

Implementation of Qur'an Learning in Shaping Early Childhood Reading Ability and Religious Character

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood is a critical period for developing cognitive abilities and religious character. However, Qur'anic learning at this stage often emphasises memorising hijaiyah letters without adequately integrating moral value internalisation, creating a gap between reading proficiency and consistent religious behaviour. This study aims to analyse the implementation of Qur'anic learning in developing early childhood students' reading skills and religious character at TK Alquran Sullamus Saniyah Unit 395 Martapura, while examining how interactive learning approaches address this gap. A qualitative case study design was employed to explore learning practices in their real-life context. Data were collected through participatory observation and in-depth interviews with three key informants: the principal, Qur'an teachers, and parents. The findings indicate that interactive learning methods, including repeated recitation of hijaiyah letters, Islamic songs, and educational games, effectively improve children's Qur'anic reading skills while fostering religious character values such as discipline, patience, respect, and empathy. These outcomes are reinforced through routine religious activities, including memorising daily prayers and performing dhikr, which facilitate the internalisation of Islamic values in children's everyday behaviour. The study proposes an integrative Qur'anic learning model based on interactive and experiential (learning-by-doing) approaches that simultaneously strengthens religious literacy and character formation in early childhood. This model contributes theoretically to the development of holistic Islamic education by integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions, while offering a practical framework for implementing engaging and structured Qur'anic learning in early childhood education settings.

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education plays a crucial role in forming the initial foundation for children's cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual development (Kasmiati, 2025). The golden age of children's growth is a strategic period to instil basic values that guide their behaviour and mindset in the future, including religious values that align with the social and cultural environment (Putranto, 2025). However, in practice, the implementation of Qur'anic learning in early childhood education often shows a gap between children's ability to read the Qur'an and the formation of their religious character (Adindo & Sutoyo, 2026; Barus et al., 2025; Hidayatullah, 2024; Ismawati, 2023; Meerangani et al., 2025; Rofiq et al., 2024). Many children can recognise and pronounce hijaiyah letters, yet these skills are not always followed by the internalisation of moral values reflected in daily behaviour. This indicates that Qur'anic learning tends to emphasise technical reading skills rather than the holistic development of religious attitudes and character (Ghanim et al., 2025; Munir et al., 2026; Sabarudin et al., 2023).

From a theoretical perspective, constructivist learning theory emphasises that children actively construct knowledge through meaningful experiences, whereas behaviourist approaches highlight the importance of repetition and habituation in shaping behaviour. In the context of Qur'anic learning, integrating these approaches is essential so that children not only memorise and read the verses but also understand and practise the values they contain (Adiyono et al., 2025; Ainiyah et al., 2025; Aulia et al., 2026; Badrudin et al., 2025). Nevertheless, existing learning methods, such as simple repetition of hijaiyah letters or rote memorisation, are often less interactive and not fully optimised to support children's cognitive and affective development simultaneously. (Syahrizal & Nurhafizah, 2023). In addition, the lack of variation in teaching strategies and limited family involvement further contribute to the suboptimal development of children's religious character. Although interactive methods such as Islamic songs and educational games have been introduced, their implementation is not always consistent or systematically designed to achieve long-term character formation. As a result, the learning process has not fully fostered discipline, patience, respect, and a deep love for religious teachings in a sustainable manner.

Therefore, it is important to examine more deeply how Qur'anic reading instruction is implemented in early childhood education and to determine whether the methods used have effectively integrated cognitive skills with character formation. Strengthening both pedagogical approaches and environmental support is necessary to ensure that children's cognitive and spiritual development grows in a balanced way, preparing them to face future social and academic challenges. (Khasanah & Nuha, 2026).

Early childhood readiness to receive Qur'an lessons is greatly influenced by the learning approach used in formal and non-formal educational environments (Muqit & Maskur, 2021). Learning that is designed in an engaging, interactive, and contextual way not only increases children's interest in reading the Qur'an but also fosters religious awareness from the early stages of development. The role of a competent teacher is key to guiding children to understand hijaiyah letters, recite verses correctly, and relate the meanings of verses to daily behaviour (Nur'aini et al., 2025). Methods appropriate to the child's developmental stage, such as songs, educational games, and gradual repetition, help children internalise moral values naturally and pleasantly. A conducive learning environment, including support from family and peers, strengthens children's motivation to participate actively in all Qur'an reading activities. This reading ability, which is formed gradually, not only equips children with religious literacy skills but also instils a moral and spiritual foundation that guides children's attitudes, behaviours, and social interactions consistently, so that learning the Qur'an becomes an integral part of character formation from an early age (F. M. Ulfa, 2025).

