



Islamic Values Integration in Early Childhood Education: A Multi-Site Case Study of Curriculum Practices in Banjarmasin, Indonesia

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) is widely recognized as the most formative stage in human development, laying the

foundation for cognitive, emotional, social, and moral growth. International frameworks, such as UNESCO's Education 2030 Agenda, stress the critical

importance of inclusive, equitable, and high-quality early education, particularly for instilling values of peace, tolerance, and global citizenship (UNESCO, 2016). In an increasingly interconnected world, ECE is expected not only to foster academic readiness and 21st-century competencies, namely critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration (Trilling & Fadel, 2009); but also to nurture moral character and ethical responsibility from the earliest years of life. This emphasis on holistic development is also echoed in Islamic early childhood education, where religious values such as honesty, compassion, and respect are embedded through contextual pedagogy (Aljaberi & Gheith, 2021; Asiyah & Afandi, 2020). Recent studies in Indonesia have demonstrated how religious-based curriculum can effectively cultivate spiritual and moral growth when integrated into thematic and play-based learning frameworks (Risnawati & Priyantoro, 2021; Putri & Siregar, 2021). Therefore, early education not only serves cognitive objectives but also becomes a crucial space for building character and religiosity in culturally grounded contexts.

In Indonesia, these global imperatives are echoed in national policy. The *National Standards for Early Childhood Education* (Permendikbud No. 137/2014) identify spiritual and moral development as core developmental goals alongside cognitive and socio-emotional skills. The *National Strategy for Character Education* (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022) further affirms the role of education in cultivating integrity, empathy, and social

responsibility from early childhood, particularly during what is widely referred to as the “golden age” of human potential.

Within this policy landscape, religious-based education plays a unique and strategic role, particularly in Indonesia as the world’s largest Muslim-majority country. In this context, religious education refers not merely to doctrinal instruction but to a holistic pedagogical framework that integrates moral formation, spiritual consciousness, and cultural identity through religious values—particularly those rooted in Islamic teachings. This approach differs from general “faith-based” or “values-based” education by grounding learning experiences in specific sacred texts, ritual practices, and theological principles.

Theoretically, this study draws from Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory, which posits that children’s development is shaped by their dynamic interactions with multiple layers of environment—including family, school, and cultural-religious institutions. From an Islamic pedagogical perspective, the concept of *tarbiyah* offers a comprehensive educational model that unites intellectual, ethical, and spiritual development, emphasizing internal transformation (ta’dib) rather than mere knowledge transmission (Rosnani, 2007).

Scholars argue that religious education in early childhood can support the development of a coherent moral compass and foster a sense of meaning and purpose in young learners. Halstead and McLaughlin (2005) emphasize that religious values can offer stability and moral clarity in a rapidly changing world.

Merry (2018) further contends that contextually grounded religious education—when inclusive and dialogical—can strengthen cultural identity while promoting social cohesion and tolerance in pluralistic societies.

Despite this strong theoretical and policy foundation, there remains limited empirical evidence on how religious values are operationalized in Indonesian ECE institutions. While existing studies explore character education in general (e.g., Lickona, 2012; Rafikov et al, 2021), few examine the specific curriculum practices, teaching strategies, and monitoring mechanisms through which Islamic values are integrated into early learning environments. Recent research highlights that Islamic character formation is often inconsistently implemented due to the lack of standardized curriculum models and teacher training on religious pedagogy (Rofiah, 2021; Sholeh et al, 2025). Qualitative inquiries into religious-based PAUD settings show varying interpretations of spiritual integration depending on institutional vision and local sociocultural contexts (Huda et al., 2017; Wuryandani & Mulyono, 2020). Studies also stress the importance of aligning religious-based curriculum with national early childhood development goals to avoid marginalization (Aljaberi & Gheith, 2021; Asiyah & Afandi, 2020). Additionally, new frameworks for early Islamic education emphasize the development of emotional and moral intelligence through integrated play-based and thematic instruction (Azizah & Arifin, 2023; Maulana & Kholid, 2022). Moreover, the diversity of religious-based

PAUD (Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini) institutions across Indonesia suggests the need for context-specific case studies that capture localized practices and pedagogical innovations.

