



Inclusive Language in Islamic Education: Strategies for Child-Friendly Communication to Prevent Verbal Abuse

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Abstract

Verbal abuse against early childhood often occurs in educational settings, yet its impact frequently goes unnoticed. This study focuses on how inclusive language in Islamic education can serve as a preventive strategy against verbal abuse in early childhood education (PAUD). Using a qualitative approach through a literature review of 15 related journals and thematic analysis, this research highlights four main themes: the forms and impacts of verbal abuse, inclusive communication strategies, integration of Islamic values in language, and the role of Islamic early childhood teachers. The findings indicate that the use of inclusive language grounded in the values of *rahmah* (compassion), *‘adl* (justice), and *karamah insaniyah* (human dignity) can create a safe, supportive, and child-friendly learning environment. Islamic early childhood teachers play a crucial role in applying language that educates without judgment, as part of their educational and spiritual responsibility. This study recommends strengthening teacher training and developing communication curricula based on Islamic values to prevent verbal abuse and holistically shape.

Keywords: Inclusive Language; Child-Friendly Communication; Prevention of Verbal Abuse; Islamic Education.

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) constitutes a fundamental stage in shaping children's character, personality, and social competence. This developmental period is often referred to as the "golden age," during which every form of stimulation exerts a profound and lasting influence on a child's life trajectory (Setiowati, 2021). Among the critical dimensions of ECE is the linguistic interaction between educators and the surrounding environment. Language functions not merely as a communicative instrument but as a pivotal medium for constructing identity, regulating emotions, and fostering social relationships. Within this framework, the adoption of inclusive language emerges as an essential pedagogical strategy, particularly in mitigating instances of verbal aggression that frequently occur unintentionally in educational settings.

Verbal abuse toward children may manifest in various forms, such as ridicule, negative labeling (Abimanyu, 2024; Lestari et al., 2023), shouting (Buulolo, 2023), or derogatory remarks (Meidalinda & Tobing, 2024). Although it does not cause physical harm, its impact on children's psychological development is profound. Exposure to verbal aggression can lead to emotional disturbances, diminished self-esteem (Bunga et al., 2022; Febriani, 2024a), and difficulties in social interaction (Meidalinda & Tobing, 2024; Sari et al., 2024a). From the perspective of Islamic education, any form of violence contradicts the core values of compassion (*rahmah*), justice (*'adl*), and respect for human dignity (*karamah insaniyah*) (Afkarina et al., 2024; Nurul, 2019; Riza & Maidefvi, 2022).

Inclusive language in Islamic education emphasizes the avoidance of harmful expressions to foster empathetic communication, respect for diversity, and a sense of security within the learning process (Mayasari, 2025; Panjwani, 2020). Foundational Islamic principles such as *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), *musyawarah* (consultation), and *husnudzon* (positive presumption) serve as the basis for cultivating healthy interactions between teachers and children (Aryani, 2015). Accordingly, this study is significant in examining how inclusive language can function as a preventive strategy against verbal abuse in early childhood Islamic education.

According to data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), verbal abuse against children is classified as a form of psychological violence. In 2022, there were 1,665 reported cases of physical and psychological violence against children, encompassing bullying (verbal abuse), physical assault, mistreatment, mobbing, and sexual violence. Furthermore, KPAI emphasizes that violence against children represents an iceberg phenomenon, with many cases remaining unreported. Of the 4,683 complaints received by KPAI in the same year, 502 cases involved physical and psychological abuse of children (Humas KPAI, 2023).

Research indicates that the use of non-inclusive language by teachers in the classroom can lead to feelings of alienation, shame, and loss of learning motivation among children, increase anxiety, depression, decrease sense of security, difficulty in socializing, and low achievement, hindering the child's communication development and creating a negative self-perception (Febriani, 2024b; Rahmadani et al., 2023; Sari et al., 2024b). Over time, this practice can obstruct socio-emotional development and reduce learning motivation (Murdiwan & Usman, 2025). Conversely, inclusive language that values diversity and provides emotional support has been shown to enhance children's participation in learning activities and strengthen their social relationships (Ackah-Jnr et al., 2020).

In Islamic education, the use of language that educates rather than judges is considered an integral part of a teacher’s moral character. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is recognized as a gentle educator who never struck or insulted children and consistently employed words that inspired confidence and motivation (Nurjanah, 2018; Thobroni et al., 2025). Consequently, Islamic education holds significant potential to serve as a model for creating learning environments free from verbal abuse through the application of inclusive language.

