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Developing Motivation, Creativity, and Character through Developmentally Appropriate Learning in 21st Century Early Childhood Islamic Education

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the development of learning motivation, creativity, and Islamic character in an integrated manner through learning that is appropriate for early childhood development in the context of 21st-century Islamic education. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design at RA Azalia Pekanbaru. The research informants consisted of three class teachers who were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in the learning process and their understanding of the characteristics and developmental needs of children. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and documentation, then analyzed through data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The main findings indicate that these three aspects are developed in an integrated manner: 1) Learning motivation through fun activities, appreciation, and individual guidance. 2) Creativity through art activities, storytelling, role-playing, open-ended questions, and exploration. 3) Islamic character through role models, habits, advice, moral stories, and positive reinforcement. The successful implementation is supported by a safe learning environment, the use of diverse methods and media, and parental involvement. However, the implementation still faces limitations in facilities, differences in children's abilities and self-confidence, poorly controlled use of digital devices, and inconsistent parental guidance. This study concludes that 21st-century learning in Islamic early childhood education needs to be realized through the integration of active-creative learning, suitability to the development and individual needs of children, and internalization of Islamic values, not just through the use of technology.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

21st-century learning demands that education not only develop academic skills but also shape students with learning motivation, creativity, independence, collaboration, responsibility, and strong character. *The OECD Learning Compass 2030* positions knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, student agency, creativity, and well-being as interrelated elements in preparing future generations (OECD, 2012). This framework emphasizes that education should provide opportunities for students to play an active role while directing their abilities toward ethical and responsible actions. The development of these competencies needs to begin in early childhood education because learning experiences at this stage form the foundation for children's cognitive, language, socio-emotional, moral, and spiritual development. However, the application of 21st-century learning in early childhood education cannot be equated with learning at higher levels of education. The demands for creativity, independence, problem-solving, and responsibility must be translated into concrete, enjoyable, play-based activities that are appropriate to children's developmental abilities. In this context, *developmentally appropriate practice* or developmentally appropriate learning becomes a relevant framework. The National Association for the Education of Young Children explains that developmentally appropriate learning is a strengths-based and play-based approach aimed at optimizing each child's development through engaging and engaging learning experiences (NAEYC, 2020). Its implementation is based on three main considerations: general patterns of child development, each child's individual characteristics, and the social and cultural context in which the child grows up. Therefore, teachers must not only adapt materials to the child's chronological age but also consider their interests, readiness, experience, abilities, learning needs, family background, and social environment.

One important dimension of developmentally appropriate learning is learning motivation. Motivated children tend to be more active in exploring their environment, maintaining attention, daring to try, and engaging in learning activities. Based on *self-determination theory*, quality motivation develops when the learning environment supports children's psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and social connectedness (Deci and Ryan, 2020). In early childhood education, this support can be realized through providing simple choices, activities with an appropriate level of difficulty, appreciation for effort, warm teacher-child relationships, and opportunities to learn with peers. Therefore, motivation is not only a child's internal condition but is also influenced by the teacher's ability to create safe and meaningful learning experiences and provide space for children to take initiative.

Learning motivation is closely related to the development of creativity. Early childhood creativity is evident in their courage to ask questions, develop stories, role-play, draw, create works, use objects in various ways, and find alternative solutions to simple problems. A study (Nikkola. et al, 2024) shows that children's creative participation in early childhood education activities is related to involvement, play, creativity, and collaboration as elements of 21st-century competencies. Research (Farantika, D. et al., 2024) also found that children's creativity can be developed through targeted teacher strategies, collaboration, support from learning resources, and the use of diverse media. These findings demonstrate that creativity is not solely an innate ability, but develops through an environment that provides opportunities for children to explore, express ideas, make simple decisions, and experiment without fear of being criticized.

