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Social Cognitive Learning in Early Childhood Islamic Prayer Education

Irfa Rizka Amelia S[1], Nelly Marhayati[2] and Buyung Surahman[3]

[123] Postgraduate Programme in Early Childhood Islamic Education, Universitas Islam Negeri Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, Bengkulu, Indonesia
Corresponding Author. e-mail: sutrismanameijaya@gmail.com

Abstract

Early childhood Islamic education requires teaching that connects observation, recall, supported practice, and motivation. This study describes the application of a social cognitive approach to daily supplications and prayer recitation at RA Plus Jâ-alHaq, Bengkulu. A qualitative descriptive design combined classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation during March–April 2026. Group B2 was the principal observation group, while Group B1 supplied supporting information. Analysis used data reduction, display, and verification, supported by source and technique triangulation. The findings identify teacher modelling, repeated recitation, practical demonstration, and positive reinforcement as interconnected instructional practices. In B2, 18 of 21 children were rated at or above expected development for daily supplication, while reported attainment varied across the supporting group and prayer tasks. These distributions describe classroom attainment rather than pre–post gains. The study contributes a contextual account of how attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation are enacted in everyday religious learning. The findings suggest that task-specific observation, patient assistance, and consistent adult examples are central to developmentally responsive religious teaching.

Keywords: Modelling; Prayer; Kindergarten; Motivation; Habituation

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching Islamic religious practices in early childhood involves more than asking children to repeat words. A child must notice a model, retain a sequence, attempt to reproduce it, and remain willing to practise when performance is incomplete. Prayer learning adds bodily and situational demands to verbal recall: children encounter movements, recitation, shared routines, and expectations about conduct. These relationships make the classroom process important. Successful group participation can coexist with uneven individual understanding or dependence on adult prompts.

A social cognitive perspective offers a useful framework for examining this process. Bandura's account of learning through observation directs attention to how learners encounter models and translate observed actions into their own behaviour. Attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation are relevant processes, while agency involves more than passive exposure to an example (Bandura, 1989). In early childhood religious education, the teacher can provide a visible and audible model, organise opportunities for rehearsal, and create conditions in which children feel able to try.

This perspective also helps distinguish teaching intentions from learning evidence. A clear demonstration may support attention, but attention does not guarantee recall. A child may remember a phrase but struggle to produce it independently or coordinate it with movement. Reproduction can be incomplete even when motivation remains high. Treating these processes separately gives teachers a more precise account of where assistance is needed than a general judgement that a child is either able or unable to participate.

The relationship between motivation and social cognitive theory is discussed by Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020). Their perspective is relevant to the role of encouragement and perceived capability in learning. For a young child, a supportive response to an incomplete attempt may help preserve willingness to practise. Conversely, visible participation should not automatically be interpreted as internal motivation or strong self-efficacy. These constructs require evidence beyond a child's presence in a group. The present study therefore examines the practices through which teachers support participation without claiming to measure motivational mechanisms directly.

Indonesian scholarship has considered social cognitive approaches in Islamic education, including Marhayati et al. (2020), and their application in teaching and learning more broadly (Hijriyah et al., 2024). Work on learning through observation in other educational contexts also provides a relevant comparison (Rayes & Albelaihi, 2023). These sources offer conceptual and instructional reference points, but their settings differ from a kindergarten religious programme. A contextual account is needed to show how the framework becomes visible in age-appropriate routines and how children's performance is interpreted.

RA Plus Jâ-alHaq, Bengkulu, provides such a setting. Its religious programme includes daily supplications, simple prayer practice, greetings, and recurring opportunities to observe adult conduct. The study focuses especially on the supplication used when looking in a mirror and the final tashahhud recitation within prayer learning. These tasks offer different instructional demands. A short supplication can be rehearsed within a familiar context, whereas prayer recitation may require a longer verbal sequence combined with posture and the organisation of worship.

The study also includes descriptive developmental ratings. These can help show the distribution of attainment within a classroom, but they require careful interpretation. A distribution recorded during teaching is not the same as evidence of improvement from an earlier baseline. Differences between two groups are not evidence that one group improved over time. Maintaining these distinctions is essential when qualitative classroom accounts are supplemented by numbers, particularly where no statistical comparison or standardised outcome measure was used.

