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Reconstructing al-Anbabi's Child Education Treatise for Child Protection-Based Moral Pedagogy in Early Childhood

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Abstract

Early childhood education (PAUD) requires an approach that integrates character, social-emotional development, responsive parenting, and child protection. The legacy of Islamic education offers valuable pedagogical principles, but it requires critical reading before being applied to contemporary contexts. This study analyzes the construction of children's education in Shams al-Dīn al-Anbābī's *Risālah fī Riyāḍat al-Ṣibyān wa Taʿlīmihim wa Taʿdībihim* and its relevance to early childhood education in the digital age. The study uses a qualitative textual design: document analysis, intertextual reading, and thematic analysis of the printed edition, combined with a critical interpretive synthesis of contemporary early childhood literature. The treatise summarizes al-Ghazali's *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* and incorporates Ibn Hajar al-Haytami's rulings on teachers' authority; although addressed to school-age boys, its household-based principles concern the earliest years. Six themes are identified: parenting responsibility, moral habituation, exemplary modelling, reward and behaviour correction, educator authority, and learning balance. Several principles are in line with responsive parenting, but tensions arise around corporal punishment and restrictions on children's speech and play. The synthesis resulted in the TA'DIB-PAUD Model: *Teladan* (exemplary modelling), *Aktivitas pembiasaan* (habituation activities), *Dialog dan bermain* (dialogue and play), *Interaksi aman dan bermakna* (safe and meaningful interaction), and *Bimbingan tanpa kekerasan* (non-violent guidance). Its contribution lies in the selective reconstruction of classical educational ethics oriented towards the development and rights of children; the effectiveness of the model still requires empirical testing.

Keywords: early childhood education; Islamic moral education; al-Anbabi; child protection; digital pedagogy

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1. Introduction

Early childhood education (PAUD) is the foundation for cognitive, social-emotional, and self-regulatory development, and it is also the period in which children begin to internalize moral values through relationships and daily routines. Meta-analytic evidence shows that parenting interventions improve early cognitive, language, and social-emotional development as well as the quality of parent–child interaction (Jeong et al., 2021), and that curriculum-based social-emotional learning in early childhood settings strengthens social competence, emotional competence, and self-regulation (Blewitt et al., 2018; see also Murano et al., 2020). Effective value education in preschools likewise depends on teacher modelling, structured activities, and a supportive environment rather than on the transmission of rules alone (Lin et al., 2025).

Islamic educational thought offers a long tradition of reflection on these same processes. The concepts of *tarbiyah*, *taʿlīm*, *taʿdīb*, and *tahdhīb al-akhlāq* describe education as nurturing, habituation, and the formation of commendable character (Alkouatli, 2018; Sahin, 2018). One compact but underexplored text in this tradition is *Risālah fī Riyāḍat al-Ṣibyān wa Taʿlīmihim wa Taʿdībihim* by Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Anbābī (d. 1313 AH/1896 CE), a Shāfiʿī jurist who twice served as Shaykh al-Azhar. The treatise opens by describing the child as a trust (*amānah*) held by the parents and then moves through parental responsibility, the habituation of conduct, companionship and stories, reward and correction, and finally the disciplinary authority of the teacher (Al-Anbabi, 2011).

Two features of the treatise shape how it can be read for early childhood. First, its subject is the *ṣabī* (pl. *ṣibyān*), a male child below the age of puberty, and much of its practical setting is the *kuttāb*, the elementary Qurʾān school that children usually entered around the age of discernment (*tamyīz*). The treatise is therefore not a text about children aged 0–6 years in the modern sense of PAUD. Its opening section, however, follows al-Ghazali's discussion of training children "in the earliest stage of their

growth" (*fī awwal nushūʾihim*) and locates the beginning of moral formation in the household, before formal schooling. This study therefore distinguishes two layers of the text: household-based principles of nurture, habituation, and environment, which can be examined for their relevance to early childhood; and *kuttāb*-specific provisions on study load and teacher discipline, which were written for older, school-age boys and are treated here as normative boundary cases rather than as transferable guidance. Second, the treatise is openly intertextual: its moral section summarizes al-Ghazali's *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* "with some additions", while its section on the teacher's authority reproduces the jurisprudence of Ibn Hajar al-Haytami (Al-Anbabi, 2011). It thus combines an ethic of gentle formation, including praise and the avoidance of public shaming, with a conditional legitimation of corporal punishment.

Reading such a text for contemporary PAUD requires attention to two conditions that were absent from al-Anbabi's world or have since been re-evaluated. The first is the digital environment, in which the context of media use matters more than its duration. Mallawaarachchi et al. (2024), in a meta-analysis of 100 studies (176,742 participants), found that background television and program viewing were negatively associated with cognitive outcomes; that program viewing, age-inappropriate content, and caregiver screen use during children's routines were negatively associated with psychosocial outcomes; and that co-use with caregivers was positively associated with cognitive outcomes ($r = 0.14$). Comparable context effects have been reported for language development (Madigan et al., 2020), and adult–child co-use shows a small positive effect on learning among children aged 0–6 years ($g = 0.198$), although that evidence base remains limited (Taylor et al., 2024). The second is the evaluation of physical discipline. An estimated 63% of children aged 2–4 years in low- and middle-income countries experience corporal punishment (Cuartas et al., 2019), yet prospective longitudinal evidence consistently links physical punishment to increases in children's behavioural problems over time and to no positive developmental outcomes (Gershoff et al., 2018; Heilmann et al., 2021). Both developments require that classical principles of exemplarity, environmental supervision, and educator authority be re-read rather than simply restated.

