

The Islamic Montessori Learning Model for Early Childhood Islamic Religious Education: A Case Study at Sunna Kids Educenter Jakarta

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to (1) develop an Islamic Montessori learning model for Early Childhood Islamic Religious Education, (2) explain the effectiveness of its implementation in improving PAI learning outcomes, and (3) formulate the development of the model along with a teacher's guidebook. The research employs a qualitative approach with a multi-case study design at Sunna Center Islamic Montessori Jakarta. Data collection methods include in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Data analysis used the Miles & Huberman model with NVivo 12 assistance, involving 5 informants (expert, principal, 2 teachers, parent) with a total of 92 coding references. The findings reveal that the Islamic Montessori model consists of six integrated components: tauhid-based policy, Islamic prepared environment ("Raudhah" area), Islamic educational manipulatives with three criteria (authentic, sensorial, self-directed), concrete experience-based learning methods, integration of worship into practical life activities, and character building through grace and courtesy activities. The model implementation proved effective in enhancing children's understanding of tauhid, independence in worship, and moral practices. The novelties of this research include a four-level organic integration model, a spiritual development observation system with concrete behavioral indicators, a resolution of the reward-punishment dialectic, Islamic educational manipulatives criteria, an applicable teacher's guidebook structure, and a parent involvement model.

Keywords: Islamic Montessori Learning Model; Early Childhood; Islamic Religious Education; PAI Learning; Teacher's Guidebook

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INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays a crucial role in establishing the foundation for children's holistic development, encompassing cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual dimensions. This period is often referred to as the golden age because, during the ages of 0–6 years, children's brains develop rapidly and optimally, making the stimulation they receive highly influential in determining their educational success at subsequent stages. In the

modern era, characterized by rapid societal changes and increasing developmental demands, there is a growing need for educational models that not only foster intellectual development but also instill moral and spiritual values from an early age.

Within the context of contemporary education, one of the most widely recognized approaches is the Montessori method. Maria Montessori emphasized the importance of a prepared environment, guided freedom, and the use of concrete learning materials to optimally stimulate children's development. The Montessori approach is considered valuable because it allows children to learn according to their own developmental pace, thereby fostering independence, concentration, and a sense of responsibility from an early age.

However, in practice, the Montessori method does not incorporate the teaching of any specific religious doctrine. This presents a particular challenge in Indonesia, the country with the world's largest Muslim population, where many parents seek educational institutions capable of nurturing children with strong Islamic character. Consequently, the idea of integrating Islamic values into the Montessori pedagogical framework has emerged, giving rise to what is known as Islamic Montessori. Islamic Montessori is an early childhood education model that combines the fundamental principles of the Montessori method with Islamic teachings. As a result, learning not only emphasizes independence, guided freedom, and the development of children's innate potential (*fitrah*) but also focuses on cultivating moral character (*akhlaq*), religious practices (*ibadah*), and love for Allah ﷻ.

Amid the increasing adoption of the Montessori approach by numerous ECE institutions in Indonesia, a concerning yet challenging phenomenon has emerged. Many institutions claiming to be Islamic Montessori schools merely add Islamic labels without undertaking a substantial transformation of their educational philosophy and learning practices. Religious activities are often implemented as supplementary ceremonial programs rather than being meaningfully integrated into the learning process, thereby limiting the creation of holistic and meaningful learning experiences. Furthermore, many educational institutions utilize the "Montessori" label primarily as a marketing strategy without fully understanding or implementing its authentic pedagogical principles. For example, external reward and punishment systems are still commonly employed, despite being inconsistent with Montessori's philosophy of intrinsic motivation.

