Positive Character: Implementation of Positive Behavior through MISI (*Kemandirian, Inisiatif, dan Salim*) Habituation in Kindergarten A Learners

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Abstract. Early childhood education is a critical stage for shaping lifelong behavior and character, yet many programs still prioritize academic skills over value formation. This research addresses the urgency of integrating character habituation into daily school practices to foster holistic child development. The study explores the implementation of MISI values (*Kemandirian, Inisiatif, and Salim*) at Kindergarten A. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through interviews and observations with one principal and four teachers, then analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The findings revealed three main themes and sub-themes: (1) fostering independence through daily routines responsibility in tasks and self-confidence; (2) encouraging initiative in learning and play voluntary participation and leadership; and (3) cultivating respect and courtesy through salim greeting routines and strengthening social bonds. The study's novelty lies in offering an applied framework of culturally rooted values. Future research should examine its long-term impact across diverse contexts.

Keywords: Habituation, MISI, Positive Behavior, Positive Character, Early Childhood Education.

1 Introduction

Education has a very important role in supporting the overall development of individuals and is a major factor in improving the quality of life [1]. Children's education as the most basic stage has a very important position in the development of human resources [2]. Early childhood, which covers the age range from birth to eight years, is a crucial period in the educational process that can affect the course of future education [3]. The kindergarten period is an early age phase characterized by rapid development, making it a very decisive time for further development [4]. Early childhood education has now developed rapidly, both through programs initiated by government agencies and those driven by the community.

Kindergarten is a formal early childhood education level, with a curriculum that focuses more on providing educational stimulus to support children's physical and mental growth and development, so that they are ready to continue to a higher level of education [5]. Kindergarten

age children are those in the age range of 4-6 years, who are in the developmental stage [6]. This development includes changes in behavior from previously immature to more mature, or from initially simple to more complex.

Learning in kindergarten follows the principle of play, because play is the core of children's activities. Through play, children are given the freedom and opportunity to express, create, and communicate [7]. Themes in learning activities in kindergarten serve as a tool to introduce concepts to children as a whole [8]. Theme is not the purpose of learning itself, but as a means to broaden horizons in order to achieve the maturity of child development. Research has consistently shown that theme-based learning enhances social competence, cooperation, and tolerance, while also making learning experiences more meaningful [9].

Despite the extensive literature on character education and thematic learning, previous studies have mainly focused on general character values such as discipline, honesty, and cooperation [10,11]. However, there is still a lack of research exploring the systematic habituation of MISI values Kemandirian (independence), Inisiatif (initiative), and Salim (courtesy/respect) within the context of early childhood thematic learning. This creates a research gap that needs to be addressed, particularly because MISI values integrate both individual competencies (independence and initiative) and prosocial attitudes (salim) that are highly relevant to the holistic development of young children.

The absence of MISI habituation at the early childhood level may result in children being less prepared to manage themselves independently, lacking initiative in problem-solving, and showing limited social respect or empathy in interactions with peers and adults. Such developmental delays can hinder school readiness and negatively affect later adjustment at higher levels of education.

In response, this study examines the implementation of MISI habituation in thematic learning at School X. Specifically, it investigates how teachers and principals integrate MISI values into daily classroom practices and how these values contribute to fostering positive character in kindergarten learners. This study is expected to fill the existing research gap while providing practical insights for strengthening character education through early habituation.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Positive Character

The positive character theory framework is based on the positive psychology approach introduced by Peterson [12], which focuses on human strengths and virtues rather than merely correcting weaknesses or disorders. Positive character is defined as a set of stable moral qualities, such as honesty, empathy, respect, responsibility, courage, and humility, that enable individuals to live ethical, meaningful, and constructive lives [13]. These traits are considered the foundation of healthy psychological functioning and are key to achieving psychological well-being and self-actualization. Positive character is not innate but is shaped through a process of socialization, education, life experiences, and continuous personal reflection [14].

