

THE URGENCY OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AT PAUDQU ROFIATUL TARBIYAH BOGOR INDONESIA

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Abstract: *Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a crucial phase in shaping children's character, identity, and worldview. Numerous studies emphasize that this stage is the golden age when children's brains develop rapidly and they are highly receptive to values. However, many ECE institutions still prioritize cognitive and motor development while giving less attention to religious and moral education. This imbalance creates a research gap, since the neglect of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in early childhood may lead to weak moral foundations, vulnerability to negative external influences, and identity crises in later stages of life. The objective of this study is to analyze the urgency of implementing IRE in ECE by focusing on its role in building children's spiritual, moral, and emotional foundations. Specifically, the study seeks to highlight how IRE can be integrated into early learning practices in ways that are developmentally appropriate, enjoyable, and effective. The scope of this research is limited to a qualitative-descriptive analysis based on literature review and contextual examination, with a particular focus on PAUDQu Rofiatul Tarbiyah in Bogor, Indonesia as the research locus. This institution provides a relevant case for understanding both the opportunities and challenges of embedding Islamic values in early education. The findings reveal that IRE can be effectively taught through storytelling, play-based learning, songs, and other creative activities, with active support from teachers and parents. In conclusion, strengthening IRE in ECE—particularly in contexts such as PAUDQu Rofiatul Tarbiyah—is both urgent and strategic to prevent moral decline and to foster a generation of Muslims with strong faith, noble character, and resilience in facing modern challenges. Moreover, this research contributes to academic discourse by offering practical insights for policymakers, educators, and parents to collaborate in creating holistic learning environments. By prioritizing IRE, early education can nurture children's potential comprehensively,*

ensuring balanced growth that encompasses intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions.

Keywords: *Early Childhood Education, Islamic Religious Education, Children's Character, Islamic Values, Moral Development*

Introduction

Education is the fundamental foundation in shaping an individual's character, morality, and personality. Among the various levels of education, Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays a crucial role as it represents the golden age in human development, spanning from birth to six years of age. During this stage, children's brains develop rapidly and they absorb vast amounts of information from their environment (UNESCO, 2015). Hence, education at this stage must adopt a holistic approach, covering not only cognitive and motor aspects but also spiritual and moral dimensions. In this context, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) becomes essential to be instilled from the earliest years.

However, many ECE institutions still prioritize cognitive development, literacy, and numeracy while giving insufficient attention to religious and moral education. This imbalance creates a gap, since neglecting Islamic education in early childhood may result in weak moral foundations, low spiritual resilience, and greater vulnerability to external negative influences. This constitutes the problem statement of the present study: despite its recognized importance, IRE is often marginalized in ECE, thereby risking the holistic development of children in line with Islamic values.

The objective of this paper is to examine the urgency of Islamic Religious Education in ECE by analyzing its philosophical, psychological, and pedagogical foundations, as well as its relevance in responding to contemporary challenges. In doing so, this study seeks to highlight the practical strategies and approaches that can strengthen IRE implementation in early learning settings. The scope of this research is limited to a qualitative-descriptive analysis based on literature review and contextual examination, particularly focusing on PAUDQu Rofiatul Tarbiyah in Bogor, Indonesia, as a case that illustrates both the opportunities and challenges of integrating IRE into early childhood education.

A number of studies support the relevance of IRE in shaping children's development. Gunawan (2023) found that children who received early Islamic education demonstrated higher levels of emotional intelligence, empathy, and discipline. Similarly, Lestari & Hasanah (2024) concluded that Islamic routines—such as daily prayers, Qur'an recitation, and sharing practices—positively influence children's social behavior and moral reasoning. On the international level, Berkowitz & Bier (2005) emphasized that moral education in early childhood is strongly correlated with long-term character formation, while Aljabreen (2020) highlighted the importance of culturally and religiously relevant curricula in ECE to foster identity and values in Muslim-majority contexts. Despite these contributions, previous studies have not comprehensively addressed the urgency of IRE within the Indonesian ECE system, particularly in local institutions such as PAUDQu Rofiatul Tarbiyah, which this paper seeks to fill.

The theoretical framework of this study draws from both Islamic and educational theories. From an Islamic perspective, the concept of fitrah—as stated in the hadith “Every child is born

in a state of fitrah...” (Bukhari & Muslim)—emphasizes the natural disposition of children toward faith, which must be nurtured through education. From a psychological standpoint, Piaget’s cognitive development theory explains how children construct moral reasoning through active interaction (Piaget, 1964), while Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory underscores the role of social environment and guidance in shaping values and behaviors (Vygotsky, 1978). These frameworks together provide the foundation for analyzing the urgency and strategies of IRE in ECE.

