

Implementation of the Asmaul Husana Song as a Mnemonic Strategy in Early Childhood Islamic Education Learning

Evie Destiana ^{1*}

Eko Raharjo ²

Udi Utomo ³

¹⁻³ Art Education, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia.

*email:

eviedestiana@students.unnes.ac.id

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the meaning, values, and lived experience of teachers and parents in using Asmaul Husna songs as a mnemonic strategy for memorizing the 99 Names of Allah at TK ABA I Candi Sidoarjo. Employing Moustakas's transcendental phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis with 7 participants (3 teachers, 4 parents). Analysis through epoché, horizontalization, clustering, and composite description yielded five major themes: (1) songs as carriers of living theological meaning; (2) psycho-musical effectiveness as a mnemonic tool; (3) embedded religious, social, and pedagogical values; (4) determinants of effective song quality; and (5) the dynamics of parental reinforcement at home. The findings propose a Psycho-Musical Mnemonic Framework for Islamic Early Childhood Education (PMMF-IECE) integrating song quality, teacher competence, children's psycho-musical engagement, and parental reinforcement as dynamically interacting components. This study enriches Islamic early childhood education literature with a phenomenological perspective that has been rarely examined.



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INTRODUCTION

The formation of religious identity in early childhood constitutes one of the most fundamental cornerstones of Islamic education. Early childhood is a critical period during which the brain develops rapidly and children possess an extraordinary capacity to absorb the values, knowledge, and beliefs that will shape their character throughout their lives (Bonita et al., 2022). In the context of Islamic education, the inculcation of aqidah (creed) values from an early age is regarded as a strategic step in shaping faithful and pious Muslim individuals (Ainnin & Ismail, 2024). One aspect of aqidah introduced as early as the kindergarten level is the recognition and memorization of Asmaul Husna, the 99 Names of Allah enshrined in the Qur'an, Surah Al-A'raf, verse 180. This verse explicitly commands Muslims to call upon Allah by His beautiful names, thereby rendering the memorization of Asmaul Husna not merely a cognitive activity, but an act of worship imbued with profound meaning.

Memorizing the 99 Names of Allah is not an easy task for children aged 4–6 years. The principal challenges lie in the Arabic linguistic origin of the names, their semantic abstractness, and their sheer number. Young children have not yet fully developed the working memory capacity required to process large amounts of verbal information sequentially (Nie et al., 2022). It is in this context that mnemonic strategies become critically important. A mnemonic strategy is a learning technique that exploits associations, patterns, or specific media to help individuals remember information more easily and durably. Among the various types of mnemonic strategies, music and song have long been recognized as among the most effective, particularly for early childhood learners (Kilag et al., 2023).

Prior research has consistently demonstrated that music possesses a unique capacity to support memory retention. The act of singing simultaneously activates neural networks linked to both episodic and semantic memory, generating stronger memory traces than ordinary verbal learning (Nie et al., 2022).

Several neurodevelopmental studies further indicate that children exposed to music from an early age show significant gains in cognitive domains such as attention, perception, and language ability (Frontiers in Education, 2024). In the context of Asmaul Husna memorization, the use of song has been shown to enhance children's emotional engagement, encourage active participation, and reinforce long-term memory of the names of Allah (Fitriani & Wahyuni, 2024). A study at RA Al Akbar Padang Sidempuan found that, following the implementation of a singing method, children's average ability to recite the names of Asmaul Husna increased significantly from 5.3 to 12.8 of the 20 target names, with a paired t-test significance value of 0.000 (Hasibuan et al., 2025).

A gap in the existing body of research on Asmaul Husna songs is that most studies focus on children's direct memorization outcomes, while overlooking the dimensions of meaning, value, and lived experience (lived experience) of the educational actors closest to the child, namely teachers and parents. The perspectives of teachers and parents are crucial because they are the ones who design, implement, and evaluate daily learning practices both at school and at home. An in-depth understanding of how teachers and parents construe the use of Asmaul Husna songs, what values they perceive to be embedded within them, and what challenges they encounter is essential information that has not been systematically explored in the existing literature (Zamzam et al., 2024).

This research gap motivates the present researcher to adopt a phenomenological approach as a methodological framework. Phenomenology enables the researcher to explore the essence of participants' lived experience in depth, moving beyond mere description of events toward an understanding of the meanings individuals construct within the context of their real lives (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Accordingly, a phenomenological study of the use of Asmaul Husna songs will produce not only a description of the learning practice but also reveal deeper constructions of meaning about why and how this song becomes a meaningful medium in Islamic early childhood education.

This study was conducted at TK ABA I Candi Sidoarjo, an Islamic kindergarten under the auspices of the Muhammadiyah organization that has integrated Asmaul Husna songs into its daily learning routine. The site was selected on the consideration that TK ABA I Candi Sidoarjo is one of the Islamic ECE institutions that has consistently and systematically implemented song-based Asmaul Husna memorization, thereby offering a rich and relevant context for phenomenological exploration. The integration of Asmaul Husna songs into the daily curriculum also aligns with the spirit of holistic Islamic education, which unifies cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects into a single meaningful and enjoyable learning experience for the child (Liriwati & Al-Shreifeen, 2024).