This study aims to address this gap by investigating curriculum management in two Islamic early childhood education institutions in Banjarmasin: PAUD IT Ukhuwah and PAUD Tahfidz Ummul Qura. Banjarmasin, as the capital of South Kalimantan, represents a critical case due to its rich Islamic cultural heritage, urban-rural educational diversity, and active network of faith-based ECE providers. The selected institutions embody two distinct models of religious-based education: PAUD IT Ukhuwah utilizes a thematic-integrative curriculum in which Islamic values are embedded across learning areas, while PAUD Tahfidz Ummul Qura emphasizes memorization-based pedagogy with a structured tahfidz (Qur'anic memorization) program supported by individualized coaching.

Data were collected using a qualitative case study design involving 11 in-depth interviews with teachers (5), principals (2), and parents (4), along with participant observations and document analysis. The research focuses on three main areas: (1) how Islamic values are integrated into the curriculum, (2) teaching strategies for delivering religious content, and (3) systems for monitoring and evaluating religious-based learning.

By examining these three dimensions of curriculum management, this study contributes both theoretically and practically. It enriches national and global discussions on values-based

education by offering a grounded model of how Islamic values can be systematically embedded in early childhood pedagogy. The findings provide actionable recommendations for curriculum developers, school leaders, and policymakers—including scaling contextually relevant teacher training, adopting thematic-integrative frameworks that align with religious and developmental goals, and formulating national guidelines for monitoring the implementation of religious-based curricula.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design. This design was chosen to explore in depth the curriculum management practices at two Islamic ECE institutions in Banjarmasin: PAUD Terpadu Tahfidz Ummul Qura and PAUD Islam Terpadu Ukhuwah. These institutions were selected purposively, as both explicitly apply a curriculum that integrates Islamic values in early childhood education, supported by institutional and community engagement aligned with the research context. The multi-site case study approach allows for cross-case analysis to identify patterns, variations, and contextual influences across different institutional settings, as emphasized by Stake (2006) and Yin (2018) in guiding multi-case qualitative inquiry.

The multi-site design allowed for a comprehensive understanding of two different yet characteristically similar contexts. The research followed several stages: preliminary study, design

formulation, data collection, cross-site analysis, and conclusion drawing.

The main research instrument was the researcher herself (human instrument). Data collection techniques included:

- In-depth interviews with school principals, teachers, and staff
- Participant observation of learning activities, curriculum management, and daily religious practices
- Document analysis of teaching materials, activity schedules, and evaluation reports

Data collection took place from February to June 2025, with the timing and locations adjusted to the availability of each institution. To ensure data validity, the researcher applied source and method triangulation, as well as member checking with informants to confirm interpretation accuracy.

Thematic analysis was conducted, beginning with an intra-site analysis followed by cross-site comparisons to identify common patterns, differences, and context-specific practices in religious-based curriculum management at the two institutions.

Participants and Research Locations

This study was conducted at two Islamic-based early childhood education institutions in Banjarmasin City: PAUD Terpadu Tahfidz Ummul Qura, located at Jl. Bumi Mas Raya, Komplek Bumi Indah III RT 08 RW 01, Pemurus Baru, South Banjarmasin District; and PAUD Islam Terpadu Ukhuwah, located at Komplek Bumi Handayani, Jl. Bumi Mas Raya No. 12A RT 33 RW 02, Pemurus Dalam, South Banjarmasin District.

These institutions were purposively selected for their consistent implementation of a curriculum that integrates Islamic values into early childhood education. Both have strong institutional characteristics, adequate human resources, and active involvement of the community and parents in the educational process.

The participants consisted of 11 key informants, including school principals, classroom teachers, curriculum coordinators, Qur'an teachers, administrative staff, and parents. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their knowledge and direct experience in planning, implementing, and evaluating the religious-based curriculum. The inclusion of parents was intentional to explore the role of family in supporting curriculum implementation, assess community engagement, and understand how religious values taught at school are reinforced in the home environment. Their perspectives provided valuable insight into the alignment between institutional goals and parental expectations in religious-based early childhood education.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis, including lesson plans (RPPH), evaluation reports, and learning activity documentation. The researcher acted as the main instrument (human instrument), observing teaching and religious practices and engaging with informants to obtain contextual insights into curriculum implementation at both institutions.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection in this study utilized three main techniques: in-depth interviews, non-participatory observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 key informants—principals, classroom teachers, Qur'an teachers, administrative staff, and parents—to explore curriculum development, teacher empowerment, and religious-based evaluation strategies. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes and was conducted in person at the school sites; follow-up interviews were conducted via telephone when necessary.

