

STRENGTHENING THE ISLAMIC EDUCATION FOR PRESCHOOLER-STUDENTS IN JEPARA, INDONESIA

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Abstract: This research describes strengthening Islamic education for six pre-schoolers in Jepara district. This study is based on field research, the most comprehensive data set obtained from the research field. The approach is qualitative. The data collection technique in this research is data collection from the area where reality will be investigated. Interview, observation, and documentation are the steps. The informant consisted of principals and teachers; there were six principals and six teachers. The data analysis technique in this research is by statements by Miles and Huberman, which are data reduction, data display, and data verification. The research results are as follows: First, the base and purpose of Islamic education as a vital reference are found in the Qur'an, as in QS. Luqman: 13–19. While the goals of Islamic education are stated in QS. Ali Imran: 102. Second, the curriculum that becomes the foundation of strengthening Islamic education for early childhood education students is reflected in core competencies and essential competencies like religious, social, science, and skill. Third, playing while learning is an effective method for strengthening Islamic education for early childhood education students. This includes storytelling, singing, modelling, habituating, and studying tours. Fourth, assessment or evaluation is done through observation, anecdote, dialogue, homework, creation, and portfolio.

Keywords: Islamic Education, Early Childhood Education, Students

A. Introduction

Education is the most precious thing to humans. It can teach children who know nothing to be clever and intelligent. In Islam, education is a fundamental thing. The importance of knowledge in Islam is reflected in Qur'an Surah Al-Alaq verses 1–5. The surah begins with reading instructions for humans (Zarif, 2020). According to Natsir in Noor, the progress or decline of a nation is determined by society's acceptance of education and how it is used in development (Noor, 2021).

Education cannot be separated from children because children are both the subject and the object of education. Children are born with potential, which becomes the parents' and educators' responsibility to understand and develop (Janna, 2013). For example, the potential for thinking and perceiving in an individual will function after the body gets what it needs from the potential roles of nutrition, growth, and others (Akib & Muhsin, 2019).

Children are precious assets to their families, society, and nation. Children are the future generation of a nation, and if we want to see a developed country, then children's education is crucial. So, learning for children is a critical thing to be done both at home and school (Huliyah, 2016).

To strengthen the function and purpose of education, Islamic education was required to fortify and guide students and enable them to perform better as citizens with better attitudes and personalities. Islamic education is indeed needed for children because, nowadays, everything can be accessed openly, and it will be dangerous for children if they know nothing about Islamic teaching. Besides, children need to know about the religion they follow, including who their God is, how to worship, behave based on their faith, and so on.

In essence, Islamic education learning attempts and is capable of building akhlaq and embedding honesty toward students' religious education and always tries to make, dig, perform, and guide to noble behaviour, or akhlaq, so that Islamic education can function as noble character education of students. Education can emerge from a person through this process and reveal their attitude, values, and morals, such as honesty in how they talk or behave toward themselves, other people,

and Allah SWT. Then, this attitude will appear and emerge in real action in daily life (Ani Jailani, Chaerul Rochman, 2019).

Children, as individuals and social creatures, have the right to education based on their needs and skills. Children are educated with the expectation that they will grow up and develop intelligently by their potential so that the next generation will be of a certain calibre. Children's brains develop at 80% of the adult brain's development (Atabik & Ahmad, 2015). The essential part of this period, childhood, is often called the "golden age." Childhood is the most appropriate time to shape children's characteristics. If, during this period, the parts of every child can be shaped, then when they become adults, they will be the generation with an overwhelming character. This makes children's education a robust foundation for the future personality and nature of the nation. Better quality means the building foundation will be stronger in the future. A better quality of children's education means a stronger foundation for children's intelligence. On the contrary, poor education results in a more impoverished nation's personality and character in the future (Atabik & Ahmad, 2015).

Islamic education is a system that allows someone (a student) to steer their life according to Islamic ideology. The effort of a Muslim adult who has faith and consciously directs and guides the student's growth and nature development (primary skill) through Islamic teaching to the maximum point of his growth and development is the truth of Islamic education. Theoretically, education can be defined as "feeding" the soul of students, so they get spiritual satisfaction; it is also often described as growing essential human competencies. If it wants to be directed to produce Islamic teaching, it has to be processed using the system of Islamic education, either through the institution or curriculum (Yulianti & Siregar, 2016).

To direct and guide the development of nature in students, an essential foundation is required, which is the Qur'an; as Ibnu Khaldun proposed that in children's education, the Qur'an is the foundation of education, which forms the main character of humans. Educating children will give a strong impression and become a foundation for the next stage of development. The first fundamental foundation in the

heart is the formation of human character. The importance of Qur'an education in early childhood is spreading religion, and through learning Qur'an and Hadith, one can strengthen faith and *akidah* in children (Masykur, 2021).

