

Implementation of Early Literacy Learning Based on Islamic Education Values Through the Beyond Centers and Circle Time (BCCT) Approach at MIS Muhammadiyah Takengon

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the implementation of early literacy learning based on Islamic Education (PAI) values through the Beyond Centers and Circle Time (BCCT) approach at MIS Muhammadiyah Takengon, Central Aceh. The BCCT model emphasizes active, holistic, and child-centered learning that integrates play, exploration, and moral reflection. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research investigates how teachers integrate Islamic educational values into early literacy activities and how this integration affects students' cognitive and spiritual development. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and document analysis involving first-grade teachers and students. The findings reveal that the BCCT approach effectively enhances children's reading and writing readiness while cultivating Islamic character through meaningful play and literacy centers. Teachers integrated storytelling, Islamic reading materials, and reflective discussions during circle time to foster moral values such as honesty, gratitude, and discipline. Challenges included time management and limited access to literacy materials reflecting Islamic content. The study concludes that BCCT-based literacy learning can holistically nurture children's intellectual and moral foundations when implemented by creative, reflective, and spiritually conscious teachers.

Keywords: Early literacy, Islamic education values, BCCT, Child-Centered Learning, Character Education

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implementasi pembelajaran literasi awal berbasis nilai-nilai Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) melalui pendekatan Beyond Centers and Circle Time (BCCT) di MIS Muhammadiyah Takengon, Aceh Tengah. Model BCCT menekankan pembelajaran aktif, holistik, dan berpusat pada anak yang memadukan kegiatan bermain, eksplorasi, dan refleksi nilai-nilai moral. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana guru mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai PAI dalam kegiatan literasi awal serta bagaimana integrasi tersebut berpengaruh terhadap perkembangan kognitif dan spiritual anak. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi dengan melibatkan guru dan peserta didik kelas I. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan BCCT efektif menumbuhkan kesiapan membaca dan menulis anak sekaligus menanamkan karakter Islami melalui kegiatan bermain dan sentra literasi yang bermakna. Guru menggunakan kegiatan bercerita Islami, membaca doa, serta refleksi nilai-nilai keislaman dalam circle time untuk menanamkan kejujuran, rasa syukur, dan kedisiplinan. Tantangan yang dihadapi antara lain pengelolaan waktu dan keterbatasan bahan bacaan Islami. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pembelajaran literasi berbasis BCCT mampu mengembangkan aspek intelektual dan moral anak secara holistik apabila diterapkan oleh guru yang kreatif, reflektif, dan berkesadaran spiritual.

Kata kunci: Literasi awal, nilai-nilai PAI, BCCT, pembelajaran berpusat pada anak, pendidikan karakter.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early literacy skills serve as the fundamental basis for the cognitive and social development of children at the elementary education level (Cooper et al., 2014). Early literacy does not only involve the ability to read and write but also encompasses skills in understanding symbols, recognizing language sounds, and developing logical and communicative thinking. UNESCO (2023) asserts that literacy is a fundamental right of every child and a key to improving educational quality and future social welfare. However, in Indonesia, basic literacy remains a serious challenge. Based on data from the National Assessment (Kemendikbudristek), approximately 32.9% of elementary school students are categorized as having literacy skills below the competent level, indicating a low ability to comprehend simple texts at an early age (I. Rifai & Rombot, 2023). This condition shows that literacy learning processes have not been optimally implemented since the early childhood education stage. A similar phenomenon can be observed in Central Aceh District, particularly at MIS Muhammadiyah Takengon. Based on preliminary observations conducted by the researcher, it was found that the students' early literacy abilities varied significantly. Some students were already able to recognize letters and write simple words, while others still faced difficulties in identifying letter symbols, constructing words, and understanding reading content (Interview with Mahara Putri, Grade 1 teacher at MIS Muhammadiyah Takengon, May 25, 2025). The teacher reported that students demonstrated high enthusiasm for reading and writing activities but were less consistent in understanding textual meaning and relating the reading material to their daily religious experiences. This situation illustrates a gap between the ideals of Islamic education, which emphasizes the formation of literate and morally upright individuals, and the actual literacy learning practices that remain technical and cognitively limited.