Non-participatory observations were carried out in five classroom learning sessions and two school-wide religious activities. To maintain objectivity, the researcher adopted a passive role, avoided interaction with participants, and documented events using structured field notes. This approach minimized researcher influence and allowed for a more authentic observation of teaching and learning processes.

Document analysis was used to complement and triangulate findings from interviews and observations. The documents reviewed included 15 daily lesson plans (RPPH), 2 semester program plans, 3 teacher training manuals, and 2 internal curriculum evaluation reports. These materials provided insight into how Islamic values were embedded in instructional design, professional development, and institutional quality assurance practices.

Non-participatory observation was carried out, meaning the researcher did not interfere in classroom activities but

observed objectively the learning processes, religious practices, and daily routines reflecting Islamic values. Observations were conducted in classrooms, teacher lounges, principals' offices, libraries, and other school areas to capture the real context of curriculum implementation.

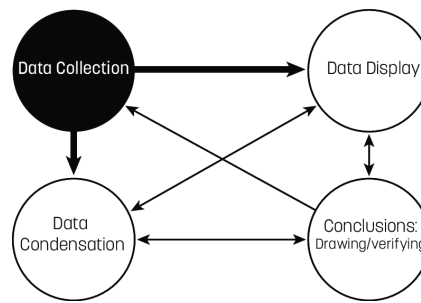
In addition, documentation studies were conducted on lesson plans (RPPH and RPPM), teaching modules, activity schedules, student and teacher evaluation reports, and institutional vision-mission statements. These documents served as triangulation tools for interviews and observations and provided insight into curriculum structure and direction at each institution.

The entire data collection process was conducted in stages from February to June 2025, with the researcher serving as the primary interpreter and recorder of field dynamics.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (2014) interactive model (Figure 1), which consists of three concurrent stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involved organizing and filtering raw data from interviews, observations, and documents to focus on key research themes—namely curriculum development, teacher empowerment, and monitoring and evaluation in religious-based early childhood education (ECE) institutions.

Figure 1. Data Analysis Techniques (Miles and Huberman Model, 2014)



A combined inductive and deductive coding approach was used. Deductive codes were derived from the conceptual framework and research questions (“integration of Islamic values, and “evaluation tools”), while inductive codes emerged from repeated patterns and participant narratives during the analysis. Coding was conducted manually using color-coded matrices and summary tables, which presented challenges in consistency and required iterative refinement to ensure inter-theme coherence.

To support reliability and transparency, a sample coded excerpt is provided in Appendix A, illustrating how interview data were segmented into relevant thematic categories and interpreted across multiple sources.

A cross-site comparison was also conducted to explore similarities and differences between the two cases. Preliminary analysis revealed that PAUD Tahfidz Ummul Qura emphasized *memorization-based religious instruction* through structured tahfidz programs and daily repetition, while PAUD IT Ukhuwah employed a *thematic-integrative approach* that embedded Islamic values into broader learning themes. These distinctions guided the interpretation of each institution's

curriculum management practices and informed the study's final conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to the research, informed consent was obtained from all participants voluntarily. The researcher explained the study's purpose, procedures, and participants' rights, including their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality was maintained using codes or initials to protect participant identities, and anonymity was ensured in reporting.

This research was conducted in accordance with ethical principles of qualitative research, including honesty, transparency, and respect for participants' rights. Ethical clearance was obtained from an authorized ethics committee as a commitment to responsible and ethical research practice

Research Stages

The research stages followed the qualitative research model by Moleong (2013), which includes four main phases: planning (pre-field), field preparation, field research, and reporting.

- **Planning Phase:** The researcher formulated the problem by identifying the main issue—religious-based curriculum management at PAUD Tahfidz Ummul Qura and PAUD IT Ukhuwah. Discussions were held with lecturers, school principals, and teachers to assess topic feasibility. A thesis proposal was developed and revised following a seminar review.
- **Field Preparation:** The researcher coordinated with both institutions' principals and teachers to gain access

and prepare research instruments such as interview guides, observation tools, and recording equipment. A research schedule was also created.

