



## **Nurturing Islamic Values in Early Childhood in Thailand's Muslim Minority**

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### **Abstract**

Islam is the major religion in southern Thailand. However, it remains a minority religion compared to the overall Thai population. The Muslim community in Thailand places great importance on Islamic religious education. They teach about Islam to children from an early age to nurture and foster Islamic values. Besides, it's helping them to understand Islam as part of their identity in the country's diversity. This study aimed to describe the teaching of Islamic values in early childhood within Thailand's Muslim minority. The research method used descriptive qualitative. Data Collection was carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. The research was conducted in a non-formal education, the Miracle Language Center in Mueng, Narathiwat, Thailand, held in August-September 2023. The subjects were ustadz and ustadzah (Islamic teachers) and early childhood students attending the center. The data analysis technique used data condensation, data presentation, and verification and conclusion drawing. The results showed that children were taught through various academic and religious activities. Academically, Arabic vocabulary was introduced through pictures and songs. Religiously, the focus was on faith, worship, and moral values. The faith was taught through the pillars of faith, Islam, and exemplary stories. Worship was taught through memorizing short surahs, daily prayers, and practicing prayer and ablution. Moral values were taught through lessons on civility and manners. This study serves as a reference for teaching Islamic values to young children in Muslim minority communities.

**Keywords:** early childhood, Islamic values, Thai muslims

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## A. Introduction

There are 1.2 billion Muslims worldwide, and their populations are spread across 40 countries and five continents, with various cultural and social diversity. The largest populations are found in Indonesia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh (Al-Mateen & Afzal, 2004). The spread of Islam does not mean making Islam the majority religion in every country. As in Thailand, Islam is a minority religion compared to the population. Until now, Thailand is still known as a country adhering to Treveda Buddhism, as it has been taught and practiced by its kings. More than 90 % of the population practices a lifestyle and way of thinking following Buddhism (Forbes & Henley, 2012; Haque et al., 2019; Shakhrani, 2022).

Other references reveal that Islam developed quite a complicated way in Thailand because it was under pressure from the Buddhist-majority government. Likewise, what happened to Islamic education there was very difficult to create. Initially, Islamic education was only informal, such as huts, and then it became madrasah. In the late 1970s, there was an attack by the Thai government as a form of eradicating an insurgency by Pattani fighters who attacked teachers at various Islamic institutions (Shakhrani, 2022).

However, the existence of Muslims in Thailand cannot be underestimated. Islam is the majority religion adopted by Southern Thailand's population, especially in Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and Satun. It was also supported by the establishment of the Islamic Kingdom in the Pattani region in the 14th century. It is the beginning of the entry of Thai Islam between the 10th and 11th centuries AD brought by Arab and Indian traders) (Hilmin et al., 2023; Mania, 2019).

In addition to the prolonged conflict decades ago, it also influenced the development of Islamic education until the Thai government issued a regulation forcing Islamic boarding schools to register as Islamic private schools integrated with academic education (Yuliani & Purwanto, 2020). Although Islamic private schools have implemented policies from the Thai government, including those in terms of Islamic education, cultural assimilation that occurs in the field of education in Islamic schools, especially in the southern part of Thailand, constantly changes according to the leadership period that is still ongoing. Therefore, Islamic minority communities in Thailand began to teach Islamic Education from an early age. It is intended to nurture and foster Islamic values in children so as not to be influenced by the majority culture and religion in Thailand (Aslan et al., 2020).

Early childhood is a period in the age range of 0-6 years. This period is usually called the *golden age*. The term is often given to early childhood because it experiences rapid growth and development in various aspects. The existence of *the golden age* in early childhood comes only once in a lifetime; it must be used as well as possible and not be wasted (Suryana, 2021; Suyadi & Ulfah, 2013).

One of the teachings that must be introduced in early childhood is the cultivation of Islamic values. Islamic values can be interpreted as nurturing values into the heart so that the spirit and soul move based on Islam. The cultivation of Islamic values occurs through an understanding of Islamic religious teachings. It is continued with awareness of the importance of religious teachings and the discovery of the possibility of realizing them in real life. It is as mentioned in the Qur'an Surah Luqman verse 16 about the nurture of Islamic values, Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala says (Rusdi et al., 2019).