The study seeks to address three guiding research questions: (1) How do teachers and parents construe the use of Asmaul Husna songs in the memorization process of early childhood learners? (2) What psycho-musical values are embedded in the practice of using Asmaul Husna songs at TK ABA I Candi Sidoarjo? (3) What factors determine the quality and effectiveness of Asmaul Husna songs as a mnemonic strategy within Islamic early childhood education?

The study is expected to make a theoretical contribution in the form of a more comprehensive understanding of the psycho-musical dimensions of religious learning in early childhood, while enriching the literature on arts-based Islamic education. Practically, the findings are expected to serve as guidance for teachers in selecting and developing high-quality Asmaul Husna songs, for parents in supporting their children's memorization at home, and for policymakers in designing Islamic ECE curricula that integrate a psycho-musical approach more systematically and in standardized form.

Asmaul Husna literally means "the beautiful names" and refers to the 99 names and attributes of Allah SWT enshrined in the Qur'an, Surah Al-A'raf, verse 180: "To Allah belong the most beautiful names, so call upon Him by them." Within Islamic theology, the understanding and memorization of Asmaul Husna is not merely a cognitive exercise but a medium of spiritual communication between the servant and the Divine, for these names represent the attributes of unlimited divine perfection (Muntasir et al., 2019). Each name carries profound theological meaning, such as Ar-Rahman (The Most Compassionate), Al-Hakim (The All-Wise), and Al-Qadir (The All-Powerful)—names that together form a holistic understanding of the majesty of Allah.

Within the context of Islamic education in Indonesia, the introduction of Asmaul Husna to young children has become a component of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum embedded in national regulations on early childhood education standards. The inculcation of aqidah values, including the introduction of Allah's attributes through Asmaul Husna, is regarded as the foundation for shaping Muslim character from the golden age of childhood (Bautista et al., 2022). Zamzam et al. (2024) affirm that integrating Asmaul Husna into early childhood education aligns with the philosophical, theological, and

cultural context of Muslim communities, ensuring that children receive a holistic education encompassing spiritual and intellectual dimensions in balanced measure. However, as acknowledged by various researchers, the lack of pedagogical media and methods appropriate to children's cognitive and emotional developmental stages remains the principal obstacle to optimizing Asmaul Husna learning at the kindergarten level (Zamzam et al., 2024).

The mnemonic strategy refers to a technique or device designed to help individuals encode information into long-term memory so that it can be more easily remembered and retrieved when needed. Various types of mnemonic strategies are commonly used in learning, including acronyms, chunking, association (linking method), rhymes and jingles, and—most relevant for early childhood—mnemonics based on music and song (Retnowati & Noormawanti, 2022; Marcos et al., 2024). The basic principle of a mnemonic strategy is to create meaningful associations between new information and patterns or structures already familiar to the learner, so that the processes of encoding and retrieval from memory become more efficient (Marcos et al., 2024).

Children aged 4–6 years are in a cognitive developmental phase in which episodic and semantic memory begin to develop significantly, even though their working memory capacity remains limited (Nie et al., 2022). At this stage, the use of appropriate mnemonic strategies is crucial for helping children consolidate information from short-term to long-term memory. Research has shown that mnemonics based on song and rhythm offer a distinct advantage over ordinary verbal repetition: melody and rhythm create auditory patterns that function as powerful retrieval cues, so that when a child sings a song again, he or she automatically activates the sequence of words bound to that melodic pattern (Kilag et al., 2023). Marcos et al. (2024) report that mnemonic devices demonstrably enhance learners' engagement, creativity, and academic performance, while Casipit et al. (2024) found that the integration of song in learning significantly improves students' motivation and comprehension.

Music has long been recognized as one of the most natural and effective learning media for young children. Various neurodevelopmental studies show that children exposed to music from an early age display gains in cognitive domains such as attention, language perception, and memory (Thapa & Rodríguez-Quiles, 2024). Nie et al. (2022), in their longitudinal study of primary school-aged children, found that musical training significantly enhances auditory working memory capacity—the ability to retain and simultaneously process auditory information—an ability highly relevant to oral memorization tasks such as Asmaul Husna.

The quality of a children's song is a critical variable determining its effectiveness as a pedagogical medium. Research on children's songs in early childhood education emphasizes several quality criteria: (1) melodic simplicity with a not-too-wide melodic contour, (2) rhythm and tempo appropriate to the child's motor and cognitive capacities, (3) repetitive structure (repetition) that enables the child to internalize patterns without excessive cognitive load, and (4) age-appropriate lyrics in terms of both language and content (Thapa & Rodríguez-Quiles, 2024). In the context of Asmaul Husna songs, these criteria become more complex because the lyrics are drawn from Arabic—an unfamiliar language for Indonesian children—so the dimension of theologically accurate pronunciation must be considered alongside child-friendly musicality.

