

Building Children's Morals from an Early Age: The Role of The Family in Teaching Apologies, Help, and Gratitude

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Early Childhood, Moral, Habituation

Abstract:

This study aims to describe the role of families in developing children's moral aspects through the habit of saying sorry, please, and thank you at Sayang Bunda Early Childhood Education Center. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study type of research. The subjects of this study were 17 children and their parents/guardians as well as 4 teachers at Sayang Bunda Early Childhood Education Center with ages ranging from 4 to 6 years old. Data were collected through observation and interviews. The validity of the data obtained was then checked using the triangulation technique involving parents, students, and teachers. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive qualitative methods, consisting of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that families play an important role in teaching children to say sorry, please, and thank you through role modeling, practice in daily life, and praise or positive reinforcement when children do so. The obstacle faced by parents is the lack of time together due to work commitments, so that practice is mostly done at school. This study provides new insights that synergy between families and schools to optimize the development of children's moral aspects from an early age can be achieved through the habit of saying sorry, please, and thank you.

Kata Kunci:

Anak Usia Dini, Moral, Pembiasaan

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan peran keluarga dalam mengembangkan aspek moral anak melalui pembiasaan berkata maaf, tolong, dan terima kasih di PAUD Sayang Bunda. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian studi kasus. Subjek penelitian adalah 17 anak dan orang tua/wali murid serta 4 guru di PAUD Sayang Bunda dengan usia 4-6 tahun. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi dan wawancara. Kemudian data yang didapatkan dicek keabsahannya melalui teknik triangulasi sumber yakni orangtua, murid dan guru. Analisis data dilakukan secara deskriptif kualitatif dengan tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keluarga memiliki peran penting dalam membiasakan anak berkata maaf, tolong, dan terima kasih melalui teladan, pembiasaan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, serta pemberian pujian atau penguatan positif ketika anak melakukannya. Hambatan yang dihadapi orang tua adalah kurangnya waktu kebersamaan akibat kesibukan bekerja, sehingga pembiasaan lebih banyak dilakukan di sekolah. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan baru bahwa adanya sinergi antara keluarga dan sekolah untuk mengoptimalkan pengembangan aspek moral anak sejak usia dini bisa melalui pembiasaan kata maaf, tolong, dan terima kasih.

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INTRODUCTION

The family is the first and most important social unit in an individual's life, where moral and ethical values begin to be instilled. In this context, the habit of good behavior, such as saying "sorry," "please," and "thank you," plays a very significant role in the development of a child's character (Fatria et al., 2024). These



three expressions are not just words, but also reflect the attitudes and values that underlie healthy social interaction (Nuraini & Syam, 2022).

The family plays a fundamental role in instilling moral values through daily habits (Loka & Annisak, 2025). Parents, as the main role models for children, are responsible for setting an example in the use of polite and respectful language. According to (Nurfadila et al., n.d.) children who grow up in a family environment that emphasizes the importance of good communication and respect for others tend to have higher moral awareness later in life. In addition, the habit of saying "sorry," "please," and "thank you" also plays a role in developing empathy and social responsibility in children (Aprily et al., 2023). When children are accustomed to saying these words in their daily interactions, they learn to understand other people's feelings, appreciate the help given, and accept mistakes with an open attitude. This is in line with the theory of moral development proposed by Lawrence Kohlberg, which emphasizes that children's moral development occurs through social experiences they gain in their surroundings (Safitri & Dewantoro, 2025). Several studies reveal that families play a very important role in providing character education and instilling morals in children from an early age. However, In some cases, such as that conducted by (Bandi et al., 2025) the familiarization of the words "sorry" and "please" was also carried out through various strategies, such as singing activities.

However, in practice, not all families consistently apply this habit. Based on the results of interviews and observations, it was found that around 40% of families did not routinely apply the habit of saying sorry, please, and thank you at home, so children tended to rarely use these expressions in their daily interactions at school. Several factors, such as parenting styles, cultural backgrounds, and social environments, also influence the extent to which children are accustomed to saying these words (Kurniati et al., 2023). Research conducted by (Fauzi & Islamiah, 2023) shows that parenting styles have a very significant influence or impact on children's mental health. Therefore, in this case, families can provide the best for their children, but they can also have the worst impact on them. It is important for parents to understand effective methods for teaching children to say "sorry," "please," and "thank you" in order to create a family environment that supports the optimal moral development of children.