- **Field Research:** Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, with the researcher acting as the primary instrument. The data were analyzed within and across sites using cross-case analysis, supported by triangulation and member checking.
- **Reporting:** A research report was compiled and reviewed with academic supervisors and peers. After revisions and discussions, the thesis document was finalized to ensure academic rigor and contribution to ECE knowledge development.
- **Research Instrument Framework**
To support the accuracy and systematic nature of the data collection process, this study employed an instrument framework (research grid) as a guide in designing the data collection tools. The instrument framework is a systematic structure that outlines the aspects or indicators to be measured, the methods of data collection, and the forms of instruments used (Sugiyono, 2017). The use of this framework ensures that each question or item posed accurately represents the established research focus. Additionally, the framework helps researchers maintain alignment between the research objectives, variables, indicators, and data-gathering techniques (Arikunto, 2018).
- The primary benefits of utilizing an instrument framework include

ensuring instrument validity, facilitating the design of systematic and targeted questions, and supporting a more structured data analysis. Therefore, in this study, the researcher developed an instrument framework as the foundation for conducting interviews, observations, and document studies related to the practice of religious-based curriculum

management at PAUD Tahfidz Ummul Qura and PAUD Islam Terpadu Ukhuwah in Banjarmasin City.

- To facilitate data exploration on religious-based curriculum management in PAUD Tahfidz Ummul Qura and PAUD Islam Terpadu Ukhuwah Banjarmasin, the instrument grid is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Instrument Framework

No.	Variable / Data	Research Focus	Indicators Investigated	Data Sources	Data Collection Techniques
1	Religious-Based Curriculum Management	Curriculum Development	1. Needs analysis 2. Formulation of curriculum vision and mission 3. Integration of religious values into the curriculum 4. Annual and semester programs 5. Preparation of lesson plans (RPPH / teaching modules)	School principals, teachers, curriculum staff	Observation, interviews, documentation
2	—	Teacher Empowerment	1. Teacher involvement in curriculum development 2. Teacher training and competency development 3. Religious mentoring for teachers 4. Periodic performance evaluation 5. Motivation and support from leadership	School principals, teachers, documents	Observation, documentation
3	—	Monitoring and Evaluation	1. Mechanism of curriculum monitoring and evaluation 2. Principal involvement in monitoring and evaluation 3. Curriculum evaluation instruments 4. Follow-up of evaluation results	School principals, teachers, documents	Interviews, documentation

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study was conducted in two early childhood education institutions in Banjarmasin City: PAUD Terpadu Tahfidz Ummul Qura and PAUD Islam Terpadu Ukhuwah. Data were collected between February and June 2025, with

classroom observations conducted in February, and interviews and document analysis carried out from May to June.

At PAUD Terpadu Tahfidz Ummul Qura, data collection involved the principal and curriculum coordinator and was conducted in various settings,

including the principal's office, teachers' room, classrooms, and through follow-up phone interviews.

At PAUD Islam Terpadu Ukhuwah, data were gathered through interviews with the principal, Qur'an teacher, classroom teacher, and administrative staff. Data collection took place in diverse locations, such as the library, TK-B1 classroom, school office, TK building, and a student's home.

PAUD Terpadu Tahfidz Ummul Qura

The curriculum at PAUD Terpadu Tahfidz Ummul Qura is designed to cultivate a generation of Qur'an memorizers from an early age, grounded in Qur'anic values and noble character. Qur'an memorization activities (Figure 2) followed a classical approach involving daily repetition, teacher-led recitation, and individualized guidance.

Figure 2. Al-Quran memorization activities for level 4 PAUD Ummul Qura group.



Learning materials include Qur'an memorization (tahfidz), recitation improvement (tahsin), daily prayers, hadith, worship practices, and early childhood themes integrated with religious values (Figure 2). The learning method is classical and leveled, especially in Qur'an memorization activities. Evaluation is carried out based on both thematic and memorization achievements through

teacher reports and semester exams. Teacher empowerment is implemented through Tilawati method training, regular memorization submission, Islamic studies sessions, and a reward system. Curriculum monitoring is conducted through direct classroom observations and daily reports, while institutional evaluations are conducted every semester by the management team and foundation.

PAUD Islam Terpadu Ukhuwah

The curriculum at PAUD Islam Terpadu Ukhuwah aims to instill Islamic character, independence, social awareness, and readiness for elementary education.