There is no doubt that the Qur'an is Allah's word, which becomes Muslims' guidance of life (a way of life). It contains basic teachings (fundamental principles) in every aspect of human life that, when developed, can be presented functionally, solving human problems based on each nation's argument. One of the problems that are always discussed in the community is education. Education is a human need in all forms, and humans will always look for models or conditions of education that can prepare them for their future because students are the generation that will replace adults (Sukatin, 2020).

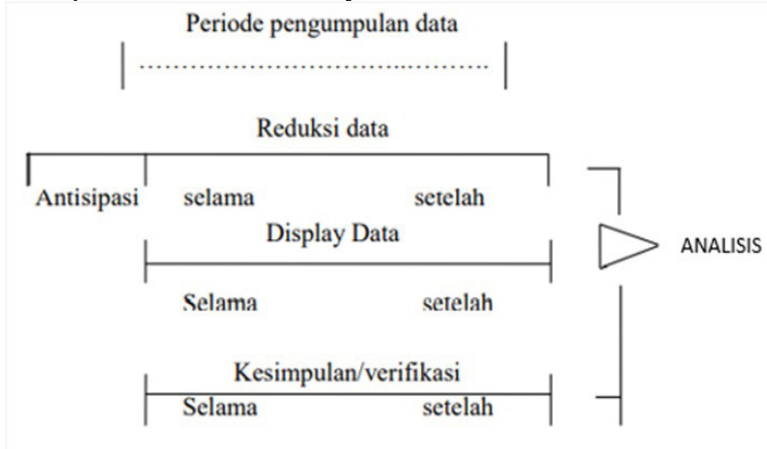
Based on the explanation above, the researcher wants to provide some recommendations on strengthening Islamic education for children. According to Al-Abrasyi, one material of Islamic education for preschoolers in the Jepara district is the induction of Islamic teaching. The purposes of Islamic education are as follows: forming noble character, preparing for life in the world and afterlife, preparing to look for sustenance and take care of its benefits, growing a scientific spirit among students, and preparing skilled professionals. Among the purposes, the one most implemented or taught in preschool (PAUD) is forming noble character since it is fundamental. Children need to be taught how to behave early to have good manners when they are adults.

B. Method

This research used field research, and the premier data are those from the research field. The researcher uses a qualitative approach to understand and interpret the meaning of phenomena, interactions, and human behaviour in specific situations. The research was done in a preschool in the Jepara district and related to strengthening Islamic education for children. The schools were picked randomly among those in three communities in Jepara, which were Tahunan, Kalinyamatan, and Kedung. Then, the researcher chose two schools from each district. The data collection technique in this

research is data from the field where reality will be investigated. Interview, observation, and documentation are the steps.

The interview used was a free interview, which means that the writer didn't use any systematic scripts. In this context, the discussion was only related to the outline of the problem, which was asked of the school principal, teacher, and parents in preschools around Jepara. The questions related to the primary purposes, curriculum and materials, methods, and evaluation of children's education in Islam. Observation is related to what is observed, when, and where. Meanwhile, documentation was archived and documented in the preschool in the Jepara district. The data analysis technique in this research was the statement by Miles and Huberman, which used data reduction, data display, and data verification. The process of this study can be illustrated as follows:



C. Result and Discussion

The Foundations and Goals of Islamic Education for Children

The basis of Islamic education as a firm reference is the Qur'an, and it is intended as guidance for humans, which has hinted at how to educate children inside. Some of the Al-Qur'an verses about education are like this: First, QS Luqman: 13: *"And remember when Luqman said to his son, while advising him, "O my dear son, never associate anything with Allah (in worship), for associating anything with Him is truly the worst*

of all wrongs.” Second, QS Luqman: 14: *“And We have enjoined upon man (care) for his parents.” His mother carried him, increasing her weakness with each passing day, and he is now two years old. “Be grateful to your parents; I to Me is the (final) destination.”* Third, QS Luqman: 15: *“And if they endeavour to make you associate with Me that of which you do not know, do not obey them but accompany them in (this) world with appropriate kindness and follow the way of those who turn back to Me (in repentance).” “Then to Me will be your return, and I will inform you about what you used to do.”* QS Luqman: 16 *“(And Luqman said): “O my son, even if a deed were the weight of a mustard seed, be it hidden in a rock or the heavens or on earth, Allah will bring it forth.” “Surely Allah is Most Subtle, All-Aware.”* QS Luqman: 17 *“O my son, establish prayer, enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and be patient over what befalls you.” All of these are among the issues that must be addressed.* QS Luqman: *“Do not turn your cheek (in contempt) toward people, and do not walk through the earth exultantly.” Indeed, Allah does not like everyone self-deluded and boastful.* QS Luqman: 19: *“And be moderate in your tone and lower your voice; indeed, the most disagreeable of sounds is the voice of donkeys”* (Sukatin, 2020).

