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Teaching Wudu through Movement and Songs: Enhancing Early Childhood Engagement in Islamic Learning

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Abstract

Teaching Islamic ritual practices to young children requires instructional approaches that are developmentally appropriate, engaging, and meaningful. Among the fundamental religious practices introduced in early childhood Islamic education, wudu plays an essential role as a prerequisite for prayer and as an important component of children's spiritual development. However, teaching wudu to young learners can be challenging when instructional methods rely primarily on verbal explanations and memorization. This study aims to explore the implementation of movement and song methods in teaching wudu to children and to examine their contribution to children's engagement in Islamic learning. Employing a qualitative descriptive research design, the study was conducted at Umega Kindergarten, Palopo City, Indonesia. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis and were analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis model. The findings reveal that the movement and song method was implemented through a combination of musical activities, physical demonstrations, and guided practice that enabled children to learn wudu procedures in an interactive and enjoyable manner. The method significantly enhanced children's engagement, as reflected in their enthusiasm, active participation, sustained attention, confidence, and ability to remember the sequence of wudu practices. The study also identified several supporting factors, including children's interest in music and movement, teacher creativity, and a supportive learning environment, as well as challenges related to time constraints and differences in learning abilities. This study contributes to the field of early childhood Islamic education by demonstrating that movement and songs can function as an effective child-centered pedagogical approach for strengthening engagement and facilitating the learning of Islamic ritual practices among young children.

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Introduction

Early childhood education plays a crucial role in shaping children's cognitive, emotional, social, physical, and spiritual development. Educational experiences during the early years significantly influence the formation of attitudes, habits, and values that often persist throughout later stages of life. Consequently, educational programs for young children are expected not only to develop academic readiness but also to nurture moral and religious values that contribute to holistic child development.

Within the context of Islamic education, introducing basic religious practices from an early age constitutes an important aspect of children's spiritual formation. Early exposure to religious rituals enables children to develop familiarity with Islamic teachings and gradually internalize religious values through daily practice. Among the various forms of Islamic worship, wudu (ablution) occupies a fundamental position because it serves as a prerequisite for salah (prayer) and represents one of the first ritual practices introduced to Muslim children. Therefore, helping children understand and perform wudu correctly is an important objective of early childhood Islamic education.

Despite its importance, teaching religious rituals to young children presents significant pedagogical challenges. Early childhood learners possess unique developmental characteristics that differ substantially from those of older children and adults. They tend to learn more effectively through concrete experiences, active participation, play, imitation, and sensory engagement rather than through abstract explanations or verbal instruction alone. As a result, instructional approaches that rely heavily on lectures and memorization may not adequately support children's understanding of religious practices. Instead, learning activities should be designed in ways that are enjoyable, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate.

Contemporary early childhood education increasingly emphasizes play-based learning as an effective strategy for facilitating children's engagement and learning. Educational researchers have argued that young children learn best when they actively participate in activities that involve movement, music, interaction, and exploration. Movement-based learning allows children to connect physical actions with cognitive understanding, while songs and music enhance memory, motivation, and emotional involvement. The integration of movement and songs therefore offers opportunities to create learning experiences that are both educational and enjoyable.

Within Islamic educational settings, movement and songs can serve as valuable pedagogical tools for introducing religious concepts and practices. Through coordinated physical movements and repetitive song lyrics, children can learn sequences of actions, develop procedural understanding, and strengthen memory retention. In the context of wudu instruction, movement and songs provide children with opportunities to practice each step of ablution while simultaneously reinforcing learning through rhythm and repetition. Such an approach aligns with the developmental needs of early childhood learners and supports active participation during the learning process.

Previous studies have demonstrated the positive contribution of movement- and music-based learning to various aspects of child development, including motor skills, language acquisition, creativity, social interaction, and learning motivation. Research has also shown that movement and songs can enhance children's engagement and improve their ability to remember learning materials. However, existing studies have predominantly

focused on general developmental outcomes or secular learning contexts. Research specifically examining the use of movement and songs for teaching Islamic ritual practices, particularly wudu, remains relatively limited within the field of early childhood Islamic education.