يُنَبِّئُ إِنَّهَا إِنْ تَكُ مِنْقَالِ حَبَّةٍ مِنْ خَرْدَلٍ فَتَكُنْ فِي صَخْرَةٍ أَوْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ أَوْ فِي الْأَرْضِ  
يَأْتِ بِهَا اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَطِيفٌ خَبِيرٌ

*(Luqman said,) "O my son, indeed if wrong should be the weight of a mustard seed and should be within a rock or [anywhere] in the heavens or the earth, Allah will bring it forth. Indeed, Allah is Subtle and Acquainted.*

The verse explains the cultivation of universal noble values whenever and wherever humans need them. Nurturing noble values is not only based on considerations of time and place. Nurturing Islamic values is a behavior or process of fostering a belief that exists in Islam, in which a person can act correctly and avoid something that is not worth doing. Therefore, the nurture of Islamic values in early childhood is the main capital for future life. Cultivating a generation of Qur'anis under Islamic teachings must be done regularly and continuously through formal and non-formal education.

As a province that connects Thailand with Malaysia, Narathiwat is expected to positively impact the development of Islamic education. Miracle Language Center is a non-formal or private school in Narathiwat, Thailand, focusing on Islamic religious education. The institution includes academic and language education and aims to shape a generation of Muslims in Thailand who make the Qur'an and Sunnah the foundation of life and can direct change towards a developed and better future of Islam.

The Islamic community in Thailand is very concerned about religious education. In addition to religious education, one of the teachings at the Miracle Language Center educational institution is languages: English as the main language and Arabic. Children at an early age at Miracle Language Center are taught Arabic, which is adapted to their age. They are only taught simple words through songs and claps. The Miracle Language Center's teaching of Arabic is to improve and strengthen faith and piety for children with the support of Islamic religious education. With the provision of the Arabic language and Islamic teaching, children can better understand the Islamic religion in depth with the basis and correct understanding. In addition, the institution pays attention to early childhood Islamic education. The purpose of this study is to describe the cultivation of Islamic values for early childhood in Thailand's Muslim minority. This research has a distinction regarding Islamic values in young children within Muslim minorities.

## **B. Literature Review**

This research refers to Abdurrahman An-Nahlawi's opinion as the leading theory. Namely, An-Nahlawi views education as a preparation for developing individuals and nature as a potential from birth. Based on this, Islamic education aims to form human beings and carry out Allah's commands. An-Nahlawi also suggested that Islamic education has various materials and methods to optimize the nurturing of Islamic values in children (An-Nahlawi, 1995).

Several previous studies are relevant to the problems in this study. Among them is research conducted by Scupin on language use conducted by Thai-speaking Muslim minorities in Thailand's Buddhist-majority region (Scupin, 1988). In addition, it also deals with hierarchical social relations and hegemonic cultural practices, thus affecting the symbolic relationship between Muslim minorities and the Thai state by Waesama-ae who discusses the problems of Islamic Education in

Anshorussunnah Badol Kindergarten (Tadika) Meuang Region Yala Region (Southern Thailand) (Waesama-ae, 2022).

Another issue stems from the dissemination of Islamic ethics in religious obedience among Muslim youth in Thailand. This condition receives only partial support from parents and teenagers. Community leaders employ several methods, including using mosques as central institutions for Islamic learning, setting examples, and organizing Islamic ethics training camps (Laeheem, 2018). However, subsequent research reveals that family communication within the Muslim community in southern Thailand can create a culture of peace and guide children towards Islamic principles, thereby minimizing the vulnerability to ongoing conflicts in the region (Benharoon, 2013).

Other research on Islamic education for early childhood in Afghanistan also experienced challenges from the government, so schools were formed using mosques as facilities (Burde et al., 2015). Furthermore, Islamic education among the Balinese Muslim minority shows that Islamic education is pursued both through formal and non-formal education. In addition, there is a need for family resilience with an Islamic spirit, teaching children about Islamic demands while still upholding the value of tolerance (Muhammad & Ariani, 2020). Therefore, the comprehensive education Muslim students receive will provide diverse contributions to a heterogeneous society (Alkouatli et al., 2023).

