

Motor Activities Strengthen Islamic Learning in Early Childhood Education: An Integrative Review

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Abstract

- Purpose** : Motor activities have increasingly been recognized as an important component of early childhood education; however, their contribution to Islamic education remains fragmented across the literature. This study investigated how motor activities support Islamic learning among young children by addressing three research questions: (1) What forms of motor activities are implemented in Islamic education? (2) How do these activities facilitate children's understanding of Islamic concepts, values, and practices? and (3) What contributions do they make to children's cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development? An integrative review design was employed to synthesize empirical evidence published between 2017 and 2025.
- Method** : A systematic search of Google Scholar and Semantic Scholar identified 45 potentially relevant studies, from which 17 peer-reviewed journal articles met the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Data were analyzed using an integrative thematic synthesis approach.
- Results** : The review identified three major findings. First, motor activities in Islamic education include practical worship movements, Sunnah-based outdoor activities, traditional games, and Islamic educational play materials. Second, motor activities function as experiential learning strategies that translate abstract religious concepts into meaningful learning experiences while strengthening independence, moral behavior, and habitual worship through repeated practice. Third, integrating motor activities contributes holistically to children's cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development by improving attention, visual memory, emotional regulation, cooperation, physical coordination, and the performance of daily religious practices.
- Conclusion** : These findings highlight the pivotal role of motor experiences in facilitating the internalization of Islamic values and suggest that movement-based learning should become an integral pedagogical approach in early childhood Islamic education.

Keywords: Early childhood education; Islamic education; Motor development; Experiential learning; Integrative review.

1. Introduction

Early childhood education has increasingly emphasized holistic child development, recognizing that cognitive, affective, social, and physical domains are inseparable components of meaningful learning. Internationally, educational approaches such as Montessori, experiential

learning, and play-based pedagogy advocate movement as a fundamental medium through which children construct knowledge, develop self-regulation, and interact with their environment (Debs et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2025; Murray et al., 2023). Rather than serving merely as physical exercise, movement enables children to transform abstract concepts into concrete experiences, thereby strengthening conceptual understanding and long-term memory. As educational systems continue to promote child-centered learning, motor activities have become an essential pedagogical strategy for supporting children's comprehensive development.

Within Islamic education, however, the role of motor activities extends beyond physical development. Islamic educational philosophy views human beings as an integrated unity of body, mind, and spirit, implying that religious learning should engage not only children's intellectual understanding but also their behavioral and spiritual development (Bhat & Bisati, 2025; Firmansyah, 2025; Hadi et al., 2024; Irpan & Sain, 2024). Consequently, many religious practices including ablution (*wudu*), daily prayers (*ṣalāh*), Qur'anic learning through manipulative materials, and Sunnah-based physical activities require coordinated bodily movements that facilitate the internalization of religious values through repeated practice. This perspective positions movement not simply as a developmental outcome but as a pedagogical pathway for cultivating Islamic character and habitual worship.

Motor activities in this study refer to structured gross and fine-motor experiences intentionally integrated into Islamic learning to facilitate children's understanding of religious concepts, values, and practices. Gross-motor activities involve large-muscle movements such as walking, jumping, balancing, or performing prayer movements, whereas fine-motor activities involve precise hand and finger coordination, including tracing Arabic letters, assembling Islamic educational puzzles, or manipulating learning materials. For example, children learning the sequence of "*wudu*" not only memorize each procedural step verbally but also physically perform the movements repeatedly, enabling cognitive understanding, psychomotor coordination, and behavioral habituation to develop simultaneously. Such examples illustrate how movement transforms religious instruction from passive information delivery into active experiential learning.

Growing scholarly interest has examined the relationship between motor development and children's learning outcomes. In one study, researchers investigated whether Islamic educational games could simultaneously stimulate motor development and strengthen children's religious identity using a qualitative literature review. Their findings indicated that Islamic educational play materials promoted both physical coordination and religious engagement, suggesting that learning media integrating movement and spirituality may enhance holistic child development (Aziz et al., 2025; Kartika, 2025; Lestari & Syafril, 2026; Suhartini et al., 2024). Although informative, the study primarily focused on educational media rather than examining the broader pedagogical functions of motor activities across different learning contexts.

