



Integration of Multiple Intelligences and Islamic Values in Early Childhood Education: A Review of The Integrative Literature and a Monotheism-Oriented Pedagogical Framework

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ABSTRACT

Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory is widely used in early childhood education because it offers a perspective that values children's diverse potentials. Its educational use, however, often shifts into labeling children according to a single intelligence or equating MI with learning styles, while the theory's psychometric basis and intervention effectiveness remain contested. Islamic education, meanwhile, positions tauhid, fitrah, adab, worship, and stewardship as orientations for whole-child development. This article synthesizes the convergences, tensions, and possibilities for integrating MI and Islamic values and develops a more defensible pedagogical framework for early childhood education. An integrative literature review was conducted through problem identification, structured searching, source evaluation, comparative-thematic analysis, and conceptual synthesis. The synthesis indicates that MI is most productively employed as a heuristic for diversifying learning pathways language, reasoning, visual representation, movement, rhythm, interaction, reflection, and nature exploration rather than as a fixed classification of children's abilities. Islamic values provide an axiological orientation that directs those pathways toward adab, initial faith formation, self-regulation, empathy, responsibility, and environmental care. The framework contributes to a holistic, inclusive, and empirically cautious curriculum and pedagogy for Islamic early childhood education.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is an arena for the formation of the foundation of development that cannot be reduced to academic readiness. Meaningful interactions, games, language, social relations, aesthetic experiences, morality, and spirituality work intertwinedly in shaping children's development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); Vygotsky, 1978; OECD, 2021). UNESCO (2021, 2022) It also places inclusive, relational, and co-survival-oriented education as an important agenda for future education. Consequently, early childhood education designs need to respect the diversity of ways children engage, express understanding, build relationships, and give meaning to experiences.

Theory *Multiple Intelligences* (MI) introduced by Gardner (1983, 1993, 1999, 2006) offers a critique of the narrowing of intelligence to linguistic and logical-mathematical abilities. In educational practice, the theory encourages teachers to provide diverse learning experiences through language, patterns and reasoning, visuals, movement, music, social interactions, self-reflection, and natural exploration (Armstrong, 2018); Campbell et al., 2004). This perspective gained wide acceptance because it was in harmony with the principles of active, playful, and multimodal early childhood learning (Berger & Pollman, 1996); Rettig, 2005; Delgoshaei & Delavari, 2012). In Indonesia, MI is also used to organize stimulation activities, learning centers, scientific approaches, and experiences that accommodate children's potential (Hasanah, 2016); Masdudi, 2017; Handayani, 2022; Minasadiyah et al., 2023).

Although pedagogically interesting, MI theory should not be used without critical reading. A number of studies have questioned the independence of each intelligence and found a strong correlation with general ability factors (Visser et al., 2006; Waterhouse, 2006). A systematic review of MI-based interventions also showed problems with methodological quality, sample size, controls, instruments, and reporting bias, so that academic effectiveness claims could not be assessed conclusively (Ferrero et al., 2021). On the other hand, Shearer and Karanian (2017) shows the existence of neurological patterns that can be read as the coherence of certain cognitive functions. The debate demands a proportionate position: MI can be defended as a pedagogical language to enrich access to learning, but it is not worthy of being used as a diagnostic tool, a child's identity label, or the basis for the claim that each child learns only through one particular modality.

This interpretation is in line with the warnings of Gardner and his colleagues that MI is not a single formula for education policy. Its practical value lies in the design of rich learning experiences, not in the mechanical matching between 'child type' and 'teaching style' (Kornhaber, 2004); Barrington, 2004; Gouws, 2007; Abenti, 2020). Therefore, this article uses the term pluralistic pedagogical pathway to refer to a variety of learning entrances that can be used flexibly, depending on the child's goals, materials, context, and responses.

In Islamic education, the development of potential is not value-neutral. Education links individual development, social-moral life, and the pursuit of knowledge with responsibility to Allah and others (Halstead, 2004); Nata, 2020). Tawheed provides unity of orientation, fitrah emphasizes the basic potential of

children, manners direct the use of knowledge and abilities, while the concept of caliph places humans as subjects responsible for life and nature. Critical studies of the concept of Islamic education also show that Islamic education needs to be read as a framework for the formation of human beings as a whole, not just the transmission of religious material (Murniasih et al., 2024).

