

## **THE ISLAMIC VISUAL ART EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN**

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.37134/jpak.vol8.1.2019>

*Received: 09 October 2019; Accepted: 10 November 2019; Published: 23 December 2019*

### **ABSTRACT**

*The art education is seen as important in children's early childhood education and it is extensively acknowledged. This study emphasizes the value of Islamic visual art among preschool children and explores the methods of teaching art in preschools as well as on the approaches used to support the children's learning, particularly on the development of social skills. The method was intended to consider the implications of Islamic visual art education in a qualitative view. Classroom structured observations were conducted mainly on the Islamic visual art painting and drawing activities among children participating in Islamic visual art activities to gauge the social skills development in the children according to their age level by referring four main attributes in social skills; communication, group, support and conflict resolution. The identified emerging findings include the importance of Islamic visual art education in order to develop social skills for children and in considering the positive relationship between children and teachers to support children's development in their early childhood settings. Hence, Islamic visual art activities could be considered an essential tool of the pedagogy in addressing problems regarding children's development and learning in early childhood, where the revision of art curriculum is required across the subject and holistic development of children.*

**Keywords:** *Islamic visual art activities, art education, early childhood education, social development*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Islamic art is typically adopted from some traditions, culture and knowledge for the surroundings of the Muslims during particular times and places. It is inspired by Arabic, Mesopotamian, African and Persian elements that made it as unique art. From the Islamic perspective, Muslims are prohibited from drawing any human figures or animals where the Quran teaches the followers about only one God should be worshipped in order to avoid the misbelief these images might be as idolatry or deity. As stated by Graves, Quotah and Simmons (2019), there are three elements that symbolise the Islamic arts which are Arabic calligraphy, geometrical patterns, and Arabesque (the floral designs) are all commonly used to portray the Islamic art as a message the Islamic culture, a manifestation of Islamic spirituality and civilisation.

Hasibuan (2017) reported that children might symbolize their world by using shapes, objects and marks in order to exemplify specific occasions or things through verbal and non-verbal signs such as actions, graphics, language, or expressions as the children's drawing and painting skills are developed. From this, they have chances to portray their emotions. However, as a part of Islamic art education, these components are not only a means of expression, but it also acts as a significant aspect of childhood development. Zoghi, Mohd Nor, and Abdul Hamid (2018) stated that the arts are used to perceive the feelings that are regularly tough to express,

nevertheless by using arts and through images, symbols, children may have a channel to deal with their emotions carefully. Hence, it gives an opportunity for children to interact with others in a non-verbal manner and release their emotions through communication.

Hence, the objective of this research is to explore the significance and relevance of Islamic visual art education for preschool children setting specifically for social skills development. As art is often viewed as an extra and not as a right within education; therefore, this research offers an opportunity to consider if a curriculum-based education neglects the teaching of art and its' important to young children, particularly when it involves a different element of art which is Islamic visual art. Thus, the research aims to answer fundamental and interrelated questions, which is subdivided into more specific questions to guide the data collection process and analysis. Therefore, it explored to answer the exploration of Islamic visual art education for preschool children's development in the early childhood education setting. Nevertheless, the research was aware with some limitation that occurred during the process such as the limited resources and literature, where not many studies focus on the specific element of Islamic visual art for preschool children.

### **Islamic Visual Art Education as A Tool to Support Social Skills for Preschool Children**

Social development refers to the child's capability in appealing in a complex interaction effectively in order to achieve a peer acceptance by building, retaining and maintaining friendships, where it is considered as an important element of pertaining children's skills and development (Theodotou, 2017). Theodotou (2017) also stated rejection from peers is the result of young children who are lacking in social skills that considered at risk in experiencing various potential problems throughout the childhood, and also adolescence where it is essential to have a peer group supports in the context of socialization of children' involvement. The early childhood time is the most important period for children to develop their social skills development (Yazici, 2017) due to this is the period where children start to develop their social interactions with people surrounding such as parents, family members and peers (Fox & Schirmacher, 2014). Moreover, according to Garvis (2012), the preschool environment provides children with tasks that require them in peer activities through the socializing elements of sharing, taking turns, teamwork, and consideration for other people's emotions.

