

The Concept of Islamic Inclusive Education in Early Childhood (Critical Analysis of STEAM Learning Model)

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Abstract

This research aims to investigate the concept of inclusive based on Islamic education by examining the learning model of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) in PAUD critically and exploring how the development of religious aspects in the STEAM model can improve the holistic education of early childhood. The research method used by the authors is qualitative with library research, and the data collection used is documentation by searching for data from books, journals, and other sources related to the research problem and analysis techniques using content analysis. The research results generally emphasize that inclusive education in the STEAM context must integrate aspects of spirituality with science. Inclusive education based on multipotential and multidimensional is important in forming individuals who are tough and competitive in facing the challenges of the digital age. This aligns with the understanding that humans have multidimensionality, which needs to be developed comprehensively from an early age. Islamic inclusive education is by the Islamic view of human nature, where humans are created with various natures. In Islam, the term "*insan kamil*" emphasizes human perfection, both spiritually and materially. The aim of Islamic inclusive education is in line with Islamic education; it is to form individuals who are balanced between world life and the afterlife.

Keywords

Early Childhood; Islamic Inclusive Education; STEAM

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1. INTRODUCTION

Departing from the confusion of the concept of inclusion that the wider community has understood. Inclusion is often defined as services for children with physical, sensory, or intellectual barriers and disorders. Still, in this study, inclusion is about equality, equal rights, and responding to all educational diversity for all children (Chandrika Devarakonda, 2013). This study is also related to the author's concerns regarding the impact of the STEAM learning model, especially in the field of religious development in early childhood. On the other hand, the STEAM learning model is a model that is suitable for the learning needs of the 21st Century (Amelia & Marini, 2022). However, when religious aspects are not developed in early childhood, it is feared that in the future, children will lose spirituality in facing the problems of their lives (Tanfidiyah, 2018).



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We understand that 21st-century learning demands a learning model that can form children's critical thinking and build digital literacy skills so that they are expected to be able to face various problems in globalization and the digital era. This demand is triggered by the complexity and problems that will arise in the future due to Globalization and the Digital era. One of the abilities that students must have (to face the complexity of these problems) is to strengthen critical thinking skills and have the power to be creative and innovative through integrating various scientific disciplines. From the number of learning models offered by education experts, the STEAM (Science, Technology, The STEAM learning is an approach to integrate scientific disciplines or indiscipline Through Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) model is believed to be very relevant to the learning needs of the 21st century (Ashari & Mariana, 2022); (Amelia & Marini, 2022).

The application of science principles, engineering, art, and mathematics. This model has interactive, holistic, integrative, scientific, contextual, thematic, effective, and collaborative learning characteristics. Through this model, students are expected to be able to answer various life problems in the future through ways of thinking and working: Science is skills to solve problems related to the environment or the universe, and technology is skills to fulfill human needs in doing their work, engineering is skills of carrying out or designing strategies to solve problems, art is skills in prioritizing aesthetic values or beauty values, and mathematics is skills to predict through analysis of numbers and arguments logic. So, with these advantages, students in the future will be able to answer any challenges that arise in the era of disruption (Henriksen, 2014).

In its development, the STEAM model has been widely adopted and implemented in Indonesia, including in inclusion institutions at the PAUD level. This is because one of the advantages of this model is to construct thinking skills and ways of working based on multidisciplinary science (Rahmadana & Agnesa, 2022).

2. METHODS

The research method used by the authors is qualitative with library research, and the data collection used is documentation by searching for data from books, journals, and other sources related to the research problem and analysis techniques using content analysis (Bungin, 2015).

The type of content analysis uses pragmatic content analysis, where classification is carried out on signs according to their possible causes and effects. This section describes how the research was conducted. The primary materials of this section are (1) research design, (2) population and sample (target of research), (3) data collection techniques and instrument development, and (4) data analysis techniques. For research using tools and materials, it is necessary to write down the specifications of the tools and materials. The tool specifications describe the tools' sophistication, while the material specifications describe the types of materials used. Qualitative research includes ethnography, case studies, document studies, natural observation, phenomenology, grounded theory, and historical research (Dr. Muhammad Hasan, S.Pd., M.Pd., Dr. Tuti Khairani Harahap. et al., 2023). It is necessary to add the presence of researchers, research subjects, informants who helped during the research ways to explore research data, location and duration of research, as well as descriptions of checking the validity of research results.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The STEAM learning model is a learning model that prioritizes holistic, integrative learning from the scientific disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics (Papadopoulou, 2024). This model is a development of the STEM model that previous education experts have formulated (Herro, Quigley, C., & Andrews, 2017). In the context of inclusive education, this model is designed to

prepare students with critical thinking and high work skills for effective potential development in this century (Land, 2013). Through this capability, it is hoped that basic potentials (human nature) can be developed simultaneously and empowered in current globalization and digitalization.