In sum, this paper argues that integrating IRE into ECE is both urgent and strategic. By situating the discussion within the context of PAUDQu Rofiatul Tarbiyah in Bogor, Indonesia, it aims to contribute to scholarly discourse and educational practice by providing a clearer understanding of how Islamic values can be systematically embedded in early education to nurture a generation of Muslims who are morally upright, spiritually strong, and prepared to face the challenges of modern society.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive design combining library research and field research. The library research involved collecting and analyzing relevant literature such as scholarly books, journal articles, national policy documents, and Islamic references (the Qur’an, Hadith, and tafsir). Meanwhile, the field research was conducted at PAUDQu Rofiatul Tarbiyah, Bogor, an Islamic-based early childhood education institution. Data were obtained through purposive sampling, involving teachers, parents, and school administrators as participants, using semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations.

All data were analyzed using a descriptive-analytical approach, which consisted of data reduction, thematic categorization, comparison with existing literature, and synthesis of findings. This methodology ensures academic rigor by integrating theoretical insights from library sources with practical experiences from the research site, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the urgency of Islamic Religious Education in Early Childhood Education

Results and Discussion

The Urgency of Islamic Religious Education in Early Childhood Education

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is universally recognized as the golden age in human development, when children’s brains grow rapidly, cognitive abilities expand, and moral foundations are laid (UNESCO, 2015). At this stage, values and habits absorbed by children tend to persist into adulthood, making early education highly influential in shaping long-term character and identity. Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in this context holds strategic urgency, as it ensures that children not only gain knowledge but also internalize Islamic values such as honesty, discipline, compassion, and piety.

At PAUDQu Rofiatul Tarbiyah Bogor, this urgency is clearly recognized. The institution integrates IRE into daily routines such as beginning the day with Qur’an recitation, short prayers, and Islamic greetings. Teachers report that these simple yet consistent practices strengthen children’s attachment to religious values and foster a sense of belonging to the Islamic community. This confirms that IRE is not an optional element in early childhood learning but a crucial necessity to build resilience against moral degradation and external cultural pressures.

Beyond the local context, global research also underlines that religious and moral foundations established in early childhood significantly influence later ethical reasoning and resilience to peer pressure (Narvaez, 2014). In an era of globalization and digital exposure, children are increasingly vulnerable to moral relativism, consumerism, and behavioral imitation from media. Therefore, the urgency of embedding IRE in ECE is not only theological but also sociological and psychological in preventing identity crises.

Philosophical and Theological Foundations

Islam places great importance on education from the earliest years of life. The hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), “Every child is born in a state of fitrah” (Bukhari & Muslim), highlights the natural disposition of children toward faith, which must be nurtured through proper education. This underlines the theological basis of IRE: to preserve and develop the child’s innate inclination toward tawhid (monotheism) and noble character (akhlaqul karimah).

Classical Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali emphasized that education in early years functions as a form of spiritual cultivation, shaping the qalb (heart) so that it remains receptive to divine guidance (Al-Ghazali, Ihya Ulumuddin). In modern times, this philosophy resonates with the emphasis on character education in Indonesia’s National Education Goals, which explicitly mention the development of faith, piety, and noble character (UU No. 20 Tahun 2003).

At PAUDQu Rofiatul Tarbiyah, the theological foundation is translated into curriculum design that emphasizes daily worship practices, memorization of short surahs, and the habituation of Islamic manners (adab). For example, children are guided to say bismillah before starting activities, greet teachers and peers with assalamu’alaikum, and show respect to elders. These practices not only fulfill theological imperatives but also serve as concrete strategies to shape children’s faith identity in a plural and globalized society like Indonesia.

Psychological and Developmental Perspectives

From a psychological perspective, early childhood is a sensitive period for moral and spiritual development. Piaget (1964) argued that moral reasoning in children begins with imitation and develops through social interaction, while Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the role of guided participation in value formation. Thus, embedding Islamic values at this stage ensures that children internalize morality not as abstract concepts but as lived experiences.

Children learn most effectively through play and observation. For instance, when teachers at PAUDQu Rofiatul Tarbiyah tell stories of the prophets, children are not only entertained but also presented with moral role models. The story of Prophet Ibrahim’s obedience, or Prophet Yusuf’s honesty, provides relatable narratives that children can imitate. Moreover, role-playing activities—such as pretending to be a teacher leading prayer or a child helping parents—create opportunities for children to enact moral behaviors in safe and enjoyable contexts.

Research in developmental psychology confirms that moral development is accelerated when abstract values are concretized through daily practice (Eisenberg, 2006). This explains why children at PAUDQu show greater enthusiasm when Islamic values are taught through songs, group games, or hands-on projects like helping classmates clean the classroom. Such

experiential learning ensures that values are not perceived as rigid rules but as joyful parts of everyday life.