Early childhood education literature shows that religion and spirituality are present through relationships, habits, stories, rituals, experiences of affection, search for meaning, and connection with oneself, others, nature, and God (Adams et al., 2016; Mata-McMahon et al., 2020, 2025). In the context of Islamic education, value formation takes place through example, habituation, dialogue, play, storytelling, media, and home-school relationships (Ananda, 2017); Nudin, 2020; Rahiem et al., 2020; Munastiwi et al., 2021; Rahiem & Marhamah, 2025). The recent study also emphasizes moral-relational pedagogy, child-friendly education, and practices that preserve children's dignity and participation (Al-Khateeb & 'Aziz, 2026).

Studies on MI and Islamic education have developed, but are still fragmented. Some studies show the application of MI in Islamic Religious Education or Islamic kindergartens (Nurhadi, 2018); Supriatna et al., 2021; Pulungan et al., 2023), while other studies focus on religious and moral values, media, stories, examples, and habituation (Pharisees, 2020); Rasmini & Karta, 2022; Harti, 2023; Cholimah et al., 2024; Ramona & Cholimah, 2025; Yusrafiddin et al., 2026). Existing integrations tend to be normative: each intelligence is paired with a single Islamic value, but rarely addresses the epistemic limitations of MI, labeling risks, the internalization mechanisms of value, the ecology of education, and the consequences of its assessment.

Based on these gaps, this article answers three questions: (1) how the literature positions the contributions and limitations of MI in early childhood education; (2) how Islamic values can provide an axiological orientation for the diversification of learning paths; and (3) what conceptual framework can integrate the two without reducing children to fixed categories of intelligence. The novelty of the article lies in the transformation of MI from a child's taxonomy into a learning design heuristic and in the placement of monotheism as a value orientation that directs, rather than merely an additional attribute to, the multiple learning experience.

METHODS

This article uses an integrative literature review because the purpose of the study is not to quantify homogeneous intervention effects, but rather to combine theoretical, empirical, methodological, and contextual sources to produce reconceptualizations and new models. Integrative review allows the integration of various research designs and knowledge traditions during the process of search, evaluation, analysis, and synthesis to be transparently described (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005; Torraco, 2016; Snyder, 2019).

The search was carried out until May 2026 through a combination of keyword searches on Google Scholar, ERIC, DOAJ, SINTA/Garuda, as well as

journal and publisher pages to check the metadata of sources indexed by Scopus or Web of Science. Keywords in Indonesian and English included multiple intelligences, multiple pathways, early childhood education, Islamic early childhood education, Islamic values, tauhid, fitrah, adab, religious and moral values, child spirituality, holistic education, and integrative review. The search was also expanded through backward and forward reference checking on key articles.

The inclusion criteria consist of: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles, basic academic books, or reports of international institutions; (2) discussing MI, criticism of intelligence theory, early childhood education, Islamic education, children's spirituality or moral values, or integrative review methodologies; (3) verifiable bibliographic metadata is available; and (4) has direct relevance to the development of a conceptual framework. Sources are excluded if they are popular without a scientific basis, duplicate other publications, use MI as a synonym for learning styles without clarification, or do not provide adequate bibliographic information.

Resource evaluation is carried out based on relevance, clarity of purpose, methodological strength, position in the debate, and conceptual contribution. The analysis uses a matrix that records the focus, main concepts, outcomes or arguments, limitations, and implications for early childhood Islamic education. The synthesis process consists of reduction, comparison between perspectives, grouping of themes, identification of convergences and tensions, and development of model propositions. The final corpus consists of 57 sources: 45 journal articles, 9 academic books, and 3 international policy reports.

Table 1. Integrative Literature Review Protocol

Stages	Procedure	Exodus
Identify the problem	Formulate three review questions and concept boundaries	Focus: contributions, criticism, Islamic values, and integrative models
Search	Bilingual keywords; index and publisher page search; citation search	Cross-disciplinary and cross-index corpus
Selection	Relevance, peer review, metadata, and conceptual contributions	57 selected sources
Evaluation	Theoretical/methodological strengths, limitations, and positions of debate	Quality record and weight of interpretation
Analysis	Thematic-comparative coding and concept mapping	Four themes of synthesis and integration matrix

Stages	Procedure	Exodus
Synthesis	Reconceptualization of MI and development of model propositions	Pedagogical Model of Pluralistic Path Oriented to Tawheed