Several previous studies have examined Qur'anic learning in early childhood from different perspectives. Research by Amin et al highlights that developing Qur'anic reading skills contributes to the formation of children's moral character, although the focus remains largely on improving reading fluency (Amin et al., 2025; Kadir et al., 2024; Syarifah & Kubra, 2024). Syahrizal and Nurhafizah (2023) emphasise the use of interactive methods, such as repetition and play-based learning, to increase children's engagement. However, the study does not explore in depth the long-term impact on the internalisation of behaviour. Other findings indicate that teacher competence and the learning environment play an important role in supporting children's religious development. However, these aspects are often discussed separately rather than as an integrated learning system.

Based on these studies, a research gap remains regarding the integration of Qur'anic reading ability with the comprehensive and sustainable formation of children's religious character. Most studies tend to focus either on technical reading skills or on general character education, without specifically examining how Qur'anic learning methods can simultaneously develop cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects in early childhood. In addition, the lack of analysis on the consistency of method implementation and the role of environmental support indicates that the effectiveness of Qur'anic learning has not been fully optimised.

The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to integrate Qur'anic reading learning methods with the formation of religious character in early childhood through a holistic approach that combines interactive pedagogy, teacher competence, and environmental support. This study not only examines children's ability to read the Qur'an, but also analyses how learning methods contribute to the internalisation of moral values and the development of consistent religious behaviour in daily life. By focusing on the interconnectedness between cognitive skills and character formation, this research is expected to provide a more comprehensive contribution to the development of Qur'anic learning models in early childhood education.

Sullamus Saniyah Qur'an Kindergarten Unit 395 Martapura is one of the educational institutions that integrates Qur'an learning throughout the early childhood curriculum. This school emphasises programs for regular Qur'an reading, memorisation of daily prayers, and instilling moral values through creative, fun learning activities, so that children can learn while playing. The results of the observation showed a positive relationship between the frequency of Qur'an reading practice and the development of children's religious character: the more often children participated in reading and memorisation activities, the greater the increase in discipline, respect for teachers and friends, and empathy skills. Children not only master the hijaiyah letters but also begin to understand and internalise moral values reflected in daily behaviour, so that learning the Qur'an becomes an effective means of shaping character based on religious values from an early age.

The holistic and continuous learning approach at Sullamus Saniyah Quran Kindergarten Unit 395, Martapura, aims to cultivate a young generation that is not only academically skilled but also possesses strong moral and religious integrity. Early educational interventions are an effective strategy to shape positive behaviours from the beginning of life, enabling children to internalise spiritual values that serve as lifelong guidance. Evaluating the Qur'an learning method in this environment is important for understanding how far the applied educational strategies can simultaneously develop reading skills and religious character in a balanced manner.

Based on this background, the focus of this study is directed at examining the implementation of Qur'an learning methods and their effectiveness in shaping early childhood religious character. The research questions can be formulated as follows: (1) How are the Qur'an learning methods implemented at Sullamus Saniyah Quran Kindergarten Unit 395 Martapura? (2) To what extent do these methods contribute to the development of children's Qur'anic reading skills and religious character? (3) What factors support and hinder the effectiveness of Qur'an learning in this institution?

The urgency of this research is viewed from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Theoretically, this study is expected to contribute to the development of early childhood education concepts, especially in integrating Qur'anic literacy with character formation through a holistic learning approach. In practical terms, the results of this study are expected to provide insights for teachers, educational institutions, and parents in designing more effective, interactive, and sustainable Qur'an learning strategies, so that the optimal formation of children's religious character can be achieved from an early age.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach to gain a deep understanding of how Qur'an learning is implemented to shape early childhood reading skills and religious character at Sullamus Saniyah Al-Qur'an Kindergarten Unit 395, Martapura. The qualitative approach was chosen because it can describe phenomena in context by presenting experiences, perceptions, and learning practices that occur naturally in the field. The focus of this research lies in the processes, methods, and interactions between teachers and children in Qur'an reading activities, as well as in the formation of religious character through daily practices in the kindergarten environment.

This study was conducted over approximately three months, from the preliminary stage through the final data analysis. The research procedures consisted of several stages. The first stage was preliminary observation, carried out to identify initial conditions related to Qur'an learning activities and to understand the general learning environment. The second stage involved preparing research instruments, including developing semi-structured interview guidelines aligned with the research focus. The third stage was the data collection phase, which involved conducting in-depth interviews and documenting relevant findings in the field. The final stage was data processing and analysis, followed by the presentation of the findings.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with three informants representing distinct yet relevant perspectives. The first informant was the head of Sullamus Saniyah Al-Qur'an Kindergarten, who is responsible for curriculum planning and learning policies. The second informant was a Qur'an teacher who directly guides children in reading and understanding the verses. The third informant was a parent of a student who observed the development of the child's Qur'an reading ability and religious character at home. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, allowing informants to express their experiences and views in depth, while also giving the researcher flexibility to explore additional relevant information.