Previous scholarship has approached these materials from separate directions. Marzooq (2013) edited and introduced al-Anbabi's treatise as a historical text, and Mohd Asri et al. (2025) derived an early childhood curriculum framework from al-Ghazali's thought, illustrating both the potential and the risks of actualizing classical pedagogy (Sahin, 2018). Child development research, in turn, provides robust evidence on social-emotional learning and self-regulation (Blewitt et al., 2018; Muir et al., 2023) but does not engage with classical Islamic texts. What is missing is a reading that simultaneously attends to the intellectual genealogy of al-Anbabi's treatise, the relevance of its principles to responsive caregiving and social-emotional development (Jeong et al., 2021; World Health Organization et al., 2018), and the normative limits that child protection places on its disciplinary provisions.

Accordingly, this study conducts a qualitative textual analysis of al-Anbabi's treatise, complemented by a critical interpretive synthesis with contemporary early childhood literature, in order to (1) identify the construction of children's education and the intellectual genealogy of the treatise; (2) assess the convergence, tension, and discontinuity of its principles with contemporary early childhood evidence and child protection standards; and (3) develop a conceptual framework for moral education oriented towards responsive parenting, active learning, digital mentoring, and child protection.

The contribution offered is the TA'DIB-PAUD Model, an acronym formed from five Indonesian terms: *Teladan* (exemplary modelling), *Aktivitas pembiasaan* (habituation activities), *Dialog dan bermain* (dialogue and play-based learning), *Interaksi aman dan bermakna* (safe and meaningful interaction), and *Bimbingan tanpa kekerasan* (non-violent guidance). The model is the researchers' critical reconstruction, not al-Anbabi's own formulation and not a tested intervention. By separating defensible ethical values from problematic historical practices, the study provides a conceptual foundation for early childhood character education that respects the capacity, safety, and dignity of children.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design and Approach

This study employs a qualitative textual design centred on a single classical treatise. The primary text was examined through document analysis (Bowen, 2009) combined with close hermeneutic and

intertextual reading. Contemporary literature was then brought into dialogue with the textual findings through a critical interpretive synthesis, which is suited to identifying normative contradictions and building arguments across heterogeneous sources (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006); in this component, studies were selected and integrated in the manner of an integrative review (Cronin & George, 2023; Snyder, 2019). The design is therefore a textual analysis with an interpretive-evaluative synthesis, not a stand-alone literature review.

The unit of analysis consists of statements, normative propositions, and pedagogical arguments in the treatise concerning parenting, moral formation, habituation, exemplary conduct, social interaction, and educator authority. Because the treatise addresses *ṣibyān* (boys below puberty) and partly presupposes the *kuttāb* setting, the relevance analysis distinguished (a) household-based principles that apply from the earliest years and can therefore be considered for children aged 0–6 years from (b) school-based provisions that presuppose an older, school-age child. Principles judged relevant were extended to girls as well as boys; this extension is an interpretive decision of the researchers and not a claim about the author's intention.

2.2 Data Sources and Literature Search Strategies

This study uses two categories of sources, namely primary and secondary sources. The primary source is the Arabic text of *Risālah fī Riyāḍat al-Ṣibyān wa Taʿlīmihim wa Taʿdībihim* by Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Anbābī (d. 1313 AH/1896 CE). All quotations and page references follow the printed edition by Walīd ibn Muḥammad al-ʿAlī, published by Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyyah in 2011 in the series *Liqāʾ al-ʿAshr al-Awākhir bi-al-Masjid al-Ḥarām* (Al-Anbabi, 2011). A digital transcription published on the Alukah portal was used as a working copy and was collated against the printed edition before submission. Information on the manuscript (al-Azhar Library, *khāṣṣ* 579, *ʿāmm* 49100; seven folios) and Marzooq's (2013) edition was used to situate the text in its historical context and intellectual tradition.

Secondary sources include scientific journal articles, historical studies, empirical research, as well as reports from international institutions that address early childhood education, character education, social-emotional development, responsive parenting, play-based learning, digital media use, and child protection. Methodological literature is used to support the design of document analysis and conceptual synthesis. Supporting sources are selected based on their relevance to issues arising from the primary text, rather than solely on the similarity of terms.

Literature search is carried out in a targeted manner through bibliographic sources, publisher catalogues, and verifiable academic publication pages. Search terms include the name of the author and the title of the book in Arabic and its transliteration variations, as well as keywords such as *early childhood education*, *Islamic moral education*, *character development*, *responsive caregiving*, *positive discipline*, *self-regulation*, *digital media*, and *child protection*. Contemporary child development literature is prioritized from 2018–2026 publications, while classical works and methodological references are not restricted by year of publication.

