

TEACHING THE DIVINE IN EARLY ISLAMIC EDUCATION: NARRATIVE APPROACHES AND PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES AMONG MUSLIM PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

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Abstract

Teaching the concept of divinity in Islam, which tends to be abstract, to preschool children is a challenge, given their immature cognitive modalities. To this end, this article explores teachers' approaches and narrative models used in providing divinity education to Muslim children. Semi-structured interviews with Muslim teachers who have more than one year of experience teaching preschool children show that the approaches and narrative models used by the teachers vary widely and tend to be eclectic. Teachers tend to introduce and relate children to the concept of divinity through habituation and religious terms rather than teaching the concept of divinity in detail to children. The approaches used by teachers are linguistic and habituation approaches. The narratives used are body analogies, natural phenomena, simple associations, and chants or nadzam (Arabic poetry) that are recited and memorized together. These findings make an important contribution to the development of contextualized and developmentally appropriate divinity education methods in an Islamic cultural environment.

Keywords: Divinity Education, Divinity Conception, Development Of Divinity Conception, Educational Narrative, Educational Approach

Abstrak

Mengajarkan konsep ketuhanan dalam Islam yang cenderung abstrak kepada anak pra sekolah merupakan tantangan tersendiri mengingat modalitas kognitifnya yang masih belum cukup matang. Untuk itu, artikel ini mengeksplorasi pendekatan guru dan model narasi yang digunakan dalam memberikan pendidikan ketuhanan kepada anak-anak Muslim. Wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan guru-guru Muslim yang memiliki pengalaman lebih dari satu tahun mengajar anak-anak prasekolah menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan dan model narasi yang digunakan oleh para guru sangat bervariasi dan cenderung eklektik. Para guru cenderung memperkenalkan dan mengaitkan anak-anak dengan konsep ketuhanan melalui pembiasaan dan istilah-istilah religius daripada mengajarkan konsep ketuhanan secara rinci kepada anak-anak. Pendekatan yang digunakan para guru berupa pendekatan linguistik dan habituasi. Narasi yang digunakan adalah analogi tubuh, fenomena alam, asosiasi sederhana, dan nyanyian atau *nadzam* (puisi Arab) yang dilantunkan dan dihafalkan bersama. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi penting dalam pengembangan metode pendidikan ketuhanan yang kontekstual dan sesuai dengan perkembangan anak usia dini dalam lingkungan budaya Islam.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Ketuhanan, Konsepsi Ketuhanan, Perkembangan Konsepsi Ketuhanan, Narasi Pendidikan, Pendekatan Pendidikan

INTRODUCTION

One of the essential elements of religion is the concept of divinity (Armstrong, 2011; Schilbrack, 2022). God is the central figure behind all acts of servitude in religious teachings. Teaching religion to someone, of course, one must also teach about the essence of God, His characteristics, traits, and even form. At this point, diversity arises, and each religion has its concept of divinity (James, 2020). The differences in the concept of divinity will undoubtedly have implications for differences in the theological teaching approach carried out by each religious community (Lam & Guerrero, 2020).

Although the concept of divinity is part of the elements of religious teachings, introducing and teaching the concept of divinity cannot be simplified or equated with teaching religion. Theoretically, the concepts of religion and God have pretty clear differences. The concept of divinity is in the belief scope, which is also part of religion, but religion has a broader area, not only beliefs but also practices, rituals, and rules (Karsten, 2020). In other words, teaching religion is not always about the concept of divinity, but teaching the concept of divinity will certainly teach some elements of religion itself.

In the process, a person's understanding of the divinity concept is termed the developmental stage of the divinity conception (Hamdanah, 2020; Nye & Carlson, 1984). This stage is a process in which a person gradually forms his understanding of the divinity concept through several religious activities and learning that he gets during his lifetime (Hamdanah, 2020; Harms, 1944).

