

# Implementation of Islamic Education Curriculum in Early Childhood Education: Challenges and Solutions

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**Abstract:** *The implementation of the Islamic education curriculum in Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a strategic effort to instill character and Islamic values from an early age. The background of this study is rooted in the importance of internalizing Islamic values per the developmental stages of children. The objective of this research is to analyze the challenges in applying the Islamic education curriculum in ECE institutions and to identify strategic solutions that can be implemented. This study employs a qualitative approach using literature review and field observations in several Islamic-based ECE institutions. The results reveal that the main challenges include limited teacher competence in comprehensively understanding the Islamic curriculum, lack of contextual learning media, and parental resistance to religious-based pedagogical approaches. Proposed solutions include enhancing teacher capacity through continuous professional development, developing creative learning materials grounded in Islamic values, and engaging parents in the learning process through Islamic parenting programs. The conclusion of this study emphasizes the importance of collaboration between educational institutions, parents, and the government in successfully implementing the Islamic education curriculum in early childhood settings.*

**Keywords:** *Islamic education curriculum, early childhood education, curriculum implementation, Islamic ECE challenges, Islamic curriculum solutions*

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## 1. Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) is the first stage of formal education that significantly influences a child's future. In the early years, children's physical, cognitive, emotional, and social abilities develop rapidly, which in turn influences their future learning and development. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the quality of education in early childhood has a significant impact on children's academic and social success later in life (Heckman, 2018). As a key foundation in shaping children's character, early childhood education plays a vital role, both globally and at the local level. At the international level, awareness of the importance of early childhood education is increasing, and many countries are allocating greater resources to the sector. However, despite international agreement on its importance, there are still global challenges in accessing quality education for young children, especially in developing countries.

One of the significant challenges in the education systems of developing countries is designing a curriculum that not only meets the academic needs of children but also takes into account the existing social, cultural, and religious contexts. In this case, faith-based education, particularly Islamic education, plays a crucial role in shaping a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also virtuous, possessing moral and spiritual values. Islamic education applied at the PAUD level is expected to instill in children the values of Islamic teachings from an early age, so that they can grow into individuals who are not only intellectually sound but also possess character and ethics under religious teachings.

In Indonesia, although Islamic education has become part of the national curriculum, its implementation at the PAUD level still faces various obstacles. One of the biggest challenges is the lack of in-depth understanding of how to integrate Islamic education into teaching-learning activities that support the psychological development of early childhood. Research by Rahmawati & Nurhayati (2019) shows that many educators in PAUD have difficulties in harmonizing the Islamic education curriculum with methodologies suitable for early childhood. Educators often face obstacles in adapting learning methods that incorporate religious values, interactive learning approaches, and child development principles. This usually results in the applied Islamic education curriculum appearing rigid and failing to capture children's interest in learning.

Furthermore, Ahmad and Hidayat (2021) examined the implementation of the Islamic education curriculum in PAUD in several regions of Indonesia. They found that, although efforts are being made to develop an Islamic-based curriculum, it often fails to accommodate the needs and potential of children. They also revealed that the Islamic education curriculum usually lacks sufficient support from the school and the surrounding community. Educators feel hampered by limitations in terms of training and facilities. Zainal (2022) also found that although many Islamic education institutions claim to have implemented a faith-based curriculum, in reality, the curriculum often relies solely on memorizing religious materials without any effort to integrate Islamic values into children's daily lives.

In addition, another challenge often faced by Islamic-based ECD education is the lack of support from parents and communities in supporting the implementation of a faith-based curriculum. Many parents lack an understanding of the importance of early religious education and tend to focus more on the child's academic achievement, overlooking the moral and spiritual aspects that are crucial to the child's character development. This leads to an imbalance between the development of academic skills and the formation of children's character, which in turn impacts the quality of education children receive.

This research is of great urgency, given the challenges mentioned above. With the increasing awareness of the importance of early childhood education, it is vital to create a curriculum that meets the academic needs of children while also developing their spiritual, moral, and character aspects from an early age. Therefore, this study will examine the challenges faced by early childhood educators in implementing the Islamic education curriculum and seek practical solutions to address these challenges. This research will also discuss how the Islamic education curriculum can be more effectively tailored to the needs of children in various regions of Indonesia, given the diverse cultures and social backgrounds that exist.

