

Teachers as Facilitators of Independence: Implementing Montessori Education through Islamic Values in Early Childhood Education

Andry Setiawan^{1*}, Euis Komala², Ani Fatimah Zahra Saifi³

^{1,3} UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia

² STIT At Taqwa Ciparay Bandung, Indonesia

Surat-e: aankincai85@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of teachers in developing children's independence through Montessori education integrated with Islamic values at Brainy Bunch Indonesia. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through classroom observations, interviews, and documentation and analyzed thematically to identify patterns of teacher facilitation and children's developing independence. The findings show that teachers facilitate independence through five interconnected stages: preparing the learning environment, introducing activities, facilitating children's practice, gradually withdrawing assistance, and supporting the internalization of values. These processes were evident in practical life activities and daily Islamic routines, including children's management of learning materials, preparation and folding of prayer mats, ablution, prayer, turn-taking, and responsibility for classroom activities. The teacher's role therefore extends beyond facilitating functional independence to guiding children toward self-regulation, responsibility, and value-oriented action. The study further indicates that Montessori practices acquire a distinctive meaning when embedded within Islamic educational values, transforming independence from individual autonomy into responsible autonomy. This integration is supported by teacher modeling, a consistent learning environment, and parental involvement, while differences in teacher competence and home practices may constrain its implementation. The study contributes the concept of relational-spiritual independence as a contextualized understanding of children's independence in Islamic Montessori education.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran guru dalam mengembangkan kemandirian anak melalui pendidikan Montessori yang diintegrasikan dengan nilai-nilai Islam di Brainy Bunch Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis secara tematis untuk mengidentifikasi pola fasilitasi guru serta perkembangan kemandirian anak. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa guru memfasilitasi kemandirian melalui lima tahap yang saling terkait: mempersiapkan lingkungan belajar, memperkenalkan aktivitas, memfasilitasi latihan anak-anak, secara bertahap menarik bantuan, dan mendukung internalisasi nilai-nilai. Proses-proses ini terlihat jelas dalam aktivitas kehidupan praktis dan rutinitas Islam sehari-hari, termasuk pengelolaan bahan belajar oleh anak-anak, persiapan dan melipat sajadah, wudhu, shalat, bergiliran, serta tanggung jawab terhadap aktivitas di kelas. Oleh karena itu, peran guru melampaui sekadar memfasilitasi kemandirian fungsional, melainkan juga membimbing anak-anak menuju pengaturan diri, tanggung jawab, dan tindakan

KEYWORDS

Montessori education; teacher facilitation; children's independence; Islamic values; early childhood education; responsible autonomy.

KATA KUNCI

Pendidikan Montessori; peran pendampingan guru; kemandirian anak; nilai-nilai Islam; pendidikan anak usia dini; otonomi yang bertanggung jawab.

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yang berorientasi pada nilai. Penelitian ini lebih lanjut menunjukkan bahwa praktik Montessori memperoleh makna yang khas ketika diintegrasikan ke dalam nilai-nilai pendidikan Islam, sehingga mengubah kemandirian dari otonomi individu menjadi otonomi yang bertanggung jawab. Integrasi ini didukung oleh teladan guru, lingkungan belajar yang konsisten, dan keterlibatan orang tua, sementara perbedaan dalam kompetensi guru dan praktik di rumah dapat membatasi pelaksanaannya.

PENDAHULUAN

Independence is one of the important developmental capacities cultivated during early childhood because it is closely related to children's ability to regulate behavior, make decisions, complete tasks, and participate actively in their learning environment. In contemporary early childhood education, independence is increasingly understood not simply as the ability to perform tasks without adult assistance, but as part of children's broader self-regulation and social-emotional development. Research on preschool self-regulation shows that children's capacity to regulate their behavior and emotions is associated with their social-emotional competence and readiness for subsequent learning (Finders et al., 2021; Vasseleu et al., 2021). This perspective positions independence as a developmental process that requires appropriate environmental conditions and pedagogical support rather than as an individual characteristic that emerges automatically with age.

Within this discussion, Montessori education has attracted sustained attention because of its emphasis on children's active participation, prepared environments, practical life activities, freedom within limits, and gradual development of self-directed learning. Montessori pedagogy places children in situations where they can engage directly with materials and everyday activities while teachers organize the environment and provide assistance according to children's developmental needs. Such an approach creates opportunities for children to practice concentration, coordination, responsibility, and self-regulation through concrete experiences. The significance of self-regulation in early childhood education has also been reinforced by recent research showing that children's capacity to regulate themselves is an important component of early development and is connected to broader cognitive and social-emotional outcomes (Finders et al., 2021; Horm et al., 2024). Thus, Montessori's emphasis on purposeful activity and progressively reduced adult intervention provides a relevant pedagogical context for understanding how independence can be cultivated in early childhood.

However, the development of independence in Montessori education cannot be separated from the teacher's role. Although Montessori pedagogy is commonly associated with child-centered learning and reduced direct instruction, this does not mean that teachers become passive observers. Teachers prepare the physical and social environment, observe children's developmental needs, introduce materials and activities, demonstrate appropriate procedures, determine when assistance is necessary, and gradually withdraw support as children become more capable. The quality of children's opportunities for self-regulation is therefore partly dependent on educators' knowledge, beliefs, confidence, and pedagogical decisions. Recent research on early childhood educators indicates that teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and self-efficacy influence how they support children's self-regulation and how such support is translated into classroom practice (Vasseleu et al., 2021).