This study discusses the role of the family in developing children's moral aspects through the habit of saying “sorry,” “please,” and “thank you,” as well as the factors that influence the effectiveness of applying these habits in daily life.

METHOD

This research is qualitative in nature, using a case study approach with the aim of describing the role of the family through the habit of saying sorry, please, and thank you at Sayang Bunda Early Childhood Education Center. The research location is in Pemulutan District, Ogan Ilir, South Sumatra. This research was conducted in the form of a case study to obtain an in-depth description of the phenomenon that occurred. The research subjects consisted of 17 children aged 4–6 years and 4 teachers at PAUD Sayang Bunda. The subjects were selected purposively, based on the consideration that they could provide data relevant to the focus of the study.

The data collection techniques in this study included observation, interviews, and documentation. The data obtained through these data collection techniques were then checked for validity through source and method triangulation. The data analysis technique used the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model, which consists of three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification.

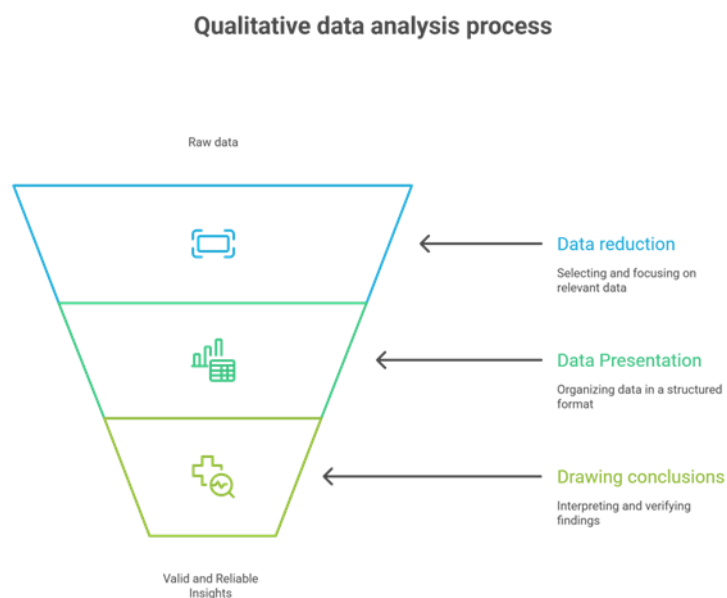


Figure 1. Miles and Huberman’s data analysis

Based on the chart, the data obtained will be selected and utilized according to its relevance to the research. Then, after the data is reduced, it will be presented. In this process, the data presentation stage involves organizing the data into a structured format. Finally, conclusions will be drawn from the presented data by interpreting and verifying the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social development is a process in which individuals learn to adapt to the rules and norms that apply in society. Internal factors in children and support from parents and educators play an important role in helping children build social interaction skills. (Simanjuntak, 2021). In the socialization process, children need to master the skills of adapting to their surroundings. Positive experiences and support received by children when participating in social activities become very meaningful provisions for achieving a successful and happy life in the future (Mardhiah et al., 2024).

Based on observations at Sayang Bunda Early Childhood Education Center, variations in children's moral behavior were found in their use of the words sorry, please, and thank you in daily activities.

1. A (4 years old, female), A seems to have started getting used to saying thank you after receiving help from friends or teachers. However, on several occasions, A still forgets to say sorry when she makes small mistakes, such as accidentally bumping into her friends while playing. Teachers need to remind her directly so that A will apologize.
2. Z (5 years old, male) quite often says "please" when asking for help from the teacher, such as asking to be handed a toy or learning materials. However, Z is rarely seen using the word "thank you" after his request is fulfilled. Interviews with the teacher show that at home, Z's parents do not routinely model the use of this word.
3. Unlike the other two children, C, aged 4, seems to be accustomed to saying sorry, please, and thank you without being reminded, both to friends and teachers. C also seems to have picked up this habit from his parents, who often use polite words when picking him up from

school. The teacher said that C's parents actively communicate with the school in an effort to instill values of politeness in their child.