STUDY RESULTS

Map of Literary Development

The literature studied forms four clusters. First, the cluster of MI theory and application, starting from Gardner's initial formulation to its application in curriculum and learning (Gardner, 1983), 1993, 1999, 2006; Armstrong, 2018; Campbell et al., 2004). Second, a cluster of empirical and epistemological criticism that examines the structure of intelligence, neurological claims, and the quality of interventions (Visser et al., 2006; Waterhouse, 2006; Shearer & Karanian, 2017; Ferrero et al., 2021). Third, the spiritual, moral, and whole-child education cluster that emphasizes the meaning, relationship, character, and development of children as a whole (Adams et al., 2016; Brifkani, 2021; Mata-McMahon et al., 2020, 2025). Fourth, the early childhood Islamic education cluster which discusses religious-moral values, pedagogical practices, family involvement, media, and educational institutions (Nudin, 2020); Munastiwi et al., 2021; Rahiem & Marhamah, 2025; Ramona & Cholimah, 2025; Nadlifah & Maemonah, 2026).

The mapping shows a space for integration, but also a difference in the level of analysis. MI discusses the diversity of capacity and the way of representation, while Islamic education discusses the purpose, values, manners, and direction of capacity use. The two cannot be combined simply by matching eight intelligences with eight values. Integration requires articulation of educational objectives, pedagogical mechanisms, relational contexts, and ways of assessing child development.

Table 2. Synthesis of Representative Literature and Gaps

Source	Focus	Contributions	Gaps for this article
Gardner (1983, 1999)	Plurality of intelligence	Expanding the definition of intelligence	It does not provide an Islamic education model or intervention evaluation guidelines
Waterhouse (2006); Visser et al. (2006)	Psychometric criticism	Indicates domain independence issues	Need a pedagogical position that does not depend on diagnosis claims
Shearer & Karanian (2017)	MI Neuroscience	Identifying the coherence of cognitive function	Not proving the effectiveness of specific learning strategies

Source	Focus	Contributions	Gaps for this article
Ferrero et al. (2021)	Review of MI interventions	Showing the methodological weaknesses of the study	Drive more cautious and measurable claims
Adams et al. (2016); Matthews et al. (2020, 2025)	Children's spirituality	Meaning, connection, virtue, and action	Not yet specific on the orientation of monotheism
Halstead (2004); Brifkani (2021)	Holistic Islamic education	Individual, social-moral, and knowledge development	Need to operationalize the practice of PAUD
Supriatna et al. (2021); Pulungan et al. (2023)	MI in Islamic education	Demonstrate the potential for practical integration	Tend not to comment on epistemic criticism and labeling risks
Ramona & Cholimah (2025); Yusrafiddin et al. (2026)	Media and multisensory moral values	Concrete experience and repetition support moral behavior	It needs to be placed in a whole value, ecology, and assessment model

Contribution and Epistemic Limits of Multiple Intelligences

MI's main contribution to early childhood education lies in its critique of standardization and in its drive to provide multiple ways to enter a concept. Stories and conversations can open linguistic pathways; groupings, patterns, and causation open pathways to reasoning; images and symbols open visual pathways; movement play and worship practices open kinesthetic pathways; song and rhythm open musical pathways; group work opens interpersonal pathways; simple reflection opens intrapersonal pathways; and environmental exploration opens naturalistic pathways. The use of diverse pathways can increase access, participation, expression, and inclusion, especially when children are given the opportunity to demonstrate understanding through more than one form (Berger & Pollman, 1996); Rettig, 2005; Barrington, 2004; Abenti, 2020).

However, these domains should not be understood as separate boxes. Storytelling activities, for example, can simultaneously involve language, visuals, emotions, social perspectives, and moral reflection. Gardening activities can involve naturalistic observation, measurement, movement, cooperation, and gratitude. Therefore, the term compound pathway is more appropriate than learning for one intelligence. He emphasizes the orchestration of different ways of participating according to the needs of learning goals, not matching one child with one modality (Kornhaber, 2004); Gouws, 2007).

Critical reading also requires the separation of MI from learning styles. The child may have relative interests or strengths, but that doesn't mean he or she can only learn visually, musically, or kinesthetically. Educators need to avoid an

inventory that locks in a child's identity and replace it with dynamic observation of responses, strategies, interests, progress, and context. Waterhouse's Critique (2006), Visser et al. (2006), dan Ferrero et al. (2021) reinforces this need. With this position, the article does not claim the eight intelligences as the final psychometric structure, but rather uses their categories as a reflection tool for learning design.