The national curriculum is integrated with Islamic values through themed learning. This includes Qur'an memorization, short surahs, prayers, and daily worship practices. The learning model uses a center-based approach and the Ummi method for Qur'anic instruction. Evaluation is conducted through child development records and daily achievement books. Teachers are empowered through continuous training such as IHT (In-House Training), KISWAH, APU, memorization targets, and specific Qur'anic teaching training. Curriculum monitoring occurs four times per semester and includes individual coaching sessions for teachers. Teacher evaluation also includes recognition and appreciation for their performance.

Cross-Site Analysis

Both institutions share similarities in integrating religious values into the curriculum, comprehensive evaluation of children's and teachers' performance, and the implementation of continuous teacher

empowerment programs. Although they differ in methods and approaches (Tilawati vs. Ummi, classical vs. center-based), both emphasize the importance of Qur'anic memorization and the development of Islamic character from early childhood. Teacher empowerment at both institutions includes regular training, certification, learning communities, and performance-based rewards. Curriculum monitoring is conducted regularly with the involvement of school principals and management teams. Overall, both institutions have successfully managed religious-based curricula with distinct approaches rooted in Islamic values and early childhood development.

Discussion

The findings of this study are organized into three main themes: curriculum development, teacher empowerment, and curriculum monitoring and evaluation. Each theme is analyzed comparatively across the two case study sites. PAUD Terpadu Tahfidz Ummul Qura and PAUD Islam Terpadu Ukhuwah, and interpreted in light of existing literature on religious-based early childhood education.

To strengthen the interpretation, this discussion integrates representative quotations from participants, as interviews were a primary data collection method. These quotes provide firsthand insight into institutional practices and perspectives, offering depth and authenticity to the analysis. For instance, in discussing curriculum development, the principal of PAUD Tahfidz Ummul Qura explained, "Our vision is to prepare a Qur'anic generation from an early age. The Tilawati

method ensures consistent memorization and proper recitation" (W/KS/31/5/2025). Such statements illustrate how curriculum choices are directly shaped by institutional religious commitments.

Similarly, in the context of teacher empowerment, one teacher at PAUD IT Ukhuwah shared, "We are given coaching sessions each semester. Sometimes it's one-on-one to ask what difficulties we face and what materials we need" (W/GR/1/6/2025). This highlights not only the presence of professional development efforts but also the personalized, reflective culture embedded within the school's management approach.

In discussing curriculum evaluation, an administrative staff member noted, "We conduct monitoring four times per semester—twice for Qur'an and twice for general learning themes. Evaluation happens at the end of the semester in a formal meeting" (W/STF/14/6/2025), indicating a systematic process of review and follow-up.

By incorporating these voices, the study provides a more grounded and nuanced understanding of how Islamic values are embedded and sustained through daily educational practices in both institutions. Especially in curriculum development, teacher empowerment, and evaluation and monitoring of the curriculum.

1. Curriculum Development

Both PAUD IT Ukhuwah and PAUD Tahfidz Ummul Qura implement curriculum frameworks that explicitly integrate Islamic values with the national curriculum. PAUD IT Ukhuwah uses a thematic-integrative and center-based

approach, where learning themes are designed to support cognitive development while instilling moral and spiritual values.

Figure 3. Daily activities of Figure 4. Daily activities of PAUD IT Ukhuwah.

**JADWAL KEGIATAN HARIAN
TAMAN KANAK-KANAK
(KELOMPOK B USIA 5 – 6 TAHUN)**

Hari Jum'at
(PEKAN 1 – 3)

No.	Waktu	Tahapan	Kegiatan
1	07.15 – 07.45	Penyambutan	Menyambut kedatangan anak
2	07.45 – 08.10	Kegiatan Pembuka	Senam
3	08.10 – 08.20	Transisi	Minum dan BAK/BAB
4	08.20 – 09.15	Kegiatan Inti	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↓ Kegiatan Fisik Motorik ↓ Life skill ↓ Kegiatan iman dan takwa
5	09.40 – 10.20	Istirahat	Jum'at berbagi
6	10.20 – 11.00	Kegiatan Penutup	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↓ Membaca doa bersama ↓ Menyampaikan cerita, nasehat/pesan

Hari Jum'at
(PEKAN 4)

No.	Waktu	Tahapan	Kegiatan
1	07.15 – 07.45	Penyambutan	Menyambut kedatangan anak
2	07.45 – 08.10	Kegiatan Pembuka	Senam
3	08.10 – 08.20	Transisi	Minum dan BAK/BAB
4	08.20 – 10.15	Kegiatan Inti	Panggung Anak Saleh
5	10.15 – 10.20	Transisi	Minum dan BAK/BAB
6	10.20 – 10.50	Istirahat	Jum'at berbagi
7	10.50 – 11.00	Kegiatan Penutup	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↓ Membaca doa bersama ↓ Menyampaikan cerita, nasehat/pesan

The curriculum is developed based on Learning Objectives Pathways (Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran – ATP), collaboratively designed by curriculum teams and teachers. Islamic values such as good character, daily prayers, and manners are integrated into all classroom activities, including Islamic stories, worship practices, and social interactions. Teaching modules are available in both print and digital formats to support flexible learning.

