



Incorporating Islamic Principles into Early Childhood Education (ECE) Practices

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Abstract:

This study aimed to analyze the integration of Islamic values and a holistic approach in early childhood education. Character development has been emphasized as a national education priority in Indonesia, where education is mandated to produce individuals with intelligence, personality, and noble morals. Previous studies have shown that embedding Islamic principles into teaching fosters respect, empathy, and discipline among children, while a holistic approach supports balanced cognitive, emotional, and spiritual growth. This research employed a qualitative descriptive method, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. Findings revealed that first, teachers perceived Islamic values as essential for nurturing children's behavior, emotional regulation, and social interaction. Second, the curriculum at Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten demonstrated flexibility, allowing educators to embed values seamlessly into classroom activities while maintaining academic objectives. Third, challenges were identified, particularly in the availability of teaching resources and professional development for teachers, indicating the need for systemic support to sustain value-based education. These findings align with previous research yet extend the discussion by highlighting practical integration within a holistic framework. The study contributes insights for curriculum improvement and recommends enhanced teacher training and resource provision.

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INTRODUCTION

Character development in early childhood has increasingly become a central concern in educational discourse, as it is widely believed that the early years provide the foundation for shaping lifelong personality traits and values. The urgency of this focus lies in the fact that young children are at a formative stage where they absorb attitudes, behaviors, and principles that will influence their future interactions with society (Jones et al., 2023; Macià-Gual & Domingo-Peñafiel, 2020; Masnawati & Masfufah, 2023). In Indonesia, national education goals emphasize not only intellectual excellence but also moral integrity, highlighting that education should produce individuals who are both knowledgeable and ethical (Maduningtias et al., 2022). Within this context, character education is not simply an addition to academic learning but a guiding principle that informs the entire educational process (Hidayah, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2023; Norrahman, 2023). The integration of religious values, particularly Islamic values in Muslim-majority contexts, becomes essential as it strengthens children's capacity to connect faith with

practice. This integration supports holistic child development, fostering not only cognitive abilities but also emotional stability, social cooperation, and spiritual awareness, all of which are crucial in preparing children to be responsible citizens.

Scholarly literature underscores the importance of embedding character development into educational curricula, particularly during early childhood. Character education is defined as the intentional cultivation of virtues, moral reasoning, and ethical behavior that align with national and cultural values (Ataman et al., 2024; Basori et al., 2023; Sanjani, 2024). In Indonesia, the National Education System Law (2003; revised 2023) explicitly identifies noble character as one of the primary goals of national education (Abidin et al., 2023; Arifin, 2024; Zubaidah et al., 2024). Researchers argue that early childhood is the most effective stage to foster character because children are in a critical period of emotional and moral formation (Masykuroh et al., 2024; Sakti et al., 2024). Additionally, it has been observed that Islamic education offers a balanced approach that integrates physical, cognitive, and spiritual dimensions (Irman et al., 2023; Safitri, 2024). This perspective is supported by scholars who highlight that the integration of Islamic principles into education contributes to the holistic development of children, encompassing intellectual, emotional, social, and religious aspects (Alazmi, 2023; Lutfauziah et al., 2024). Hence, character development through Islamic values represents a comprehensive educational model that aligns national objectives with cultural and spiritual identity.

In practice, the demand for character-based education in Indonesia has grown in response to pressing social challenges, including moral decline among youth, increasing cases of juvenile delinquency, and weakening interpersonal values such as respect and empathy. Parents and educators alike have expressed concerns about the need to counterbalance the pervasive influence of digital culture, which often exposes children to inappropriate values at an early age (Saracho, 2023). As a result, schools are increasingly viewed not only as centers for academic learning but also as vital spaces for moral formation. Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten in Cakru, Kencong, represents one example where the integration of Islamic values into the learning process has been applied to address these concerns. The initiative reflects a growing recognition that early childhood institutions must actively instill moral and spiritual guidance alongside cognitive skills. By aligning character education with Islamic values, the institution attempts to respond to societal needs while nurturing children who are prepared to engage responsibly in family, community, and national life.