Based on preliminary observations conducted by the researchers in several ECE institutions implementing the Montessori approach, it was found that Islamic religious education was still delivered through conventional methods such as lectures, assignments, and worksheets, all of which were predominantly teacher-centered. This practice contradicts the fundamental Montessori principle that learning should be child-centered. In addition, these institutions lacked specifically designed prepared environments for religious education, did not possess Montessori educational materials integrated with Islamic values, and had no structured Montessori-style observation and documentation systems for monitoring children's religious development. This gap between the ideal and the actual implementation indicates an urgent need for an Islamic Montessori learning model that is not only conceptually sound but also practical and effective, particularly in fostering Islamic Religious Education (IRE) values among young children.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a multi-case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the Islamic Montessori learning model implementation for early childhood religious education at Sunna Center Islamic Montessori Jakarta. The qualitative approach was chosen as it allows the researcher to explore meanings, processes, and contexts of the phenomenon under investigation, rather than merely measuring specific variables. The multi-case study design was applied by treating each class and each teacher as distinct analytical units, followed by cross-case analysis to identify general patterns and characteristic differences. The research was conducted at Sunna Center Islamic Montessori Jakarta, located on Jl. Kalibata Utara II No.38, Kalibata, Pancoran, South Jakarta, from January to June 2025. This location was purposively selected based on the school's consistent implementation of

Montessori philosophy within an Islamic value framework and its structured religious education area.

The study involved five key informants selected using purposive sampling combined with snowball sampling techniques. The informants included one expert in Islamic Montessori education who provided theoretical-normative perspectives, one school principal responsible for curriculum policy, two classroom teachers as direct learning implementers, and one parent who experienced the learning outcomes at home. The selection criteria required informants to have direct involvement in planning, implementing, or evaluating Islamic Montessori learning, a minimum of one year of experience at the school, and willingness to provide open and honest information. Data collection employed three techniques: in-depth semi-structured interviews using interview guides, participant observation where the researcher engaged in classroom activities, and documentation studies including photographs, lesson plans, student portfolios, and school policy documents. All interviews were audio-recorded with the informant's consent and transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman interactive model, consisting of three concurrent activities: data reduction through coding and theme identification, data presentation in narrative and tabular forms, and conclusion drawing with verification. NVivo 12 software was utilized to manage, code, and analyze the 92 coding references across 11 thematic nodes, enabling systematic identification of patterns and relationships. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation (comparing data across different informants), method triangulation (cross-checking interview findings with observations and documents), and member checking (confirming interpretations with informants). The trustworthiness of findings was further strengthened through prolonged engagement at the research site and reflexive journaling throughout the research process.

RESULTS

The study involved five key informants who were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in the implementation of the Islamic Montessori learning model. These informants consisted of an Islamic Montessori education practitioner and expert (Ahmad Zaki), who provided a theoretical and normative perspective; the school principal (Abla Anis), who was responsible for policy and curriculum implementation; two classroom teachers (Abla Vidia and Annisa Khairunnisa), who directly facilitated the learning process; and a parent (Faizah), who provided insights into the impact of the learning model on children's development at home. The NVivo-assisted data analysis identified a total of 92 coded references, which were distributed across 11 major nodes or themes. These themes represented the key dimensions of the Islamic Montessori learning model and its implementation in early childhood Islamic religious education.

Islamic Montessori Learning Model for Early Childhood Islamic Religious Education

This study successfully identified and described an Islamic Montessori learning model for the field of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in early childhood education as developed at Sunna Center Islamic Montessori Jakarta. The model represents an organic integration of Montessori pedagogical principles with Islamic educational content and values. The findings indicate that the Islamic Montessori model implemented at the institution is based on the premise that the integration of Islam and Montessori is not superficial but rather holistic and organic in nature. As explained by Ahmad Zaki:

“An authentic Islamic Montessori model must place the Qur'an and Sunnah as the foundation of the curriculum, rather than merely as decorative elements. Islamic values should become the spirit of every learning activity, not simply an addition to it.”

The model consists of six integrated components.

First, a tawhid-based educational policy serves as the foundation for all aspects of learning. This component ensures that religious education is not treated as a separate subject but is integrated into the entire learning process. The school principal explained that the vision of Sunna Center Islamic Montessori is to nurture an independent generation of Muslims with noble character and a love of knowledge through a Montessori approach grounded in Islamic values. Its mission is to provide a learning environment that respects children's innate nature (*fitrah*) while instilling Islamic beliefs (*aqidah*) and manners (*adab*) from an early age.