Music operates not only on the cognitive dimension but also on affective and social dimensions. Communal singing (communal singing) has been shown to foster a sense of togetherness, build social bonds among participants, and enhance children's intrinsic motivation to engage actively in learning (Jakubowski, et al., 2022). In the practice of Asmaul Husna learning at Islamic ECE institutions, communal singing functions not only as a memorization strategy but also as a community ritual that reinforces the collective religious identity of the learners.

The concept of the psycho-musical refers to the psychological dimensions activated through engagement with music, encompassing aspects of emotion, motivation, attention, and spiritual connection. In Islamic religious education, music—particularly in the form of songs containing religious content—possesses a unique potential to bridge children's cognitive and spiritual experiences simultaneously. Cho and O'Connor (2024) found that spiritual content that touches the emotional dimension demonstrably reinforces morality and fosters meaningful emotional engagement. Walter and Altorfer (2022) show that music plays a significant psychological role in facilitating religious experience, operating through the regulation of attention and the elicitation of emotional states conducive to spiritual contemplation.

In the specific context of Asmaul Husna learning in kindergarten, this psycho-musical dimension is realized through several mechanisms: the song's rhythm creates a relaxed yet focused condition optimal for learning, the repetitive melody builds auditory expectations that strengthen memory, while the collective

dimension of communal singing builds positive affect toward religious content from an early age. Fitriani and Wahyuni (2024) report that combining movement and song in Asmaul Husna learning not only enhances memorization ability but also actively engages children emotionally, supports motor development, and strengthens understanding of the meaning of Allah's names. This indicates that a psycho-musical approach can synergistically integrate children's cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions into a single, integrated learning experience.

A number of studies have examined the use of song and singing methods in the context of Asmaul Husna memorization. Hasibuan et al. (2022) reported the effectiveness of combining singing methods and movement in enhancing memorization of Asmaul Husna in kindergarten, with the finding that this multisensory approach significantly increased children's active participation and memorization retention. Retnowati et al. (2022) likewise confirm that the use of movement and song in young children's Asmaul Husna memorization yields positive effects on motivation and the ability to remember the names of Allah. From the perspective of learning media, Zamzam et al. (2024), through their systematic review, conclude that diverse media—including songs, interactive applications, and picture books—demonstrably render abstract religious concepts more accessible and engaging for young children.

This review of the existing literature reveals a significant gap: most studies adopt descriptive-quantitative or quasi-experimental designs focused on measuring children's direct memorization outcomes, without delving deeply into the dimensions of meaning and lived experience of the most influential educational actors in the practice. A phenomenological perspective that positions the subjective experiences of teachers and parents as the primary object of inquiry remains very rarely found in the literature on Asmaul Husna learning. The meaning constructions developed by teachers and parents regarding the use of Asmaul Husna songs will substantially determine the quality, consistency, and sustainability of implementation in both classroom and home settings. This gap constitutes the principal justification for the present phenomenological study, which seeks to fill the void in the literature by presenting rich and in-depth narratives of lived experience from the perspectives of teachers and parents at TK ABA I Candi Sidoarjo.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a transcendental phenomenological design as developed by Moustakas (1994). This approach was selected for its alignment with the study's aims—namely, to explore and describe the essence of the lived experience (lived experience) of teachers and parents in using Asmaul Husna songs as a memorization strategy at TK ABA I Candi Sidoarjo. Transcendental phenomenology, rooted in the philosophical tradition of Husserl, positions consciousness and subjective meaning as the central object of inquiry and requires the researcher to suspend pre-research assumptions through the process of epoché or bracketing (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). In contrast to hermeneutic phenomenology, which is more interpretive, the transcendental approach used in this study focuses on describing participants' experience as it is, so that the resulting meaning constructions more faithfully reflect the authentic perspectives of the research subjects (Moustakas, 1994).

A phenomenological approach was chosen on the consideration that the research questions cannot be adequately addressed through quantitative methods. Questions of "how" and "what does it mean" concerning an experience demand an approach capable of capturing the nuance, context, and depth of meaning that can only be revealed through in-depth qualitative exploration (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the context of Islamic education research in Indonesia, phenomenological inquiry has also proven effective for uncovering the rich dimensions of value and experience of educational actors, as demonstrated by Suyatno et al. (2022) in their study of progressive Islamic education at Muhammadiyah schools using semi-structured interviews with an interpretive phenomenological approach.

The study was conducted at TK ABA I Candi Sidoarjo, an Islamic kindergarten under the auspices of the Muhammadiyah organization in Sidoarjo Regency, East Java. The site was selected purposively, on the consideration that TK ABA I Candi Sidoarjo has consistently integrated Asmaul Husna songs into its daily learning program for more than five years, giving the teachers and parents at this institution rich and relevant experiences to explore.