In early childhood Islamic education, the development of motivation and creativity must take place within the framework of Islamic character formation. Creativity is not only directed at the ability to generate new ideas, but also at the ability to use those ideas usefully, responsibly, and in accordance with Islamic values. The values of honesty, discipline, responsibility, independence, caring, cooperation, patience, respect, and love for Allah and His Messenger must be integrated into daily learning experiences. This process can be carried out through role models,

habits, advice, positive reinforcement, stories, religious activities, social interactions, and concrete experiences. (Rofiki. et al, 2022), for example, show that learning the hadith in early childhood can be used to connect the introduction of Islamic teachings with the development of children's behavior. Research (Rofiki. et al, 2022) also found that Islamic education within the family has a positive influence on the prophetic character of early childhood. This suggests that the formation of Islamic character requires continuity between learning experiences at school and habits in the family environment.

Several previous studies have provided an important foundation for the development of each of these aspects. (Deci and Ryan, 2020) explain the psychological factors that support motivation; (Nikkola. et al, 2024) examine participation and learning strategies that support creativity; while (Nikkola, T.M., Kangas, J., & Reunamo, 2024) and (Nikkola. et al, 2024) examine character formation and the instilling of Islamic teachings in children. Furthermore, (Paul et al., 2018) demonstrate the importance of parental involvement in family-based character education. However, these studies generally still focus on motivation, creativity, character, or family involvement as relatively separate domains. Studies explaining how teachers simultaneously develop motivation, creativity, and Islamic character through developmentally appropriate learning are still limited, particularly in the context of Islamic early childhood education institutions in Indonesia. This limitation raises empirical issues because teachers are faced with children who have different motivations, thinking skills, creativity, self-confidence, concentration, and support needs. Preliminary data at RA Azalia Pekanbaru shows that some children are active and confident in participating in activities, while others require motivation, repetition, concrete media, or individual guidance. Teachers have responded to this diversity through enjoyable activities, providing motivation and appreciation, open-ended questions, creative activities, media use, role modeling, habituation, individual support, and communication with parents. However, it is not yet fully understood how these strategies are designed, implemented, and linked consistently to each child's developmental characteristics and the goals of developing Islamic character. Therefore, the primary issue of this research is not simply the presence or absence of creative activities and religious support, but rather how teachers integrate all these strategies into an adaptive learning process.

This research is important because implementing 21st-century competencies without considering child development risks producing learning that is overly academic and structured, and beyond the child's readiness. Conversely, learning that relies solely on routines and habits without providing opportunities for choice, questioning, exploring, and expressing ideas can limit children's motivation and creativity. Therefore, a contextual understanding of teacher practices in balancing freedom of exploration, individual support, learning objectives, and Islamic character formation is needed. The novelty of this research lies in its integrative analysis of four elements that have often been studied separately: learning motivation, creativity, Islamic character, and developmentally appropriate learning. This research does not position motivation, creativity, and character as standalone developmental outcomes, but rather as processes that influence each other in teachers' learning practices. The analysis also includes how teachers respond to individual differences and learning difficulties and involve parents as part of the child's developmental environment. Based on these gaps, this study aims to analyze teacher strategies in developing motivation, creativity, and Islamic character through developmentally appropriate learning at RA Azalia Pekanbaru.



Method (منهج)

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of teacher practices in developing motivation, creativity, and character

through developmentally appropriate learning at RA Azalia Pekanbaru (Creswell, 2014) . The research informants were three teachers who were purposively selected because they were directly involved in learning and understood the characteristics of child development and their learning needs. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews on June 26, 2026, with questions covering the psychology of learning and child development, learning motivation, stimulating creativity, internalizing values and character, and 21st-century learning. Documentation in the form of notes and photos of activities were used as supporting data. Data were analyzed interactively through the stages of data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Miles, MB, Huberman, AM, & Saldaña, n.d.) . Interview transcripts were read repeatedly, coded, and grouped into themes of motivation development strategies, stimulating creativity, character building, learning adjustments, handling learning difficulties, and supporting and inhibiting factors. Data validity was maintained through triangulation between interview results and documentation, as well as cross-checking interpretations to ensure consistency with informant statements (Sugiyono, 2015) . This research was conducted with informant consent, maintaining confidentiality, and using the data solely for academic purposes. As a case study with a single informant, the results of this study are not intended to be statistically generalized, but rather to provide a contextual understanding of learning practices at the research site.