Research on infant and toddler classrooms likewise emphasizes the importance of responsive educational environments and teacher practices in supporting the development of self-regulation (Horm et al., 2024). These findings suggest that the teacher remains central to the development of independence even within pedagogies that place children at the center of learning.

The concept of independence, however, is not culturally neutral. In educational contexts shaped by Islamic values, the purpose of educating an independent child extends beyond the capacity to perform personal tasks without assistance. Independence is also connected with responsibility, discipline, ethical conduct, respect for others, and awareness of one's relationship with God. From this perspective, the ideal learner is not an autonomous individual detached from social and moral obligations, but a person capable of managing oneself while remaining oriented toward values and responsibilities. Contemporary discussions of spirituality in early childhood education similarly indicate that spiritual development can form part of children's holistic development and that pedagogical practices may influence how children experience moral, relational, and spiritual dimensions of learning. Recent scholarship has also highlighted the challenges teachers encounter when translating spirituality from an abstract educational ideal into everyday pedagogical practice (One teacher's journey towards a spiritual pedagogy, 2024; Is spirituality in ECEC a valued component or pushed aside?, 2024).

In Indonesia, the integration of Islamic values into early childhood education has been explored through curriculum development, learning practices, and the formation of children's moral and religious dispositions. Studies have shown that Islamic education can be embedded into curriculum and daily learning rather than treated solely as a separate instructional subject. Elyana and Das (2022), for example, demonstrate how Islamic education can be integrated into early childhood curriculum construction and everyday educational practices, with an emphasis on character formation and continuity of Islamic attitudes. More recent research on Islamic preschool education in Indonesia similarly shows that religious education can contribute not only to children's intellectual development but also to social development and the internalization of religious values (Nurhayati et al., 2024). These studies indicate that value-based early childhood education requires integration between curriculum, learning activities, teacher practices, and the everyday environment experienced by children.

Nevertheless, a conceptual and empirical gap remains at the intersection of Montessori pedagogy, teacher facilitation, and Islamic educational values. Montessori research has generally emphasized autonomy, self-directed learning, practical life, prepared environments, and child development, while Islamic early childhood education research has tended to emphasize religious habituation, moral formation, curriculum integration, and spiritual development. What remains insufficiently explained is how teachers negotiate these two orientations in everyday classroom practice: how they facilitate children's independence while simultaneously ensuring that independence is developed within a framework of responsibility, ethical conduct, social relations, and religious values. In other words, the question is not merely whether Montessori can develop independent children, but how teachers transform Montessori principles into pedagogical practices that are compatible with an Islamic conception of the child.

This issue becomes particularly important because the teacher's gradual withdrawal of assistance, a central feature of Montessori pedagogy, may be interpreted differently depending on the educational conception of independence being pursued. If independence is understood exclusively as individual autonomy, the teacher's withdrawal can be viewed primarily as a strategy for reducing dependency. Within an Islamic educational framework, however, reduced dependency should also lead to greater responsibility, self-discipline, care for others, and conscious engagement with religious practices. The pedagogical challenge therefore lies in maintaining children's agency without separating it from the values that provide direction for that agency. Such an approach requires teachers to operate simultaneously as facilitators of learning, observers of children's development, designers of learning environments, models of conduct, and guides who help children connect everyday actions with meaningful values.

This study addresses that gap by examining how teachers facilitate the development of children's independence through Montessori education integrated with Islamic values at Brainy Bunch Indonesia. Rather than treating teacher facilitation as a general description of Montessori practice, this study focuses on the concrete pedagogical processes through which teachers prepare children for independent action, introduce and demonstrate activities, provide assistance, gradually reduce intervention, and support the internalization of responsibility and values. Particular attention is given to practical life activities and daily religious routines because these activities provide observable contexts in which independence, self-regulation, responsibility, and Islamic values intersect. The study therefore asks: how do teachers facilitate children's independence within an Islamic Montessori learning environment, and how does their pedagogical role contribute to the development of an understanding of independence that extends beyond functional autonomy?

The study contributes to the literature in two ways. First, it provides an empirically grounded account of teacher facilitation in an Islamic Montessori context, thereby moving beyond the assumption that Montessori teachers merely observe children or provide materials. Second, it proposes a contextual understanding of children's independence as relational-spiritual independence, in which the capacity to act independently is connected with self-regulation, responsibility, social relationships, and orientation toward Islamic values. This perspective reframes independence not as freedom from guidance, but as the gradual development of responsible agency through a carefully prepared environment, teacher facilitation, habituation, and value formation.

Theoretical Framework

Montessori and the Development of Independence

Montessori education is founded upon a view of children as active participants in their own development. Children are not treated merely as recipients of knowledge but as individuals possessing an internal developmental potential that requires an appropriate environment (Montessori, 1964).

Independence is consequently cultivated through action. Children learn by doing, repeating, correcting, and completing meaningful activities. The purpose of practical activity is not simply to teach children how to

perform everyday tasks but to support concentration, coordination, order, movement, confidence, and self-regulation (Lillard, 2006).

The prepared environment is central to this process. An environment that is organized according to children's developmental needs allows children to access materials and perform activities with progressively less adult assistance (Montessori, 1966).

The teacher's responsibility is therefore partly transferred into the environment. Instead of repeatedly telling children what to do, teachers prepare conditions that enable children to discover and practice appropriate action.

The Teacher as Observer and Facilitator

The Montessori teacher functions as an observer because children's developmental needs cannot always be identified through predetermined assumptions. Observation enables teachers to understand children's interests, readiness, concentration, difficulties, and progress (Montessori, 1995). Observation also determines intervention.