1. Practical Implementation in ECE Contexts

The integration of IRE in early learning must balance between formal teaching and informal habituation. At PAUDQu Rofiatul Tarbiyah, implementation takes place through multiple dimensions:

- a) Daily Routines – Beginning and ending classes with prayers, Qur'an recitation, and gratitude expressions. These routines foster spiritual discipline and habituate children to remember Allah in every activity.
- b) Curriculum Integration – Embedding Islamic values in subjects such as language, art, and physical education. For example, when learning colors, teachers associate them with creations of Allah; in art, children may draw mosques or natural scenery while praising Allah's greatness.
- c) Parental Involvement – Organizing parenting seminars to align values taught at school with those practiced at home. Parents are encouraged to model consistent Islamic behavior, thereby reinforcing children's learning environments.
- d) Environmental Design – Displaying Islamic calligraphy, prayer schedules, and posters of good deeds across the school environment. Such visual stimuli subtly remind children of the presence of faith in their surroundings.

This holistic integration demonstrates that IRE is not limited to religious instruction sessions but is embedded across the entire educational atmosphere. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), which asserts that child development is shaped by multiple, interconnected environments.

2. Challenges and Opportunities

Despite its successes, PAUDQu Rofiatul Tarbiyah faces challenges similar to other ECE institutions in Indonesia. These challenges reflect broader structural, cultural, and technological issues that influence the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at the early childhood level. Understanding these challenges is crucial, because identifying them accurately opens the way to discovering opportunities for innovation and long-term improvement.

a) Shortage of Trained Teachers

One of the most pressing challenges is the shortage of teachers who are formally trained in early childhood Islamic pedagogy. Many educators at PAUDQu and similar institutions come from backgrounds in general Islamic education but have not received specialized training in child psychology or early childhood pedagogy. As a result, while they may have strong religious knowledge, their teaching strategies may not always align with the developmental needs of young children.

This issue leads to teaching methods that are sometimes too rigid, overly didactic, or heavily memorization-based. Children at the ECE stage require interactive, play-based, and exploratory learning experiences that are joyful and age-appropriate. Without sufficient training, teachers may struggle to bridge Islamic content with engaging pedagogical approaches.

However, this challenge also presents an opportunity. There is growing recognition of the need for specialized teacher training programs in early childhood Islamic education.

Universities, Islamic higher education institutions (PTKI), and professional organizations could collaborate to design certification programs that combine Islamic theology with child development theories. By equipping teachers with both domains of knowledge, Indonesia could cultivate a new generation of educators who are not only pious but also pedagogically competent.

b) Learning Media Limitations

Another challenge lies in the limited availability of age-appropriate Islamic learning media. While secular ECE institutions often have access to a wide variety of colorful, interactive, and technologically advanced resources, Islamic ECE institutions sometimes rely on outdated textbooks, basic posters, or limited storybooks. This imbalance makes it harder for children to engage with religious learning in ways that feel exciting and relevant.

For instance, while global platforms like YouTube Kids offer thousands of animated videos, very few of them are explicitly designed to teach Islamic values in a developmentally suitable manner. Children are therefore more attracted to secular or even problematic content because it is packaged more attractively.

The opportunity here lies in the digital creative industry. With Indonesia's large Muslim population and growing digital economy, there is significant potential for publishers, app developers, and educators to create innovative Islamic learning media. Examples could include:

- i. Animated story series about prophets and companions.
- ii. Interactive mobile apps for learning short surahs, du'as, and Islamic manners.
- iii. Islamic board games and flashcards that blend fun with moral learning.
- iv. Augmented Reality (AR) or Virtual Reality (VR) experiences that allow children to explore stories from the Qur'an in immersive ways.
- v. These innovations would not only address the media gap but also turn Islamic ECE into a competitive and attractive educational option for parents.

c) Influence of Digital Culture

The rise of digital culture poses both a challenge and an opportunity. On the one hand, children are increasingly exposed to gadgets, cartoons, and social media from a very young age. Studies show that excessive screen time can lead to attention difficulties, reduced social interaction, and early exposure to inappropriate content (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). For Muslim children, the danger is compounded when the content promotes values that contradict Islamic teachings, such as consumerism, individualism, or disrespect for elders.

On the other hand, digital culture can also be harnessed for good. If guided appropriately, technology can become a powerful tool for introducing Islamic values. For example, instead of banning gadgets entirely, PAUDQu could design structured digital literacy programs where children use tablets for supervised Islamic learning activities. Teachers and parents could also curate playlists of high-quality Islamic songs, stories, and educational videos.