To bridge this gap, the Beyond Centers and Circle Time (BCCT) approach is considered a relevant pedagogical model to implement. This approach combines play-based learning, exploration, and value reflection through various "learning centers," such as reading-writing centers, role-play centers, and art centers. According to Al Adawiyah et al (2025), the BCCT approach emphasizes active, holistic, and child-centered learning, in which children learn through meaningful, hands-on experiences. This model has proven effective in enhancing children's participation and fostering learning independence. Research by Cahyani et al (2025) shows that the implementation of the BCCT approach can improve early literacy skills while simultaneously nurturing religious character in early childhood through guided play activities and the habituation of Islamic values. These findings are consistent with the conditions at MIS Muhammadiyah Takengon, where teachers have begun to implement literacy learning through various centers such as reading Islamic stories, writing daily prayers, and conducting discussions during circle time. However, the implementation of these strategies has not yet been fully structured or systematically integrated with Islamic Education (PAI) values. Thus, there is an urgent need to examine more deeply how early literacy learning based on PAI values through the BCCT approach can be effectively implemented at MIS Muhammadiyah Takengon. This study is significant not only for improving literacy competence but also for developing children's spiritual and moral character, which lies at the core of Islamic education.

Research on early literacy learning for young children has been widely conducted, particularly in the context of language development and reading readiness. However, most of these studies focus primarily on the cognitive and technical aspects of literacy such as letter recognition, vocabulary building, and phonological awareness without deeply linking them to religious values and the formation of Islamic character. For instance, Fikri & Amril (2025) study on Islamic-based early literacy strategies at TKIT Nurul Fikri demonstrated that activities such as Islamic storytelling and shared reading could increase children's reading interest, but it did not explain how Islamic values were systematically integrated through a specific learning model.

Similarly, Hadi & Mulyadin (2025) research on the internalization of Islamic values through daily activities in early childhood education emphasized the importance of teacher modeling and habituation of Islamic values. However, it did not discuss specific pedagogical strategies that explicitly combine literacy and spirituality in a structured way. In other words, many previous studies remain conceptual and have not provided a comprehensive and applicable model for developing Islamic-based early literacy learning.

On the other hand, study by Aulia (2024) have proven that the BCCT approach is effective in stimulating multiple aspects of child development, including social, emotional, and linguistic domains. However, these studies have rarely connected the BCCT approach to the Islamic education context specifically how BCCT can function as an integrative medium for instilling Islamic values through children's literacy activities. This

indicates a research gap between theoretical studies on BCCT's effectiveness and its practical implementation in religious-based literacy learning within Islamic educational institutions. In addition, previous studies also display methodological limitations, such as focusing on only one aspect of child development without examining the interrelation between cognitive, social, and spiritual aspects, or not conducting direct field observations in educational settings that strongly embody Islamic characteristics, such as MIS Muhammadiyah Takengon. This institution emphasizes the integration of academic learning and Islamic character formation, making it an ideal context for further in-depth study. Based on the explanation above, it can be identified that research on early literacy learning based on PAI values through the BCCT approach remains limited both conceptually and practically. This limitation presents an important opportunity to conduct a study that not only describes early childhood literacy activities but also explores how Islamic values are internalized through play, reading, and writing activities within the BCCT approach.

Therefore, this research is considered highly urgent. Theoretically, it aims to broaden the understanding of the integration between early literacy and Islamic character education within the BCCT framework. Practically, the findings are expected to serve as a reference for teachers and Islamic educational institutions in designing effective, enjoyable, and spiritually grounded learning strategies to cultivate a generation that is literate, religious, intelligent, and of noble character.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Early Literacy and Its Role in Islamic Education

Early literacy refers to the foundational set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that precede conventional reading and writing abilities (Kennedy & McLoughlin, 2023). It includes children's capacity to recognize letters, understand sound-symbol correspondence, interpret meaning, and engage with texts meaningfully through oral and visual language (Mehlhase et al., 2025). In the Islamic perspective, literacy (*iqra'*) is not only a cognitive process but also a spiritual command that encourages individuals to acquire knowledge and reflect upon divine creation (Qur'an, Al-'Alaq: 1-5). Therefore, early literacy in Islamic education should integrate cognitive development with spiritual and moral awareness.