Participants were selected using the technique of purposive sampling, a sampling strategy based on the researcher's judgment to ensure that each participant possesses direct and in-depth experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Memon et al., 2025). Inclusion criteria comprised: (1) for the teacher group, active educators at TK ABA I Candi Sidoarjo with at least two years of teaching experience who

actively use Asmaul Husna songs in their teaching; (2) for the parent group, parents or guardians of children currently or formerly enrolled at TK ABA I Candi Sidoarjo who are aware of the Asmaul Husna song learning practice at the school. On the basis of these criteria, the study involved 3 teachers and 4 parents as participants, for a total of 7 informants. This number aligns with the general guidance in qualitative phenomenological research recommending 5–25 participants to achieve adequate data saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

Data were collected through three complementary methods designed to ensure depth and completeness of information—in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth semi-structured interviews (in-depth semi-structured interviews) served as the principal method of data collection. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their capacity to give the researcher flexibility to probe themes that arise spontaneously while maintaining focus on the predetermined research questions (Ruslin et al., 2022). Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, was recorded with participant consent, and was subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. The interview guide was developed on the basis of the three research questions and underwent pilot testing with two initial informants before being fully deployed.

Participant observation was conducted across eight Asmaul Husna song learning sessions in the classroom. The aim of observation was to obtain contextual data on how the practice of using Asmaul Husna songs actually unfolds in the classroom, which could then be confirmed and deepened through interviews. Document analysis was applied to daily lesson plans (RPPH), the Asmaul Husna song lyric texts used, and the school's religious program documents, in order to provide institutional context that strengthens the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Data analysis followed Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological procedure, which consists of four sequential stages. The first stage is epoché (bracketing), in which the researcher consciously identifies and suspends her personal judgments and assumptions about the topic in order to approach the data freshly and openly. The second stage is horizontalization, in which each meaningful statement (significant statements) in the interview transcripts relevant to participants' experience of the Asmaul Husna song is identified, with each statement treated as having equal weight. The third stage is clustering, in which overlapping or related meaningful statements are grouped into thematic clusters that reflect the core aspects of the experience (invariant constituents). The fourth stage is the construction of textural descriptions (describing what participants experienced), structural descriptions (describing how the experience occurred), and ultimately a composite description synthesizing the essence of the experience as a whole (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022).

Data trustworthiness was secured through four strategies recommended in qualitative research (Ahmed, 2024): (1) credibility, achieved through member checking, in which analytic findings were confirmed back to participants, and through triangulation of data sources across interviews, observation, and documents; (2) transferability, achieved through thick description describing the research context in detail so that readers may judge the relevance of the findings to other contexts; (3) dependability, achieved through the maintenance of an audit trail that systematically documents all methodological decisions; and (4) confirmability, achieved through reflexivity, in which the researcher documented her positionality in a reflexive journal throughout the research process.

All research procedures adhered to the prevailing principles of research ethics, encompassing transparency of the study's purpose, guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity of participant identities, and the voluntary obtaining of consent through signed informed consent forms prior to data collection (Alhabsi, 2024). Participants were granted full freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The phenomenological analysis of in-depth interview data, classroom observations, and learning documents yielded five interrelated major themes. These five themes represent the essence of the lived experience of teachers and parents at TK ABA I Candi Sidoarjo in using Asmaul Husna songs as a mnemonic strategy. Each theme is presented with a rich textural description, supported by representative quotations from participants and contextualized within the relevant literature.

The first theme to emerge from the horizontalization analysis is the experience of teachers and parents construing Asmaul Husna songs not merely as a medium of memorization but as carriers of theological meaning that is alive and tangible for the child. The teachers recounted that when the children sing the

names of Allah, something occurs that transcends mere verbal repetition, a process of meaning-making takes place naturally through pitch and rhythm.

A senior teacher with eight years of teaching experience remarked: "When the children are asked to repeat the names of Allah without song, they become bored quickly and do not grasp their meaning. But once there is a melody, they seem to feel something – their faces change; there is a calm in them." Similar expressions were voiced by other teachers, who emphasized that song helps the child build an emotional connection with the names of Allah rather than simply reciting a string of foreign words. This is consistent with Zamzam et al. (2024), who affirm that the principal aim of Asmaul Husna learning for young children is to cultivate belief (*iman*) through holistic introduction to the names and attributes of Allah, rather than mere verbal memorization.

From the parents' perspective, the meaning of Asmaul Husna songs is understood in a broader context as a long-term spiritual investment. A mother of a group B child stated: "I am so glad that when my child comes home from school, she immediately sings Asmaul Husna while playing. It means she is not only memorizing them, but already feels them to be part of her life." This construction of meaning reflects the understanding that Asmaul Husna songs function as a bridge between the world of school and the everyday world of the child, so that the theological experience is not estranged from real lived experience.

The second theme centers on the experience of teachers and parents in observing and perceiving how the psycho-musical dimension of Asmaul Husna songs concretely supports children's memorization ability. The teachers consistently reported that the song's rhythm and melody serve as an auditory anchor that helps children encode and retrieve the names of Allah more easily than conventional verbal repetition.