In the Islamic concept, humans are created to carry diverse natures. Abul Abbas, in his interpretation of Ibn Athiyyah, explains that *fitrah* means *al Khilqah* and *al shari'ah* (form) that exist in children who are prepared and given the ability to distinguish the creations of Allah Swt (Abu Abdillah Muhammad Al-Qurthubi, 2007).

The Essence of Islamic Education

According to the author, form means dimensions within humans. Human nature leads us to realize and understand our existence on earth as the best, most superior, and most dignified creatures compared to other creations. The book of Religious states that humans are called multidimensional creatures because there are body, psychic, and spiritual dimensions within humans. One another cannot be separated; the spiritual dimension underlies these three dimensions (Rianto, 2018).

Islamic education aims to form a perfect human (*insan kamil*) or a person who is complete, perfect, and balanced between life in this world and the hereafter (Munawaroh & Ula, 2023). A perfect human is a human being who can place himself in the right situation and environment (Fatimah & Sumarni, 2024). As stated by Zakiyah Daradjat that:

Islamic education aims to guide and shape people into pious servants of Allah, firm in their faith, devout in worship, and have commendable morals (Darajat, 2004). The entire movement in every Muslim's life, from deeds, words, and any actions carried out with the value of seeking Allah's blessing, fulfilling all His commands, and avoiding all His proherehibitions, is worship. So, to carry out all the personal and social life tasks, studying and guiding them with faith and commendable morals is necessary. In this way, Muslim identity will be visible in all aspects of life (Hasan Langgulong, 1988).

The mandate entrusted to Islamic education is very hard; humans, as subjects and objects in education itself, humans as objects should be prepared to become *khalifah fi al-Ard* through an environment and atmosphere that can stimulate optimal human growth and development (Merazga et al., 2019).

From the various opinions above, researchers see that the religious aspect is a fundamental and essential aspect of humans, which must be developed and empowered in human life in an integrative and coherent manner. Human balance and perfection will be achieved when these potentials can be utilized optimally. However, on the contrary, when one of these potentials is neglected, it will impact the integrity of humans as God's creatures. The idea of STEAM learning with spiritual value content (integration of religion with science) is based on a framework of thinking about the importance of religion as a dimension of humans and the basis for the existence of other dimensions in humans (Amelia & Marini, 2022).

As mentioned previously, religion/monotheism is one of human nature that needs to be developed and empowered. One effort to develop this nature is through the educational process. According to Imam al-Ghazali, humans have a religious nature (Nasution, 2012). Every human being is born with the instinct to be religious. That's why education cannot be separated from this nature, because if education is separated or ignores religious values, then education will be separated from human nature.

Regarding the human dimension, Imam Al-Ghazali divided humans into two parts: the body, which is material, and the soul (*al-nafs*), which is immaterial (Nasution, 2012). The difference in basic properties between *al-nafs* and the body occurs because both come from different worlds: *al-Nafs* comes from '*alam al-amr*', and the body comes from '*alam al-khalq*'. According to him, '*alam al-amr*' is higher than '*alam al-khalq*'. Empowerment of the Soul/*Nafs* aspect is an inseparable part of education. In fact, according to him, it is more important than physical education because, from the soul/*nafs*, intellectual

and intuitive powers are born as the most important powers and the main criteria for human perfection (Nasution, 2012).

Based on these views, researchers see that the potential of religion (*Ghorizah al-tadayyun*) and the dimension of the soul (*Nafs*) are two very important things to develop in the world of education (Zainuri, Rohman, Fida Amalia, 2017). The Islamic view of human nature has contributed a lot to the conceptualization of Islamic education because education is entirely a human activity, by them, of them, and for them. Among the implications are (Nasution, 2012): (1) At the orientation level, education must be directed at empowering human potential so that in the future, they can actualize the essence of their existence as *Kholifah fi al-Ard* (prosperous conservator of the natural world); (2) At the material content level, education does not only contain aspects of science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics (or science and technology) but also contains religious and spiritual values; (3) At the learning level, it should be adapted to the reality of the nature, growth, and development of students, especially their psychological dynamics, so that they are motivated to learn and the learning method becomes something enjoyable.

Multidimensional Aspects of Humans in Islamic Education

Islamic education views multipotential and multidimensional education are an important part of the current era to form individuals who are strong and skilled in solving the problems in today's digital era. The meaning of multipotential and multidimensional education is an educational model that accommodates all human potential (innate nature), whether related to religious, artistic, intellectual, or other potential (Nawangsih & Achmad, 2022). The aspects related to the human dimension are also developed balanced and comprehensively.