Data analysis was carried out using the techniques of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing as proposed by Miles and Huberman. Interview data were coded according to main themes: learning methods, the development of Qur'anic reading skills, and the formation of religious character. Furthermore, the data were compared across informants to identify patterns of similarity and difference, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the implementation of Qur'an learning at Sullamus Saniyah Al-Qur'an Kindergarten Unit 395, Martapura.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results of the study show that the implementation of Qur'an learning at Sullamus Saniyah Al-Qur'an Kindergarten Unit 395, Martapura, can gradually develop both children's Qur'anic reading skills and their religious character. Children are introduced to hijaiyah letters through repetition, Islamic chanting, and engaging educational games, which make it easier for them to recognise and read the letters. One of the teachers stated,

"Children are more likely to recognise hijaiyah letters when the learning method is combined with songs and games, and they become enthusiastic every time they learn to read the Qur'an."

This indicates that interactive learning methods play a key role in improving early childhood reading skills.

More specifically, the learning activity model is implemented in a structured and continuous manner. Every morning, Qur'an learning activities are conducted for approximately 30 minutes. The lesson begins with an opening activity in which the teacher greets the children, leads a short prayer, and reviews previously learned hijaiyah letters using rhythmic songs. This initial stage aims to build children's readiness and recall prior knowledge in a fun and engaging way.

The core activity is carried out through several interactive stages. First, the teacher introduces new Hijaiyah letters using visual media such as letter cards and learning posters, while pronouncing the letters clearly and asking children to repeat them together. Second, children are invited to play educational games, such as matching letter cards, arranging Hijaiyah puzzles, or pointing to letters the teacher mentions. Third, group reading practice is conducted, where children read simple letter sequences together and individually under the teacher's guidance. Through repetition and variation of activities, children gradually improve their ability to recognise and read Hijaiyah letters.

After the reading session, the learning continues with character-building activities. Children are guided to memorise daily prayers, perform morning dhikr, and practice simple religious habits such as greeting others, waiting their turn, and showing respect to teachers and peers. The head of the kindergarten explained,

"We always emphasise moral values through Qur'an reading and prayer memorisation; children slowly begin to show respect for friends and teachers."

These structured activities demonstrate that Qur'an learning is integrated with the cultivation of discipline, patience, and respectful behaviour.

At the closing stage, the teacher reinforces praise, brief feedback, and encouragement, followed by a closing prayer. This final stage helps strengthen children's confidence and emotional attachment to the learning process.

The students' parents also observed positive changes at home. One parent stated,

"Since participating in activities in kindergarten, my child has started to get used to saying prayers before eating and is more patient when playing with friends."

This indicates that the learning outcomes extend beyond the classroom and influence children's daily behaviour.

The results of interviews with the three informants can be summarised in the following table:

Table 1
Summary of the Interview

Aspects	Kindergarten Principal	Teaching Teacher	Parents of Students
Learning Methods	Emphasising memorisation and moral values	A combination of songs, games, and repetitions	Supports interactive methods at home
Reading Ability	Gradual improvement is seen	Children recognise hijaiyah letters faster	Children can read simple letters at home
Religious Character	Discipline, respect, and patience	Habit of dhikr and prayer	Children are more obedient and patient

In addition to interview data, observations during the learning process showed that the frequency of Qur'an reading practice correlated with children's reading ability. The following diagram illustrates the development of hijaiyah literacy skills in the 4–5-year-old age group for one semester:

Table 2
Development of Reading the Qur'an (Hijaiyah Letters)

Weeks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Number of Known Letters	5	8	12	15	18	21	24	28

The data show a significant improvement in reading ability, particularly after children become accustomed to interactive methods involving games and songs. These findings confirm that the learning strategies used at Sullamus Saniyah Al-Qur'an Kindergarten create an enjoyable learning environment while supporting early childhood religious development.

The results indicate that the integration of structured interactive learning methods, consistent teacher guidance, and parental support plays a crucial role in shaping children's Qur'an reading skills and religious character. This approach produces a dual impact, namely, enhancing early Qur'anic literacy while simultaneously internalising moral values that form the foundation of children's religious character during their golden age.