If the teacher intervenes too quickly, the child loses the opportunity to solve a problem independently. If the teacher intervenes too late, the child may experience unnecessary frustration. Effective Montessori practice therefore requires what may be called graduated intervention: assistance is provided according to need and reduced as competence develops.

This means that teacher effectiveness cannot simply be measured by how much the teacher teaches. In Montessori education, effectiveness may instead be visible in the increasing capacity of children to act without unnecessary adult assistance.

Independence from an Islamic Perspective

Islamic education provides a broader moral framework for understanding human agency (Setiawan et al, 2026). Human beings possess capacities and are given responsibility for how those capacities are used. Therefore, independence cannot be separated from responsibility. Within early childhood education, this principle can be expressed through concrete practices. Children learn to care for themselves, care for materials, maintain cleanliness, respect other people's activities, follow routines, and complete responsibilities.

The practical activity therefore becomes a site of value formation. A child who independently cleans a workspace is developing a practical skill, but is also learning responsibility and cleanliness. A child who returns learning materials after using them is developing order and responsibility. A child who waits for another child and respects the other child's work is developing social discipline and adab.

Thus, Islamic values do not necessarily need to be separated from Montessori activities. They can be embedded within the meaning of those activities.

METODE PENELITIAN

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to examine how teachers facilitate children's independence through the implementation of Montessori pedagogy integrated with Islamic values in an early childhood education setting. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study focused on understanding pedagogical practices, teacher-child interactions, meanings attributed to independence, and the ways in which Montessori principles and Islamic values were enacted in everyday educational activities rather than measured through predetermined quantitative variables. The case study approach enabled an in-depth investigation of these processes within their natural institutional context, where pedagogical practices, religious routines, classroom organization, teacher competence, and school culture interact as an integrated system.

The case was bounded by the institutional setting of Brainy Bunch Indonesia and, more specifically, by the educational practices observed at its Tebet and Bintaro sites. The selection of these sites was purposive because Brainy Bunch explicitly implements Montessori-based early childhood education while integrating Islamic values into its curriculum and daily routines. This combination provided an information-rich context for examining teacher facilitation of independence within an Islamic Montessori framework. The study did not seek statistical generalization; rather, it aimed to develop an analytically grounded understanding of pedagogical processes that may provide conceptual and practical insights for similar Islamic early childhood education settings.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at Brainy Bunch Indonesia, an early childhood education institution that combines Montessori pedagogy with Islamic educational values. The study focused on two sites, namely the Tebet site in South Jakarta and the Bintaro site in South Tangerang. These settings were selected because they provide concrete contexts in which Montessori principles, practical life activities, classroom routines, and Islamic practices are implemented as part of children's everyday learning experiences. The institutional setting was therefore treated not merely as a physical location but as part of the pedagogical environment through which children's independence was cultivated.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling. The selection criterion was direct involvement in the implementation, supervision, or interpretation of educational practices related to Montessori pedagogy and children's independence. The primary participants consisted of school leaders and classroom teachers who were directly involved in daily pedagogical activities. Relevant staff and parents were also considered as supporting sources where their experiences were relevant to understanding the continuity of educational values and children's independent behavior across school and home contexts. Children were not interviewed because of their age and the ethical considerations associated with direct interviewing of young children; their experiences were accessed through naturalistic observation of their participation, behavior, interactions, and engagement in classroom and religious activities. The use of purposive sampling was intended to prioritize information-rich participants rather than statistical representation.

Because the present article specifically examines the teacher's role as a facilitator, greater analytical weight was placed on teacher participants and classroom-based evidence. School leaders provided contextual information concerning institutional expectations, Montessori implementation, and the integration of Islamic values, while parents served as complementary sources concerning the continuity of children's habituation beyond the classroom. Participants were informed about the purpose and scope of the research, and confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms or role-based identification in reporting empirical data.

Data Collection Period and Procedures

Data collection was conducted during the field research period at the selected Brainy Bunch Indonesia sites between June 2025 and February 2026. The relatively extended period of engagement allowed the researcher to observe pedagogical practices across recurring classroom routines rather than relying on a single classroom encounter. This was particularly important because the development of independence in Montessori education is cumulative and becomes visible through repeated activities, habituation, and changes in the degree of adult assistance provided to children.

Three complementary techniques were employed: non-participant classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observation constituted an important source of empirical evidence because the central concern of the study was how teachers actually facilitated children's independence in everyday practice. Observations focused on the organization of the prepared environment; teacher-child interactions; teacher demonstrations; children's selection and use of Montessori materials; practical life activities; transitions between activities; children's self-care and classroom responsibilities; the degree and timing of teacher assistance; and the gradual withdrawal of adult intervention. Particular attention was also given to situations in which Islamic values were embedded in everyday activities, including prayer routines, ablution, preparation and folding of prayer mats, greetings, turn-taking, responsibility, cleanliness, and respectful interaction with peers and teachers.