Second, the Islamic prepared environment. This component received the highest number of coding references in the NVivo analysis (15 references), indicating its central role in the implementation of the model. One classroom teacher explained that the school provides a dedicated religious-learning shelf located in a quiet corner of the classroom. The shelf contains illustrated daily prayer cards, Islamic Pillars puzzles, child-safe mock ablution materials, illustrated stories of the prophets, and tactile *Hijaiyah* letter cards. All materials are arranged in attractive trays or baskets, allowing children to independently select, use, and return them. Another teacher added that the religious-learning area in her classroom is called *Raudhah* ("a small garden of paradise"), featuring natural wooden shelves containing materials such as three-part prophet nomenclature cards, Kaaba puzzles, prayer demonstration materials, and Islamic storybooks. The area also includes a *muroja'ah* corner furnished with small carpets where children can review and recite Qur'anic verses.

Third, specially designed Islamic educational learning materials. The principal identified the availability of Montessori-standard Islamic learning materials as one of the major challenges in implementation. Conventional Montessori materials cannot simply be adopted without adaptation to Islamic educational objectives. Consequently, the school develops several instructional materials independently, including nomenclature cards for the Articles of Faith (*Rukun Iman*), prophet-story puzzles, ablution demonstration kits, and sensory materials themed around the creations of Allah.

Fourth, experiential and concrete learning methods. The study found that Islamic Religious Education within the Islamic Montessori model is characterized by the avoidance of lecture-based instruction and the use of exploratory, sensory, and practical activities. One teacher explained that she rarely delivers formal lectures. When teaching *tawhid*, for example, children are invited to observe their surroundings. They plant mung bean seeds in moist cotton and observe their growth each day. The teacher then asks who caused the plants to grow, prompting children to respond, "Allah." Similarly, prayer is taught through direct practice by providing child-sized prayer mats and miniature prayer garments, allowing children to participate enthusiastically in congregational prayer.

Another teacher described how the concept of *zakat* is introduced through hands-on activities rather than abstract explanations. Children practice pouring rice from a large container into smaller containers using funnels. The collected rice is then used as a starting point for discussing the importance of sharing with those in need. Stories of the prophets are taught through storytelling using hand puppets. At the same time, moral education (*akhlaq*) is facilitated through scenario cards in which children match examples of good and inappropriate behavior and discuss their choices. In these activities, teachers function primarily as facilitators rather than instructors.

Fifth, the integration of worship practices into daily life activities. The findings indicate that worship is not taught as a separate subject but is embedded within everyday learning experiences. Teachers explained that ablution and prayer practices are incorporated into the *practical life* area. Children learn to remove their socks, fold prayer mats, organize prayer garments, and pour water from pitchers. These activities simultaneously develop life skills, independence, and readiness to perform acts of worship.

Sixth, character formation through grace and courtesy activities. Moral values are cultivated through daily habits such as saying "please," "sorry," and "thank you," as well as greeting and shaking hands with teachers. These practices are designed to internalize Islamic manners and social etiquette within children's daily interactions.

Four operational principles guide the implementation of this model. First, the integration of Islam and Montessori is holistic and organic rather than artificial or forced. Second, learning is child-centered, allowing children the freedom to choose activities while remaining within the framework of Islamic *adab*. Third, the model respects children's sensitive periods of development by utilizing stages in which children are highly receptive to imitation, particularly in memorizing prayers and religious expressions. Fourth, the model promotes intrinsic motivation through affection, encouragement, and meaningful experiences, while avoiding external reward-and-punishment systems that are inconsistent with Montessori philosophy.