These findings indicate that differences in children's moral behavior are influenced by the role of the family, especially in encouraging the use of words such as sorry, please, and thank you at home. According to Lawrence Kohlberg, young children are generally at the preconventional stage, where they behave well to avoid punishment or receive rewards (Asfiyah, 2023). According to Jean Piaget, children's moral development consists of two main stages (Juliana & Sitorus, 2025):

1. Heteronomous morality (ages 4–7): Children understand rules as something absolute and unchangeable. They obey rules because they fear punishment.
2. Autonomous morality (ages 7 and up): Children begin to understand that rules are made by humans and can be negotiated based on specific situations.

The moral aspect in early childhood refers to the development of ethical values, attitudes, and behaviors that reflect children's understanding of right and wrong. This moral development does not happen instantly, but rather through interaction with the environment, especially the family as the main agent of socialization.

The role of parents and the home environment

Parents play a very important role in teaching children to use polite language. Research shows that consistent role modeling at home encourages children to imitate and adopt such behavior. When parents actively use expressions such as sorry, please, thank you, and excuse me, they set a concrete example that encourages children to grow up in an environment that supports the development of good character. (Sanusi et al., 2020).

Based on interviews with four teachers at Sayang Bunda Early Childhood Education Center, it was revealed that the role of parents and the home environment greatly influence the formation of children's moral habits, especially in the use of the words sorry, please, and thank you. Teachers said that children who are accustomed to hearing and seeing their

parents use polite words at home tend to more easily imitate and apply these habits at school.

One teacher explained, “We see that children whose parents often set an example of using polite words, such as sorry, please, and thank you, are quicker to pick up and use them at school, even without being reminded.” This statement is evident in Chika's behavior, who consistently uses these three words in her daily interactions at school. This shows the involvement of parents in instilling moral values through direct examples at home.

Conversely, teachers also revealed that some children seemed unfamiliar with using these words. One teacher said, “There are children who rarely say thank you or sorry, even though we have reminded them. When we asked them, it turned out that they rarely heard these words from their parents at home.” An example of this can be seen in Z, who tends to rarely say thank you after his requests are fulfilled.

The home environment includes not only verbal communication habits, but also the emotional atmosphere and daily interactions. Teachers added that children who grow up in communicative and appreciative family environments find it easier to internalize the value of politeness, compared to children who rarely interact positively with their parents.

These findings are in line with Bandura's social learning theory, which emphasizes that children learn through observation and imitation of the behavior of adults around them (Handayaningsih et al., 2024). Thus, parents have a strategic role as role models in fostering moral habits from an early age through direct practice in the home environment (Wibowo et al., 2023).

In addition, parents can also support their children's moral learning by applying various interesting educational methods, such as storytelling, role-playing, or using media such as storybooks and educational videos that teach the importance of politeness and empathy (Remma et al., 2022). In this way, children not only understand moral concepts in theory but can also apply them in everyday situations. Not only parents, but siblings and other family members living in the same house also contribute to shaping these habits (Alfarizi & Loka, 2025). Warm interactions between children and their

siblings can be a natural learning medium, where they learn to ask each other for help, say thank you, and apologize when they make mistakes.

Although the role of parents and the home environment are very important in shaping polite speaking habits, this often faces obstacles, one of which is the busyness of parents, which reduces the amount of direct interaction with their children (Telnoni, 2020). When parents are too focused on work or other activities, children may not receive enough guidance or real-life examples of polite language use. Therefore, despite time constraints, parents still need to make time for quality communication with their children, for example during meals, playtime, or bedtime. These moments are valuable opportunities for children to learn and appreciate the importance of politeness in everyday life.