Observation notes were recorded systematically to distinguish descriptive information from the researcher's subsequent interpretation. Descriptive notes captured observable events, interactions, activities, and responses, while reflective notes recorded emerging analytical questions and interpretations that could later be compared with interview and documentary evidence. This procedure was intended to prevent the findings from being based solely on retrospective accounts provided by participants.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with relevant school leaders and teachers to obtain participants' explanations of the pedagogical rationale underlying their practices. The interview guide was organized around several domains: (1) teachers' understanding of children's independence; (2) the teacher's role in preparing the learning environment; (3) procedures for introducing and demonstrating Montessori activities; (4) forms of assistance provided to children; (5) decisions concerning when assistance should be reduced or withdrawn; (6) strategies for encouraging children to complete activities independently; (7) the integration of Islamic values into Montessori activities; (8) teacher modeling and habituation; and (9) factors

supporting or constraining the development of independence. Questions were open-ended to allow participants to describe concrete experiences rather than merely confirm predetermined categories.

Document analysis was used as a complementary source to examine the institutional and curricular context in which classroom practices occurred. Documents included relevant curriculum materials, daily routines, school programs, learning guidelines, and other institutional documents related to Montessori implementation and Islamic educational practices. Documentary evidence was used not as a substitute for field data but to clarify institutional expectations and compare formally stated practices with observed classroom implementation.

Research Instrument and Observation Framework

In qualitative research, the researcher functioned as the principal research instrument, supported by observation and interview guidelines. The instruments were developed according to the research focus on teacher facilitation and children's independence. The observation framework covered five interconnected dimensions: the preparation of the learning environment; the introduction and demonstration of activities; facilitation and scaffolding during children's practice; gradual withdrawal of assistance; and the emergence of independent and responsible behavior. Within these dimensions, the researcher examined observable indicators such as children's ability to initiate activities, use materials appropriately, make choices, complete practical life tasks, regulate behavior, wait for turns, care for the learning environment, and assume responsibility for activities.

The interview framework was designed to complement observation by investigating teachers' intentions and interpretations behind observable practices. For example, when a teacher reduced assistance during a practical life activity, the interview sought to clarify why the teacher considered intervention necessary at one point but unnecessary at another. Similarly, when Islamic routines such as prayer, ablution, or the preparation of prayer materials were integrated into the daily schedule, interview questions explored how teachers understood the relationship between religious habituation and children's independence. This combination of observation and interview data enabled the study to examine both what teachers did and how they understood the pedagogical meaning of those actions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted iteratively throughout the research process. Observation notes, interview materials, and documents were reviewed repeatedly to develop familiarity with the data and to identify recurring patterns relevant to the research question. Initial coding focused on meaningful segments concerning teacher facilitation, Montessori practices, children's independent behavior, Islamic values, teacher intervention, habituation, and the classroom environment.

The analysis followed the logic of qualitative data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification as described in the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña approach. During data reduction, information that was directly relevant to teacher facilitation and children's independence was identified, coded, compared,

and organized. Data display was subsequently used to examine relationships among teacher actions, classroom situations, children's responses, and value-oriented practices. At the interpretation stage, emerging patterns were continuously compared against the original observation records, interview accounts, and documentary evidence to determine whether an interpretation was sufficiently supported by the data.

Through this iterative process, several recurring analytical categories emerged. These included the teacher's preparation of the environment, demonstration of activities, responsive assistance, facilitation of repeated practice, reduction of intervention, teacher modeling of Islamic values, and the development of children's responsibility and self-regulation. These categories were then synthesized into the five-stage facilitation model identified in the findings: Preparing, Introducing, Facilitating, Withdrawing, and Internalizing. The model was therefore developed through synthesis of empirical patterns rather than imposed as a predetermined theoretical sequence.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Several strategies were employed to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings. First, methodological triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. When a particular interpretation emerged from one source, it was examined against other available sources to determine whether the pattern was consistent or whether discrepancies required further interpretation. This procedure was especially important in distinguishing teachers' stated pedagogical intentions from their observable classroom practices.

Second, prolonged engagement in the research setting enabled the researcher to observe recurring routines and interactions across different activities and periods of the school day. Repeated observation reduced the risk of interpreting a single classroom event as representative of the overall pedagogical practice. Third, member checking was used by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants so that they could clarify whether the researcher's interpretation corresponded with their experiences and intentions. Fourth, peer debriefing was used to discuss emerging interpretations with colleagues familiar with Islamic education and qualitative research, providing an external perspective on the analytical process.

An audit trail was also maintained throughout data collection and analysis. Observation records, interview materials, documentary evidence, coding decisions, and analytical notes were retained to allow interpretations to be traced back to their empirical sources. Reflexivity was maintained by recognizing the researcher's position and prior familiarity with Islamic education and Montessori-related educational practices. The researcher therefore distinguished between direct empirical observations, participants' accounts, and the researcher's analytical interpretations. These procedures were intended to strengthen credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transparency.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the research process. Adult participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the voluntary nature of their participation, and consent was obtained before

interviews were conducted. Participants' identities were protected through pseudonyms or role-based descriptions when reporting findings. Because the study involved young children, observations were conducted unobtrusively within normal classroom activities without identifying individual children in ways that could compromise their privacy. The researcher also sought to minimize disruption to learning activities and maintained a non-evaluative stance toward teachers and the institution.

The study consequently treated children's classroom behavior as naturally occurring pedagogical data rather than as individually identifiable personal information. This ethical position was important because the purpose of the research was to understand the pedagogical process through which teachers facilitated independence, rather than to evaluate individual children or teachers.