The development of the divinity conception in humans is widely associated with their cognitive development, and this issue has become a significant discussion in the last decade (Dogan 2023). One of the theories about the development of the divinity conception is what was proposed by Harms (1944). In this theory, a person forms their conception of God through three phases: the *fairy tale*, the *realistic*, and the *individual* stage. In the *fairy tale* stage (3-6 years), the understanding of God is heavily influenced by fantasy and emotions. In the *realistic* phase (7-12 years), the understanding of the divinity concept develops through thought and reality. In the *individual* stage (12 years and above), a person's understanding of the divinity concept has become part of their character, which is reflected in their behavior and habits (Harms, 1966).

One of the issues that still leaves problems to be discussed is the development of the divinity conception that occurs in childhood. In the concept of human development, childhood is an essential stage for further periods of development. This is when individuals develop their basic understanding of God (Susanti & Ikhwanisifa, 2020). The development of the divinity conception occurs in different patterns and models depending on the religious teachings followed in society. This is because the concept of divinity is different between each religion. The differences in concepts not only lead to differences in patterns and models of the learning process but also have implications for the development of the children's divinity conception (Lam & Guerrero, 2020).

The character of children's cognitive development is in the *pre-operational* stage, where the dominating pattern of thought is in the form of imaginative things (Bjorklund, 2022; Piaget, 1929). For religious teachings with a conception of divinity that has a concrete explanation of God's form and existence, such children's cognitive modality is not a problem. Nevertheless, it becomes a problem when it is brought into the context of religious teachings with an abstract conception of divinity that does not provide a concrete explanation of God's form and existence, such as in Islam.

Although the conception of divinity is widely correlated with children's cognitive processes, the cognitive developmental theory approach to explaining the topic seems less able to describe how it occurs in some specific cultural contexts effectively. This is because the concept of divinity, as it exists in Islam, for example, is normatively unsuitable for a particular stage of child development (Dogan 2023). In many studies, the children's cognitive modalities, which still tend to be imaginative, are insufficient to abstractly describe supernatural things such as God, demons, or angels in certain religious teachings, including in Islam (Saide & Richert, 2022, 2020).

Based on Piaget's stage of cognitive development, children whose cognitive stage is immature

describe God as a superhuman figure who lives in the sky until their cognitive stage reaches the *concrete operational* level, which is usually in the early teens (Barrett & Richert, 2003; Piaget, 1929). When viewed from the developmental stage of the divinity conception, children still in the fairy tale phase develop their understanding of God through fantasy-filled thoughts (Harms, 1944, 1966). This theoretical explanation certainly still cannot accommodate explanations related to the development process of divinity conception in Muslim children.

Although not yet effective enough, in some religious societies, especially Islam, children have been introduced to the concept of divinity since the early days of their development through correspondence and involvement in social environments that are closely related to religious traditions and also through teaching in schools (Nyhof & Johnson, 2017). The existence of imaginative tendencies in children is a problem and challenge in some religious teachings, with the concept of divinity that is formless and does not provide a detailed physical explanation of God. An equally complicated, even quite crucial issue is how to introduce the concept of divinity to children, which inevitably must be done as early as possible to provide provisions for children's religiosity from their development.

Considering that children's cognitive needs differ from those of adults, the educational model must certainly adjust to the cognitive modalities children possess. Children will likely raise many critical, imaginative questions about the existence and essence of God (De Roos et al., 2001). How the process of teaching or educating children in the context of Muslim society has been carried out needs to be scientifically explained so that it does not become contradictory to some existing developmental theories. How can divinity education in the context of Muslim society be given to children whose cognitive stage is not yet able to understand God as it is, following Islamic teachings? This question will be challenging to answer without an explanation processed through research.

The process and pattern of learning the concept of divinity in children is one of the directional orientations suggested by researchers to be explored in order to understand better how the dynamics of the conception of divinity are internalized in children in the learning process (Saide & Richert, 2022). In some studies, the social circle is the most influential aspect in shaping conceptions of divinity (Dogan 2023). The social agents that introduce children to the conception of divinity are none other than parents and teachers at school.