Several studies have investigated the role of Islamic values in early childhood education, producing consistent findings about their positive impact. It has been reported that Islamic values contribute to children's social and moral development, fostering empathy and discipline (Fatimah & Siswanto, 2024; Omar & Jodi, 2024). Another study confirmed that when these values are embedded into teaching practices, they create an atmosphere of respect and responsibility (Purwanto et al., 2023). Islamic moral teachings enhance academic performance and emotional well-being (Jubba et al., 2021; Yuliasih, 2023). Further, curriculum flexibility has been highlighted as necessary for effective integration (Irawan et al., 2023), while teacher training is considered vital for success. Seamless integration of Islamic values into early childhood education is possible when adequate support and resources are provided. Collectively, these seven studies underline that Islamic values significantly enhance holistic child development, yet they also suggest the need for systemic reinforcement to sustain integration efforts.

Despite the growing body of research, significant gaps remain in understanding how Islamic values can be effectively packaged and integrated into daily teaching practices at the kindergarten level. Most prior studies have examined general principles or teacher perceptions without exploring specific pedagogical models that combine Islamic values with holistic approaches. Additionally, there has been limited focus on how curriculum design can address multidimensional child development needs—cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual—simultaneously. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to bridge this gap by examining how Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten integrates Islamic values with a holistic educational framework. Unlike previous research that often isolates moral development from other aspects of learning, this study emphasizes the interconnectedness of religiosity, imagination, intellect, culture, aesthetics, and physical development. By situating Islamic values within a holistic curriculum design, the research offers new insights into how value-based education can be systematically embedded to foster well-rounded children who are both academically competent and morally grounded.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the learning process at Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten, specifically examining how teaching materials and strategies are packaged to integrate Islamic values within a holistic approach. The research focuses on exploring both the curriculum design and its practical implementation, emphasizing the alignment of character-based education with religious values. By doing so, the study seeks to uncover the methods employed by teachers to balance academic, emotional, social, and spiritual learning outcomes. Additionally, the study aims to identify challenges faced by educators in integrating Islamic principles into everyday classroom activities. A central aspect of the focus is to evaluate whether the curriculum fosters multidimensional child development that prepares children not only for academic success but also for becoming empathetic, disciplined, and spiritually aware individuals. Thus, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Islamic values can be translated into actionable educational practices within the kindergarten context.

This study offers originality by combining two critical frameworks—Islamic values and holistic education—within the context of early childhood learning. While earlier research has examined the impact of Islamic principles on moral development, limited attention has been given to how these values can be structurally embedded in a holistic curriculum. The argument presented here is that character education cannot be separated from spiritual formation and that both must be developed concurrently with intellectual, emotional, and social growth. The study positions Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten as a case example that illustrates how an institution can implement such integration effectively. By focusing on both the theoretical and practical dimensions of curriculum design, this research builds an argument for a more comprehensive model of early childhood education. It is contended that integrating Islamic values within a holistic approach is not only consistent with national education goals but also provides an innovative strategy for addressing contemporary social challenges while preparing children for a balanced and meaningful future.

RESEARCH METHODS

The material object of this study was the learning process at Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten, Cakru, Kencong, particularly focusing on the integration of Islamic values into early childhood education through a holistic approach. The study explored how

character-based education is implemented in the classroom, how teachers design and package teaching materials, and how these practices support children's multidimensional development. Considering the aim of examining meaning and process rather than quantifiable outcomes, the research employed a qualitative approach, as it allows for in-depth exploration of phenomena in their natural context (Leko et al., 2021). This approach is suitable for investigating the perceptions, experiences, and practices of teachers in applying Islamic values during the teaching and learning process. The type of research adopted was descriptive qualitative, as the study intended to provide rich descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation without manipulating the natural setting. By focusing on how Islamic values were embedded in everyday learning, the research aimed to capture the lived realities of teachers and students, offering insights into the interaction between curriculum design, instructional strategies, and holistic child development in the context of early childhood education.