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

Teacher Facilitation as a Graduated Process of Independence Formation

The field findings indicate that teachers at Brainy Bunch Indonesia did not facilitate children's independence through a single instructional technique. Rather, teacher facilitation appeared as a gradual pedagogical process in which the intensity of adult involvement changed according to children's readiness and the demands of the activity. Classroom observations at the Tebet and Bintaro sites showed that teachers prepared an environment in which children could access materials, move between learning areas, select activities, practice practical life skills, and complete classroom routines with progressively less direct assistance. This pattern is consistent with the teachers' understanding that the adult's role is not to replace the child's effort but to create the conditions under which the child can act independently. One teacher, Euis, described the teacher's role primarily in terms of observing children's engagement and intervening only when necessary to support self-directed learning (Euis, teacher interview, 2025). This statement is important because it shows that facilitation at Brainy Bunch was not synonymous with continuous assistance; observation itself became a pedagogical action through which teachers determined when intervention was needed and when it should be reduced.

The observational evidence also showed that independence was cultivated through ordinary activities rather than through a separate "independence lesson." Children were expected to participate in self-care and classroom-care routines, including putting on and removing shoes, managing their bags, opening and closing lunch containers, washing their hands in sequence, waiting for their turn, wiping their mouths after eating, arranging simple clothing, cleaning work areas, and returning learning materials to their designated places. These activities are significant because they transform independence from an abstract educational objective into repeated bodily and social experiences. The child does not merely hear that he or she should be responsible; responsibility is practiced through handling personal belongings, caring for materials, completing a task, and restoring the environment after use.

The same pattern was visible in the organization of the prepared environment. Learning materials were arranged in designated areas so that children could identify, select, use, and return materials with limited adult

direction. Color coding further supported this process: practical life materials were associated with the yellow area, sensorial materials with red, language with blue, mathematics with pink, religion with green, and playhouse activities with purple. Such organization reduced children's dependence on teachers for locating materials and simultaneously introduced an expectation of order. The classroom environment therefore operated as a silent instructional structure: it communicated where an activity belonged, how materials should be handled, and where they should be returned. In this sense, the teacher's facilitative role was partly exercised through environmental design rather than verbal instruction.

The findings therefore suggest that the teacher's facilitation can be understood through five interconnected stages: Preparing, Introducing, Facilitating, Withdrawing, and Internalizing. These stages should not be interpreted as rigid chronological steps that occur once for every child or activity. Instead, they represent a recurring pedagogical sequence through which teacher support gradually shifts from environmental preparation and explicit demonstration toward children's self-regulation and internal responsibility.

Preparing: Constructing the Conditions for Independent Action

The first stage, Preparing, concerns the teacher's responsibility for constructing an environment in which independent action is possible. Classroom observations showed that children were provided with accessible materials, clearly organized learning spaces, and routines that enabled them to participate without depending continuously on adults. The significance of this stage lies in the fact that independence cannot simply be demanded from children. Children require an environment that makes independent action practically possible. When materials are inaccessible, routines are unclear, or every action requires teacher permission, children remain dependent even when teachers verbally encourage them to be independent.

At Brainy Bunch, preparation extended beyond the physical arrangement of materials. The daily structure itself became part of the prepared environment. Children were expected to arrive around 07:30, followed by Dhuha prayer at approximately 07:45 before the learning activities continued. Religious routines were therefore embedded within the temporal structure of the school day. The same institutional organization that structured learning also established predictable expectations concerning prayer, transitions, personal care, and responsibility. Previous observations and institutional documents indicated that such regularity supported children's ability to anticipate what they needed to do next rather than relying on repeated verbal direction from teachers.

The Preparing stage also included preparing children emotionally and socially for independent participation. At the beginning of their school experience, some children still required considerable adult assistance in activities such as eating, tidying materials, putting on shoes, and adapting to classroom routines. Teachers therefore did not treat initial dependence as failure. Instead, the environment and routines were repeatedly presented until children became familiar with them. This finding is important for understanding Montessori facilitation in practice: independence developed through environmental consistency and repeated opportunities rather than through the immediate removal of adult support.

The prepared environment consequently functioned as an extension of teacher action. Montessori scholarship commonly emphasizes that the environment should support purposeful activity and self-directed learning; the present case demonstrates how this principle was operationalized within an Islamic institutional setting. The environment was not value-neutral, however. Its organization was accompanied by expectations concerning cleanliness, order, respect for others, responsibility for materials, and participation in religious routines. Thus, the teacher prepared not only a physical environment for autonomy but also a normative environment in which autonomy was expected to be exercised responsibly.

Introducing: Demonstrating Before Expecting Independence

The second stage, Introducing, involved the teacher's demonstration of how an activity should be performed. Field evidence indicates that children were not simply given materials and expected to discover all procedures independently. Teachers first modeled or demonstrated activities, particularly when children were unfamiliar with a practical life task, religious routine, or classroom procedure. This stage is essential because Montessori independence does not imply the absence of teaching. Rather, the adult provides an appropriate presentation and then allows the child to practice.

Practical life activities illustrate this principle clearly. Children learned how to put on shoes, manage bags, open and close lunch containers, wash their hands properly, and care for their immediate environment. These activities required teachers initially to show the sequence and expected manner of performance. Once the procedure had been demonstrated, children were given repeated opportunities to practice it. The teacher's intervention could consequently shift from direct demonstration to observation as the child became increasingly familiar with the task.

Religious activities followed a comparable pattern. At the beginning of ablution practice at the Tebet site, children were introduced first to the movements without water and subsequently to the use of water. At Bintaro, children practiced directly with water under teacher supervision. Prayer routines were also modeled by teachers, after which children gradually participated more actively. During prayer routines, children were given opportunities to prepare and fold prayer mats and, within the established routine, take turns serving as imam. These practices show that religious education was not confined to verbal explanation. Children learned through bodily participation, repetition, observation, and responsibility.