Although numerous studies have addressed verbal abuse in early childhood education, most have concentrated on its forms, psychological impacts (Sari et al., 2024; Tawakkol, 2025), and general approaches to positive discipline (Sege et al., 2018). Few have specifically examined how inclusive language—rooted in Islamic values such as *rahmah* (compassion), *‘adl* (justice), and *karamah insaniyah* (respect for human dignity)—can function as a preventive strategy against verbal abuse in early childhood Islamic education. Within this context, language is not merely a tool for communication but also a means of shaping character and spirituality. Therefore, this study is significant and offers novelty by proposing an approach that integrates Islamic principles into teachers’ linguistic practices to create a safe, child-friendly, and verbal-abuse-free learning environment.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach using the library research method. The primary focus is to explore, examine, and analyze theoretical and empirical concepts developed in national and international literature related to inclusive language, Islamic education, and verbal abuse in early childhood education. The research does not involve direct field data collection; instead, it relies on relevant written sources as the main basis for analysis.

The data sources consist of 15 peer-reviewed journal articles, selected purposively based on their relevance and credibility to the research objectives. The literature includes references from the fields of Islamic education, linguistics, and child protection. To analyze the data, this study employs thematic analysis, a technique aimed at identifying, organizing, and interpreting key themes emerging from textual data. In the context of this library research, thematic analysis was conducted by thoroughly reading each source, noting significant ideas, and grouping information according to themes relevant to the research objectives (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the journals used are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Type of Study	Peer-reviewed journal articles, conceptual papers, and empirical studies	Non-academic sources (blogs, opinion pieces, news articles)
Publication Year	2015–2025	Publications prior to 2015 unless highly relevant
Language	Indonesian and English	Other languages without translation

Focus Area	Studies on inclusive language, Islamic education, verbal abuse in early childhood education	Studies unrelated to language use, Islamic pedagogy, or verbal abuse
Population	Early childhood education (PAUD) context	Research focusing on secondary or higher education
Relevance	Directly addresses theoretical or empirical aspects of inclusive language and verbal abuse	Articles with minimal or no relevance to the research objectives

The thematic analysis process began with data familiarization, involving comprehensive reading and understanding of the literature. This was followed by initial coding, where important excerpts from the sources were labeled according to issues discussed, such as “inclusive language in Islam,” “verbal abuse in early childhood education,” “teacher communication strategies,” and “values of rahmatan lil ‘alamin.” These codes were then organized into major themes, which were analyzed in depth to identify conceptual relationships and practical implications within the context of Islamic early childhood education. To ensure data validity, source triangulation was applied by comparing information across various types of literature and verifying consistency among findings. Additionally, the researcher critically reviewed the content to avoid interpretive bias and maintain objectivity and academic rigor.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Verbal Abuse Toward Children and Its Impact on Socio-Emotional Development

The findings of this study reveal that children who experience verbal abuse from parents or teachers exhibit symptoms of withdrawal, aggressive behavior, and communication disorders (Meidalinda & Tobing, 2024). These findings are reinforced by research indicating that verbal abuse significantly reduces self-confidence in early childhood and hinders their participation in learning activities (Ackah-Jnr et al., 2020). Other studies also show that verbal abuse increases the risk of emotional disorders such as anxiety, depression, and insecurity, while impeding children’s communication skills (Sari et al., 2024). These impacts are not merely temporary but also affect children’s social interactions within the school environment (Bunga et al., 2022; Putri & Zulkarnaen, 2024).

Psychologically, verbal abuse disrupts the stages of children’s socio-emotional development. According to Erik Erikson’s theory, early childhood falls within the “initiative vs. guilt” stage, where children begin to build self-confidence through exploration (Widick, Parker, & Knefelkamp, 1978). When children are subjected to harsh or demeaning words, they fail to successfully navigate this stage, resulting in excessive guilt and an inability to take initiative. Furthermore, Becker’s labeling theory explains that negative labels such as “naughty” or “stupid” can shape a negative self-concept that influences children’s behavior (Becker, 2018). Research by Ackah-Jnr et al. also confirms that the use of non-inclusive language by teachers causes children to feel alienated, ashamed, and lose enthusiasm for learning (Ackah-Jnr et al., 2020).

From the perspective of Islamic education, verbal abuse contradicts the principles of *rahmah* (compassion), *karamah insaniyah* (respect for human dignity), and *‘adl* (justice). Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as the ultimate role model, never used harsh words

toward children, even when they made mistakes. Instead, he adopted a gentle, empathetic approach that encouraged children to improve themselves. The concept of *tarbiyah* in Islam emphasizes character formation through language that educates rather than judges. Thus, verbal abuse is not merely a pedagogical issue but also an ethical and spiritual concern (Jhon, 2024).

By adopting language that reflects compassion and respect, educators can create a learning environment that nurtures children's emotional security and self-worth. This approach aligns with the Qur'anic emphasis on gentle speech (*qawlan layyina*) and the prophetic model of communication that inspires rather than humiliates. Implementing inclusive language helps prevent the negative psychological consequences associated with verbal abuse, such as low self-esteem and social withdrawal, while promoting positive identity formation and active participation in learning. Thus, integrating Islamic values into linguistic practices offers a holistic framework for safeguarding children from verbal harm and fostering their socio-emotional development.

