Child-Friendly Mosque: The Ramadan Qismul Aulad Program at Masjid Al-Muktafi Billah Shah (MAMBS), Kuala Terengganu in Support of Tarawih

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Qismul Aulad program, implemented exclusively during Ramadan at Masjid Al-Muktafi Billah Shah (MAMBS), Kuala Terengganu, as a child-friendly mosque initiative that supports parents' performance of tarawih. Conceived as a community practice embedded in the mosque's Ramadan routine, Qismul Aulad functions not merely as childcare but as a ritualised pedagogy that transmits Qur'anic literacy, nurtures adab, and normalises children's presence in sacred space while tarawih is in session. Using a qualitative approach document analysis, observations, and semi-structured interviews with mosque administrators, parents or guardians, and child participants the study finds that the program strengthens intergenerational ties, increases parental engagement with mosque life, and cultivates pro-social dispositions among children. It also helps parents maintain prayer focus through structured, supervised activities aligned with prayer cycles. The paper recommends that other mosques implement similar initiatives to realise child-friendly mosque environments that sustain youth engagement while directly supporting tarawih.

Keywords: Qismul Aulad, Child-friendly Mosque, Tarawih support, Religious socialization

INTRODUCTION

Mosques are pivotal institutions in the lives of Muslims, serving not only as places of worship but also as centres for education and social development. Mosques serve as social spaces where Muslims engage in welfare activities, social interactions, and community decision-making (Aneesh et al., 2024). For example, mosques in Malaysia, for instance, implement mechanisms like zakat (alms) and waqf (endowments) to support the economic well-being of the Muslim community (Muhammad Najib Abd Wakil et al., 2024). The strategic orientation of mosque management committees can significantly enhance the economic performance and social welfare of the community (Omar et al., 2019). By leveraging their historical significance and adapting to contemporary needs, mosques can continue to be central to the development and cohesion of Muslim communities worldwide. The obligation of congregational prayer in mosques offers individuals the opportunity to improve the quality of their worship and attain greater reward (Headley, 2018). Regular participation in congregational prayers is associated with the cultivation of virtues and the aspiration for paradise, as emphasized in Islamic teachings (Halman, 2022). This is affirmed in the Qur'an:

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فِي بُيُوتٍ أَذِنَ ٱللَّهُ أَن تُرْفَعَ وَيُذْكَرَ فِيهَا ٱسْمُهُ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ فِيهَا بِٱلْغُدُوِّ وَٱلْآصَالِ ﴿٣٦﴾

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Meaning: "In houses (of worship) which Allah has commanded to be exalted and that His name be mentioned therein; in them He is glorified morning and evening." (Sūrat al-Nūr, 24:36)

Based on this verse, Allah commands the construction and veneration of mosques and their active enlivenment. The verse contains an injunction to populate and preserve the sanctity of mosques (Abdou Samadou et al., 2023).

In line with this, mosque enlivenment is not limited to ritual worship but encompasses all activities that benefit the Muslim community (Al-Krenawi, 2016). Mosques contribute to the cultural identity and heritage of Muslim communities. They often host cultural events and activities that foster a sense of community and belonging (Maatouk & Moscatelli, 2025). Such enlivenment requires the involvement of the surrounding community to strengthen the mosque's capacity (Booth & Mohammed, 2024). This is further supported that mosques bear a significant role and responsibility in shaping Islamic education and civilisational values (Adhani et al., 2024).

Positioning the mosque as a centre for guidance and counselling aligns with contemporary social realities (Al-Krenawi, 2016). Mosques serve as community learning centers, offering educational programs and library services to support community learning and foster the ummah (Tekin, 2024). Today's society faces multiple pressures and troubling social issues family disharmony, internet addiction, divorce, underage sex, illicit mixing between men and women, abuse, and the neglect of rights(Shek et al., 2015) (Kumar & Dhakar, 2025). Family disharmony often leads to divorce, which is influenced by factors such as lack of financial support, unequal gender roles, and poor communication within the household(Bukido et al., 2025) (Bukido et al., 2025). Data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2022) show a marked rise in divorce cases, from 43,936 in 2021 to 62,890 in 2022. Moreover, moral formation and religious education must be prioritised by all stakeholders (Eaude, 2023).