So far, several studies have emphasized investigating parents' roles in forming children's conceptions of divinity. Through parents, children are introduced to several terms and activities that inform them about the concept of divinity (Baring, 2012; Kusainun & Berngacha, 2023; Saide & Richert, 2020). At this point, a theoretical gap emerges. When looking at Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979), The microsphere of the child's system is not only the family but also the school, which in this case is represented by the presence of the teacher as a figure who teaches children about religion or the concept of divinity. Even in a report, although parents and teachers contribute to the development of children's concept of divinity, the denomination of the religious environment at school has an influence that is more significant than the role of parents in the family (De Roos et al., 2001). In other words, exploring the process of teachers in teaching the concept of divinity to children is an essential research topic to be carried out in order to fill the gap of existing studies on the topic of divinity education for Muslim children in schools.

This study aims to explore how the concept of divinity is understood and taught to young children by teachers in early childhood Islamic education. Specifically, it tries to identify the teaching methods teachers use, analyze the types of narratives or stories they tell to explain the concept of divinity and explore the values and teaching principles that underlie their strategies. Thus, this study aims to provide a comprehensive picture of how teachers shape children's theological understanding from an early age within the Islamic education context.

There are different accounts regarding the age at which children develop their conception of God. In an investigation, Saide and Richert (2020) found that children's conception develops at the age of 3.52 to 6.98 years. In contrast, Moriguchi (2022) reported that children in Japan develop their conception of divinity at the age of 4 to 7. Wille et al. (2021) broke down the development of

conception into two stages. At the age of four to five, children develop their understanding through observation of others, and then, at the age of six to seven, they will focus on their understanding. In essence, the point taken from these descriptions is that children begin to develop their conception of divinity at pre-primary school age. The development of the conception of divinity occurs in different patterns and models depending on the cultural setting prevailing in a society. This is because the concept of divinity is different between each religion. (Lam & Guerrero, 2020).

In Islamic cultural settings, it is reported that children develop their conceptions of divinity in two models: through understanding the nature and characteristics of God and through involvement in religious practices and rituals such as praying or worshipping (Susanti & Ikhwanisifa, 2020). Through these two models, the child understands God as an existence who created the universe and possesses many properties and characteristics of omnipotence so that he should be worshipped and adored by humanity.

Children's engagement with religious agendas that lead them to understand the concept of divinity is inseparable from their immediate social environment. The role of the family has been highlighted in several scientific reports (Bader & Desmond, 2006; Baring, 2012; Cui et al., 2020). Through parents, children get many examples of behavior and habituation patterns, which they then develop while internalizing their religious knowledge until the concept of God is formed (Kusainun & Berngacha, 2023). In other words, the formation of the concept of divinity in children occurs through socialization. On this basis, an approach that emphasizes the concept of attachment from Krikpatrick (2019) and the social learning theory of Bandura (1969) can more effectively explain how children develop their concept of divinity.

The process of children's social learning about the concept of divinity is inseparable from the presence of adults as agents who introduce children to supernatural things, including God. Two patterns of social learning have emerged among scholars to explain the social and attachment process of children, which connects their cognitive development and the religious culture in their environment. The two patterns are participation and testimony (Saide & Richert, 2022).

Although this article is more inclined to state that there is a difference between the knowledge of divinity and religion, the learning process of both can be interrelated, primarily through religious culture born from community religious activities. Children's participation in religious activities will lead them to religious enculturation, slowly providing them with religious knowledge bases, including conceptions of divinity (Bader & Desmond, 2006). In addition to participation, children also receive the concept of divinity through testimony. This process helps children accept something they have never experienced or felt through adult testimony. As reported by Cui et al. (2020), children tend to claim that something invisible, such as God, is real because they follow what adults promote.

Although Cui et al. (2020) emphasized the role of parents as agents in the process of children's testimony, they also explained that the social circle around children, including teachers, also forms a consensus related to the supernatural. In other words, the role of teachers should not be underestimated in shaping children's conception of divinity.