The purpose of human creation is to serve Allah SWT. So, the purpose of Islamic education is to create a society based on the laws and values of Islam. The Qur’an and Hadith are the foundation of the effort to develop the main character. The final purpose of Islamic education can be understood in Allah’s word QS Ali Imran (3), verse 102, which means, *“O you who have believed, fear Allah as He should be feared and do not die except as Muslims (in submission to Him).”* To die in the state of surrendering to Allah as a Muslim is a top-off from worship as the end-of-life process, which contains educational activities. This is the end of the education process, which can be considered the final purpose of Islamic education (Wahid, 2015).

Ibn Khaldun also stated that Islamic education could be divided into three parts: first, the personality structure; Islamic education aims to optimally develop knowledge and potential, as well as physic and spirit (thought, respiration, and energy) so that humanity’s existence becomes perfect. Second, its characteristics as social education, socialise, and

Islamic education is aimed at educating humans to reach social life so that with knowledge and capacity, they can build the fastest civilisation. *Third, in terms of function and role as a servant of Allah and a representative of Allah in the world, Islamic education aims to educate humans to engage in worship activities while also maintaining trust as representatives of Allah in the world.* From this perspective, it is clear that Ibnu Khaldun's formulation of Islamic education purposes is consistent with the basic principles of Islamic education, which are balance (tawazun) and thoroughness (Komarudin, 2022).

The same thing is also explained by Syekh Nawawi, who says that Islamic education's purpose reflects the human's function as an "ubudiyah" and "co-creator." According to his argument, there are four purposes of instruction in Islam: 1) to gain Allah's blessing (mardhatillah) and gain an afterlife (ukhrawi), 2) to remove stupidity from oneself and apply the knowledge, 3) to activate religion and capture Islam with the light of knowledge, and 4) to express gratitude to Allah who gives a healthy brain and body (Faiqah, 2015).

In Al-Qur'an, the primary source of Islam, it is also mentioned that there are three criteria: those that show and describe the nature of divinity, those that describe the fundamental relationship between humans and God, and those that describe the principles and rules of Islamic society. In conclusion, the Qur'an asks humans to have a religious character. Religious values are moral and ethical behaviour principles constructed by traditions, texts, and religious beliefs (Taja et al., 2021). In other words, Islamic education is sourced from the Qur'an and Hadith. Because it contains content related to educational activities, the Qur'an becomes a resource and the main foundation of Islamic teaching. The Qur'an, as the primary source of guidance and a resource for kindness values, contains two main principles: syari'ah, or worship, and tauhid, which are faith and belief related to the human heart (Nugroho & Musdalifah, 2021).

As a result, early childhood is often referred to as the "golden age" due to its numerous benefits. The fast development of the brain influences students' intelligence in the future. The more stimulation is given, the more neurons

form networks in the brain's storage (Pancaningrum, 2015).

According to Islamic teaching, the purpose of Islamic education is to instil worship and morals while also upholding the truth to create humans with good personalities and characters. The primary purpose of Islamic education is to explain the meaning of human life, which is to gain the pleasure of Allah. So, the goal of Islamic education is the creation of humans who gain Allah's satisfaction, the man who perfectly fulfils his ideal role as Allah's servant and caliph. Muhammad Athiyah al-Abrasyi stated that the purposes of Islamic education are: 1) creating a noble character; 2) preparing life in the world and afterlife; 3) preparing to look for sustenance and take care of its advantages; 4) growing a scientific spirit among students; and 5) preparing skilled professionals (Yulianti & Siregar, 1991).

Curriculum and Materials of Children's Education in Islam

The curriculum is all the planning that is contained in the learning process. Curriculum can be defined as all efforts made by educational institutions to achieve agreed-upon goals. The curriculum is an education plan that summarises all the learning experiences available to students. The curriculum for each level of education is different. Each group has other curricula considering the student's age and ability. As for preschool, the curriculum must be comprehended, involving parents, based on the students' needs, developing students' competence, establishing relationships among family and society, and providing facilities. Those are because children are not the same as adults. Childhood is the first stage of life; in this stage, children need to learn many things.

