

DAYCARE CAREGIVERS' ROLE IN INSTILLING ISLAMIC VALUES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

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Abstract: This study examines the role of daycare caregivers in instilling Islamic values in early childhood at Rumah Bune Islamic Daycare, Bekasi. Previous studies have predominantly focused on formal teachers, while the contribution of caregivers who interact intensively with children through daily caregiving activities remains underexplored. This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, collecting data through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The findings show that caregivers perform a strategic informal *tarbiyah* role through three mechanisms: habituating worship and *thaharah* within daily caregiving routines; providing direct role modeling through eating, sleeping, personal hygiene, and religious practices; and affectively reinforcing Islamic values through intensive attachment-based relationships. These findings demonstrate that caregivers are not merely childcare providers but also informal *tarbiyah* agents who complement the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in developing children's Islamic character. The novelty of this study lies in conceptualizing caregivers as a "Tarbiyah Bridge" that connects formal academic learning spaces with children's everyday life experiences, a perspective that remains underexplored in the literature on Islamic early childhood education in Indonesia.

Keywords: Daycare Caregivers, Islamic Values, Early Childhood Education

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji peran caregiver daycare menanamkan nilai-nilai keislaman pada anak usia dini di Rumah Bune Islamic Daycare, Bekasi. Penelitian terdahulu sebagian besar berfokus pada guru formal, sementara kontribusi caregiver yang berinteraksi secara intensif dengan anak melalui aktivitas pengasuhan sehari-hari masih kurang diteliti. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, dengan pengumpulan data melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan caregiver menjalankan peran *tarbiyah* informal strategis melalui tiga mekanisme: pembiasaan ibadah dan *thaharah* dalam rutinitas pengasuhan sehari-hari; pemberian keteladanan langsung dalam aktivitas makan, tidur, kebersihan diri, dan praktik keagamaan; serta penguatan nilai-nilai keislaman secara afektif melalui hubungan berbasis kelekatan yang intensif. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa caregiver bukan sekadar penyedia layanan pengasuhan anak, tetapi juga agen *tarbiyah* informal yang melengkapi peran guru Pendidikan Agama Islam membentuk karakter Islami anak. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada konseptualisasi caregiver sebagai "Jembatan Tarbiyah" yang menghubungkan ruang pembelajaran akademik formal dengan pengalaman kehidupan sehari-hari anak, sebuah perspektif yang masih kurang mendapat perhatian dalam literatur pendidikan anak usia dini Islam di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Caregiver Daycare, Nilai Keislaman, Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is widely recognized by developmental psychologists and neuroscientists as a critical period or “golden age,” particularly from birth to six years, when children experience rapid development in cognitive, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual capacities. During this period, experiences, interactions, and stimuli received by children contribute significantly to the formation of long-term foundations for personality, character, cognition, and spirituality (Shonkoff & Garner, 2020). Therefore, early childhood education should not be understood merely as an effort to develop academic and cognitive abilities but also as a strategic process for cultivating moral character and religious values. From an Islamic perspective, the importance of early education is closely related to the concept of *fitrah* as described in the Qur'an, particularly Surah Ar-Rum verse 30, as well as the prophetic tradition stating that every child is born in a state of *fitrah* and that the surrounding environment plays a significant role in shaping the child's religious orientation. This perspective places the responsibility for children's religious and moral development not only on parents and formal teachers but also on every adult who interacts intensively with children during their formative years.

The contemporary social context has significantly transformed patterns of childcare and parenting. Increasing work demands, parents' professional responsibilities, and high social mobility

have reduced the amount of time available for parents to accompany their children's daily growth and development. This condition has contributed to the growing demand for daycare services as an institutional alternative for childcare. Data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2022) indicate the extensive growth of Early Childhood Education institutions in Indonesia, with more than 217,000 educational units operating across the country and an increasing development of full-day educational and childcare services. The expansion of daycare institutions creates both opportunities and challenges for early childhood education, particularly in relation to the continuity of children's moral and religious formation. Children spend a substantial portion of their daily lives in daycare environments, where they interact not only with teachers but also with caregivers who accompany them during routine activities. Consequently, daycare should not be viewed solely as a place for supervision and childcare but also as a social and educational environment in which values are transmitted through everyday interactions and habituation.