Implementation of the Islamic Montessori Model in Enhancing Islamic Religious Education Learning Outcomes

The findings revealed that the implementation of the Islamic Montessori model at Sunna Center Islamic Montessori Jakarta has been carried out systematically and has generated various positive outcomes in early childhood Islamic Religious Education (IRE). The implementation process follows a structured framework consisting of four major stages.

The planning stage involves gradual curriculum development through a bottom-up approach, whereby input from classroom teachers serves as the primary basis for curriculum design. Teachers develop Islamic-themed lesson plans that integrate religious concepts into thematic learning activities. For example, when exploring the theme of "Water," teachers prepare practical ablution activities, picture-matching exercises involving purification tools, and prayer cards containing supplications recited before and after ablution. Learning activities are designed according to the Montessori principle of *moving from the concrete to the abstract*. Thus, when introducing the concept of *zakat*, teachers do not begin with abstract definitions; instead, children first engage in practical activities such as pouring rice from one container to another before discussing the concept of sharing with those in need.

The implementation stage is characterized by the use of gradual presentations, in which children are free to select activities from the classroom shelves, independently take and use learning materials, and return them after use. Teachers function primarily as facilitators who ensure that learning materials remain accessible and ready for use rather than acting as direct instructors. This approach promotes children's autonomy, initiative, and active engagement in the learning process.

The evaluation and documentation stage constitutes an essential component of the learning process. The school employs daily observations, anecdotal records, children's portfolios, and independent work records as evaluation instruments. Weekly discussions are conducted between classroom teachers and the curriculum coordinator, while comprehensive evaluations are undertaken at the end of each semester.

The importance of this component is reflected in the NVivo analysis, where the node "Observation and Documentation" received ten coding references. Teachers utilize spiritual development observation sheets to document behaviors such as children voluntarily saying *Bismillah* before meals, reminding peers to pray, or requesting a prayer mat to perform voluntary prayers (*sunnah* prayers). These observations are compiled into monthly narrative reports that are shared with parents to provide a comprehensive overview of each child's development.

The findings further indicate that the implementation of the Islamic Montessori model has generated several positive outcomes in early childhood Islamic Religious Education. Unlike conventional approaches that often emphasize memorization without deep understanding, the Islamic Montessori model promotes meaningful comprehension, particularly regarding the concept of *tawhid*. Children develop their understanding through concrete observations and hands-on experiences, such as monitoring the growth of mung bean seeds and reflecting on the source of life and creation.

Parents reported significant improvements in children's independence. According to parental accounts, children became more capable of performing daily tasks independently, such as putting on their own shoes, making their beds, and even initiating requests to participate in congregational prayers. These findings suggest that the integration of Montessori principles

and Islamic values contributes not only to religious understanding but also to the development of self-reliance and responsibility.

In addition, the study identified notable improvements in children's moral conduct (*akhlaq*) in their daily lives. Parents explained that their children had developed habits such as saying “*Bismillah*” before beginning activities, expressing *Alhamdulillah* after sneezing, saying “*Astaghfirullah*” when making mistakes, and willingly giving charity whenever they received pocket money by setting aside a portion for donation. Parents believed that these behavioral changes occurred because children were not merely taught religious values at school but were consistently encouraged to practice them within a positive and enjoyable learning environment.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also identified several implementation challenges. The development of independence in worship practices does not occur instantly but emerges gradually through continuous modeling and habituation. Teachers acknowledged that one of the greatest challenges is fostering children's willingness to engage in acts of worship without coercion. For example, some children initially treated ablution practice as a form of play. Rather than discouraging such behavior, teachers modeled the practice seriously yet joyfully, allowing children to gradually imitate and internalize the correct behavior.

Beyond children's internal development, external factors such as family support were found to play a critical role in the success of the learning process. Teachers reported challenges when some parents evaluated educational success primarily based on the quantity of memorization achieved by their children rather than on character development and learning processes. To address this issue, teachers engaged in intensive communication with parents to explain that Montessori education emphasizes gradual development and deeper learning outcomes. Through repeated meetings and discussions, parents gradually developed a better understanding of the Montessori approach and its long-term benefits.