The curriculum is conducted by curriculum experts, science experts, educators, education ministers, business people, and other community members. This planning is undertaken to guide the agent of education in driving students' development and reaching the goals of students, families, or society. According to its most recent definition, the curriculum is any activity that provides students with experiences under the supervision of responsible school personnel. Meanwhile, the curriculum of Islamic education consists of materials for

Islamic education in the form of activities, knowledge, and conscious and systematic experience given to students to achieve the purpose of Islamic teaching. In other words, the curriculum of Islamic education is all the activities, knowledge, and conscious and systematic experience the teacher gives students as a purpose of Islamic education (Noorzanah, 2017).

When conducting a curriculum, especially for students in early childhood education, the conductor should consider children's loudness, focus, and experiences and begin with things children can do. They can develop children's ideas and enrich their pedagogy to shape current and future curriculum provision, providing the 21st-century curriculum our youngest learners deserve (Thomas, 2021).

As a result of an interview with Laili (teacher - 22 years old), the following preschool curriculum was developed:

"That's right, sir." The curriculum structure is like this: there is a graduate competence standard (SKL), which contains children who are ready to learn, then core competence and basic competence, which describe attitudes such as religious, social, knowledge, and skill. Meanwhile, the indicators are aspects of development and stages of children's development. "The processes are as follows: observation, inquiry, thinking, communication, comparison with natural phenomena, science, mathematics, social interaction, and culture" (Interview on December 16th, 2021).

So, the preschool curriculum is conducted based on the children's needs. The government and school developed the curriculum based on the children's stages. The process of curriculum development in preschool is done in stages. First, observation is needed to know how children behave and what they need. Compliance is also required to understand the phenomenon that has recently occurred in society. Second, inquire about some experts to know the next step. Third, a discussion is needed to decide what program and material should be implemented. The fourth is the implementation of the decision.

That is consistent with the various types of curriculum developed by experts, such as a separated curriculum,

a curriculum that connects one lesson to another, and an integrated curriculum, in which students gain broad experiences because all classes are a unified whole or round. It means that the curriculum includes all activities that provide students with experiences under the supervision of responsible school personnel. Meanwhile, the curriculum of Islamic education consists of materials for Islamic education in the form of activities, knowledge, and conscious and systematic experience given to students to achieve the purpose of Islamic teaching.

So, there are various forms of curriculum developed by education experts: First, a separate curriculum means that each lesson has a different curriculum, and one after another has relevancy because each class has an integrated organisation. Second, the interrelated curriculum between each class still has relevance. Third, an integrated curriculum in which students gain diverse experiences because all lessons are part of a larger whole or round. The development aspect of preschool students is the total potential of children, including physical and motoric, intellectual, moral, social, and emotional factors. Language skills are also developed because they are needed in communication to socialise and actualise. Preschool teachers help students develop their potential to form complete human beings who can function independently (Sukatin, 2020).

It can be understood that the curriculum of Islamic education for school functions as, *first*. This development improves the faith and piety of students toward Allah SWT, which is planted in the family. Each parent in the family should do the obligation to instil confidence and purity. The school functions to further the growth and development of children through guidance, teaching, and training so that faith and holiness can be developed optimally based on their growth level. *Second, self-cultivation is the road map for seeking happiness in this world and the afterlife*. Third, mental adaptation, which is the ability to adapt to one's surroundings both physically and socially, has the potential to change the environment based on Islamic teaching. *Fourth*, improvement involves fixing problems, deficiencies, and weaknesses of students' beliefs, understandings, and teaching experiences

in daily life. *Fifth, prevention is the prevention of negative things from the environment or other cultures that can put oneself in danger and completely obstruct the development of an Indonesian citizen.* Sixth, teach about the science of religion (real and imagined), systems, and functionality. *Seventh, distribution is to distribute children who have particular skills in the Islamic part so that the skill can be developed optimally and used for themselves and others* (Azis, 2017).

Relate to the learning material implemented in preschools, one of which is Preschool Nurul Ilmi. As stated by Laili (teacher, 22 years old), the aspect of religious and moral development for preschoolers can be done through habituation as follows:

“First, salaam when meeting teachers. Second, handshake. The third is the habituation of smiling, greeting, and salaam when meeting someone. Fourth, before entering class, students are asked to take wudu consecutively. Fifth, reciting du’a before entering the house or class. Sixth, starting activity with *Basmalah*. Seventh, reciting *asmaul husna* before the learning process is started. Eight is reciting do’a before learning. Ninth, finish all activities by reciting *hamdalah*” (Interview on December 16th, 2021).

The curriculum, which evolved as material in the teaching and learning process, primarily contains essential competencies that children should learn as the next generation, such as daily prayer, polite greetings, preliminary numbers and alphabet, and so on. Then, all of the material will be taught in a fun way.