Although parents are seen as highly influential as a child's closest circle in shaping their conception of divinity, not all scholarly reports agree that a child's conception of divinity will be precisely the same as that of their parents. Although children associate their understanding with their parents, it remains the case that children tend to conceptualize God as a tangible, embodied existence, not the same as their parents (Saide & Richert, 2022). Children's conceptions are more anthropomorphic than their parents' (Saide & Richert, 2020).

Considering that the development of children's conception of divinity cannot be pinned on one agent only or solely on parents, it is very important to explore the dynamics of other social cells contributing to children's conception of divinity. After all, the concept of divinity cannot just be allowed to grow naturally following the child's developmental stage. There are interrelated dynamics between cognitive modality and cultural processes that need to be considered around children that lead them to recognize supernatural things, including God (Burdett et al., 2020).

The social circle that shapes children's cultural process is not only parents but also teachers or religious leaders in the neighborhood where children live. In this article, the identification of narratives, models, and ways teachers provide divinity education will be highlighted as the focus of research.

The cultural setting to be investigated in this research is a society with an Islamic culture. Remembering that Islam has an abstract concept of divinity, which is formless and cannot be sensed by the naked eye, something like this must be a challenge for the learning process of a belief. Moreover, the burden of teachers as educators differs from parents because teachers have to teach many children, unlike parents who only teach their children.

RESEARCH METHOD

This is a qualitative narrative inquiry by interviewing ten teachers who have experienced teaching the concept of divinity to children. The selection of the method was decided because, historically, the narrative inquiry method emerged to study education in the qualitative realm that focuses on a person's life experience (Clandinin et al., 2007). Through the narrative inquiry method, it is possible to utilize a person's experience as a basis for gaining knowledge about the topic of study (Kim, 2016).

This study focuses on teachers' understanding of and approach to teaching the concept of divinity to children, as explored through the experiences of interviewees. The children in question are preschoolers aged around 3-6 years old. The teachers interviewed are active educators in early childhood education institutions, both formal and non-formal, in Yogyakarta city, Indonesia. Each has more than one year of experience teaching early childhood education, with some having taught for five to ten years. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore their experiences, particularly the teaching models, narratives, and approaches they use to instill an understanding of divinity in children.

Table 1.
Details of each interviewee's teaching experience.

No.	Interviewee (pseudonym)	Length of experience teaching children
1.	Lidia	± 10 years
2.	Dina	± 5 years
3.	Amel	± 5 years
4.	Lila	± 5 years
5.	Serli	± 3 years
6.	Safitri	± 2 years
7.	Danila	± 2 years
8.	Ina	± 2 years
9.	Fina	± 2 years
10.	Novi	± 2 years

Interviews were conducted after obtaining ethical approval from participants, and the entire process was recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis. In order to maintain confidentiality and respect the ethical principles of research, interviewees' identities were disguised by using pseudonyms. The thematic analysis steps were adopted from Braun & Clarke (2006), starting with repeated readings of the transcripts to understand the meaning and capture emerging patterns. Things that were unclear in the transcripts were reconfirmed with the interviewees to ensure data validity. Furthermore, important ideas and themes related to the research focus were recorded, organized, and processed into main patterns, which were then presented in the research findings section.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teachers' Understanding of Children's Divinity Knowledge

The interviewees in this study did not describe their children's divine knowledge equally. They divided their children's knowledge based on their religious experiences with their families. Although some interviewees said that some children did not understand religious materials, such as divinity, the average interviewee described their children as having gained more or less religious knowledge from their families at home, including the concept of divinity. Although the child's concept of divinity has been illustrated, it is only limited to certain things. As stated by interviewee Lidia (initials):

“They know it is 'Allah,' but conceptually, they do not understand” (Interviewee Lidia).

Lidia described that in her experience teaching children, children's knowledge of God is limited to the name. Children understand that the name of their God (in Islam) is Allah, but their knowledge of the concept of divinity is not yet perfectly illustrated. In this area, the teacher is tasked with perfecting the child's conception of divinity, not limited to the name only.