Similarly, another investigation explored the relationship between children's motor and cognitive development from the perspective of Islamic educational psychology using a qualitative library research approach (Alfani et al., 2025; Jamilah & Syahputri, 2025; Sandi et al., 2026). The study concluded that physical, cognitive, and spiritual development interact dynamically throughout childhood, implying that motor development should not be separated from moral and religious education. Nevertheless, the analysis concentrated mainly on conceptual relationships and

provided limited synthesis regarding practical learning activities employed in Islamic educational settings.

Other researchers have specifically examined prayer movements as a medium for gross-motor development among young children. Using a literature-based approach, they reported that regular performance of prayer movements contributed not only to physical coordination but also to language development, emotional regulation, and moral formation (Riyadi et al., 2025; Syafii et al., 2025; Syahmil & Sa-U, 2024). These findings demonstrate that ritual movement possesses multidimensional educational value. However, because the investigation centered exclusively on prayer, its conclusions cannot fully explain the broader spectrum of motor activities employed in early childhood Islamic education.

Likewise, qualitative field studies investigating the integration of Islamic values into motor development programs found that combining gross and fine-motor activities with religious instruction supported children's physical growth while simultaneously fostering Islamic character and positive learning behaviors (Firdaus et al., 2025; Wardani et al., 2025). Teachers were shown to play a crucial role in designing learning environments where movement and religious instruction complemented one another. Although these findings provide valuable practical insights, they remain context-specific and do not synthesize evidence accumulated across multiple empirical investigations.

Further literature has emphasized that physical-motor development in Islam encompasses balanced growth between bodily health, spiritual awareness, and moral responsibility. Activities such as traditional games, outdoor learning, Sunnah sports, and physically engaging religious practices have all been reported to contribute positively to children's holistic development. Despite these encouraging findings, evidence remains scattered across different educational contexts, research designs, and instructional approaches, making it difficult to identify consistent pedagogical patterns regarding how motor activities strengthen Islamic learning.

2. Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative “*integrative review*” design to synthesize empirical evidence regarding the role of motor activities in strengthening Islamic learning among young children. An integrative review was selected because it enables the systematic inclusion, comparison, and synthesis of findings derived from diverse research methodologies, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of a complex educational phenomenon. Following the methodological framework proposed by Whittemore and Knafl, the review combined evidence from qualitative and quantitative studies to identify recurring patterns and generate broader conceptual insights.

The review focused on three analytical constructs: (1) forms of motor activities implemented in early childhood Islamic education, (2) the pedagogical role of motor activities in facilitating children's understanding of Islamic concepts, values, and practices, and (3) the contribution of motor activities to children's cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development. These constructs were operationalized through thematic synthesis of findings reported in the selected empirical studies.

Sample Selection and Eligibility Criteria

The population consisted of scholarly publications examining motor activities within the context of Islamic education for early childhood. A purposive sampling strategy was applied to identify studies that directly addressed the objectives of the review.

To ensure methodological consistency, studies were included if they met the following criteria: (1) published in peer-reviewed national or international journals; (2) published between 2017 and 2025; (3) investigated gross- or fine-motor activities involving early childhood learners; and (4) explicitly discussed Islamic education, Islamic learning, or religious educational contexts.

Studies were excluded when they (1) focused exclusively on general motor development without an Islamic educational context, (2) consisted of books, conference abstracts, opinion articles, blogs, or other non-peer-reviewed publications, (3) were published outside the predetermined publication period, (4) duplicated records retrieved from multiple databases, or (5) lacked sufficient methodological information or full-text accessibility for comprehensive analysis.

Following the screening and eligibility process, **17 journal articles** satisfied all inclusion criteria and were included in the final synthesis.

Search Strategy and Data Sources

A systematic literature search was conducted between **April and May 2026** using **Google Scholar** and **Semantic Scholar**. These databases were selected because they provide broad coverage of educational and interdisciplinary research relevant to early childhood education and Islamic education.

The search strategy combined Indonesian and English keywords representing the principal concepts of the study. Search terms included **motor activities, motor development, Islamic education, Islamic religious education, early childhood, and early childhood education**. Boolean operators (AND, OR, and NOT) were applied to refine and broaden the search where appropriate. Examples of search combinations included **motor activities AND Islamic education, early childhood OR preschool, and motor development NOT sports**.

All retrieved records were exported, screened for duplication, and evaluated according to the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria before proceeding to full-text assessment.

Data Collection Procedure

The review followed a transparent and chronological procedure consisting of five sequential stages.