There are several strategies for cultivating worship habits in children in Muslim minorities. Examples are worship activities and religious traditions (Harahap et al., 2019). This research explores Islamic values, including faith, worship, and morals. In addition, the subject is early childhood studies at the Miracle Language Center in Thailand.

### **C. Method**

This research used a qualitative approach oriented toward symptoms or phenomena in a study's natural nature (Zuchri, 2021). Qualitative research is used to ensure the correctness of data and to understand hidden meanings in a complex, dynamic, and holistic manner (Sugiyono, 2017). The qualitative approach in this study is intended to describe the background of research and phenomena in detail, understand the participants' behavior in-depth, and explain the complex research picture of the cultivation of Islamic values in early childhood in the Thai Muslim minority. The study was conducted at *Miracle Language Center*, 200 Yakang Street, Bang-Nag, Muang, Narathiwat, Thailand. The research was conducted in August-September 2023. The subjects of this research were one Ustadz, one Ustadzah, and three young children who learn at the Miracle Language Center. Data collection techniques included observation, in-depth interviews with the ustadz and ustadzah at the Miracle Language Center, and documentation. The documentation included photos of activities related to teaching Islamic values to young children at the Miracle Language Center. The data analysis technique followed the theory of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, using three stages: data condensation, data presentation, and verification and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014).

### **D. Findings**

Based on observations conducted at the Miracle Language Center in Mueng, Narathiwat, Thailand, various endeavors have been undertaken to teach Islamic values in early childhood. These efforts encompass not only academic education but

also emphasize learning about the fundamentals of Islam, encompassing faith, worship, and morals. The Miracle Language Center also offers public classes for children who attend other institutions on Saturdays and Sundays. Children aged 4 to 6 attending the Miracle Language Center participate in Islamic learning sessions lasting 2-3 hours daily. These sessions are conducted in a classical format. Apart from the regular classes held on Saturdays and Sundays, the children also attend lectures and recitations after the congregational evening prayers.

The Ustadz and Ustadzah employ various teaching methods to deliver content to the children, including demonstrations. At the Miracle Language Center, besides foreign language proficiency, children are taught Quran memorization and fostered independence through activities like cooking and other life skills. However, the resources and facilities for early childhood learning at MLC Thailand are still insufficient.

Academic education obtained in early childhood includes Arabic language learning, which takes place on Saturdays and Sundays. This learning is carried out in public classes together with children from other schools. Here, the ustadz and ustadzah teach Arabic vocabulary through various methods, such as pictures and songs.

As for the activities to nurture the value of faith in early childhood, observations show that ustadz and ustadzah always teach about faith. When learning, children are first asked to mention the pillars of faith and Islam. In addition, it is also sometimes interspersed with giving exemplary stories in it.

The following are the results of an interview that researchers have conducted with one of the ustadz and the person in charge of the Miracle Language Center:

*"The system of nurturing Islamic values in children is in the aspect of faith, namely the pillars of faith and Islam. Here, the child must memorize and understand the pillars of faith and the pillars of Islam because a Muslim is required to believe and believe in it and practice it".*

The Miracle Language Center teaches about the value of faith and the cultivation of Islamic values in worship. Here, the task of an ustadz or ustadzah is not only to provide theoretical teaching to children but also to set a good example for children. In practice, in worship, children will be taught about memorizing short surahs, prayers in everyday life, and practicing prayer and ablution.

The memorization of the short surahs takes place on Saturdays and Sundays in public classes simultaneously with children from other schools. Usually, the ustadz and ustadzah will instruct children to memorize short surahs. Ustadz and ustadzah, who teach, direct children to form halaqah and provide simulations first before children memorize short surahs and prayers to be memorized. At the same time, prayer in everyday life is usually applied through habituation. Before doing various activities, ustadz and ustadzah will invite children to pray first, for example, before studying and eating.