The inclusion criteria include sources that have a direct connection to the concept of education in the book, explain relevant theoretical approaches, or provide empirical evidence to assess the suitability and limitations of classical education principles in the context of early childhood education. Sources that have no conceptual relevance, cannot be verified for their bibliographic identity, or do not provide sufficient information for the analysis are not used as the main basis for the argument. The selection of literature is purposive and oriented towards the depth of interpretation, so this study does not claim comprehensive coverage of all publications in the field of early childhood education.

2.3 Data Collection and Extraction Procedures

Data collection was carried out through document analysis (Bowen, 2009). The first stage included checking the identity of the author, title, discussion structure, and the explicit relationship of the treatise with al-Ghazali's thought and Shāfiʿī fiqh tradition.

The second stage is the extraction of educational propositions from the primary text. Each relevant section is analyzed based on the substance of the idea, the subject of the education, the form of practice that is recommended, and the underlying normative reason. Every proposition was recorded with its page number in the 2011 edition and a short Arabic excerpt, so that each interpretive claim in the Results can be traced to the text. The data are then grouped into initial themes, including parenting

responsibilities, moral habituation, social example, reward and behaviour correction, learning balance, and the limits of the educator's authority.

The third stage is the collection of supporting evidence from the contemporary literature to assess the relevance of each theme. The information considered includes the identity of the publication, the purpose of the research, the methodological design, the key findings, the context of the child's development, and the pedagogical implications. The comparison is not directed at proving that the concept of modern education has been fully found in the classics, but rather to identify points of fit, differences, and possible conceptual reconstructions.

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using *thematic analysis* combined with intertextual reading and critical synthesis. Thematic analysis refers to Braun and Clarke (2006), who view themes as patterns of meaning developed through the researcher's systematic involvement with data. The analysis process is carried out iteratively so that the initial categories can be reviewed when ideas are found that expand or contradict previous interpretations.

The analysis begins with repeated reading of the primary text to understand the structure of the argumentation and the context of the use of educational terms. Furthermore, initial coding of statements describing educational objectives, habituation methods, parenting practices, educator-child relationships, and behavioural settings is carried out. Codes that have conceptual relationships are grouped into temporary themes, then re-examined based on suitability with the text and research questions.

Intertextual reading is used to distinguish ideas that al-Anbabi explicitly extracts from earlier sources and reconstructs them in the treatise. This procedure is important so that the research does not attribute all pedagogical concepts in the book to the author's original thoughts. Interpretation also considers the normative-historical context of the source, especially when discussing the position of the child, family responsibilities, and disciplinary authority.

The next stage is critical synthesis by comparing each classical theme against the child development literature and contemporary protection standards. The results of the comparison are classified into three analytical categories: convergence, when there is a conformity of principles after considering differences in context; tension, when an idea needs to be reinterpreted to fit the needs of child development; and normative discontinuity, when historical practices cannot be recommended because they conflict with scientific evidence or child protection principles.

In the final stage, interthematic relationships are synthesized to develop a conceptual framework of moral education called the TA'DIB-PAUD Model. The model is formulated through five dimensions: *Teladan* (exemplary modelling), *Aktivitas pembiasaan* (habituation activities), *Dialog dan bermain* (dialogue and play-based learning), *Interaksi aman dan bermakna* (safe and meaningful interaction), and *Bimbingan tanpa kekerasan* (non-violent guidance). The construction of the model is based on a selective integration between the defensible educational values of the primary text and contemporary pedagogical approaches supported by the literature. Thus, the model is positioned as the result of a theoretical synthesis that requires further empirical validation, rather than as a theory directly formulated by al-Anbabi.

2.5 Interpretive Validity and Methodological Limitations

Interpretive validity is sought through source traceability, coding consistency, cross-literature comparison, and explicit distinction between the author's statements, previous research findings, and the researchers' interpretations. Key statements are reported with short Arabic quotations, page references to the printed edition, and English translations by the researchers, so that readers can verify each reading. Terms that have normative implications, especially *taʿdīb*, *riyāḍah*, and disciplinary practices, are interpreted based on the context in which they are used, not merely on the basis of modern equivalents. Arabic is transliterated following the ALA-LC system; frequently cited personal names (al-Anbabi, al-Ghazali, Ibn Hajar al-Haytami) are given in simplified form.

3. Results

3.1 The Intellectual Genealogy of Children's Education in al-Anbabi's Risālah

Analysis of al-Anbabi's treatise shows that children's education is placed within the framework of moral formation, habit regulation, family responsibility, and the authority of educators. The book is not a work of child development psychology in the modern sense, but a normative treatise that compiles a number of educational guidelines based on Islamic scientific traditions.