Humans were created as the perfect creatures among His other creations on earth, superior and dignified, and it is even quoted in the book Religiosity that "humans are called multidimensional creatures because within humans there are bodily, psychic, and spiritual dimensions (Rianto dkk, 2018). These three dimensions are interrelated and complement each other to form a unity even though they are separate. The spiritual dimension underlies the other dimensions." Therefore, STEAM requires spirituality and changes to STEAMS.

Amir also reviews the human dimensions that need to be developed through education.

Ernest Mark and Marx Scheler in Riyanto et al. state that the physical dimension refers to the human body. The body is an observable part of the human physique, commonly known as the physical aspect. This dimension in early childhood education relates to children's physical motor development. The motto *Mens Sana in Corpore Sano* means a healthy soul is found in a strong body. Allah has given humans a perfect body, and its potential must be maximized. It is stated that when the body is strong, the mind functions optimally and becomes more productive.

The spiritual/religious dimension is closely related to religious nature. In the PAUD (early childhood education) concept, there is a focus on developing religious and moral values. These values are crucial for PAUD students to enhance their spirituality. Children are guided to recognize good and bad, even though they can naturally differentiate between them through observation. Embedded religious values are expected to shape a perfect personality. According to Imam Al-Ghazali in *Ihya' 'Ulumuddin*, the soul (*nafs*) is the essential essence of humans, as it can either obey or disobey Allah. The soul possesses power and potential in life, including piety, creativity, taste, work, and intention. John Naisbitt refers to the concept of the *soul* as spirituality. Religious attitudes in human life cannot be separated from morals.

The faith dimension is emphasized in the Qur'an, specifically in Surah Ar-Rum (30:30), where humans are encouraged to turn their faces straight toward the religion of Allah as their natural disposition. In a hadith, Prophet Muhammad also stated, "Every human being is born in a state of fitrah, and it is his parents who make him a Jew, Christian, or Magi." Buya Hamka acknowledged the

importance of faith and knowledge. He stated, "Faith without knowledge is like a lantern in the hand of the blind, but knowledge without faith is like a lantern in the hand of a thief."

The social dimension is closely related to social-emotional development. Every human being is born as part of a social community. As social creatures, humans must develop this dimension, which is particularly important in early childhood. Since early childhood is considered the *golden age*, external influences, whether significant or minor, will shape a child's social life.

The moral dimension plays a significant role in children's growth and development, as it is strongly related to religious and moral values. Morality is one of the fundamental aspects of human life. The closer a person is to Allah, the better their character and morals will be, and vice versa.

The intellectual dimension relates to cognitive growth and development in early childhood education. Humans are often called *hayawani agnatic*, which sets them apart from other creatures created by Allah. Thus, intellectual intelligence plays a vital role in human development.

The aesthetic dimension was previously considered part of six other developmental aspects. However, art is manifested across five other developments in the current perspective. Essentially, art is a fundamental aspect of human nature. Considering this view, it becomes clear that humans possess multiple dimensions that must be nurtured from early childhood to later stages of life. These dimensions should function according to their nature to help individuals reach their full potential (Amir, 2012).

However, this target can be realized if the learning model applied is a model that accommodates all of these potentials and dimensions (not just partial or dichotomy). This multipotential and multidimensional education is needed from early childhood because this is where growth and development begin to be monitored. So, through the implementation of multidimensional education from an early age, there will be a process of growth and development of all dimensions and potential of the children in a balanced and interrelated manner. Human self-awareness of their nature will encourage them to respond appropriately to existing phenomena and be critical of their problems. This aligns with Islamic education's aim, an effort to develop all the potential (*fitrah*) and abilities students possess to prepare for their lives as complete human beings (*insan kamil*).

Inclusive Education

The importance and benefits of quality the European community and international policymakers have recognized Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) over the past decades of the United Nations [UN]; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO]; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); The World Bank, and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). ECEC is highlighted as the foundation for subsequent school achievement and lifelong learning. Building on the Salamanca Statement from 1994 and the Dakar Statement on Education for All from 2000, UNESCO and other key international partners organized the 2015 World Education Forum in Incheon, Japan. The Incheon Education Declaration 2030 sets out the education vision for the next 15 years based on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals ([SDG2030] UN2015), and pre-primary education is highlighted with a special focus on inclusion. The definition of inclusion used in this paper is that adopted by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education: "The main vision for an inclusive education system is to ensure that all learners of all ages are provided with meaningful and high-quality educational opportunities in their local communities, alongside their friends and peers" (K Eileen Allen dan Ilene S Schwartz, 2001).