This situation raises an important educational question concerning the role of caregivers in the formation of Islamic values among young children. Unlike formal teachers, caregivers are directly involved in children's daily routines, including eating, sleeping, personal hygiene, play, emotional regulation, and interpersonal interactions. These seemingly ordinary activities provide

continuous opportunities for introducing and reinforcing Islamic values such as prayer, gratitude, cleanliness, discipline, respect, compassion, honesty, responsibility, and good manners. Nevertheless, in many educational discussions, the role of caregivers tends to be positioned primarily within the domain of physical care and child supervision rather than as part of the broader educational process. This limited understanding may result in an important dimension of early Islamic education being overlooked, despite the fact that children may spend more time interacting with caregivers than with formal teachers during their daily activities.

Empirical studies on Islamic education in early childhood have developed considerably over the past decade. Previous research has examined the effectiveness of center-based learning approaches in supporting children's development (Suyadi & Dahlia, 2021), the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers in developing children's moral character (Mulyasa, 2020), and the implementation of Qur'an-based curricula in early childhood education institutions (Mansur, 2021). These studies demonstrate that Islamic values can be effectively cultivated through structured learning, teacher guidance, and curriculum design. In addition, research indicates that children's character development is influenced by a supportive learning environment, including interactions among educational personnel and the selection of appropriate learning methods (Djuningsih, dkk., 2024).

However, these studies predominantly focus on formal educators, classroom-based learning, and curriculum implementation. The contribution of caregivers as individuals who provide continuous and intimate interaction with children in everyday contexts remains relatively underexplored.

This research gap becomes more significant when examined through contemporary theories of child development. Bowlby (2008), through Attachment Theory, emphasizes that consistent caregiver figures play an important role in children's attachment formation and subsequent social-emotional development. Although attachment theory primarily explains the emotional bond between children and their caregivers, its implications also extend to the formation of children's trust, behavioral patterns, and responses to their social environment. Similarly, Bandura (2019), through Social Learning Theory, explains that children acquire behaviors, attitudes, and values through observation, imitation, and modeling of significant figures in their environment. Caregivers therefore occupy a strategic position because their proximity, consistency, and frequency of interaction provide extensive opportunities for children to observe and imitate behaviors. In the context of Islamic daycare, caregivers can function as everyday role models who embody Islamic values through speech, attitudes, habits, and responses to children's needs. Thus, the process of instilling Islamic values does not occur exclusively through explicit

religious instruction but also through repeated habituation, interpersonal relationships, and modeling embedded in daily caregiving practices.

The urgency of examining this issue lies in the need to reconceptualize daycare as an integrated environment of care, education, and value formation. In an Islamic daycare context, the caregiver's role should extend beyond ensuring children's physical safety and comfort toward becoming an active agent in the cultivation of Islamic character. This perspective is particularly important because early childhood is a period when values are most effectively internalized through repetition, emotional closeness, concrete experiences, and consistent examples. The novelty of this study lies in positioning caregivers as informal agents of *tarbiyah* who contribute directly to the internalization of Islamic values through everyday caregiving practices. Rather than examining Islamic education solely through formal curriculum or teacher-centered instruction, this study highlights the educational significance of routine care activities and caregiver-child interactions as a form of informal Islamic education. This approach offers a broader understanding of Islamic value formation by connecting caregiving practices, attachment, social learning, habituation, and Islamic educational principles within the daycare ecosystem.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the role of daycare caregivers in instilling Islamic values in early childhood. Specifically, the study seeks to explore how