The main finding concerns the intertextual composition of the treatise. After the sections on the child's nurture, manners, and the teacher's conduct, al-Anbabi closes the borrowed material with an explicit statement of its source: «هذا مُلخَّص ما في إحياء العلوم بنوع زيادة» ("this is a summary of what is in the *Iḥyāʾ*, with some additions") (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 40). The editor traces the passage to al-Ghazali's section in the *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* on training children in the earliest stage of their growth (vol. 3, pp. 72–74). The next section is introduced with «وفي رسالة العلامة ابن حجر» ("and in the treatise of the learned Ibn Hajar"), followed by «ما مُلخَّصه» ("what may be summarized as"), and draws on Ibn Hajar al-Haytami's *Taḥrīr al-maqāl fī ādāb wa-aḥkām wa-fawāʾid yaḥtāju ilayhā muʾaddibū al-aṭfāl*, a Shāfiʿī legal manual for teachers of children (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 41).

Al-Anbabi's own contribution is therefore editorial and evaluative rather than foundational: he selects, condenses, and joins two genres, an ethical manual of character formation and a juridical manual on the teacher's powers, and his "additions" include juristic qualifications on discipline at the end of the Ghazalian summary (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 40). Recognizing this composition prevents two opposite errors in reading the text: crediting al-Anbabi with ideas that originate with al-Ghazali, and dismissing the treatise as a mere copy when its significance lies precisely in what a nineteenth-century Shaykh al-Azhar chose to combine.

The structure shows two interrelated orientations. First, an ethical orientation that emphasizes the formation of commendable habits and behaviours. Second, a juridical-normative orientation that regulates the authority and limits of the educator's actions. Thus, al-Anbabi's contribution lies primarily in the reformulation and connection of the legacy of moral education with the provisions of educational jurisprudence, not in the formulation of all these principles independently.

3.2 Responsibility for Nurturing and Moral Formation from an Early Age

The first theme is the placement of the child as a trust (*amānah*) whose moral formation begins in the family. The treatise states: «والصبي أمانة عند والديه، وقلبه الطاهر جوهرة نفيسة» ("the child is a trust with his parents, and his pure heart is a precious jewel") (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 33). The heart is described as free of any engraving and receptive to whatever is engraved upon it: a child accustomed to good grows up upon it, and his parents and every teacher share in his reward, whereas a child accustomed to evil and neglected like cattle is ruined, and the burden falls on his guardian. The passage is framed by Q. 66:6, which commands believers to protect themselves and their families from the Fire (Al-Anbabi, 2011, pp. 33–34).

Two features of this formulation matter for early childhood. The image of an unengraved jewel locates moral formation before formal instruction, in the earliest experiences of the household, which corresponds to the developmental window addressed by PAUD. At the same time, the metaphor is one of impression: the child receives what adults engrave, and agency rests with the educator. This asymmetry is revisited in Section 4.1.

Family care is therefore not positioned as a matter separate from education, but as the first environment that shapes the habits and moral orientation of children. These responsibilities include setting an example, introducing good behaviour, supervising the social environment, and accompanying daily activities.

3.3 Habituation as a Mechanism for Internalizing Moral Values

The second theme is the habituation of behaviour through concrete daily conduct. The treatise addresses eating manners, simplicity in food and clothing, humility, control of desires, and respect for others. Its social ethic is illustrated by the instruction that the child «ويُمنع من أن يفتخر على أقرانه بشيء مما يملكه والده» ("is prevented from boasting to his peers about anything his father owns") (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 36), and by the lesson that «الرّفعة في الإعطاء لا في الأخذ» ("honour lies in giving, not in taking") (Al-

Anbabi, 2011, p. 37). Humility and generosity are thus taught not as abstract virtues but as rules governing everyday relationships among peers of unequal wealth.

The description shows that the process of moral formation takes place through actions that can be practiced in daily life. Politeness is associated with the way of communication, humility with social relationships, and concern with the behaviour of giving. Thus, moral education in the treatise is not limited to the introduction of normative concepts, but is realized through the habituation of actions.

However, a substantial group of provisions regulates the child's speech and bodily expression in the presence of adults. The child is to be prevented from excessive talk («ويُمنع كثرة الكلام») and from oaths altogether («ويُمنع من الحلف رأساً»), and is told not to blow his nose or spit in another's gathering and not to cross his legs (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 37). He is further to be prevented from initiating conversation («ويُمنع من أن يبتدئ الكلام»), accustomed to speak only in reply («ويُعوَّد أن لا يتكلم إلا جواباً»), and taught to stand for those above him (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 38). The teacher is also to teach him to abstain from play in the presence of elders («وأن يُعلَّم ترك اللعب بين أيديهم») (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 39). These provisions show that habituation serves not only moral internalization but also adjustment to an age-graded social hierarchy in which the child's voice is valued chiefly as a response to adults. It is this layer, rather than the ethic of humility and generosity, that stands in tension with contemporary recognition of children's participation.

3.4 Exemplary and Influence of the Social Environment

The third theme concerns exemplary models and the social environment. In the *kuttāb*, the child should learn the Qurʾān, hadith, and «حكايات الأبرار وأحوالهم» (“the stories of the righteous and their states”), so that love of the virtuous takes root in him, while he is kept away from poetry that dwells on passionate love («ويُحفظ عن الأشعار التي فيها ذكر العشق وأهله») (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 36). In the household, the parent's duty of protection includes the obligation to «ويحفظه من قرناء السوء» (“guard him from bad companions”) (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 34), a warning repeated later in the treatise (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 38). Behaviour encountered through stories and companionship is thus treated as a direct source of moral dispositions, and the adult's task is to curate both.