Recent Indonesian studies identify habituation, adult example, and the school environment as important contexts for religious and moral learning. A review of Islamic values in early childhood emphasises links between family and teacher practice (Ardiansari & Dimyati, 2021), while an empirical account identifies the teacher's overlapping roles as model, guide, motivator, and organiser (Siyami & Zaharuddin, 2023). Research at another kindergarten describes consistent adult examples within character development (Oktavia et al., 2024), and classroom action research examines modelling through repeated religious and moral activities (Hernawati et al., 2025). These studies provide relevant comparators without establishing what occurs in the present RA setting.

The distinction between participation and independent learning is also visible beyond religious education. Play orientation and assessment are interrelated in kindergarten practice (Pyle et al., 2022), and guided play research identifies outcome-specific rather than universal benefits (Skene et al., 2022). Social and emotional programme research likewise connects the content taught with the interactional conditions in which children encounter it (Blewitt, Morris, et al., 2020). These findings support an account of how demonstrations, prompts, repetition,

and encouragement are combined, rather than a conclusion based only on whether children appear engaged.

The present study therefore addresses an implementation gap between theoretical descriptions of observational learning and the specific practices through which young children encounter prayer. It examines an integrated verbal and bodily task alongside a short daily supplication, making it possible to identify both shared teaching processes and differences in reported attainment. The developmental summaries support contextual description; they are not interpreted as an intervention test or a sequence of before-and-after measurements.

The research therefore asks how a social cognitive approach was enacted in daily supplication and prayer learning, what patterns of participation and attainment were reported, and which conditions supported or constrained implementation. Its contribution is a process-based account of teacher modelling, repeated practice, and reinforcement within an early childhood Islamic setting. Rather than evaluating an isolated intervention, the article examines the coherence between instructional activity and the evidence available about children's responses.

METHODS

Research Design and Context

A qualitative descriptive design examined the application of social cognitive learning within the religious programme at RA Plus Jâ-alHaq, Bengkulu. Observation and developmental assessment reported in the findings took place during March–April 2026, within the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The principal teaching contexts were daily supplication and simple prayer practice, especially the mirror supplication and final tashahhud recitation. The approach was investigated within ordinary classroom routines rather than through random allocation or a controlled intervention.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected purposively because of their direct involvement in the religious learning programme. The principal and classroom teachers provided information about planning, implementation, and school routines. Group B2 was the main focus of intensive observation, while Group B1 supplied supporting information about teaching and attainment. The clearly labelled developmental summaries use 21 children as the denominator in each group. These are separate classroom groups, not pretest and posttest measurements. The assessment denominator does not establish the total number of individual interviewees.

Instruments and Materials

Observation addressed teacher modelling, attention, recall, imitation, motivation, and participation in religious routines. Semi-structured interviews explored planning, demonstration, reinforcement, and classroom constraints. Documents included teaching materials, schedules, habituation programmes, developmental assessment sheets, and activity photographs. The developmental categories were BB, not yet developing; MB, beginning to develop; BSH, developing as expected; and BSB, developing very well. These ordinal categories supported description rather than a numerical ability scale. Table 1 sets out the indicators used to organise the examination of social cognitive processes.

Table 1. Indicators used to examine social cognitive learning

Process	Classroom indicators	Evidence sources
Attention	Orientation towards the teacher; following demonstrations	Observation and teacher explanation
Retention	Recall of supplication or prayer sequence; response to repetition	Observation, interviews and developmental records
Reproduction	Attempts to recite or perform; level of assistance required	Observation and assessment documentation
Motivation	Willingness to attempt; responses to praise and encouragement	Observation and teacher interviews

Note. These are qualitative organising indicators, not a validated psychometric scale.

Procedure and Data Collection

During religious activities, teachers demonstrated recitations and movements, children observed and attempted to imitate them, and teachers provided repetition and encouragement. The researcher observed these interactions, interviewed the principal and teachers, and reviewed developmental records. Teacher interviews were conducted on 17 March 2026, while the attainment descriptions cover March–April. Observations centred on B2, with B1 used to enrich the contextual account. No unreported number of sessions or standardised instructional dosage is assigned to the programme.