In contrast, PAUD Tahfidz Ummul Qura develops a structured curriculum focusing on Qur'an memorization, recitation improvement, worship practices, and Islamic character building. The Tilawati method is used in Qur'anic instruction, taught classically and leveled according to each child's ability. The curriculum is arranged based on the academic calendar and targeted memorization achievements per semester.

Children engage in daily routines such as memorizing short surahs, performing ablution, practicing prayer, and developing respectful behavior. The learning content is also integrated with ECE themes, such as recognizing God's creations through topics like nature and the human body (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Opening activities of the PAUD Ummul Qura class



Both institutions align their curricula with their respective institutional visions. PAUD Ukhuwah focuses on developing religious, intelligent, and well-mannered generations, while Ummul Qura aims to produce Qur'an-memorizing children with Qur'anic character. These findings support the notion that curriculum development in religious-based institutions involves more than just content planning; it also involves aligning vision, pedagogy, and daily routines into a consistent religious framework (Halstead, 2007; Hashim, 2014; Aljaberi & Gheith, 2021; Asiyah & Afandi, 2020).

2. Teacher Empowerment

Teacher empowerment is seen as a key element in ensuring the effective implementation of religious-based curricula. PAUD IT Ukhuwah promotes empowerment through ongoing programs such as In-House Training (IHT), the Ukhuwah Staff Academy (APU), and

KISWAH (Ukhuwah Islamic Studies). Additionally, there are spiritual mentoring sessions and Ummi method training for Qur'an teachers. Teachers are actively involved in curriculum planning and development through discussion forums and regular evaluations. Teacher performance is assessed by the principal through classroom observations, child development reports, and evaluations of character and worship practices. Appreciation is shown through awards for exemplary teachers and semesterly recognition.

At PAUD Tahfidz Ummul Qura, religious qualifications are emphasized during recruitment. Teachers are required to have memorized at least three juz and be certified in the Tilawati method. Initial orientation is led by senior teachers, focusing on behavior modeling and memorization techniques. Capacity building is supported through weekly halaqah sessions, Tilawati and tahfidz training, and regular memorization tests for teachers. Teacher empowerment is reinforced with semesterly rewards, both in the form of praise and moral support from the foundation.

The emphasis on ongoing professional development in both institutions aligns with best practices in teacher empowerment, which highlight the importance of supportive learning communities, performance-based assessments, and alignment between personal values, pedagogical competence, and institutional mission (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; McLeod & Giardiello, 2019; Wuryandani & Mulyono, 2020).

3. Curriculum Monitoring and Evaluation

Both institutions have developed systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure the curriculum is implemented according to institutional visions and objectives. At PAUD IT Ukhuwah, monitoring is scheduled four times per semester—twice for the national ECE curriculum and twice for the Qur'anic curriculum. The principal and curriculum team actively conduct classroom observations, review lesson plans, and examine the integration of Islamic values in learning activities. The results are followed up with individual coaching, module revisions, and learning improvement plans.

Curriculum evaluation at Ukhuwah is participatory, involving teachers, the principal, and parent representatives. Child achievement is assessed through portfolios, anecdotal records, student work, and thematic progress reports. Parent feedback is gathered through periodic meetings, serving as platforms for reflection and joint improvement.

At PAUD Tahfidz Ummul Qura, the evaluation system focuses on Qur'anic memorization, worship practices, and the development of Islamic character. Daily monitoring is conducted through teacher reports shared via WhatsApp class groups, compiled weekly by the curriculum coordinator. Formal evaluations are held once or twice each semester in teacher forums and management meetings with the foundation.

Evaluation instruments are structured and cover memorization achievements, worship discipline, and

character development. Evaluation results inform teaching strategies, student ability classification, and learning targets for the following semester.