A teacher of class B1 described this mechanism vividly: "Once the children have memorized the melody, the names of Allah are carried along with it. I often see them forget one name, but as soon as they hum the melody, they remember it again instantly. That does not happen with ordinary repetition." From a neurocognitive standpoint, this phenomenon can be explained through the mechanism of the auditory retrieval cue, in which melody functions as a memory trigger that activates the corresponding neural networks more efficiently (Nie et al., 2022). This finding is also consistent with the report of Fitriani and Wahyuni (2024) that combining movement and song in Asmaul Husna learning actively engages children emotionally while enhancing memorization retention.

The emotional dimension of this psycho-musical effectiveness is also strongly evident in participants' narratives. Teachers reported that children display authentic expressions of joy during Asmaul Husna singing sessions – in contrast to other memorization activities that tend to be tense. One teacher observed: "When we sing Asmaul Husna, the atmosphere of the class changes. Children who normally have difficulty focusing suddenly join in and memorize. Music is like opening a locked door." This positive, anxiety-free emotional state aligns with Kilag et al.'s (2023) findings on how music creates an affective state conducive to cognitive processes, including memory encoding and retrieval.

Data analysis revealed that teachers and parents perceive the practice of singing Asmaul Husna as a value-laden practice that transcends its instrumental pedagogical function. At least three categories of value were articulated consistently by the participants: religious-spiritual, social-communal, and pedagogical.

Religious-spiritual value was expressed by the teachers as the core of the entire practice. A teacher with a background in Islamic religious education explained: "Every name of Allah that is sung is, in reality, an act of *dhikr*. The children are engaged in remembrance of Allah without realizing it. This is not just a lesson; this is worship wrapped in something joyful." This view reflects the understanding that singing Asmaul Husna is a manifestation of the command in Qur'an Surah Al-A'raf 7:180 to call upon Allah by His beautiful names, so that this activity possesses an authentic worship dimension. Eade (2024) reminds us that repeated ritual activities play an important role in fostering children's spiritual development, and the daily practice of singing

Asmaul Husna at TK ABA I Candi Sidoarjo is a concrete illustration of this principle. Social-communal value emerged in narratives about the experience of communal singing (communal singing) in the classroom. The teachers identified that, in singing together, children learn to harmonize their voices, follow a collective rhythm, and feel themselves part of a larger community. One teacher recounted: "There is a child who is normally quiet, but when we sing Asmaul Husna she joins in with enthusiasm. Singing together unites them." From the parents' perspective, this social value is extended into the family context: several parents reported that their children invited the entire family to sing together at home, creating religious moments that strengthen family bonds.

Pedagogical value is understood by the teachers as the methodological advantage distinguishing Asmaul Husna songs from conventional teaching methods. As stated by one head of a learning group: "With

song, the child learns without feeling that they are learning. There is no pressure, no tears. That is an extraordinary value for their age." This view aligns with the principle of joyful learning in early childhood education, which emphasizes that effective learning is enjoyable and stress-free.



Figure 1. Singing the Asmaul Husana song during circle time activities in class A

The fourth theme uncovers the in-depth understanding of teachers and parents regarding the factors that render an Asmaul Husana song effective as a mnemonic tool. Four principal factors were identified: melodic simplicity, tempo appropriateness, theological accuracy of content, and the teacher's competence in leading the singing.

Melodic simplicity and repetitive structure were cited by all teachers as the most determinant factors. The teachers consistently distinguished between "successful" and "ineffective" Asmaul Husana songs on the basis of melodic simplicity. One teacher explained: "If the melody is too complex, the children become preoccupied with following the tune and forget the content of the names. A good one has a short, repetitive melody where the names of Allah are clearly heard." This observation is supported by the children's music education literature, which emphasizes the importance of a not-too-wide melodic contour and a predictable phrase structure for children aged 4–6 years (Thapa & Rodríguez-Quiles, 2024).

Theological accuracy of Arabic pronunciation is a critical factor strongly emphasized by the teachers. Unlike most children's songs, Asmaul Husana songs must meet the standards of correct pronunciation (makhraj and tajwid), because they concern the names of Allah. A teacher who also serves as a Qur'an instructor remarked: "I have come across recordings of Asmaul Husana songs whose Arabic pronunciation is incorrect. That is dangerous. A child who memorizes incorrectly is in fact much harder to correct." This awareness indicates that the quality of Asmaul Husana songs is judged not only on musical grounds but also on theological grounds that cannot be compromised. Hayya et al. (2024), in their study of the application of singing methods for Asmaul Husana memorization, likewise identify pronunciation accuracy as an absolute requirement for song selection in Islamic schools.

The teacher's vocal and pedagogical competence as song leader (song leader) was identified as a fourth highly influential factor. Several parents explicitly linked their children's enthusiasm for singing Asmaul Husana to the manner in which the teacher delivers the song in the classroom. One father stated: "My child tells me that her teacher sings with great spirit and expressiveness. That is why my child also becomes enthusiastic. If the teacher is flat, the children will certainly not be interested either." This underscores that the effectiveness of Asmaul Husana songs as a mnemonic strategy is determined not only by the quality of the song itself but also by the teacher's ability to bring the song to life in the classroom—a pedagogical competence referred to as song leading in the music education literature (Hürlimann & Savona, 2022).