This reconceptualization is also relevant to the practice of early childhood education in Indonesia. Local research shows the use of scientific activities, games, art, centers, and hands-on experiences to stimulate children's potential (Hasanah, 2016); Masdudi, 2017; Handayani, 2022; Minasadiyah et al., 2023). For such practices to be scientifically robust, evaluations need to focus on the quality of engagement, variation in representation, transfer of understanding, and development of values, not on improving 'intelligence' scores whose validity is unclear.

Islamic Values as an Axiological Orientation

In Islamic education, monotheism is not just a material for the knowledge of God, but a principle that unites goals, relationships, knowledge, and actions. Tawheed directs the development of abilities so that it does not stop at individual achievements, but leads to manners, worship, benefits, and responsibility. Halstead (2004) distinguishes the dimensions of individual development, social-moral education, and the acquisition of knowledge; all three can be read as interrelated areas in the formation of man. Nata (2020) and Murniasih et al. (2024) emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive and non-fragmented orientation of Islamic education.

The concept of fitrah provides the basis that children bring potential, tendencies, and readiness to develop that need to be maintained mercifully and gradually. Fitrah is not synonymous with a completed score of intelligence or talent; it demands an environment that provides good experiences, safe relationships, and opportunities for growth. The concept of adab further provides ethical direction for language, reason, creativity, movement, social relations, self-reflection, and interaction with nature. Thus, Islamic values are not decorative layers attached to MI activities, but criteria for choosing goals, content, ways of interacting, and forms of evaluation.

Islamic PAUD literature shows that the internalization of values takes place in an embodied and relational manner. Children learn greetings, prayers, honesty, empathy, responsibility, and care through example, routine, stories, conversations, games, media, and participation in the community (Ananda, 2017); Pharisees, 2020; Nudin, 2020; Rahiem et al., 2020; Munastiwi et al., 2021; Rasmini & Karta, 2022; Harti, 2023). Parents also view religious education as a combination of faith, manners, worship practices, and pedagogy that is gentle and developmental (Rahiem & Marhamah, 2025).

Cutting-edge studies expand this orientation. Moral education in faith-based institutions requires interactive and reflective strategies, not rituals that are detached from meaning (Cholimah et al., 2024). Media can support the internalization of values when combined with stories, games, routines, and cultural contexts (Ramona & Cholimah, 2025). Multisensory practices help

children associate polite language with observed actions, although long-term behavioral changes still require further evaluation (Yusrafiddin et al., 2026). Child-friendly pedagogy also requires a balance between moral guidance, participation, protection, and the dignity of the child (Al-Khateeb & 'Aziz, 2026).

Pedagogical Pathway Matrix, Values, and Experiential Indicators

Based on the synthesis, the eight MI domains are reformulated into pedagogical pathways that can intersect. The mapping in Table 3 is not intended to label children, but rather to help teachers vary experiences and relate them to observable grades and developmental indicators.

Table 3. Pluralistic Pedagogical Path Oriented to Islamic Values

Pathway	Value orientation	Examples of early childhood experiences	Authentic indicators
Language & stories	Shidq, manners of speaking, affection	Prophetic stories, moral dialogue, prayer, role-playing	Conveying experiences, choosing polite words, understanding messages
Reason & pattern	Tafakkur, trust, justice	Grouping creations, ablution sequences, patterns, simple cause-and-effect	Explain reasons, sequence steps, solve problems
Visuals & symbols	Beauty, order, tadabbur	Picture of a story, mosque symbol, good deed map, artwork	Using symbols, communicating meaning, paying attention to detail
Movement & practice	Cleanliness, discipline, worship	Practice ablution/prayer, cooperative games, sharing simulation	Coordination of actions, following sequences, maintaining safety
Rhythm & sound	Gratitude, dhikr, positive expression	Educational songs, prayer rhythms, nature sound games	Remembering through rhythm, expressing emotions appropriately
Social collaboration	Ukhuwah, empathy, ta'awun	Group projects, tool sharing, conflict resolution	Wait for your turn, help, listen, negotiate
Self-reflection	Patience, Patience, and Patience	Picture journal, conversation feelings, good action choices	Recognize feelings, cite reasons, correct actions
Nature exploration	Caliph, rahmah, ecological responsibility	Gardening, observing animals, sorting garbage, treating water	Caring for living beings, observing change, acting responsibly