caregivers integrate Islamic values into children's daily routines and interactions, to identify the forms and strategies of Islamic value habituation implemented through informal caregiving practices, and to analyze the caregiver's position as an informal educational agent within an Islamic daycare environment. By focusing on the everyday practices of caregivers, this research is expected to contribute to the development of a more comprehensive conceptual understanding of early Islamic education, in which the responsibility for children's religious and moral formation is shared among parents, teachers, and caregivers. The study is conducted at Rumah Bune Islamic Daycare, Bekasi Regency, an institution that integrates daycare services with a comprehensive Islamic education system, providing a relevant context for examining how caregivers participate in the process of instilling Islamic values during children's early developmental years.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a holistic single-case study design (Yin, 2018). This design was selected based on the consideration that the phenomenon of caregivers' roles in instilling Islamic values is complex and context-dependent, requiring an in-depth understanding that cannot be reduced to numerical data. The study adopted an interpretive-constructivist paradigm, which views educational reality as a social construction shaped by interactions among actors within a

particular setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research was conducted at Rumah Bune Islamic Daycare, located at Jl. Manggis 3/15 Rt. 002 Rw. 05, Karang Satria, North Tambun District, Bekasi Regency, West Java. The institution is a “B”-accredited early childhood education institution operating under the auspices of Yayasan Trimuslim Indonesia (NPSN: 69912013). The institution was purposively selected because of its distinctive characteristics, namely its integration of full-day daycare services (06:00–17:30 WIB) with a structured Islamic curriculum within a full-day school platform, as well as its clearly defined division of roles between center teachers and caregivers.

The research subjects consisted of six key informants selected through purposive sampling, comprising two caregivers as the primary research subjects, one Islamic Religious Education center teacher, one school principal as an informant providing institutional context, and two parents as external triangulators. Observations were also conducted involving 10 children aged 4–6 years who actively participated in the learning ecosystem.

Data were collected through three complementary techniques as part of method triangulation: (1) moderate participant observation, involving field notes documenting daily activities from 06:00 to 17:30 WIB; (2) semi-structured interviews with all key informants; and (3) analysis of institutional documents,

including Daily Learning Implementation Plans, weekly center schedules, daily activity guidebooks, and parental consent forms. Source triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from different informants to validate the consistency of the findings.

Data were analyzed inductively using the interactive analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consisted of four stages: (1) data condensation through open thematic coding; (2) data display in the form of matrices and descriptive narratives; (3) drawing tentative conclusions; and (4) verification through member checking with key informants. Data trustworthiness was ensured through four criteria: credibility, achieved through prolonged engagement and member checking; transferability, supported by thick description; dependability, established through an audit trail; and confirmability, ensured through the traceability of findings to empirical evidence from the field.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings reveal four interrelated main themes that describe the role of daycare caregivers as informal educational agents at Rumah Bune Islamic Daycare. These four themes were extracted from the coding of field data and subsequently confirmed through a process of triangulation and member checking.

Profile of the Daycare-Based Islamic Education Ecosystem

Rumah Bune Islamic Daycare explicitly integrates its daycare mission of childcare and child nurturing with its mission of Islamic education. This integration is reflected in its 11.5-hour daily routine (06:00–17:30 WIB; UTC+7), in which Islamic values are embedded into every segment of the day, from morning arrival and welcoming activities to afternoon pick-up. The human resource structure, consisting of four center teachers and two caregivers, with an overall caregiver-to-child ratio of 1:1.67 for 10 children, demonstrates the institution's commitment to quality supervision and individualized assistance.

Field observations revealed that the 11.5-hour daily schedule is divided into two major zones based on the

dominant educational actors. The formal academic zone, lasting approximately 3.5 hours, is primarily led by center teachers and involves structured activities, including center-based learning, *Imtaq* activities, and Qur'anic School instruction. Meanwhile, the informal-caregiving zone, which occupies approximately 8 hours, is largely under the responsibility of caregivers and encompasses welcoming activities, three daily meals, personal hygiene routines, rest periods, and transitions between activities. These data quantitatively confirm that caregivers spend more time with children than any individual center teacher, positioning them as the most persistent pedagogical actors within the educational ecosystem. The distribution of daily activities and the Islamic values instilled during each time segment are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Daily Activities, Islamic Values, and Roles of Educational Actors