Inclusion as a concept has been interpreted differently in different countries. Inclusion means different things to different people and can often reflect the stages of developing inclusive practices (Heldanita, 2018). Different definitions of inclusion can be divided into descriptive and prescriptive categories. The definition of inclusion under the descriptive category relates to how inclusion is implemented in practice (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). The prescriptive definition of inclusion refers to how others can interpret and use the definition (Chandrika Devarakonda, 2013). Furthermore, they have

classified how the concept of inclusion has been defined in six different ways: (1) Inclusion related to students with disabilities and others who are categorized as 'having special needs education'; (2) Inclusion in response to disciplinary inclusion; (3) Inclusion about all groups considered vulnerable to exclusion; (4) Inclusion as developing schools for all; (5) Inclusion as 'education for all'; (6) Inclusion as a principled approach to education and society (Booth et al., 2015).

Inclusive is not only uniting children with special needs with regular children, but inclusive education, according to Allen, means "providing all students within the mainstream appropriate educational programs that are challenging yet geared to their capabilities and needs as well as any support and assistance they and/or their teachers may need to be successful in the mainstream." In the sense that inclusiveness is different from integration and mainstreaming. Inclusive education provides appropriate, challenging programs tailored to their abilities and needs and any support and assistance they and/or their teachers need to succeed in the mainstream (Loreman et al., 2005). According to Ehlers in Alieen, there are three ways to look at inclusion:

Through beliefs and values, namely in a state order, the family is the smallest specific in determining the quality of a country. Family is where children are raised with all values and beliefs embraced by their respective cultural beliefs. Likewise, the role of the family, the environment, and politics greatly influence the outcome of policies that will foster inclusivity. If families, neighborhoods, and communities believe that we must support all programs for children with special needs in seeking their potential. In the concept of Goodness on fit by Thomas, it is stated that it is essential when developing inclusive programs (K Eileen Allen dan Ilene S Schwartz, 2001).

From various kinds of evidence (this is evidence of what kind of research results are above), the author tries to straighten out the meaning and understanding of inclusive schools that most people in Indonesia have embraced, that inclusion is not said to be related to the service of children with special needs alone, but to serve all students in the school environment with all the uniqueness and diversity they have. Education services must be able to accommodate all diversity and give them the right to develop their potential (Supardi, 2023).

Conceptually, this model is suitable for preparing a generation adaptive to today's digital changes. However, when the researchers analyzed human nature from an Islamic religious perspective, this model did not accommodate aspects of children's religious and moral development. This researcher's concerns are also reinforced by several previous researchers' statements that the STEAM model is a model initiated by a group of scientists as an emphasis on the importance of these four scientific disciplines in solving global competition problems through developing basic human potential in the fields of science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics (Ashari & Mariana, 2022). From several of these articles, researchers see that the STEAM model never touches on religious and moral aspects as human nature that must be developed; it does not touch on the importance of developing spiritual aspects in facing future life problems, and it also does not accommodate human diversity (Edward T Baker, Margaret C Wang, 1995).

This is because this model was initiated by those not from religious/spiritual groups, and an urgent need, such as the issue of industrialization and globalization, triggered the birth of this model. This reason is reasonable and acceptable; however, in the context of holistic and integrative Islamic education, researchers view that religious and moral aspects are very important to develop in facing globalization and digital currents. Because it is feared that education that only prioritizes aspects of science and technology and ignores religious values will only produce value-free thinkers or scientists, this concern has recently emerged in several developed countries such as America and China (countries that have claimed successfully to implement STEAM) (Novrizal & Manaf, 2024). In Indonesia's education context, where most of the population is Muslim, strengthening religious and moral aspects is very important.

From these views, researchers want to know the concept of inclusive education based on Islam, at

least from two points: first, theologically, the religious aspect is human nature, which must be developed on various occasions so that humans can live with their human elements (Sunarto et al., 2024). The reviews related to human nature about modern education have been carried out by several previous researchers such as Toni Pransiska, Syarifah Ismail, Kahar, Mualimin, and other researchers. Overall, the study explains that the religious aspect is fundamental in humans because human nature (innate potential) is given as a provision for human survival, so the education that is developed must be in line with this nature. Second, practically, the STEAM model applied in PAUD still cannot be integrated with religious and moral values, especially in learning centers; third, a learning model that integrates religion and science is a necessity as a distinctive feature of early childhood Islamic education institutions, such as Raudhatul Athfal (RA), Al-Quran Kindergarten (TKQ) and the others.

4. CONCLUSION

In general, this paper emphasizes that inclusive education in the STEAM context must integrate the aspects of spirituality with science. Inclusive education based on multipotential and multidimensional is very important in forming individuals who are tough and competitive in facing the challenges of the digital age. This is in line with the understanding that humans have multidimensional which needs to be developed comprehensively from an early age.

Islamic inclusive education is by the Islamic view of human nature, where humans are created with various natures. In Islam, the term *insan kamil* emphasizes human perfection, both spiritually and materially. The aim of Islamic inclusive education aligns with Islamic education, which is to form individuals who are balanced between world life and the afterlife. With a focus on forming pious character and commendable morals.

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