



Implementation of an Integrated Pre-Tahfiz Model for Developing Religious Values in Early Childhood Education: A Case Study at Tadika Ceria Az-Zahra Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation of an integrated pre-Tahfiz model in early childhood education and its contribution to developing religious values among young learners at Tadika Ceria Az-Zahra, Malaysia. In response to the growing need for holistic Islamic-based education at the preschool level, the pre-Tahfiz program integrates Qur'anic memorization with character-building activities rooted in Islamic teachings. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews with teachers and parents, and documentation of daily classroom activities. The results indicate that structured and engaging memorization sessions, combined with consistent reinforcement of religious practices such as prayer, dua recitation, and Islamic storytelling, significantly enhance children's spiritual awareness and behavioral discipline. Furthermore, the study highlights the vital role of parental involvement in reinforcing learning outcomes at home. Parents who actively participate in their children's Qur'anic learning tend to foster stronger religious values and emotional bonds. The integrated pre-Tahfiz model at Tadika Ceria Az-Zahra is found to be effective not only in improving children's memorization skills but also in nurturing respect, responsibility, and a love for Islam from an early age. This model can serve as a reference for other early childhood institutions seeking to combine academic and spiritual development through early Qur'anic education. The findings support the importance of collaborative efforts between educators and parents in shaping the religious character of young Muslim learners.

INTRODUCTION

The early years of childhood represent a foundational phase in human development that profoundly shapes a child's worldview, behavior, and identity. According to UNESCO (2015), early childhood education must not only support academic and cognitive skills but also address the holistic development of children—including their spiritual and moral dimensions. In the context of Islamic education, this entails nurturing religious values, introducing Qur'anic literacy, and fostering ethical behavior from the earliest stages of learning.

In recent years, the growing demand for Islamic early childhood education has led to the emergence of programs specifically tailored to cultivate spiritual growth in young children. Among these, pre-Tahfiz programs have gained recognition for their focus on early

Qur'anic memorization (tahfiz) as a vehicle to build religious consciousness and character. These programs typically include memorization of short surahs, daily practices of doa (supplications), moral storytelling, and reinforcement of Islamic etiquettes in both school and home settings (Lestari et al., 2024; Sari & Hayati, 2024).

However, while memorization is important, studies have shown that religious character formation in early childhood requires more than rote learning. It demands structured, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate pedagogies that connect Qur'anic content with lived experiences (Syafi'ah, 2022). Furthermore, parental involvement plays a significant role in reinforcing these values at home, as children's moral behaviors are strongly influenced by consistent modeling and encouragement from caregivers (Tarmilia et al., 2022).

Previous research has explored individual aspects of early Islamic education. For example, Mohd Zin et al. (2023) analyzed communication strategies in pre-Tahfiz classes in Malaysia, while Prathiwi & Syamsudin (2023) studied the impact of Qur'an-based routines on children's faith development. Yet, there remains a gap in studies that comprehensively evaluate an integrated model that aligns curriculum, teaching methods, spiritual practices, and home-school collaboration in a single framework—especially in the context of institutionalized early childhood education in Malaysia.

This research responds to that gap by examining the integrated pre-Tahfiz model implemented at Tadika Ceria Az-Zahra Malaysia, a preschool institution that offers Qur'an-focused programs combined with Islamic values education and parental engagement. The institution represents a unique case of One-Stop Islamic Early Childhood Learning, where spiritual development is seamlessly integrated into the daily learning environment.

The novelty of this study lies in its holistic analysis of how religious values are intentionally embedded in the curriculum, how teachers and parents co-participate in shaping children's behaviors, and how early exposure to Tahfiz influences character formation over time. Unlike previous research that isolates memorization or teacher strategies, this study adopts a broader lens to assess the synergistic effect of institutional design, instructional implementation, and familial support.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the implementation of an integrated pre-Tahfiz model and evaluate its contribution to the formation of religious character in early childhood learners. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) describe the structure and components of the program; (2) analyze its impact on children's spiritual behaviors; and (3) explore the role of parental involvement in supporting religious character development.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design to deeply explore the implementation and impact of the integrated pre-Tahfiz model on the development of religious values in early childhood education at Tadika Ceria Az-Zahra Malaysia. The case study approach was chosen to allow an in-depth understanding of the educational practices, interactions, and contextual dynamics within the institution.