Theoretically, the development of positive character can also be explained through social learning theory Bandura [15], in which individuals learn through observation of positive behavioral models in their social environment, as well as through reinforcement of behaviors

that are consistent with moral values. In addition, Kohlberg [16] provides a basis for the idea that character development is closely related to the stages of cognitive and moral development. Thus, positive character is viewed not only as a psychological predisposition but also as the result of a process of habit formation and reflection on values in daily life.

Within a cultural framework, positive character cannot be separated from the context of local or religious values [17]. For example, in Eastern cultures or religious societies, positive character is often integrated with spiritual values such as sincerity, trust in God, or good manners towards others. Thus, positive character is cross-cultural, but it can be manifested differently according to the norms and value systems of a particular society. The role of educational institutions, families, and communities is crucial in the process of internalizing positive character. Through a holistic approach, positive character is not merely the ultimate goal of character education but also a means to cultivate resilient, independent, and moral individuals capable of navigating the dynamics of contemporary life [18].

2.2 Positive Behavior

The theoretical framework of positive behavior is based on the understanding that human behavior is not only a response to external stimuli, but is also influenced by internal values, self-perceptions, and a supportive social environment [19]. Positive behavior refers to actions that reflect responsibility, respect, concern for others, cooperation, and adherence to constructive social norms [20]. This theory is rooted in behavioral and cognitive-social approaches, in which Bandura [21], through his Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes the importance of observation, modeling, and social reinforcement in shaping adaptive behavior. In addition, the approach of *Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)* also makes an important contribution to understanding that positive behavior can be developed systematically through the creation of a consistent environment, positive feedback, and planned reinforcement strategies [22].

Individuals who exhibit positive behavior tend to have healthier interpersonal relationships, are better able to cope with social challenges, and demonstrate higher levels of psychological well-being [23]. Therefore, positive behavior is not merely a result of compliance with rules, but rather a manifestation of the internalization of mature character values and social skills, which can be shaped from an early age and developed throughout the lifespan. As such, the reinforcement of positive behavior is an important component of psychological interventions, character education, and personal development strategies in various contexts, including schools, families, and communities [24].

2.3 MISI (Kemandirian, Inisiatif, dan Salim)

The theoretical framework of this study is based on three core values in character building, namely independence (kemandirian), initiative (inisiatif), and salim. These three values are seen as important pillars in the development of individuals who are psychologically, socially, and morally well-rounded. Independence in the context of developmental psychology is the ability of individuals to regulate themselves, make decisions independently, and take responsibility for the consequences of their actions [25]. This aspect is closely related to the concept of autonomy in Self-Determination Theory [26–28], which emphasizes that individuals have a basic psychological need to feel that they are agents of their own actions. Independence does not mean total detachment from others, but rather the capacity to manage oneself and make

choices based on mature personal considerations, as well as having strong internal control over one's behavior.

Meanwhile, initiative refers to the ability and drive to act proactively, taking the first step in a situation without waiting for instructions or direction from others [29]. This concept aligns with the theory of proactive personality Bateman & Crant [30], which suggests that individuals with a proactive personality tend to exhibit initiative in seeking opportunities, solving problems, and creating positive change in their environment. In the context of education or organizations, initiative is crucial as it demonstrates an individual's readiness to think ahead, have a vision, act responsibly, and develop solutions independently in complex situations [31]. Initiative also reflects the development of executive cognitive functions, particularly in planning and decision-making aspects [32].

The third value, salim, which means mutual assistance, emphasizes the importance of healthy social relationships, empathy, and commitment to the common good. In social psychology, this value is rooted in the theory of prosocial behavior Eisenberg & Fabes [33], which explains that helping behavior develops from a process of empathy, social norms, and learning experiences from an early age. Mutual assistance not only improves social well-being but also strengthens bonds between individuals and fosters a sense of belonging within the community [34]. From a moral perspective, salim also reflects the development of altruistic values that are essential for building an inclusive, resilient, and just society [35].

These three values (independence, initiative, and salim) do not stand alone but complement each other and form a balanced character structure between self-development and social responsibility. In personality development, the combination of these three values enables individuals not only to grow personally but also to make meaningful contributions to their environment. Thus, understanding and strengthening these values are highly relevant in the design of psychological interventions, character education curricula, and human resource development policies across various socio-cultural contexts.