Islamic pedagogy views literacy as a means of cultivating both *'ilm* (knowledge) and *adab* (ethical conduct). According to Haerudin & Noor (2022), the process of learning to read and write must be accompanied by the internalization of Islamic values, such as honesty, discipline, and gratitude, so that literacy becomes a form of moral cultivation. In this context, the teacher's task extends beyond language instruction to the nurturing of *akhlaq al-karimah* (noble character).

Recent studies emphasize that early literacy cannot be separated from children's socio-cultural and moral contexts (Suryana & Kurnia, 2025). Integrating religious and cultural values helps children understand language as a tool for expressing faith and building empathy. For example, reading Islamic stories or writing short reflections on moral behavior can help children connect literacy activities to their spiritual identity. Such value-based literacy programs have been proven to enhance children's motivation, empathy, and sense of belonging in faith-based schools (Amin, 2024).

Therefore, in Islamic educational institutions, literacy should be redefined as a holistic practice that nurtures intellectual curiosity and ethical sensitivity simultaneously. As Polemikou & Da Silva (2022) note, literacy development in early childhood must be approached as both a cognitive skill and a spiritual practice that supports the formation of *insan literat dan berakhlak mulia* literate individuals with virtuous character.

2.2 The Beyond Centers and Circle Time (BCCT) Approach

The Beyond Centers and Circle Time (BCCT) approach, originally developed by Pamela Phelps in the United States, has become one of the most influential models in early childhood education. It emphasizes play-based, center-based, and reflective learning as the main pathways for children's development. The approach is grounded in constructivist theory, which posits that children build knowledge through active exploration, social interaction, and reflection (Kurniawati & Sa'ida, 2023). BCCT consists of two core elements: "centers" and "circle time." Centers are structured learning environments designed to stimulate children's cognitive, emotional, and physical development through purposeful play such as reading, writing, art, and role-play centers. Circle time, meanwhile, is a reflective group activity where children and teachers discuss what they have learned, share experiences, and reinforce social-emotional skills.

In the context of Islamic education, BCCT can be adapted to emphasize spiritual reflection and moral engagement. Teachers can use the reading center to explore Islamic stories, the art center to illustrate moral lessons, and circle time to discuss values such as honesty, gratitude, and patience. Firdaus & Utomo (2025) found that integrating BCCT with moral reflection in Indonesian Islamic preschools encouraged children to internalize values through meaningful play and social dialogue.

Research by Astuti et al (2025) also revealed that BCCT supports holistic learning outcomes when teachers intentionally embed religious values in literacy activities. Children exposed to value-laden stories demonstrated stronger comprehension and empathy, indicating that moral context enriches literacy meaning-

making. Similarly, Hasani (2025) found that teachers' creative adaptation of BCCT by incorporating Islamic songs, short prayers, and storytelling enhanced both reading interest and spiritual awareness among early learners. The BCCT model aligns with Islamic pedagogical principles that advocate for experiential learning (*ta'lim bi al-tajribah*) learning through experience and balanced development (*tathawwur kulli*), encompassing cognitive, emotional, physical, and spiritual growth (Rahman, 2025). Hence, BCCT provides a pedagogical bridge between modern constructivism and Islamic educational philosophy, offering a framework for integrating play, reflection, and moral cultivation within early literacy.

2.3 Integration of Literacy, Morality, and Spirituality

Integrating literacy with morality and spirituality represents the essence of value-based education. In Islamic pedagogy, this integration corresponds to the concept of *tarbiyah ruhiyah* spiritual nurturing that harmonizes intellectual and emotional intelligence. As Ajhuri (2024) states, the educator's role evolves from being a *mu'allim* (knowledge transmitter) to a *murabbi* (spiritual nurturer) and *mursyid* (moral guide). Within this paradigm, teaching literacy becomes a moral act, aiming not only to inform but also to transform children's hearts and behaviors. Recent frameworks such as Digital Spiritual Literacy (DSL) stress that 21st-century educators must integrate technological literacy with ethical and spiritual reasoning (Lubis & Asrin, 2025). For early childhood Islamic education, this means that teachers should creatively use media like digital storybooks or interactive illustrations to convey moral messages consistent with Islamic ethics. In the BCCT context, these digital tools can enrich centers with interactive activities while maintaining spiritual integrity.

