
SAIZU INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON TRANSDISCIPLINARY RELIGIOUS STUDIES (SAIZU ICON-TREES)

ISSN 2964-5859, 2024, Pages 173-186

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24090/icontrees.2024.1102>

Proceeding of 3rd Internasional Conference on Integrating Religion, Contemporary Environmental Issues and SDGs

Male Students' Motivation and Challenges in the Islamic Early Childhood Education Study Program

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Abstract: Male students remain a minority in the Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD) study program and frequently encounter negative stigma from their social environment. This study aims to analyze the motivations and challenges faced by male students pursuing education in the PIAUD program. A qualitative descriptive research method was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews. The research was conducted at an Islamic university in the Banyumas area, focusing on six male students enrolled in the PIAUD program. The findings indicate that the motivations for selecting the PIAUD program are both external and internal. External motivations include family encouragement, the availability of scholarships, and promising job prospects. Internal motivations encompass an interest in child development, a desire to contribute to early childhood education, and a need to prove oneself. Students face challenges in both social and academic environments. Social challenges include bullying, negative stigma, being a minority in the classroom, and difficulties adapting to the academic process. To address these issues, it is crucial to provide support from all related parties, including parents, lecturers, and peers. The future aspirations of students in the PIAUD program include pursuing a Master's degree, becoming lecturers, and obtaining Early Childhood Education teacher certification. Based on the study's results, it is recommended to develop a specialized mentoring and guidance program for male students in the PIAUD program, involving successful alumni as mentors.

Keywords: *motivation; challenges; male student*

A. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) is a crucial stage in a child's development, laying the foundation for future learning and growth. In recent decades, there has been an increased focus on ECE, reflected in both

government policies and academic research (UNESCO, 2015). Despite this, the involvement of male students in ECE study programs remains relatively low compared to their female counterparts (Kurniawati, et al., 2022).



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Research by Cameron, Moss, and Owen (1999) highlights that the number of male students in ECE study programs is very minimal and has been decreasing over time. Their survey indicated that male students comprised only about 2-3% of the student population in this field across various higher education institutions in Europe. Cameron (2006) further corroborated these findings, showing that men represented approximately 3-5% of the total student population in ECE programs.

This trend is also observed in Indonesia. Putra dan Suryani (2021) analyzed male student participation in the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) study program and found that the enrollment of men in this program was very low, constituting only about 1-2% of the total PAUD student population.

Several factors contribute to the low participation of men in early childhood education (ECE) programs. These include negative public perceptions of men in early childhood care and teaching roles, entrenched gender stereotypes, discomfort working in a female-dominated environment, and a lack of role models and support for men pursuing careers in this field. Cameron (2009) emphasizes the need for a more inclusive approach and stronger support to boost male participation in ECE education, as current recruitment efforts and awareness campaigns have not significantly increased the number of male participants.

Given the low enrollment of male students in ECE study programs, it is crucial to explore the motivating factors and

challenges they face in pursuing studies in this field.

Motivation plays a key role in academic success, and according to Ryan & Deci (2000), it can be categorized into two types: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation refers to an internal drive to engage in an activity due to personal interest and satisfaction (Rachman, Pranoto, et al., 2022). Conversely, extrinsic motivation arises from external factors, such as rewards or recognition. For male students choosing the PAUD study program, motivations may include personal interest in child development, a desire to challenge gender stereotypes, or attractive career prospects in education.

Several studies indicate that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations play a role in encouraging male students to choose Early Childhood Education (PAUD) programs (Pancaningrum & Pasiningsih, 2023). Warin (2017) found that many male students are drawn to PAUD programs due to a strong interest in child development and a desire to make a positive societal impact. Career prospects in this profession also serve as a significant motivation. Understanding these motivations is crucial for educational institutions to develop effective strategies to attract and retain male students in PAUD programs.

However, the challenges faced by male students in PAUD programs must not be overlooked. These challenges include pervasive stereotypes and negative social stigmas that label early childhood education as a female-dominated field (Fadillah & Ngaisah, 2023). The prevailing assumption

that PAUD teachers are inherently feminine, and that only women possess the requisite attitudes, contributes to these issues. Furthermore, PAUD classes are still predominantly female, and there is a lack of social support and limited male role models in the field (Smith, 2013). Research by Sumsion (2005) highlights that male students often experience isolation and a sense of not being fully accepted in these female-dominated environments, which can negatively impact their motivation and academic performance.

Research on the motivations and challenges faced by male students in early childhood education programs has been ongoing for some time. Cameron (2006) highlighted that the presence of men in early childhood education can enhance children's learning experiences. Despite an increase in male enrollment in early childhood education programs, these students continue to face several obstacles. Therefore, this study aims to provide a detailed examination of the motivations and challenges encountered by male students in the Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD) program. By understanding these factors, the study seeks to develop more effective strategies to support the involvement and success of male students in early childhood education. Additionally, it aims to contribute to the formulation of more inclusive and gender-sensitive educational policies.

B. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research method to explore the perspectives of male students enrolled in the

Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD) program. Conducted in August 2024, the research focused on six students from the fifth and seventh semesters at a college in the Banyumas regency.

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews designed to investigate both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of male students. This method provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing their career choices by allowing researchers to probe deeply and contextually. Each interview lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. While the researchers had prepared a set of guiding questions, the interviews were conducted in an open-ended format, enabling further questions based on the respondents' answers.

To ensure data validity, the study employed triangulation and member checking. The researchers compared interview results with observations made during the lecture process to confirm consistency. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, involving data reduction, sorting according to research focus, and data presentation to draw conclusions (Sugiyono, 2018).

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Motivation for Choosing the Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program

Based on the research data, several motivations underlie the informants' choice of the PIAUD study program. These motivations can be broadly categorized into two types: external and internal.

a. Eksternal Motivation

External motivations for choosing the PIAUD study program include family encouragement, the availability of scholarships, and promising job prospects. Parental influence plays a significant role, with parents often perceiving substantial opportunities for male PAUD teachers. They also recognize the rarity of male PAUD teachers, which further motivates them to encourage their sons to pursue this field. Pratiwi & Kumalasari (2021) assert that increased parental support is positively correlated with higher student resilience.

Encouragement from parents is crucial in a male student's decision to become a PAUD teacher. Parents who see substantial opportunities in this profession provide additional motivation, driven not only by a desire for their children's success but also by an understanding of the significant role men can play in early childhood education. Support from the social environment, including parents, significantly influences career decisions (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Davis and Joanna (2020) highlight that parents' awareness of the male teacher shortage and their recognition of its impact on children's education enhance their motivation to guide their sons into this profession.

Another motivation is related to career potential within the field of PAUD. Students are driven by the prospect of becoming lecturers and are therefore enthusiastic about pursuing advanced studies at the master's level.

“Milih PIAUD itu karena memang ada beasiswa yang 0 UKT dan memang dari orang tua juga meminta untuk sebisa mungkin nyari yang beasiswa” (F, personal communication, August 1, 2024)

“I chose the PIAUD program because it offered scholarships with zero tuition fees, and my parents encouraged me to explore every opportunity for financial support.”

Career potential in the field of PAUD serves as a significant draw for students. Beyond the opportunity to work as a teacher, there is the possibility of advancing to a Master's degree and eventually becoming a lecturer, which opens avenues for broader and deeper career development. Additionally, male students who choose the PAUD program often seek to demonstrate that this field encompasses more than just activities like singing and playing; it also involves critical areas such as child health, nutrition, and psychology. They aim to showcase their expertise and relevant skills in supporting child development. According to Maslow (1943) theory, the pursuit of self-actualization,

which includes further educational opportunities and career advancement, can significantly motivate individuals to commit to and persist in a chosen field.

Another motivating factor is the availability of scholarships. Data indicates that scholarships covering full tuition fees (0 rupiah UKT) in the PAUD program attract students significantly. These scholarships are offered to those who select the PAUD program as their first choice, providing full tuition coverage throughout their studies. This financial support is particularly appealing, especially for students from underprivileged backgrounds, as it alleviates barriers to education and enhances accessibility for those with limited resources. (Ayuni & Oktavia, 2022).

Field conditions reveal that male PAUD teachers are exceptionally rare, which presents a unique opportunity for men interested in entering this field. The scarcity of male PAUD teachers allows those who pursue this career to stand out and contribute a distinct perspective to early childhood education. Furthermore, the availability of scholarships that cover tuition fees (UKT) adds to the attractiveness of the program. These scholarships not only alleviate the financial burden but also demonstrate the support of educational institutions for gender

diversification within the PAUD teaching profession.

b. Internal Motivation

Internal motivations for choosing the Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD) study program include a strong interest in child development, a desire to contribute to early childhood education, and a personal drive to demonstrate that the field encompasses more than just activities such as playing and singing. For instance, informants AD and L were motivated by the opportunity to prove that the PIAUD study program includes substantive coursework on child psychology, child health, and nutrition, which aligns with their academic interests. The program covers critical topics such as early childhood psychology, child health and nutrition, the diagnosis of child problems, and the role of fathers in child education.

Additionally, the motivation to address fatherlessness in Indonesia is a significant factor for many male students. They are drawn to courses on health, psychology, and the paternal role in child education with the aim of preparing themselves to be better fathers and positively impacting their children's lives. Thus, choosing to become an early childhood educator is viewed not only as a career path but also as a personal commitment to

supporting children's development and addressing broader social issues related to family dynamics.