Parental involvement was also evident in efforts to create a consistent learning environment at home. Parents attempted to implement Montessori-inspired practices by providing low shelves for the Qur'an and prayer books, preparing child-sized prayer mats, and encouraging children to perform the *adhan* and *iqamah* when prayer times arrived. Communication between parents and teachers was highly intensive, facilitated through daily communication journals and detailed monthly narrative progress reports. As a result, parents remained well informed about their children's learning experiences and developmental progress, thereby strengthening the continuity between home and school environments.

Development of the Model and Teacher Guidebook

To ensure the sustainability of the Islamic Montessori learning approach, the school has designed several long-term strategic initiatives, particularly through the development of instructional modules and teaching resources. The school principal revealed a long-term plan to develop a comprehensive Islamic Montessori-based teacher guidebook for Islamic Religious Education (IRE), complete with learning scenarios and children's activity modules that can be implemented both at school and at home. In addition, the school is currently exploring collaboration opportunities with publishing companies to produce a series of Montessori-inspired Islamic storybooks for young children.

To provide a clearer framework for developing effective educational materials, the Montessori expert formulated three essential criteria that Islamic educational learning materials should meet. First, they must be authentic, accurately reflecting Islamic teachings and values. Second, they should be sensorial, enabling children to explore and internalize concepts through their senses. Third, they must promote independence, allowing children to use the materials autonomously without continuous teacher assistance. These criteria are considered fundamental to preserving the core principles of Montessori pedagogy while ensuring the meaningful integration of Islamic values.

The findings also highlighted the need for a practical guidebook that bridges the gap between theory and practice, enabling teachers and parents to adopt a shared framework for

supporting children's learning and development. According to the participants, an ideal guidebook should include: (1) the philosophical foundations of Montessori education and Islamic teachings; (2) step-by-step presentation guidelines for learning activities; (3) observation instruments for monitoring children's spiritual development; (4) examples of teacher–child interactions and dialogues; and (5) reflection sheets to facilitate continuous evaluation and improvement. Participants emphasized that such a guidebook should be highly practical and implementation-oriented rather than merely theoretical.

Beyond applying Montessori principles of independence at home, parents expressed strong expectations for collaborative programs that could strengthen partnerships among children, families, and the school. Parents suggested that the school organize more family-oriented activities involving both parents and children, such as family religious seminars, family-based character and etiquette competitions, and community service programs, including charitable activities for orphaned children. These initiatives were perceived as valuable opportunities to reinforce the values taught at school while fostering stronger family engagement in children's education.

Furthermore, parents strongly supported the development of Islamic activity modules that could be used at home during school holidays. They believed that such resources would greatly assist families in accompanying children's learning and maintaining consistency between school-based and home-based educational experiences. The availability of structured home-learning materials would contribute to sustaining children's religious, moral, and personal development beyond the classroom setting.

DISCUSSION

Organic Integration of Montessori Philosophy and Islamic Values

The findings of this study indicate that the Islamic Montessori model implemented at Sunna Center Islamic Montessori is not merely the addition of an “Islamic” label to the conventional Montessori approach. Rather, it represents a holistic and organic integration of Montessori philosophy and Islamic values. As emphasized by the participants, an authentic Islamic Montessori model should position the Qur'an and Sunnah as the foundation of the curriculum rather than as supplementary elements, with Islamic values serving as the guiding spirit of all learning activities. This finding supports the argument of Julita (2021), who contends that an Islamic Montessori curriculum can be reconstructed by establishing Islam as the philosophical foundation while employing Montessori as the pedagogical method. It is also consistent with Dr. Roselina Shakir's concept of *Nurturing Eeman in the Montessori Home*, which views the Montessori prepared environment as a contemporary manifestation of the Islamic concept of *tarbiyah*.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support Maria Montessori's concepts of the *Absorbent Mind* and the *Spiritual Embryo*. Montessori argued that children possess an absorbent mind that unconsciously internalizes values, attitudes, and experiences from their environment, as well as a spiritual embryo that requires the fulfillment of inner and spiritual needs (Kusnawati, 2021). The integration of Islamic values into the Montessori environment addresses children's spiritual needs, which, according to Montessori's original framework, were not explicitly accommodated due to the social and cultural context in which her educational philosophy was developed. Consequently, the Islamic Montessori model extends Montessori's theoretical framework by incorporating a structured spiritual dimension that aligns with the developmental needs of Muslim children.