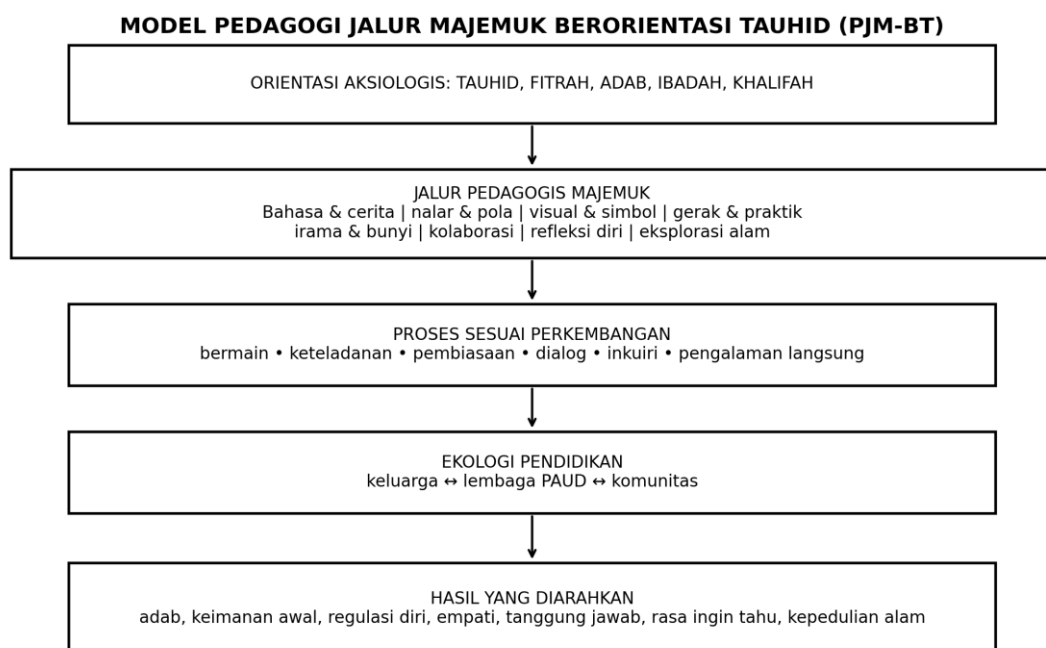
Pedagogical Model of the Plural Path Oriented to Tawheed

The Pedagogical Model of the Plural Path Oriented to Tawheed (PJM-BT) is built on five layers. The first layer is the axiological orientation: monotheism, fitrah, adab, worship, and caliph. The second layer is the pluralistic pedagogical path that functions as a design choice, not a child category. The third layer is a developmental process in the form of play, example, habituation, dialogue, inquiry, and direct experience. The fourth layer is an educational ecology that connects families, early childhood education institutions, and communities. The fifth layer is directed outcomes: early faith, manners, self-regulation, empathy, responsibility, curiosity, and concern for nature.

PJM-BT has three safety principles. First, no labeling: teachers do not deduce the child's fixed identity based on a single activity or instrument. Second, purposeful variation: a variety of paths are chosen based on objectives and materials, not just making learning crowded. Third, authentic evidence: development is assessed through observation, conversations, portfolios, documentation of works, and examples of actions in various contexts. This principle makes the model more compatible with empirical criticism of MI and with the need for Islamic education that emphasizes the process of sustainable value formation.

Ecologically, the model recognizes that the experience at school is not enough if it does not have continuity with the home and the community. Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains the development as a result of interaction between systems, while Nudin (2020) shows the importance of parent-school cooperation in character building. Therefore, PJM-BT requires communication of value goals, habit agreements, developmental documentation, and space for parents to provide information about their child's experiences at home.

Figure 1. Pedagogy Model of Plural Path Oriented to Tawheed (PJM-BT)



Prinsip pengaman: tidak melabel anak, tidak menyamakan MI dengan learning styles, dan menggunakan asesmen autentik.

Source: Authors' synthesis based on Gardner (1983, 1999), Halstead (2004), Bronfenbrenner (1979), Whittemore and Knafl (2005), as well as the Islamic early childhood literature studied.

DISCUSSION

The main theoretical contribution of this article is to transform the meeting point of MI and Islamic education. Integration is not laid on the claim that the eight intelligences constitute a completely separate psychological structure, but on the idea that learning needs to provide a variety of pathways of representation, participation, action, and reflection. This transformation maintains the pedagogical power of MI while responding to scientific criticism of its measurement and effectiveness (Waterhouse, 2006; Visser et al., 2006; Ferrero et al., 2021). This position also prevents Islamic education from using popular theory apologetically without critical evaluation.

