



Hexis of the Body and the Project of Active Piety in Islamic Early Childhood Education in Solo

Nur Tanfidiyah^{1✉}, Sangkot Sirait¹

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Abstract

Purpose – This study addresses the limited scholarly attention given to the role of the body in shaping religious piety within early childhood education, particularly in Islamic-based institutions. While most studies on piety emphasize cognitive, doctrinal, or socio-political dimensions, little is known about how bodily practices contribute to the internalization of religious values from an early age. Therefore, this research aims to reveal the significant role of the body in the project of piety within Islamic-based Early Childhood Education institutions, specifically Raudlatul Athfal (RA) Ummah 5. In teaching Islam, RA Ummah 5 emphasizes the importance of bodily discipline.

Design/methods/approach – This research employed an ethnographic approach. Data collection was conducted through participatory observation to capture children's activities during both classroom and outdoor learning processes. In addition, in-depth interviews were carried out with the RA principal and teachers, and relevant documents were gathered to strengthen the findings. Through the ethnographic approach, the study explored the specific cultural patterns practiced at RA Ummah 5. Data were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's framework, which includes data collection, display, reduction, and verification/conclusion drawing.

Findings – The piety project developed at RA Ummah 5 cannot be linked to the market or radicalism; instead, the institution defines its own model of piety based on foundational texts (the Qur'an and Hadith) interpreted textually. This aligns with the ideology rooted in the practices of the Prophet and the third generation of Muslims after him. Bodily practices reflect a discursive Islamic tradition connected to the past and validated by the continuity of practices transmitted across generations. In other words, RA Ummah 5 seeks to construct a future Islam that mirrors the past, distancing itself from modernity by reviving and sustaining traditional Islamic practices.

Research implications/limitations – This study is limited in scope as it focuses on a single institution with a small number of respondents. Future research should expand to include more diverse contexts and participants to provide deeper and more comprehensive insights. Researchers should also develop a broader understanding of the research setting to enhance data collection.

Practical implications – The findings provide new insights for educators, suggesting that *hexis* can serve as a means of shaping and controlling children's behavior to achieve specific educational visions.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating how RA Ummah 5 constructs its own version of piety—nurturing a *rabbani* generation that is spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually intelligent. The form of piety developed through bodily *hexis* is neither dictated by the market nor aligned with radicalism, as often emphasized in prior studies. Instead, this research highlights how bodily *hexis* is strategically employed as a medium for transmitting and internalizing Islamic values in early childhood education, in accordance with the ideology constructed by the school.

Keywords Bodily *hexis*, Project of piety, Early childhood education

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✉ Corresponding author:

Email Address: nur.tanfidiyah@staff.uinsaid.ac.id.

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1. Introduction

The body is not only understood as a biological entity but also as a medium for representing ideological and religious values. In Islamic-based Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions, the process of shaping children's religious identity takes place through the inculcation of values concretely manifested in bodily practices. Various activities—such as wearing Muslim uniforms, habituating respectful postures, practicing proper ways of walking and sitting, and reciting daily prayers—serve as examples of how piety is internalized through repeated physical actions (Garcia Yeste et al., 2020; Gottardello et al., 2025; Hew, 2024; Velthuis et al., 2022). In this context, RA Ummah, in teaching Islam to young children, has demonstrated a particular Islamic culture shaped by the ideology it upholds.

This study aims to examine how the project of piety is embodied through bodily discipline instilled in early childhood Islamic education, specifically at RA Ummah 5, by means of habituating daily movements, symbols, and bodily postures. According to Turner, the term piety originates from the Latin *pietas*, meaning reverence and obedience to God. Turner conceptualizes this as a form of respectful and obedient action, later described as the *habitus* of the pious (Isin & Nielsen, 2008). Meanwhile, Asef Bayat defines the active project of piety as the practice of religion not only on a personal level but also through efforts to preach or invite others to engage in the same practices (Bayat, 2005). Within this context, the study seeks to explore how institutions cultivate piety among young children by emphasizing the significant role of the body. Here, Islam is taught not only pedagogically but also through bodily discipline (Ismail et al., 2013).

In line with this, Starrett, adopting the view of Robert Ranulph Marett, argues that religion is something felt rather than thought. He notes that early or “primitive” forms of religion are grounded more in emotions and bodily actions than in cognition. For children in particular, abstract thinking about religion has not yet fully developed; their religious engagement is therefore centered on feelings, moods, and physical practices (Starrett, 2006). Consequently, religious introduction at the early childhood level is best approached through concrete means such as role modeling and habituation.