3 Method

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach. Phenomenology was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the lived experiences of teachers and principals in implementing MISI habituation in early childhood education [36]. The focus of phenomenology on subjective meaning and interpretation is considered most appropriate to capture the depth of informants' perspectives and practices in shaping children's character development. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used because it not only emphasizes describing phenomena, but also interpreting the meaning behind informants' experiences.

The study involved five informants, consisting of one principal and four class teachers from School X. Informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in implementing MISI habituation in kindergarten learning. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were provided with an explanation of the research objectives, procedures, confidentiality assurances, and their right to withdraw at any time.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation. The interviews were conducted face-to-face at School X in a quiet room to ensure comfort and minimize disruption to school activities, with each session lasting approximately 45–60 minutes and recorded with the participants' permission. The interview guide contained open-ended questions that focused on teachers' understanding of MISI values, strategies used in habituating independence, initiative, and salim, challenges encountered in implementation, as well as the perceived impact on children's behavior and character. Complementing this, observations were carried out over a four-week period by following the daily routines of kindergarten classes. The observation guide emphasized teacher-student interactions related to MISI habituation, children's responses to independence training such as tidying up and washing hands, expressions of initiative during play and learning activities, and the habituation of salim and greetings during school entry and exit. Field notes were taken systematically to strengthen and enrich the data obtained from interviews. Researchers make every effort to obtain data from all these components, so that the information obtained is precise, accurate, and comprehensive [37]. Data validity in research is very important, because good research requires valid, credible, and reliable data. Testing the validity of data in this study includes triangulation, extended observation, negative case analysis, and the use of reference materials [38].

The method can be interpreted as a systematic way to facilitate the implementation of activities to achieve predetermined goals [39]. *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA) according to Smith & Osborn [40], is a recent qualitative approach to analyzing data, introduced by Jonathan Smith and his colleagues in the mid-1990s. This approach has become increasingly popular, especially in applied fields such as health psychology and counseling. IPA can be said to represent a representation of qualitative psychology with a focus on individuals doing self-reflection and interpretation, and aims to explore the meaning of individuals in their personal and social lives. According to Noon [41], IPA is phenomenological and is used to explore individual perceptions.

IPA data analysis according to Smith et al., [42], there are 7 steps consisting of data collection, transcription, initial reading, note taking, theme identification, in-depth analysis and interpretation. The data collection stage used in this research is by interview and observation techniques, then for research informants consisting of principals and teachers. Furthermore, the data obtained from interviews and observations were transcribed for further analysis, after which the researcher read the transcripts to gain a general understanding of the experiences and views of the research informants. In the next step, the researcher identified themes that emerged from the data related to the habituation of MISI values and its impact on children's positive character, then each theme was analyzed more deeply to understand its meaning and context, as well as how the theme relates to individual experiences. Then the researcher provides an interpretation of the themes found and tries to understand the deeper meaning of the learners' experiences and how the habituation of these values affects their development. Finally, the results of the analysis are compiled in a report that includes the main themes, quotes from informants, the researcher's interpretation, and the implications of the research for early childhood education

Habituation is the process of instilling skills in doing and saying something, so that the right ways are favored by learners and have a deeper impact if done with the right approach, and can be effective in shaping character when learners get examples from an adult environment. The method to improve children's moral behavior is known as the habituation method [43,44]. According to Destiyanti & Setiana [2020], the habituation method is a learning approach that emphasizes certain lessons. Other research states that the habituation method is a way to form

certain habits or behaviors in students [46]. Education through habituation can be implemented with careful planning and intense routine activities [47]. In school X, the educational method applied to class A students is the method of habituation of positive behavior with the theme of MISI, which focuses more on emphasizing character, independence, and initiative, such as teaching salim to the mother teacher when arriving at school and leaving school.