Discussion

The implementation of Qur'an learning in early childhood at Sullamus Saniyah Al-Qur'an Kindergarten Unit 395, Martapura, can be analysed from the perspective of Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Children aged 4–6 years are in the preoperational stage, in which symbolic thinking begins to develop but remains highly dependent on concrete experiences and social interaction (Kotrunnada et al., 2025). In this phase, children understand concepts through symbols such as images, sounds, and simple representations that relate to their real-life experiences (M. Ulfa & Na'imah, 2020). Therefore, learning methods that combine singing, educational games, and the repetition of hijaiyah letters enable children to associate abstract letter symbols with enjoyable, meaningful experiences. This makes the learning process easier to understand and retain, while also strengthening memory and attention (Febriyando & Mokoagow, 2024; Helmalia et al., 2024).

In addition, this learning approach is aligned with Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development, which emphasises the importance of social interaction and guidance in optimising children's development (Insani, 2024). With scaffolding from teachers, children can gradually master Qur'anic reading skills that initially require assistance (Alviani & Budiati, 2025). Peer interaction in group activities, such as playing letter games, singing together, and reading in turns, also supports collaborative learning and enhances communication, empathy, and social skills (Basir et al., 2024; Haruna, 2025; Hayati et al., 2025; Mukhammad & Bon, 2026). These findings indicate that Qur'an learning is not only a cognitive activity but also a social process that supports holistic child development.

Furthermore, from a character education perspective, the findings are consistent with Lickona's theory, which emphasises the integration of moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral actions in shaping character. (Sumantri et al., 2025). Daily habituation activities such as reading the Qur'an, memorising prayers, and performing dhikr provide concrete experiences that enable children to internalise values such as discipline, patience, respect, and responsibility. (Taufikin et al., 2025). This indicates that the formation of religious character occurs not only through cognitive understanding but also through repeated practice and real-life application.

Based on these theoretical perspectives and empirical findings, this study offers several important implications. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of Islamic education theory, particularly in early childhood education, by reinforcing the idea that Qur'anic learning should not be limited to technical literacy but must integrate cognitive, social, and moral dimensions. This study confirms that the combination of the constructivist (Piaget), sociocultural (Vygotsky), and character education (Lickona) frameworks can serve as a comprehensive foundation for developing effective, holistic, and developmentally appropriate Qur'anic learning models. In addition, this research enriches the discourse on Qur'anic education by highlighting the importance of interactive, experience-based, and value-oriented learning in shaping both literacy and character simultaneously.

Practically, this study provides concrete contributions to the implementation of Qur'anic learning in early childhood education institutions. First, it emphasises the importance of using interactive methods—such as songs, games, and guided repetition—as effective strategies to improve children's engagement and reading ability (Ahyani et al., 2024; Andriyani & Leksono, 2024; Ilham & Syauqi, 2025). Second, it highlights the need for structured, consistent habituation activities, such as daily prayers, dhikr, and group reading, to strengthen the development of religious character. Third, the study underlines the crucial role of teachers as facilitators who provide scaffolding and create a supportive learning environment, as well as the importance of parental involvement in reinforcing learning outcomes at home.

Thus, this research not only strengthens theoretical understanding but also offers practical guidance for educators and institutions in designing Qur'anic learning models that are more effective, meaningful, and capable of fostering balanced cognitive and spiritual development in early childhood.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study answer the research problems concerning (1) the implementation of Qur'an learning methods, (2) their contribution to children's Qur'anic reading ability and religious character, and (3) the supporting factors in the learning process at Sullamus Saniyah Al-Qur'an Kindergarten Unit 395 Martapura. The results show that Qur'an learning is implemented through structured, interactive methods, such as singing, educational games, and repetitive practice, integrated into daily activities. These methods have proven effective in improving children's ability to recognise and read hijaiyah letters, while simultaneously fostering religious character such as discipline, patience, and respect through habituation activities like prayer memorisation and dhikr. This indicates that

Qur'anic learning in early childhood is not limited to technical literacy but also functions as a medium for holistic development encompassing cognitive and moral dimensions.

The main novelty of this study lies in the formulation of an integrative Qur'anic learning model based on interactive methods that simultaneously impacts religious literacy and character formation in early childhood. This model emphasises the integration of cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects through engaging and participatory learning experiences. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of Islamic education by strengthening the concept of holistic Qur'anic learning. At the same time, practically, it provides a reference for educators in designing effective and meaningful learning strategies. However, this study is limited by the small number of informants and the focus on a single research location, so further research with broader samples and varied methods is needed to enhance the generalizability and depth of the findings.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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