These findings show that the social environment is positioned as part of the educational process. Exemplification is not only related to direct instruction, but also to examples of behaviour that are available in a child's life. Parents, teachers, peers, and story material become important elements in the moral experience that children acquire.

3.5 Reward and Correction of Children's Behaviour

The fourth theme is the reward of good conduct and the graduated correction of mistakes. When a commendable trait appears, «فينبغي أن يُكرَم عليه ويُجازى عليه بما يفرح به» (“he should be honoured for it and rewarded with what gladdens him”). When he errs for the first time, the educator «فينبغي أن يتغافل عنه ولا يهتك ستره» (“should overlook it and not expose him”). If the mistake is repeated, «ينبغي أن يعاتبه سراً» (“he should be reproached privately”), but the educator «ولا يُكثر العتاب عليه كل وقت» (“should not reproach him at every moment”), because frequent reproach «يُهوّن عليه سماع الملامة وركوب القبائح» (“makes it easy for him to hear blame and to commit misdeeds”) (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 39).

The description shows a difference between strategies to reinforce positive behaviour and strategies for dealing with unexpected behaviours. Praise and rewards are seen as encouraging good behaviour, while excessive reprimand is feared to lose its effect on children.

These findings also indicate that there is concern about the relationship between educators and children. Al-Anbabi is aware that shaming children in front of others can have unintended consequences. However, the reasons used are still closely related to the purpose of maintaining the effectiveness of discipline, not to the formulation of children's rights as understood today.

3.6 Regulation of Educator Authority and Physical Discipline

The fifth theme is the most problematic in contemporary terms. The treatise regulates the teacher's power to strike in two places. At the end of the Ghazalian summary, among al-Anbabi's additions, the teacher «ولا يضرب ضرباً مبرحاً» (“may not strike injuriously”), may not move to a harsher level of discipline while a lighter one suffices, and «وعليه أن يتقي الضرب على المهالك والوجه» (“must avoid striking vital places and the face”) (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 40). The section drawn from Ibn Hajar then adds three groups of conditions. The first is paternal permission: «لا يجوز للمعلم ضرب الصغير إلا إن أذن له

أبوه» ("it is not permissible for the teacher to strike the young child unless his father permits it"), and the permission must be explicit, since «فليس مجرد الإذن في التعليم إذناً في الضرب» ("mere permission to teach is not permission to strike") (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 41). The second is a numerical ceiling: «ولا يجوز له أن يبلغ بالضرب أربعين في الحر، وعشرين في غيره» ("he may not reach forty strokes for a free person, or twenty for others"), that is, discretionary punishment (*taʿzīr*) must remain below the fixed penalties. The hadith limiting lashes to ten outside the *ḥudūd* is cited but read as indicating what is preferable rather than a binding limit (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 43). The third is expected benefit: striking is allowed only if the teacher expects it to deter, and «فإذا ظن أنه لا يفيد فيه إلا المبرح: فلا يجوز المبرح إجماعاً، ولا غيره على الأصح» ("if he believes that only injurious striking would be effective, injurious striking is impermissible by consensus, and, on the sounder view, so is any other striking") (Al-Anbabi, 2011, pp. 43–44). Notably, neither passage specifies a minimum age: the text speaks generically of *al-ṣaghīr* (the minor), and its frame of reference is the *kuttāb* teacher rather than the parent of an infant.

These conditions show that al-Anbabi, following Ibn Hajar, sought to restrain rather than abolish the teacher's power to strike. The restraints, namely explicit paternal permission, the prohibition of injurious blows, protection of the face, a numerical ceiling, and the requirement of expected benefit, are protective by the standards of their time, but they presuppose that moderate physical pain is a legitimate educational instrument. It is this presupposition, and not merely the intensity of the act, that is evaluated in Section 4.5.

3.7 Balance of Learning Activities and Children's Needs

The sixth theme concerns the intensity of learning. The teacher is warned «وأن لا يُلجئه إلى التعلم دائماً؛ وإلا كان متسبباً في موت قلبه» ("not to force him to study constantly, otherwise he becomes the cause of the death of his heart") (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 38). The rationale is affective and cognitive: unrelieved study is said to deaden the child's heart, dull his intelligence, and embitter his life.

However, the treatise does not translate this warning into an explicit endorsement of play. The editor notes that al-Ghazali's original adds that the child should be permitted, after leaving the *kuttāb*, to play "beautiful play" that relieves the fatigue of study, a sentence that al-Anbabi's summary omits (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 38, n. 3). What the summary retains instead is the instruction to abstain from play in the presence of elders (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 39) and to prevent daytime sleep because it breeds laziness (Al-Anbabi, 2011, p. 36). Attention to learning load in the treatise therefore cannot be equated with the play-based learning approach of contemporary early childhood education.