4 Result

The habituation method is a practical method to shape and prepare students in the educational process [48]. This method will produce a more optimal impact if applied with appropriate strategies. Habituation has proven effective in developing student character, especially when students are given direct examples by adults [49]. Implementation of habituation-based education requires careful planning, routine implementation, and consistent intensity [50]. The process of instilling character values in children through habituation ideally involves the active role of various parties, including parents, teachers, and the community environment [51]. Cooperation between schools, families, and communities plays an important role in supporting character building and optimizing the development of positive behavior in children [52].

Character has a very important role in the life of each individual [53,54]. Character formation from an early age is a major determinant of a person's future, regardless of the profession that will be undertaken [55–57]. Therefore, having a positive character since childhood is very important to face various challenges and struggles in life [58,59]. The same thing was conveyed by [6], which states that the success of children in facing the future does not only depend on academic ability, but also on the positive character they have. This is the reason why the cultivation of positive character needs to be done from an early age.

4.1 Findings

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) on in-depth interviews and participant observations revealed three main themes regarding the habituation of MISI values in early childhood education. These themes include: (1) fostering independence through daily routines, (2) encouraging initiative in learning and play activities, and (3) cultivating respect and courtesy through salim practices. Each theme was supported by several sub-themes that highlight children's behavioral changes and teachers' reflections.

Theme 1: Fostering Independence through Daily Routines

Sub-theme: Responsibility in daily tasks

Independence was observed through children's ability to manage simple tasks without relying on teachers' assistance. These included washing hands after activities, tidying up toys, and preparing learning materials. Teachers noted a gradual change in children's attitudes, from waiting for adult help to showing initiative in carrying out routines. Teachers explained:

"At first, the children often waited for the aunty to help them. But now they can tidy up their toys by themselves and even remind their friends to do the same." (Teacher 2)

"Now, if their pencil gets dull, they immediately take the sharpener and throw the shavings in the trash. Before, they always had to be reminded." (Teacher 1)

"Simple habits like clearing the table after eating or washing their hands have now become automatic routines, without needing the aunty's guidance anymore." (Teacher 4)

This demonstrates not only behavioral change but also the emergence of responsibility and peer influence. Independence was interpreted as children's growing capacity to regulate their actions and internalize discipline.

Sub-theme: Building self-confidence

Children expressed pride when completing tasks independently. Observations revealed moments when students smiled or verbally acknowledged their achievement after completing routines, reflecting increased confidence. Independence in daily routines thus provided a foundation for character development, aligning with the idea that repeated habits shape long-term behavior. Teachers explained:

"After successfully putting on their own socks, they often say, 'I can do it myself, Aunty!' with a proud smile." (Principal)

"There are children who used to always ask for help opening their lunch boxes; now, if they can do it themselves, they immediately show the aunty while laughing." (Teacher 3)

"Their confidence is becoming more visible; they like to tell their friends that they can do something without any help." (Teacher 1)

Independence in daily routines thus provided a foundation for character development, aligning with the idea that repeated habits shape long-term behavior.

Theme 2: Encouraging Initiative in Learning and Play Activities

Sub-theme: Voluntary participation in classroom tasks

Children demonstrated initiative by volunteering to help teachers, preparing learning materials, or taking the lead during group activities. Such behavior was consistently highlighted by teachers as an indicator of proactive engagement. Teachers described:

"Some children voluntarily help the aunty prepare the materials before the lesson starts, and they are brave enough to read words or tell stories in front of their classmates." (Teacher 3)

"There are those who immediately step to the front of the class without being asked, inviting their friends to join them as well." (Teacher 2)

"When one child volunteers to come forward, usually the others get motivated too, so the initiative spreads." (Principal)

These findings suggest that children increasingly positioned themselves as active contributors rather than passive learners.

Sub-theme: Leadership in peer interactions

Observations showed children organizing peers during group play, guiding others in completing activities, and taking initiative in problem-solving. Initiative was thus understood as a form of leadership expressed in natural social settings. It fostered collaboration, creativity, and confidence in expressing ideas.