Prayer and ablution learning are usually carried out weekly after learning Arabic. Ustadz and ustadzah direct children to always perform prayers on time. Teach children about the correct way of praying and give directions on how to perform ablution properly based on the guidance that has been given. Children are also taught to simulate or practice implementing compulsory prayers and ablution procedures directly.

As the interview results on ustadzah S said:

*"We usually teach Islamic values at the Miracle Language Center in worship once a week in public classes with children from other schools who participate in studying at this Miracle Language Center. The teaching we give is understanding the commands that must be carried out or done and staying away from all the prohibitions that God gives. The teaching given to children is the procedure of praying and ablution that is good and correct according to Islamic guidance".*

Finally, Islamic values are cultivated within the scope of moral values; children are taught how to establish good relationships with fellow humans and the surrounding environment, for example, speaking and behaving. This learning is done through habituation and examples given by the teacher. The results of interviews that researchers with ustadz T have conducted suggest that:

*"The teaching of Islamic values about morals is how children are taught to build relationships with others and nature. Children should be taught to speak politely and have good etiquette with their elders, teachers, and parents."*

## **E. Discussion**

The source of Islamic teachings is the Qur'an and Hadith. While reasoning is the source of the third teaching, humans are qualified to ijtihad to develop the Islamic religious component of faith, sharia, and morals (Ali, 2018). Based on this, Islamic values are the forces that encourage human life by the teachings of Islam. So, Islamic values are essential for each child, one of which is through education. Knowing Islamic values in children can provide measures and directions that will be carried out to realize the actions of these Islamic values. Islamic education is a guide to human physical and spiritual growth through wisdom, teaching, directing, training, and supervising based on Islamic teachings. In the actualization process, Islamic values in education can be realized both inside and outside the classroom (Zaqiah & Rusdiana, 2014).

In addition to designing a contextual curriculum based on Islamic concepts, the Miracle Language Center also designs learning methods that follow the early childhood age. The methods used are learning while playing, learning through stories, learning through songs, and learning by utilizing the natural environment. In addition, teachers also carry out exemplary methods and habituation to their students; one example is providing examples using exemplary stories, so that children can take lessons and examples from the stories read. Learning methods in early childhood education are systematic steps used to manage children's learning experiences to achieve a learning goal (Abidin, 2023).

Children's playing time is also essential here; children are given enough time to play. In addition to using the learning method while playing, children are also given 30-45 minutes to play freely in the surrounding environment, which cannot be separated from the supervision of the teachers. The purpose of providing children with free play time is so that they can explore the surrounding environment.

According to An-Nahlawi, education is a form of preparation for individual development, inseparable from the nature he brings from birth and the need for support through a conducive environment (An-Nahlawi, 1995b, 1995a). At the Miracle Language Center, a non-formal institution, it is important to realize Islamic values in early childhood as a minority Muslim in Thailand. There are various problems related to social and religious issues in the region, so it is necessary to have

a religious foundation from an early age so that children have a strong identity. Furthermore, the highest goal of Islamic education is to make humans human beings both individually and socially (An-Nahlawi, 1995b, 1995a), which will be realized in every child.

Early childhood is unique, and has the natural ability to learn many things (Magini, 2013; Montessori, 1992). An-Nahlawi revealed that children are also seen as servants and caliphs who can carry out the sharia of Allah. Based on this, the child's learning stages need to be adjusted to their readiness and age based on Islamic teachings (An-Nahlawi, 1995b, 1995a).

In the concept of Islamic education, there are Islamic values, including faith, worship, and morals. First, the value of the faith is related vertically to Allah SWT (Zaqiah & Rusdiana, 2014). The value of faith is a foundation for the life of humanity, which is nature (An-Nahlawi, 1995b). Therefore, it needs to be nurtured early so that children are accustomed to being educated in their souls through faith education. As has been done at the Miracle Language Center, children began to be nurtured in monotheistic material. That starts with the basic material about the pillars of faith and Islam. These two materials must be believed and practiced so they cannot be separated. Interrelated and perfect between one and another. It also needs to be nurtured correctly in the children's souls so that their daily lives are by Islamic religious guidance in virtue and they stay away from prohibited actions. Monotheism can also be taught to children through exemplary stories, making understanding the important things they need to learn easier. Children at an early age have a high imagination and can think concretely (Khadijah, 2016; Warmansyah et al., 2023). Therefore, learning needs to be done contextually.