Data Analysis

Data reduction, display, and conclusion verification followed an interactive qualitative approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Evidence was organised around attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation, then connected with classroom practices and reported attainment. Source and technique triangulation compared institutional accounts, teacher explanations, observed participation, and documents. Duplicate B2 supplication summaries were consolidated. Percentages were recalculated from stated frequencies using n = 21. A reproduction table with conflicting individual and summary counts was excluded from numerical comparisons; the remaining distributions are treated as reported classroom summaries, not audited longitudinal data.

Ethical Considerations

Children's names have been removed from assessment summaries, and individual identities are not linked with developmental categories. Adult evidence is identified by educational role. No formal ethics approval identifier or detailed consent protocol was available in the documentation, so the report does not assert an unrecorded approval or procedure.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Figure 1 organises the observed teaching practices around attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. The arrows indicate a practical teaching sequence and feedback, not a tested causal pathway.

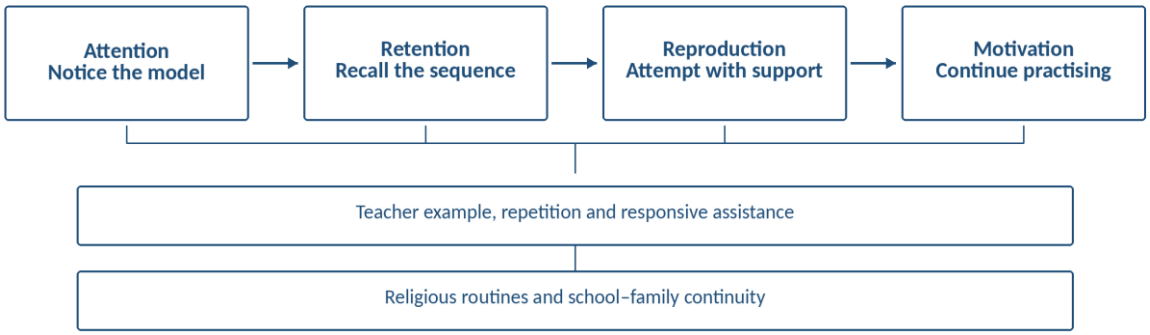

Figure 1. Social cognitive processes within the religious learning sequence

Planned Modelling in Religious Learning

Teacher modelling was incorporated into daily planning. Teachers described selecting themes, identifying religious values, and placing demonstrations and practical participation within teaching modules or flexible daily plans. This indicates that modelling was more than a spontaneous response to children's errors. It was part of the way religious learning was organised, with the adult expected to provide an example that children could observe and attempt.

The B2 teacher explained: "I plan Islamic education by referring to the curriculum, then put it into the Islamic education teaching module. Planning considers themes, developmental indicators, and the religious values to be introduced" (interview, 17 March 2026; translated from Indonesian). The statement locates modelling within planning.

For final tashahhud learning, the teacher recited slowly and clearly and demonstrated the sitting position. Children were invited to attend and imitate according to their current ability. The practice was revisited during classroom religious activities and collective prayer routines. The account therefore combines auditory and bodily modelling. It does not establish that children had mastered every component of prayer; the specific task remained embedded within a broader programme of introductory religious practice.

For the mirror supplication, teachers first provided a clear verbal example and then invited collective repetition. They also explained its everyday context. This connection between wording and use was important because recitation alone could remain detached from the situation in which the supplication was intended to occur. The learning activity offered a model of both what to say and when it was relevant, although independent use beyond school was not systematically measured.

Modelling also appeared in ordinary interaction. Teachers described greeting children, speaking gently, demonstrating patience, and participating in supplication. These practices made the adult's conduct part of the learning environment. They also extended the focus from verbal accuracy to relational and religious habits. The principal's account emphasised integrating religious learning within school life rather than treating it exclusively as content delivered during a separate lesson.

Attention as Access to the Model

Teachers used clear speech, expressive demonstration, songs, clapping, and enjoyable activities to attract children's attention. These strategies were especially relevant because

children's concentration varied. The teacher needed to make the model available and sufficiently salient before expecting accurate imitation. Attention was consequently treated as an instructional responsibility as well as a child response.

The reported B2 attention summary placed 18 of 21 children in BSB and three in BSH, with none in BB or MB. These figures correspond to 85.7% and 14.3%, respectively. The distribution suggests that attention during the recorded activity was generally rated favourably. It does not establish how long attention was sustained across the school day or whether the same ratings would have been obtained by an independent observer.