Time	Activity	Islamic Values Instilled	Role of Caregivers/Teachers
06:00–07:00	Student Arrival and Welcoming	Greeting (<i>salam</i>), noble character (<i>akhlak al-karimah</i>), Islamic brotherhood (<i>ukhuwah Islamiyah</i>)	Teachers and caregivers (<i>bunda asuh</i>) welcome children with greetings and smiles
07:00–07:30	Shared Breakfast	Prayers before and after meals, gratitude (<i>tahmid</i>), and table manners	Caregivers guide children in prayers and Islamic dining etiquette
07:30–08:30	Islamic Character Habituation: <i>Dhuha</i> Prayer, <i>Dhikr</i> , Prayers, Short Surahs, and Islamic Stories	Worship, monotheism (<i>tawhid</i>), faith (<i>aqidah</i>), and the exemplary conduct of the Prophet	The Islamic Religious Education center teacher leads the activities; caregivers provide assistance and serve as role models
08:30–09:15	Morning Routine and Snack Time	Discipline, gratitude, and <i>ta'awun</i> (sharing food)	Caregivers supervise cleanliness and proper manners in eating and sharing
10:00–11:30	Center-Based Learning (<i>Imtaq</i> ,	Integrative values according to each learning center	Center teachers lead the activities; caregivers assist

	Cognitive, Language, and STEAM)		with individual children's needs
11:45–12:15	Personal Hygiene Training and Congregational <i>Dhuhr</i> Prayer	<i>Thaharah</i> (ritual purity), obligatory worship, time discipline, and cleanliness (<i>nazafah</i>)	Caregivers train children in ablution (<i>wudhu</i>) and personal hygiene; the Islamic religious education teacher leads the congregational prayer
12:15–14:45	Nap Time	Bedtime prayers, <i>tawakkal</i> (reliance upon Allah), and <i>tuma'ninah</i> (inner tranquility)	Caregivers provide full assistance and recite prayers before children sleep
15:00–15:30	Personal Hygiene and Congregational <i>Asr</i> Prayer	<i>Thaharah</i> (ritual purity), consistency in worship (<i>istiqamah</i>), and responsibility (<i>amanah</i>)	Caregivers guide children in maintaining personal hygiene; all staff members perform congregational prayer together with the children
15:30–17:30	<i>TPQ</i> Class and Afternoon Meal	Qur'anic recitation (<i>tilawah</i>), love for the Qur'an (<i>mahabbah al-Qur'an</i>), and dining etiquette	The Islamic religious Education teacher leads the <i>TPQ</i> class; caregivers assist children during meals and the afternoon pick-up process

Source: Field observation data (2025)

Caregivers as Informal *Tarbiyah* Agents: Three Mechanisms of Value Internalization

Based on the coding of field data, this study identified three primary mechanisms employed by caregivers to instill Islamic values: habituation, modeling, and attachment-based affective reinforcement.

First, Habituation (*Ta'wid*) in the Context of Caregiving. From the perspective of Islamic education, habituation is a methodological pillar rooted in the concept of *ta'wid*, namely the process of developing habits through consistent repetition until a behavior becomes a natural habitus (Al-Ghazali in Fathurrohman, 2020). The caregivers (*bunda asuh*) at Rumah Bune Islamic Daycare systematically implement this

mechanism throughout each caregiving segment. During mealtimes, which occur three times a day, caregivers consistently guide children to recite the prayer before eating (*Bismillah*), remind them to observe the etiquette of eating with the right hand, and conclude the activity with a prayer after eating. This repetition, occurring up to 15 times per week, creates a condition that Lickona (2019) refers to as “moral automation,” in which value-based behavior no longer requires explicit instruction because it has been internalized as a spontaneous response.

Second, Direct Modeling (*Uswah Hasanah*). Field findings indicate that caregivers consistently practice the behaviors they expect from the children themselves. When guiding children in performing ablution (*wudhu*) before the

Dhuhr and *Asr* prayers, caregivers do not merely explain the steps of ablution verbally but also perform ablution alongside the children. During nap time, caregivers first recite the bedtime prayer in a gentle voice before the children close their eyes. This pattern is consistent with Bandura's (2019) Social Learning Theory, which states that children learn most effectively through observational learning from models perceived as competent and emotionally close to them—two characteristics that are strongly associated with the role of caregivers.