By creating a supportive home environment and setting a good example in communication, parents can play an active role in helping children develop their moral aspects optimally. When these values are firmly embedded in the home environment, children will find it easier to apply them in broader social interactions, both at school and in the community.

The impact of using magic words on children's moral development

The use of magic words such as "Sorry," "Please," and "Thank you" in everyday life has a huge impact on children's character development, especially in shaping personalities based on values of politeness, empathy, and respect for others. When children are accustomed to saying these words from an early age, they indirectly learn to respect the feelings of others, understand the importance of apologizing when they make mistakes, and show gratitude for the help they receive. This habit not only helps children build better social relationships with their peers, teachers, and family members, but also contributes to the formation of a more caring and responsible character in their daily lives.

Table 1. Children's Moral Aspects in Accordance with the Child Development Achievement Level Standard (STPPA).

Category

No	Child's name	NYD	STD	DAE	DVW
1.	A (4 y.o)			✓	
2.	Z (5 y.o)		✓		
3.	C (4 y.o)				✓

Note:

NYD : Not yet depelovment

STD : Starting to develop

DAE : Developing as expected

DVW : Developing very well

Based on interviews with teachers at Sayang Bunda Early Childhood Education Center, the use of the words “sorry,” “please,” and “thank you”—often referred to as magic words—has a significant influence on children's character development, particularly in shaping politeness, empathy, and a sense of responsibility.

One teacher stated that children who are accustomed to using magic words tend to socialize more easily with their friends. The teacher explained, “Children who are accustomed to saying sorry, please, and thank you are more quickly accepted by their peers because they are considered more polite and fun to play with.” This shows that the use of magic words plays a role in developing children's social skills from an early age.

Another teacher added that the use of magic words also trains children to understand the moral values behind these expressions. “When children say sorry, they learn to take responsibility for their mistakes. When they say please, they learn to appreciate the help of others. And when they say thank you, they learn to be grateful,” he said. This statement shows that magic words are not just formal expressions, but also an important means of moral learning.

However, teachers also acknowledge that not all children show the same progress. Some children who are not accustomed to using magic words at home tend to find it more difficult to apply them at school. “We see that if parents rarely set an example at home, children find it more difficult to get used to it. Sometimes they have to be reminded many times,” said one

teacher. This confirms that the role of the family is very important in the successful habit of using magic words in children.

Overall, the use of magic words has a positive impact on children's character development, especially in building politeness, respect for others, and empathy. However, the effectiveness of this habit is greatly influenced by consistent application both at school and at home.

Consistent use of magic words has various positive effects on children's character development. Children who are accustomed to using polite words such as please, sorry, thank you, and excuse me show a significant improvement in building polite and respectful social interactions (Witasari & Wiyani, 2020). This has been observed through research in various school environments that implement the habit of using these words in everyday life (Dirna, 2022).

In these schools, students become more prepared to listen and respond respectfully when interacting with classmates and teachers. This habit not only creates a more positive learning environment, but also helps them understand the importance of respecting the views and feelings of others. With better interactions, students learn to build more harmonious relationships, thereby supporting healthy social development (zilvana Zetta & Rachim, 2021).

Saying “sorry” when you make a mistake and “thank you” after receiving help are fundamental aspects of social learning. This habit not only teaches children to acknowledge their mistakes, but also helps them understand and appreciate the feelings of others who may be affected by their actions. By learning to say “sorry,” children develop self-reflection and empathy.

Meanwhile, saying “thank you” fosters gratitude and appreciation for the help of others. This habit helps children become more aware of their social environment, which ultimately strengthens their relationships with their peers. Research shows that children who are accustomed to using these expressions tend to have better social skills and are able to build stronger friendships.

Although the role of parents and the home environment are very important in shaping polite speaking habits, this often faces obstacles, one of which is the busyness of parents, which reduces the amount of direct interaction with their children. When parents are too focused on work or other activities, children may not receive enough guidance or real-life examples of polite language use (Soaputty et al., 2022). Therefore, despite time constraints, parents still need to make time for quality communication with their children, for example, during meals, playtime, or bedtime. These moments are valuable opportunities for children to learn and appreciate the importance of politeness in everyday life.