The following is the research flow:

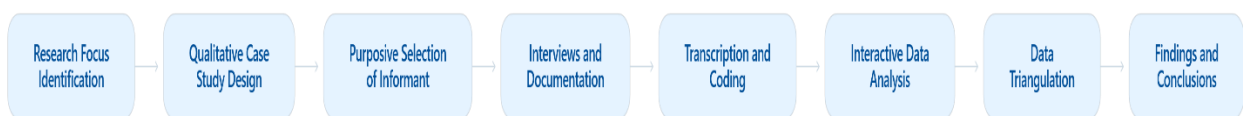


Figure 1.1 Research Flow

Results (نتائج)

Research findings indicate that the development of motivation, creativity, and character in 21st-century Islamic early childhood education at RA Azalia Pekanbaru is implemented through interconnected learning practices. Based on the interview results, the findings are grouped into five main themes, namely learning motivation, creativity, character development, the implementation of learning that is appropriate to child development, and factors that support and inhibit learning. Teachers foster motivation through encouragement, praise, fun activities, and individual guidance, as stated by the informant, "I try to encourage students, give praise when they try, create a fun learning atmosphere, and relate the material to everyday life so that they are more motivated to learn." Creativity is stimulated through drawing, coloring, making art, storytelling, role-playing, discussions, and answering open-ended questions. The informant explained, "I ask open-ended questions, invite children to discuss, give them the opportunity to express their opinions, and give assignments that encourage them to think and find solutions in their own way." Meanwhile, Islamic character is developed through teacher role models, the habit of praying, polite behavior, honesty, discipline, responsibility, advice, moral stories, and reinforcement of good behavior. The informant emphasized that character building is carried out through "daily habits, such as praying before studying, being polite to teachers and friends, being disciplined, honest, and responsible." All of these practices are tailored to the developmental stage and individual needs of children through simplification of language, repetition of explanations, use of engaging media, gradual exercises, and individual mentoring. The informant stated, "I try to understand each child's condition first, not comparing them with other friends, [and] providing an approach that suits each child's needs." This mentoring reportedly helps

children begin to understand the material better, become more confident, and actively participate in learning. Supporting factors identified include parental involvement, a comfortable learning environment, engaging learning methods, media use, teacher role models, and positive peer influence. Inhibiting factors include limited media and facilities, monotonous learning, uncontrolled gadget use, low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and inconsistent parental mentoring. Thus, motivation, creativity, and Islamic character are not developed separately, but are integrated in learning that is fun, adaptive, exploration-based, and tailored to each child's development.