RA Ummah 5 is a school with a vision of nurturing pious and intelligent children by shaping a Rabbani generation that is spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually strong. Its mission is to position the school as a medium of religious education through the concept of Islamic pedagogy, grounded in the habituation of Islamic ways of life. RA Ummah 5 claims to follow the footsteps of the Salaf al-Salih. All learning materials and school activities are based directly on the Qur'an and Hadith in a textual manner.

This study is significant because it highlights the non-verbal dimensions of Islamic education, an aspect often overlooked in pedagogical studies of Islam that tend to focus more on technical or practical domains. It presents new insights into how the project of piety at RA Ummah 5 is instilled in early childhood, not merely in technical or methodological terms but also in political ones. The research contributes to the literature on Islamic education, the sociology of the body, and the formation of religious subjects within educational institutions. Moreover, the theme has broader relevance for understanding how social communities seek to shape Muslim generations from an early age on the basis of particular Islamic ideologies.

Conceptually, this paper is grounded in Bourdieu's theory of bodily hexis, which views the body not merely as an instrument of command but as a repository and practitioner of social structures through gestures, styles, and dispositions that may appear trivial yet are laden with ideological meaning (Bourdieu & Bourdieu, 2006). Gregory Starrett further develops this concept of the body in the context of Islamic education in Egypt through his idea of *the hexis of interpretation: Islam and the body in the Egyptian Popular School*, which illustrates how the interpretation of Islam is instilled through highly structured bodily discipline in schools. Starrett emphasizes that interpretations of Islamic teachings cannot be separated from forms of bodily control, wherein children's bodies become sites for the institutionalized production of religious meaning (Starrett, 1995). Starrett's notion of hexis is thus highly relevant for understanding bodily practices at RA Ummah 5.

Previous research conducted by Mahmood has shown that piety is not connected to the market but is instead grounded in Islamic values. The most closely related studies can be found in the works of Karen Bryner and Lies Marcoes, both of whom examined the concept of piety in educational institutions (Mahmood, 2012). Karen Bryner explored how piety was applied in two educational institutions, namely Al Azhar Elementary School and Lukmanul Hakim, through the concept of integrated schooling. These schools emerged as an expression of middle-class Muslim aspirations, where piety was closely tied to the market (Bryner, 2013). Meanwhile, Lies Marcoes highlighted the concept of piety in ECE, linking it to radicalism and pointing to the characteristics of certain Islamic movements. The form of piety observed in this context was connected to the market as well as the state, particularly through the use of the BCCT (Beyond Center and Circle Time) curriculum model (Lindsey et al., 2023).

Indonesian scholars such as Rinaldo (2013) and Fadil (2009) have described how religious sensibilities are instilled through rituals and bodily habituation, including within educational contexts. This study seeks to reveal a different project of piety carried out by RA Ummah 5, where the school aims to cultivate its own version of piety that is not linked to the market, radicalism, or broader portraits of religious sensibility. The project of piety at this RA is intended to explore how Islamic values are instilled not only pedagogically but also through the crucial role of bodily discipline habituated in daily life.

Pierre Bourdieu introduced the concept of bodily hexis, referring to the way the body becomes obedient and serves as a manifestation of habitus—a system of bodily dispositions that is permanent and transferable, shaping ways of thinking, feeling, and acting (Rock-Singer, 2020). In the field of religious studies, bodily hexis offers a lens for understanding how religious beliefs and values are internalized and expressed through repetitive bodily practices such as rituals, worship, dress, and others (Mahariah, 2023). Bodily hexis is not only individual but also collective, as it shapes group identity and distinguishes one community from another.

In the context of education, the body plays a crucial role in the socialization of specific values and norms among students. Bodily expressions such as sitting calmly, speaking politely, and dressing according to established rules serve as means through which learners internalize the values upheld by the institution. Bodily hexis within religious education functions as a medium for instilling beliefs and practices that shape particular religious identities, even from an early age (Suardi & Rudiyanto, 2021).

In Islamic early childhood education, bodily hexis becomes an important medium for transmitting Islamic values and ideologies. Children are not only taught Islam cognitively but are also trained to practice it in daily life through bodily discipline, allowing it to become embodied and enduring. At RA Ummah 5, for example, children are taught Islamic dress codes, including wearing a long jilbab that covers the entire body except for the eyes and palms. They are also habituated to follow rules in social interactions, such as speaking politely, respecting elders, avoiding physical contact with the opposite sex who are not *mahram*, memorizing the Qur'an, and other practices. Through these embodied routines, the bodies of young children become a site for the formation of an Islamic ideological habitus, realized in concrete and lived forms (Apridayanti et al., 2022).