The result of the interview with Nafis (teacher, 24 years old), teacher of preschool Nurul Forqon, related to the material stated that the education of preschoolers in this institution is as follows:

“Children are asked for the first time to follow their teacher in reciting Arabic in *yanbu’a*, such as the alphabet (A, B, C), through speech (*Abata, Sajaha, Hawaza*, and so on). “Then memorise a short surah in Juz Amma Al-Qur’an, daily du’a, such as du’a before and after learning, du’a before and after sleeping, du’a before and after eating, and when you meet

your teacher, and she greets you with salaam and a handshake” (interview on December 16th, 2021).

The result of an interview with Durrun Nafis (a teacher; 23 years old), a teacher of Preschool al-Qur’an, Daris Salamah, related to this material stated that the education of preschoolers in this institution is as follows:

“Yes, sir... the students here in the first period of learning are murottalan through the texts in the qiroati book repeatedly, then getting used to the practice of praying alternately in groups, then daily prayer materials, such as du’a before and after learning, prayers before going to bed and waking up, prayers for eating and after eating, prayers for entering and leaving the house. “Besides that, there is memorisation material for short surahs in the Qur’an according to the level” (Interview on December 16th, 2021).

Based on the interview, the materials of Islamic education are: first, saying hello when you meet a teacher. Students are trained in Islamic habits to strengthen their noble character. Second, shaking hands; third, cultivating smiles, greetings, and greetings when meeting someone; fourth, performing ablution in turn before entering class; fifth, reading prayer when going to the house or class; sixth, starting the activity by reading Basmalah; seventh, praying for Asmaul Husna before KBM begins; eighth, reading the prayer will learn; and ninth, concluding the activity by reciting Hamdalah.

Some results of the interview above are what was stated by al-Abrasyi in Ahmad Tafsir (1994), that the material in Islamic education is at least composed of five principles. First, a lesson is supposed to teach the soul or heart, which means that material is related to awareness of God, which can be translated into each human act and step. Humanity is a creation that always leans on the Almighty, Allah SWT. Second, the given lesson contains the guidance of life. This lesson does not only talk about fiqh and akhlak but also about science, which can guide them to a better life in all dimensions. Third, the lessons delivered should contain scientific content; science should push humans’ curiosity toward everything they need to

know. Science is required to look for Allah's gift through noble ways full of calculation. Fourth, the given lesson should have life-long practical benefits; the main thing is that the material should teach experience, skills, and a broad perspective on life. Fifth, the conveyed lesson should frame other materials. So, the learned science is helpful for other sciences (Noorzanah, 2017).

Teachers are needed to obtain knowledge that can guide students to a better life in all dimensions. According to Ibnu Khaldun's argument, to acquire knowledge, one must not only rely on individual perception but also have a teacher to master it through repetition, understanding, and practice so that it becomes attached to the brain and its *malakah*, allowing *malakah* to form. To form *malakah*, thought should be oriented toward unification between theory and practice (Arifin, 2021).

Then, according to the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 137 of 2014 concerning the National Standards for Formal or Non-Formal Early Childhood Education, six aspects are developed in early childhood education. They are religious and moral values development, cognitive development, physical and motoric development, language development, social-emotional development, and arts development (Sjamsir & Yuliani, 2021).

It means that schools made various efforts with habits in daily life to develop religious and moral values, such as practising greeting or saying hello when meeting teachers, shaking hands, praying at the beginning and end of the learning process with teachers' guidance, visiting sick friends dressed in Muslim clothes on certain occasions, and reciting a short surah of the Qur'an with their respective teachers.

So, religious and moral values are developed into the school's curriculum.

The curriculum in an educational institution has a role that can determine the achievement of educational goals. The curriculum serves three primary functions: *First, a conservative curriculum can be developed to transform past cultural values and heritage that were deemed appropriate and could be preserved until now.* This is a past-oriented curriculum. This role is fundamental and customised to education as a social process. One of the assignments of education is to influence and teach

students according to the social values that exist in society.

It means that preschool students should be given various habits that are relevant to the local tradition and culture so that they can adapt to the condition of their environment, as with the existence of the reading practice of Surah al-Fatihah, al-Ikhlash, an-Nas, al-Falaq, and the beginning of Surah al-Baqarah. They hope to remember the surah well enough to use it in tahlil and other religious activities when they grow up. Besides, the students are also trained to help other people by doing charity. It is done in preschool every Friday. The result is that they give donations to their friends who are hospitalised. With the guidance of their teachers, students are actively doing charity. The process of internalising Islamic values toward early childhood is accurate, reminding us that a child's growth and development are at their peak in early childhood. In this phase, a child is clean and pure and hasn't been impacted by adverse effects from outside or his environment (Nugroho & Musdalifah, 2021).