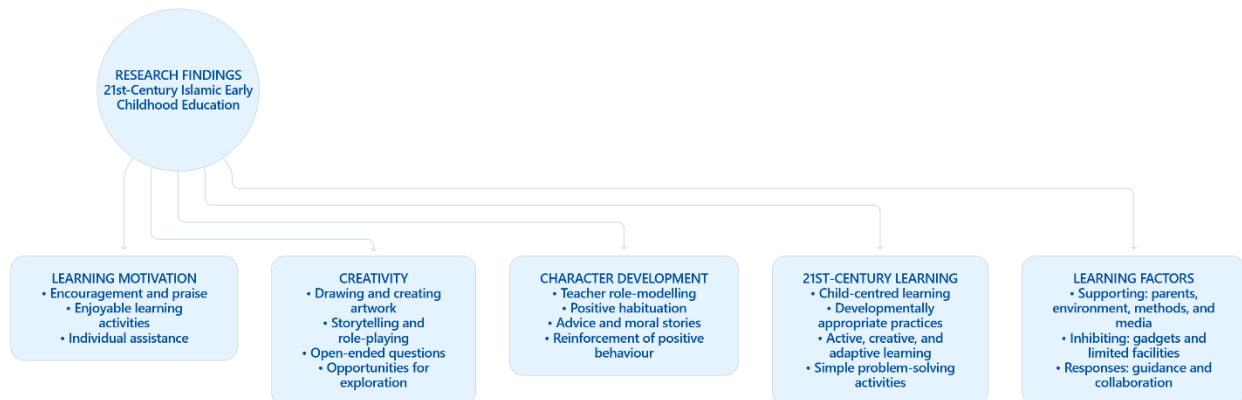


Figure 1.2 Research Results



Discussion (مناقشة)

1. Developing Learning Motivation through Developmentally Appropriate Learning

The results of the study indicate that teachers at RA Azalia Pekanbaru develop children's learning motivation through encouragement, praise, and appreciation, creating a pleasant learning atmosphere, connecting material to everyday life, and individual guidance. Children's learning motivation is recognized through active participation in activities, courage to ask questions, willingness to complete assignments, and persistence during the learning process. These findings indicate that children's motivation is influenced not only by internal drive, but also by the quality of interactions with teachers and the learning environment created in the classroom. These findings align with self-determination theory, which explains that learning motivation develops when the educational environment is able to meet three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and social connectedness (Ryan, Richard M., 2020). The need for autonomy is met when children have the opportunity to choose activities, express opinions, and try to complete tasks in their own way. The need for competence develops when children are given tasks that match their abilities, gradual guidance, and reinforcement for progress achieved. Meanwhile, the need for connectedness is formed through a warm, safe, and caring relationship between teacher and child. Thus, learning motivation cannot be built adequately through commands or rewards, but requires an environment that makes children feel accepted, capable, and involved in learning.

Praise and appreciation from teachers can be positive reinforcement for children's engagement. However, praise should be directed at effort, courage to try, persistence, and progress, not just the final result or perceived ability. (Hordern, 2016) explains that praise can increase motivation if it is sincere, informative, and supports a child's competence. Conversely, excessive praise, controlling, or only given when a child achieves a specific outcome can make children overly dependent on external assessments. Therefore, statements such as "You tried to solve that" or "The method you tried was very interesting" are more supportive of motivation

than general praise that does not acknowledge a child's efforts. Enjoyable learning is also an important part of developing motivation. Teachers use interesting activities, learning media, hands-on practice, images, and experiences that are close to the child's life. Enjoyable activities do not mean learning is merely entertainment, but demonstrate a match between learning objectives, developmental characteristics, interests, and the way children construct knowledge. (Lidz, 1984) emphasizes that developmentally appropriate learning practices must consider the general characteristics of children's development, the individuality of each child, and the sociocultural context of their lives. Therefore, the use of stories, games, art activities, conversations, and concrete experiences are relevant forms of learning because young children are more easily engaged through meaningful activities that can be experienced directly.

Connecting material to everyday life also helps children understand the benefits and meaning of learning activities. Material related to family experiences, the school environment, friendships, religious activities, and daily habits is easier to understand than material presented abstractly. Contextual learning provides opportunities for children to connect new knowledge to their existing experiences. When children understand the connection between learning activities and their lives, engagement and motivation to participate in learning tend to increase. This practice aligns with the principles of 21st-century learning, which positions students as active participants in constructing knowledge, not simply as recipients of information (OECD, 2012) .