These monitoring and evaluation practices reflect a formative and participatory approach aligned with Islamic values. Evaluation focuses not only on academic performance but also on spiritual and socio-emotional development. Previous studies have shown that values-based evaluation models can enhance curriculum quality, program sustainability, and community engagement in early childhood education (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010; Rofiah, 2021; Sholeh et al, 2025).

Overall, these findings affirm that religious-based curriculum management requires an evaluation system that not only measures curriculum implementation success but also functions as a continuous guidance tool within a framework of faith

and character. The models adopted by PAUD IT Ukhuwah and PAUD Tahfidz Ummul Qura offer inspirational examples for integrating spiritual values into ECE systems in various global contexts.

Cross-Site Analysis

To clarify the field findings, the following presents a summary of the cross-site analysis between PAUD Terpadu Tahfidz Ummul Qura and PAUD Islam Terpadu Ukhuwah. This table highlights the similarities and differences in three main aspects: curriculum development, teacher empowerment, and monitoring and evaluation, which are the core focus areas of this study.

The results of the cross-site analysis between PAUD Ummul Qura and PAUD IT Ukhuwah are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Simplified Cross-Site Analysis of PAUD Ummul Qura and PAUD IT Ukhuwah

Focus Area	Indicator	Site 1: Ummul Qura	Site 2: IT Ukhuwah	Common Findings
	Needs Analysis	Based on vision, child needs, era, Qur’anic goals	Based on vision, child needs, era, moral values	Curriculum based on vision, values, and national policy
	Vision & Mission	Vision: Qur’anic generation Mission: memorization, values, ICT	Vision: noble, independent, green Mission: character, readiness, care	Foundation for curriculum
	Religious Integration	Classical model + Islamic themes	Center-based model + Islamic values	Thematic learning + Qur’an, hadith, prayer, adab
Curriculum Development	Year/Semester Program	Focus on tahfidz, tahsin, worship	Focus on themes, play centers, Islamic events	Programs embed Islamic values
	Learning Modules	Weekly modules + Qur’anic materials	Modules from teachers + Umami support	Tailored to school’s vision and style

	Involvement	Teachers join curriculum planning	Teachers involved in design	Active teacher role
	Training & Skills	Tilawati, mentoring, tests	Qur'an IHT, Ummi learning groups	Continuous capacity building
Teacher Empowerment	Religious Development Evaluation	Internal & public studies Weekly Qur'an test + semester review	APU, Kiswah, coaching Monthly review + memorization ranking	Regular Islamic training Performance-based evaluation
	Motivation	General motivation + group chats	Daily coaching + personal feedback	Active and motivational leadership
	Mechanism	Semester & daily reports	4x/semester formal monitoring	Routine, structured monitoring
	Principal Involvement	Principal + team active	Principal monitors directly	Highly involved leadership
Monitoring & Evaluation	Evaluation Tools	Work-based memorization tests	+ Anecdotes, checklists, tests	Varied tools; focus on religion & skills
	Follow-Up	Year-end review + curriculum revision	Year-end review + planning meeting	Evaluated and revised annually

The *Results and Discussion* section of this study should be systematically structured around the three main themes: curriculum development, teacher empowerment, and curriculum monitoring and evaluation. Each theme should be presented as a separate sub-section, beginning with key findings from both case study sites, followed by supporting interview quotes to humanize the data, and concluding with analysis interpreted through relevant theories and literature. The use of direct quotations is crucial, given that interviews were one of the main data collection instruments. For example, in the context of curriculum development, the principal at PAUD Ummul Qura stated, “*The Tilawati method ensures consistent memorization and proper recitation,*” illustrating how the

memorization-based approach is concretely implemented in daily practice.