"When playing on the playground, some children immediately organize turns for the slide so that everyone gets a chance." (Teacher 4)

"For example, if a friend is having trouble folding origami, other children immediately help without being told." (Principal)

"They are also brave enough to share ideas with their group, such as suggesting new ways to arrange blocks or puzzles." (Teacher 3)

Initiative was thus understood as a form of leadership expressed in natural social settings. It fostered collaboration, creativity, and confidence in expressing ideas.

Theme 3: Cultivating Respect and Courtesy through Salim Practices

Sub-theme: Routine of greeting and salim

Respect and courtesy were habituated through daily practices of greeting teachers and peers with salim upon entering and leaving the school. Teachers emphasized that over time, this practice became automatic for children and extended beyond school. A principal stated:

"The habit of greeting and shaking hands with the aunty has now become automatic for them. Even outside school, parents say their children often politely greet neighbors." (Principal)

"Every morning, they immediately line up to shake hands with the teachers without being reminded." (Teacher 1)

"When a new teacher or guest arrives, the children spontaneously greet and shake hands politely." (Teacher 2)

This indicates that salim practices instilled values that were transferable to broader social contexts.

Sub-theme: Strengthening social bonds

The practice of salim was not only symbolic but also reinforced emotional closeness and mutual respect between teachers and students. It cultivated a culture of politeness and strengthened the school's social environment. Salim thus functioned as both a moral and social habit that shaped children's interpersonal relationships.

"The ritual of shaking hands (salim) has made the relationship between the aunties and the children closer; it feels warm and full of love every morning." (Principal)

The findings above illustrate how the habituation method facilitated the internalization of MISI values among young learners. The integration of independence, initiative, and salim into daily school life reflects a systematic process of character building, with evidence showing children's growing responsibility, confidence, and respectfulness. A summary of the themes and sub-themes identified is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Theme structure and sub-themes

Main Theme	Sub-Themes	Key Meanings
Independence	Children tidying up their own belongings after activities	Indicates early development of self-regulation and responsibility.
	Choosing their own materials for play or learning	Reflects decision-making ability and sense of control over the environment, which supports intrinsic motivation.
Initiative	Children volunteering to help peers in group activities	Suggests prosocial behavior and the capacity to take initiative without external prompting.
	Proactively starting a task without being told	Demonstrates self-starting behavior, showing children's intrinsic drive to explore and learn.
Greetings (Salim)	Children greeting teachers and peers upon arrival	Represents respect, social awareness, and acknowledgment of others' presence, which is linked to the development of empathy and positive peer relationships.
	Saying thank you after receiving help	Reflects gratitude and recognition of others' contributions, reinforcing positive social norms.

5 Discussion

School X, a kindergarten resulting from the merger of two institutions located in Purwokerto and Purbalingga, has implemented a consistent positive behavior habituation program across both sites using the MISI approach (Independence, Initiative, and *Salim*). This program plays a vital role in early childhood education because it supports not only character building but also children's holistic development. Early childhood education is a critical foundation in human resource development, as experiences during the ages of 4–6 significantly influence long-term growth and learning trajectories. Therefore, kindergarten education should not merely emphasize intellectual advancement but must also prioritize character formation to prepare children for higher levels of education.

Character education in early childhood requires consistency, modeling, and repetition through habituation. As scholars have noted, the outcomes of this process are not instant but require time and sustained practice. The implementation of MISI at School X demonstrates this principle. Teachers, parents, and the school environment together cultivate positive behaviors that strengthen discipline, responsibility, and respect. These values align with broader character education goals, such as honesty, caring, cooperation, and creativity. The findings of this study reveal several key aspects of children's positive behavior development through the MISI dimensions.

5.1 Independence (Kemandirian)

The findings reveal significant development in children's independence. Children were able to complete daily routines without adult assistance, such as throwing trash in its place, washing hands after activities, and preparing learning materials. They also managed personal needs, including going to the bathroom, eating without help, or wearing socks independently. Such practices reflect the success of habituation in fostering autonomy from an early age. Independence is closely linked to self-regulation and responsibility, laying the groundwork for self-confidence and problem-solving skills [61]. For teachers, students' growing independence also reduced dependence on adult guidance, allowing them to focus more on lesson delivery and classroom management.