Furthermore, this study confirms the findings of Putri, Pahrurroji, and Widyastri (2024), who reported that the Islamic Montessori approach is effective in instilling Islamic educational values through a prepared environment and integrated learning materials. However, the present study contributes additional insights by demonstrating that successful integration requires a strong philosophical foundation rather than the mere incorporation of Islamic content into an otherwise unchanged Montessori framework. In other words, the effectiveness of Islamic Montessori education depends not only on the inclusion of religious

materials but also on the alignment of educational goals, learning environments, pedagogical practices, and value systems within a coherent Islamic worldview.

The Islamic Prepared Environment as the Foundational Element of Learning

The *Prepared Environment* node received the highest number of coding references (15 references), indicating that this component serves as the cornerstone of the Islamic Montessori model's implementation. The findings revealed that the school has established a dedicated religious-learning area known as *Raudhah* (“a small garden of paradise”), consisting of natural wooden shelves containing various Islamic learning materials, such as daily prayer cards, Pillars of Islam puzzles, mock ablution kits, and tactile Hijaiyah letter cards. These findings reinforce Montessori’s concept of the *prepared environment*, which emphasizes that the physical environment should be intentionally designed to facilitate independent learning and optimal child exploration (Ngaisah, Munawarah, & Aulia, 2023). Within an Islamic context, the organization of the learning environment also reflects the concept of *tarbiyah*, whereby physical spaces are arranged to support the development of Islamic character and values.

The findings are consistent with the study conducted by Khan and Ali (2022), which emphasized that learning environments should incorporate religious dimensions through the provision of Islamic educational materials, such as “*Hijaiyah*” sandpaper letters and prayer-mat sequencing activities. However, the present study extends previous findings by demonstrating that the naming of the learning area (*Raudhah*) and the integration of Islamic aesthetics and symbolism within the classroom environment exert a positive psychological influence on children’s interest and engagement in religious activities.

From a theoretical perspective, the concept of *Raudhah* represents an innovative contribution to the Islamic Montessori literature. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on the adaptation of Montessori materials to Islamic content, this study highlights the symbolic and emotional dimensions of the learning environment. The *Raudhah* concept establishes a meaningful connection between Montessori’s notion of a prepared environment—designed to invite children toward independent exploration and learning—and the Islamic understanding of *Raudhah* as a blessed and desirable place associated with spiritual tranquility and virtue. As a result, the learning environment functions not only as a physical setting for educational activities but also as a symbolic space that nurtures children’s spiritual awareness, emotional attachment to Islamic values, and intrinsic motivation to engage in religious learning experiences.

Experiential Learning Through Concrete Experiences

The node “*Islamic Religious Education Learning Methods*” received 14 coding references, indicating the consistent application of experiential and concrete learning approaches within the Islamic Montessori model. The findings revealed that teachers rarely relied on lecture-based instruction. Instead, they encouraged children to observe their surroundings, engage in hands-on religious practices, and participate in storytelling activities using hand puppets. These findings are consistent with Montessori’s principle that learning should progress from concrete experiences to abstract understanding (R et al., 2022).

For example, the concept of *tawhid* was introduced through direct observation of the growth of mung bean seeds, enabling children to reflect on the source of life and creation. Similarly, the concept of *zakat* was introduced through practical activities such as pouring rice from one container to another before discussing the value of sharing and helping those in need. This approach aligns with the developmental characteristics of young children, whose learning processes are primarily concrete, experiential, and activity-based (Syafitri et al., 2024).