A key distinction emerges when this distribution is compared with daily supplication attainment. Although every child was rated at least BSH for attention, three remained at MB for the supplication task. This shows why visible attention should not be used as a substitute for evidence of recall or independent performance. The child may be available for learning while still needing further practice or assistance to reproduce the material.

Retention Through Repeated and Situated Practice

Repeated exposure was the main approach described for supporting retention. Children heard the same verbal model in recurring religious routines and practised it with the group. Teachers reported that some children gradually needed fewer reminders. The supplication and prayer sequence were therefore not introduced once and left for later recall. They were revisited within activities whose familiarity could help children anticipate what came next.

The B1 teacher described increasing familiarity: "Usually the children immediately imitate what they see, such as joining the prayer, and eventually they can do it without being reminded" (interview, 17 March 2026; translated from Indonesian). This is a teacher account of growing independence, not a separate longitudinal measure.

The setting of the activity also mattered. The mirror supplication was related to its everyday use, while prayer recitation was practised within a sequence involving posture and shared participation. These connections supplied contextual cues alongside verbal repetition. The study does not isolate their relative contribution, but it shows that retention was supported through repeated experiences rather than an exclusively verbal explanation of religious concepts.

Reproduction and Supported Performance

Reproduction became visible when children attempted to recite supplications or practise prayer movements after observing the teacher. Some children performed relatively independently, while others required prompts or repeated examples. Teachers described guiding participation gradually rather than expecting all children to demonstrate complete mastery at once. This is consistent with the developmental purpose of the programme, which introduced religious practices through supported experience.

The prayer task appeared more demanding than the short supplication in parts of the supporting data. It required attention to verbal order and, in practical activity, coordination with the sequence of prayer. However, the evidence does not justify a universal claim that every child found prayer more difficult. Differences across group-level distributions suggest that task performance also depended on the classroom context and the assistance available.

Motivation and Reinforcement

Teachers used verbal praise, positive facial expressions, and emotional encouragement when children attempted the recitations or demonstrated desired conduct. The purpose described was to maintain willingness to practise and repeat positive behaviour. Appreciation was offered as part of ordinary interaction rather than a separately evaluated reward programme. Teachers also described encouraging children who were not yet fluent.

Children's readiness to participate was linked in teacher accounts with the warmth of the learning environment and the familiarity of routines. Repeated successful attempts could

give children opportunities to perform with less assistance. Nevertheless, the study did not administer a motivation or self-efficacy measure. Terms such as confidence and enthusiasm therefore describe observed or reported participation, not independently established psychological change.

The practical significance is that performance errors did not end the learning process. Children could receive another model, repeat a shorter portion, or practise again within a later routine. Teacher support helped organise these opportunities. The evidence supports reinforcement as a visible instructional practice, while its separate causal contribution to attainment remains untested.

Patterns of Reported Attainment

Table 2 brings together the clearly labelled attainment summaries for daily supplication and prayer recitation. Each group-level distribution has a stated denominator of 21. Percentages are calculated from those counts, rounded to one decimal place. The two groups represent different classroom descriptions; they are not presented as successive measurements of the same children.

Table 2. Reported developmental ratings by group and task

Group and task	BB n (%)	MB n (%)	BSH n (%)	BSB n (%)
B2 daily supplication	0 (0.0)	3 (14.3)	5 (23.8)	13 (61.9)
B1 daily supplication	0 (0.0)	8 (38.1)	8 (38.1)	5 (23.8)
B1 prayer recitation	0 (0.0)	10 (47.6)	6 (28.6)	5 (23.8)
B2 prayer recitation	0 (0.0)	2 (9.5)	7 (33.3)	12 (57.1)

Note. n = 21 per group. BB = not yet developing; MB = beginning to develop; BSH = developing as expected; BSB = developing very well. Percentages are recalculated. These are separate groups, not pre–post observations.

Table 3 summarises the facilitating conditions, constraints, and instructional responses identified across the accounts.

Table 3. Conditions surrounding religious learning

Dimension	Facilitating condition or constraint	Instructional response
Adult example	Consistent modelling supports access to an example	Demonstrate recitation and conduct during routines
Task demands	Longer sequences and coordination require assistance	Repeat, demonstrate slowly and guide attempts
Motivation	Children vary in confidence and fluency	Use praise and patient encouragement
Routine	Religious activities recur through the school day	Connect formal teaching with everyday participation
Family continuity	Home practice and parent involvement vary	Communicate individual memorisation needs

Note. The table summarises the qualitative evidence without assigning causal weights.