The second contribution is the distinction of function between path and orientation. The path answers how the child can experience and express learning; monotheism and Islamic values answer for what purpose abilities are developed and how skills are used civilly. Thus, linguistic activity is not automatically Islamic because it contains religious vocabulary; it acquires an Islamic orientation when it builds honesty, compassion, responsibility, and a relationship with Allah. Naturalistic activity is not just about knowing plants; it is directed at gratitude and the responsibility of caring for creation. This distinction prevents superficial symbolism and strengthens curriculum coherence.

The third contribution is the placement of relationships and ecology as internalization mechanisms. Children do not internalize values only through explanation, but through repeated experiences in safe and meaningful relationships. The study of children's spirituality shows the importance of connection, virtue, and meaning-making (Adams et al., 2016; Mata-McMahon et al., 2020, 2025). The study of Islamic PAUD shows the role of examples, stories, media, family, and social habits (Rahiem M. D. H. & Rahim, 2020; Munastiwi et al., 2021; Ramona & Cholimah, 2025). The PJM-BT model brings these elements together as a pedagogical system, rather than a separate list of methods.

At the curriculum level, teachers can start with grades and developmental achievements, then choose experiences that open up more than one path. Hygiene themes, for example, can incorporate stories about manners, the sequencing of ablution steps, movement practices, visual posters, class-keeping group work, and reflections on responsibility. Planning doesn't have to force all paths to appear in a single meeting; variety is built throughout the learning unit. This principle is more realistic than creating eight separate activities for eight intelligences.

At the assessment level, a single MI profile score should not be used to determine a child's identity or future. Teachers are more appropriate to collect evidence of development through anecdotal notes, work samples, photos of the process with consent, recordings of conversations, portfolios, and dialogues with parents. Modifications of holistic early childhood education instruments need to consider their validity, context, and formative function (Apriyansyah et al., 2023). The evidence can be used to tailor support, expand opportunities, and see the consistency of values in different contexts.

At the teacher education level, a critical understanding of MI needs to be combined with knowledge of child development, multimodal design, Islamic pedagogy, authentic observation, and ethical reflection. Teachers must be able to distinguish potential diversity from labeling, differentiation from learning styles, habituation from mechanical control, and moral guidance from domination. Nadlifah and Maemonah Study (2026) about reward and punishment and Al-Khateeb and 'Aziz (2026) about moral-relational pedagogy shows the importance of dialogue, mercy, participation, and the dignity of children in the practice of Islamic education.

PJM-BT also opens up the research agenda. The model needs to be tested through design-based research on diverse Islamic PAUD institutions, with detailed documentation of goals, activities, teacher-child interactions, family involvement, and behavior change within an adequate period of time. Subsequent research needs to use valid developmental instruments, relevant comparators, and transparent reporting so as not to repeat the weaknesses of MI intervention studies. Cross-cultural studies are also important because the meaning of values, spiritual expression, music, visuals, and social practices are influenced by cultural contexts.

This article has limitations. As an integrative review, the corpus combines sources with diverse designs and qualities; the resulting synthesis is conceptual and has not proven the effectiveness of the model. Access to literature is also influenced by the availability of metadata and publications in Indonesian or English. In addition, the terms tauhid, fitrah, adab, and holistic people have various interpretations in the Islamic educational tradition. Therefore, PJM-BT needs to be seen as an open framework that must be tested, criticized, and adjusted empirically.

CONCLUSION

The integration of Multiple Intelligences and Islamic values in early childhood education requires a theoretical repositioning. MI should not be used to determine the type of intelligence of children or assume that children can only learn through one modality. Its pedagogical value lies in the ability to help teachers provide diverse and intersecting learning paths. Tawheed, fitrah, adab, worship, and the responsibilities of the caliphate further provide an axiologic orientation so that the diversity of abilities develops towards the formation of humans who are faithful, civilized, empathetic, responsible, and caring for nature. The Tawheed-Oriented Plural Path Pedagogy Model (PJM-BT) integrates value orientation, variety of learning paths, practices according to development, family-school-community ecology, and authentic assessments without labeling. The contribution of this model is to bridge the pedagogical appeal of MI with its empirical criticism and operationalize holistic Islamic education in the design of early childhood education. Multisite empirical research and design-based research are needed to test the feasibility, implementation process, and long-term impact of the model.

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