Consequently, mosques play an important role in addressing these issues by providing counselling services or appointing licensed counsellors (Ali & Milstein, 2012). Education for adolescents should begin from birth and continue through childhood, not focusing solely on academics(Whitaker et al., 2023). The mosque functions as a venue for informal education for children (Sözeri et al., 2022). Mosques play a significant role in providing informal education to children, serving as multifunctional spaces that extend beyond their primary religious functions (ERDOĞAN, 2020). This is supported by Mariam Abd Majid and Nurulbahiah Awang, who advocate for mosque programmes that are realistic and relevant to community needs (Mariam Abd Majid & Nurulbahiah Awang, 2021). However, challenges remain, including instances where children are barred from entering mosques on the grounds that they disturb congregational serenity (Rochanah, 2023). Mosques can provide strong emotional and social support for families, including those with children, by creating inclusive and welcoming environments (Shikarpurya & Singh, 2021). This can be achieved through structured support systems and respite care, which can help parents feel more comfortable bringing their children to the mosque (Zakaria et al., 2024). Such practices limit children's familiarity with the mosque environment and religious activities. More concerning are cases where mosque authorities admonish children harshly, assuming they will disrupt worshippers, thereby discouraging parents from bringing children to the mosque (Muhammad Faisal Ashaari & Firdaus Mokhtar, 2018). A lack of understanding of children's natural behaviour and of the needs of families with young children can make them feel uncomfortable and unwelcome (Aniza Abu Bakar et al., 2020). This situation adversely affects women particularly mothers by diminishing the warmth and quality of their worship experience (Shikarpurya & Singh, 2021). Implementing effective facility management strategies can ensure that the mosque's physical environment and services meet the needs of all congregants, including children. This includes maintaining cleanliness, appropriate design, and adequate facilities to create a pleasant and welcoming environment (Muin et al., 2024).

Contributing factors include mosque designs that are not family- or child-friendly(Aniza Abu Bakar et al., 2019). Consistently, Aniza Abu Bakar and Zur Atiqa Zulkifely report that mosque administrators' negative perceptions of children stem from design, management, and social factors that are not child friendly(Aniza Abu Bakar & Zur Atiqa Zulkifely, 2020). In fact, mosques have a crucial role in children's educational development by diversifying activities that nurture them into righteous Muslims(Sözeri & Altinyelken, 2019). Accordingly, mosques must provide spaces and designs that are welcoming and safe for children, particularly to enliven the month of Ramadan (Zara Mohammed, 2023). Masjid Al-Muktafi Billah Shah (MAMBS) has implemented a dedicated space for children so that parents can perform their prayers properly. Located in Kuala Terengganu, MAMBS has organised the Qismul Aulad programme since around 2016 as part of a more inclusive approach to mosque enlivenment. The Qismul Aulad (Children's Activity Centre) service conceived as a "kids-friendly" initiative provides comfort for congregants, including parents, to perform Tarawih in a calm and focused environment without disruptive noise in the main prayer hall. Conducted in a hall separate from the prayer area, the programme runs from 8:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. during Ramadan. It is offered free of charge and has received encouraging participation. Grounded in the child-friendly mosque concept, the programme not only allows

children to be present within the mosque environment but also organises age-appropriate activities. The dedicated space and engaging activities position the mosque as an early educational arena where children are introduced to Islamic values. Activities include colouring, drawing, congregational prayer, *tadarus*, *iqra'*, educational games, and storytelling. The primary objective is to shape children's character and instil love for the mosque from a young age. The programme's effectiveness has prompted mosque institutions to take proactive steps toward creating more conducive and child-friendly environments.

METODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach with data collected through interviews, observation, and document analysis. Qualitative research is an interpretative methodology aimed at gaining in-depth insights into social phenomena through the subjective experiences of participants. This approach is particularly useful for exploring processes and meanings rather than quantifying data (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013) (Feuer & Makarov, 2025). Interviews were conducted with mosque administrators, programme facilitators, parents, and participants to obtain in-depth perspectives on programme implementation and impact. Interviews allow participants to share their stories in their own words, providing rich, context-bound insights (Nathan et al., 2019). They are effective in understanding participants' attitudes, beliefs, and experiences (Mitchell, 2011). In addition, structured observational documentation of programme activities was undertaken to capture an authentic account of activity flow and participant interactions. Provides direct access to social phenomena, allowing researchers to see culture in action and understand complex social processes(Salmon, 2015) (Court et al., 2017). Document analysis was also performed on programme reports and participant feedback to assess effectiveness and challenges encountered. This is useful for understanding historical and contextual factors and can be conducted without the need for fieldwork(Bowen, 2009). The collected data were analysed thematically to identify patterns, key issues, and the programme's implications for shaping a more child-friendly mosque environment.

RESULT

Educational and Worship Activities: Congregational Prayer, Children's Tadarus of the Qur'an and Iqra'

Congregational prayer refers to performing ṣalāh collectively with an imam leading and followers (maʾmūm) behind him(Wahbah al-Zuhayli, 2008). The greater the number of congregants, the greater the reward. The prescription of congregational prayer is established in the Qur'an, ḥadīth, and ijmāʿ (consensus). As stated in the Qur'an:

وَإِذَا كُنتَ فِيهِمْ فَأَقَمْتَ لَهُمُ ٱلصَّلَوٰة

"And when you (O Muhammad) are among them and lead them in prayer…" (Surah al-Baqarah: 20)

The Qismul Aulad programme also trains children to perform the ʿIshāʾ and *Tarāwīḥ* prayers in congregation. This approach aligns with broader educational practices within Islamic communities that emphasize early exposure to religious practices and environments. Early exposure of children to the masjid is crucial for nurturing a love for the masjid, which is seen as a process towards loving the creator, strengthening their faith, and improving their akhlaq (behavior)(Aniza Abu Bakar et al., 2019)**.** This nurtures in children an appreciation for the centrality of prayer in a Muslim's life and cultivates discipline, etiquette, and devotion in worship. Studies indicate that children's participation in congregational prayers can enhance self-leadership and foster more virtuous character (Haslina Hamzah, Siti Haswa Niza Abdullah, 2024).

Figure 1: Congregational ʿIshāʾ and Tarāwīḥ prayers

In addition, the programme's educational activities include "Children's Tadarus" of the Qur'an and Iqra'. Children's tadarus involves reading, understanding, and reflecting upon Qur'anic verses together. Qur'anic education is foundational in Islamic teaching, with early childhood being the optimal time for such education. This early instruction is believed to instill belief in Islam deeply in the hearts of children (ÖNDER, 2023). The principle that knowledge acquired at a young age is enduring underscores the importance of starting religious education early. Iqra' is a foundational method for Qur'an reading that helps children recognise Arabic letters and develop reading skills. This activity improves Qur'an reading fluency and nurtures love for the Word of God. Research shows that children engaged in group tadarus tend to improve their reading proficiency more effectively (H. Zamakhsyari, 2016). Mohd Shukri Mohd Senin and Mohd Ali Muhammad Don, further demonstrate that Qur'an reading practice enhances learning focus (Mohd Shukri Mohd Senin, Mohd Ali Muhammad Don, 2024).

Figure 2: Children's Tadarus (Qur'an and Iqra')

Creativity Activities: Colouring, Drawing, Handicrafts, Origami

Creative activities are an effective approach to stimulating children's imagination and self-expression. Engaging in such activities allows children to explore their creativity, develop critical thinking skills, and express themselves in unique ways (Robson & Rowe, 2012). Through enjoyable play-based tasks, children explore their surroundings, enrich their knowledge, and develop new skills (Amizah & Andin, 2024). Activities such as colouring, drawing, handicrafts, and origami not only strengthen fine motor skills but also support cognitive and

emotional development in an enjoyable, meaningful environment (Bunn, 2022). These activities are effective in developing fine motor skills, which are crucial for tasks requiring precision and coordination, such as writing (Kurniawan et al., 2019). Colouring improves hand-eye coordination and creativity drawing encourages critical thinking and visual communication handicrafts build manual skills and creative problem-solving and origami reinforces geometric understanding and concentration (Song et al., 2020). Collectively, these activities benefit cognitive and motor development while fostering perseverance and patience among children.
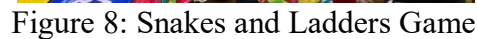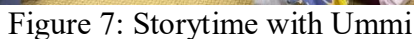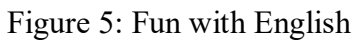