This pattern demonstrates the importance of modeling in the teacher's facilitative role. The teacher first makes the expected action visible, but the purpose of demonstration is not to create permanent dependence on the teacher. Demonstration becomes the bridge between unfamiliarity and independent performance. The teacher therefore occupies a transitional position: sufficiently present to make the task comprehensible, but sufficiently restrained to prevent the child's activity from becoming an imitation of adult action without personal ownership.

The Introducing stage also provides a point at which Montessori pedagogy and Islamic educational practice intersect. Teacher modeling is simultaneously pedagogical and ethical. When teachers demonstrate how to handle materials carefully, wait for a turn, greet others, apologize after mistakes, or maintain

cleanliness, children encounter values through observable conduct. The teacher therefore introduces not only procedures but also patterns of adab. This supports the interpretation that the teacher's role at Brainy Bunch extended beyond technical Montessori facilitation toward the modeling of responsible behavior.

Facilitating: Supporting the Child Without Taking Over

The third stage, Facilitating, emerged when children began to perform activities themselves but still required varying degrees of support. The teacher's role at this stage was characterized by observation, selective intervention, encouragement, and adjustment of assistance. Rather than completing a task for the child when difficulties emerged, teachers attempted to allow children opportunities to persist, repeat, and solve problems within reasonable limits. This was particularly visible in practical life activities, where the purpose was not simply to obtain a correct final result but to allow children to develop coordination, concentration, sequencing, and responsibility through the activity itself.

The empirical pattern is consistent with the statement attributed to Euis that teachers observed children's engagement and intervened only when necessary to support self-directed learning (Euis, teacher interview, 2025). The significance of this statement becomes clearer when viewed against classroom practice. Teacher intervention was not eliminated; rather, it was regulated. The teacher had to judge whether a child genuinely required assistance, whether the difficulty was part of the learning process, and whether additional intervention would support or undermine the child's opportunity to act independently.

The same facilitative principle appeared in classroom transitions and social routines. Children were expected to wait for their turns, participate in orderly transitions, and return materials after completing activities. Teachers provided reminders when necessary, but repeated routines gradually reduced the need for verbal direction. In this respect, facilitation involved a movement from external regulation toward self-regulation. The child initially responded to environmental structure and teacher guidance, but through repetition the expected behavior became increasingly familiar and predictable.

The teacher's facilitation was also relational. Independence was not interpreted as leaving children alone. Teachers continued to monitor children's emotional and social conditions while allowing them to act. This distinction is important because an overly individualistic interpretation of Montessori autonomy could overlook the social dimension of learning. At Brainy Bunch, children's independent actions occurred in shared spaces and were therefore constrained by responsibilities toward peers, materials, teachers, and the learning environment.

The findings consequently suggest that facilitation represents the central balancing point of the teacher's role. Too much intervention can prevent the development of competence because the adult performs what the child could learn to perform. Too little intervention can leave the child without adequate orientation. Effective facilitation therefore requires pedagogical judgment: the teacher must remain sufficiently attentive to intervene when intervention is educationally necessary, while simultaneously preserving the child's opportunity to act, repeat, make decisions, and experience the consequences of action.

Withdrawing: Reducing Adult Assistance as Competence Emerges

The fourth stage, Withdrawing, refers to the gradual reduction of teacher assistance once children demonstrate sufficient familiarity and competence. This stage is particularly important because it distinguishes facilitation from dependency-producing assistance. The teacher does not simply continue helping because help is available. Instead, assistance is progressively reduced as the child becomes capable of carrying out the activity independently.

The classroom routines surrounding practical life provide empirical evidence for this process. Activities that initially required considerable adult prompting gradually became routines that children could perform with less intervention. Putting on shoes, managing personal belongings, eating, washing hands, tidying learning materials, and returning materials to their designated places were increasingly treated as children's own responsibilities. Repetition was therefore not merely a mechanism for skill acquisition but also a mechanism through which the teacher could withdraw.

A similar process occurred in religious routines. After Dhuha, Dhuhr, or Asr prayers, children were expected to prepare, use, and fold their prayer mats and return them to the appropriate place. The connection between the Montessori exercise of folding a mat and the religious practice of caring for the prayer mat is particularly significant. The teacher's objective was not simply that the child complete a folding exercise correctly but that the skill become part of an authentic responsibility within the child's daily religious life. As children became familiar with the routine, the teacher's verbal intervention became less central.

The Withdrawing stage therefore illustrates an important characteristic of the teacher as facilitator: success is partly demonstrated by the teacher becoming less necessary for the completion of familiar tasks. This does not mean that the teacher disappears. Rather, the teacher's presence becomes less visible because the environment, routine, and child's internalized understanding increasingly perform functions that previously required direct adult guidance.

This finding extends the conventional understanding of teacher facilitation. In many instructional models, effective teaching is often associated with the amount and clarity of teacher explanation. In the present case, however, effective facilitation is also indicated by the teacher's ability to reduce intervention at the appropriate moment. Withdrawal is therefore not passive absence but a deliberate pedagogical decision based on observation of children's readiness.

Internalizing: From Performed Routine to Responsible Independence

The fifth stage, Internalizing, represents the point at which repeated actions begin to function as self-regulated behavior rather than merely responses to teacher instruction. The evidence suggests that children's independence at Brainy Bunch was visible not only when they could perform practical tasks without help but also when they began to recognize what needed to be done without being explicitly instructed. Returning materials, maintaining order, preparing prayer materials, participating in routines, waiting for turns, and caring for personal belongings became increasingly embedded in everyday behavior.