Moreover, the integration of moral and literacy education must consider children's developmental stages. Early learners interpret stories and symbols emotionally before cognitively. According to Chaidi & Drigas (2022), moral understanding in young children emerges from emotional engagement and modeling rather than abstract reasoning. Therefore, teachers in BCCT environments should act as moral models who demonstrate sincerity (*ikhlas*), compassion (*rahmah*), and consistency (*istiqamah*) in their interactions. This relational modeling helps children internalize values implicitly during play and discussion.

Empirical evidence supports this approach. Samad & Jariah (2025) found that storytelling sessions grounded in Islamic narratives significantly improved children's comprehension and prosocial behavior. Similarly, A. Rifai (2025) reported that moral storytelling integrated with play-based literacy activities increased empathy and moral reflection among elementary students. These studies affirm that literacy intertwined with moral narratives leads to deeper cognitive and affective learning. In summary, integrating literacy and spirituality nurtures both the mind and soul. BCCT provides the pedagogical structure, while Islamic values supply the ethical and spiritual substance. When combined, they form a holistic model of literacy education that shapes *insan kamil* balanced individuals who can think critically, communicate effectively, and act ethically.

2.4 The Role of Teachers as Moral Facilitators in BCCT Literacy Learning

Teachers hold a pivotal role in ensuring that the integration of BCCT and Islamic values functions effectively. In this approach, teachers are not mere facilitators of play but also designers of moral experiences. They create literacy environments where every activity reading, writing, storytelling, or dialogue becomes an opportunity for ethical reflection. According to Jaikla & Piyakun (2025), teachers' emotional commitment and care directly influence students' well-being and engagement. In Islamic education, this aligns with *rahmah* (compassionate pedagogy), where the teacher's warmth and sincerity form the foundation of effective moral education (Fahrurrozi et al., 2025). Teachers in BCCT-based classrooms must thus balance three roles: (1) facilitator of learning, (2) moral role model, and (3) reflective practitioner. Reflective practice is essential for sustaining professional and spiritual growth. As Werdiningsih & Rochmah (2023) emphasize, reflection allows teachers to align pedagogical strategies with ethical principles. In the case of BCCT literacy learning, reflection helps teachers evaluate how activities support both literacy development and moral internalization. Regular reflection sessions either individually or in professional learning communities can enhance teachers' sensitivity toward the spiritual dimension of literacy learning (Segev et al., 2026).

Furthermore, contextual innovation is critical in resource-limited environments such as rural Islamic schools. Teachers often adapt BCCT materials using locally available resources like handmade picture books or printed Islamic stories. Lu (2025) highlight this practice as "localized adaptation," ensuring that pedagogical innovation remains culturally relevant and inclusive. This adaptability demonstrates the resilience and creativity of Islamic teachers who transform challenges into opportunities for moral and intellectual enrichment.

3. Methodology

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the implementation of early literacy learning integrated with Islamic Education (PAI) values through the Beyond Centers and Circle Time (BCCT) approach at MIS Muhammadiyah Takengon. A qualitative design was chosen to understand classroom experiences and interactions naturally and contextually. The participants included one first-grade teacher, ten students aged six to seven years, and the school principal. The school was selected because it actively combines innovative learning