Similarly, another interviewee (Lila) said that the portrait of children's knowledge of divinity varies depending on how parents are treated at home. Some other interviewees, such as Danila, Ina, and Novi, did not find it too difficult to introduce the concept of divinity to children because since they started learning, most of the children they taught were already familiar with the terms in the Islamic concept of divinity, which they obtained from their social environment, especially their religious families.

“I do not find it too difficult to teach that (the concept of Islamic divinity). Because the children in our place live in a religious environment, I see that their families have more or less taught them Islamic materials and invited them to worship since childhood” (Interviewee Danila).

Even so, one interviewee (Serli) stated that he had taught a child whose religious and divine knowledge was utterly absent or had never really been taught by his parents. Thus, what needs to be emphasized in this study is that the teacher does not fully play the role of the social agent who first introduces religious knowledge or the concept of divinity to children. Although for some children it may happen, the number is only small, as stated by the interviewees.

Teachers' Narration in Explaining the Concept of Divinity

All interviewees seemed to prioritize making children aware of God's existence rather than explaining the concept of divinity in detail to children. The interviewees used some mediums, such as religious activities or the universe and its contents, which are creations, to explain the existence of the creator, namely Allah. Because the concept of God in Islam is formless and cannot be sensed, the interviewees explained it through the attributes inherent in God. They are conveyed to children through narratives that are easy to understand. Lidia puts forward the narrative that God is a figure or existence that created the universe. As explained in the previous sub-chapter, through the theme "myself," Lidia invites children to realize that behind all the limbs that exist in humans, God is the one who created them. The narrative is also reinforced by the expression that limbs cannot be bought because only God can create them.

“We are created by Allah. Everything, hands, feet, and mouth, was created by Allah, and it cannot be bought (Interviewee Lidia).

Interviewee Lidia uses the analogy of explaining natural phenomena that cannot be seen but can be felt to explain the concept of God's existence in Islam, which tends to be abstract and formless. In this case, Lidia had received questions about how God exists from the children he taught. For this reason, he used the wind as a medium to make the children understand that God exists even though it cannot be seen.

"Allah can see us; Allah created us," L said as if demonstrating the teaching. "Can you see the wind?" No, it can not, teacher. However, if I do this (while fanning the child), do you feel it? Yes, it feels. Allah is like that (Interviewee Lidia).

Not only teaching the child the analogy of the wind, but Lidia also practiced it in passing by fanning the child so that the children could feel the wind. This is the narrative used by Lidia to explain the concept of divinity in Islam to children. She also said that after explaining it to the child, she would go around to demonstrate that the wind can be felt even though it cannot be seen, just like God (in a simple analogy).

Interviewee Serli practiced the narrative that God is the one who created the universe. Using the narrative, Serli would explain incredible things like the sun, moon, and stars to the children. Then, she would ask the children questions about who created those powerful space objects. Through this question, Serli emphasized to the children that Allah is the creator of everything.

With a similar narrative model, Fina and Novi, who teach in the same place, will first invite children to think and mention incredible things in the universe, such as the sun, sky, mountains, and oceans. Then, they would both lead the children to think that there is something more extraordinary than the extraordinary things they mentioned, which is God, who created the universe.

“Yes, the sun, the earth, the mountains, and the sea are marvelous things, but what is even more marvelous is the one who created them all, Allah, the Almighty Creator (speaks as if practicing the process of learning)” (Interviewee Novi).

In explaining the concept of God's abstract form, two interviewees, Lila and Safitri, use the narrative that Allah is not the same as his creatures. With this keyword, Lila and Safitri emphasize the limitations of children not imagining Allah as his creature. They also emphasized that Allah has no children and no parents.

Interviewees Amel and Dina used the narrative that Allah is omniscient. Even though humans cannot see Allah, Allah can know whatever humans do. In explaining this, Dina and Amel emphasized to the children that children must do good and in accordance with religious teachings because Allah is always watching their actions, and Allah does not like when he sees people who do not behave in accordance with religious teachings.