This stage is reflected in the teachers' broader understanding of independence. Datin explained that independence was not simply the ability to perform tasks alone but involved internal discipline and responsible agency within a communal learning environment (Datin, teacher interview, 2025). This account provides an important empirical basis for the concept of responsible autonomy developed in this study. Independence was valued because it enabled children to manage themselves responsibly, not because it encouraged separation from others.

The Internalizing stage is also where Montessori independence becomes particularly compatible with Islamic educational values. When a child independently returns a learning material, folds a prayer mat, waits for a turn, maintains cleanliness, or assists a peer, the behavior has moved beyond mechanical compliance if it is performed with an emerging awareness of responsibility. The distinction is between "doing because the teacher tells me" and "doing because I understand that this is what I am responsible for." The latter represents a deeper form of independence because external control has begun to be transformed into internal regulation.

The integration of Islamic values strengthens this process by giving everyday actions an ethical meaning. Religious routines, greetings, expressions of gratitude, apology, cleanliness, respect, and responsibility were incorporated into ordinary classroom interactions rather than presented exclusively as separate moral lessons. Observational evidence indicated that teachers used concrete situations to reinforce these values, such as reminding children to return materials respectfully or to assist peers when appropriate. Thus, internalization was not limited to Montessori classroom discipline; it involved the formation of dispositions that connected personal independence with social and spiritual responsibility.

The five-stage process can therefore be summarized as a gradual transformation of the teacher's pedagogical position. In Preparing, the teacher structures the conditions for independence; in Introducing, the teacher makes the expected action comprehensible; in Facilitating, the teacher supports the child's effort; in Withdrawing, the teacher deliberately reduces assistance; and in Internalizing, the child increasingly assumes responsibility for action. The process represents a shift in the locus of regulation from teacher and environment toward the child's own emerging self-regulation.

Relational-Spiritual Independence: Reframing the Meaning of Independence

The most significant conceptual finding emerging from these practices is that independence at Brainy Bunch cannot adequately be described as functional autonomy alone. Children were certainly expected to perform activities independently, make choices, manage belongings, and complete tasks without constant adult assistance. However, these behaviors occurred within a social and religious framework that gave independence a broader meaning. Children were expected to exercise autonomy while respecting others, caring for shared materials, maintaining order, participating in religious routines, and responding to teachers and peers appropriately.

This pattern supports the concept of Relational-Spiritual Independence proposed in this study. Relational independence refers to the capacity to act independently without becoming detached from social responsibility, whereas spiritual independence refers to the orientation of personal action toward ethical and religious

commitments. In this framework, independence is not equivalent to self-sufficiency. A child who can put on shoes independently but refuses to wait for another child's turn demonstrates functional competence but not yet the full form of responsible autonomy identified in this case.

The empirical evidence also indicates that Islamic values were not simply added to Montessori activities as supplementary content. Rather, values shaped the meaning of the activities themselves. Practical life activities cultivated order and responsibility; prayer routines cultivated religious discipline; waiting for turns cultivated social consideration; greeting and thanking cultivated adab; and caring for learning materials cultivated responsibility toward a shared environment. The same action could therefore have both a Montessori and an Islamic pedagogical significance.

This finding is consistent with the broader institutional evidence that Islamic practices were embedded within daily pedagogical routines rather than treated as an isolated curricular component. The existing analysis of the case similarly found that adab and tauhid were operationalized through routine practices, teacher modeling, and value-infused classroom interactions. What distinguishes the present article is the identification of the teacher's facilitative process as the mechanism through which these values become connected to children's developing independence.

The concept of Relational-Spiritual Independence therefore provides a bridge between Montessori's emphasis on autonomy and Islamic education's emphasis on moral responsibility. Montessori contributes the pedagogical mechanism through which children are given meaningful opportunities to act, choose, practice, repeat, and regulate themselves. Islamic values provide the ethical and spiritual orientation that determines how such autonomy should be exercised. The resulting independence is neither purely individualistic nor purely obedience-based; it is an autonomy that is exercised within responsibility.

Discussion: Teacher Facilitation as Responsible Autonomy in Practice

The findings extend the understanding of the Montessori teacher beyond the binary distinction between "teacher-centered" and "child-centered" education. The teachers observed in this study were not passive observers who simply allowed children to act freely. Nor were they conventional instructors who continuously directed children's behavior. Their role was dynamic and graduated. They prepared the environment, demonstrated activities, monitored children's readiness, provided assistance, regulated intervention, and progressively withdrew support.

This pattern is consistent with Montessori's principle of freedom within limits. Children were provided with opportunities to select activities and act independently, but these opportunities existed within a structured environment and shared expectations. The evidence from Brainy Bunch suggests that the "limits" were not merely classroom management rules. They also included ethical expectations concerning respect, cleanliness, responsibility, religious practice, and social conduct. Consequently, freedom became pedagogically meaningful because children learned to exercise it within a framework of responsibility.

The findings also contribute to contemporary discussions of teacher-child interaction in Montessori education. Research has emphasized the importance of communication and collaboration between teachers and

children, while Montessori scholarship has increasingly examined the adaptability of Montessori practice across contexts. The present case adds that, in an Islamic setting, teacher facilitation may simultaneously function as a mechanism of pedagogical scaffolding and ethical formation. The teacher facilitates not only the child's acquisition of practical competence but also the child's gradual movement toward responsible action.

