

Optimising Islamic Education for Young Children Through Contextual Learning

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Abstract: Early childhood education is an effort aimed at children from birth to six years of age, carried out through the provision of educational stimuli to assist physical and spiritual growth and development so that children are prepared to enter further education. For this reason, the instilling of Islamic values needs to be carried out from an early age so that it becomes a strong foundation in shaping the character of students. The research method used was a qualitative approach with a literature study method. The results showed that the contextual approach emphasized the involvement of students in understanding the material through direct experience, so that their understanding of Islamic values as a strong foundation for character building became more optimal. The contextual learning model can be applied to all subjects, with the aim of enabling students to be more actively involved in learning and constructing their knowledge independently, thereby optimising their understanding of Islamic values as a strong foundation for character building in early childhood.

Keywords: contextual learning, Islamic religious education, and early childhood education.

Abstrak: Pendidikan anak usia dini adalah suatu upaya pembinaan yang ditujukan kepada anak sejak lahir sampai dengan usia enam tahun yang dilakukan melalui pemberian rangsangan pendidikan untuk membantu pertumbuhan dan perkembangan jasmani dan rohani agar anak memiliki kesiapan dalam memasuki pendidikan lebih lanjut. Untuk itu, penanaman nilai-nilai agama Islam perlu dilakukan sejak usia dini agar menjadi fondasi yang kuat dalam pembentukan karakter peserta didik. metode penelitian yang diterapkan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi literatur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan kontekstual menekankan pada keterlibatan anak didik dalam memahami materi melalui pengalaman secara langsung, sehingga pemahaman nilai-nilai agama Islam sebagai fondasi yang kuat dalam pembentukan karakter menjadi lebih optimal. Model pembelajaran kontekstual bisa diterapkan pada seluruh mata pelajaran, dengan tujuan agar anak didik bisa terlibat lebih aktif dalam pembelajaran dan mengonstruksi pengetahuannya secara mandiri, sehingga pemahaman nilai-nilai agama Islam sebagai fondasi yang kuat dalam pembentukan karakter anak usia dini menjadi lebih optimal.

Kata Kunci: pembelajaran kontekstual, pendidikan agama islam, dan pendidikan anak usia dini

1. Introduction

Islamic Religious Education is one of the important subjects at all levels of education. This subject is aimed not only at building a good understanding of Islamic teachings, but more importantly at building the character (akhlakul karimah) of students. Instilling religious values in students is a necessity that must be done from an early age. This is in line with the National Education Goals, that education is aimed at shaping and developing the potential of students

to become people who are faithful and devoted to God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, skilled, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens.¹

Based on the National Education Goals above, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning not only shapes students to be intelligent and knowledgeable, but also to be responsible and obedient individuals. However, people with good character are more valuable than those who are intelligent but behave badly. That is why Islamic Religious Education subjects at various levels of education are important. They serve as an effort to nurture and guide students so that they can fully understand Islamic teachings, appreciate their objectives, and ultimately practise and make Islam their way of life.²

In the context of early childhood education, Islamic education is fundamental. This is because early childhood education is a golden age for children to grow and develop physically and mentally in an extraordinary way. It is also a crucial period for the formation of children's personalities, so that PAI learning can provide a solid foundation for religious education from an early age.³

Thus, Islamic Religious Education becomes more significant in its function of introducing and instilling the fundamentals of religion in students from an early age. Its implementation is based on strong foundations, both legal and religious. The legal basis itself is the basis for the implementation of religious education derived from legislation, which can be used directly or indirectly as a guideline in implementing religious education in schools or formal educational institutions in Indonesia. This legal basis can be divided into three types, namely:

- a. Ideal Foundation; the basis of state philosophy, where the first principle of Pancasila is Belief in One God. This implies that all Indonesians must believe in One God, or in other words, must be religious.
- b. Operational Basis; the basis of the 1945 Constitution. In Chapter XI Article 29 paragraphs 1 and 2, it is stated: (a) The state is based on belief in One God; (b) The state guarantees the freedom of each citizen to embrace their respective religions and to worship according to their religion and beliefs.
- c. Theological basis: the Qur'an and Hadith.