The findings underscore that verbal abuse directed at early childhood constitutes a critical issue that is frequently overlooked. Its consequences extend beyond immediate psychological well-being, exerting a profound influence on the child's long-term development. Within the framework of Islamic education, the use of gentle and inclusive language is regarded as an essential manifestation of the educator's moral character. Language functions not merely as a medium of communication but also as a pivotal instrument in shaping children's character and identity. Consequently, refraining from verbal aggression reflects the practical implementation of Islamic values in everyday educational practices.

Inclusive Language as A Preventive Communication Strategy in Islamic Early Childhood Education

The findings of this study reinforce the critical role of language as a preventive strategy against verbal abuse in early childhood education. Ferreira et al. (2022) demonstrated that early childhood educators who employ inclusive language foster more positive relationships with their students. Such practices contribute to children feeling valued, confident, and actively engaged in learning activities. Simple affirmations, such as *"You're great," "Let's try together,"* or *"It's okay, we'll learn slowly,"* have been shown to alleviate anxiety and enhance motivation for learning.

These results align with previous research indicating that supportive and non-judgmental language creates a conducive learning environment, promotes social engagement, and strengthens task-completion skills (Ackah-Jnr et al., 2020). Conversely, negative corrective expressions, such as *"You're always troublesome,"* instill guilt and fear, which can hinder development. From a communication psychology perspective, positive language contributes to the formation of a healthy self-concept, whereas negative language undermines a sense of security and triggers anxiety (Ghosh, 2024; Sampthirao, 2016). Neuropsychological evidence further suggests that empathetic words stimulate oxytocin, enhancing trust, while harsh words activate cortisol, which is associated with stress (Sun et al., 2023).

Within the framework of Islamic education, effective communication is regarded as an essential component of an educator's moral character. Prophet Muhammad exemplified this principle by using gentle, compassionate, and encouraging words when interacting with children. A hadith narrated by Abu Dawud highlights that he never scolded children, even when

they made mistakes, but guided them patiently through positive dialogue. The principles of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* and *tauhid* emphasize that every child is a creation of Allah with inherent dignity and potential. Consequently, inclusive language in Islamic education represents a manifestation of spiritual values that honor human nature (Suyani & Usiono, 2024; Zurrachmah, 2021).

These findings affirm that inclusive language serves as an effective preventive communication strategy to mitigate verbal abuse and support holistic development in early childhood education. From an Islamic perspective, the use of nurturing and compassionate language is not only pedagogical but also a moral and spiritual obligation. Teachers, as key actors in the educational process, must ensure that every word they utter reflects values of mercy, respect, and justice, thereby transforming education into a process that promotes goodness for all.

Integrating Islamic Values into Inclusive Language to Create a Child-Friendly Learning Environment

The findings of this study emphasize that Islamic education must be grounded in principles of gentleness and respect for children's rights to grow within a safe and supportive environment (Ainiyah & Khusnah, 2019). Prior research indicates that teachers who employ language reflecting spiritual values, such as "*Alhamdulillah, you have tried,*" "*InsyaAllah, you can do it,*" or "*Let us learn together patiently*" create a calm and empathetic learning atmosphere that fosters active participation among children (Aziz et al., 2025; Noviyanti & Rafi'i, 2025). Similarly, Afria, Prastiti, and Sari (2025) highlight the importance of peaceful and constructive language in cultivating early spiritual and social awareness.

The concept of *rahmah* (compassion) serves as the foundation of inclusive communication in Islamic pedagogy. Mayasari 2025 explains that *rahmah* encompasses empathy, understanding, and support for the child's condition. The value of *'adl* (justice) requires language that is non-discriminatory and free from negative labeling, while *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) is expressed through collaborative phrases such as "*We learn together*" or "*We help each other,*" which promote a sense of community. Furthermore, the principle of *karamah insaniyah* (human dignity) asserts that every child possesses inherent worth that must be respected, making derogatory language incompatible with Islamic educational ethics. The *ta'dib* approach reinforces this by emphasizing the formation of character through polite, gentle, and spiritually meaningful language, enabling children to internalize Islamic values in practical ways.