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This research is an ethnographic study employing a qualitative approach to examine how bodily hexis is formed and interpreted within the project of piety in the Salafi community, particularly at the early childhood education institution RA Ummah 5. The study was conducted over approximately seven months, though data collection was not carried out continuously or on a daily basis. As Busetto et al. note, qualitative research seeks to explore phenomena by collecting data primarily in the form of words rather than numbers (Busetto et al., 2020). Ethnographic research produces detailed and comprehensive accounts of various social phenomena, including actions, behaviors, and beliefs (Busetto et al., 2020; Patton & Patton, 2002). Because this

ethnographic study is qualitative in nature, it is inherently naturalistic and interpretive. Unlike experimental, survey, or other quantitative studies, it does not employ statistical calculations.

According to Knox, ethnographic research, which originated in anthropology and was later adopted by sociology, is particularly well-suited for examining beliefs, social interactions, and behaviors within smaller communities. This method involves direct participation and observation over an extended period of time. Accordingly, this study relies on ethnographic methods to provide in-depth insights into how bodily hexis functions as a medium of religious formation in the daily lives of children at RA Ummah 5 (Knox, 2021).

2.2. Population and Research Subjects

The population in this study was selected based on its relevance to the research objectives. The selection of informants was determined by their knowledge and understanding of the research problem, their experience, and their direct involvement with the research subjects. The informants consisted of the head of RA and the teachers of RA Ummah 5. Each of the Kindergarten A and B levels had two classes, with each class taught by a homeroom teacher and an assistant teacher, making a total of eight teachers. From this group, the researcher selected four homeroom teachers as interviewees and as subjects of observation, considering their significant role in teaching and learning activities.

In addition to the teachers, children in Kindergarten A and B also served as research subjects. Their involvement was essential to observe directly how they interacted and carried out daily activities in accordance with the bodily hexis practices implemented at RA Ummah 5.

2.3. Data Collection

This qualitative ethnographic study enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of everyday practices involving the body, religious symbols, and gestures that are instilled from an early age. Data were collected through participant observation and in-depth interviews with teachers and school administrators to obtain detailed information on the learning process and bodily practices as part of children's habituation in the school context. Observations were conducted intensively to capture internalized bodily dispositions, such as ways of dressing, sitting, walking, and even children's facial expressions within the framework of religious activities.

To strengthen the data obtained from observations and interviews, the researcher also collected documentation of routine activities, including photographs, lesson plans, learning media, and other relevant documents. Data collection was carried out systematically through observation, interviews, and documentation to explore how the RA Ummah 5 community teaches Islam to young children through bodily discipline. In addition, the researcher examined what kind of Islam was being transmitted to early childhood learners.

This method aligns with the theoretical framework of Gregory Starrett, who draws on Bourdieu's concept of bodily hexis, emphasizing how social and ideological structures are embodied through bodily practices that appear "natural" but are in fact cultivated through continuous training. The validity of the research data was reinforced through triangulation of sources, methods, and time, as well as through critical reflection on the researcher's position and involvement during the data collection process.

2.4. Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis in this study was carried out interactively and consisted of three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014, 2020).

First, data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming data that emerged from the complete corpus, including written field notes, interview transcripts, documents, and other empirical materials. Condensation is an integral part of analysis. It involves sharpening, sorting, focusing, discarding, and organizing data in such a way that the "final" conclusions can be drawn and verified.

Second, data display involves presenting information in a structured and concise form so that it is easy to understand and can be used as a basis for drawing conclusions or taking action.

Third, conclusion drawing/verification refers to the process of interpreting and confirming the findings. From the beginning of data collection, the researcher attempted to make sense of the data by looking for patterns, explanations, causal relationships, and developing initial interpretations. These conclusions were tested through verification, which was conducted in simple ways, such as reconsidering conclusions during the writing process and testing them against different sets of data. The purpose of verification was to ensure that the data were reasonable, strong, and accurate.

These three cycles—data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification—are interconnected before, during, and after data collection in a parallel manner, forming a broader domain referred to as “analysis” (Miles et al., 2020).