Furthermore, studies on Islamic learning for young children often emphasize curriculum content and religious values while paying less attention to instructional strategies that effectively engage children in learning religious practices. As a result, there is a need for further investigation into pedagogical approaches that can make Islamic learning more interactive, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate for early childhood learners. Understanding how movement and songs facilitate children's engagement during religious learning may contribute to the development of more effective teaching practices in Islamic early childhood education.

Against this background, this study explores the implementation of movement and song methods in teaching wudu to children at Umega Kindergarten, Palopo City. The study examines how the method is implemented, identifies the factors that support and hinder its application, and analyzes its contribution to children's engagement in Islamic learning. By focusing on the intersection between play-based learning and Islamic religious instruction, this study seeks to provide insights into innovative approaches for teaching religious practices to young children.

The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on movement and songs as an interactive pedagogical strategy for enhancing children's engagement in learning Islamic ritual practices. While previous studies have generally investigated movement and songs within broader developmental contexts, this article specifically highlights their role in facilitating the introduction of wudu in early childhood Islamic education. The findings are expected to contribute to scholarly discussions on Islamic pedagogy, early childhood religious education, and child-centered approaches to teaching religious practices.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the implementation of movement and song methods in teaching wudu to early childhood learners at Umega Kindergarten, Palopo City. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the learning process, children's engagement, and the factors influencing the implementation of the method within its natural educational setting.

The research was conducted at Umega Kindergarten, Palopo City, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Participants included the school principal, Group B teachers, and Group B students who were directly involved in the learning activities. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their active participation and knowledge of the instructional process.

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted to examine how movement and songs were integrated into wudu instruction and to identify children's responses during learning activities. Interviews with teachers and the school principal were carried out to obtain detailed information regarding instructional practices, supporting factors, and challenges encountered during implementation. Documentary evidence, including lesson

plans, learning materials, and photographs of classroom activities, was used to complement and validate the findings.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis process involved organizing and categorizing data according to emerging themes related to instructional implementation, student engagement, and contextual factors affecting the learning process.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed source triangulation and methodological triangulation. Information obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation was compared and cross-checked to enhance the credibility and consistency of the findings.

Results

Preparing Interactive Wudu Learning Activities

The findings indicate that the implementation of movement and song methods in teaching wudu was carefully planned and organized by teachers at Umega Kindergarten. Prior to the learning activities, teachers prepared instructional materials, selected appropriate songs containing the sequence of wudu procedures, and designed accompanying movements that reflected each step of ablution. Teachers also introduced the learning objectives and provided preliminary explanations regarding the importance of cleanliness and wudu in Islamic worship.

The preparation stage played an important role in ensuring that learning activities were aligned with children's developmental characteristics. By integrating songs, movements, and visual demonstrations, teachers created a learning environment that was accessible and engaging for young learners. The use of familiar melodies and simple movements helped children anticipate and participate in the activities more confidently.

Implementing Wudu Instruction through Movement and Songs

The implementation stage involved combining song-based instruction with physical demonstrations of wudu movements. Teachers first introduced the wudu song and then demonstrated each ablution step according to the song lyrics. The sequence included reciting the basmalah, washing the hands, rinsing the mouth, cleaning the nose, washing the face, washing the arms, wiping the head, cleaning the ears, and washing the feet.

Children were encouraged to sing and perform the movements simultaneously. The repetitive nature of the activities enabled learners to connect verbal information with physical actions, making the learning process more concrete and meaningful. Classroom observations showed that children actively followed the teacher's demonstrations and gradually became familiar with the sequence of wudu procedures.

The integration of movement and songs transformed religious instruction from a predominantly verbal activity into an interactive learning experience. Instead of passively listening to explanations, children actively participated in the learning process through singing, imitation, and movement.