Thus, it can be concluded that the use of magic words not only functions as part of social norms but also plays an important role in shaping children's characters to be more empathetic, respectful of others, and socially aware (Munif et al., 2022). Through continuous practice at home, school, and the surrounding environment, children will grow into individuals who are able to interact well, have harmonious relationships with others, and uphold the values of politeness and respect in every aspect of their lives (Idris & Pd, 2023).

Factors supporting and inhibiting implementation

The role of the family in instilling moral values through the habit of saying “Sorry,” “Please,” and “Thank you” is greatly influenced by various supporting and inhibiting factors. Factors such as parental role modeling, a warm family environment, creative learning methods, and support from schools and social environments can accelerate the process of moral learning in children. Conversely, parents' limited time, lack of awareness about the importance of moral education, inconsistency in implementation, an unsupportive environment, and lack of patience in educating children can be obstacles in building polite speech habits (Rokhyatun, 2020).

1. Supporting factors

Children tend to imitate the behavior of the adults around them. When teachers and parents consistently use polite words in everyday conversation, children find it easier to absorb and apply these habits in their interactions (Dewi, 2022). The examples set by adults create a supportive learning

environment, where children are encouraged to use polite words in their interactions. When teachers, for example, ask for help by saying “Please” or say “Thank you” after receiving help from students, this reinforces that the use of these words is valued and expected behavior.

Using creative methods such as songs, games, and role-playing makes the learning process more interesting and interactive for children (Husen et al., 2023). This approach helps them internalize positive habits more easily, as they learn through activities that are fun and relevant to their interests.

Songs with lyrics such as “Sorry,” “Please,” “Thank you,” and “Excuse me” help children become accustomed to hearing and saying these words. Meanwhile, role-playing allows them to practice using these words in real-life situations, such as asking permission to play or asking a friend for help.

Cooperation between teachers at school and parents at home plays an important role in reinforcing these positive habits (Wachidah & ..., 2024). When both parties communicate and work together to monitor the child's development and ensure that polite words are used consistently, children will more easily understand the importance of such behavior. This collaboration can be done through regular meetings, communication apps, or child development reports, which help align learning methods at school with educational approaches at home (Kurnianto et al., 2024).

2. Inhibiting factor

One of the main challenges in teaching children to use polite words at home is the limited time and energy of parents. Busy with work or other responsibilities, parents often find it difficult to be actively involved in their children's learning process. As a result, consistency in teaching the use of polite words is reduced, which can affect the extent to which children internalize this habit.

If schools do not consistently enforce the use of polite words, children may assume that such behavior is not very important or only relevant in certain situations. Therefore, consistency in enforcement is necessary to form long-lasting habits.

The limited time children spend with their parents can hinder the formation and reinforcement of polite language habits. Parents with busy schedules often have little opportunity to monitor and support their children's behavioral development. As a result, children may not receive enough attention and encouragement to get used to using polite language.

If the habit of using polite words is not consistently applied at home and at school, children may not understand the importance of such behavior. Without continuity in both environments, they may experience confusion and not understand the reasons behind the use of polite words. As a result, their character development may be hampered, and these habits may not be properly internalized.

Therefore, families need to realize the importance of their role in shaping children's character by creating a positive environment, setting a good example, and applying consistent learning methods so that moral values can be internalized properly in children's lives.

CONCLUSION

Families, especially parents, have a huge responsibility in shaping children's character and moral values from an early age. As the first and primary environment for children, families serve as a place where children learn to understand the concepts of politeness, empathy, and respect for others through the use of polite language in everyday life. By setting a good example, such as using polite words in daily family interactions, parents can directly teach children the importance of speaking respectfully, apologizing when they make mistakes, and saying thank you as a form of appreciation for the help given by others. In addition, a supportive home environment, full of positive communication and loving interactions, will make it easier for children to internalize these good habits. Creative learning methods, such as storytelling, role-playing, and the use of educational media, can also be effective tools in strengthening children's understanding of the moral values that you want to instill.

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