Table 1

Results of identification of pedagogical themes in al-Anbabi's treatises

Theme	Findings in primary sources	Pedagogical characteristic
Parenting responsibilities	The child as a trust (*amānah*) whose heart is a "precious jewel" open to the formation of habits	Family upbringing is the basis for moral formation
Behavioural habituation	Politeness, humility, control of desires, the habit of giving, and restrictions on speech and expression before adults	Moral values are practised through daily activities within an age-graded social hierarchy
Exemplary models and environment	Stories of the righteous (*ḥikāyāt al-abrār*), avoidance of love poetry, and protection from bad companions	Behavior formation through social examples
Rewards and correction	Honouring good conduct, overlooking a first lapse, private and infrequent reproach	Reinforcement of positive behaviour and graduated, non-humiliating correction
Authority of educators	Father's permission, no injurious blows, avoidance of the face, numerical ceiling on strokes; no minimum age stated	The authority of educators is regulated through the provisions of historical Shāfiʿī fiqh
Learning balance	Warning against forcing constant study; no explicit permission to play retained	Attention to the child's learning intensity and response

Note. Source: Results of thematic analysis of al-Anbabi's treatise (2011).

4. Discussion

4.1 Reconstructing the Concept of Children as Trust in the Perspective of Responsive Parenting

The results of the study show that the concept of children as a mandate is one of the foundations of education in the treatise of al-Anbabi. The placement of children as individuals who need guidance shows the importance of the responsibility of the family and educators for moral development from the beginning of life. However, this concept needs to be reinterpreted so as not to produce the view that children are fully objects of behaviour formation by adults.

The *Nurturing Care for Early Childhood Development framework* emphasizes that child development requires a safe environment, responsive parenting, health, nutrition, and quality learning opportunities (World Health Organization et al., 2018). UNESCO and UNICEF (2024) also underscore the importance of integrating the roles of families, educators, communities, and education policies in building an ecosystem that supports children's development and well-being.

The fundamental difference lies in the position of children in educational relations. The metaphor of children as a gem that can be formed should not be interpreted as meaning that children do not have individual capacities, characteristics, or needs. Contemporary early childhood education needs to recognize that children play an active role in building understanding, expressing emotions, and responding to the environment (Correia et al., 2023).

Based on this synthesis, the principle of educational responsibility in al-Anbabi's treatise can be reconstructed into parenting that combines adult guidance with appreciation for children's needs and capacities. This change in orientation is important to avoid character education that only emphasizes obedience, while maintaining the value of moral responsibility in the Islamic educational tradition.

4.2 Moral Habituation and Social-Emotional Competency Development

Blewitt et al. (2018) found that social-emotional learning interventions have a positive impact on social, emotional, self-regulation, and early learning skills. The findings suggest that behaviour formation is not enough to be done through verbal delivery of values, but requires learning experiences that allow children to practice social skills directly.

However, habituation should not be understood as a process of repetition of behaviours without understanding. Muir et al. (2023) show that the development of self-regulation can be supported through learning approaches that demand active child involvement, including educator-mediated play, physical activity, and mindfulness practices.

Based on these findings, moral habituation can be reconstructed from the repetition of actions determined by adults into moral experiences involving interaction, self-regulation, and simple reflection according to the child's developmental level. Teachers not only supervise obedience to rules, but also help children understand why a behaviour is important in life together.

4.3 Exemplary and Transformation of the Educational Environment in the Digital Era

It should be noted that al-Anbabi discusses the social environment, not digital technology. His concern with the stories a child hears and the companions he keeps (Section 3.4) is the textual anchor for the present discussion; its extension to media experience is an interpretive step taken by this study.

Mallawaarachchi et al. (2024) show that the impact of media use on children's development depends on the context of use, including the type of content, co-use, and the conditions under which devices are used. Program viewing, age-inappropriate content, and caregiver device use during children's routines are associated with poorer psychosocial outcomes, whereas co-use with caregivers is positively associated with cognitive outcomes. Nonetheless, the quality of joint media engagement matters: shared smartphone or tablet activities have been found to increase children's engagement but to be accompanied by lower-quality parent–child language than non-digital play (Ewin et al., 2021).

Based on this synthesis, the principle of exemplary in al-Anbabi's treatise can be expanded to value-based digital mentoring. It is not enough for parents and teachers to limit access to content, but they also need to be role models in the responsible use of technology, choose materials that are developmentally appropriate, and assist children in understanding the behaviour displayed through the media.

This approach is in line with the principles of children's rights in the digital environment as described by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2021), which emphasizes a balance between protection, access to information, participation, and appreciation for children's capacity development (see also Livingstone & Third, 2017).

4.4 Rewards, Behaviour Correction, and Respect for the Dignity of Children

Al-Anbabi's graduated sequence of rewarding good conduct, overlooking a first lapse, and reproaching privately (Section 3.5) contains an ethic of protecting the child from humiliation that can be retained. In early childhood education, recognition of positive behaviour can be given through feedback that is specific to the child's actions. When a child helps a friend, for example, the teacher can explain that the action has benefited others. Such an approach allows the child to relate the action to its social consequences.

Meanwhile, behaviour correction needs to be directed at learning opportunities and the restoration of social relationships. Children who take toys without permission can be helped to understand their friends' feelings, calm down, and learn how to ask for a turn. Corrective action does not need to be given through insults or negative labelling of the child's identity.