The fifth theme uncovers the complexity of the parental role in supporting—or hindering—the success of a song-based Asmaul Husana memorization strategy. The data show significant variation in levels of parental involvement, which form three principal patterns: parents as active reinforcement; parents as passive supporters; and parents who confront structural barriers.

Active reinforcement parents are those who consciously and systematically continue the practice of singing Asmaul Husana at home. One mother recounted: "Every dinner we sing Asmaul Husana together. My child has already memorized more than 50 names. I think this is the best investment I can give her." This pattern reflects parents' understanding of the importance of school-home synergy in young children's

religious education. Alfiyanto et al. (2024) affirm that active parental involvement in children's Islamic education—including reinforcement at home—contributes significantly to the formation of strong character and religious identity.

Passive supporters are parents who are positively disposed toward the practice but do not actively facilitate it at home. The reasons offered varied, ranging from not knowing how to continue the learning to limitations of time due to the demands of work. One parent admitted: "I am supportive, but honestly, I do not know the song. So I only listen to my child sing; I do not join in."

Structural barriers facing parents in supporting Asmaul Husna memorization at home comprise three dominant factors identified in the interviews: (1) parents' limited knowledge of correct Arabic pronunciation, (2) digital screen distractions (screen time) that divert children's attention from religious activities, and (3) misalignment between the song version taught at school and versions available on digital platforms. Regarding this technological challenge, Assyfa Journal (Pandia, 2023) notes that social media and digital technology are often used more for entertainment than for religious education, becoming a significant hindrance in the transmission of Islamic values within the family. The teachers at TK ABA I Candi Sidoarjo have confirmed this challenge and sought to address it by providing audio recordings of the Asmaul Husna song used at school to parents via the class WhatsApp group, as a bridge between school learning and home reinforcement.

The five themes above form a coherent phenomenological portrait: the use of Asmaul Husna songs at TK ABA I Candi Sidoarjo is a practice that is theologically meaningful, psycho-musically effective, value-laden, determined by the quality of the song and the teacher's competence, and sustained, sometimes also constrained by the dynamics of the parental role at home.

When the five themes described above are read horizontally and dialogically, they reveal an integrative pattern that constitutes the core finding of this study: the use of Asmaul Husna songs at TK ABA I Candi Sidoarjo operates simultaneously on three dimensions that the Western literature has tended to treat separately—the cognitive (mnemonic), the affective (emotional and motivational), and the spiritual (theological contemplation). It is the convergence of these three dimensions that constitutes the principal distinction of the learning practice at this institution and, we argue, at other Islamic ECE institutions with similar ritual structures. This convergence does not occur by accident, but is formed by the deliberate interaction of the song's musical design, the teacher's pedagogical intentionality, and the child's psychological openness to repeated ritual experience.



Figure 2. Singing the Asmaul Husna song during circle time activities in class B

On the cognitive dimension, teachers' narratives about melody as an "anchor" for memorization and about children "humming and immediately remembering" confirm the auditory retrieval cue mechanism described by Nie et al. (2022), in which musical training consistently enhances the auditory working memory capacity of school-aged children. Our findings, however, go beyond such confirmation: the teachers not only use melody as an external tool but construe melody as something that "opens a locked door"—a metaphor implying that melody does not merely facilitate the encoding of information, but also activates the child's psychological availability to receive religious content. This emic construal enriches the predominantly etic neurocognitive framework with a hermeneutic dimension distinctive to the context of Islamic education. In other words, song-based Asmaul Husna mnemonics is not merely a cognitive technique, but a meaningful practice that simultaneously disposes the child affectively to receive the names of Allah as something valuable.

On the affective dimension, the teachers' observation that "children who normally have difficulty focusing suddenly join in and memorize" shows that Asmaul Husna songs function as an affective equalizer of the classroom. This relatively uniform positive affective state, as Kilag et al. (2023) underscore, not only creates a pleasant learning climate but concretely reduces the extraneous cognitive load typical of formal memorization activities. As a consequence, the child's working memory resources can be allocated more efficiently to the encoding of the names of Allah. The affective dimension in this practice is therefore not a supplementary component that merely makes the child happy, but a functional prerequisite for the effectiveness of the cognitive dimension. This observation is also pertinent to the finding of Fitriani and Wahyuni (2024) that combining movement and song actively engages children emotionally while enhancing retention an affective-cognitive synergy difficult to achieve through conventional verbal repetition.

On the spiritual dimension, the theme of "the song as dhikr" voiced by one teacher elevates the learning activity into the domain of authentic worship, the child who sings is simultaneously engaged in dhikr, "without realizing it." EAUDE (2024) argues that children's spiritual development does not occur through the verbal transmission of doctrine but through repeated participation in meaningful ritual. The daily practice at TK ABA I Candi Sidoarjo concretely illustrates this principle while also addressing EAUDE's concern that modern educational institutions often fail to provide authentic ritual space for children's spiritual development. Furthermore, the integration of ritual into the daily learning routine produces what may be termed "internalized spirituality," distinct from mere performative memorization. The child who sings is not only reciting but also "feeling" and this is precisely the dimension that Pandia et al. (2023) identify as the key to the formation of religious ideals in childhood.