Further research findings indicate that children's motivation levels and learning outcomes are not always consistent. Children who actively participate in learning may not achieve the same results as their peers because each child has different abilities, developmental pace, emotional state, family experiences, and support needs. This situation encourages teachers to repeat explanations, use simpler language, provide engaging media, provide gradual exercises, and provide individual support. This approach demonstrates that teachers have attempted to adapt the learning process to each child's readiness and needs. This individualized support is a form of developmentally appropriate learning because children are not required to achieve uniform results and within the same timeframe. Teachers first understand the child's difficulties and then determine the necessary assistance. Children who struggle to understand explanations receive repetition using simpler language, while children who lack confidence receive motivation and reinforcement. Children who need more time are given the opportunity to complete tasks gradually. This adjustment does not mean lowering learning objectives, but rather providing a more appropriate learning path so that each child has the opportunity to develop.

In practice, teachers use a variety of presentation methods, such as pictures, oral explanations, and hands-on activities. This variation should not be understood as grouping children based on fixed learning styles, but rather as an effort to provide multimodal learning experiences and observe children's responses to various activities. A flexible approach is more in line with the principle of individuality in early childhood learning, as children's learning needs and responses can change depending on the material, situation, and developmental stage. Therefore, teachers need to conduct ongoing observations and adjust support based on the child's actual needs. Motivational development is also influenced by the continuity of support between school and family. Research shows that parental attention, guidance, and encouragement influence children's persistence and engagement in learning. Conversely, a lack of parental attention, an unsupportive environment, and uncontrolled use of gadgets can hinder motivation. Teachers strive to address this situation by communicating with parents, communicating about their children's progress, and inviting them to support learning activities at home. This collaboration is important because children's motivation is formed through repeated experiences, both at school and within the family environment.

2. Encouraging Children's Creativity in 21st Century Learning

The results of the study indicate that children's creativity is stimulated at RA Azalia Pekanbaru through drawing, coloring, making crafts, storytelling, singing, role-playing, discussions, and expressing opinions. Teachers also provide open-ended questions and opportunities for children to try new things and complete tasks in their own way. These findings indicate that creativity is not only understood as the ability to produce works of art, but also includes the ability to imagine, express ideas, try various possibilities, and find simple solutions in learning activities. Early childhood creativity needs to be understood as an ability that develops through the interaction between the child's potential and the learning environment. Children may have natural curiosity and imagination, but their development is influenced by opportunities to explore, the availability of media, teachers' responses to children's ideas, and the psychological atmosphere in the classroom. (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014) explain that the classroom environment plays a crucial role in supporting or limiting student creativity. Teachers can build an environment that supports creativity by providing opportunities for children to express ideas, accept a variety of answers, and view mistakes as part of the learning process.

The use of drawing, coloring, crafting, storytelling, and role-playing activities in the research findings demonstrate experiential learning. Through drawing and creativity, children can express ideas visually. Storytelling activities help children develop imagination, language, and the ability to sequence events. Meanwhile, role-playing allows children to create situations, determine roles, communicate, and solve problems that arise during play. These activities align with the principles of *developmentally appropriate practices*, which place play, exploration, and active engagement as the foundation of early childhood learning (Strawhacker, 2020). These creative activities will be more meaningful when teachers do not overly dictate a single product that all children must imitate. If all children are asked to produce the same shape, color, or answer, an activity that seems creative can turn into a reproduction activity. Conversely, providing a variety of materials, activity options, and freedom to choose the form of the work allows children to express their own ideas. This does not mean that teachers allow the activities to proceed aimlessly. Teachers still set developmental goals, provide materials, provide examples as needed, and help children who are having difficulties, but do not take over the child's creative process.

Open-ended questions are key to stimulating creativity. Questions like "What can you make from this material?", "How else can this be done?", or "What would happen if the shape were changed?" can generate more than one answer. This type of question differs from closed-ended questions, which require only one correct answer. Through open-ended questions, children are encouraged to observe, predict, compare, explain reasons, and discover various possibilities. (Strawhacker, 2020) places hands-on experience, meaningful choices, exploration, inquiry, and thought-provoking questions as part of learning practices that support children's development. Research findings also show that teachers identify children's creativity based on their activeness, boldness in expressing ideas, how they complete tasks, and the work they produce. Children who generate a lot of ideas and are brave enough to try new things are considered to have higher levels of creativity. However, categorizing creativity into high, medium, or average levels requires caution. Children who are not actively speaking or have not yet produced outstanding work are not necessarily uncreative. Creativity can emerge in various forms and is influenced by the child's self-confidence, language skills, experience, interests, and emotional state during the activity.