Philosophically, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's concept of *ta'dib* situates education as the process of inculcating *adab* (right conduct) by recognizing the proper place of things in the order of existence; *ta'dib* integrates knowledge (*'ilm*), instruction (*ta'lim*), and moral formation, offering a holistic foundation for teacher language that is polite, gentle, and spiritually meaningful. Contemporary analyses of *ta'dib* in Indonesian and Malay scholarship reiterate that restoring *adab* through educational language is central to countering moral decline and cultivating *insan kamil* (holistic persons). These sources converge with *rahmah*, *'adl*, *ukhuwah*, and *karamah insaniyah* as communicative values: compassion (*rahmah*) supports empathic speech; justice (*'adl*) requires non-discriminatory language free of negative labels; brotherhood (*ukhuwah*) invites inclusive "we-language" fostering collaboration; and human dignity (*karamah insaniyah*) forbids demeaning expressions (Al-Attas, 1980)

Children are regarded as an *amanah* (trust) from Allah SWT, requiring care and education rooted in compassion. Consequently, the language used by educators must reflect respect for the child's innate nature and support their spiritual and emotional development. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) exemplified this principle by consistently using gentle and encouraging words, never rebuking children even when they erred, but guiding them patiently through positive dialogue. Therefore, integrating the principles of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, *'adl*, *ukhuwah*, and *karamah insaniyah* into every verbal interaction ensures that education becomes a transformative process for character and spiritual development.

The Role of Islamic Early Childhood Teachers in Implementing Inclusive Language as an Effort to Prevent Verbal Violence

Research findings indicate that teachers who recognize the importance of inclusive language are better able to build positive relationships with children, reduce verbal conflicts, and increase participation in learning activities (Rambe et al., 2024). Studies reveal that Islamic early childhood teachers trained in empathetic communication grounded in Islamic values show significant improvement in using educational and non-judgmental language. They frequently employ affirmative expressions such as “*You can do it*,” “*Thank you for trying*,” or “*It's okay, let's learn together*” (Bangsawan & Ridwan, 2025). Research also underscores that teachers are the primary actors in preventing verbal violence in schools (Irnawati et al., 2025).

The role of teachers in implementing inclusive language can be viewed through three dimensions: pedagogical, psychological, and spiritual. Pedagogically, teachers act as facilitators who create a conducive classroom environment. Inclusive language fosters dialogic rather than authoritarian interaction, enabling children to feel valued and confident in expressing themselves. Psychologically, teachers shape children's identity; early learners imitate teachers' communication patterns. Positive language nurtures a healthy self-concept, whereas negative language damages self-esteem and instills fear. Spiritually, teachers in Islamic education serve as guardians of Islamic values. A hadith narrated by Bukhari and Muslim emphasizes gentleness in teaching: “*Gentleness is not found in anything except that it beautifies it, and it is not removed from anything except that it disfigures it.*” This serves as guidance for teachers in choosing their words.

In Islam, teachers are role models of character and protectors of children's innate nature (*fitrah*). The language they use must reflect *rahmah* (compassion), *'adl* (justice), and *karamah insaniyah* (human dignity). Negative labeling such as “naughty” or “stupid” contradicts these principles because it undermines a child's dignity. Conversely, affirmative language that supports a child's effort reflects Islamic values and fosters good character. The implementation of inclusive language also aligns with the concepts of *tarbiyah* and *ta'dib*, which emphasize character formation through gentle and educational communication.

These findings affirm that Islamic early childhood teachers play a crucial role in preventing verbal violence through inclusive language. Language is not merely a tool for communication but also a means of shaping character, identity, and spirituality. A key challenge is that many teachers remain unaware of the profound impact words have on children's psychology. Therefore, training in communication based on Islamic values must become a priority in teacher capacity development. Teacher role modeling is equally vital; when teachers

consistently use gentle and respectful language, children will imitate these patterns, creating a school culture that is healthy and free from verbal abuse.

CONCLUSION

The research indicates that verbal abuse has serious consequences for children's socio-emotional development, including reduced self-confidence, behavioral disorders, and psychological trauma. In the context of Islamic education, verbal abuse contradicts fundamental values such as rahmah (compassion), 'adl (justice), and karāmah insāniyah (human dignity), which emphasize mercy, fairness, and respect for human dignity. Inclusive language has been proven to be an effective communication strategy for preventing verbal abuse in early childhood education settings. Educational, empathetic, and non-judgmental language creates a safe and supportive learning environment. When teachers use positive and constructive language, children feel valued, become more confident, and participate more actively in the learning process. Integrating Islamic values into inclusive language strengthens this approach, making communication a means of instilling character and spirituality from an early age.

Islamic early childhood teachers play a vital role in implementing inclusive language as part of their spiritual responsibility. The language used by teachers must reflect the Islamic values they uphold. Therefore, Islamic early childhood educators need to be equipped with knowledge and communication skills aligned with child-friendly Islamic educational principles. As a recommendation, Islamic educational institutions should develop specialized training for early childhood teachers on the use of inclusive language grounded in Islamic values. Teacher education curricula should also incorporate content on inclusive communication and strategies for preventing verbal abuse.

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