Drawing on cross-thematic synthesis and dialogue with the existing literature, this study proposes the Psycho-Musical Mnemonic Framework for Islamic Early Childhood Education (PMMF-IECE). The framework is constructed from four dynamically interacting components: (1) song quality, (2) the teacher's pedagogical competence, (3) children's psycho-musical engagement, and (4) parental reinforcement at home. These four components are not additive (a mere sum) but multiplicative – weakness in any one component substantially reduces overall effectiveness, just as the strength of any single component alone is insufficient to guarantee success.

The first component, song quality, comprises three sub-dimensions identified in Theme 4: melodic simplicity, theological accuracy of Arabic pronunciation, and tempo-rhythm appropriateness to the child's developmental capacity. These sub-dimensions align with the criteria for early childhood educational songs articulated by Thapa and Rodríguez-Quiles (2024), but with a critical addition that serves as a contextual marker: theological accuracy. Hayya et al. (2024) raised a similar issue in the primary school context; PMMF-IECE, however, formalizes theological accuracy as a non-negotiable structural component rather than a mere supplementary consideration. The implication is that any Asmaul Husna song selected for use in Islamic ECE must pass a double test: it must meet developmental-musicality criteria and meet the criteria of makhraj and tajwid accuracy.

The second component, the teacher's pedagogical competence, unites the song-leading capability conceptualized by Hürlimann and Savona (2022) with the dimension of the teacher's religious contemplation as a Muslim educator. The finding of a father who reported that his child was enthusiastic because the teacher "sings with great spirit and expressiveness" illustrates that this competence transcends technical musical skill; it is the pedagogical articulation of the teacher's religious contemplation. Within the PMMF-IECE framework, teacher competence is conceived as twofold: a musical axis (vocal control, ability to lead group singing, expressiveness) and a religious axis (contemplation of the meaning of Allah's names, ability to contextualize, embodied witness as a Muslim). These two axes mutually reinforce: high musical competence without religious contemplation yields a technically proficient but hollow performance, while deep religious contemplation without musical competence struggles to reach the child's heart through the medium of song.

The third component, children's psycho-musical engagement, encompasses emotional resonance, positive affective conditions, and the internalization of rhythmic patterns into long-term memory structures. In contrast to learning theories that position the child as a passive recipient of information, PMMF-IECE positions the child as an active psycho-musical agent. Bonita et al. (2022) emphasize that early childhood is the golden age of development, during which consistent multimodal stimulation can shape cognitive-spiritual structures that endure across the lifespan. This third component also serves as an indicator of implementation success: without authentic psycho-musical engagement on the child's part – marked by joyful expression, spontaneous participation outside class, and independent reproduction of the song – the other three components will produce only surface memorization that fades over time. Indicators of psycho-

musical engagement may therefore serve as a simple but valid formative assessment instrument for teachers in Islamic ECE.

The fourth component, parental reinforcement at home, as described in Theme 5, spans a spectrum from active reinforcement through passive support to confrontation with structural barriers. Alfiyanto et al. (2024) affirm that the sustainability of religious learning in early childhood cannot be guaranteed without ongoing school-family synergy. Within PMMF-IECE, this synergy is conceptualized as a constructive feedback loop: success at school triggers the child's enthusiasm at home, which parents then read as an indicator of the value of the practice, prompting more intensive reinforcement, which in turn strengthens the child's performance at school. Conversely, when this feedback loop is broken by structural barriers (limited Arabic knowledge, digital screen distractions, misaligned song versions), the effectiveness of the practice undergoes a gradual erosion often unnoticed by both school and family. The identification of this feedback loop is one of the important conceptual contributions of PMMF-IECE.

The findings of this study must be carefully positioned within the international discourse on music-based mnemonics and religious education. First, the PMMF-IECE framework offers a distinctive contribution by elevating the theological dimension to a structural component rather than a merely situational context. This is consistent with Liriwati and Al-Shreifeen's (2024) call for an integrative approach that incorporates Islamic values into the national curriculum, but PMMF-IECE goes further by demonstrating how such integration operates concretely at the level of micro-practices in the classroom. In other words, the integration of values is not an abstract ideological claim, but is visible in the choice of melody, the pronunciation of tajwid, and the manner in which the teacher delivers the song.

Second, the finding regarding the daily ritual of Asmaul Husna songs at circle time confirms – while also extending – EAUDE's (2024) argument concerning the importance of repeated rituals for children's spiritual development. What is important to note here is that the ritual identified in this study is not one imposed from above, but one construed emically by the teachers as “worship wrapped in something joyful.” This construal addresses the classic critique of religious education in formal institutions – that it tends to reduce spirituality to a series of tedious cognitive tasks estranged from the child's emotional life. Furthermore, this finding aligns with Zamzam et al.'s (2024) effort to position Asmaul Husna learning media as a means of holistic faith inculcation rather than merely as a tool for information mastery.

