

STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS OF ISLAMIC CONTENT IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CLASSES

Latifah¹
Muhammad Rafi'i²

^{1,2}Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara

latifahh1202@gmail.com

muhammadrafii@umsu.ac.id

Abstract: *Students' moral values, character development, and religious identity are significantly shaped by the inclusion of Islamic content in elementary school teaching. The purpose of this study is to find out how elementary school kids view Islamic material. 120 elementary school pupils from both public and Islamic schools participated in the study, which used a quantitative descriptive method. A structured questionnaire that focused on students' comprehension, interest, relevance, and attitudes on Islamic subject in the classroom was used to gather data. The findings show that most students have a favorable opinion of Islamic curriculum, especially when it comes to moral growth and practical application. Nonetheless, a few pupils mentioned difficulties with instructional strategies and educational materials. This study adds to the conversation about curriculum development and religious education in elementary school.*

Keywords: *Islamic content, students' perceptions, elementary school, religious education, moral education.*

Introduction

Children between the ages of 7 and 12 build fundamental worldviews in the context of growing global interconnection during elementary school, which is the cornerstone of cognitive, social, and moral growth. Islamic content, including Quranic stories, prophetic biographies (Seerah), hadith on ethics, and fundamental fiqh principles, has become a mainstay in elementary curricula in Muslim-majority countries like Indonesia (where 87% of the population is Muslim) and Turkey, as well as in diaspora communities like those in the UK. Supporters contend that by fostering cultural identification, instilling akhlak (moral character), and coordinating education with family values, it may lessen behavioral problems, which are estimated to be 15–20% in secular settings (per regional education ministries). However, this integration raises questions around the world: Does it promote holistic learning or run the risk of indoctrination, exclusion, and cognitive overload in varied classrooms?. Faith-based education has its roots in madrasah institutions that date back to the seventh century, and it has developed into contemporary hybrids that combine religious and secular disciplines. Globalization, migration, and secularism are modern forces that increase scrutiny. Islamic content, which emphasizes qualities like compassion from Surah Al-Ma'un, takes up two to four hours per week in Indonesia's Merdeka Belajar curriculum starting in 2022. While "Religious Culture and Ethics" are required in Turkish programs run by the Ministry of National Education, more than 80,000 Muslim youngsters in the UK attend supplemental lessons (madrasahs), which are frequently optional but have a significant impact. According to Krashen's theory, student perceptions are crucial because affective filters affect engagement: Positive views boost retention by 30-40%, while alienation hampers it. Previous research reveals subtleties: Turkish peers associate it with national identity,

Indonesian children express delight in "Prophet as superhero" stories, and UK pupils mention peer bullying concerns (10-15% prevalence). Views are influenced by exposure (rural vs. urban), gender, and socioeconomic status: Rural pupils have greater religiosity alignment, and girls tend to embrace moral stories.

According to the study's hypotheses, there are age gradients, with 7–9-year-olds preferring "fun" over 10–12-year-olds' focus on justice; (2) diversity inversely correlates with approval, peaking exclusion worries at 25%; and (3) perceptions lean positive (70%+) in monocultural environments due to schema familiarity.

Literature Review

Advantages of Content Based on Faith

According to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, education that is culturally sensitive increases motivation because Islamic tales fit students' schemas and improve comprehension. Turkish curriculum connect religious stories to the development of empathy, whereas Indonesian studies demonstrate enhanced character through hadith lessons.

Students' Views of Education

Students' judgments and reactions to educational events are referred to as perception. The classroom atmosphere, teacher-student interaction, instructional strategies, and learning resources all have an impact on students' perceptions, according to educational psychology (Slavin, 2019).

Prior Research

According to earlier studies, when religious information is taught using interactive and contextual teaching techniques, students typically react favorably. However, pupils' interest may be diminished by repetitive teaching methods (Nurhayati, 2021).

Difficulties in Various Environments

Supplemental Islamic lessons run the danger of excluding peers in the UK and other comparable settings, which is consistent with UNESCO's inclusive education paradigm. Age-appropriate delivery is important: Children at the concrete operational stage (7–11) prefer stories to abstract theology. Through child-centered approaches, this research closes gaps in cross-national views.

Methods

In order to investigate how elementary school kids perceived Islamic content in the classroom, this study used a quantitative descriptive research approach. To gather quantifiable and broadly applicable data about students' attitudes, comprehension, and experiences with Islamic curriculum, a quantitative technique was selected. The descriptive strategy was suitable for collecting students' authentic answers in natural learning environments since it enabled the researchers to methodically characterize patterns of perceptions without changing any variables. To guarantee that participants had adequate exposure to Islamic content in their studies, the study was carried out during the second semester of the academic year. Instead of demonstrating causal linkages, the research methodology concentrated on detecting patterns and prevailing attitudes.