The findings also support the study conducted by Hassan and Ibrahim (2022), which demonstrated that *Practical Life* activities integrated with Qur’anic values effectively foster children’s independence and moral development. The present study extends these findings by showing that experiential learning is equally effective in introducing theological concepts such as *tawhid* as well as practical aspects of worship. Rather than presenting religious concepts as abstract doctrines to be memorized, the Islamic Montessori approach enables children to

construct understanding through direct interaction with meaningful experiences and real-life situations.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce Montessori's constructivist view that knowledge is actively constructed through interaction with the environment. In the context of Islamic education, the use of concrete experiences provides an effective bridge between children's cognitive development and their emerging spiritual understanding. By connecting religious concepts with observable phenomena and practical activities, children are able to develop a deeper and more meaningful understanding of Islamic teachings. Consequently, religious learning becomes not merely a process of memorization but an experiential journey that integrates cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual development.

Observation and Documentation of Children's Spiritual Development

The "*Observation and Documentation*" node received 10 coding references, highlighting the significant role of assessment and documentation within the Islamic Montessori learning model. The findings revealed that the school employs a comprehensive evaluation system consisting of daily observations, anecdotal records, children's portfolios, and monthly narrative progress reports. Teachers systematically document various indicators of children's spiritual development, such as initiating the recitation of *Bismillah* without prompting, reminding peers to pray, or independently requesting a prayer mat to perform voluntary (*sunnah*) prayers.

This documentation system addresses the challenge identified by Rahman and Hashim (2023), who argued that Islamic Montessori education requires not only appropriate learning materials but also adequate teacher preparation and assessment mechanisms. The present study demonstrates that Montessori-style structured observation systems can be effectively adapted to assess and document children's spiritual development systematically and objectively. The observation instruments developed at Sunna Center Islamic Montessori possess several distinctive characteristics. *First*, they are based on observable behavioral indicators rather than abstract measures of religiosity. Examples include children's spontaneous use of *Bismillah*, their initiative in encouraging peers to engage in religious practices, and their voluntary participation in acts of worship. Such indicators enable teachers to assess spiritual development through concrete and measurable behaviors.

Second, the system employs a narrative approach rather than relying solely on numerical scores or simple checklists. This allows teachers to capture the nuances, contexts, and complexities of children's developmental processes more comprehensively. Narrative documentation provides richer insights into children's spiritual growth by describing not only what behaviors occur but also how and under what circumstances they emerge. *Third*, the observation system is integrated with parent communication mechanisms through monthly developmental reports and daily communication journals. This integration promotes continuity between home and school environments and enables parents to actively participate in supporting their children's spiritual and moral development.

Fourth, observation serves as the basis for instructional adaptation and pedagogical decision-making. Rather than functioning merely as a summative assessment tool, the collected observations are used formatively to guide teachers in designing appropriate learning experiences and interventions according to each child's developmental needs. In this regard, assessment becomes an integral component of the learning process itself, reflecting Montessori's emphasis on continuous observation as a means of understanding and supporting children's holistic development.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings contribute to the growing body of literature on assessment in Islamic early childhood education by demonstrating how Montessori observation practices can be adapted to evaluate spiritual development. The study suggests that spiritual growth can be documented through observable behaviors and reflective narratives without reducing it to purely quantitative measures. This approach offers a more

holistic framework for assessing religious and moral development among young children while remaining consistent with both Montessori philosophy and Islamic educational principles.

Resolving the Dialectic of Reward and Punishment

This study identified a practical and theoretical resolution to the dialectic between Montessori's rejection of external reward and punishment systems and the Islamic concept of motivation through the promise of Paradise and the warning of Hell. The expert practitioner explained that Montessori's principle of intrinsic motivation is highly compatible with Islamic teachings, as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) never physically punished young children. For early childhood learners, external rewards such as stickers or stars may actually diminish intrinsic motivation. Therefore, Islamic education for young children should be grounded in compassion, role modeling, and habituation.