A developmental psychologist, Howard Gardner believed early childhood is the critical age of creativity, in where this age is a period when a child has the potential to be an artist – in their own ways. Children require arts to support them in learning basics lessons of life (Yazici, Yaman & Pinarcik, 2016). For example, through Islamic art activities, children discover the arts of delivering the ideas through communication, how to cooperate with others, manage problems, and cope with disappointment, and after all, they gain happiness through the help of adults and peers (Nutbrown and Jones 2006). In addition, from a social interaction perspective, when children play and involve interaction, it is the beginning of all the imaginative play, as well as a starting point at the social level of communication. As Vygotsky believed the social interactions would give benefits not only for social development but for the holistic development of children. This is supported by Ozyurek, Begde and Yavuz (2014), who emphasized the relationship between children's communication and arts education activities, which summarized it helps for creative thinking skills and develops the social interaction.

Although the research was only considered on 3- and 4-years old children, it indicated the significant link between children's learning and communication. The Islamic visual art

activities such as the Islamic geometrical pattern that involved repetition helps children not only for the learning, but it covers the vocabulary development. Hence, literacy activity in classroom settings should not only comprise a verbal language; nonetheless, visual images as a tool of text (Atasavun & Duger, 2012). Burke (2009) indicated four attributes of social skills development to assess authentic learning in children, namely communication, support, grouping, and conflict resolution. Therefore, this research adopted these four attributes to see the significance of Islamic arts in developing the social skills of children in a preschool setting.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study explores to answer the research question regarding the benefits of Islamic visual arts education of preschool children on their social skills development. A structured observation was used to extend potential emerging themes and the exploration of problems by preparing instruments in order to validate or confirm the result made during the qualitative stage. This strategy demotes qualitative analysis to the extent of exploration of a problem and potential emerging themes.

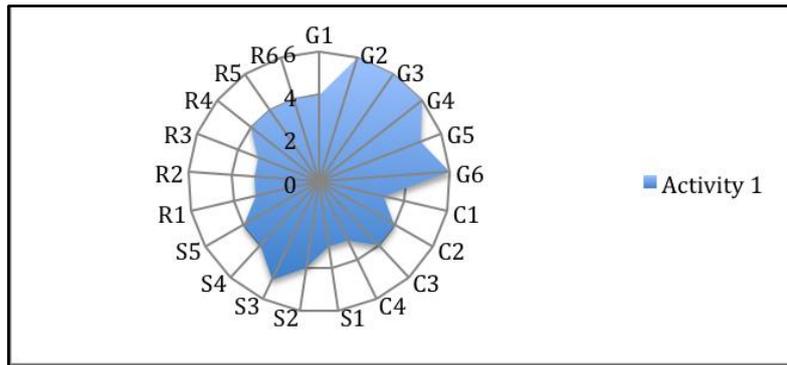
The study was performed in preschools located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Twelve children aged between five to six years were chosen for the observation sessions which employed two different Islamic visual art activities which were arabesque painting and geometrical drawing with each activity comprising six children being observed as the art activities were conducted by the teachers.

The school representative was informed of the study and because it involved children, parental consent letters were sent out to the parents of children in the five- and six-years-old classes. Though, not all parents give their consent. The children selected for the study were only those who had returned the reply slip. Thus, the total number of children per session was reduced to 15 from 21 for the arabesque painting class and to 17 from 23 for the geometrical drawing class. However, 4 parents who returned the reply slips did not confirm on their consent. Thus their children were also unable to participate in the study.