methods with Islamic character education. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and document analysis over four weeks. Observations focused on classroom interactions, teaching strategies, student participation, and the integration of Islamic values such as honesty, respect, and gratitude during literacy activities. Semi-structured interviews with the teacher and principal explored lesson planning, value integration, and challenges in implementing BCCT. Supporting documents, including lesson plans and student work, were also analyzed to strengthen the findings. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The data were coded and categorized based on emerging themes such as Islamic value integration, teacher reflection, and student engagement. To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability through triangulation, member checking, detailed documentation, and reflective journaling. Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the study by obtaining permission and informed consent from participants and parents. Participant identities were protected using pseudonyms, and the researcher upheld Islamic ethical values such as amanah, adab, and rahmah during the research process. Although the study focused on one school and one teacher, it provided valuable insights into integrating Islamic values into literacy learning through the BCCT approach.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The results of this study are presented based on three main sources of data: classroom observations, interviews with the teacher and principal, and documentation analysis. Together, these data provide a comprehensive understanding of how the Beyond Centers and Circle Time (BCCT) approach was implemented to develop early literacy skills integrated with Islamic Education (PAI) values at MIS Muhammadiyah Takengon.

Classroom observations, conducted over four consecutive weeks, revealed that literacy learning activities were carried out in an interactive, joyful, and spiritually meaningful atmosphere. The teacher implemented the BCCT approach by dividing the classroom into several learning centers: the reading writing center, the role-play center, and the art and creativity center. Each center provided opportunities for students to explore reading and writing in ways appropriate to their developmental stages while internalizing Islamic values.

In the reading-writing center, students engaged with simple Islamic storybooks and word cards prepared by the teacher. For example, one activity involved reading a short story titled “The Honest Child”, followed by identifying key vocabulary such as “truth,” “trust,” and “reward.” The teacher guided the children to relate the moral of the story to the Prophet Muhammad’s example of honesty (*sidq*). Afterward, students practiced writing simple sentences expressing honesty and gratitude. Observation notes indicated that this activity not only improved students’ vocabulary recognition and writing fluency but also stimulated moral discussion. The children appeared enthusiastic and motivated, often volunteering to read aloud or help peers spell words correctly.

The role-play center was used to connect literacy with real-life moral experiences. Students were asked to act out short scenarios inspired by Islamic teachings for instance, helping a friend, greeting politely, or sharing food during break time. Through these dramatizations, students internalized values of cooperation (*ta’awun*), empathy, and respect (*adab*). During one session, a group of students performed a short play about helping their parents clean the house. As they acted, the teacher inserted literacy elements by asking them to label objects with written words and describe their actions in sentences. This integration of play, language, and value learning embodied the BCCT principle that learning should occur through meaningful activity rather than rote memorization.

Meanwhile, the art and creativity center provided space for students to visually express the moral messages they learned from literacy activities. After reading an Islamic story or learning a new word, students were invited to draw or color pictures that reflected the story’s moral lesson such as kindness, gratitude, or honesty. These drawings were later displayed on the classroom wall as part of a “Character and Literacy Corner.” The visual products demonstrated that children could represent abstract moral ideas in creative and concrete ways. Observation notes also recorded that students showed pride and ownership when their artwork was displayed, reinforcing their sense of accomplishment and belonging. The circle time component, conducted at the end of each learning session, served as a reflection forum. Here, the teacher and students gathered in a circle to review what they had learned. The teacher prompted reflection by asking guiding questions such as, “What good habits did we practice today?” or “How can we use what we learned at home?” Students responded with statements like “We should tell the truth,” or “We must thank Allah before eating.” These reflective dialogues encouraged children to connect literacy tasks with their moral and spiritual understanding. The warm, interactive atmosphere during circle time created emotional safety and trust, enabling students to speak openly and reflect sincerely.

The interview data supported and deepened the findings from observation. The first-grade teacher, as the main implementer of the BCCT approach, explained that her primary motivation for integrating Islamic values

into literacy activities stemmed from the belief that “learning to read and write must lead to better character.” She emphasized that the BCCT approach provided a flexible structure for linking academic and moral objectives. According to her, “The centers make children active. They play, read, and talk. When I guide them with stories or verses, they understand the meaning of literacy as part of worship.”