For B2 daily supplication, 13 children were rated BSB, five BSH, and three MB. Eighteen of 21 children, or 85.7%, were consequently at or above BSH. The B1 supporting summary recorded five BSB, eight BSH, and eight MB, placing 13 children, or 61.9%, at or above BSH. These distributions show variation in reported attainment without establishing why the groups differed.

The prayer-recitation summaries show further variation. B1 recorded five children at BSB, six at BSH, and ten at MB, so 11 of 21 children, or 52.4%, were at or above BSH. B2 recorded 12 at BSB, seven at BSH, and two at MB, so 19 of 21, or 90.5%, were at or above BSH.

These are task-specific classroom summaries and should not be merged into a single religious ability score.

Religious Habits and Environmental Support

Teachers reported increasing familiarity with greetings, supplication before and after activities, polite speech, and simple worship routines. Some children were described as needing fewer reminders over time. These accounts suggest that the school environment provided recurring opportunities to encounter and enact religious behaviour. They extend the findings beyond a single recitation task, but remain qualitative accounts rather than systematically tracked longitudinal outcomes.

The principal and teachers identified a religious school culture, consistent adult examples, and communication with parents as supporting conditions. School routines made the desired practices available repeatedly, while family communication was intended to support continuity beyond school. Differences in home habits, parent participation, and children's backgrounds were described as potential constraints. The study did not measure these influences separately or assign them quantitative weights.

Children's varying attention and current ability also affected implementation. Teachers had to adapt demonstrations and repetition rather than presume an identical learning trajectory. Limited school time and inconsistency in adult modelling were additional concerns in the interview material. These findings show that the approach depended on the surrounding environment and the quality of interaction, not merely on presenting a correct verbal model.

The reported task distributions differ across groups. Because rating conditions and assistance were not fully standardised, the figures are not interpreted as an ordered comparison of task difficulty. Conflicting reproduction counts were excluded, as explained in Methods.

Individual Checking Within a Collective Religious Routine

The school programme supplied repeated occasions for religious practice, including greetings, morning remembrance, dhuha prayer, shared recitation, short surahs, supplications, and hadith. These routines formed the background to the more specific tasks examined in the study. The principal described religious education as integrated into daily school activity rather than confined to a single lesson. That organisation made models available repeatedly, while also creating a need to distinguish collective participation from each child's current ability.

The interview material describes an individual memorisation check during every third week. When a child had not yet memorised the material, teachers communicated with the parents. This account gives a more concrete form to the link between school assessment and family support. It does not establish that every family provided identical practice or that all children reached the same category after a set period. It shows how teachers sought information about individual performance within a programme otherwise rich in collective routines.

Teachers' use of praise also belonged to this relationship. Appreciation was directed towards children who were willing to attempt or present a recitation, while those who were not fluent continued to receive encouragement. The reported practice combined an expectation of progress with repeated opportunities. The analytical significance is that modelling supplied an example and assessment supplied information about how much assistance was still required. The two functions were connected but not interchangeable.

The resulting instructional implication is to keep collective familiarisation and individual checking complementary. Joint recitation can provide repeated exposure and social support, while a brief individual attempt can reveal whether a child is relying on nearby voices or adult prompts. This implication follows from the reported routines and variation in attainment. It is not presented as an additional experiment or a new assessment protocol validated by the study.

Discussion

Religious Modelling as a Contextual Form of Guided Learning

The four-process account gives concrete form to the use of social cognitive theory in Islamic education (Marhayati et al., 2020). It also relates to a broader discussion of social learning in teaching (Warini et al., 2023). The added contribution is not another statement that children imitate adults, but an account of how teachers make a model available, organise recall, support a partial attempt, and encourage renewed participation. These are distinguishable instructional functions even when they occur within the same brief classroom routine.

Indonesian evidence provides useful points of convergence. Character development through teacher example has been examined in another kindergarten (Oktavia et al., 2024), while the teacher's instructional, motivational, and guidance roles are described within religious and moral education (Siyami & Zaharuddin, 2023). Classroom action research also connects consistent modelling with religious and moral activity (Hernawati et al., 2025). The present case differs by examining supplication and prayer through attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation and by reporting task-labelled attainment distributions. These comparisons support a contextual interpretation rather than a claim that all modelling programmes have equivalent outcomes.