A comparative analysis between the two schools reveals significant pedagogical differences. PAUD Ummul Qura employs a structured, classical Qur'an memorization model that emphasizes discipline and routine. In contrast, PAUD IT Ukhuwah utilizes a center-based thematic learning approach that integrates Islamic values into play-based and contextual learning. This approach aligns with global early childhood education (ECE) models such as Montessori and Reggio Emilia, which promote creativity, autonomy, and child agency. These contrasts highlight the flexibility of religious-based education to adapt to different pedagogical philosophies while remaining grounded in Islamic principles.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings may engage with debates on the impact of rote memorization in early childhood. Critics argue that memorization-heavy curricula may hinder creativity and critical thinking (e.g., Alsubaie, 2020). However, PAUD Ummul Qura appears to mitigate such risks by combining memorization with value internalization, character education, and structured teacher guidance. Ukhuwah's center-based model, on the other hand, reflects an integration of child-centered pedagogy with Islamic teachings, creating a balanced and culturally relevant curriculum. These findings support Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which emphasizes the importance of interactions between the child and surrounding environments—family, school, and culture—in shaping development. Likewise, the concept of *tarbiyah* in Islamic education affirms that moral, spiritual, and intellectual growth should be integrated from an early age. As Halstead and McLaughlin (2005) note, religious education in the early years can offer a coherent ethical framework that nurtures a sense of meaning and purpose beyond cognitive outcomes.

These findings have practical policy implications. The Ministry of Education could consider scaling *Tilawati* and *Ummi Qur'an* pedagogy through certified national teacher training, particularly for Islamic early childhood institutions. Moreover, Ukhuwah's thematic-integrative approach could serve as a model for embedding religious values into the national ECE curriculum, in line with character education goals.

Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations. Data were primarily drawn from interviews and documents provided by school staff and parents, which may be subject to self-reporting bias. In addition, the study did not assess long-term child outcomes, such as the development of moral behavior or spiritual identity. Future research could incorporate direct observation of children's religious and socio-emotional behavior, as well as longitudinal tracking to evaluate the lasting impact of religious-based ECE models.

In summary, while Ummul Qura offers a structured, memorization-based model grounded in discipline and Qur'anic mastery, Ukhuwah represents a more integrative, creative model emphasizing contextualized learning and character development. Both approaches reflect viable pathways within Islamic pedagogy, and their contrast underscores the importance of contextual responsiveness in religious-based curriculum design for early childhood education.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how two Islamic early childhood education (ECE) institutions in Banjarmasin—PAUD Islam Terpadu Ukhuwah and PAUD Terpadu Tahfidz Ummul Qura—manage religious-based curricula through three interrelated components: curriculum development, teacher empowerment, and curriculum monitoring and evaluation. The findings reveal that Islamic values can be meaningfully integrated into early childhood education through a combination of structured planning,

continuous teacher development, and collaborative assessment strategies.

Theoretically, this study contributes to broader debates in Islamic education by showing that memorization-based pedagogy, often critiqued for lacking creativity or flexibility, can achieve moral-cognitive balance when aligned with values education and character formation. This is consistent with the concept of *tarbiyah*, which emphasizes the integrated nurturing of children's intellectual, moral, and spiritual development from an early age. In this context, Ummul Qura's *tahfidz*-focused model illustrates the spiritual depth and discipline achievable through structured religious learning, while Ukhuwah's thematic-integrative model demonstrates how Islamic values can be embedded across play-based and inquiry-driven pedagogies.

From a comparative perspective, the two institutions offer complementary frameworks for Islamic ECE. Ukhuwah's center-based thematic flexibility supports creativity and contextualized learning, making it adaptable for broader public PAUD settings. In contrast, Ummul Qura's structured memorization system, supported by *Tilawati* methods and certification benchmarks, provides a standardized model that ensures depth in Qur'anic mastery and spiritual discipline. Together, these models offer scalable and context-sensitive templates for integrating religion into early education across diverse institutional landscapes.

The policy implications of this study are particularly relevant for curriculum developers, ECE practitioners, and education authorities. The Ministry of

Education could consider adapting Ukhuwah's center-based thematic learning for public early childhood programs, especially in urban Islamic communities, while maintaining certification standards and teacher training models from Ummul Qura to preserve Qur'anic learning quality. Further, the implementation of teacher coaching, Islamic mentoring, and routine performance evaluation can strengthen the professional culture within Islamic ECE institutions nationwide.

However, this study is not without limitations. The research focused on two high-performing urban Islamic institutions, which may limit the generalizability of findings to rural, under-resourced, or secular ECE contexts. Additionally, the study relied heavily on self-reported data from teachers and administrators, which may introduce bias in reporting empowerment or effectiveness. Future research is encouraged to include child outcome assessments—such as behavioral indicators of moral development—and to conduct longitudinal studies exploring the lasting impact of religious-based ECE. Cross-national comparative research could also enrich understanding of how Islamic pedagogical models are adapted across cultural and systemic contexts.

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