The implementation of Islamic education is God's command and is a manifestation of worship to Him. In the Qur'an, there are many verses that indicate this command, one of which is QS. An-Nahl: 125, which states that, "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided."

These various principles must, of course, be adhered to by Islamic Education teachers so that Islamic Education can be implemented properly in line with the objectives of education itself. However, in practice, instilling religious awareness, teaching good behaviour and noble character, and instilling values of obedience to God and responsibility to others in students is not an easy task.

Islamic Religious Education, like other subjects in school, must be taught using effective, efficient, appropriate, and enjoyable approaches, models, methods, strategies, and learning

¹ Undang-Undang. *Undang-Undang Nomor 20 tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional*. (Jakarta: 2003).

² Abdul Majid, *Pendidikan Agama Islam Berbasis Kompetensi: Konsep dan Implementasi Kurikulum* (Badung: Rosda Karya, 2004).

³ Karimah Busahdiar et al., "Edukasi Anak Usia Dini: Pentingnya Belajar Pendidikan Agama Islam," *Prosiding Seminar Nasional LPPM UMJ*, 2023, 1–8, accessed September 24, 2025, <https://maryamsejahtera.com/index.php/Education/article/view/581>.

techniques. In reality, this subject and all of its teaching objectives are difficult to achieve, mainly due to fundamental problems in teaching itself, such as a lack of creativity on the part of teachers in presenting teaching materials in a way that is easy for students to digest, monotonous learning patterns that are more teacher-centred, and teaching and learning practices that do not attract students' interest.

These fundamental issues in teaching are indeed problems that are often encountered in many teaching and learning practices for various subjects in schools. Most teachers generally use conventional learning models, which treat students solely as objects of teaching, using lecture and memorisation methods. This type of learning model naturally causes students to often become bored and find it difficult to understand the material being taught.

On this basis, experts recommend the need to apply contextual learning models to various subjects, including Islamic Religious Education. Contextual learning models are learning models designed to help teachers relate classroom learning materials to real-world situations or the daily experiences of students. This learning model emphasises the importance of practice, models, and the relationship between learning material and the daily behaviour or events experienced directly by students, so that they can understand the lessons taught better and more meaningfully.⁴

The contextual learning model is one of the most rational choices for Islamic Religious Education subjects, as this model makes students the main subjects who are actively involved in learning, while also being guided to apply the material they have learned in real life. The application of this model is expected to overcome fundamental problems in the quality learning process, as this learning model provides space for students to understand and apply what they have learned in real life.

This article is essentially an attempt to explore how to apply contextual learning models to the Islamic Religious Education process, to reveal how learning steps can be effective, and how their implications can be optimally achieved, in order to improve the quality of the process and outcomes of Islamic Religious Education subjects..

2. Method

A qualitative approach utilising literature review methods. The aim is to gain an in-depth understanding of how contextual learning models can be applied in Islamic Religious Education for early childhood. By examining various written sources such as books, journals, and documents, this study analyses key concepts and finds that the contextual approach emphasises the direct involvement of students in understanding the material through real experiences, so that their understanding of Islamic religious values becomes more optimal as a foundation for character building.

3. Results and Discussion

Contextual Learning Model

The contextual learning model is an effort to enable students to actively engage in the learning process. This model also makes activities more organised in the learning environment and connects them with the knowledge learned during the learning process. The environment in this sense is not only the learning space, but also includes teachers,

⁴ Yatim Riyanto, *Paradigma Baru Pembelajaran sebagai Referensi bagi Guru/Pendidik dalam Implementasi Pembelajaran yang Efektif dan Berkualitas* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2010).

teaching aids, libraries, laboratories, and so on that are relevant to the students' learning activities.⁵

A learning model is a plan or pattern used as a guideline in planning classroom learning. Learning models refer to the learning approaches that will be used, including teaching objectives, stages of learning activities, learning environments, and classroom management.