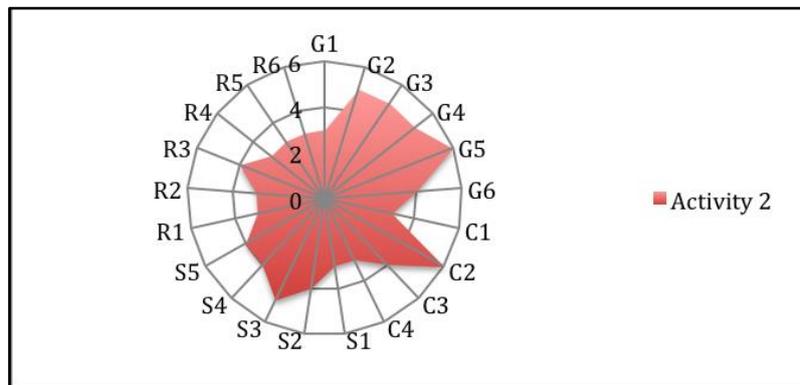
The children were selected randomly, and two sessions of observation were scheduled. Classes with children of age five to six years old were chosen due to this is the age when more elements of social skills can be more easily observed based on the milestones (Burke, 2009). Initially, the children have had an explanation of the objectives of this study since children have the right to understand their part in the study. Six children were chosen randomly with the consent of the teachers and parents. All of them were given coloured stickers and those who received stickers of specific colour were observed, and this approach was applied to both observation sessions.

## **FINDINGS**

To study how the Islamic visual art education benefits the children development during preschool, four attributes of the social skills were observed in order to indicate the development: communication (C), support (S), grouping (G) and conflict resolution (R). To analyses the Islamic visual art activities would affect the social skills of children, Diagram 1 and 2 illustrate the patterns of each attribute of arabesque painting and geometrical drawing activities.



*Diagram 1.* Pattern for social skills' attributes of arabesque painting activity.



*Diagram 2.* Pattern for social skills' attributes of geometrical drawing activity.

The elements for each attribute as follow;

#### Formation of Groups

- G1 - Forms groups quietly.
- G2 - Sits eyeball to eyeball.
- G3 - Makes eye contact.
- G4 - Uses first names.
- G5 - Shares materials.
- G6 - Follows role assignments.

#### Communication

- C1 - Uses low voices.
- C2 - Takes turns.
- C3 - Makes sure everyone speaks.
- C4 - Waits until speaker is finished before speaking.

#### Support

- S1 - Checks for understanding.
- S2 - Offers help.
- S3 - Asks the group for help.
- S4 - Encourages others.
- S5 - Energizes the group.
- S6 - Disagrees with the idea-not the person.

### Conflict Resolution

R1 - Disagrees with the idea-not the person.

R2 - Respects the opinion of others.

R3 - Thinks for self.

R4 - Explores different points of view.

R5 - Negotiates and/or compromises.

R6 - Reaches consensus.

A noticeable comparison between Diagrams 1 and 2, for all elements of attributes in the social skills development for children shown a high frequency was detected for both Islamic visual art activities. However, both diagrams do not indicate which differences are significant. A radar chart was plotted based on the frequency of elements of each attribute that appeared during the observation of the Islamic art activities and showed the elements of social skills displayed by the children. Therefore, this can be used to determine the similarities in arabesque painting and geometrical activities to confirm the benefits of Islamic visual arts in improving the social skills of children's development.

Hence, from both radar charts in Diagrams 1 and 2, the conclusion is Arabesque painting and geometrical drawing do not indicate any variance in enhancing social skills for children. Radar charts showed similarities for all attributes. The grouping is the highest attribute because it has the largest plotted value in the observation and the high number of the children appeared to show the elements of the social skills attribute during art activities in a classroom. The conflict resolution is the lowest attribute where arabesque painting and geometrical dancing were rated respectively. Even though there is the interaction that occurred during the activities, it did not justify the requirement for all elements of the attributes. Meanwhile, for the attributes of communication and support, the least difference points plotted to suggest the difference in the nature of the activities. During the geometrical drawing activity, not much communication was observed among the children but in the arabesque painting activity, more conversation was noted. Thus, by using Islamic visual art-based activities, it contributes a significant outcome for preschool children's development

## **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION**

It is helpful to consider that the data to support such results from the Islamic art activities is drawn during the middle of the year during the school session. Preschool children were expected to be performing in Islamic art sessions. However, there was a lacking sign of developments in all the social skills suggesting that the development of social skills through Islamic art education is not verified/guaranteed. Hence, the accomplishment of these results is decidedly dependent on the effectiveness of teaching and learning sessions during Islamic art activities.