The novelty of this research lies in its more contextual and adaptive approach to local conditions. Previous research has focused more on the implementation of the Islamic education curriculum in theory, without examining the challenges faced by educators in adapting the curriculum to the conditions of early childhood. This research aims to provide a new understanding of how early childhood educators in Indonesia overcome barriers and how the Islamic education curriculum can be implemented more effectively, both in theory and practice.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the challenges faced by ECD educators in implementing the Islamic education curriculum and to find appropriate solutions to overcome these problems. The study aims to provide practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and the community in developing a better curriculum that can improve the quality of education in Islamic-based ECD centers in Indonesia.

The benefits of this research are significant for ECD educators, policymakers, and the broader community. For educators, this research will provide deeper insights into practical ways to integrate Islamic education into the ECD curriculum in a manner that is more engaging and relevant for children. For policymakers, this research can inform the formulation of educational policies that are more responsive to the needs of faith-based education in early childhood. For the community, this research will provide a better understanding of the importance of character and religious education for children's early development, thereby increasing parental and community support for Islamic-based education.

The implication of this research is to make a significant contribution to improving the quality of education in Islamic-based ECD institutions. It is hoped that, with the solutions found in this research, ECD institutions can enhance the teaching of Islamic education in a manner that is more contextual, effective, and aligned with the psychological development of children. This research is also expected to contribute to the development of more inclusive and faith-based education policies at the ECD level, which will have a positive impact on the quality of early childhood education in Indonesia.

## 2. Method

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in-depth the challenges faced in implementing the Islamic education curriculum in Early Childhood Education (ECED) and the solutions applied to overcome these challenges. The qualitative approach was chosen because it provides a more in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the perspectives of educators, parents, and other related parties towards the implementation of this curriculum in different contexts. This research aims to understand the phenomena that occur in the field and identify factors that influence the implementation of the Islamic education curriculum in PAUD.

The research design is a case study, where the main focus of the research is on the implementation of the Islamic education curriculum in several Islamic-based ECD institutions in Indonesia. The case study design was chosen because it allows researchers to investigate in depth the practices in different ECD institutions, both in urban and rural areas. This provides greater insight into the challenges faced in implementing the Islamic education curriculum, as well as the solutions applied to overcome them. This case study enables researchers to capture the differences in implementing the Islamic education curriculum across varied local contexts.

The research was conducted in several Islamic-based ECD institutions spread across urban and rural areas in Indonesia. The selection of this location aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced in implementing the Islamic education curriculum across various social and geographical contexts. The subjects of this study included ECD educators, heads of educational institutions, parents, and ECD students themselves. This approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of each party's experiences and perspectives on the Islamic education curriculum at the ECD level.

The research instruments used in this study were in depth interviews, participatory observation, and open ended questionnaires. In depth interviews were conducted with early childhood educators, heads of educational institutions, and parents to explore their views on the challenges faced in implementing the Islamic education curriculum and the solutions they proposed. These interviews provided respondents with an opportunity to speak openly about their experiences in the curriculum implementation process within their respective institutions. Participatory observation was conducted to see firsthand how the Islamic education curriculum is implemented in classroom learning activities. These observations enabled researchers to monitor interactions between educators and students, as well as the way Islamic values are taught through daily activities at PAUD institutions. Open-ended questionnaires were also distributed to parents and educators to obtain

additional data on their views on the effectiveness of the Islamic education curriculum implemented in PAUD.

The data collection technique used in this study was data triangulation, which involved a combination of in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and open ended questionnaires to ensure the validity and reliability of the data obtained. The data collection procedure began with interviews conducted among educators, heads of educational institutions, and parents of students. These interviews are conducted using a pre-designed interview guideline, and each interview will be recorded and then transcribed. In addition, researchers will also conduct participatory observations in Islamic-based ECD classrooms, recording the learning process and interactions that occur between educators and children. An open-ended questionnaire will be distributed to parents and educators to gather additional information regarding their views on the implementation of the Islamic education curriculum in PAUD.