However, the principle of maintaining the confidentiality of children's mistakes should not be interpreted as an obligation to cover up actions that endanger safety or require special protection treatment. In the event of violence, bullying, or other actions that threaten the welfare of children, educators are still obliged to carry out appropriate protection procedures.

4.5 Normative Discontinuity: Corporal Punishment and Child Protection

The corporal-punishment provision described in Section 3.6, which permits striking with the father's permission, without injurious force, away from the face, and below a numerical ceiling, can now be evaluated against current evidence. Heilmann et al. (2021), synthesizing 69 prospective longitudinal studies, found that physical punishment consistently predicted increases in children's behavioural problems over time and was not associated with any positive outcome. Because these harms are observed for ordinary, non-injurious physical punishment, limiting its intensity, which is the strategy adopted by al-Anbabi and Ibn Hajar, is not sufficient to make it a recommendable educational practice (Gershoff et al., 2018).

In the Indonesian context, this principle is relevant to the Regulation of the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education Number 6 of 2026 concerning Safe and Comfortable School Culture (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of the Republic of Indonesia, 2026). This regulation emphasizes the fulfilment of spiritual needs, physical protection, psychological well-being, sociocultural security, and digital civility and security as important elements of the educational environment. Indonesian court judgments nevertheless show that the use of physical force in education remains contested, partly because of historical, cultural, and religious interpretations (Zulfa et al., 2024).

Based on these findings, this study does not recommend the application of corporal punishment described in al-Anbabi's treatise. Instead, the principle of educator responsibility is reconstructed into behavioural guidance that emphasizes dialogical communication, reinforcement of prosocial behaviour, regulation of emotions, and the restoration of nonviolent relationships. Such a shift is feasible, as parenting interventions grounded in social learning theory have been shown to reduce physical and emotional violence against children, although their effects weaken over time (Backhaus et al., 2023).

4.6 Balance Learning and Play-Based Approaches

Muir et al. (2023) show that educator-mediated play includes approaches that have relatively consistent empirical support in developing preschoolers' self-regulation and executive function. The findings provide a basis for reinterpreting the importance of balancing educational activities through active and developmentally appropriate learning experiences (Parker et al., 2022; Skene et al., 2022).

In early childhood education, moral education can be developed through stories, symbolic games, exploration, group activities, motor activities, and simple reflective conversations (Rahiem, 2021). Learning the value of honesty, for example, can be done through role play that invites children to consider their choices and the impact of actions on others.

Accordingly, the treatise's restrictions on play in the presence of elders, on daytime rest, and on children's initiation of speech (Sections 3.3 and 3.7) cannot be applied as universal provisions in PAUD.

Children's needs to play, rest, move, ask questions, and express themselves should be addressed according to their individual development and conditions.

4.7 Critical Synthesis of al-Anbabi Thought and Contemporary Early Childhood Education

A synthesis of the results shows that the relationship between al-Anbabi thought and contemporary early childhood education can be understood through three categories: convergence, tension, and normative discontinuity. Convergence includes habituation and example; tension arises in the dominance of adult authority over the child's participation; while discontinuity applies to corporal punishment. This classification distinguishes the conformity of ethical principles from approval of historical practices.

Table 2
Critical synthesis matrix and pedagogical decisions

Theme	Analysis results	Reconstruction decision
Parenting responsibilities	Convergence with the importance of the family environment	Developed into responsive parenting
Habituation of morals	Convergence with value learning through experience	Developed into prosocial activities and simple reflection
Exemplary modelling and environment	Convergence with the role of social experience	Expanded to social and digital assistance
Rewards and correction	Partial convergence with positive behavior rewards	Reconstructed into feedback that preserves the dignity of children
Restriction of children's speech, play, and expression	Tensions with contemporary developmental approaches	Reinterpreted with individual participation and needs in mind
Corporal punishment	Normative discontinuity	Not adopted; replaced with non-violent positive discipline
Learning balance	Partial convergence with the importance of child involvement	Developed into active, play-based learning

Note. Source: Critical synthesis of researchers based on Al-Anbabi (2011), Blewitt et al. (2018), Heilmann et al. (2021), Muir et al. (2023), Mallawaarachchi et al. (2024), and the World Health Organization (2025).

4.8 Conceptual Novelty: Development of the TA'DIB-PAUD Model

Based on the critical synthesis, the study proposes the TA'DIB-PAUD Model, which combines classical educational ethics, responsive parenting, active learning, digital mentoring, and child protection. The acronym is deliberately formed from Indonesian terms, namely T for *Teladan* (exemplary modelling), A for *Aktivitas pembiasaan* (habituation activities), D for *Dialog dan bermain* (dialogue and play-based learning), I for *Interaksi aman dan bermakna* (safe and meaningful interaction), and B for *Bimbingan tanpa kekerasan* (non-violent guidance), so that it echoes the Arabic *taʿdīb* while remaining usable by Indonesian PAUD teachers; English glosses are given in Table 3. The model is a construction of the researchers, not the original formulation of al-Anbabi.

The TA'DIB-PAUD model consists of five interrelated dimensions.