The research was conducted at Tadika Ceria Az-Zahra, a private Islamic early childhood education center located in Klang, Selangor, Malaysia. The institution was selected due to its comprehensive implementation of a structured pre-Tahfiz program integrated with Islamic character education and family involvement. Participants consisted of: 1) 2 pre-Tahfiz teachers, 2) 1 school principal, 3) 15 children aged 5–6 years enrolled in the pre-Tahfiz class, 4) and 5 parents actively involved in the program. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that data would reflect the perspectives of those directly engaged in the program.

Data were gathered through multiple sources to ensure triangulation: 1) Non-participant observation – to capture classroom interactions, Qur’anic memorization sessions, and character-building activities. 2) Semi-structured interviews – with teachers, the principal, and selected parents to gain insights into pedagogical approaches, implementation challenges, and parental roles. 3) Document analysis – including lesson plans, children’s work samples, program syllabi, and daily activity logs to support findings from observation and interviews.

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (1994) model involving: 1) Data reduction – summarizing and selecting relevant data; 2) Data display – organizing data in thematic matrices; 3) Conclusion drawing and verification – identifying patterns, interpreting meaning, and verifying with triangulated sources. To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied data triangulation, member checking (validating findings with participants), and peer debriefing with fellow researchers. Field notes and reflexive journals were maintained throughout the process to enhance transparency and researcher accountability.

RESULT

The findings of this study are organized into three primary themes: (1) the structure and implementation of the integrated pre-Tahfiz program, (2) the observed impact on children’s religious character development, and (3) the role of parental involvement in supporting the program.

1.1 The Structure and Implementation of the Pre-Tahfiz Program

Tadika Ceria Az-Zahra applies a structured and integrated pre-Tahfiz model that blends Qur’anic memorization with Islamic character education. The daily schedule includes a 30-minute Tahfiz session in the morning, followed by thematic Islamic storytelling, prayer practices, and moral values education through real-life scenarios and play-based learning. The memorization curriculum focuses on Juz 'Amma (chapters 30 of the Qur’an), particularly short surahs such as Al-Fatihah, Al-Ikhlâs, An-Nas, and Al-Falaq.

The instructional approach is child-centered, using rhythmic repetition, visual aids, and songs to make memorization engaging. Teachers also use positive reinforcement techniques such as praise, reward stickers, and group recitation challenges to motivate students. Observations revealed that the classroom environment was warm, structured, and highly responsive to children’s developmental stages.

Additionally, Islamic routines were embedded into everyday activities. For instance, children recite short duas before and after eating, before entering the restroom,

and during circle time. Teachers model behaviors such as giving salam, sharing, and forgiveness, and children are encouraged to follow through imitation and practice.

1.2 The Impact on Children's Religious Character

Observational data and teacher interviews indicated that the program significantly contributes to shaping children's religious behaviors and attitudes. Most children were able to recite at least five surahs fluently by the end of the term and demonstrated understanding of their meanings through associated moral lessons.

Children exhibited consistent behaviors such as using Islamic greetings, showing respect to peers and teachers, taking turns during play, and participating actively in congregational prayer activities. Teachers noted that students who joined the program from earlier levels (Taska/Tadika 1) showed more maturity in religious expression and empathy.

Moreover, there were marked improvements in children's discipline, responsibility, and internal motivation to participate in Qur'anic activities. These behavioral changes suggest that the program fosters not only surface-level memorization but also deeper moral internalization aligned with Islamic teachings.

1.3 Parental Involvement and Home Reinforcement

One of the key strengths of the pre-Tahfiz model at Tadika Ceria Az-Zahra is the active collaboration with parents. Interviews revealed that parents are regularly involved in their children's learning process through structured home assignments, Qur'an tracking books, and weekly feedback sessions with teachers.

Parents reported increased bonding time with their children during review sessions at home and expressed gratitude for the support provided by the school in building spiritual habits early in life. Some parents shared stories of their children reminding them to pray or initiating doa recitation at home, which indicates successful internalization of religious routines.