2.5. Instruments

Data collection in this study was carried out through non-participant observation, meaning the researcher did not take part in the activities of the research subjects but only observed and recorded teacher-child interactions. Several observations focused on the activities of the RA principal and learning activities inside and outside the classroom, such as the way the principal interacted, daily routines at school, teachers’ instructional practices—including disciplining children, teaching methods used, delivering learning materials—as well as activities such as Qur’ an memorization and reading using the MuriQ method. Observations of the children included how they sat, entered the classroom, greeted teachers, followed instructions, interacted with peers, performed prayers, and so forth.

In-depth interviews were conducted to obtain more detailed and comprehensive data on the research topic and to strengthen the findings from observation. Some sample interview questions included:

- What is the vision and mission of RA Ummah 5?
- How is learning implemented at RA Ummah 5?
- What are the distinctive features of RA Ummah 5?
- How do teachers introduce Islam to young children (including the methods used)?
- What are the flagship programs at RA Ummah 5?
- To what extent are parents involved in achieving the school’ s objectives?

The interview guidelines above were used flexibly according to research needs and could be developed into new questions to support the data. Furthermore, the researcher employed documentation techniques to strengthen both observation and interview data so that the findings could be considered credible. Documentation included records of the historical establishment of the RA, lesson plans, and other relevant documents.

For data analysis, the researcher adopted the concept of bodily hexis as articulated by Gregory Starrett. According to Starrett, Islamic rituals clearly demonstrate bodily hexis—or habit in Ancient Greek—through practices such as prostration, ablution, circumambulation, and fasting. Over time, these rituals have been interpreted by both Muslims and non-Muslims, each associating them with diverse meanings and understandings. The concept of hexis was first introduced by Pierre Bourdieu to explain bodily dispositions within social systems that lack explicit interpretation, but it becomes more complex in the context of Muslim societies. Through this theoretical lens, the researcher sought to analyze how RA Ummah 5 has shaped the bodies of young children into compliance with various activities and commands aligned with the ideology being constructed. Here, the body is understood not merely in a biological sense, but as carrying broader symbolic and political meanings. To support this analysis, the study also drew on the frameworks of Rachael S. Burke and Judith Duncan, who categorize children’ s bodily practices into several domains.

To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, the researcher employed triangulation of sources and methods. Data were cross-checked by comparing results from observation,

interviews, and documentation. To further strengthen credibility, cross-checks were also conducted with different informants and the same data were revisited at different times.

3. Result

Bodily hexis at RA Ummah 5 is evident in several activities. From a secular perspective, the bodily discipline practiced at RA Ummah 5 has been criticized for not aligning with educational principles. However, this RA assigns a distinct meaning to bodily discipline, particularly in what is taught to early childhood students. Some forms of bodily hexis instilled in young children at RA Ummah 5 are as follows:

3.1. Prohibition of Songs and Music

Based on observations conducted on September 30, 2022, the institution does not employ songs or music during the learning process. The main reason expressed is the concern that music might interfere with children's memorization skills and is considered inconsistent with Islamic values. As stated by the head of RA:

"Kami memang tidak menggunakan lagu, musik, dan tarian. Karena bisa mengganggu hafalan anak-anak. Musik dan tarian juga tidak sesuai dengan Islam. Musik dapat mengganggu hafalan karena dapat mengalihkan perhatian anak yang harusnya untuk hafalan Al-Qur'an. Kalo lagu anak-anak tetap ada, misalnya lagu teko kecil yang mungil untuk ice breaking. Tapi lagu lainnya tidak dan kita tidak menggunakan musik dan nari ya."

(We do not use songs, music, or dance because they can disrupt children's memorization. Music and dance are not in line with Islam. Music distracts children's focus from Qur'an memorization. As for children's songs, we still allow some, for example, the Little Teapot song as an ice breaker, but no other songs, and we do not use music or dance)

The head of RA also added that parents are not allowed to give mobile phones to their children at home, as this may interfere with memorization. During the learning process, teachers use melodic tones only to deliver daily prayers, such as before meals, after studying, closing gatherings, and a few simple songs meant for motivation or ice breaking. The head of RA reiterated that they do not use songs and music because they are incompatible with Islam, stressing that memorization cannot be combined with music. Nonetheless, certain children's songs, such as *I Am a Little Teapot*, are still used as ice breakers. Apart from this, they do not employ music such as marching band instruments or dance. Throughout the researcher's observation, no singing, dancing, or music-related activities were found in the learning process. While the main justification given—that music could significantly hinder memorization—seems logical if both activities occur simultaneously, the head of RA did not provide a more detailed explanation for prohibiting songs, music, and dance altogether.