The data collection techniques used in this study were designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic values and holistic education are integrated in practice. Three primary methods were employed: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to directly examine classroom activities, teaching methods, and interactions between teachers and students. This technique allowed the researcher to gain firsthand insights into the practical implementation of Islamic values and the ways in which they were embedded in daily learning routines. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with teachers, administrators, and parents to explore their perceptions, experiences, and challenges in applying Islamic principles in early childhood education. The interviews provided nuanced data that complemented the observations, revealing underlying attitudes and pedagogical considerations. Documentation was also collected in the form of lesson plans, curriculum guidelines, activity records, and school policy documents. These sources provided additional evidence about the formal structures that supported the integration of Islamic values into the curriculum. Triangulation of these three techniques—observation, interviews, and documentation—was applied to ensure the credibility and validity of the data. This combination enriched the findings, allowing the researcher to portray the phenomenon holistically and with greater reliability.

The data analysis process in this study followed the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three interrelated stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Maxwell, 2020). Data reduction involved organizing and simplifying the raw data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation. During this stage, important information related to the integration of Islamic values and the holistic approach was coded, categorized, and grouped according to emerging themes. Once the data had been reduced, the next stage was data display, where the information was presented in narrative descriptions, matrices, and thematic charts. This step made it easier to identify patterns, relationships, and differences across the various sources of data. Finally, the process of conclusion drawing and verification was conducted to interpret the findings and ensure their validity. The researcher continuously checked the consistency of interpretations with the collected evidence, revisiting the data when necessary to refine conclusions. Verification also involved triangulating data from multiple sources and confirming interpretations with participants through member checking.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teacher Perceptions on the Role of Islamic Values

Investigates early childhood educators' views on the importance and effectiveness of incorporating Islamic principles into the daily teaching process, and how they perceive its impact on student behavior and learning. Early childhood educators at Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten express strong support for the integration of Islamic values into daily teaching practices. They acknowledge that embedding Islamic principles, such as respect, kindness, and responsibility, not only contributes to the moral development of students but also positively impacts their behavior in the classroom. The majority of teachers believe that Islamic values create a solid foundation for building positive social interactions among students, fostering an environment of mutual respect. Many teachers also feel that these values are essential for shaping children's character at an early stage, influencing their academic progress and emotional stability. The integration of Islamic values is seen as a fundamental aspect of nurturing holistic development, focusing on both academic excellence and moral growth. In their view, Islamic principles are particularly valuable in guiding young children to understand the importance of compassion, patience, and empathy. These perceptions suggest a widespread belief among educators that Islamic values should play a central role in shaping the pedagogical approach at Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten.

The educators actively apply Islamic principles through various teaching strategies and materials in the classroom. Teachers use Islamic stories, prayers, and role-playing activities to introduce values such as honesty, kindness, and respect. Observations revealed that students respond positively to these activities, often demonstrating increased willingness to share, cooperate, and express empathy towards one another. Educators noted a significant improvement in student behavior, with fewer instances of conflict or disruptive actions. This is attributed to the reinforcement of Islamic values in daily interactions, creating a peaceful and supportive learning environment. Teachers also reported that students' understanding of Islamic principles deepens over time, with older children showing more maturity in applying values such as respect for others and self-discipline. This reinforces the idea that early exposure to Islamic values in education can lay the groundwork for lasting character development.