Early childhood education benefits from the presence of adult male figures. Irfan emphasizes the critical role fathers play in a child's development, noting that a father figure can significantly enhance a child's self-confidence and contribute to a healthy mental state. Rachman (2024) highlights that men bring a unique masculine perspective to early childhood education, which is essential for balanced development.

Informant D pointed out that fatherlessness impacts children's upbringing due to the absence of a paternal figure. By becoming male educators in early childhood education, such individuals can fulfill the role of a father figure, providing the emotional and developmental support children need at school.

Moreover, the involvement of men in early childhood education contributes to gender equality. Historically, PAUD educators have predominantly been women (Marlisa et al., 2020). The prevailing belief that educating children is a female domain has led to the underrepresentation of male teachers in PAUD settings. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that early childhood education should be accessible to both male and female students, ensuring

equal opportunities for all aspiring educators.

Gender roles should not constrain an individual's contributions in any field. In this context, male students recognize the essential role of fathers in child-rearing. Research indicates that the presence of fathers in parenting positively impacts children's self-confidence, mental health, and overall development (Sum & Talu, 2019).

Based on these findings, it is evident that educational institutions should develop an inclusive curriculum. Such a curriculum would enhance male students' engagement and motivation in their studies. Additionally, a diverse curriculum can offer a more comprehensive understanding of gender roles in early childhood education, fostering a more equitable and supportive learning environment.

2. Challenges Faced by Male Students in the Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program

The challenges faced by male students in the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) study program can be categorized into two main aspects: the social environment and the academic environment.

a. Social Environmental Aspects

The first challenge faced by students in the Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD) study

program pertains to the social environment. The number of male students in each class is notably small. Data indicate that the proportion of male students in the PIAUD study program, as detailed in Table 1, is significantly low.

Table 1. Number of male students in the PIAUD study program

Year of Entry	Number of Male Students
2023	1
2022	3
2021	5

The small number of male students in the Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD) study program poses significant challenges, particularly in adapting to a predominantly female environment, often resulting in feelings of isolation and reduced acceptance (Yang, 2018).

Additionally, social stigma regarding the suitability of men for PAUD roles frequently leads to instances of bullying. For example, Informant I reported experiencing negative stigma when peers questioned his choice of the PAUD study program. Upon learning that he was studying PAUD, some individuals responded with remarks such as, "Why are men studying PAUD?" reflecting their belief that it was inappropriate for men to pursue this field.

Connell (2009) emphasizes the need for education to offer equal opportunities regardless of gender. In this context, male students often face the prejudice that PAUD is an inherently female domain, despite the significant contributions men can make to early childhood education. Furthermore, Informant L experienced derogatory comments from friends who viewed his enrollment in PAUD as unconventional. Such negative stigmas serve as a driving force for students to demonstrate their capabilities and challenge the misconception that early childhood education is exclusively for women. Connell (2009) explains that negative stigma and bullying can adversely affect students' motivation and academic performance, highlighting the need for supportive and inclusive educational environments.

The stigma that men are unsuitable for studying in the Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD) program leads to feelings of isolation and diminished self-confidence among male students. Consequently, their potential may not develop optimally. To address these negative stigmas, efforts must be made to enhance social acceptance of men in the field of early childhood education. Promoting a more inclusive and diverse learning environment can help counteract these prejudices.

In coping with these social challenges, informants reported receiving support from various sources. The primary source of support was their families, particularly their parents. All respondents indicated that their parents were highly supportive of their decision to pursue higher education. Parents not only endorsed their choice of study program but also emphasized the importance of commitment to completing their studies.

Support from PIAUD lecturers was also significant. Informant F noted that despite having met the study program coordinator only briefly, he felt a boost in enthusiasm and positive energy. Similarly, Informant A reported receiving encouraging support from a previous study program coordinator, which contributed to his motivation to continue his studies.

“Saat semester 1 Pak Heru menyampaikan kalau kuliah di PIAUD besok lanjut S2 PIAUD.” (A, Personal Communication, July 30, 2024)

“During the first semester, Mr. Heru mentioned that he intended to continue his studies in the PIAUD program at the Master's level.”

Positive support from male lecturers significantly enhances students' enthusiasm to persist in their studies within the PIAUD program. This is reflected in the fact

that, following encouragement, all respondents expressed a desire to pursue Master's degrees and eventually become lecturers. The findings underscore the critical role of social support from family, lecturers, and peers for students in the PIAUD program. It is essential for educational practitioners to recognize that adequate emotional support is necessary for student success. Such support can be facilitated through mentoring programs, counseling, and initiatives that strengthen student relationships.