Second, the curriculum plays a creative role; it is a tool that should be capable of developing and creating something new that will benefit the present and future, as well as assisting students in developing their potential to gain the experience and knowledge they require in their lives. It means that students will become humans with great character through new habits and understanding when they are stimulated and supported by a positive educational environment, both at home and school and when their parents and the rest of society play an active role in building the values of character education on every occasion, especially in early childhood. Habit is teaching children to do certain things so that they become attached to them and can do them without guidance (Marwiyati, 2020).

Third, the curriculum should be able to position itself as a cultural value filter, which is relevant to the present because it does not rule out the possibility of changes in local cultural values at any time. The role of the curriculum is not only to pass on existing deals and culture or apply the results of new developments that occur but also to assess and choose values and culture as well as new knowledge to be inherited. In this sense, the curriculum should actively participate

in control or social filtering. Social values inappropriate for the current conditions and demands are removed and held for modification or improvement (Wafi, 2017).

In this context, the school prepares the learning patterns and habits of children that are relevant to the conditions of culture that exist, such as the preservation of the culture of smiling, greeting, and greeting (S3), which is used in daily life, especially in creating friendly and comfortable school environments. From the perspective of Ki Hajar Dewantara, "education is an effort to promote the growth of character (inner strength), mind, and body in children." The parts should not be separated so that we can show the perfection of our children's lives.

Teaching Methods of Children's Education in Islam

The teaching method is one of the most important things in education. Using the teaching method will make the learning process more enjoyable. The teacher must determine an appropriate teaching method or combination of two ways to achieve learning goals (Shofoyeke, 2015). A professional teacher usually uses teaching methods as much as possible because there is no perfect method. So, the teacher should choose the appropriate teaching method for every material. The approach and teaching method selected by the teacher should facilitate children's learning, motivate them to learn, and encourage them to be involved in first-hand experience during the learning process (Veziroglu-celik & Acar, 2018).

In the regulations of the national education system, it is stated that teachers should have specific competencies: pedagogy, personality, professionalism, and socialism. Future teachers must have those competencies, the most important of which is professionalism. Professionalism and competency speak directly to specific competencies and skills about developing early childhood potential for preschool teachers. Teaching early childhood students differs from teaching elementary students, adolescents, and adults. The teaching method that is used is also another. Early childhood students should be prepared and learn through play by their age; it is yet to be their time to study, as it is for elementary students, adolescents, and adults. In other

words, the “play world” is full of friendliness, cheerfulness, and happiness often found in preschool or kindergarten. It is common because playing activities cannot be separated from children’s lives and kindergarten (Hunainah, 2019).

As stated by Ahmad Tafsir (2001), Islamic education as a system is an activity that includes aspects of purpose, curriculum, teacher, method, approach, facilities, environment, administration, and so on, all of which are related to each other and form an integrated system. In Islamic education, approach and method are significant in achieving the purpose. Even though approach and method are art, they can transfer knowledge or learning material to students more significantly than the material itself. An adigum stated that “*al Thariqat Ahamm Min al-Maddah*” (“method is more important than metaphysics”). Applying the proper methods and approaches significantly affects success in teaching and learning. The wrong approach and method will affect efficiency (Rianie, 2015).

Refer to the method used in preschools, one of which is Nurul Ilmi’s, as stated by Laili (the 22-year-old teacher):

“In strengthening Islamic education, methods have a significant position to achieve the purpose. Methods we applied are played while learning, storytelling, singing, and study tours or exploring nature” (Interview on December 16th, 2021).

The teaching methods for children and adults are different. For children, the methods used are usually related to fun games, songs, pictures, etc. With this fun learning method, children will not get bored quickly and absorb the material being taught more efficiently.

One of the methods in the Qur’an and Hadith is to educate through games, songs, and stories. It can be understood that this method is suitable for preschoolers’ development, who like to have various exciting games done for them. So, education through games is an attractive method to be implemented in preschool education. The game is a positive one that can develop children’s intellect and creativity.

Methods of training-experiencing and instilling good habits have been implemented in Mustika Siwi preschool,

as described in the following interview with Khalwah Khuknatus Syifah (teacher-19 years old) as follows:

“One method used in Mustika Siwi is a method of training and experience, as in the practice of wudu and shalat (prayer), reciting the wired after shalat, eating with the right hand, and entering the toilet with the left foot first. Meanwhile, methods of inculcating good habits such as handshakes with teachers and giving salaam, memorising *asmaul husna*, reciting du’a before and after learning processes, du’a before and after eating, and du’a before sleeping and when waking up are available (interview on December 18th, 2021).