5.2 Initiative (Inisiatif)

Children also showed a strong ability to take initiative in both learning and play. They voluntarily helped prepare learning media, cleaned up toys after play, and confidently answered teachers' questions. Examples include children daring to tell stories in front of peers or attempting to read aloud words provided by teachers. Such actions signify children's proactive engagement and intrinsic motivation, which are essential for creativity and lifelong learning. Initiative reflects autonomous motivation that fosters sustained involvement in learning [62]. These findings suggest that habituation can nurture not only compliance with routines but also active participation and leadership among young learners.

5.3 Salim

Another key dimension observed was *Salim*, which emphasizes respect, courtesy, and harmonious relationships. At School X, salim practices were ritualized through daily greetings when children arrived and left school, shaping consistent habits of respect toward teachers and parents. Teachers also noted that these behaviors transferred beyond the classroom, as parents reported children greeting neighbors politely. This demonstrates that habituation successfully internalized values that extend to broader social contexts. Prosocial behaviors such as helping peers, showing empathy when a friend was upset, and respecting adults are critical to emotional development and social competence [63]. These habits contribute to a classroom climate that is inclusive, cooperative, and nurturing.

The MISI habituation program provided tangible benefits not only for students but also for teachers. For students, it nurtured independence, self-confidence, responsibility, courtesy, and creativity dimensions that collectively enhance social, emotional, and cognitive development. For teachers, the program improved classroom effectiveness: with children becoming more autonomous and respectful, teachers were able to dedicate more time to instructional design and quality improvement. The salim values, in particular, promoted a more harmonious atmosphere, which reduced behavioral disruptions and enhanced professional satisfaction for teachers.

Implementation of MISI values at School X demonstrates that consistent habituation methods, when reinforced across school and home environments, can significantly shape children's behavior and character. The program not only improved positive behavior in the short term but also helped form mindsets and attitudes that will serve children well into the future. In this sense, MISI habituation contributes to both the immediate classroom environment and the broader goal of strengthening the quality of education, laying a foundation for lifelong learning and responsible citizenship.

The success of MISI habituation at School X also highlights the importance of collaboration between teachers, parents, and the wider community. Character formation cannot be achieved by schools alone; rather, it requires consistency across multiple environments in which the child develops. When parents reinforce at home the same values of independence, initiative, and respect practiced at school, children experience coherence in expectations and are more likely to internalize these behaviors as part of their everyday lives. This finding resonates with prior research emphasizing the shared responsibility of educators and families in cultivating character education, where joint reinforcement ensures that values become enduring habits rather than situational behaviors.

Furthermore, the MISI program demonstrates its potential to contribute to the broader educational agenda of developing holistic learners who are academically capable, socially responsible, and emotionally resilient. By embedding character education into daily routines rather than treating it as an additional subject, the program ensures that values are not abstract ideals but lived experiences. This integration is crucial for preparing children to face future challenges with integrity and adaptability. As such, the implementation of MISI habituation at School X offers an important model for other early childhood institutions seeking to balance cognitive development with moral and social growth, thereby advancing the long-term goal of nurturing a generation with both competence and character.

6 Conclusion

The main theme of this study highlights the effectiveness of the habituation method as a fundamental approach in student character education. The sub-themes that emerged include the development of independence, initiative, courtesy, and students' active participation in classroom activities. These findings show that habituation not only supports behavioral changes but also contributes to the growth of social, emotional, and cognitive aspects of students, while at the same time creating a more conducive learning environment.

The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on the role of habituation as a sustainable and practical method that involves collaboration among parents, teachers, and the wider community, making character education more holistic and impactful. This approach also provides additional benefits for teachers, including easier classroom management and greater professional satisfaction. For future researchers, it is recommended to explore the long-term effects of habituation methods on students' character development, compare its effectiveness with other educational approaches, and examine how cultural and contextual factors may influence its implementation. Such studies will enrich the understanding of character education practices and provide broader implications for both theory and practice.

Acknowledgments

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