1. First, potentially relevant studies were identified through systematic searches of the selected databases using predefined search strings.
2. Second, duplicate records were removed and titles and abstracts were screened to eliminate studies that did not correspond to the objectives of the review.
3. Third, the remaining articles underwent full-text eligibility assessment using the established inclusion and exclusion criteria.
4. Fourth, data extraction was conducted using a structured extraction matrix. Information extracted from each article included author(s), publication year, research objectives, study design, participant characteristics, educational context, forms of motor activities, instructional approaches, and principal findings relevant to the three research questions.

Finally, all extracted information was organized into a synthesis table to facilitate cross-study comparison before thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using an **integrative thematic analysis** approach. The analytical procedure consisted of four iterative stages.

1. The first stage involved data reduction, during which extracted findings relevant to the research questions were identified and organized.
2. The second stage comprised data display through synthesis tables that enabled systematic comparison of study characteristics and research findings.
3. The third stage involved constant comparison across studies to identify recurring concepts, similarities, differences, and emerging thematic categories related to motor activities and Islamic education.
4. The final stage consisted of thematic synthesis and conclusion drawing. Themes were developed inductively by grouping conceptually related findings across studies. The resulting themes corresponded directly to the research questions: (1) forms of motor activities, (2) pedagogical roles of motor activities in Islamic learning, and (3) contributions to children's cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development.

Because this investigation synthesized qualitative evidence from published literature, no statistical analyses, hypothesis testing, or significance testing procedures were performed.

Trustworthiness

To enhance methodological rigor, credibility was established through predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria and systematic screening procedures. Dependability was supported by documenting each stage of the review process, including search strategy, eligibility assessment, data extraction, and thematic synthesis. Confirmability was strengthened by basing all interpretations exclusively on evidence reported in the included studies rather than on researchers' assumptions. Transferability was facilitated by providing transparent descriptions of the search strategy, article selection process, and analytical procedures, enabling future researchers to replicate or extend the review.

Ethical Considerations

This study involved the analysis of publicly available scholarly publications and therefore did not require direct participation of human subjects or institutional ethical approval. No personal or confidential information was collected. All reviewed studies were cited appropriately, and the review adhered to principles of academic integrity, transparency, and responsible scholarly reporting throughout the research process.

3. Result

A total of **45** records were initially identified through database searches. After title and abstract screening, duplicate removal, and full-text eligibility assessment, **17 peer-reviewed studies** met the predefined inclusion criteria and were included in the integrative review. The findings are presented according to the three research questions.

Forms of Motor Activities in Early Childhood Islamic Education

The reviewed studies identified a wide range of motor activities implemented within Islamic educational settings. These activities were consistently classified into gross-motor and fine-motor categories.

Gross-motor activities primarily included practical worship movements, such as “*wudu*” and “*ṣalāh*”, which required coordinated body movements performed repeatedly during learning. Several studies also reported Sunnah-based outdoor activities, including horse riding, swimming, and archery, as well as movement-oriented traditional games designed to promote children's physical engagement while introducing Islamic values.

Fine-motor activities were represented by manipulative learning experiences using Islamic educational materials. Frequently reported examples included Hijaiyah letter puzzles, Iqra blocks, Islamic-themed educational games, tracing Arabic letters, and digital hypercontent learning modules requiring children's active hand-eye coordination. Several studies additionally incorporated drawing, coloring, cutting, and object manipulation activities linked with Islamic learning materials.

Across the reviewed literature, many educational programs combined gross- and fine-motor activities within the same instructional sequence rather than implementing them separately. The reviewed studies also demonstrated increasing use of educational play materials designed specifically to integrate motor development with religious learning objectives.

The Role of Motor Activities in Supporting Islamic Learning

The selected studies consistently reported that motor activities functioned as instructional strategies facilitating children's engagement with Islamic concepts, values, and religious practices.

Most studies described movement-based learning as an experiential approach in which children acquired religious understanding through direct participation rather than verbal explanation alone. Repeated performance of worship movements was frequently reported as part of classroom instruction to familiarize children with the procedural aspects of Islamic rituals.

Several studies documented that Montessori-inspired activities encouraged children's independence during religious learning by allowing them to manipulate educational materials and complete structured learning tasks individually. Other studies highlighted repeated motor practice as part of routine classroom activities intended to establish habitual participation in daily worship.