“If you act like this, Allah will be angry (as if demonstrating the delivery of the lesson)” (Interviewee Amel).

Interviewee Safitri also uses a narrative about Allah, who is all-seeing and all-knowing. Similar to Amel and Dina, Safitri emphasizes that God is an existence who commands humans to worship and serve him and always watches over human movements. In using her narrative, Safitri utilizes the questions she asks the children at certain moments like she said:

"What do you think we pray for?" "To worship God, Mom." (projecting the children's answers). "So let us be orderly and pray well" (speaking as if teaching the children) (Interviewee Safitri).

In this statement, Safitri uses the prayer activity to explain that the reason behind the prayer is that Allah commands humans to worship him through prayer. Through such a narrative, Safitri explains to children that God is a figure that humans worship and obey.

Other narrative models used by the interviewees can also be seen from the characters of the songs they use to educate children about divinity. There are three kinds of songs used by the interviewees. Three interviewees (Amel, Dina, and Safitri) used the same song, which was composed of questions and answers sung alternately between the teacher and the children. The other song was the one Serli used. The song Serli adopts the narrative of "Satu-satu Aku Sayang Ibu," which is widely used in children's education. The song's tone is the same, but there is a modification of the lyrics made by Serli, where the word "mother" is replaced with "Allah". Meanwhile, the other three interviewees (Lila, Danila, and Ina) used the recitation of the *nadzam Aqidatul Awam* recited with a certain rhythmic tone together.

Finally, the narrative model found in this study is the narrative used by Serli to explain where Allah is. In the story of her experience, when Serli got an answer from a child who stated that Allah is in the sky, she did not necessarily blame him and even confirmed it but with an additional

note. She added that Allah could be in the sky and everywhere. She also explained to the children that the meaning of Allah can be anywhere: Allah is always watching over humans wherever and whenever humans are, even though humans cannot see Allah.

Teachers' Approach Pattern in Divinity Education

The divinity education provided by the interviewees in this study to children is not done in one specific material about divinity. The introduction of divinity is done through various approaches, both material and practical. The interviewees did not directly explain the concept of divinity to children in a classical manner but instead introduced God through several activities.

Like what interviewee Lidia (initials) does, she introduces God to children using some approaches. Lidia uses a thematic approach to explain God's existence. The theme of her approach, for example, is about "myself". In the theme, L explains the parts of the human body to the child. Then, after explaining the parts of the body and their functions, Lidia will explain to the child that these parts do not appear and exist by themselves, but someone created them. The creator of the body is none other than God. As L said:

“At the beginning of school, there are themes and sub-themes. In that theme, we have something called 'me.' In the theme 'myself,' there are hands, feet, and so on (limbs). Well, there, I will explain: We are created by Allah. Everything, hands, feet, mouth were created by Allah” (Interviewee Lidia).

Another learning theme that Lidia uses to explain God to children is "the universe ."Lidia said that after she teaches and introduces various things, such as the universe, she will direct the conversation to the information that the one who created the universe is Allah. Interviewee Serli also practices this thematic approach.

Serli's thematic approach is more inclined to utilize outer space objects to explain God as the one who created them. In addition, Serli also takes a thematic approach by explaining the meaning of the Qur'anic surahs when children are doing memorization lessons or Qur'an recitation activities. She gave an example of this approach technique through the meaning of Surah Al-Ikhlâs, which contains information about the oneness of Allah.

“Like surah Al-Ikhlâs, it is about the oneness of Allah. But we explain it just like: 'Allah is one, there is no other' (explanation of the meaning of Surah Al-Ikhlâs) in a simple way” (Interviewee Serli).

Another approach taken by interviewees, such as Lidia, is to introduce and familiarize children with songs or recitations of *al-'asma' al-husna* (99 names of Allah, which are also his attributes). He familiarizes the children with the recitation almost every morning. It is not only the reading of *al-'asma' al-husna* but also accompanied by body movements that illustrate the meaning of each name or nature of Allah. Interviewee Safitri also took this approach.