This learning model is also referred to as a conceptual framework that describes systematic procedures for organising learning experiences to achieve specific learning objectives. It serves as a guideline for learning designers and teachers in planning and implementing learning activities.⁶

This learning model serves as a guideline for teachers in conducting lessons. The choice of model is greatly influenced by the characteristics of the material, the learning objectives, and the level of competence to be achieved by the students. In addition, each learning model also has stages (syntax) that can be carried out by students with the guidance of a teacher. There are also differences between one syntax and another. These differences include different openings and closings for each lesson. Therefore, teachers need to master and be able to apply various teaching skills in order to achieve diverse learning objectives and create a learning environment that is characteristic of these objectives. Learning models also come in various forms and types, such as constructivist learning models and integrated thematic learning models.

Thus, contextual learning is a form of learning that emphasises the process and full involvement of students in discovering the material being studied and connecting it to real-life situations, where students are encouraged to apply their knowledge in real life so that they can derive meaning and benefit from that knowledge.⁷

Meanwhile, Jhonson emphasised that the contextual learning model is an educational approach that emphasises the importance of linking learning materials to real situations experienced by students in their daily lives. This model is based on the principle that students will find it easier to understand and remember the concepts they learn if they can relate them to direct experiences that are relevant to their lives. Contextual learning encourages students to build their own understanding through active interaction with their surroundings, making learning a more meaningful and beneficial process.⁸

Furthermore, the term contextual (*contextual*) itself comes from the word context (*context*), which means "a part of a description or sentence that can support or add clarity to the meaning, a situation that is related to an event." Contextual can therefore be interpreted as "something related to context."⁹

In accordance with this contextual understanding, contextual learning is a form of learning that can support and strengthen students' understanding of concepts in absorbing a range of learning materials, enabling them to derive meaning from what they learn and connect it to their everyday lives. In other words, this contextual learning model is a learning concept that helps educators to relate the material they teach to the real-world situations of

⁵ Suryanto. *Penggunaan masalah kontekstual dalam pembelajaran Fisika*. (Yogyakarta: Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, 2002).

Trianto. *Mendesain Model Pembelajaran Inovatif-Progresif, Konsep, Landasan, dan Implementasi pada Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan*. (Jakarta: Kencana Prenada Media, 2009).

⁶ M. Sumantri and J. Permana, *Strategi Pembelajaran* (Jakarta: Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, 1999).

⁷ Wina Sanjaya, *Strategi Pembelajaran Berorientasi Standar Proses Pendidikan* (Jakarta: Prenada Media Group, 2010).

⁸ Elaine B. Johnson, *Contextual Teaching and Learning: What It Is and Why It's Here to Stay* (Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press, 2002).

⁹ Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, CTL: Pendekatan Contextual Teaching and Learning (Jakarta: Depdiknas, 2002).

their students and encourages students to make connections between their knowledge and its application in life.

Contextual learning uses a variety of contextual problems as a starting point, so that students learn by using their knowledge and abilities to solve problems, both real and simulated, whether they are related to other subjects at school, school situations, or problems outside school, including relevant issues in the home environment.¹⁰

Contextual learning is a holistic educational process that aims to help students see the meaning of the subject matter they are learning by relating it to the context of their daily lives (personal, social and cultural contexts), so that students have knowledge/skills that can be flexibly applied from one problem/context to another.¹¹

There are three main things that must be understood from this contextual learning, namely:

- a. The contextual approach emphasises student involvement in learning to discover material or learning processes oriented towards direct experience. The learning process in contextual learning does not only expect students to receive lessons, but also to be actively involved in searching for and discovering the material being taught for themselves.
- b. The contextual approach encourages students to find connections between the material they are learning and real-life situations. When students are able to find these connections, they will learn the functions and uses of their knowledge directly.
- c. The contextual approach encourages students to apply the knowledge they learn at school in their lives. When students understand the relationship between the subject matter and real-life situations, and understand the function and usefulness of that knowledge in the situations they encounter, they can easily apply what they have learned at school in their own experiences.

Through contextual learning, students are encouraged to understand the subject matter and its connection to real life. In turn, when they can apply what they have learned in their daily experiences, that knowledge will take on meaning. After all, knowledge is only useful if it is put into practice and becomes part of a person's character. The teacher's role in contextual learning is ultimately to help students achieve their goals. This means that teachers manage the class more as a team working together to discover new things for the class members (students).

