct experience with the subjects (Moleong, 2017). The research locus is set at SDIT Ar-Raayah, and data collection was conducted through three main instruments:

1. **Participans Observation:** Direct observations of the checklist completion activities and changes in students' daily worship behavior at SDIT Ar-Raayah and within the family environment.

2. In-depth Interviews: Conducted with parents and educators to explore their perceptions of the impact of positive reinforcement on children's spiritual motivation.
3. Documentation: Collecting data in the form of students' Ramadan checklist books and character development records provided by the school.

Data analysis was performed using the Miles and Huberman model, which involves three systematic stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Matthew B. Miles, 2014). To ensure the integrity of the findings, the validity of the data was tested through source triangulation, comparing data obtained from teachers, parents, and direct observations of students (Sugiyono, 2019). Through this rigorous methodology, the study reveals the correlation between concrete pedagogical instruments and the successful internalization of religious values in first-grade students, ensuring that the transition from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic character is documented accurately within its natural social context.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study on students' worship behavior and explains how the Ramadan checklist book contributes to the internalization of religious character. The analysis reveals that the implementation of this monitoring medium functions as more than a recording tool; it acts as a structured stimulant that bridges the gap between formal instruction and consistent spiritual practice. To provide a comprehensive understanding, the following discussion details the mechanism of this internalization process through three main dimensions:

1. Concrete Worship Habits and Visual Scaffolding

The findings show that students at SDIT Ar-Raayah consistently recorded their daily worship activities throughout the month of Ramadan. The documentation included the five daily prayers (*Salawat al-Khamsah*), fasting (*Sawm*), *Tarawih*, *Dhuha* prayers, and daily charity (*Sadaqah*). Most students were able to complete the checklist regularly, indicating a marked increase in worship consistency compared to their habits outside of the Ramadan period.

This finding aligns with Piaget's concrete operational stage, where seven-year-old children require physical representations of their achievements to process abstract values

(Piaget, 2011); (Santrock, 2010). The checklist book serves as a "concrete representative" that allows students to apply logical classification to their spiritual activities. This is further supported by Harms' Realistic Stage, where a child's religiosity is heavily influenced by tangible symbols and measurable rituals (Harms, 1944). As noted by (Hidayat, 2016) and (Mulyadi, 2018), physical monitoring media can significantly increase children's worship consistency by transforming abstract values into measurable daily tasks.

## 2. Positive Reinforcement and Habituation Mechanisms

Field observations revealed an extraordinary level of persistence among the participants. Several students demonstrated a strong drive to keep their daily columns filled, even in challenging circumstances. For instance, (Informant A, 2026) reported that a student insisted on continuing their fast despite feeling unwell, driven by the desire to ensure their monitoring record remained perfect.

The mechanism of the monitoring book operates under the principle of Positive Reinforcement. In B.F. Skinner's behaviorist perspective, the check-mark functions as a non-material reward that strengthens behavior so it is repeated (Goddard, 2017). This consistent external stimulus encourages Habituation, where worship is no longer felt as a burden but as a conditioned response to achieve set targets (Fadilah, 2021).

However, this finding also indicates the need for proper guidance, as excessive reinforcement may lead students to prioritize checklist completion over their physical well-being. If not carefully monitored by parents (Mursalin, 2022), the drive for external validation could potentially overshadow the internal spiritual essence. As suggested by (Gaschler, 2021), while check-marks provide immediate feedback that strengthens neurological pathways for forming habits, they must be balanced with pedagogical wisdom.

## 3. Internalization of Character and Self-Identity

The ultimate 'Why' behind this instrument's success lies in the internalization process, moving from administrative compliance to a stable disposition (*malakah*). This process aligns with the pedagogical perspective of (M. Quraish Shihab, 2020), who posits

that true Islamic education (ta'dib) is not merely the transmission of ritualistic knowledge, but the cultivation of a consistent 'shakhsyah' (personality). According to Shihab, a child's religious character is firmly established when worship transitions from a formal obligation into a 'biological' necessity of the soul. This is also deeply rooted in the principles of (Al-Ghazali, 2020) and (Miskawayh, 2011) regarding character cultivation through *riadhah*. Several unique field findings highlight this deep internalization:

- a) Accountability: A student who missed the *Dhuha* prayer in the morning insisted on performing it later in the day to compensate for the "empty box" (Informant B, 2026).
- b) Integrity: A student who had to break their fast due to illness chose to take their medicine secretly, expressing a sense of "shame" (*haya'*) and a firm commitment to repay the missed days in Shawwal (C, 2026).
- c) Identity: The observation of a student prioritizing their monitoring book as the most essential item for their *mudik* (homecoming) trip proves that worship has been integrated into their primary identity (D, 2026).
- d) Teacher's Perspective: Educators observed that students became more proactive and enthusiastic in seeking validation for their worship records, indicating a shift from passive instruction to active participation (E, 2026).

The synthesis of these findings is summarized in Table 1 below:

**Table 1. Summary of Field Findings: Internalization through the Ramadan Checklist Book**

| No | Finding Category   | Observation/Interview Indicators      | Synthesis of Interview Results  |
|----|--------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1  | Motivational Shift | Positive Reinforcement and Initiative | Students demonstrate high initiative to "avoid empty columns." The check-mark functions as a psychological reward.    |
| 2  | Visual Necessity   | Concrete Operational Stage            | Students understand worship targets better when seeing the physical form of the book compared to verbal instructions. |
| 3  | Self-Integrity     | Honesty and Self-Control              | Awareness to not fill in the check-   |

|   |                     |               |   |
|---|---------------------|---------------|---|
|   |                     |               | mark if worship was imperfect, indicating the internalization of honesty.   |
| 4 | Educational Synergy | Social Impact | The book serves as a bridge for active communication between parents and children in monitoring spiritual progress. |

Overall, the synergy between teacher instructions and parental guidance through this checklist creates a solid educational ecosystem. As emphasized by (Nasrul Umam, 2020) and (Rohili, 2025), such systematic evaluation instruments are the "soul" of sustainable character education, ensuring that spiritual values are not merely taught but are lived and documented, creating a lasting impact on the student's moral identity.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of the Ramadan Worship Monitoring Book at SDIT Ar-Raayah effectively bridges the gap between abstract religious concepts and concrete daily practices for first-grade students. The research highlights that the integration of visual monitoring tools and positive reinforcement mechanisms is not merely an administrative process, but a significant pedagogical stimulant that aligns with the concrete operational stage of child development. This approach successfully transforms worship from a formal obligation into a participatory habit, ultimately fostering the early stages of religious character internalization (*malakah*).

Based on these findings, it is recommended that primary educators adopt structured and visual-based monitoring media to replace abstract verbal instructions, ensuring a more empirical and enjoyable spiritual learning experience. Furthermore, maintaining synergy between teachers and parents remains a critical pillar in sustaining this habituation. Future research should undertake longitudinal studies to examine the long-term sustainability of these religious characters beyond the Ramadan period, providing deeper insights into the stability of habituation in various environmental contexts.

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