Third, Attachment-Based Affective Reinforcement. The distinctive position of caregivers compared to center teachers lies in the intensity and intimacy of their interactions with children. During the 2.5-hour nap period, caregivers remain in close physical proximity to the children, such as gently patting their backs, whispering prayers, and responding immediately to their needs. Such interactions foster an attachment bond that, within Bowlby's (2008) framework, functions as a "secure base" from which children can explore and internalize the values transmitted by their attachment figures. From an Islamic perspective, this relationship is analogous to the concept of *murabbi-mutarabbī* (educator-learner), which is grounded in compassion (*rahmah*) rather than merely instructional authority.

The Synergistic Dynamics between Caregivers and Islami religious Education Center Teachers

One of the most significant findings of this study is the identification of a complementary synergy between the roles of caregivers (*bunda asuh*) and Islamic Religious Education center teachers. This relationship is neither hierarchical nor substitutive; rather, it represents a co-pedagogical relationship in which both roles complement and reinforce one another. PAI center teachers are responsible for the formal-cognitive dimensions of Islamic education, including memorization of short surahs, prayer recitations, selected hadiths, and the understanding of basic concepts of Islamic creed (*aqidah*), which are delivered within the framework of the *Imtaq* Center and *TPQ* classes. Meanwhile, caregivers operate primarily within the informal-affective domain, ensuring that the values taught in the classroom are genuinely manifested in children's everyday behaviors.

This synergistic pattern can be concretely illustrated through the practice of prayer. In the *Imtaq* Center class, the Islamic Religious Education teacher teaches prayer recitations in a structured manner using the *talqin* and *muqabalah* methods. This cognitive understanding is subsequently reinforced through congregational *Dhuhr* and *Asr* prayers. In practice, however, caregivers are responsible for ensuring the children's physical and ritual readiness by guiding them in performing ablution (*wudhu*), arranging their clothing to ensure proper

coverage of the *aurah*, organizing the prayer rows (*shaf*), and reminding them of the intention to pray using language that is easily understood by children. The process of transferring knowledge (*ma'rifah*) into actual practice (*'amal*) is therefore a distinctive responsibility carried out by caregivers.

These findings reinforce Al-Attas's (2021) proposition concerning the concept of *tarbiyah* in Islam, which encompasses three inseparable dimensions: *ta'lim*

(knowledge transmission), *ta'dib* (internalization of proper manners and ethical conduct), and *tarbiyah* (the nurturing of holistic growth). If Islamic religious education center teachers are dominant in the domain of *ta'lim*, caregivers become the frontline agents of *ta'dib* and *tarbiyah*—two dimensions that can be understood as essential components of Islamic education. Table 2 systematically compares the division of roles between these two educational actors.

Table 2. Comparison of the Roles of Caregivers and Islamic religious Education Center Teachers in the Tarbiyah Ecosystem

Role Dimension	Islamic Religious Education Center Teacher	Caregiver
Context of Value Internalization	Formal-structured: <i>Imtaq</i> Center, hadith memorization, and prayer recitations	Informal-contextual: daily caregiving activities (eating, sleeping, and bathing)
Learning Approach	Instructive: lectures, demonstrations, memorization, and verbal reinforcement	Modeling and attachment: direct role modeling integrated into daily routines
Primary Values Transmitted	<i>Aqidah</i> , <i>fiqh</i> of worship, Qur'anic morality (<i>akhlaq</i>), and Qur'anic literacy	<i>Thaharah</i> , daily manners (<i>adab</i>), gratitude, <i>tuma'ninah</i> , and Islamic brotherhood (<i>ukhuwah Islamiyah</i>)
Dominant Interaction Time	07:30–08:30 (<i>Imtaq</i>) and 15:30–17:30 (<i>TPQ</i>)	Throughout the day; predominantly 11:45–14:45 (caregiving and nap time)
Theoretical Foundation	Islamic <i>tarbiyah</i> : <i>ta'lim</i> (teaching) and <i>ta'dib</i> (internalization of proper manners and ethical conduct)	Attachment Theory (Bowlby) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura)
Evaluation System	Assessment of memorization, prayer recitation skills, and Islamic character values	Observation of everyday behaviors: independence, cleanliness, and social manners
Status in the Literature	Widely examined in the literature on Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Early Childhood Education (PAUD)	Underexplored: caregivers as informal <i>tarbiyah</i> agents (Novelty)