The program also organizes monthly *Majlis Khatam Surah* events where children recite memorized surahs in front of peers and parents. These events further enhance motivation, confidence, and community involvement in children's religious development.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study confirm that the integrated pre-Tahfiz model implemented at Tadika Ceria Az-Zahra Malaysia is highly effective in fostering the development of religious values among early childhood learners. This finding aligns with the theoretical framework that highlights early childhood as a formative stage for moral and spiritual development (UNESCO, 2015; Mustapa & Othman, 2019). Through a well-structured curriculum that merges Qur'anic memorization with practical Islamic routines and strong home-school collaboration, the program has successfully shaped both external behaviors and internal dispositions that reflect Islamic character.

One of the most significant aspects observed in this study is the intentional and consistent integration of Islamic practices into children's daily routines. Activities such as morning duas, structured Tahfiz sessions, Islamic storytelling, and behavior modeling by

teachers created a learning environment that nurtures respect, discipline, and responsibility. This supports previous findings by Tarmizi et al. (2020), who emphasized that consistent religious habituation in early years plays a pivotal role in anchoring lifelong moral behavior. Moreover, the incorporation of rhythmic and multisensory strategies in Qur'an memorization reflects the principles of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), which has been shown to be effective in improving memory retention and comprehension among young learners (Nasrullah & Yunus, 2021).

Another key contribution of the integrated model is the emphasis on parental involvement, which serves as a critical component in the reinforcement of religious values at home. According to Mohd Zin et al. (2023), religious education in early childhood should not be confined to institutional settings but must be supported by active engagement from parents to ensure consistent value transmission. In this study, the use of Qur'an tracking books, parent-teacher check-ins, and community-based events such as Majlis Khatam Surah successfully bridged the gap between home and school, creating a unified moral environment for the children.

The observed transformation in children's behavior—such as their use of Islamic greetings, practice of dua recitation, and improved self-discipline—indicates that the program moves beyond rote memorization to meaningful internalization of Islamic values. This finding is supported by a Scopus-indexed study by Arifin & Abu Bakar (2022), which found that preschool children exposed to integrated Islamic programs exhibited stronger empathy, self-regulation, and moral reasoning compared to those in conventional settings.

However, it is important to note that the success of such a model depends greatly on the commitment and capability of the educators. Teachers at Tadika Ceria Az-Zahra were not only knowledgeable in Islamic pedagogy but also showed strong emotional engagement with the children. This corresponds with findings by Nasir & Nordin (2020) in a comparative study of Islamic kindergartens in Malaysia, who noted that the teacher's role as a role model is a decisive factor in character formation.

Despite its effectiveness, the integrated pre-Tahfiz model still faces challenges, particularly in scalability and standardization. While the model thrives in the context of a well-managed institution like Tadika Ceria Az-Zahra, further research is needed to explore its adaptability in public preschool settings or in underserved communities with limited resources. Additionally, long-term studies could further assess the sustainability of its impact on children's religious behavior as they transition to primary school.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the existing literature by offering a comprehensive perspective on how an integrated pre-Tahfiz model can holistically support the development of religious values in early childhood. It reinforces the argument that early Islamic education must go beyond memorization to include relational, behavioral, and spiritual dimensions, and that meaningful parental involvement is essential for its success.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the implementation of an integrated pre-Tahfiz model at Tadika Ceria Az-Zahra Malaysia significantly contributes to the holistic

development of religious values in early childhood learners. The integration of Qur'anic memorization, Islamic character education, and consistent religious routines within a structured and child-friendly environment fosters not only the cognitive aspects of learning but also cultivates spiritual awareness, moral behavior, and emotional maturity.

Key elements of the program—such as rhythmic memorization, Islamic storytelling, daily prayer habits, and teacher modeling—were found to be effective in promoting values such as discipline, empathy, responsibility, and love for Islam. The study also underlined the essential role of parental involvement as a reinforcing factor that ensures the continuity of religious education at home. The collaboration between teachers and parents created a consistent moral framework that enhanced children's behavioral development and religious consciousness.

The success of the pre-Tahfiz model at Tadika Ceria Az-Zahra highlights the potential of early Islamic education programs that go beyond traditional memorization and adopt a comprehensive, values-based pedagogical approach. It also provides a promising reference for other Islamic preschools seeking to implement a spiritually enriching and developmentally appropriate Qur'an-based curriculum.

Nevertheless, future research is recommended to examine the long-term effects of such integrated programs and to explore their scalability in diverse educational contexts, particularly in public or rural early childhood institutions. Sustained support, professional teacher training, and family engagement will be key factors in ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of such faith-based early education models.

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