Other interviewees, Dina, Amel, Safitri, and Serli, also used the approach through songs or chanting. Dina, Amel, and Safitri had the same song and chant model approach. They all organized their songs into questions and answers and the teacher would sing the questions, and the children would sing the answers simultaneously. In the song, the lyrics explicitly ask the children who their God is, and in the answer, the children are directed to answer that Allah is their God. The three speakers also emphasized the approach of formulas that children need to memorize, such as the pillars of faith, where the first pillar of faith is to believe in God. The songs that Serli teaches the children differ from the other three interviewees (Dina, Amel, and Safitri). However, the lyrics of their songs both function to instill beliefs and conceptions of divinity in children without explicitly mentioning God's form and shape.

Three other interviewees (Danila, Ina, and Lila) have their approach to using songs and lyrics. Although they teach in different places, they both use the recitation of the *nadzam* (Arabic poem) *Aqidatul Awam* by Ahmad al-Marzuki (2012) to teach children the concept of divinity. In the Islamic tradition, especially in Indonesia, the *nadzam* is commonly used in learning tawhid and matters related to faith, including the concept of divinity (Muhammad et al., 2024). Although the

nadzam is in Arabic, all three interviewees teach it to their children completely, including its meaning, so that, in addition to habituation, the recitation of the *nadzam* is also accompanied by learning its meaning.

Dina and Amel, who are teachers in the same institution, emphasize a more dogmatic approach by emphasizing a number of mandatory memorizations that must be known by children in the form of songs or things about the formulas of belief in Islam, including divinity. Although they tend to be dogmatic, Dina and Amel also take an approach in the form of involving children in some religious activities, such as reciting the Koran and habituation of reciting prayers together with the aim that children easily accept religious concepts, including divinity in Islam because children are quite familiar with their religious activities.

Dina also approached the children through wisdom stories. Through the story, he explains praiseworthy attitudes toward children, such as honesty and doing good, which Allah will notice and watch. In addition to making children interested and enthusiastic, such stories are also intended to teach exemplary actions and make children realize that Allah will always watch over them in every action.

Table 2.
Details of each interviewee's teaching experience.

Approach	Method	Variety	Details
Linguistic Approach	Memorization	Pillars of Faith	Memorize the points of faith required in Islam, including faith in God as the first pillar of faith.
		Songs	Introducing God through songs about divinity and beliefs
	Thematic Narratives	Myself (limbs)	Introducing God as the one who created the limbs
		Universe	Introducing God as the one who created space objects and the entire universe
		Wisdom stories	Telling stories that contain God's power and examples of righteous people
		The Meaning of the Surahs of the Qur'an	A simple explanation of the oneness of God from Qur'anic verses
Habituation Approach	Religious Practice	Sunnah prayer	Cultivating a sense of God's supervision through solemn prayers.
		Recitation of <i>al-Asma al-husna</i>	Making children familiar with terms related to God through the recitation of <i>al-Asma al-husna</i>
		Reciting the Qur'an	Familiarizing children with religious activities by reciting the Qur'an so that children become familiar with the ritual of worshipping God.
		Praying (dua)	Fostering children's feelings of servitude to God by reading prayers and habituation to prayer

The study's findings generally indicate that teachers grasp the abstract nature of the concept of divinity but recognize the potential for introducing it to early childhood through an approach that is contextual, gradual, and aligned with children's daily lives. Rather than conveying the concept of divinity directly or theoretically, teachers use narrative approaches, sensory experiences, and habituation of religious terms and practices. When teaching about God, teachers use natural phenomena with which children are familiar and create associations through spiritual experiences, such as daily prayers and worship.

The findings of this study highlight that the process of teaching the concept of divinity to children does not occur in an abstract cognitive learning process but through concrete experiences that are full of meaning. The use of natural phenomena as an entry point to introduce God is in line with the theory of attachment, where children build their world perception not only through their

closest social agents but also through their experiences of natural phenomena around them (Christian, 2020).