This resolution offers a theoretical synthesis in which intrinsic motivation serves as the primary foundation for early childhood education. At the same time, the Islamic concepts of *targhib* (encouragement) and *tarhib* (warning) are understood within a framework of compassion rather than threats or material incentives. The promise of Paradise is presented as glad tidings of Allah's mercy rather than as a transactional reward. Likewise, references to Hell are conveyed in a highly limited manner; when introduced, they are presented as reminders of the consequences of one's actions rather than as frightening threats. This approach is consistent with the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ treatment of children, which was characterized by gentleness and compassion. He never struck or punished children; rather, he provided positive examples, offered gentle guidance, and nurtured good habits within a joyful and supportive environment.

Parental Involvement in Implementation

This study identified five dimensions of effective parental involvement. First, the implementation of Montessori principles at home, such as providing low shelves for the Qur'an, prayer books, and child-sized prayer mats. Second, involvement in daily worship practices, such as encouraging children to perform the *adhan* and *iqamah* when prayer times arrive. Third, intensive communication with the school through daily communication journals, monthly developmental reports, and regular parent-teacher meetings. Fourth, participation in collaborative programs such as family religious seminars, inter-family etiquette competitions, and social service activities. Fifth, support for the development of home-learning modules to be used during school holidays.

These findings reinforce the study by Sari and Utami (2022), which reported that parents were satisfied with the Islamic Montessori approach because it fostered greater independence in children and facilitated the natural internalization of Islamic values. However, the present study makes a broader contribution by identifying in detail the forms of effective parental involvement, the challenges encountered (such as differing perspectives regarding indicators of educational success), and the solutions developed to address these challenges, including intensive communication and continuous parent education.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study have significant theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the study enriches the literature on curriculum integration by demonstrating that value integration is insufficient when implemented solely at the content level. Rather, it must permeate the philosophical, environmental, methodological, and evaluative dimensions of education. The four-level organic integration model identified in this study may serve as a conceptual framework for the future development of Islamic Montessori education.

From a practical perspective, the study provides concrete guidance for Islamic early childhood education institutions seeking to implement the Islamic Montessori approach. This guidance includes strategies for designing an Islamic prepared environment through the

establishment of a *Raudhah* area; developing Islamic educational materials that meet the criteria of authenticity, sensorial engagement, and the promotion of independence; implementing experiential learning methods for teaching *tawhid*, worship practices, and moral values; conducting observation and documentation of children's spiritual development through observable behavioral indicators; and building effective partnerships with parents.

The study also offers a resolution to the long-standing debate surrounding reward and punishment systems by emphasizing that, in early childhood education, compassion, role modeling, and habituation are more fundamental than external systems of rewards and punishments.

CONCLUSION

This study developed an organic integration model between Montessori philosophy and Islamic values that extends beyond the mere addition of religious content into the curriculum. The findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of Islamic Montessori education lies in embedding Islamic values throughout all dimensions of learning, including educational philosophy, learning environments, instructional materials, teaching methods, and assessment practices. Implemented at Sunna Center Islamic Montessori, this model integrates *tawhid* into every aspect of the educational process through a prepared environment (*Raudhah*), authentic and sensorial learning materials, experiential learning activities, and the integration of worship into daily life. The study's primary theoretical contribution is the proposition that Islam should function not merely as content to be taught but as the foundational worldview that shapes the entire educational experience.

Practically, the study introduces a structured framework for observing and documenting children's spiritual development through concrete behavioral indicators and provides a resolution to the longstanding debate between Montessori's rejection of external rewards and punishments and the Islamic concepts of *targhib* and *tarhib*. The findings suggest that compassion, role modeling, and habituation constitute the most appropriate approach for early childhood religious education. More broadly, this model offers valuable guidance for Islamic early childhood education institutions seeking to nurture both independence and religiosity, demonstrating that child-centered pedagogy and faith-based education can be harmoniously integrated within a holistic educational framework.

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