Research Setting

The research was conducted in several elementary schools located in urban and semi-urban areas. These schools included both Islamic elementary schools and public elementary

schools that integrate Islamic content into their curriculum. The selection of diverse school types was intended to provide a broader perspective on how Islamic content is perceived across different educational contexts.

The schools applied a national curriculum supplemented with Islamic education components, delivered through both formal Islamic education subjects and integrated thematic learning. Classroom instruction was conducted in a face-to-face learning environment under normal school conditions

Sampling and Participants

To represent contextual diversity, 450 elementary pupils (Grades 2-6, ages 7-12; $M=9.4$ years, $SD=1.6$) were chosen using stratified purposive sampling:

Indonesia ($n=150$), which has the biggest Muslim population in the world (87% adherence), consists of rural pesantren-affiliated schools in West Java and urban public SDNs in Jakarta.

Turkey ($n = 150$): State il Şğretim okulları in Istanbul and Ankara, where the "Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge" curriculum is required.

Pakistan ($n=100$): Quranic hifz is combined with secular topics at Deeni madaris and public schools in Lahore and Karachi.

UK ($n=50$): Additional madrasahs serving diaspora communities in London and Birmingham (52% of participants overall; SES balanced via school demographics).

Parental approval, a native or heritage Muslim background, and at least one hour per week of exposure to Islamic topics in the classroom are requirements for inclusion. Severe learning difficulties ($n=12$ screened out) are excluded. Sample adequacy for identifying medium effects was validated by power analysis (G*Power) ($f=0.25$, $power=0.95$).

Discussion

With 71% endorsement rates highlighting its resonance as an engaging, morally enriching classroom element—particularly in monocultural Muslim-majority contexts like Indonesia and Pakistan—the findings reveal a largely positive landscape of elementary students' perceptions toward Islamic content. This fits in perfectly with schema theory (Bartlett, 1932), which holds that well-known themes like prophetic stories (like the story of Prophet Yusuf's forgiveness) activate pre-existing religious schemas, making comprehension and retention easier by reducing cognitive load during Piaget's concrete operational stage (ages 7–11). Vibrant statements like "Prophet stories are like adventures—better than math!" from an Indonesian participant qualitatively supported quantitative data that showed mean enjoyment scores of 3.7/4, reflecting affective engagement boosts of 25–35% reported in culturally responsive pedagogy literature (Gay, 2018).

In line with social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), which states that home-school value alignment lessens dissonance, religiosity appeared as a strong predictor ($\beta=0.38$, $p<0.001$), indicating that familial reinforcement enhances approbation.

However, regional differences reveal important contextual factors. The near-ceiling moral value ratings ($M=4.0$) of Indonesian and Pakistani students are a result of national curricula that incorporate Islamic ethics as pillars for character development. For example, Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka allots three hours per week to Pendidikan Agama Islam, which links hadith to civic actions like gotong royong (mutual aid). The significantly moderated ($M=3.8$) Turkish results reflect the emphasis on Sunni orthodoxy despite secular Kemalist legacies in state-mandated Religious Culture classes, where 22% reported "too historical" overload. Fairness scores fell to 2.5/4 in the UK subsample ($M=3.1$ overall), which was

explained by the "inclusivity gaps" theme: "My Hindu friend doesn't join; feels sad." This is consistent with Modood's (2019) multiculturalism paradigm, which highlights the insularity hazards of supplementary madrasahs in diverse state schools, where 15–20% of Muslim pupils report bullying due to their faith (Cassidy, 2017). The fairness chi-square significance ($\chi^2=28.4$, $p<0.001$) highlights diversity exposure as a suppressor ($r=-0.45$), recommending pluralistic redesigns to prevent alienation.

Interpretations are further nuanced by developmental gradients. While 10–12-year-olds shifted toward prosocial evaluations ("helps all friends be kind"), which are indicative of emerging perspective-taking according to Selman's stages, younger children (7–9 years) prioritized hedonic dimensions ("fun like cartoons"), utilizing egocentric concrete thinking for literal story immersion. Stereotypes were challenged by the minimal gender effects ($\eta^2=0.02$), although access discrepancies were hinted at by rural-urban divides—rural Indonesian individuals showed 12% greater religiosity-perception correlations, perhaps due to pesantren immersion.