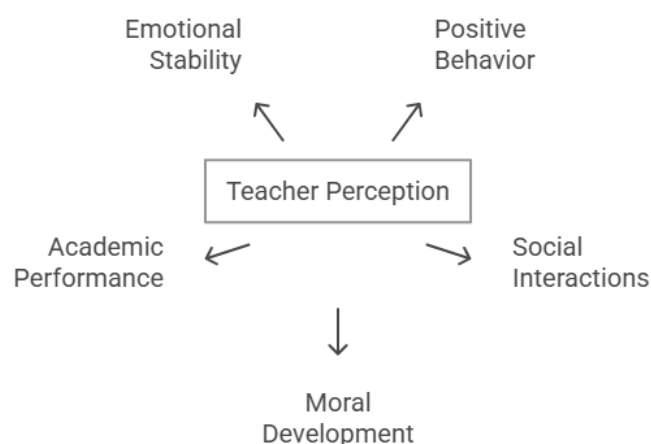


Figure 1. Teacher Perception

These findings suggest that teachers at Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten overwhelmingly perceive the integration of Islamic values as beneficial for both the moral and academic development of children. Teachers view Islamic teachings as crucial in fostering an environment of respect and cooperation, and their perceptions align with the broader educational philosophy of the institution. These insights indicate that integrating Islamic principles into early childhood education can significantly contribute to shaping well-rounded individuals, socially and academically.

The research found that teachers at Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten strongly believe in the importance of incorporating Islamic values into early childhood education. They report noticeable improvements in student behavior and character development, suggesting that the inclusion of Islamic teachings plays a vital role in nurturing responsible, respectful, and emotionally stable children. As a conclusion, it can be stated that teachers' perceptions align with the educational goals of the institution, indicating a shared understanding of the importance of Islamic values in early childhood development.

Curriculum Design

Analyzes existing early childhood education curricula and examines how Islamic values can be effectively embedded within teaching materials, activities, and teaching strategies. The current curriculum at Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten incorporates Islamic values through various themes and activities. Teachers integrate Islamic teachings into the subjects of language, social studies, and ethics. The curriculum includes dedicated time for learning Islamic stories, memorizing short prayers, and practicing moral lessons that emphasize respect, honesty, and responsibility. These elements are woven into everyday activities, such as greeting others, sharing, and helping peers, to instill the values of cooperation and empathy. The curriculum design is flexible, allowing teachers to adapt lessons based on the needs of the students and the emphasis on specific values as needed. This integration is viewed as a way to guide children's moral development while supporting their cognitive and social growth. The design is structured in a way that aligns with the developmental stages of early childhood, ensuring that the activities are age-appropriate and meaningful.

The teachers revealed that while the integration of Islamic values is generally seen as effective, there are areas for improvement. Some teachers expressed a need for more resources and training to further enhance the integration of Islamic principles into the curriculum. While the materials available, such as Islamic storybooks and visual aids, are helpful, teachers noted that having more diverse and interactive resources would better engage students and deepen their understanding of Islamic teachings. Moreover, the teachers highlighted the importance of having clear guidelines and a systematic approach to incorporating Islamic values across all subjects. Despite these challenges, teachers are committed to continually refining the curriculum to ensure that Islamic values are effectively embedded in the learning process.

Table 1. Integration Curriculum Design of Islamic Values

No	Theme	Learning Materials	Islamic Values	A Holistic Approach	Learning Activities
1	Family	Getting to Know Family Members	Respect for parents, affection,	Emotional approach: developing a sense of love and respect for the	Discussions and stories: Children are invited to tell the role of family

			responsibility	family		members, followed by the story of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH about affection for the family
2	Universe	Getting to Know Plants and Animals	Gratitude for Allah's creation, keeping trust	Environmental approach: Inviting children to care and be responsible for the surrounding environment		Observation and practice: Children are invited to plant small plants at school, while being taught to say the words of amazement (Masyallah) when they see plants and animals.
3	Yourself	Getting to Know Body Parts	Gratitude for Allah's blessings, maintaining health and cleanliness	Physical approach: Introducing the importance of maintaining a healthy body through healthy living habits		Games and activities: Children are invited to play guessing body parts, then continue by distinguishing God's creations.
4	Negaraku	Getting to Know Traditional Clothes and Regional Traditions	Respect the diversity of God's creation, tolerance	Cultural approach: Teaching children to appreciate culture and tradition as a beautiful form of diversity		Traditional clothing and folklore: Children wear traditional clothes, followed by folklore that contains Islamic moral messages.
5	My Needs	Getting to Know Daily Prayers	Faith in Allah, closeness to Allah through prayer	Spiritual approach: Strengthening the child's relationship with God through the introduction of daily prayer		Prayer practice: Teaching children simple prayers such as dressing prayers.