The results revealed that the social skills of children's development would be benefited from Islamic visual art activities. It further confirms that the findings from the observations do not only give the advantage of children's creativity, but it is much wider that also include the whole development of children. The data shows that wider and more frequent attributes of social skills appeared during art activities for social development. The findings noticeably demonstrated the positive level of broad-ranging effects for both arabesque painting and geometrical drawing during the observation session. It presented that a broad array of all

attributes of social skills were showed including communication, support, grouping and conflict resolution. For instance, the arabesque painting activity has been integrated into all subjects in the classroom setting. Children were needed to share painting tools and space such as colour, water, and brushes, where it led them to have a peer interaction by using all tools. Arabesque painting gave pleasure, enjoyment and creativity that emerged during the socialization.

The literature reviews were noticeably germane with the elements of attributes for social skills development that emphasizing the link between children's Islamic art activities such as painting and drawing with social skills. As several researchers, such as Theodotou (2017), and Yazici et al. (2016) concluded that Islamic art activities could give some improvement for children, particularly in their social development. This research showed that children were engaged with discussions that involved meaningful social interactions when they required to finish up their Islamic art activities such as painting and drawing. During arabesque painting activities, children cultivate to express their emotions through colour that they love and have opportunities to share and explain the colour preference and view with peers. They use verbal and non-verbal communications, build up cooperation, and asking for help while sharing the ideas during the Islamic art activities. With the exception of various levels of social skills, children develop abilities to differ on others' views, negotiate and respect the points to reach an agreement.

The children's arabesque painting and geometrical drawing activities offered as a framework to scaffold them in developing social skills. Children could ever give and follow the instructions so that they actively participate in the teaching and learning of Islamic visual arts education, easing the painting experience. For example, when drawing geographical patterns, their conversation was on their experience of visiting the mosque with Islamic art. The children communicate with their peers drawing and that drawing and interacting with others often occur simultaneously. This satisfaction in arabesque painting shows that children share ideas about painting looks a similar approach they share views in a game. This concurs with Ozyurek et al. (2014) who proposed that painting helps develop creative skills and speaking ability in children. They also suggested that communication that involved listening to others while painting may give an innate understanding of children's way of thinking.

### **Policy Implication**

This is a significant signal that affects the current national curriculum for early childhood education. School principals found that the national curriculum is lacking because Islamic visual arts are sometimes used as a filler activity, thus reducing it as a compulsory subject rather than integrating within the subjects. Islamic art is used as an instrument in the learning and teaching process that is greatly respected for its role in drawing and painting activities. Besides, the national curriculum should revise the art modules accordingly to the development and age appropriateness. As a result, this syllabus is based on adult's expectations rather than children's interests, which can develop their confidence and experience in Islamic arts, and this is found lacking in the current framework. Therefore, the national curricula should pay attention to Islamic visual arts because it is central to and holistically, shows a significant advantage in children's development. It is a strategy for children to closely engage in exploratory learning where children's learning process can be discovered is matter and not the results.

## CONCLUSION

Islamic visual art education could provide a disparity in the development of children and their involvement where acknowledgment of social skills opportunities is observed. The social interactions with other children, particularly on a continuation of the Islamic visual art activities for each child, can enhance social skills, which is a part of child development. Many kinds of literature agreed that visual art could improve the social skills of children. For instance, when they are involved in Islamic art activities, their interactions and communication demonstrated some improvement signifying that arts can support children's social skills and development. Finally, the research emphasizes the significance of Islamic visual art education in children since the preschool period from both the children's and teacher's perspectives. It is worthy of initiating the Islamic visual art education in children during their early childhood education and those closely involved in the area of early childhood education and setting could contribute the changes now for the sake of our next generation.

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