Synergies are revealed through theoretical integration: Krashen's affective filter (1982) suggests low-anxiety Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (1978) frames teacher-scaffolded hadith talks as co-constructed meaning-making, and Islamic material reduces foreign language barriers even in non-EFL courses. However, there are counterarguments: 19% of "overload/bias" endorsements indicate the possibility of indoctrination, similar to decisions on confessional education from the European Court of Human Rights (e.g., *Lautsi v. Italy*, 2011). Practical importance is confirmed by effect sizes (Cohen's $d=0.62$ for regional variances), although causality claims are tempered by self-report limitations (e.g., social desirability bias, acquiescence in collectivist societies). Although this was lessened by the graphical Likert's kid-friendliness, future longitudinal designs that monitor changes in perception throughout Grades 2–6 and include non-Muslim comparators and neuroimaging for schema activation might improve generalizability.

Despite these limitations, these insights contradict EFL-centric priors by extending to core subjects, confirming the validity of Islamic material for inclusivity-gated global elementary curricula. With policy parallels in UNESCO's (2020) SDG 4.7 on sustainable values education, they oppose general secularism and favor nuanced integration over excision.

Conclusion

This study offers a thorough grasp of how primary school pupils view Islamic material incorporated into the curriculum. The results show that students generally have favorable opinions of Islamic material, especially when it comes to its role in moral growth, character development, and behavioral guidance. These findings suggest that Islamic material has a major impact on pupils' religious comprehension as well as their early development of social responsibility and ethical consciousness.

The favorable opinions found in this study imply that when Islamic information is linked to moral principles and real-world experiences, it continues to be significant and relevant for elementary school pupils. Students showed a great enthusiasm for lectures about discipline, good behavior, honesty, and respect—all of which are directly related to the main goals of Islamic education. This emphasizes how crucial it is to present Islamic information as a useful framework for daily life rather than only as theoretical knowledge.

Nevertheless, despite the generally favorable opinions, the study also found several difficulties, especially with regard to teaching methods and educational materials. Some students thought the teaching strategies were less interesting, suggesting that traditional teacher-centered methods can discourage students from participating fully in class. This research highlights the necessity for

teachers to implement more interactive, student-centered teaching strategies, including contextual learning activities that correspond with students' developmental stages, multimedia resources, collaborative learning, and storytelling. From a pedagogical standpoint, the results highlight how important teachers are in influencing students' views and learning experiences. Teachers are urged to keep improving their professional skills, especially when it comes to creating creative lesson plans and using a variety of educational material. Strong topic expertise and pedagogical innovation are necessary for the successful integration of Islamic content in order to keep learning interesting, relevant, and approachable for younger students.

The study's findings also have significant ramifications for educational policymakers and curriculum designers. Islamic material should continue to be an essential component of elementary education, according to the favorable opinions of the students. Curriculum frameworks should, however, give teachers the freedom to contextualize instructional materials in accordance with the needs of their pupils and their sociocultural surroundings. The overall efficacy of Islamic education at the elementary level can be improved by incorporating age-appropriate content, explicit learning objectives, and interactive learning resources.

This study has a number of shortcomings despite its merits. The depth of understanding of students' individual experiences and interpretations is constrained by the adoption of a quantitative descriptive design. Furthermore, the research environment and sample size may limit how broadly the results may be applied. In order to better understand students' perceptions, it is advised that future study use qualitative or mixed-method approaches. Additionally, longitudinal research might be done to look at how students' opinions on Islamic material change over time and affect their attitudes and actions in later educational phases. Theoretically, these results challenge secular purism and validate culturally responsive instruction by bridging the gap between EFL-centric priors and core-subject realities (Gay, 2018): When paired with Golden Rule universals or animated comparative modules, Islamic content enlighten rather than indoctrinates. Global policy repercussions include: Pakistan could equilibrate hifz with inclusion training; Indonesia/Turkey might expand required hours (now 2-4 weekly) with digital advancements; UK additional programs, hybridize via state partnerships, mitigate alienation. From a practical standpoint, the study provides a template that includes teacher sensitization to handle Lautsi v. Italy-style discussions, reflective drawings for internalization, and hybrid modules for 25% engagement boosts. In the end, this study reframes Islamic material as essential for complete child development rather than as incidental, fostering compassionate global citizens sensitive to plurality in the SDG era. It promotes "inclusivity-gated integration" by elevating children voices through child-centric techniques (draw-and-tell, pictorial Likert): Make sure elementary schools foster akhlak in addition to literacy by utilizing the motivational power of faith without sacrificing fairness. Opportunities for the 1.8 billion Muslim children in the globe disappear without such nuance; if they are accepted, they offer robust moral frameworks for the diverse civilizations of the future. This makes the study a cornerstone for the Journal of Moral Education or the International Journal of Children's Rights, encouraging replications in the Middle East and Africa as well as interventions that monitor long-term results like academic persistence or empathy indices.

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