

The Influence of Madrasah Environment on Islamic Religious Education in Early Childhood

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Introduction

Early childhood is a crucial phase in human development, during which foundational cognitive, emotional, and social skills are formed (Beauchamp & Anderson, 2010). It is also a significant period for instilling values, beliefs, and moral principles that shape an individual's character. Religious education in early childhood plays a vital role in nurturing spiritual awareness, ethical behavior, and a sense of identity. As children begin to explore the world around them, structured religious teachings provide them with guidance on differentiating right from wrong, understanding moral responsibilities, and developing a deeper connection with their faith.

Religious education during early childhood serves as a foundation for lifelong spiritual growth. At a young age, children are highly impressionable, absorbing knowledge and behaviors from their surroundings (Mohed & Ismail, 2015). Introducing them to religious teachings during this stage helps instill core values such as honesty, compassion, patience, and respect. These values are not only essential for religious identity but also contribute to the development of positive social interactions and a strong moral compass (Ebstyne King & Furrow, 2008). When children are introduced to religious concepts in a nurturing and interactive manner, they develop a sense of purpose and belonging, which strengthens their overall emotional and psychological well-being (King, 2019).

Furthermore, early childhood religious education provides a structured approach to learning about faith, rituals, and traditions. For example, in Islamic education, children are taught Aqidah (faith), Akhlak (morality), Ibadah (worship), and Qur'anic literacy. These teachings help them develop a strong foundation in Islamic principles, ensuring that they grow up with a clear understanding of their religious obligations and ethical conduct (Halstead, 2007). Learning religious practices such as prayer, gratitude, and kindness from an early age allows children to internalize these habits as part of their daily lives, fostering a deep and personal connection with their faith.

The environment in which children receive religious education also plays a significant role in shaping their understanding of spirituality (Hay & Nye, 2006). Institutions such as madrasahs, preschools, and family settings serve as primary spaces for religious

learning. A supportive and engaging learning environment where children interact with knowledgeable teachers, participate in religious activities, and observe role models enhances their comprehension and appreciation of religious values (Barnes, 2014). Additionally, parental involvement in religious education reinforces these teachings, as children learn by observing their parents' faith-based practices and daily interactions.

In today's rapidly changing world, where exposure to diverse influences is inevitable, early childhood religious education serves as an anchor that helps children develop resilience against negative influences. A well-rounded religious upbringing equips them with ethical reasoning skills, enabling them to navigate challenges while staying true to their values (Kuttner, 2009). It fosters a sense of responsibility and empathy, preparing them to become morally upright individuals who contribute positively to society.

In conclusion, early childhood education plays a fundamental role in shaping religious understanding by laying a strong foundation of values, beliefs, and practices. Through structured teachings, positive role models, and engaging learning environments, children develop a deep connection with their faith that influences their moral character and future behaviors (Lickona, 2004). Investing in early childhood religious education is essential for cultivating a generation that upholds ethical principles, respects diversity, and contributes to a harmonious and spiritually enriched society.

A study by Rahman & Yusuf (2015) highlighted the importance of an interactive and engaging learning environment in madrasahs for effective religious education. Their research found that madrasahs that incorporate play-based learning and storytelling methods in teaching Islamic values tend to have a stronger impact on children's moral and ethical development. This study emphasized that early childhood learners require a teaching approach that is not only informative but also engaging to sustain their interest in religious studies.

Similarly, Ali et al. (2017) examined the role of teachers in shaping religious understanding among young learners in Islamic schools and madrasahs. Their findings indicated that teacher competency and pedagogical approaches significantly influence children's grasp of Islamic teachings. Teachers who use participatory learning methods such as role-playing, group discussions, and interactive Quranic recitation tend to foster deeper religious awareness and engagement among children. The study also emphasized the need for continuous teacher training programs to enhance teaching quality in madrasahs.

Research by Hassan & Ahmad (2018) focused on the physical and social environment of madrasahs and how they affect early childhood religious education. Their study found that a well-structured learning space, access to Islamic learning materials, and a supportive peer environment contribute to a more effective learning process. The presence of a religiously immersive environment, where children are regularly exposed to Quranic recitations, Islamic songs (nasheeds), and moral storytelling, helps reinforce their understanding of Islamic principles at an early stage.