Second, the value of worship is the implementation of the value of the faith that has been believed (Zaqiah & Rusdiana, 2014). Worship is an impact and concrete evidence of a Muslim's faith level in believing and guiding the religion of Islam (Uhbiyati, 2009). According to Fiqh experts, worship is done to gain the pleasure of Allah and hope for the afterlife (Ulfah, 2009). Through worship learning, such as memorizing short surahs, daily prayers, and practicing prayer and ablution, children will know that all activities are inseparable from the purpose of worshipping Allah. On the other hand, children learn how to worship under the guidance of the Prophet of Allah. It is also in line with Ulwan's opinion that when children are accustomed to worship and obedience, they will become harmonious humans and human beings (Ulwan, 2017).

Third, moral values are the realization of faith and sharia or muamalah values (Zaqiah & Rusdiana, 2014). It is undeniable that morality is the most important highlight. As Al-Ghazali gives criteria for morality, morality must remain in the soul, and the deed arises easily. Therefore, an action will lead to good or bad deeds. At the same time, the state of one's soul will gravitate towards one of these two conditions (Rohayati, 2011). It is what is done at the Miracle Language Center. Children begin to be nurtured with various commendable morals for themselves, fellow humans, and the environment. The goal is for children to be accustomed to good qualities so that they are not easily influenced by characters not following Islamic religious guidance. Various learning materials are applied at the Miracle Language Center to nurture Islamic values and follow the Islam-based curriculum. As quoted from An-Nahlawi's opinion, the educational curriculum must be designed contextually and based on Islamic concepts, including the material of the Qur'an, hadith, tawhid, fiqh, and Islamic culture (An-Nahlawi, 1995b, 1995a).

The nurture of Islamic values in early childhood is essential, especially with the condition of the community, which is a Muslim minority in the region. The purpose of nurturing Islamic values in children is to provide measures and directions that will be carried out to realize the actions of these Islamic values. Therefore, schools have become institutions that play a critical role in Islamic education (An-Nahlawi, 1995b). Another aspect is the role of educators in nurturing Islamic values. Educators play a role in teaching, are competent in educating children, and become role models based on Rabbani's character (An-Nahlawi, 1995b, 1995a). It is what teachers at the Miracle Language Center have done. In addition to providing learning materials that follow Islamic religious guidance, teachers also become role models for children through habituation and guidance. In line with An-Nahlawi's opinion, there are several methods of education based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. Among them are example and habituation (An-Nahlawi, 1995b). Through education, direction, and examples carried out by educators, one can form a good personality as a Muslim (Yayo, 2019). Educators also have a role in optimizing child development (Aghnaita et al., 2020).

## F. Conclusion

Nurturing Islamic values for early childhood at the Miracle Language Center not only teaches children about academic education but also provides teaching about the basics of Islam. Academically, children are taught Arabic by learning vocabulary through pictures and songs carried out every Saturday and Sunday. The teaching of the basis of Islam includes several values, namely the values of faith, worship, and morals. In nurturing the value of faith, children are taught about monotheism by introducing the pillars of faith, Islam, and exemplary stories. Second, the cultivation of the value of worship is carried out through teaching related to the commandments and prohibitions in Islam through the practice of worship in everyday life. For example, memorizing short surahs, daily prayers, and practicing prayer and ablution with exemplary methods and practices by ustadz and ustadzah. The nurturing of moral values is the understanding of commendable qualities towards fellow humans such as parents, teachers, friends, and the environment. This study can be utilized as a reference regarding the teaching of Islamic values in young children among Muslim minorities. It also offers a foundation for further comprehensive investigations within different domains. One limitation lies in its exclusive focus on teaching Islamic values, suggesting potential avenues for future research exploring strategies, methodologies, and approaches for nurturing Islamic values.

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