From these results, it can be concluded that the integration of Islamic values and a holistic approach is very important to be applied to students at an early age in order to form a good character and be able to develop aspects of development as a whole, not only in general development but there is development in accordance with religion, especially aspects of spiritual development. The aspect of spiritual development is very important for Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD) about understanding Islamic teachings and strengthening the individual's relationship with Allah, not only related to religious aspects but also includes sensitivity to human values, empathy, social justice, wisdom and growth.

Impact of Islamic Values on Character Development

This study explores how integrating Islamic values in the curriculum positively influences the moral and ethical development of young children, fostering behaviors such as respect, honesty, and responsibility. The study reveals a significant positive impact of integrating Islamic values on the character development of children at Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten. Teachers reported noticeable improvements in the children's behavior, particularly in terms of respect for others, honesty, and self-discipline.

Through regular exposure to Islamic principles, students developed a better understanding of empathy, learning to show compassion and understanding towards their peers. Teachers observed that children were more cooperative in group activities, showed greater consideration for their classmates, and were more likely to express apologies when necessary. This aligns with the Islamic values of kindness and respect,

which are reinforced through daily practices and activities at the school.

In the observation sessions, it was noted that students who were consistently engaged in activities involving Islamic values demonstrated greater emotional intelligence. These children were better able to identify and regulate their emotions, exhibiting increased patience, understanding, and self-control. In contrast, children who had less exposure to Islamic teachings displayed more difficulty in managing their emotions and showed less respect for their peers. This finding suggests that the incorporation of Islamic values plays a crucial role in fostering emotional maturity and social skills in young children, helping them develop positive relationships with others and adapt better to social settings.

The integrating Islamic values into the curriculum significantly contributes to the moral and social development of young children. The positive impact on children's character development reinforces the importance of incorporating such values in early childhood education. Islamic values help children internalize virtues like respect, kindness, and responsibility, which are crucial in fostering harmonious relationships and emotional stability.

The study confirms that integrating Islamic values into early childhood education at Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten plays a vital role in shaping the character of children. Teachers reported improvements in social behavior, emotional regulation, and cooperation, indicating that Islamic teachings contribute significantly to children's character development. It can be concluded that early exposure to Islamic values is essential for fostering responsible, empathetic, and emotionally intelligent individuals.

Discussion

The findings of this study concerning teacher perceptions are consistent with earlier investigations in the field. It has been reported that educators generally believe Islamic values play a significant role in enhancing the moral and social development of young children (Agus et al., 2021; Thoha, 2024). These studies have emphasized that such values are perceived as crucial in fostering a nurturing, caring, and respectful classroom environment. The integration of Islamic values as a foundation for encouraging children to develop respect for their peers and teachers, as well as to internalize positive behavior. This perspective supports the observations made at Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten, where teachers similarly viewed Islamic principles as essential to the learning process. The alignment between prior literature and the present study illustrates that there is broad consensus regarding the influence of Islamic teachings on classroom atmosphere. Moreover, it has been indicated that when values are properly integrated into early education, children are more likely to exhibit cooperative behavior and positive character traits. Thus, the present findings are not isolated but rather add to a growing body of evidence that highlights the importance of values-based instruction.

Further support for this study's findings can be found in research suggesting that the application of Islamic principles in teaching practices encourages respect, discipline, and empathy among learners (Masykuroh et al., 2024). The literature has consistently indicated that such practices cultivate an atmosphere where students are motivated to uphold positive behavior and moral responsibility. Evidence from previous research has also demonstrated that Islamic moral teachings can influence academic performance and contribute to improved emotional well-being (Fansori et al., 2024; Susilo et al., 2022). These outcomes resonate with the experiences observed at Dewi Masyithoh III

Kindergarten, where the integration of Islamic values was associated with enhanced student conduct and learning motivation. The evidence therefore corroborates the present research, suggesting that Islamic principles serve not only as moral guidelines but also as educational tools that strengthen student character while fostering emotional and academic growth.