Enhancing Children's Engagement in Islamic Learning

One of the most significant findings of this study concerns the positive impact of movement and songs on children's engagement during Islamic learning activities. Observation data revealed that children demonstrated high levels of enthusiasm, participation, and attention throughout the instructional process.

Children appeared more motivated to participate because the learning activities resembled play rather than formal instruction. They willingly repeated songs and movements, interacted with peers, and showed excitement when performing wudu sequences together. The combination of music and physical activity helped sustain children's attention and reduced the likelihood of boredom during the lesson.

Furthermore, repeated exposure to songs and movements supported memory retention. Most children were able to recall the sequence of wudu procedures after several repetitions and showed increasing confidence in performing the movements independently. These findings suggest that movement and songs can function as effective tools for enhancing engagement and facilitating the acquisition of religious practices among young learners.

Table 1. Contributions of Movement and Songs to Children's Learning Engagement

Learning Aspect	Observed Contribution
Participation	Children actively joined learning activities
Attention	Children remained focused for longer periods
Motivation	Learning activities generated enthusiasm and enjoyment
Memory Retention	Children more easily remembered wudu sequences
Confidence	Children became more willing to perform wudu movements independently
Social Interaction	Children learned collaboratively with peers

Supporting Factors for Successful Implementation

The findings reveal several factors that contributed to the successful implementation of movement and song methods. The most prominent supporting factor was children's enthusiasm toward singing and movement-based activities. Because these activities corresponded with children's natural interests, they facilitated active participation throughout the learning process.

Teacher creativity also emerged as an important supporting factor. Teachers were able to adapt instructional materials, select appropriate songs, and create engaging movements that reflected the content being taught. In addition, the availability of adequate learning facilities and a supportive school environment contributed positively to the implementation of the method.

These findings indicate that successful implementation depends not only on the instructional method itself but also on the teacher's ability to design developmentally appropriate learning experiences.

Challenges in Implementing Movement and Song Methods

Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges were identified during implementation. One of the primary challenges involved limited instructional time. Teachers reported that additional time was often required to repeat songs and movements until all children fully understood the learning material.

Differences in children's learning abilities also presented challenges. While some children quickly memorized the songs and movements, others required additional guidance and repetition. Variations in attention span further affected the pace of learning, as some children became distracted more easily than others.

Nevertheless, teachers addressed these challenges by providing repeated demonstrations, offering individualized support, and varying learning activities to maintain children's interest and participation. These strategies helped ensure that all children could benefit from the learning experience regardless of their individual differences.

Discussion

Movement and Songs as Developmentally Appropriate Approaches to Islamic Learning

The findings demonstrate that movement and songs provide an effective pedagogical approach for introducing Islamic ritual practices to early childhood learners. The successful implementation of the method indicates that young children learn religious concepts more effectively when learning experiences are aligned with their developmental characteristics. Rather than relying solely on verbal explanations, the integration of music and physical movement enables children to interact directly with learning materials through active participation.

This finding is consistent with constructivist perspectives on early childhood education, which emphasize that children develop understanding through direct experiences and meaningful interactions with their environment. In the context of wudu instruction, children were not merely told about the sequence of ablution but actively practiced each step through coordinated movements and repeated songs. Such experiences transformed abstract religious concepts into concrete learning activities that were easier for children to understand and remember.

The findings also support contemporary perspectives on play-based learning, which view play, movement, and enjoyment as important components of effective learning during early childhood. Through movement and songs, learning activities became enjoyable and less intimidating, allowing children to participate without experiencing the pressure often associated with formal instruction. This suggests that religious learning for young children should move beyond teacher-centered approaches toward more interactive and child-centered pedagogical practices.

Enhancing Engagement through Embodied and Interactive Learning

One of the most significant findings of this study concerns the positive influence of movement and songs on children's engagement during Islamic learning activities. The observed enthusiasm, active participation, sustained attention, and willingness to repeat learning activities indicate that children were deeply involved in the learning process.