Third, in dialogue with Pandia et al. (2023) on the best approach to cultivating religious ideals in children, our findings indicate that a participatory music-spiritual approach is more effective than a top-down doctrinal transmission approach. The child who sings does not merely receive information about Allah, but performatively “constructs” a relationship with Him through his or her own voice and rhythm – a form of agentic religiosity that is rare in early childhood. This notion of agentic religiosity is consonant with Hasibuan et al.'s (2022) and Retnowati et al.'s (2022) prior documentation of the effectiveness of combined movement and song, but PMMF-IECE adds a conceptual layer: the child's psycho-musical agency is the point at which a pedagogical intervention becomes a religious experience owned by the child.

At the theoretical level, this study extends the literature on music-based mnemonics by adding a theological-Islamic dimension hitherto absent from mainstream music-mnemonic frameworks. Previous studies of song-based mnemonics (Nie et al., 2022; Thapa & Rodríguez-Quiles, 2024) have been predominantly conducted in secular and general educational contexts. PMMF-IECE offers a contextual framework that can be adapted not only for Asmaul Husna but also for other learning content within the Islamic tradition, such as the memorization of short Qur'anic surahs, daily prayers, short hadiths, and even the pillars of faith and Islam. Generalizing this framework requires adaptation to each content type, yet its four-component structure can be retained as the basic configuration.

At the practical level, the findings give rise to several concrete recommendations. For Islamic ECE teachers, the development of song-leading competence should become a systematic part of professional development, as documented by Hürlimann and Savona (2022) in the context of early childhood music education. For school principals, the integration of Asmaul Husna songs as a core component of the circle time routine should be formalized in curriculum documents – not merely left to individual teacher initiative – so that consistency is maintained across personnel changes. For parents, the provision of audio recordings via digital channels such as the class WhatsApp group (as initiated by the teachers of TK ABA I Candi Sidoarjo) has proven effective in bridging structural barriers such as limited Arabic pronunciation knowledge. For Islamic education policymakers in Indonesia, the study proposes the need for a national quality standard for religious songs in Islamic ECE that incorporates parameters of both musicality and theological accuracy, as a quality assurance mechanism that can be implemented by teacher associations,

religious organizations, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The need for such a standard also aligns with the call for integration of Islamic education into the national curriculum issued by Ainnin and Ismail (2024).

This study has a number of limitations that should be transparently acknowledged. First, the single-case design at a single institution limits the transferability of the findings to other contexts. Although thick description has been pursued to enable readers to assess the relevance of the findings to their own contexts, multi-site studies across different types of Islamic ECE institutions—other Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal, Raudhatul Athfal under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Integrated Islamic Kindergartens, and Nahdlatul Ulama ECEs—would strengthen the external validity of the PMMF-IECE framework. Second, the data in this study are self-reports from teachers and parents, without direct assessment of children’s memorization performance and meaning comprehension. Future research combining a phenomenological approach with longitudinal measurement of children’s memory development would provide stronger methodological triangulation. Third, the researcher’s positionality as a member of the Muslim community inherently limits the extent to which epoché/bracketing can be fully realized. This acknowledgement is not a weakness to be concealed but an integral part of phenomenological honesty (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Research conducted by scholars with different positionalities—for example, non-Muslim researchers or researchers from different Islamic traditions—would offer valuable complementary perspectives.

CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study uncovers the essence of the lived experience of teachers and parents at TK ABA I Candi Sidoarjo in using Asmaul Husna songs as a mnemonic strategy to help young children memorize the 99 Names of Allah. The five major themes identified—songs as carriers of living theological meaning, psycho-musical effectiveness as a mnemonic tool, the religious-social-pedagogical value content, the determinants of song quality, and the dynamics of the parental role—form a coherent and interrelated configuration. This configuration is not merely a description of practice but reveals the existential structure of Asmaul Husna learning as a convergence of cognition, emotion, and spirituality.

The principal contribution of this study is the formulation of the Psycho-Musical Mnemonic Framework for Islamic ECE (PMMF-IECE), which integrates song quality, the teacher’s pedagogical competence, children’s psycho-musical engagement, and parental reinforcement as four multiplicatively interacting components. The framework complements the Western literature on music-based mnemonics by adding the hitherto absent theological-Islamic dimension, while also extending the discussion of Eade (2024) and Pandia et al. (2023) on children’s spiritual growth by demonstrating the concrete mechanisms through which daily musical rituals facilitate religious internalization. Practically, the findings recommend the development of song-leading competence for teachers, the formalization of Asmaul Husna songs in curriculum documents, the provision of a digital school-home bridge, and the establishment of a national quality standard for religious songs in Islamic ECE. Multi-site, mixed-methods, and longitudinal follow-up research is strongly recommended to test the generalizability and robustness of this framework across institutional, regional, and religious-organizational contexts.

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