The reviewed evidence further showed that movement-based instructional activities were incorporated alongside educational games, traditional play, storytelling, and manipulative learning media. Multiple studies reported that these instructional approaches were implemented simultaneously within classroom learning rather than as isolated educational activities.

Contributions of Motor Activities to Children's Development

The reviewed literature demonstrated that motor activities contributed to three interconnected developmental domains: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development.

Within the cognitive domain, several studies reported improvements in children's attention during classroom learning, increased visual memory related to Islamic learning materials, greater ability to recognize religious symbols, and improved understanding of sequential worship procedures.

Within the affective domain, the included studies documented the development of patience, cooperation, emotional regulation, responsibility, discipline, and positive social interaction during movement-based learning activities. Several investigations also reported the integration of Islamic moral values through collaborative games and routine religious practices.

Within the psychomotor domain, consistent findings included improved body coordination, balance, fine-motor control, gross-motor performance, muscular coordination, and the ability to perform daily religious practices accurately. Repeated practice of worship movements was commonly reported as supporting children's physical mastery of Islamic rituals.

Cross-Study Patterns

Although instructional contexts differed across the reviewed studies, several recurring patterns emerged.

First, movement-based worship practices were the most frequently reported form of motor activity across Islamic educational settings. Second, manipulative educational media were commonly used to integrate fine-motor development with early religious literacy. Third, multiple studies implemented combinations of physical movement, educational play, and Islamic instructional materials within the same learning activities.

The reviewed literature also revealed variations in instructional media and learning environments. While some studies emphasized classroom-based manipulative learning, others incorporated outdoor physical activities and traditional games. Despite these contextual differences, all included studies examined motor activities as components of early childhood Islamic education.

Unexpected Findings

Several studies reported findings extending beyond the initial focus on motor development. In addition to improvements in physical skills, movement-based learning activities were associated with children's social participation, classroom engagement, emotional self-regulation, and independent learning behaviors. Furthermore, some studies incorporated digital learning resources, including hypercontent-based instructional materials, indicating an emerging integration of technology into movement-based Islamic learning for young children.

4. Discussion

The present integrative review demonstrates that motor activities constitute an essential pedagogical component of early childhood Islamic education rather than merely serving as complementary physical exercises. Across the reviewed studies, motor activities were consistently implemented through practical worship movements, Islamic educational games, manipulative learning materials, traditional games, and Sunnah-inspired physical activities. These learning experiences were reported to facilitate children's understanding of Islamic concepts while simultaneously promoting cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development. Collectively, the evidence supports all three research questions by showing that motor activities assume multiple instructional forms, function as experiential learning strategies, and contribute to holistic child development within Islamic educational contexts.

The first major finding indicates that motor activities in Islamic education extend beyond physical development to become meaningful instructional strategies. This finding suggests that

bodily movement is not simply an outcome of children's maturation but an active medium through which religious knowledge is constructed. Young children naturally learn by interacting with their environment through movement, observation, imitation, and repeated practice. Consequently, learning experiences that combine physical engagement with religious instruction enable children to connect abstract Islamic concepts with concrete experiences. Rather than memorizing procedural knowledge about worship, children participate directly in religious practices, making learning more authentic and developmentally appropriate.

This pattern can be understood through experiential learning theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is generated through concrete experience followed by reflection and repeated application. Within Islamic education, practical worship activities such as "*wudu*" and "*ṣalāh*" exemplify this process because children learn not only by listening to explanations but also by physically performing each sequence of movements. The repeated enactment of these practices strengthens procedural memory while simultaneously fostering familiarity with Islamic rituals. The reviewed studies consistently demonstrated that movement transformed religious learning from passive knowledge acquisition into active participation, thereby increasing children's engagement throughout the learning process.

The findings are also consistent with constructivist perspectives, which argue that young learners actively construct understanding through direct interaction with learning environments. Motor activities provide opportunities for exploration, manipulation, experimentation, and problem-solving that cannot be achieved through verbal instruction alone. For example, children manipulating Hijaiyah puzzles or arranging Islamic educational materials simultaneously develop fine-motor coordination, visual recognition, and religious literacy. Learning therefore occurs through integrated sensory experiences rather than isolated cognitive processing. This reinforces the proposition that movement functions as an indispensable element of effective early childhood pedagogy.