The teacher further explained that integrating values into literacy activities required careful planning. Before each session, she selected short stories, prayers, or Qur’anic verses that were relevant to the weekly theme. For example, when the theme was Helping Others, she chose the hadith “The best people are those who benefit others”, which she incorporated into a writing exercise where students composed simple sentences describing acts of kindness. She noted that students were more engaged when the literacy materials reflected familiar moral situations rather than abstract academic topics. The school principal supported this integration and emphasized that MIS Muhammadiyah Takengon prioritizes holistic education that combines literacy competence with character development. He stated that “literacy without values is empty. Our goal is not just for students to read fluently but to understand what they read and apply it in life.” He also noted that the BCCT approach aligns with the school’s vision of developing independent, creative, and religious learners.

Both the teacher and principal acknowledged challenges in implementing BCCT effectively. The teacher mentioned limited time allocation and the scarcity of Islamic reading resources suitable for early learners. She often had to create her own story materials using local examples or adapt general reading books by inserting Islamic values. Despite these obstacles, both interviewees agreed that the BCCT model had significantly increased student participation and improved their moral awareness. The teacher observed noticeable changes in students’ behavior, stating, “They now remind each other to pray before eating, to be honest when writing tasks, and to help friends who are struggling.” Such behavioral outcomes indicate that the moral dimensions of literacy learning were effectively internalized.

Document analysis provided additional evidence of the structured implementation of BCCT and the integration of Islamic values. The teacher’s lesson plans (RPP) included clear objectives that combined literacy and moral development, such as “students are able to write simple sentences about daily activities while expressing gratitude to Allah.” The lesson plans also showed detailed steps for conducting activities at each center, including time allocations, materials, and reflection questions for circle time. The students’ written work and drawings served as tangible documentation of learning outcomes. Samples collected during the study showed that most students could write simple sentences using familiar vocabulary, such as “I love my mother,” “We pray every day,” and “We must help others.” Their writing demonstrated both linguistic progress and value understanding. The visual artworks also revealed themes of faith, family, and kindness indicating that students not only learned to express ideas in words but also developed moral imagination. In addition, the school’s literacy policy documents highlighted institutional support for value-based education. The program “Literasi Islami Anak Saleh” (Islamic Literacy for Virtuous Children) was formally included in the school’s curriculum as part of character development. These documents underscored that literacy was viewed not merely as an academic competency but as a medium for nurturing faith and moral responsibility.

Across all three data sources observation, interviews, and documentation the study consistently found that the BCCT approach at MIS Muhammadiyah Takengon created an integrated learning environment where literacy, play, and spirituality were interconnected. The teacher’s creative use of stories, art, and reflective dialogue allowed children to experience literacy as a joyful and morally meaningful process. The observations confirmed that students learned best through active participation and reflection, while the interviews highlighted the teacher’s intentional design and moral purpose behind each activity. Documentation validated that these practices were embedded systematically in lesson planning and curriculum policies. Together, these findings demonstrate that BCCT-based literacy learning fosters not only reading and writing skills but also shapes students’ Islamic identity, social empathy, and character. The overall results thus show that the BCCT approach, when grounded in Islamic Education (PAI) values, functions as a holistic pedagogical model capable of strengthening both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. The combination of structured play, value-based storytelling, and reflective dialogue created a classroom culture that promotes literacy, moral awareness, and faith development simultaneously.

4.2 Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that the implementation of early literacy learning based on Islamic Education (PAI) values through the Beyond Centers and Circle Time (BCCT) approach at MIS Muhammadiyah Takengon fosters a meaningful and holistic educational experience. This finding aligns with recent studies emphasizing that literacy development should not be limited to linguistic competence but should also integrate moral, emotional, and spiritual dimensions (Juzwik et al., 2022). The observations revealed that children learned reading and writing not as mechanical skills but as moral practices infused with values such as honesty (*sidq*), gratitude (*shukr*), and cooperation (*ta’awun*). These results confirm that BCCT serves as an effective pedagogical bridge between academic literacy and Islamic moral education, harmonizing cognitive learning with character formation. One major finding concerns the role of play-based learning in increasing children’s

motivation and engagement during literacy activities. The BCCT approach, with its learning centers and circle time, transformed the classroom into a dynamic environment that encouraged exploration, collaboration, and creativity. This is consistent with Saefudin & Cahyo (2025), who found that children's literacy development improves when they learn through play and discovery because such activities stimulate intrinsic motivation and foster active learning. The integration of moral messages into play also supports the notion proposed by Rifai (2025) that storytelling and dramatization rooted in Islamic narratives enhance comprehension and prosocial behavior. In this study, the children's enthusiasm during role-play and storytelling sessions indicated that value-based play not only developed their vocabulary and writing fluency but also deepened their moral understanding.