As we know, experience is the best teacher. By experiencing it directly, children will be easier to remember and use the experience gained by learning in the future. In addition, the training also aims to teach children gradually, starting with introduction, practice, and habituation. Through this training, the material will stick to the child longer.

Meanwhile, in Mutiara Preschool, Nur Imanah (teacher, 19 years old) and Durrun Nafisah (teacher, 23 years old) delivered interviews as follows:

“The learning method in this school is practice, habituation, and repetition (*takror*); it’s like this: before entering class, students do wudhu practice, then memorise short surah (*juz amma*), students recite *asmaul husna* twice a week, practice Shalat Dhuha (dhuha prayer) every Friday, and before going home, students recite *dzikiran*, *sholawat*, short surah, and du’a together” (Interview on December 18th, 2021).

Repetition is also very effective for teaching children. Recurrence is also very effective for teaching children. Repetition means that the lessons received are embedded in the students’ memories. In practice, it is recommended that students only add new memorisation after first repeating existing memorisation.

According to Syahrowiyah (2016), cited by Fadli, the practice method can strengthen the teaching and learning model for early childhood students and the playing process.

This practice method is a teaching method that presents lesson material by directly demonstrating the object or giving an example of how to do something to convey a process. Children will be happy to do various activities; they always seem energised and energised and go through their days from waking up to going to sleep. As a preschool teacher, you should be able to provide positive activities that allow students to explore their characteristics (Fadli, 2019).

It is clear from the Al-Qur'an and Hadith, which are the primary sources. Several methods of Islamic education are appropriate and worth applying to preschool education activities. Those methods are:

- a. Exemplary method in Islamic education is an effective method with proven success in preparing and forming children's moral, spiritual, and social aspects at a young age. This is because the educator is the most crucial figure in the student's eyes, and their behaviour and manner, consciously or unconsciously, will be observed and imitated by them. So, teachers need to build great relationships with students. If the relationship between teacher and student is good, the student will be able to improve his vocabulary through the interaction (Hu et al., 2021).
- b. Education through training and experience; Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, as the first and foremost Islamic educator, used this method and saw positive results in the Islamic development of his companions.
- c. Educating through games, songs, and stories is appropriate for their development, so children naturally enjoy playing various exciting games with them in their early years. Related to this, education through games is an attractive method applied in preschool education. Indeed, the game is positive and can develop children's intellect and creativity. Music or song is one of the teaching methods frequently used by preschool teachers (Bakar & Samsudin, 2021).
- d. Targhib and Tahrib education: Targhib is a promise accompanied by persuasion, and it makes one happy toward benefit, pleasure, or pleasure in the afterlife. While

tahrib is the threat of torture as a result of doing something sinful or making a mistake that Allah forbids or as a result of being careless in fulfilling an obligation Allah orders.

- e. Praise for children influences them so that it will move their feelings and senses. As a result, a child will rush up to correct his behaviour and act. His soul will become cheerful and happy with this praise, which will make him more active in the future.
- f. Instilling good habits is part of providing education and assisting preschoolers' development; in addition to developing intellectually and skillfully, students must also instil positive habits from an early age. Education by teaching and habituating is the strongest pillar of preschool education. It is the most effective method for forming students' beliefs and straightening their character because this method is based on participation. Early childhood education is most likely to produce positive results, whereas educating and training adults is extremely difficult to achieve perfection (Yulianti & Siregar, 1991).

Evaluation of Children's Education in Islam

Literally, "evaluation" is derived from the English word "evaluation," which in Arabic is "al-Tadr" and in Indonesian means "Penilaian." The Arabic word for value is "al-Qmah," which translates to "Nilai" in Indonesian. Measurement in English and muqayasah in Arabic can be defined as an activity carried out to measure something. Measuring is comparing something with or based on specific measurements. At the same time, assessment is deciding on something based on whether it is good or bad, healthy, sick, and so on. The evaluation includes two activities that have been stated before: measurement and assessment (Tatang Hidayat, 2019).

The following evaluation activities were carried out by Mustika Siwi Preschool, Khalwah Khuknatus Syifah (teacher - 19 years old), Nur Imanah (teacher-19 years old) from Mutiara Preschool, and Durrun Nafis (teacher-23 years old) from Al-Qur'an Daris Salamah Preschool:

"The model of assessment in our school is observing students'

learning activity in the classroom and how they communicate, both with other students and with their teacher or parents.” It also can be seen from their diligence and orderliness in praying, marching, entering class, sitting, and listening to the teacher” (Interview on December 31st, 2021).