Therefore, creativity assessment should not be based solely on a single piece of work or activity. Teachers need to continuously observe children's processes as they generate ideas, select materials, try new methods, correct mistakes, and explain their work. Documentation in the form of progress notes, collections of work, photos of activities, and conversations with children can

provide a more complete picture. This approach helps teachers see the development of each child's creativity without overly comparing them with their peers. The creativity stimulation found at RA Azalia Pekanbaru is related to the demands of 21st-century learning. Creativity is one of the skills students need to face change, generate ideas, and find alternative solutions to problems. (OECD, n.d.) places the ability to create new values, take responsibility, and face tension or dilemmas as transformative competencies needed by students. Thus, simple activities such as drawing, telling stories, selecting materials, discussing, and solving problems in play can form the initial foundation for the development of 21st-century skills if conducted in a focused and developmentally appropriate manner.

21st-century learning in early childhood education doesn't always have to be realized through the use of digital devices. Technology can be used as a supporting medium, but creativity doesn't depend on technological sophistication. Children can develop creativity through simple materials found in their environment, such as paper, blocks, natural objects, used materials, stories, movement, music, and imaginative play. More important is the quality of activity design and teacher-child interactions. Teachers need to provide appropriate challenges, sufficient time for exploration, and responses that respect the uniqueness of each child's ideas. Research has also identified several factors that hinder the stimulation of creativity, including monotonous learning, limited media and facilities, lack of environmental support, low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and limited opportunities to showcase ideas. These barriers indicate that creativity cannot develop optimally if learning is too centered on teacher answers or the final product. Children need an environment that provides a sense of security to try, fail, improve, and try again. In this context, teachers act as facilitators, providing experiences, asking questions, observing the process, and providing assistance as needed.

Encouraging creativity also requires family involvement, as children's creative experiences don't just happen at school. Parents can provide opportunities for play, storytelling, drawing, building, and exploring the home environment while maintaining supervision. Collaboration between teachers and parents is crucial to ensure children have a consistent space for expression. Gadget use also needs to be appropriately directed to prevent it from replacing the active play, social interaction, and hands-on experiences children need to develop their creativity.

3. Islamic Character Building Through Exemplary Behavior and Habits

The results of the study indicate that Islamic character formation at RA Azalia Pekanbaru is carried out through role models, habits, advice, moral stories, and positive reinforcement. The values developed include religiosity, honesty, discipline, responsibility, independence, caring, cooperation, and respect for others. These values are applied in daily activities, such as praying before studying, greeting, obeying rules, being polite, and tidying up learning equipment. Teacher role models are very important because early childhood tends to learn through observation and imitation. This finding is in accordance with social learning theory which explains that behavior can be learned by observing models in the surrounding environment (Bandura, 1977) . When teachers demonstrate honesty, patience, discipline, and caring, children obtain concrete examples of expected behavior. In Islamic education, the principle of role models is also reflected in QS. Al-Ahzab verse 21 which places the Prophet Muhammad as a good role model.

In addition to role models, consistent habituation is crucial to ensure that the values instilled in children become daily behavior. This is in line with (Lickona, 2013) , who stated that character encompasses knowledge of goodness, awareness of loving goodness, and the habit of practicing goodness. Islamic education also directs learning toward integrated intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual development. Character formation is also influenced by the continuity of education between school and family. Inconsistent rules, lack of parental guidance, and

uncontrolled gadget use are obstacles to the formation of positive habits. Therefore, collaboration between teachers and parents is necessary to ensure that the values instilled in school are consistently applied at home. These findings confirm that Islamic character formation will be more meaningful if carried out through concrete examples, consistent repetition, and support from the child's environment.