Religious habits also depend on the wider ecology of example and practice. A review identifies family, teacher, and environmental influences (Susetya & Zulkarnaen, 2022); work on Islamic values emphasises habituation and adult models (Ardiansari & Dimyati, 2021). Discussion of character education distinguishes knowing values from acting on them (Susanti, 2022), and the nine-pillar literature provides a comparable framework of intended conduct (Rachmah et al., 2022). The relevance here is that fluent recitation remains only one part of religious learning. Greeting others, participating respectfully, and applying a supplication in a familiar situation involve additional forms of understanding and conduct.

Relationships Motivation and Task Complexity

Motivation should be interpreted through the interaction between learner, activity, and environment (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Observational-learning research in language teaching (Rayes & Albelaihi, 2023) and theoretical work on Arabic learning (Hijriyah et al., 2024) provide comparison at the process level, while a study applying social cognitive theory to digital games concerns a substantially older population (Chen & Tu, 2021). These differences prevent direct transfer of outcome claims. They nevertheless help articulate why attention, perceived support, and willingness to attempt a task should be considered alongside the accuracy of performance.

Early childhood evidence makes the teaching environment more explicit. Professional support can change aspects of interaction quality (Buøen et al., 2021), and a brief intervention examines educator responsivity (Brunsek et al., 2024). Guided-play research identifies benefits for some outcomes rather than all (Skene et al., 2022), while kindergarten assessment practices vary with play orientation (Pyle et al., 2022). The present findings add that religious learning similarly needs an alignment between task demands and assistance. A longer recitation embedded in posture and sequence cannot be assumed to have the same difficulty as a short supplication, and neither can difficulty be inferred from group labels alone.

Connecting Religious and Social Learning Without Collapsing Their Aims

The relational component of religious education can be compared with social and emotional programme design (Blewitt, Morris, et al., 2020) and evidence concerning teacher outcomes (Blewitt, O'Connor, et al., 2020). Trials of social-skills learning (Larose et al., 2020) and the I Can Succeed programme (Kats Gold et al., 2021) test specific outcomes, whereas the present study describes classroom processes. Research integrating Panca Cinta into RA routines (Seprya, 2026) and nine-pillar materials into kindergarten practice (Putri & Prahesti, 2025) supplies

closer examples of values being embedded within activity. The common implication is intentionality: the desired conduct needs to be linked with what children observe and practise.

At the same time, religious learning should not be treated as interchangeable with a generic social-skills intervention. Its content, meanings, and intended practices are specific. A broad meta-analysis of ECEC quality finds small and variable associations across developmental domains (von Suchodoletz et al., 2023), reinforcing the need to specify outcomes. In this study, the strongest claims concern the organisation of modelling and the reported classroom attainment picture. The findings cannot establish stable religious dispositions or the approach's causal superiority over other forms of teaching.

Limitations and Future Research

The study is limited to one institution and a short fieldwork period. It relies on participant accounts, observations, and school assessment records without independent psychometric validation. The full participant roster, observation frequency, and detailed consent procedures were not reported. Researcher interpretation and favourable institutional perspectives may also have influenced the account. These limitations do not remove the value of the process description but restrict generalisation and causal conclusions.

Future studies could document individual assistance, task definitions, observation schedules, and rating decisions more explicitly. Following the same children across repeated assessments would permit a clearer account of development without confusing differences between groups with change over time. Additional observation outside led recitation would also help distinguish memorised performance from spontaneous religious habits. Such work would strengthen the evidence while retaining the present focus on ordinary, developmentally responsive classroom practice.

CONCLUSION

Social cognitive processes were visible in the religious learning programme at RA Plus Jâ-alHaq through clear teacher models, repeated recitation, practical demonstration, and positive reinforcement. Children's attention, recall, and independent performance did not develop uniformly, making responsive assistance an essential part of the approach. The reported attainment distributions provide descriptive context, while teacher accounts indicate growing familiarity with everyday religious routines.

These findings support using the four-process framework to organise observation and teaching decisions. They do not establish causal improvement or uniform mastery. Assessment records should distinguish tasks, groups, and assistance levels, and the inconsistent reproduction data require checking before further numerical claims are made. Longer and more explicit documentation would strengthen understanding of how supported practice becomes independent participation.

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