Based on the interview, it can be known that children can be assessed while observing them. It is because most of what their teacher taught them can be followed, such as how they act during the learning process, how they pray, how they communicate with others, and so on.

The interview result is from a study by Tatang Hidayat, which stated that an evaluation technique and target were needed to direct success in learning and education. A good evaluation is based on goals established in advance and communicated to students by the teacher. Even though the review is excellent, it will only achieve the target if it leans on the settled goals. The evaluation process must be appropriate to the type of goal, which is usually stated in behavioural language. Because not all behaviours can be framed and displayed with the same evaluation tools, evaluation becomes a complex and challenging task that must be realised by the teacher (Tatang Hidayat, 2019).

“Evaluation is customised according to the characteristics of each student, as in the assessment of students’ diligence, perseverance, tenacity, behaviour, and personality, as well as their language and manners when they are in the classroom without assignments.” This is done based on time, daily and weekly or monthly, semester, and so on. “The evaluation techniques are observation, anecdote note, dialogue, assignment, creation, and portfolio” (Interview on December 31st, 2021).

So, evaluation for children can be customised by the teacher since each student has a different character and way of thinking. The teacher also uses various forms for the assessment of other aspects. For example, teachers use observation to evaluate students’ behaviour. Then use dialogue for assessing students’ communication skills,

creating creativity, assignments for students' knowledge, and a portfolio for students writing.

Discipline assessment includes how they dress, join morning assembly and prayers before entering class, carefully wash their hands before class, do a handshake with the teacher, diligently follow the learning process in class, and diligently follow the teacher's voice. Teachers can assign a grade to students based on their participation in these activities.

According to Nata (2010), evaluation of Islamic education is a method or effort of assessing students' behaviour based on a comprehensive calculation that includes aspects of psychology and spirituality because Islamic education is not only for students who have complete knowledge or are religious but for someone who has both, having knowledge as well as religious behaviour and being good and loyal to the Most Powerful God (Sari, 2018).

Evaluating children in a school environment considering theoretical, practical, pedagogical, scientific, political, personal, and ethical dimensions is challenging (Sakellariou & Mitsi, 2019).

It is to Wayan Nurkancana and Sumartana that one of the functions of evaluation is to know the student's level of readiness in education, to understand how far the achieved result in the education process has gone, to get information to decide whether the students will be passed to the next grade or not, and to compare whether the achievements that students have achieved are by their capacity or not (Noorzanah, 2017).

Sakellariou and Mitsi also stated that preschool educators could use several evaluation techniques, such as observation, a folder for teamwork, assigning work at the end of each activity, daily oral communication, a rubric, a students' portfolio, systematic observation, self-assessment, evaluating others, a project, and a pedagogical calendar (Sakellariou & Mitsi, 2019). Aside from these techniques, educators can create or combine existing ones.

In Islamic education, the purpose is the primary reference in arranging programs. All Islamic education programs are always oriented toward the intended goal to be achieved so that the outcome is consistent with the plan. The success of a program in achieving its purpose can be seen

after evaluation or assessment. So, through the review, we can identify strengths and weaknesses and decide the next step to increase and fix previous programs. Through evaluation or checking, we can know how far the students' achievement has come and whether the program implemented has produced results according to the expected goals or is still far from the educational purposes. With evaluation, we will know the strengths and weaknesses of the learning process implemented by students and teachers (Sari, 2018).

To assess the quality of the children, teachers should consider structural and process factors. Structural aspects include child ratios, group size, caregiver qualification, and caregiver training. Caregiving practices, children's experiences, and caregiver-child interaction are examples of process factors (Munoz-chereau et al., 2021).

D. Conclusion

Strengthening Islamic education in early childhood in the Jepara district means: First, the base and purpose of Islamic education, which is used as the primary reference, are found in the Qur'an, as stated in QS Luqman: 13–19. At the same time, the purpose of Islamic education is described in QS Ali Imran: 102. Second, the curriculum used to strengthen children's Islamic education in preschool is reflected in primary and basic competence as religious, social, knowledge, and skill. Third, methods used enhancement Islamic teaching in schools are playing while learning, storytelling, singing, role modelling, habituation, and study tours. Fourth, assessment or evaluation is done through observation, anecdote, dialogue, homework, creation, and portfolio.

From the study result above, many teaching methods can be used for early childhood students to strengthen Islamic education. There are fun teaching methods that can be implemented in Islamic education classes that haven't been discussed before. And various assessment techniques can be used for evaluation.

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