Contextual learning is carried out through five main strategies: (a) relating, whereby learning is based on children's life experiences and prior knowledge; (b) experiencing, where learning is based on the child's direct involvement through exploration, discovery, and invention; (c) applying, namely learning using concepts. The introduction of these concepts is visualised with special images that are easy for children to understand and embody imaginative thinking; (d) cooperating, which is learning through sharing, responding, and communicating with other children; and (e) *transferring*, namely learning is carried out by using these concepts in new contexts and new situations that have not been discussed in class.¹²

¹⁰ Suryanto. *Penggunaan masalah kontekstual dalam pembelajaran Fisika*. (Yogyakarta: Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta 2002).

¹¹ Rudiyanto, *Penggunaan Model Cooperative Learning dalam Pembelajaran IPS* (Bandung: Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, 2012).

¹² Crawford, M. L. *Teaching Contextually: Research, Rationale, and Techniques for Improving Student Motivation and Achievement*. Texas: CCI Publishing, Inc., 2001.

The above components serve as guidelines for teachers in applying contextual learning models in their classrooms. Teachers can develop contextual-based learning steps by incorporating all of these components into their teaching, either in a structured manner as outlined in the component stages or in a random manner while still including all of the components.

Islamic Religious Education in Early Childhood Education

Islamic education is essentially an effort to nurture and guide students so that they can fully understand Islamic teachings, appreciate its objectives, and ultimately practise and adopt Islam as a way of life.¹³ Therefore, when we refer to Islamic education, it encompasses two things: first, educating students to behave in accordance with Islamic values or morals; second, educating students to learn Islamic teachings (subjects related to knowledge of Islamic teachings).

Islamic religious education at the early childhood level basically aims to instil Islamic values from an early age, so that they become a strong foundation in shaping the character of students. PAI learning in kindergarten must still take into account the level of development of the students themselves, both physically, psychologically, and religiously, so that the educational process can nurture the potential of children in accordance with their developmental phase. Similarly, the approach to learning in the classroom or outside the classroom is based on learning that is adapted to the developmental stage of children, namely learning through play.¹⁴

Learning that reinforces religious values and morals in early childhood education units is not carried out separately but is integrated with daily habits, learning, and play activities in early childhood education units. In early childhood education units, efforts to instil and nurture religious values and morals are carried out in an integrated, holistic manner, not in a fragmented way, and are part of daily learning activities. Thus, children will see religion and morals as values that must be practised in all activities, both at home and at school. Young children need to be guided to develop an understanding of religious values and morals in accordance with their stage of growth and development. The learning objectives designed to build this understanding can be incorporated into daily activities, including routine activities..¹⁵

Early Childhood Education (PAUD)

Early childhood education (PAUD) plays a crucial role in building a strong foundation for learning, as well as providing a basic framework for developing solid independence skills. This is because wasting this phase means losing a precious moment in a child's life. The foundation for a child's brain development in the pre-school education phase is key to the success of their subsequent brain development. Experts refer to this as optimal stimulation during the golden age.

Therefore, appropriate early childhood education (PAUD) is believed to accelerate children's development during their golden age of development. (Ministry of Education and

¹³ Abdul Majid, Pendidikan Agama Islam Berbasis Kompetensi: Konsep dan Implementasi Kurikulum (Badung: Rosda Karya, 2004).

¹⁴ Widyastuti, *Pedoman Pengembangan Pembelajaran PAI TK Tahun 2016*. (Jakarta: Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Islam Kemeterian Agama RI, 2016).

¹⁵ Susanti, W. M., and Kurniasari, A. F. *Nilai Agama dan Budi Pekerti (Panduan Guru)*. (Jakarta: Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia. Dilindungi, 2023).

Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2015) Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System mandates that “Early childhood education is an effort aimed at children from birth to six years of age, carried out through the provision of educational stimuli to assist physical and spiritual growth and development so that children are prepared to enter further education.” (Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, 2003)“.