Data collected from interviews, observations, and questionnaires will be analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. Thematic analysis is used to identify patterns and key themes that emerge from the collected data. Data from interviews and observations will be coded to identify themes related to the challenges encountered in implementing the Islamic education curriculum and the solutions employed to address them. After the coding process, researchers will compile a report based on the themes found, which will be used to draw conclusions and provide recommendations related to the development of the Islamic education curriculum in PAUD.

By employing a qualitative approach and case study design, this research aims to provide an in depth description of the challenges faced by ECD educators in implementing the Islamic education curriculum, as well as the solutions that can be applied to enhance the quality of education in Islamic based ECD institutions in Indonesia.

### **3. Result & Discussion**

This study involved three groups of respondents, comprising ECD educators, heads of educational institutions, and parents. The sample used in this study came from four Islamic-based ECD institutions located in two different areas, urban and rural. The institutions were selected based on their diversity in implementing the Islamic education curriculum. A total of 15 ECD educators, 4 heads of institutions, and 50 parents participated in the study.

ECD educators involved in this study have varied educational backgrounds. Most educators hold a Bachelor of Education degree and have between 2 and 10 years of teaching experience. They teach in Islamic based ECD institutions with a

focus on teaching Islamic religious values, as well as child character development. On average, they face challenges in balancing academic and religious teaching.

The heads of the educational institutions involved were individuals with more than five years of experience in managing PAUD institutions. Most of the heads have a background in education management and have a good understanding of the importance of integrating religious education in the curriculum.

The 50 parents who participated in this study come from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Most of them want an education that emphasizes the development of children's moral character, in addition to academics, with the hope that their children will grow up to be well-rounded individuals under the guidance of religious teachings.

Through in-depth interviews with heads of educational institutions, it was found that the majority of Islamic ECD institutions face significant challenges in terms of resource availability and educator training. Most heads of institutions revealed that although the Islamic education curriculum has been implemented, its implementation is still hampered by the lack of supportive learning facilities and equipment.

Additionally, the institution's head revealed that there is a mismatch between the existing curriculum and educators' ability to implement faith based materials. Most educators revealed that they lacked adequate training on teaching methods for an Islamic education curriculum that is developmentally appropriate for young children. The memorization-based nature of the Islamic education curriculum was also a significant complaint. The head of the institution suggested that the curriculum should be more flexible and applicable, given the importance of a more holistic approach to developing children's character.

A questionnaire distributed to licensed early childhood educators revealed that most educators felt they were not fully prepared to implement an age appropriate Islamic education curriculum for their children. Many educators reported that they felt they lacked relevant training on integrating Islamic values into early childhood learning activities.

Most educators argued that they focus more on teaching academics and basic skills such as reading, writing, and counting, and less on integrating religious values in the learning. Data from the questionnaire also showed that although educators are highly motivated to teach religious values, they find it challenging to adapt the Islamic education curriculum to the developmental characteristics of early childhood. The questionnaire results illustrate the significant gap between the need for a faith-based curriculum and educators' capacity to implement it effectively.

Observations conducted in Islamic based ECD classrooms showed that there are efforts to integrate religious values into teaching and learning activities.

However, the practices observed were still minimal. Most interactions between educators and students were more focused on academic teaching, such as learning to read and count. The teaching of Islamic values is primarily accomplished through the memorization of short prayers and some religious stories recited at specific times.

Observations also reveal that the classroom learning process is more oriented towards theoretical teaching, without providing sufficient opportunities for children to experience or internalize Islamic values in their daily lives. For example, learning activities rely more on the lecture method rather than hands on practice, which allows children to understand and apply the values. This became one of the main findings in this study, showing that although Islamic education has been implemented, its implementation is still far from expectations to shape children's character based on Islamic teachings.

Here are some visualizations that illustrate the results of research on challenges in implementing the Islamic education curriculum in PAUD.