The second key finding relates to the integration of Islamic values into literacy instruction, which proved to be both pedagogically effective and spiritually transformative. Islamic values were not delivered as separate lessons but embedded organically in every literacy task, from reading and writing to art and reflection. This integration exemplifies the Islamic pedagogical principle of *ta'dib* the cultivation of proper moral and intellectual behavior through knowledge (Abdullah, 2021). The teacher's practice of guiding students to connect literacy activities with Qur'anic messages, such as writing sentences of gratitude or discussing stories of honesty, demonstrates how BCCT operationalizes this principle in daily classroom practice. Similar findings were reported by Nursobah et al (2025), who emphasized that habituation and reflection are essential methods for integrating moral and spiritual dimensions in Islamic education. The reflective discussions during circle time observed in this study served as practical applications of *muhasabah* (self-reflection), enabling children to internalize moral values through verbal expression and emotional connection.

Furthermore, this research reinforces the argument that teacher reflection and creativity are crucial in sustaining integrative literacy learning. The teacher at MIS Muhammadiyah Takengon functioned not only as an instructor but as a *murabbi* a spiritual and moral mentor who designed activities that linked learning outcomes to Islamic virtues. Her reflective practice, observed through journaling and continuous adaptation of materials, aligns with the model of reflective pedagogy discussed by Kolajo (2025), which highlights the importance of ongoing self-assessment in achieving pedagogical and ethical excellence. In Islamic educational contexts, reflection (*tafakkur*) and sincerity (*ikhlas*) are foundational values that transform teaching into an act of worship (*ibadah*). By combining reflection and moral intention, the teacher effectively embodied what Arifin (2026) describe as spiritual professionalism the alignment of pedagogical skill with spiritual consciousness.

The study also found that emotional connection between teacher and students played an essential role in facilitating both literacy and moral learning. The teacher's empathetic communication, patience, and encouragement fostered a safe emotional climate where children felt confident to participate and express themselves. This finding resonates with Savina et al (2025) who concluded that teachers' care and emotional presence directly enhance students' engagement and academic success. In Islamic pedagogy, this approach is in harmony with the principle of *rahmah* (compassion) and the prophetic model of teaching, which emphasizes kindness and patience as integral components of education. By nurturing emotional bonds, the teacher transformed the literacy classroom into a community of faith and learning an environment where students experienced knowledge not only intellectually but also spiritually and emotionally.

Another important discussion points concerns contextual innovation and teacher autonomy in resource-limited environments. The documentation showed that the teacher created her own literacy materials mini-Islamic storybooks, illustrated vocabulary cards, and simple worksheets aligned with moral themes. This practice reflects what Harris et al (2025) term "localized adaptation," a pedagogical strategy that ensures learning remains culturally and spiritually relevant even when material resources are scarce. Similarly, Ilyas et al (2023) observed that teachers in Aceh's Islamic schools often innovate by contextualizing general literacy materials to include Qur'anic verses or Islamic stories, thereby maintaining both developmental appropriateness and moral integrity. The teacher's creative adaptation in this study illustrates resilience and commitment to *amanah* (educational responsibility), ensuring that literacy teaching remains grounded in faith-based values.