Characteristics of Early Childhood

Early childhood refers to individuals in the early stages of development, generally ranging from 0 to 6 years of age. During this period, children experience rapid growth and development in various aspects, including physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and language development. This period is often referred to as the “golden age” because at this stage, children’s brains are highly plastic and open to receiving various kinds of stimulation from their surroundings. Development during early childhood has a long-term impact on children’s future learning abilities and mental health, making this period very important in shaping the foundations of children’s personalities, skills, and social abilities.¹⁶

Early childhood has certain characteristics that are widely discussed and have become an important topic in the field of child education. Efforts to understand the developmental characteristics of children at this stage can help educators and parents design effective learning strategies that are tailored to the needs of children. Early childhood is generally considered to be the initial stage of development for many aspects of a child’s life, which is reflected in a number of unique characteristics that reflect their cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development.

Copple and Bredekamp (2009) explains that one of the main characteristics of early childhood is a high level of curiosity. Children at this age are very enthusiastic about exploring the world around them and have a natural desire to learn. They often ask many questions and try to understand various things through observation and simple experiments. This curiosity is an important foundation for learning, as it encourages children to actively engage in activities that can enrich their knowledge and skills.

In addition, young children also show rapid motor development. Gordon dan Browne (2013) explains that at this stage, children begin to develop gross and fine motor skills. Gross motor skills, such as running, jumping, and climbing, develop rapidly and help children explore their environment. Meanwhile, fine motor skills, such as drawing, writing, and using eating utensils, begin to emerge and become more refined over time. This motor development is very important because it supports children’s ability to perform various daily activities and also plays a role in their cognitive and social development.

Cognitive development in early childhood is also very significant. According to Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, children at this age are in the preoperational stage, where they begin to use symbols to represent objects and events, even though they still have limitations in logical thinking.¹⁷ For example, they may have difficulty understanding the concept of conservation (that the amount of something does not change even if its form changes). However, children at this age are very imaginative and creative, often engaging in pretend play that helps them understand the world and different roles in society.¹⁸

Social and emotional development is also an important aspect of early childhood characteristics. Berk (2013) explains that children at this stage begin to develop an

¹⁶ Laura E. Berk, *Child Development*, 9th ed. (London: Pearson, 2013).

¹⁷ John W. Santrock, *Children*, 13th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2019).

¹⁸ John W. Santrock, *Children*, 13th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2019).

understanding of themselves and others. They learn to recognise and manage their emotions, and begin to form social relationships with their peers and the adults around them. Social skills such as sharing, taking turns, and cooperating begin to develop, although children are still learning to control their impulses and understand other people's perspectives. Positive relationships with parents, teachers, and peers are essential for supporting healthy social and emotional development at this age.

In terms of language development, young children experience a remarkable surge in language skills. They begin to develop a broader vocabulary, improve their ability to speak in more complex sentences, and understand basic grammar rules.¹⁹

Therefore, as emphasised Otto (2018) Social interactions involving conversation and listening to stories are very important for encouraging language development. In addition, children at this stage begin to show an interest in early literacy activities, such as recognising letters, listening to stories, and trying to write their own names. This language development is not only important for communication, but also plays an important role in overall cognitive and social development.

Here are some summary points about the characteristics of early childhood based on the opinions of the experts mentioned earlier:

- a. Early Developmental Stage: Early childhood spans from 0 to 6 years of age, a period in which children experience rapid growth and development in various aspects, including physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and language.²⁰
- b. High Curiosity: Children at this age are very curious and enthusiastic about exploring the world around them. They tend to ask questions frequently and try to understand things through observation and simple experiments.²¹
- c. Motor Development: At this stage, children rapidly develop gross and fine motor skills. Gross motor skills such as running and jumping help them explore their environment, while fine motor skills such as drawing and writing support everyday activities.²²
- d. Cognitive Development: According to Piaget's theory, young children are in the preoperational stage, where they begin to use symbols to represent objects and events. However, they still have limitations in logical thinking.²³
- e. Social and Emotional Development: Young children begin to develop an understanding of themselves and others. They learn to recognise and manage their emotions, and begin to form social relationships with peers and adults.²⁴
- f. Language Development: At this age, children experience a surge in language skills, developing a broader vocabulary and beginning to understand grammar rules. They also begin to show interest in early literacy activities such as recognising letters and writing their names.²⁵

It is important to understand these characteristics of early childhood because they enable educators and parents to provide support that is appropriate for the developmental needs of children according to their age. For example, by creating a learning environment rich in

¹⁹ Beverly W. Otto, *Language Development in Early Childhood Education*, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2018).