4. Integration of 21st Century Learning, Child Developmental Needs, and Environmental Support

The results of the study indicate that the implementation of 21st-century learning at RA Azalia Pekanbaru is not only realized through the use of technology, but primarily through active, creative, contextual, adaptive, and child-centered learning. Teachers provide opportunities for children to ask questions, discuss, express opinions, create works, role-play, try new experiences, and find simple solutions to problems that arise during learning activities. These practices indicate that children are positioned as active participants who construct knowledge through experience, not just as recipients of information from teachers. This finding is in line with the *OECD Learning Compass 2030*, which places creativity, responsibility, the ability to act, and the ability to face problems as important competencies in future education (OECD, 2019). In early childhood education, these competencies do not have to be realized in the form of complex academic tasks. 21st-century skills can begin to be developed through simple activities, such as selecting play materials, collaborating with friends, expressing ideas, resolving disputes, sharing experiences, and finding new ways to use objects in the surrounding environment.

The implementation of 21st-century learning must continue to consider children's developmental stages. Early childhood is characterized by developing thinking skills, attention spans, emotional regulation, and social skills. Therefore, teachers cannot apply learning demands uniformly. Research shows that teachers use pictures, stories, games, hands-on practice, simple explanations, and repetition to make activities more understandable. Teachers also provide individual support to children who have difficulty reading, concentrating, understanding instructions, completing tasks, or demonstrating self-confidence. These adjustments align with the principles of *developmentally appropriate practice*, which emphasize that learning must consider the general characteristics of children's development, individual differences, and the social and cultural contexts of their lives. Developmentally appropriate learning does not mean allowing children to learn aimlessly, but rather providing challenges that are appropriate to their readiness and abilities. Teachers still determine learning goals but provide different support, media, time, and forms of activity based on each child's needs. This approach allows each child a fair opportunity to learn without having to achieve results in the same way and at the same time.

Research findings indicate that teachers act as facilitators and providers of learning support. When children are unable to complete a task independently, teachers provide examples, ask questions, provide additional explanations, or provide step-by-step guidance. This assistance can then be reduced as children begin to work independently. This practice aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) view that child development can be supported through social interaction and assistance from more capable peers. Therefore, 21st-century learning still requires an active role for teachers in directing and supporting children's learning processes. The integration of 21st-century learning and developmental needs is also evident in the relationship between motivation, creativity, and character. Enjoyable and ability-appropriate learning can increase children's willingness to engage. This engagement opens up opportunities for children to experiment, express ideas, and produce work. At the same time, group activities, collaborative play, and task completion can be used to foster responsibility, cooperation, discipline, and respect for others. Thus, motivation, creativity, and character are not developed in isolation, but through the same learning experience.

This development also requires a safe psychological environment. Children need to feel accepted, valued, and not afraid to make mistakes. (Ryan, Richard M., 2020) explains that motivation can develop when the environment supports the needs for autonomy, competence, and social connectedness. Research findings indicate that these needs are supported by providing opportunities for children to participate, appreciation for effort, ability-based guidance, and positive relationships between teachers and children. A safe environment allows children to be more confident in asking questions, experimenting, and expressing creativity. In addition to the classroom environment, families play a crucial role in supporting children's ongoing development. Research shows that parental attention, motivation, and guidance influence children's engagement in learning. Children who receive support at home are more likely to repeat positive habits, complete learning activities, and develop self-confidence. Conversely, lack of parental attention, uncontrolled device use, and inconsistent rules between home and school can hinder children's development.