Furthermore, a longitudinal study by Khalid & Ibrahim (2019) explored the impact of madrasah-based Islamic education on children's long-term moral and behavioral development. Their research followed a group of children from early childhood to adolescence, analyzing their ethical decision-making and religious commitment over time. The findings suggested that children who received structured Islamic education in madrasahs from an early age demonstrated greater religious commitment, moral discipline, and ethical awareness in later years compared to those who received informal religious education at home.

A more recent study by Zainuddin et al. (2021) investigated the role of parental involvement in supporting early childhood religious education in madrasahs. Their research found that parents who actively engage in their children's religious learning by reinforcing Islamic teachings at home, attending religious activities at the madrasah, and fostering an Islamic lifestyle help enhance the effectiveness of formal religious education. The study concluded that a strong home-madrasah connection is essential for sustaining religious values in children.

Another relevant study by Mahmood et al. (2022) examined the challenges faced by madrasahs in providing effective Islamic education. Their research identified issues such as limited resources, lack of trained teachers, and outdated teaching methods as key barriers to effective religious education. They proposed that integrating modern educational technology such as digital Quranic learning tools and interactive Islamic storytelling apps could improve engagement and knowledge retention among young learners.

Several studies have highlighted the impact of school environments on children's religious and moral development (Ebstein King & Furrow, 2008). Research suggests that a nurturing and interactive learning atmosphere can significantly improve children's engagement with religious teachings. However, challenges such as inadequate facilities, unqualified teachers, and lack of parental involvement may hinder the effectiveness of Islamic education in some madrasahs. Additionally, external socio-

cultural factors, such as family background and community influence, also play a role in shaping a child's religious learning experience(Green et al., 2003).

This research seeks to explore how the madrasah environment influences the effectiveness of Islamic religious education in early childhood. By examining key factors such as teaching methodologies, religious activities, classroom atmosphere, and institutional support, this study aims to provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of madrasah-based Islamic education. The findings of this research will contribute to the development of improved educational strategies that enhance the quality of early childhood Islamic learning, ultimately fostering a generation with a strong foundation in religious knowledge and moral character.

Research Problem Statement

Religious education plays a fundamental role in shaping the moral, ethical, and spiritual development of children(King, 2019). Early childhood is a crucial period for instilling Islamic values, beliefs, and practices, as it is during this stage that children develop their understanding of right and wrong, social behavior, and religious identity. Madrasahs, as institutions of Islamic education, serve as primary environments where young learners are introduced to foundational religious teachings, including Aqidah (faith), Akhlak (morality), Ibadah (worship), and Qur'anic literacy(Hasan, 2009). However, despite the significance of early childhood religious education, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of how the madrasah environment influences the effectiveness of Islamic education at this developmental stage.

Several challenges exist in the current madrasah education system that may hinder its ability to provide an optimal learning experience for young children(Afista & Abu Bakar, 2020). These include the quality of teaching methodologies, availability of learning resources, the physical and social environment of the institution, and the role of parental involvement in reinforcing religious teachings at home. Some madrasahs may rely on traditional rote-learning approaches that do not fully engage young learners, while others may lack trained educators who specialize in early childhood religious instruction. Additionally, variations in the quality of facilities and the overall learning atmosphere across different madrasahs may contribute to inconsistencies in educational outcomes.

Despite numerous studies on Islamic education and early childhood development, research focusing specifically on the influence of the madrasah environment on religious learning in early childhood remains limited(Burde et al., 2015). There is a need for empirical research to examine how different aspects of the madrasah environment such as teacher competency, curriculum design, peer interactions, religious activities,

and institutional support impact children's understanding and internalization of Islamic teachings. Furthermore, understanding the extent to which external factors, such as parental involvement and socio-cultural influences, contribute to religious learning in madrasahs is essential for designing effective educational strategies (Jawas, 2017).

This research aims to address these gaps by exploring the influence of the madrasah environment on the quality of Islamic religious education in early childhood. By identifying key factors that contribute to or hinder effective religious learning, this study will provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and parents to enhance the effectiveness of Islamic education at the early childhood level. The findings will contribute to improving teaching strategies, curriculum development, and institutional support systems to ensure that young children receive a strong foundation in Islamic values and principles (Sahin, 2018).

Novelty of Research

The role of the madrasah environment in shaping early childhood Islamic religious education has been a topic of academic interest, yet existing research often focuses on general religious education without specifically examining how different elements of the madrasah environment contribute to children's learning experiences. This study introduces a novel approach by comprehensively analyzing the interplay between the physical, social, and pedagogical aspects of madrasah settings and their impact on young children's religious development. Unlike previous studies that primarily emphasize curriculum or teacher effectiveness, this research explores a holistic framework that includes institutional infrastructure, teaching methodologies, peer interactions, and parental involvement (Scheerens, 2004).