²⁰ Laura E. Berk, *Child Development*, 9th ed. (London: Pearson, 2013).

²¹ Carol Cople and Sue Bredekamp, eds., *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

²² Ann M. Gordon and Kathryn W. Browne, *Beginnings and Beyond: Foundations in Early Childhood Education*, 9th ed. (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2013).

²³ John W. Santrock, *Children*, 13th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2019)

²⁴ Laura E. Berk, *Child Development*, 9th ed. (London: Pearson, 2013)

²⁵ Beverly W. Otto, *Language Development in Early Childhood Education*, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2018).

opportunities for exploration, social interaction, and cognitive stimulation, educators and parents can help their children grow into confident, creative individuals who are capable of facing future challenges.

Aspects of Early Childhood Development

Early childhood development encompasses various dimensions or important aspects that together form the basis for a child's overall growth and development. Each of these dimensions or aspects is interrelated and contributes to the formation of children's skills, personalities, and abilities to interact with the world around them. A thorough understanding of these aspects is essential for parents, educators, and professionals working with early childhood to ensure that they can support children's development optimally.

One of the main aspects that is important to pay attention to is the physical development of children, which includes the growth of the child's body and the improvement of motor skills. At an early age, children experience rapid growth, both in body size and gross and fine motor coordination. Gross motor skills, such as running, jumping, and climbing, help children explore their physical environment. Meanwhile, fine motor skills, such as drawing, holding writing instruments, and using eating utensils, develop along with the maturation of the nervous system and continuous practice.²⁶ This physical development forms the basis for children's ability to perform daily activities and also influences their cognitive and social abilities.

Cognitive development is another important aspect of early childhood development. At this stage, children begin to develop more complex thinking skills, including memory, attention, and problem-solving. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, early childhood is in the preoperational stage, where children begin to use symbols such as words and pictures to represent objects and ideas, although they still struggle with more abstract logical thinking. They tend to think egocentrically, which means they find it difficult to understand other people's perspectives. However, cognitive development at this age is greatly influenced by experiences and interactions with the environment, as well as stimulation provided by the adults around them.²⁷

Social and emotional development is also crucial in early childhood. Children begin to understand and manage their own emotions and recognise and respond to the emotions of others. They begin to learn social skills such as sharing, cooperating, and obeying social rules. Interactions with adults and peers play an important role in this social and emotional development. Children learn about social norms, gender roles, and cultural expectations through daily observation and interaction.²⁸ This healthy social and emotional development is essential for building positive relationships and for success in school and future life.²⁹

Language development is another aspect that also plays an important role in the growth and development of young children. At this stage, children usually experience a surge in language acquisition, from the ability to understand and use words to forming more complex sentences.³⁰ The development of language is generally greatly influenced by social interaction, including everyday conversations with parents, teachers, and peers. Children also begin to

²⁶ Ann M. Gordon and Kathryn W. Browne, *Beginnings and Beyond: Foundations in Early Childhood Education*, 9th ed. (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2013).

²⁷ John W. Santrock, *Children*, 13th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2019).

²⁸ Laura E. Berk, *Child Development*, 9th ed. (London: Pearson, 2013).

²⁹ Laura E. Berk, *Child Development*, 9th ed. (London: Pearson, 2013).