Moreover, the integration of BCCT and Islamic values supports the holistic development model that encompasses cognitive, affective, social, and spiritual dimensions. The BCCT approach's core philosophy learning through play and reflection mirrors Islamic education's emphasis on *fitrah* (innate potential) and *tathawwur kulli* (balanced growth). According to Aulia (2024), BCCT provides a flexible structure for developing early literacy while reinforcing moral and emotional intelligence. This study confirms that when literacy activities are combined with spiritual reflection and moral discussion, children develop critical thinking skills alongside ethical awareness. The synergy between literacy and spirituality nurtures the *whole child*, producing learners who are not only literate but also morally grounded and emotionally mature. In connecting the empirical findings to theory, this research provides evidence that the BCCT model aligns with constructivist learning principles while also fulfilling the Islamic concept of *tarbiyah* (nurturing). Constructivist theorists such as Vygotsky emphasize that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and reflection, while Islamic pedagogy extends this idea by asserting that all knowledge must ultimately lead to self-improvement and service to God. The reflective discussions and collaborative literacy centers observed in this study demonstrate how

these two frameworks can coexist harmoniously. As Namaziandost et al (2026) suggest, integrating moral storytelling and reflective dialogue in literacy learning strengthens both empathy and higher-order thinking a pattern evident in the children's behavior and verbal responses during circle time.

The discussion also underscores the institutional dimension of integrating literacy and Islamic values. The inclusion of "Literasi Islami Anak Saleh" as part of the school's official literacy program shows that the success of value-based education depends on administrative support and curricular alignment. This institutional commitment echoes Zul et al (2026) argument that sustainable moral education requires systemic integration across curriculum, pedagogy, and school culture. At MIS Muhammadiyah Takengon, this systemic approach ensured that teachers, administrators, and students shared a unified vision of literacy as both a skill and a moral responsibility.

Finally, the findings have broader implications for Islamic education in Indonesia and beyond. The success of BCCT-based literacy learning at MIS Muhammadiyah Takengon suggests that faith-integrated pedagogy can be both modern and authentic combining contemporary child-centered approaches with Islamic ethical foundations. This counters the misconception that religious education is incompatible with innovation or play-based learning. On the contrary, as Siagian (2025) notes, faith-based literacy models enhance motivation and moral engagement when aligned with children's natural curiosity and playfulness. The present study therefore contributes to a growing body of literature advocating for the revitalization of Islamic pedagogy through integrative, reflective, and contextually relevant teaching models. In conclusion, the discussion affirms that the BCCT approach, when infused with Islamic Education (PAI) values, offers a transformative model for early literacy learning. It harmonizes the development of cognitive skills and moral character through play, reflection, and meaningful interaction. The teacher's reflective professionalism, the children's active participation, and the school's moral vision collectively demonstrate that literacy, in its truest Islamic sense, is both a means of intellectual empowerment and a path to spiritual enlightenment.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that the implementation of early literacy learning based on Islamic Education (PAI) values through the BCCT approach at MIS Muhammadiyah Takengon successfully integrated cognitive, moral, and spiritual aspects into a meaningful learning process. The BCCT model effectively improved children's reading and writing skills while strengthening Islamic values such as honesty, gratitude, cooperation, and respect through literacy centers and circle time activities. Literacy learning was not only focused on academic skills but also became a medium for character building and spiritual awareness. The study also found that literacy learning becomes more engaging when connected to children's cultural and spiritual backgrounds. Teachers used Islamic stories, prayers, and moral themes to combine literacy development with faith-based values. This approach supported the formation of akhlaq al-karimah (noble character) alongside linguistic competence. Despite limited resources, teachers demonstrated creativity and professionalism in designing meaningful and value-oriented learning experiences. In addition, the teacher's role as a murabbi or moral guide was central to the success of the program. Through patience, sincerity, and reflective teaching, the teacher created a compassionate and wise learning environment where literacy activities were connected to daily moral behavior. Students were encouraged to see reading and writing as part of worship and self-improvement, inspired by the Islamic principle "*Iqra' bismi rabbika alladhi khalaq.*" This helped children develop not only literacy skills but also empathy, responsibility, and spiritual reflection. Although challenges such as limited Islamic reading materials and time constraints were identified, the study concludes that these obstacles can be addressed through teacher creativity and institutional support. Overall, the BCCT approach integrated with Islamic values provides an effective framework for holistic early literacy education by combining academic learning, emotional growth, and spiritual development

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