The narration of natural phenomena to introduce God also reflects a pattern in line with the story of Prophet Ibrahim in Surah Al-An'am, verses 76-79. In the verse, Ibrahim built his conception of divinity by searching for extraordinary things in the universe. He associated the sun, moon, and stars with God. However, it could not satisfy and answer his curiosity until finally, he understood that God is an entity that is not visible to the senses, which tends to be abstract and formless (Al-Alusi, 2014; Zuhaili, 2009). Although there are differences of opinion among scholars about whether Abraham's experience was prophetic or universal (Dogan 2023), the teachers' strategies in this study show that the process of searching for and making meaning about God can also be facilitated from an early age through reflective and empirical teaching processes.

The reflective and empirical teaching processes in introducing the divinity concept to children can be explained logically and scientifically through the readiness theory of Barrett and Richert (2003). Although, at a certain age, children are not yet able to understand God abstractly, their innate potential to develop a theological understanding of God already exists and can be cultivated through approaches appropriate to their stage of development.

Such a discourse can also be supported by the scientific conclusions of Bloom (2007) that religion has a natural potential in terms of cultural dynamics or biological innateness that children have. Barrett and Richert (2003) explain that children are meaning-making actors who naturally look for the reasons behind everything they see and feel. In this case, the association of simple natural phenomena provided by the teacher bridges the instinct of searching for meaning in children, which leads to the theological understanding of the concept of divinity.

Another dominant approach in the findings of this study is the habituation of religious practices through worship, prayer, and recitation of the Quran. This finding is in line with the results of other studies, where children's religious involvement is considered to influence their conception of divinity (Lee et al., 2023; Saide & Richert, 2020). This religious involvement is also recommended to create a religious environment that then naturally instills religious beliefs in children (Kusainun & Berngacha, 2023).

In addition to the religious practices habituation, religious linguistic familiarization is also practiced by the teachers in this study through the recitation of Qur'anic verses, *al-asma' a-husna*, *nadzam aqidatul away*, and memorization of religious songs and pillars of faith. This linguistic approach is in line with the theory of the development of religious thought developed by Murphy (1978) and Goldman (2022), which explains that the development of children's linguistic aspects also supports the development of their divinity conception. While children may not fully grasp theological or religious language, introducing them to this vocabulary, particularly that related to God, establishes a fundamental foundation for comprehension. These early experiences provide children with linguistic instruments and conceptual anchors that can later support more profound theological understanding as their cognitive and spiritual growth progresses.

From all the explanations related to teachers' approaches and narratives to provide divinity education to children, the approach and narrative models used tend to be eclectic, and none of the interviewees lean towards learning in only one way. This is entirely relevant given that the interlocutors are young children who are still at the age of play, and it is not easy to concentrate for a long time on the same method, so it requires a variety of methods in turn, even tending to change. Scientific studies report that school students can only concentrate for 10 to 15 minutes on average (Chaisricharoen et al., 2019), especially those who are still children. Therefore, this study suggests that the idea of divinity should be introduced to young children in Islamic education through an approach that combines different methods, adapts to the needs of the students, and is based on their concrete experiences. However, to improve this understanding, more research is needed to see how well these different approaches work. Future studies need to find out how these approaches can help children develop a stronger and more meaningful understanding of divinity.

CONCLUSION

The education and development of children's conceptions of divinity involves many aspects and approaches. This study shows that teachers play an important role in strengthening and developing children's conceptions of divinity, which have been naturally or religiously embedded in the family sphere. Teachers help children gradually and contextually understand abstract concepts of divinity through linguistic approaches such as body narratives, songs, analogies to natural phenomena, the meaning of sacred texts, and memorization, as well as through the habituation of religious activities such as worship, recitation of the Quran, and prayer. The nuances of religious culture in the school environment act as a support system that strengthens the internalization of the concept of divinity. This demonstrates that divine education for preschoolers is more effective through linguistic reflective approaches and habituation in a religious environment than through cognitive approaches alone. Further research is needed to more deeply examine the developmental patterns of the concept of divinity in Muslim children and the most effective approaches in the context of early childhood education.

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