The five-stage model consequently represents more than a procedural description of Montessori teaching. It provides a conceptual account of how independence can be cultivated through changing patterns of adult involvement. Preparing establishes the conditions; Introducing establishes understanding; Facilitating sustains effort; Withdrawing transfers responsibility; and Internalizing represents the emergence of self-regulated conduct. The sequence demonstrates that independence is produced through a pedagogical relationship rather than through the simple removal of adult assistance.

The model also helps explain why the Islamic dimension is theoretically significant. Without an ethical orientation, the final outcome of the process could be interpreted simply as autonomous functioning. Within the Islamic framework observed at Brainy Bunch, however, the endpoint is different: children are encouraged to become capable of acting for themselves while remaining attentive to God, others, and the shared environment. This is the basis for describing the outcome as Relational-Spiritual Independence.

The contribution of this study, therefore, lies not in claiming that Montessori and Islamic education can simply be combined, but in showing how their interaction can be operationalized through the teacher's graduated facilitation. Montessori provides the pedagogical architecture of independence, while Islamic values orient the meaning and direction of that independence. The teacher becomes the mediating actor who connects environment, activity, repetition, social responsibility, and spiritual orientation. In this sense, teacher facilitation constitutes the practical mechanism through which responsible autonomy is formed.

KESIMPULAN

This study demonstrates that the implementation of Montessori education at Brainy Bunch Indonesia positions teachers not primarily as direct instructors, but as facilitators who gradually cultivate children's independence through a structured pedagogical process. The findings indicate that teacher facilitation operates through five interconnected stages: Preparing, Introducing, Facilitating, Withdrawing, and Internalizing. Through these stages, teachers prepare an accessible and orderly learning environment, introduce activities through modeling and demonstration, provide assistance according to children's needs, gradually reduce intervention, and reinforce repeated practices until children are able to perform activities with greater initiative and self-regulation. Independence therefore emerges not simply from giving children freedom, but from carefully calibrated teacher support that enables children to move from dependence toward responsible autonomy.

The findings further show that Montessori practices at Brainy Bunch Indonesia are integrated with Islamic values through everyday routines and social interactions rather than being treated as separate religious instruction. Practices such as prayer, ablution, greeting, waiting for one's turn, caring for learning materials,

maintaining cleanliness, completing tasks, and returning materials to their proper places provide concrete contexts through which children encounter responsibility, discipline, respect, patience, and adab. This integration suggests that Montessori independence can be recontextualized within an Islamic educational framework in which freedom is accompanied by moral and relational responsibility. Accordingly, the study conceptualizes this form of independence as Relational-Spiritual Independence: an understanding of autonomy in which children are encouraged to act independently while remaining attentive to ethical conduct, other people, shared environments, and religious values.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the discussion of Montessori education by extending the concept of independence beyond functional self-sufficiency. The findings suggest that independence in an Islamic Montessori context is simultaneously practical, psychological, social, and spiritual. The five-stage teacher facilitation process provides a conceptual explanation of how this form of independence can be cultivated pedagogically. Rather than understanding teacher withdrawal as a complete retreat from children's learning, the study shows that withdrawal is a gradual pedagogical decision that depends on observation, children's readiness, and the internalization of routines and values. This positions the teacher as an intentional facilitator whose role changes according to the developmental needs of the child.

Practically, the findings have implications for teacher development, school management, and home-school collaboration. Montessori teachers working in Islamic early-childhood settings require more than technical knowledge of Montessori materials; they need the capacity to observe children, determine when assistance is necessary, model appropriate behavior, and recognize when intervention can be reduced. Teacher professional development should therefore include observation skills, graduated assistance, classroom-environment preparation, value-based modeling, and strategies for transferring responsibility to children. Schools can also strengthen children's independence by maintaining consistency in routines and expectations across classrooms and by involving parents in reinforcing similar practices at home. Such consistency is particularly important because independence is developed through repetition and habituation rather than through isolated classroom activities.

This study has several limitations. First, it employed a qualitative case study design bounded to Brainy Bunch Indonesia and therefore was intended to provide contextual and analytical understanding rather than statistical generalization to all Montessori or Islamic early-childhood institutions. Second, the study focused primarily on teacher facilitation, classroom practices, and the integration of Islamic values; consequently, children's perspectives were accessed through observation rather than direct interviewing, in accordance with their young age and ethical considerations. Third, although the study examined the relationship between school practices and home-school consistency, parental perspectives were not the primary analytical focus. The findings should therefore be interpreted within the institutional, cultural, and pedagogical context in which the research was conducted.

Future research could extend this study in several directions. Comparative studies involving multiple Islamic Montessori schools, including institutions with different management models and geographical or cultural contexts, could examine whether the five-stage facilitation process and the concept of Relational-

Spiritual Independence are transferable across settings. Longitudinal research could also investigate how children's independence develops over a longer period and whether early experiences of responsibility, self-regulation, and Islamic habituation are sustained as children move to subsequent educational levels. In addition, future studies could incorporate children's voices through developmentally appropriate participatory methods and examine parents' experiences more systematically to understand how school and home environments jointly shape children's independence. Quantitative or mixed-method studies may further test the proposed dimensions of Relational-Spiritual Independence and examine relationships among teacher facilitation, classroom environment, family consistency, and children's independent behavior. These directions would allow the model proposed in this study to be further examined, refined, and potentially adapted beyond the specific case investigated here.

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