**Table 1.** Educators' Readiness Level in Teaching the Islamic Education Curriculum

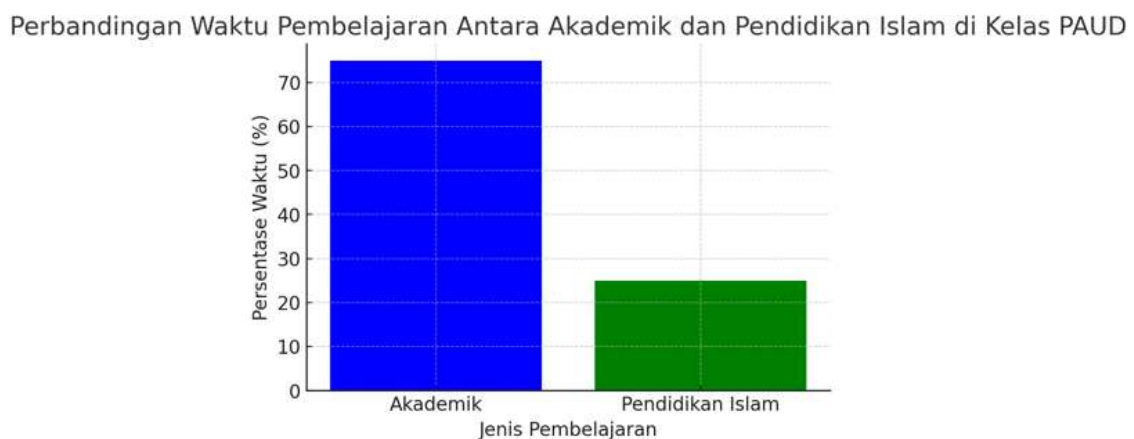
Category	Percentage (%)
Educators are ready to teach Islamic values	45%
Educators need additional training	55%

**Figure 1.** Illustration of Teaching Religious Values in ECD Learning Activities.



*Image:* This picture depicts a situation where the educator teaches short prayers to children, but with little practical interaction that allows the child to internalize the religious value in daily life.

**Figure 2.** Comparison of Learning Time Between Academic and Islamic Education in Early Childhood Classes



This figure illustrates the division of time educators spend teaching academic materials compared to teaching Islamic education in the ECD classroom. It can be observed that more time is devoted to educational materials, with less time allocated to teaching religious values.

Based on the findings obtained from interviews, questionnaires, and observations, it can be concluded that despite efforts to implement an Islamic education curriculum in PAUD, numerous challenges remain. The existing curriculum often fails to meet the developmental needs of early childhood fully, and educators usually feel ill-prepared to teach religious values effectively. Therefore, improvements are needed in terms of educator training, the development of a more flexible curriculum, and the adoption of more relevant teaching methods to integrate religious values into daily learning activities.

### Discussion Results

The results of in depth interviews conducted with heads of educational institutions, PAUD educators, and parents of students provide valuable insights into the challenges and solutions for implementing the Islamic education curriculum in PAUD. From interviews with heads of educational institutions, it was found that although the Islamic education curriculum has been implemented in most Islamic-based PAUD institutions, its implementation is far from optimal. Most heads of institutions reported that several obstacles hinder the implementation of this

curriculum, including a lack of training for educators, time constraints, and limited resources.

Many heads of institutions stated that PAUD educators need further training to be able to teach religious material in an age appropriate manner. For example, some heads of institutions have revealed that educators often struggle to balance academic learning and spiritual values in the curriculum. They tend to focus more on teaching basic academic skills, such as reading and writing, without giving adequate attention to character building and religious teaching aspects.

Meanwhile, interviews with PAUD educators showed that although they strongly support the teaching of religious values, they feel less confident in teaching the Islamic education curriculum effectively. Most educators felt that they lacked relevant training on religious teaching methods that are appropriate to the psychological development of young children. Some educators stated that they felt more comfortable teaching more structured and measurable academic materials than more flexible and less structured religious materials.

From interviews with parents, it was found that most parents are very supportive of implementing the Islamic education curriculum in PAUD. They want their children not only to be academically brilliant but also to possess good character, as per Islamic teachings. However, some parents also feel that the time allocated for teaching religious values is still insufficient, given the importance of moral and spiritual education from an early age.

The questionnaire distributed to licensed early childhood educators yielded some significant findings. Most educators felt that they were not fully prepared to teach an Islamic education curriculum based on religious values. As many as 60% of educators reported feeling that they lacked adequate training in teaching religious materials effectively to young children. This highlights the urgent need to enhance training and debriefing for educators, enabling them to prepare better to implement the Islamic education curriculum using effective methods.

In addition, the questionnaire data also shows that educators feel that the existing curriculum is still too focused on memorization and does not provide enough space for children to apply religious values in their daily lives. As many as 55% of educators believed that the Islamic education curriculum emphasizes memorizing prayers and short verses rather than teaching moral and character values that can be applied in children's social interactions.