Figure 3: Drawing Activity

Figure 4: Origami Activity

Intellectual Activities: Fun with English, Bijak Jawi, Storytime with Ummi

The programme's intellectual tracks are designed to promote children's cognitive and language development. "Fun with English" is an interactive learning session that helps children grasp foundational English through games and songs. Interactive applications and games are effective tools for enhancing early language development (Shirindzi & Sikhwari, 2025). By Zulfikri & Abdul Halim, confirm that interactive learning is a productive approach that positively affects student engagement and English language learning (Zulfikri & Abdul Halim, 2022). Next activities are "Bijak Jawi" focuses on introducing and consolidating the Jawi script to foster fluency in reading and writing this Islamic heritage script. Jawi, derived from the Arabic script, has been a significant part of Malay culture and Islamic heritage since at least the 14th century (Hijjas, 2022). By addressing these aspects, the "Bijak Jawi" initiative can effectively introduce and consolidate the Jawi script, ensuring its continued relevance and fluency among learners. Next activities "Storytime with Ummi" serves as a key medium for cultivating imagination and morals through instructive tales. Interactive story reading is a well-researched method that significantly boosts language learning in children (Cahill & Ingram, 2022). This approach helps children improve their analytical thinking, self-expression, problem-solving skills, and inquiry abilities (Er & Biçakçi, 2020). This engagement encourages children to think critically and express their thoughts, thereby improving their language skills. Through these activities, children acquire new knowledge while sharpening communication and critical-thinking skills.

Additionally, games such as the Ramadan-themed Snakes and Ladders (Dam Ular Ramadan) enhance strategic thinking and patience, and cooperative play. A variant of the Snakes and Ladders game allows players to choose whether to climb a ladder or not, introducing strategic decision-making into the gameplay (Wu, 2020). This modification encourages players to think ahead and consider the potential outcomes of their choices, thereby enhancing their strategic thinking skills (Pedersen et al., 2022). Ramadan puzzles further stimulate the mind with questions related to the month, fasting, and Islamic history. These interactive and relaxed activities not only entertain but also act as pedagogical tools that strengthen children's understanding of Islamic teachings in a pleasant, engaging atmosphere ensuring they enjoy positive experiences at the mosque.

Figure 5: Fun with English

Figure 6: Bijak Jawi Activity

Figure 7: Storytime with Ummi

Figure 8: Snakes and Ladders Game

DISCUSSION

The Ramadan *Qismul Aulad* program at Masjid Al-Muktafi Billah Shah (MAMBS) was conceived as a child-friendly initiative that allows parents to perform *Tarawih* with focus while their children engage in guided worship, learning, and play. Grounded in local wisdom mutual care, cooperation, and small acts of charity the program treats the mosque as a living ecosystem where spiritual formation, community bonding, and early religious literacy grow together (ZHUZEY et al., 2020). In practice, *Qismul Aulad* runs in parallel with evening prayers and offers age-appropriate experiences that calm, occupy, and educate children without compromising the sanctity of worship spaces. Its learning design blends three strands that reinforce one another. First, an educational-worship strand introduces children to congregational ʿIshāʾ and selected rakaʿāt of *Tarawih*, coaching adab, simple mosque etiquette, and confidence in standing, bowing, and listening with attention. The Qismul Aulad programme's focus on congregational prayers for children is supported by broader Islamic educational practices that emphasize early religious exposure, innovative teaching methods, and holistic moral education. These practices collectively aim to instill discipline, etiquette, and devotion in worship, while also respecting the individuality and autonomy of children (Pranoto et al., 2025).