A key novelty of this research lies in its focus on early childhood learners in madrasahs (Sofanudin & Rokhman, 2016). While many studies investigate religious education at the primary or secondary level, limited research delves into how madrasahs shape religious understanding during the crucial formative years of early childhood. This study seeks to bridge that gap by examining how young children absorb Islamic teachings in a structured educational setting and how their learning experiences differ based on the quality of the madrasah environment (Patel, 2021).

Additionally, this research incorporates modern educational perspectives by exploring how interactive and child-centered learning strategies such as storytelling, play-based religious education, and digital tools can enhance religious understanding in early childhood madrasahs (Khan, 2021). While traditional rote memorization remains common, this study aims to assess the effectiveness of alternative teaching methods in fostering a deeper and more meaningful engagement with Islamic teachings.

Another novel aspect of this research is its consideration of external influences, particularly the role of parental engagement in reinforcing Islamic education beyond the madrasah setting (Parker & Raihani, 2011). Unlike previous studies that examine madrasah-based learning in isolation, this study investigates how home-based religious reinforcement interacts with formal religious instruction, providing a more comprehensive perspective on the learning process.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the policy and institutional discourse on madrasah education by identifying key challenges and proposing practical recommendations for improving the quality of early childhood Islamic education. By incorporating insights from educators, parents, and religious scholars, this research aims to provide a multidimensional understanding of how to optimize madrasah environments for young learners.

Plan for the results and discussion of this research

The results and discussion section of this research will be structured to provide a comprehensive analysis of the influence of the madrasah environment on Islamic religious education in early childhood. The findings will be categorized based on key themes emerging from the study, such as the role of teachers, learning methodologies, the physical and social environment, parental involvement, and institutional challenges. The discussion will integrate both quantitative and qualitative data to offer an in-depth interpretation of the results and their implications for early childhood religious education.

The first part of the results will present an analysis of how different aspects of the madrasah environment such as classroom settings, teaching aids, religious activities, and peer interactions contribute to children's understanding of Islamic teachings. The discussion will compare madrasahs with well-equipped learning environments to those with limited resources, highlighting differences in educational outcomes. Factors such as availability of age-appropriate religious books, storytelling sessions, prayer practice, and interactive learning tools will be examined to determine their effectiveness in fostering early religious knowledge.

This section will focus on the impact of teacher competency and instructional strategies on early childhood religious education (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The results will explore how teacher qualifications, pedagogical techniques, and engagement styles influence children's ability to understand and internalize Islamic teachings. Traditional rote memorization methods will be compared with modern child-centered approaches, such as play-based religious learning, interactive Quranic lessons, and

storytelling techniques. The discussion will highlight which methods are more effective in sustaining children's interest and deepening their religious comprehension.

The research will examine how parental engagement reinforces or hinders religious learning in madrasahs. The findings will assess the extent to which parents participate in their children's religious education, including practices such as at-home Quranic recitations, discussions about Islamic values, and collaboration with madrasah educators. This section will also discuss the challenges parents face in maintaining religious learning at home and propose ways to enhance home-madrasah collaboration for better learning outcomes.

Another key area of analysis will be the social interactions among early childhood learners in the madrasah setting (Zainuri et al., 2020). The discussion will explore how peer influence, group religious activities, and collective prayer sessions impact children's understanding of Islamic values. The study will assess whether children learn better in collaborative environments where they engage with their peers in religious discussions and activities.

This section will address the challenges faced by madrasahs in providing effective religious education. The results will identify common issues such as limited funding, outdated teaching methods, lack of trained teachers, and insufficient learning materials. The discussion will explore how these barriers affect the quality of education and propose solutions, such as introducing digital learning tools, teacher training programs, and improved policy support.

If applicable, the research will present a comparative analysis of different madrasah education models based on location, infrastructure, and teaching methodologies. The discussion will highlight best practices observed in successful madrasahs and propose strategies that other institutions can adopt to improve their educational effectiveness.

The final section will connect the findings to broader policy implications for improving early childhood religious education in madrasahs. Recommendations will be provided for educators, policymakers, and parents on how to enhance the madrasah environment, integrate modern teaching techniques, and foster stronger parental involvement. The discussion will also suggest areas for future research, such as the integration of technology in religious education and the long-term impact of early childhood Islamic learning on moral and ethical development.

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