The influence of family and school can be explained through the theory of developmental ecology (Bronfman, 2020). This theory states that child development occurs through interactions with various interconnected environments, particularly family and school. When the values, rules, and support provided by both environments are consistent, children gain stronger developmental experiences. Conversely, differences in habit patterns between home and school can make it difficult for children to understand expected behavior. Therefore, communication between teachers and parents is necessary to align the forms of support provided to children. Collaboration can be achieved through communicating about children's developmental progress, discussing learning difficulties, suggesting activities at home, and agreeing on rules for device use. Teachers not only address children's deficiencies but also inform them about their progress, interests, and potential that can be developed. Parents can then provide supportive experiences, such as reading stories, engaging children in discussions, providing creative activities, and fostering simple responsibilities. This collaboration extends the learning process from the classroom into children's daily lives.

However, integrated learning faces several obstacles, such as limited media and facilities, monotonous learning potential, low motivation and self-confidence among children, and a lack of consistent parental support. These obstacles demonstrate that the quality of learning is determined not only by teacher skills but also by the availability of learning resources and environmental support. Limited facilities can be overcome by utilizing simple materials and surrounding objects as media for play and learning. Meanwhile, barriers to motivation and self-confidence need to be addressed through emotional support, gradual activities, and appreciation of children's processes and efforts. In the context of Islamic education, the integration of 21st-century learning needs to remain guided by moral and spiritual values. Creativity, communication, independence, and problem-solving skills need to be developed alongside honesty, responsibility, caring, politeness, and respect for others. Islamic education not only develops intellectual abilities but also shapes children's moral, social, and spiritual character. Thus, 21st-century competencies provide a means for children to develop, while Islamic character provides direction for the use of these competencies.

The findings of this study not only confirm previous research on the importance of motivation, creativity, character development, and family support but also demonstrate the functional relationship between these elements. Unlike research (E.L. Deci and R.M. Ryan, 2020), which focused on psychological needs as the basis of motivation, (Nikkola, T.M., Kangas, J., & Reunamo, 2024) on creative participation as the foundation of 21st-century skills. Instilling Islamic values and character, this study found that these four aspects occur within an integrated pedagogical process. Support and enjoyable learning build children's motivation; motivation fosters engagement; engagement opens up space for exploration and creativity; while Islamic

character provides ethical direction for freedom of expression to be exercised responsibly and with respect for others. Developmentally appropriate learning serves as a framework that regulates the level of challenge, choice of activities, media, and support based on each child's needs. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies not in each strategy separately, but in the discovery of an integrated pattern between motivation as a driving force, creativity as an exploration process, Islamic character as a value orientation, and developmental appropriateness as a basis for learning adaptation. These findings demonstrate that Islamic early childhood education can develop 21st-century competencies without separating it from moral and spiritual development. However, because the research evidence comes primarily from teachers' accounts, this relationship reflects the informants' perceived practices and has not yet demonstrated quantitative effectiveness.



Conclusion (خاتمة)

This study concludes that the development of motivation, creativity, and character in 21st-century Islamic early childhood education at RA Azalia Pekanbaru is implemented in an integrated manner through fun, contextual, and active learning that is appropriate to children's developmental needs. Learning motivation is developed through encouragement, appreciation, and individual guidance; creativity is stimulated through art activities, storytelling, role-playing, open-ended questions, and opportunities for exploration; while Islamic character is formed through role models, habits, advice, moral stories, and reinforcement of positive behavior. The implementation of this learning is supported by the role of teachers, a safe learning environment, the use of various methods and media, and collaboration with parents, but still faces obstacles such as limited facilities, differences in children's abilities, uncontrolled gadget use, and inconsistent guidance at home. Thus, 21st-century learning in Islamic early childhood education is not only characterized by the use of technology, but also by the ability of teachers to integrate creative competencies, developmental needs, and Islamic values into children's learning experiences. However, because this study is limited to one informant and one institutional context, the findings obtained are contextual and not intended to be broadly generalized. However, because this research is limited to a single institutional context, the findings are contextual and not intended to be broadly generalized. This limitation also means the results do not yet reflect the diversity of perspectives and practices in other early childhood Islamic educational institutions. Therefore, future research needs to involve more institutions to obtain a more comprehensive understanding.

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