Another important finding concerns the contribution of motor activities to holistic child development. The reviewed studies consistently reported improvements across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Although these developmental dimensions are often discussed separately, the findings suggest that they operate interactively during movement-based Islamic learning. Cognitive development was reflected in improved attention, visual memory, and understanding of religious procedures. Affective development appeared through greater cooperation, patience, discipline, emotional regulation, and responsibility, whereas psychomotor development involved enhanced coordination, balance, and mastery of worship movements. These findings reinforce holistic developmental theories, which emphasize that learning experiences simultaneously influence multiple developmental domains rather than affecting isolated abilities.

From the perspective of Islamic educational philosophy, these findings are particularly meaningful because Islamic education seeks balanced development of intellectual, spiritual, emotional, moral, and physical capacities. Human beings are viewed as integrated entities in which bodily actions reinforce spiritual awareness and moral behaviour. Consequently, motor activities become educational practices through which children internalize Islamic values while developing healthy physical habits. The evidence synthesized in this review therefore supports the long-standing educational principle that religious knowledge should be translated into observable

behaviour through repeated practice rather than remaining at the level of conceptual understanding.

Comparison with previous literature further strengthens these conclusions. Earlier studies investigating Islamic educational games similarly concluded that movement-based play enhanced children's learning motivation while simultaneously stimulating physical and cognitive development. The present review extends those findings by demonstrating that educational games represent only one category within a broader continuum of motor-based pedagogies. Practical worship, traditional games, outdoor activities, and manipulative learning materials collectively contribute to religious learning through different instructional mechanisms. This broader synthesis provides a more comprehensive understanding than individual case studies limited to specific interventions.

Similarly, previous research examining prayer movements reported positive effects on gross-motor development and religious habituation. The present findings are consistent with these observations but further reveal that prayer movements are only one manifestation of movement-based Islamic learning. The reviewed literature shows that motor activities also encompass fine-motor learning, collaborative play, outdoor exploration, and classroom-based manipulative experiences. Accordingly, the educational value of movement cannot be restricted to ritual performance alone but should be understood as a multidimensional instructional approach supporting various aspects of children's learning.

Nevertheless, some differences across the reviewed studies deserve consideration. Several investigations emphasized gross-motor activities performed through outdoor experiences and Sunnah-inspired sports, whereas others focused primarily on fine-motor learning using classroom educational media. These differences likely reflect variations in educational objectives, institutional resources, children's developmental stages, and instructional contexts rather than contradictory findings. Despite these contextual variations, all reviewed studies consistently positioned movement as an integral component of meaningful Islamic learning.

Another noteworthy observation concerns the increasing integration of educational technology within movement-based learning environments. Although most reviewed studies relied on conventional learning materials and face-to-face activities, several recent investigations introduced digital learning resources, including hypercontent-based educational media. This development indicates that contemporary Islamic education is beginning to combine technological innovation with active movement rather than replacing physical engagement with screen-based instruction. Such approaches illustrate the evolving nature of movement-based pedagogy while maintaining children's active participation as the central learning principle.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the role of motor activities in strengthening Islamic learning in early childhood education through an integrative review of empirical research. The review sought to synthesize current evidence regarding the forms of motor activities implemented in Islamic educational settings, their pedagogical functions, and their contributions to children's holistic development.

The findings demonstrate four major conclusions. First, motor activities in early childhood Islamic education encompass diverse learning experiences, including practical worship movements, Islamic educational games, manipulative learning materials, traditional games, and Sunnah-inspired physical activities. Second, these activities function as experiential learning strategies that enable children to translate abstract Islamic concepts into meaningful and developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Third, motor activities contribute simultaneously to cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development by enhancing attention, religious understanding, emotional regulation, cooperation, physical coordination, and the performance of daily religious practices. Finally, the reviewed evidence indicates that movement-based learning promotes the integration of physical, intellectual, and spiritual development, reflecting the holistic philosophy of Islamic education.

The study contributes to both theory and practice by extending current understanding of movement-based pedagogy within early childhood Islamic education and by synthesizing fragmented evidence into a coherent conceptual framework. Practically, the findings encourage educators to integrate structured motor activities into Islamic learning, curriculum developers to design movement-oriented instructional resources, and policymakers to support active, child-centered pedagogical approaches that foster holistic development.

Future research should validate the proposed conceptual relationships through empirical classroom investigations, longitudinal studies, and intervention-based designs involving diverse educational contexts. Further studies may also examine the effectiveness of specific movement-based instructional models and explore how emerging educational technologies can be integrated with motor activities to enhance Islamic learning while preserving children's active engagement and holistic development.

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