Source: Analysis of primary research data (2025)

Clusters of Islamic Values Instilled through Caregiver Activities

Data analysis indicates that the Islamic values instilled through the role of caregivers encompass five interconnected thematic clusters. First, the value of *thaharah* (purity and

cleanliness). In Islam, the concept of *thaharah* is not merely concerned with physical cleanliness but also encompasses a profound spiritual dimension. Caregivers at Rumah Bune Islamic Daycare actively integrate this perspective into every personal hygiene

training session. When guiding children to wash their hands before meals, Caregiver 1 (field notes, March 14, 2025) consistently stated, "Wash your hands first, good Muslim child. Cleanliness is part of faith." This simple yet repetitive framing effectively connects hygienic activities with the children's Islamic identity.

Second, the values of worship and ritual discipline. The daily habituation of performing congregational prayers at two prayer times, namely *Dhuhr* and *Asr*, which amounts to ten guided congregational prayers per week, places children on a path toward developing a strong habitus of worship long before they reach the age at which prayer becomes obligatory. Research by Majid and Andayani (2021) found a significant correlation between the habituation of prayer from early childhood and consistency in religious practice during adolescence. This finding reinforces the urgency of institutional interventions such as those implemented at Rumah Bune Islamic Daycare.

Third, the values of *ukhuwah* and *ta'awun* (brotherhood and mutual assistance). Shared meals conducted three times a day are not merely intended to fulfill children's biological needs but are designed as a social laboratory for practicing Islamic values. Caregivers actively facilitate food sharing, encourage children to give priority to older individuals, and teach them to express gratitude. These values are referred to in Islamic terminology as *akhlak al-*

ijtima'iyah (social ethics). This approach is consistent with the concept of holistic-integrative education emphasized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2023) in *Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures*.

Fourth, the values of *tawakkal* (reliance upon Allah) and patience. The 2.5-hour nap period is managed by caregivers through an approach enriched with spiritual values. In addition to reciting bedtime prayers, caregivers help children accept a "pause" from activities as part of the rhythm of life established by Allah, using simple language such as, "Take a nap so you will be strong enough to worship, okay? This is also Allah's command to take care of our bodies." The internalization of *tawakkal* and acceptance (*qana'ah*) in this context represents a unique contribution that is difficult to replicate in formal classroom settings.

Fifth, the value of *mahabbah* (love) for the Qur'an. The Qur'anic learning class (*Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an*) held every afternoon positions Qur'anic recitation (*tilawah Al-Qur'an*) as the closing activity of the day. Rather than merely listening to recitations, caregivers often hum along with children's *murattal* recitations during afternoon activities, creating an auditory environment saturated with Qur'anic sounds. This approach is consistent with the findings of Jalaluddin (2021) concerning the importance of Qur'an-based auditory stimulation from early

childhood in fostering children's love and familiarity with the holy scripture.

Trust-Based Supervision System: Safety as an Islamic Value

Child safety and monitoring at Rumah Bune Islamic Daycare are managed through two complementary pillars: personal physical supervision and technological supervision. Under the first pillar, center teachers and caregivers implement a close supervision system through carefully structured duty schedules during every transition between activities. No child is allowed to remain outside the visual range of the staff members on duty at any time. Under the second pillar, the institution is equipped with a comprehensive closed-circuit television system covering all operational areas except bathrooms, a policy designed to maintain a balance between child safety and privacy.