³⁰ Beverly W. Otto, *Language Development in Early Childhood Education*, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2018).

show an interest in early literacy, such as recognising letters, listening to stories, and trying to write their own names. Well-developed language skills are essential for effective communication and also support broader cognitive development.³¹

Another aspect is moral development and values, which also begin to form in early childhood. At this stage, children begin to understand basic concepts of right and wrong, and develop a sense of responsibility and empathy. They learn values through the examples set by the adults around them and through interactions with their peers.³² Although their understanding of these concepts is still simple and often based on rewards or punishments, this is an important first step in the development of more mature morals in the future. The formation of these values is greatly influenced by the family, school and community environment, as well as by the culture in which the child is raised. Understanding the various aspects of early childhood development is essential in ensuring that children have a strong foundation to grow into healthy, well-balanced individuals who are able to contribute positively to society.

Contextual learning is not actually a new approach, but its implementation in the world of learning is still not optimal. The lack of optimal implementation is due to the perception among teachers that the contextual approach is difficult and requires a lot of space, money and time. In fact, contextual learning has advantages in terms of creating an applicable, meaningful, and enjoyable learning atmosphere, as an approach that is indeed necessary in the context of Islamic education to make it more interesting and applicable and to foster religious awareness in students independently from within themselves.

Contextual learning is a highly effective model that is particularly useful in Islamic Religious Education. It is easy for teachers to implement and helps students understand the material more easily. In contextual learning, students construct their own knowledge, with teachers guiding them in this process. In contextual learning, teachers act as facilitators, helping students discover meaning (knowledge). Contextual learning is offered as a holistic approach to education that can be used by all students, both those who are highly gifted and those who have learning difficulties.

In practice, when teachers wish to implement this contextual learning model, they only need to adhere to the seven main components or principles of contextual learning. In this case, or in PAI learning, teachers can organise the learning steps as follows:

a. Sharp constructivism

In initiating contextual learning, teachers present problems to students based on their prior knowledge to form an understanding of the new knowledge. Students give meaning through real experiences, the essence of which is that a person's knowledge can only be built by themselves and not given by others to be taken and remembered. Teachers only act as mediators and facilitators in learning, encouraging students to be more actively involved in it. However, as with the idea of constructivism, each individual is able to acquire knowledge from the abstraction of their experiences, both natural and human. Construction is an active process, both personally and socially. Islamic Education teachers who function as facilitators and mediators are thus tasked with helping students to construct their knowledge in accordance with concrete real-world situations, using teaching strategies that are appropriate to the needs and circumstances of the students..

b. Finding

³¹ Beverly W. Otto, *Language Development in Early Childhood Education*, 5th ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2018).

³² Grazyna Kochanska and Nazan Aksan, "Children's Conscience and Self-Regulation," *Journal of Personality* 74, no. 6 (2006): 1587–1617.

Students are accustomed to finding solutions to problems themselves, with teachers facilitating and building their creativity. Teachers must always design activities that refer to discovery, regardless of the material being taught. In practice, students first observe what the teacher says, take notes on important points, ask questions about things they do not understand, draw preliminary conclusions, and reinforce their conclusions with relevant sources or references until they are confident in the accuracy of the knowledge they have discovered.

a. Analisis

Teachers need to understand that early childhood education is a nurturing effort aimed at children from birth to six years of age, carried out through the provision of educational stimuli to assist physical and spiritual growth and development so that children are prepared to enter further education. This is because wasting this phase means losing a precious moment in their lives. For this reason, Islamic values need to be instilled from an early age to provide a strong foundation for the character development of students. Islamic education in kindergarten must take into account the level of development of the students themselves, physically, psychologically and religiously, so that the educational process can nurture the potential of children in accordance with their stage of development.

4. Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, several conclusions can be drawn. The contextual learning model is an approach that emphasizes students' independence in learning, the connection between the material and real-life situations, and the importance of deriving meaningful understanding from the learning process. This model can be implemented across all school subjects, aiming to encourage students to actively engage in learning, construct knowledge independently, seek information through questioning, participate in discussions, collaborate with peers, and reflect on their experiences to extract meaning from the knowledge acquired.

In addition, early childhood education plays a critical role for children aged birth to six years. Therefore, instilling Islamic values from an early age is essential to establish a strong foundation for students' character development. Learning PAI (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*) in kindergarten must consider the developmental level of the children physically, psychologically, and religiously so that the educational process effectively nurtures and develops their potential in accordance with their stage of growth.

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