However, some educators also revealed that, although the Islamic education curriculum is sometimes less practical, they still strive to incorporate religious values into daily classroom activities. They achieve this by combining stories of prophets or moral tales that teach goodness, although not all of these stories are included in the formal curriculum.

Observations made in several Islamic-based ECD classes show that teaching religious values is often done separately from academic learning. Spiritual teaching is usually given in the form of short lectures on prayers or stories of prophets, but it is lacking in terms of concrete practices that involve children directly. For example, while there is teaching on the importance of sharing, there are no concrete activities that involve children in social action or sharing with their friends.

In addition, observations show that teaching religious values is mostly done with a verbal approach, through stories or memorization, and does not involve enough activities that allow children to experience and apply these values in their daily lives. Religious teaching is top down and does not encourage active participation from children, which should be the focus of early childhood education.

In this case, religious teaching can be more effective if done with an experiential approach, where children not only listen to stories or prayers, but are also invited to do activities that reflect these values, such as sharing with friends, helping the teacher, or praying together in a fun way.

Previous research by Rahmawati & Nurhayati (2019) on the implementation of the Islamic education curriculum in PAUD also found similar challenges in terms of lack of training for educators and limited resources. This research supports our finding that although the Islamic education curriculum is already implemented in many Islamic-based ECD institutions, its implementation still faces many obstacles that need to be overcome.

Ahmad & Hidayat's (2021) research also notes that the main challenge in implementing the Islamic education curriculum in PAUD is the limited time available for religious teaching, which is more often neglected compared to academic teaching. This is in line with our findings, where academic teaching gets more time allocation than religious teaching, although both are equally important.

Based on the above findings, this study has some important practical implications for the development of education in Islamic-based PAUD. One of the main implications is the need for increased training for ECD educators, especially in teaching religious values with methods that are appropriate to the psychological development of early childhood. This training needs to include more applicable teaching strategies, where children are not only taught prayers and memorization, but also given the opportunity to apply religious values in their daily lives through various fun and meaningful activities.

In addition, there is a need to develop a more flexible and contextualized Islamic education curriculum that addresses children's academic and moral needs in a balanced way. This curriculum should include character-based activities, such as sharing, mutual respect and praying together, which can help children internalize Islamic values in a more effective way.

This study has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the sample was limited to specific ECD institutions in urban and rural areas of Indonesia, so the results cannot be generalized to all Islamic-based ECD institutions in Indonesia. Secondly, observations were made in only a few ECD classrooms, so the findings may not reflect practices in all Islamic-based ECD institutions.

In addition, the limited time for data collection was also a challenge in obtaining a more comprehensive picture of the implementation of the Islamic education curriculum in PAUD. The limited time to conduct interviews and observations may have affected the depth of analysis that could be conducted.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Based on the results of research conducted in several Islamic-based ECD institutions, it can be concluded that although an Islamic education curriculum has been implemented, its implementation still faces a number of significant challenges. The main challenges found in this study are the lack of training for educators, the limited time allocated for religious instruction, and the limited resources available in ECD institutions. The more structured approach and focus on academic teaching means that religious education is often neglected or only taught through memorizing prayers and religious stories without providing enough opportunities for children to internalize these values in their daily lives.

Despite these challenges, the study also found that there are efforts from educators to integrate Islamic values in daily classroom activities, although they are still limited to verbal teaching and do not involve children directly in practice-based activities. Therefore, it is important to develop a more flexible and applicable Islamic education curriculum that allows children not only to understand religious teachings through memorization but also to apply these values in real actions involving social interactions and daily activities.

The research also suggests that training of ECD educators at local and national levels should focus more on teaching a faith-based curriculum that is appropriate to the psychological development of young children. Teaching approaches involving experiential methods need to be introduced, so that children can more easily understand and internalize religious values in a way that is fun and relevant to their lives.

Overall, although the implementation of the Islamic education curriculum in Islamic-based PAUD has been done, greater efforts are still needed to balance academic and religious education. This will be an important step towards preparing a generation that is not only academically intelligent, but also has good character and morals, in accordance with Islamic teachings.

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