What distinguishes this supervision system from conventional daycare services is its underlying value framework. Technological monitoring is communicated to staff members and parents not as a form of punitive surveillance but within the framework of *amanah* (trust and responsibility). The school principal stated in an interview on March 22, 2025, "The closed-circuit television system is not intended to make us suspicious of teachers or caregivers. It is a tool that helps us fulfill the trust entrusted to us by parents who have placed their children in our care." The internalization of *amanah* within the

supervision system has profound pedagogical implications: caregivers who understand their responsibilities as a trust are more likely to provide meaningful and holistic care (Hasanuddin, 2022).

Research Novelty: The Concept of the Tarbiyah Bridge

The primary novelty of this study lies in formulating the concept of the "Tarbiyah Bridge" to describe the strategic role of caregivers within the Islamic education ecosystem of early childhood. The metaphor of a bridge is appropriate because it illustrates the caregiver's function as a connector between two domains that are often regarded as separate: the formal academic space, including classrooms, learning centers, and Qur'anic learning classes, and the space of real-life experiences, including eating, sleeping, bathing, and playing. Within the literature on Islamic education, values that exist only within academic spaces but fail to become rooted in everyday practices indicate a failure of *tarbiyah*, a condition that has been highlighted as a concern by numerous scholars (Azra, 2021).

Compared with previous studies, such as Rohani et al. (2022) on the management of Islamic Early Childhood Education in Sumatra, Wahab and Rosidin (2021) on the implementation of Islamic curricula in Integrated Islamic Kindergartens in the Greater Jakarta area, and Ibrahim (2020) on the role of Islamic

Religious Education teachers in developing character among kindergarten children, this study offers advantages in three aspects. First, it positions caregivers, rather than formal teachers, as the primary subjects of analysis. Second, it examines a full-day school context that provides children with substantially longer exposure to educational and caregiving interactions. Third, it integrates attachment theory, social learning theory, and the Islamic concept of *tarbiyah* into a coherent analytical framework.

At the policy level, these findings indicate the need for reorientation in the recruitment, training, and professional development systems for caregivers in Islamic Early Childhood Education institutions. If training has traditionally focused on physical caregiving skills, such as first aid, child nutrition, and hygiene, caregiver training curricula should also incorporate informal *tarbiyah* competencies. These competencies include understanding Islamic values relevant to caregiving contexts, mastering habituation and modeling techniques based on Islamic values, and developing affective sensitivity to establish healthy attachment relationships with children. Research by Permata and Hasanah (2023) on the competencies of Islamic Early Childhood Education educators in West Java confirms that existing competency standards do not yet explicitly accommodate the dimension of informal *tarbiyah* among caregivers.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that caregivers at Rumah Bune Islamic Daycare play a role that extends far beyond physical childcare. They function as strategic informal *tarbiyah* agents within the Islamic education ecosystem of early childhood. This role is manifested through three primary mechanisms: the habituation of Islamic values within daily caregiving activities, direct role modeling (*uswah hasanah*) in religious practices and manners, and attachment-based affective reinforcement that creates optimal psychological conditions for value internalization. The role of caregivers is complementary and co-pedagogical to that of Islamic Religious Education center teachers. While Islamic Religious Education teachers operate primarily within the domain of *ta'lim*, caregivers contribute significantly to the domains of *ta'dib* and *tarbiyah*. The dichotomy between academic spaces and caregiving spaces in early childhood Islamic education, which has largely been overlooked, is in fact bridged by the role of caregivers. This function is conceptualized in this study as the "Tarbiyah Bridge," representing a new conceptual contribution to the body of knowledge in Islamic education in Indonesia. The practical implications of this study include the need to revise competency standards for caregivers in Islamic Early Childhood Education institutions by integrating informal *tarbiyah* dimensions; the need to establish professional development

programs for caregivers based on Islamic competencies; and the need for institutional recognition of the strategic role of caregivers as an integral part of the educational team rather than merely as non-teaching staff. This study is limited to a single institutional setting and requires replication in more diverse contexts to strengthen the generalizability of the proposed Tarbiyah Bridge concept.

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