Children also join small group *tadarus* and Iqraʾ, which strengthens recognition of Arabic letters, nurtures Qurʾan fluency, and models reverence for revelation before and after prayers. These practices not only enhance their linguistic skills but also foster a deep spiritual connection to the Qurʾan, contributing to their overall religious education and development (Beyhom, 2024). Second, a creativity strand colouring, drawing, handicraft, and origami channels energy into mindful making, building fine-motor control, visual communication, and perseverance through Ramadan-themed prompts such as moon phases, masjid silhouettes, and acts of kindness (Miladi et al., 2024). Third, an intellectual-language strand uses playful micro-tasks, songs, and games to build basic English and Jawi confidence, and "Storytime with Ummi" cultivates imagination and moral reasoning through short, instructive narratives. "Storytime with Ummi" likely employs a combination of these interactive activities to enhance language acquisition. By integrating extratextual talk, dialogic reading, role-playing, digital tools, educational robots, sensory-enhanced techniques, and structured reading sessions, the program can create an engaging and educational environment that supports children's language development effectively (Read et al., 2025). The Snakes and Ladders game can be a powerful tool to enhance strategic thinking, patience, and cooperative play. By incorporating elements that require strategic decision-making and fostering a cooperative

environment, the game can provide both educational and social benefits, aligning well with the values and practices of Ramadan (Marcos & López-García, 2024).

Operationally, Qismul Aulad preserves prayer focus through deliberate spatial planning and safeguarding. However, because the activity area is located at some distance from the women's prayer hall, a women-friendly support zone is needed closer to the prayer space ideally including a supervised children's room (and nursing corner) to enable mothers to pray with minimal disruption while maintaining safe, well-lit circulation, controlled access, and clear supervisory sightlines. Simple audio-visual cues help facilitators track the *Tarawih* cycle without disturbing worshippers, and female-led teams maintain sign-in sheets, pickup protocols, and calm corners for children who need sensory breaks. Short blocks of activity alternate with brief movement or quiet time to avoid overstimulation, and basic inclusion measures accommodate younger participants and varied needs. The observed benefits span children, parents, and the wider congregation. Children develop stronger mosque identity, prayer etiquette, and Qurʾan fluency alongside prosocial behaviours such as sharing and turn-taking. Parents report better presence and *khushuʿ* during *Tarawih* and greater confidence in bringing children to the mosque.

Continuous improvement is built into the routine. Simple instruments attendance logs, brief feedback cards from parents and children, and facilitator reflections guide adjustments to session length, activity mix, and safeguarding procedures. Findings consistently show higher engagement when literacy or worship activities are interleaved with hands-on creativity, and when transitions are predictable and calm. Transparent lists of material needs invite the community to participate sustainably, and light-touch training equips volunteers with child-safety basics and inclusive pedagogy. Taken together, the MAMBS *Qismul Aulad* experience demonstrates that a mosque can remain serene for *Tarawih* while welcoming children as active learners and future congregants. By weaving together guided worship, Qurʾan literacy, creative making, and bilingual micro-learning, within a safeguarding framework that respects prayer the program strengthens family ties to the mosque and seeds lifelong affection for worship, knowledge, and service. Extending these sessions beyond Ramadan on a monthly or term basis would consolidate gains, while the core model is readily adaptable for other mosques seeking inclusive, child-friendly arrangements during the holy month. The living ecosystem of a mosque is a dynamic and multifaceted environment that supports spiritual formation and community bonding through its religious, educational, social, economic, sustainable, cultural, and technological components. By addressing these diverse needs, mosques can effectively serve as centers of worship, learning, and community empowerment.

CONCLUSION

The Qismul Aulad programme at Masjid Al-Muktafi Billah Shah offers a scalable model for mosques especially during Ramadan to cultivate a child-friendly environment. To sustain impact beyond the holy month, mosques should institutionalize regular, year-round sessions led by qualified educators and anchored by strong community support. Crucially, women-friendly architectural provisions must enable mothers with infants, young children, or during pregnancy to participate fully in mosque life. This includes a supervised children's room adjacent (but acoustically buffered) to the women's prayer hall, a nursing and changing corner, stroller parking with barrier-free routes, and clear sightlines for safe supervision. Together, these programmatic and design measures ensure the mosque is not a barrier to women and children but a welcoming hub that nurtures character, strengthens attachment to worship, and instils Islamic values from an early age shaping the next generation that will build a virtuous, resilient civilisation.

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