In relation to curriculum design, findings from this study correspond with broader discussions in the literature concerning the integration of Islamic values into early childhood education. It has been pointed out that curriculum flexibility plays an important role in allowing educators to meaningfully embed these values into daily teaching (Irman et al., 2023). Additionally, scholars have emphasized that teachers require adequate training to deliver Islamic principles effectively, highlighting the importance of professional preparedness (Adiyono et al., 2024). The current study reflects these insights by demonstrating that the teachers at Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten recognized the need for more structured guidance and resources. This suggests that although the incorporation of Islamic values is possible, its effectiveness depends largely on the support systems available to teachers. Thus, the research reinforces the argument that the curriculum should not only be designed with flexibility but also provide continuous support for teachers to sustain value-based teaching.

The present findings are also consistent with earlier studies which observed that Islamic values can be successfully embedded in early childhood curricula. It has been suggested that such integration is not only possible but also highly beneficial in shaping children's development (Nezhad et al., 2024). However, these investigations have cautioned that the effectiveness of this process depends on the extent of professional development offered to educators and the adequacy of teaching materials provided. This perspective supports the conclusions drawn from Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten, where teachers acknowledged that while Islamic values could be taught effectively, there remained a need for more structured assistance. The success of curriculum integration has been linked to the ability of teachers to receive ongoing training, as well as the provision of resources that enable them to deliver lessons confidently.

The positive effect of Islamic values on children's character development has been well documented in educational research. It has been observed that children exposed to Islamic teachings display enhanced emotional regulation, greater patience, and improved social skills (Fardous, 2024). This perspective aligns with the findings at Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten, where teachers reported notable improvements in children's behavior and emotional maturity following exposure to Islamic principles. Such evidence suggests that value-based education not only supports children's social growth but also contributes to their emotional resilience. Islamic teachings provide children with frameworks for managing interpersonal relationships, thereby reducing conflicts and encouraging cooperation.

Additional support for this study's conclusions is found in research showing that Islamic values significantly enhance children's emotional intelligence and social cooperation. It has been reported that when values are systematically taught, children demonstrate greater respect for others and increased willingness to collaborate (Putri et al., 2023). These studies provide evidence that exposure to Islamic principles equips children with tools for empathy, patience, and cooperation, qualities that were also observed at Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten. The findings of this study therefore align with broader evidence that the early integration of values fosters children's ability to

interact positively within social groups. It has also been highlighted in prior research that such integration creates lasting impacts, helping children carry values into later stages of education and beyond. By nurturing both social and emotional intelligence, Islamic teachings contribute to building well-rounded individuals who are capable of engaging respectfully and empathetically with peers.

The findings from Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten and supporting literature highlight the significant role of Islamic values in shaping children's behavior and character. The implication is that value-based education serves as a foundation for producing well-rounded individuals who are not only academically competent but also morally responsible. The present study therefore affirms that Islamic values play a vital role in character development and should be prioritized in early childhood education. It has also been underscored that teacher training and professional development are essential components of successful implementation.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of Islamic values into early childhood education at Dewi Masyithoh III Kindergarten significantly supports children's character formation, emotional maturity, and social cooperation. Teachers perceived these values as essential for creating a respectful and nurturing classroom environment, and the literature consistently corroborated their impact on children's academic, social, and emotional development. Despite these valuable insights, the study was limited by its focus on a single kindergarten, which restricts the generalizability of the results to broader educational contexts. Additionally, the reliance on teacher perceptions may have introduced subjective bias, as the study did not incorporate direct classroom observations or parental perspectives. Future research is therefore recommended to expand the scope by including multiple schools across different regions, employing longitudinal methods to track long-term effects of value integration, and incorporating diverse stakeholders such as parents and administrators.

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