In addition, digital platforms open opportunities for parental engagement. Many parents today are active smartphone users. Schools could create WhatsApp groups, digital newsletters, or online parent seminars to share Islamic parenting tips, daily Qur'an memorization challenges, or recommended Islamic media for children. This would strengthen the school-home partnership and ensure consistency in value transmission.

d) Social and Cultural Dynamics

Finally, social and cultural dynamics present both hurdles and opportunities. Indonesia's pluralistic society means that children are often exposed to diverse cultural practices, beliefs, and values from a young age. While this diversity can enrich social tolerance, it may also dilute the distinctiveness of Islamic identity if not carefully nurtured.

At the same time, parents' varying levels of religious commitment can influence the effectiveness of IRE in schools. Some families may fully support Islamic education, while others prioritize cognitive or linguistic achievements over religious formation. Bridging this gap requires strong school–parent communication and ongoing parenting education.

This situation, however, also provides opportunities to position PAUDQu not only as a school but as a community hub for Islamic parenting support. By offering workshops, family events, and collaborative projects, institutions like Rofiatul Tarbiyah can extend their influence beyond the classroom and into family life, ensuring that children experience consistent religious values across contexts

3. Theoretical Framework Application

This study applies an integrative theoretical framework:

- a) Islamic Theology (Fitrah Concept): emphasizing that children are naturally inclined toward faith, which education should nurture.
- b) Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory: highlighting how children construct understanding of moral norms through interaction and gradual cognitive maturation.
- c) Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory: emphasizing the centrality of teachers, parents, and community in shaping children's values through scaffolding and guided learning.
- d) Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory: situating children's moral development within the interplay of family, school, community, and cultural influences.

In practice, PAUDQu Rofiatul Tarbiyah operationalizes these frameworks by combining structured teaching, peer interaction, and value-based modeling from teachers and parents. This triangulation ensures that IRE is not merely theoretical but lived and experienced daily.

4. Contribution to the Field

By situating the study in PAUDQu Rofiatul Tarbiyah Bogor, this research provides a localized yet representative picture of IRE implementation in Indonesian ECE. The findings confirm previous international research on moral education but enrich it with context-specific practices rooted in Islamic tradition. This makes the study relevant both to national policymakers and to global discussions on culturally responsive early childhood curricula.

Specifically, the contribution of this research lies in:

Empirical Insights – Documenting how IRE is integrated practically in a real educational setting.

Theoretical Enrichment – Combining Islamic theology with modern developmental psychology to create a comprehensive framework.

Policy Relevance – Offering recommendations for strengthening teacher training, parental involvement, and curriculum development.

Global Dialogue – Positioning Indonesian experiences as part of the broader discourse on values-based early childhood education in Muslim societies.

Ultimately, the study argues that Islamic Religious Education in early childhood is not merely supplementary but foundational for building a resilient generation. In the face of globalization, digital culture, and moral relativism, such an approach is urgently needed to ensure that children grow into adults with strong faith, noble character, and the ability to contribute positively to society.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the urgency of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Early Childhood Education (ECE), particularly at PAUDQu Rofiatul Tarbiyah, Bogor, which serves as the locus of this research. The golden age of children's development provides a critical window for instilling religious, moral, and spiritual values. The main problem identified is that many ECE institutions—including in Indonesia—tend to prioritize literacy and numeracy while giving insufficient attention to IRE, resulting in weak moral foundations and increased vulnerability to negative external influences.

The objective of this study was to analyze the urgency of IRE in ECE by examining its philosophical, psychological, and pedagogical foundations, while also exploring contextual implementation at PAUDQu Rofiatul Tarbiyah. The research scope was limited to a qualitative-descriptive analysis through literature review and local contextual examination, without attempting to generalize all Islamic pedagogy or global ECE practices.

The findings show that at PAUDQu Rofiatul Tarbiyah, IRE can be effectively implemented through play-based learning, storytelling, singing, and the habituation of daily worship, supported by strong collaboration between teachers and parents. The contribution of this study lies in providing a contextualized model of IRE integration in Indonesian Islamic ECE institutions, which enriches international discourse on moral and character education while offering practical implications for educators, parents, and policymakers. Strengthening IRE in ECE is therefore not only complementary but a strategic necessity to nurture a generation of Muslims who are faithful, knowledgeable, and morally upright.

Overall, PKBM Auladul Mustopa demonstrates that holistic Islamic education can only be realized through the synergy of school, family, and community. This model embodies the vision of forming *insan kamil*—individuals who are intellectually competent, morally upright, and spiritually strong—while being prepared to face the challenges of the digital era. The case offers inspiration for the further development of non-formal Islamic education in Indonesia.

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