Table 3
Conceptual construction of the TA'DIB-PAUD Model

Dimensions	Operational definition	Implementation examples
T — *Teladan* (exemplary modelling)	Adults exhibit consistent moral behavior in daily interactions	Teachers exemplify apologizing, sharing, listening, and using technology responsibly
A — *Aktivitas pembiasaan* (habituation activities)	Moral values are practiced through real, repetitive and developmental experiences	Share toys, help friends, take care of the environment, and carry out simple responsibilities
D — *Dialog dan bermain* (dialogue and play-based learning)	Children are given the opportunity to understand values through questions, conversations, stories, and games	Role-playing about honesty, resolving simple conflicts, and discussing the character's feelings

Dimensions	Operational definition	Implementation examples
I — *Interaksi aman dan bermakna* (safe and meaningful interaction)	Families and schools build social and digital environments that support children's development and well-being	Assistance in the use of digital media, age-appropriate content selection, and teacher-parent communication
B — *Bimbingan tanpa kekerasan* (non-violent guidance)	Wrongdoing is addressed through safe correction strategies, respect for the dignity of the child, and behavioral restoration.	Assistance in emotion regulation, setting clear boundaries, and resolving conflicts without physical punishment

Note. Source: Conceptual formulation of the research based on the analysis of al-Anbabi's treatise and the synthesis of contemporary child development literature.

The model makes three contributions. The first is theoretical: it shifts the orientation from a behaviour-control approach to a child moral-competence approach. Habituation is no longer interpreted as mechanical obedience, but as an opportunity for the child to experience, understand, and develop behaviours that reflect certain values. Exemplary modelling serves not only as indirect moral instruction, but also as the formation of a consistent social environment between family and school.

The second contribution lies in integrating the digital environment into moral learning. In al-Anbabi's treatise, social experiences are shaped through the people around the child and the stories introduced to him. This study extends that concern to audiovisual media and digital interactions that are now part of children's everyday experience. This extension is interpretive and is supported by empirical literature on the context of media use and adult involvement in children's digital experiences (Mallawaarachchi et al., 2024; Taylor et al., 2024).

The third contribution is the link between classical educational values and pedagogical dimensions that can be operationalized. Exemplary modelling can be studied through the consistency of adult behaviour; habituation activities through the quality of prosocial behaviour; dialogue and play through children's participation; safe interaction through the quality of family–school relationships and media mentoring; and non-violent guidance through the use of positive discipline strategies.

The model can be the basis for the development of research instruments, observation guides, learning tools, and programs to strengthen the competence of early childhood education educators. However, all of these possible applications still require testing through empirical research.

4.9 Limitations and Future Research Agenda

This study has four limitations. First, it relies on one classical source, so the findings cannot be generalized as a representation of the entire Islamic educational tradition. Second, the treatise addresses school-age boys (*ṣibyān*) and partly presupposes the *kuttāb*; its application to children aged 0–6 years and to girls rests on the interpretive distinction described in Section 2.1 and requires validation. Third, the contemporary literature was selected purposively, so the study is not a *systematic review* covering all relevant publications. Fourth, the analysis relies on the 2011 printed edition; the al-Azhar manuscript was not examined directly.

Subsequent research can be directed at content validation through a panel of experts in Islamic education, developmental psychology, and early childhood education; development of measurable indicators; feasibility studies of implementation in early childhood education institutions; and effectiveness testing using appropriate intervention designs. Research across cultural and institutional contexts is also needed to assess the model's ability to adapt to different developmental needs, family experiences, and educational environments.

5. Conclusion

The idea of children's education in al-Anbabi's treatise brings together the tradition of moral education, habituation, environmental influence, and the provisions of the educator's authority. Intertextual analysis shows that the moral section summarizes al-Ghazali's *Iḥyāʾ* with some additions, while the disciplinary provisions reproduce Shāfiʿī jurisprudence, especially that of Ibn Hajar al-Haytami.

The six themes identified are parenting, habituation, exemplary modelling, reward and correction, educator authority, and learning balance. Several principles can be associated with responsive parenting, social-emotional development, and digital mentoring. However, the legitimation

of corporal punishment and the restrictions on children's speech and play cannot be applied directly because they conflict with child protection and contemporary developmental approaches. For PAUD teachers, the practical implication is concrete: retain the treatise's emphasis on consistent modelling, daily habituation, specific praise, and private, non-humiliating correction, while replacing its restrictions on children's speech and play and its provision for corporal punishment with dialogue, play-based learning, and non-violent guidance.

The novelty of the study lies in the TA'DIB-PAUD Model with five dimensions: *Teladan* (exemplary modelling), *Aktivitas pembiasaan* (habituation activities), *Dialog dan bermain* (dialogue and play-based learning), *Interaksi aman dan bermakna* (safe and meaningful interaction), and *Bimbingan tanpa kekerasan* (non-violent guidance). This model maintains relevant ethical principles while placing the safety, developmental needs, and dignity of children as pedagogical limits.

The relevance of classical Islamic education therefore requires a critical interpretation, not the application of all historical provisions. Validation of the content and empirical testing of the TA'DIB-PAUD Model is the next research agenda.

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