These findings can be understood through the concept of embodied learning, which emphasizes the role of the body in cognitive development and knowledge acquisition. Learning does not occur solely through listening and observation but also through physical actions and sensory experiences. When children performed wudu movements while singing the corresponding lyrics, they connected physical actions with cognitive

understanding. This integration of movement and meaning strengthened memory retention and facilitated procedural learning.

The repetitive nature of songs also contributed to children's ability to remember the sequence of wudu practices. Repetition through music created opportunities for continuous reinforcement without generating boredom. Unlike conventional memorization techniques, songs transformed repetition into an enjoyable activity, making it easier for children to internalize learning content. This finding reinforces previous educational research suggesting that music-based instruction can improve attention, memory, and learning motivation among young learners.

Furthermore, movement and songs encouraged social interaction among children. Learning activities were conducted collectively, allowing children to observe peers, imitate movements, and participate in shared experiences. Such interactions not only supported cognitive development but also contributed to children's social and emotional growth, which constitutes an essential objective of early childhood education.

Implications for Early Childhood Islamic Education

The findings have important implications for the development of Islamic education for young children. Traditional approaches to religious instruction often emphasize memorization and verbal transmission of knowledge. While these approaches remain valuable, the present study suggests that instructional effectiveness can be enhanced when religious content is delivered through developmentally appropriate and engaging learning experiences.

The use of movement and songs demonstrates how Islamic learning can be integrated with child-centered pedagogical principles without compromising religious content. In the case of wudu instruction, children learned not only the sequence of ablution but also developed positive attitudes toward religious learning. Enjoyable learning experiences may contribute to the formation of positive religious habits and increase children's willingness to participate in future religious activities.

Another important implication concerns the role of teachers in designing creative learning environments. The findings indicate that the effectiveness of movement and song methods depends largely on teacher creativity, instructional planning, and the ability to adapt learning activities to children's needs. Consequently, professional development programs for early childhood educators should encourage the use of innovative instructional strategies that integrate religious learning with active and experiential learning approaches.

More broadly, this study contributes to discussions on Islamic pedagogy by demonstrating that religious education can benefit from contemporary educational approaches that emphasize engagement, participation, and meaningful learning experiences. The integration of movement and songs provides a practical example of how Islamic learning can be delivered in ways that are both pedagogically effective and developmentally appropriate for young children.

Overall, the findings suggest that movement and songs represent more than a supplementary teaching technique. They function as an interactive pedagogical approach capable of enhancing children's engagement, supporting memory retention, and facilitating

the acquisition of Islamic ritual practices. As such, the method offers valuable opportunities for strengthening the quality of Islamic education in early childhood settings.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the movement and song method serves as an effective pedagogical approach for introducing wudu to early childhood learners. The method was implemented through a combination of song-based instruction, physical demonstrations, and guided practice that enabled children to learn the sequence of wudu in an interactive and enjoyable manner. The findings indicate that the integration of movement and songs significantly enhanced children's engagement during Islamic learning activities, as reflected in their enthusiasm, active participation, sustained attention, confidence, and ability to remember the procedures of wudu.

The study further reveals that the success of the method was influenced by several supporting factors, including children's interest in movement and music, teacher creativity, and the availability of a supportive learning environment. At the same time, challenges such as limited instructional time and differences in children's learning abilities required teachers to provide repeated demonstrations and individualized guidance. Despite these challenges, the method proved effective in facilitating meaningful religious learning experiences for young children.

This study contributes to the field of early childhood Islamic education by demonstrating how movement and songs can function as a child-centered and developmentally appropriate approach to teaching Islamic ritual practices. The findings suggest that religious learning can be made more engaging and meaningful when instructional strategies align with children's developmental characteristics. Consequently, movement and song methods offer valuable opportunities for strengthening children's participation in Islamic learning and fostering positive attitudes toward religious practices from an early age.

Future research may examine the effectiveness of movement- and music-based learning strategies across different Islamic learning contexts, age groups, and religious topics. Comparative and longitudinal studies may also provide deeper insights into the long-term impact of interactive learning approaches on children's religious understanding, practice, and character development.

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