Social support is crucial in helping students navigate challenges related to negative stigma. Support from family, friends, and lecturers—the primary components of the students' daily social environment—can foster a sense of safety and comfort. According to Pancaningrum & Pasiningsih (2023) external support is vital for altering negative perceptions of male students in the PIAUD program. Furthermore, this support plays a key role in promoting gender equality within the field of early childhood education.

b. Academic Aspects

Another difficulty faced by male students in the academic realm involves certain courses requiring high social-emotional skills, such as dance or games. Data indicates

that all six informants encountered obstacles in the Dance Arts course, where exams consisted of practical dance performances. As a result, they communicated their concerns to the lecturer, who then provided leniency by offering alternative assignments.

Moreover, stigma and bullying pose significant problems, with male students facing negative evaluations and demeaning treatment for choosing fields perceived as incongruent with traditional gender norms (Davis & Joanna, 2020). Academically, male students find courses deemed more feminine, such as dance, particularly challenging, which can elevate stress levels and complicate their adaptation to the curriculum (Smith & Thompson, 2019). Beyond social and academic hurdles, health issues also influence their studies; stress related to stigma and adaptation difficulties can exacerbate these health problems, subsequently affecting academic performance and overall well-being (Johnson & Parker, 2021).

3. Hopes and Future Plans of Male Students in the Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program

D and AD aspire to pursue their master's degrees upon graduation. Similarly, Irfan and Lukman share this ambition; however, they intend to work first to accumulate the necessary funds for their further education. Informant F presents a different perspective. F hopes

to register for the PAUD teacher certification offered by the Ministry of Education and Culture immediately after graduating. Fajar's rationale is that the Ministry provides a pre-service teacher professional education (PPG) program accessible to aspiring teachers without prior work experience. Fajar's interest in the PPG Prajab stems from the perceived ease in future applications for PPPK or ASN positions. The PAUD teacher certification program, conducted by both the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Religion, aims to advance teacher careers and improve the welfare of PAUD educators (Prawata et al., 2021).

From these findings, it can be concluded that the future plans of male students in the Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program revolve around advancing their education and careers. This includes opportunities as lecturers or within the education office. According to Connell (2009) gender role theory, with appropriate support, male students can effectively set and achieve their goals, contributing significantly to the field of early childhood education.

4. Support Expected by Male Students in the Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program

Several informants highlighted the need for support from lecturers as their primary expectation. They view lecturers as akin to teachers or second parents on campus. Research by Febriyola et al. (2023) indicates a positive correlation between lecturer support and student resilience.

Respondents consistently expressed a desire for continuous support from lecturers. Informant L emphasized the importance of motivational reinforcement from lecturers, particularly during the initial phase of college, as being a minority in the class presents significant challenges. This motivational support, especially from male lecturers, is crucial to sustaining their enthusiasm for studying.

Informant I, on the other hand, expressed a preference for lecturers who provide practical teaching by visiting early childhood education centers (PAUD). This approach, according to Informant I, facilitates a better understanding of how to apply classroom theories in real-world settings. In contrast, Informant D's primary expectation is for thesis guidance from lecturers to aid in the completion of their studies. Mansyur (2022) has observed that increased support from academic supervisors enhances students' optimism in finishing their studies.

In addition, students also expect support from the campus. Informant L indicated that campus support should include the improvement of student learning facilities, such as comfortable study rooms and access to educational resources. The provision of adequate facilities can enhance the teaching and learning process. According to Briyantoro et al., (2023) improving campus facilities and academic services positively influences student satisfaction. Conversely, informant D

expressed the need for scholarships during college, particularly in the PIAUD study program. Providing scholarships can alleviate the financial burden on students and serve as a means to promote the PIAUD study program, thereby attracting more students to choose it.

D. CONCLUSION

The intrinsic motivation for students choosing the PIAUD study program stems from their interest in studying early childhood development. Extrinsic motivations include positive support from parents, scholarship opportunities, and promising career prospects in the PAUD field. Students face challenges such as negative stigma from their surroundings, associating the PIAUD program predominantly with women, and the experience of being a minority in the classroom. However, they require social support from family, lecturers, and peers to maintain their motivation in the PAUD program. Further research is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of this support and develop innovative approaches to better facilitate male participation in early childhood education.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that educational institutions and stakeholders enhance efforts to provide stronger social support for male students in the PIAUD program. This could be achieved through mentoring programs, support groups, and targeted training to combat stigma and increase male engagement in this field. Additionally, it is crucial to continually assess and develop scholarships

and other incentives to attract more male students. Further research should focus on identifying the most effective strategies to bolster male students' motivation and academic success in ECE and understand the long-term impact of social support on their engagement. These efforts will help cultivate a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all students.

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