3.2. Tahfidz (Qur'an Memorization) Program

Memorizing the Qur'an is one of the core characteristics and priorities of Islamic-based educational institutions. The *tahfidz* program at RA Ummah 5 is considered crucial and is even a graduation requirement. Observations particularly in classes A1 and A2 revealed classrooms filled with children actively memorizing Qur'an verses. In one instance, a child was called to the front of the class to recite a short surah aloud. The teacher listened attentively, tapping a ruler against the desk to guide the correct rhythm of recitation and to indicate mistakes.

In Class A2, boys took turns reciting the Qur'an to one teacher, while others waited in line to read from the *Ali Method* book, monitored by two assistant teachers. During the memorization session, the class teacher instructed:

"Satu-satu maju hafalan ya setelah surat an-Naba dan yang lain mendengarkan. Hei, mas jangan gojek (bermain) dengarkan teman yang akan hafalan. Ayok, siapa yang mau maju hafalan dahulu?"

(Come forward one by one to recite after Surah An-Naba, and the others must listen. Hey, don't play around, listen to your friend who is reciting. Come on, who wants to go first?)

Meanwhile, in Class A1, composed of girls, children recited short surahs in front of the class while sitting down, often in low voices. Some whispered verses directly into the teacher's ear, while others took turns reading from the *Ali Method* book. Whether memorizing the Qur'an or reading from the *Ali Method*, students were required to sit upright, cross-legged, keep their gaze forward, and place their hands in front of them. According to the head of RA, memorization is vitally important because children who memorize the Qur'an are believed to become intercessors for their parents in the afterlife.

3.3. Prohibition of Drawing Living Creatures

RA Ummah 5 implements learning strictly based on the textual values of the Qur'an and Hadith. One of these values is the prohibition against drawing complete living beings. During an observation in Class A1, which consisted of girls, children were engaged in an activity of drawing animals as part of the thematic lesson on pets, with a subtheme on sacrificial animals (*hewan qurban*). Children worked with activity sheets containing pictures of sacrificial and non-sacrificial animals, including cows, goats, elephants, camels, and pigs. The teacher instructed the students to cut and match the pictures of sacrificial animals. Importantly, the animal illustrations used in this learning activity were in cartoon form, with facial features left incomplete. Similar images of living beings were also found in the children's learning magazine, *Cermai*, which was used as a supplementary resource.

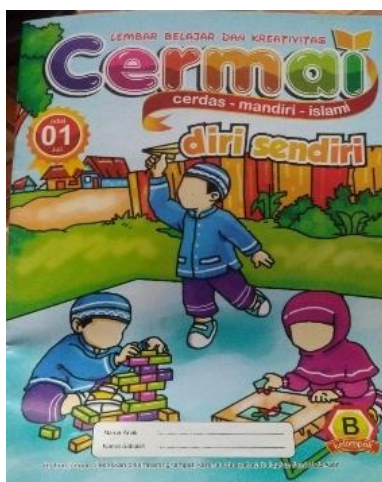


Figure 1. Cermai Magazine

Another activity that demonstrates the prohibition of drawing living beings in their entirety can be seen in a teacher's activity of guiding children to draw animals such as geese and rabbits on the blackboard. The teacher instructed the children to draw the animals exactly as shown on the board. The children then imitated the drawing and colored it. During the drawing process, two children in Class B1 asked questions. The first child said, *"Teacher, why doesn't it have eyes?"* However, the teacher did not respond and continued drawing the animals on the board. Then, the second child asked, *"Teacher, may I add the eyes?"* The teacher firmly replied, *"No need to add eyes,"* without providing any further explanation.

Observations indicated that the school enforces the prohibition against drawing living beings because it is considered inconsistent with Islamic values. This prohibition is implemented by following the textual basis of Islamic sources (the Qur'an and hadith).

Based on the interview with the principal of RA Ummah 5:

"Kami memang tidak mengajarkan kepada anak tentang menggambar makhluk hidup secara utuh seperti manusia atau hewan baik dalam bentuk boneka ataupun kartun. Misalnya tidak menggambar mata, alis, hidung, mulut, dan apa yang tampak di wajah. Ada hadis larangan menggambar makhluk hidup secara utuh yang artinya, "tidak diperbolehkan menggambar makhluk hidup secara utuh karena akan dimintai pertanggungjawaban diakhirat nanti (HR. Bukhori Muslim)."

(We do not teach children to draw living beings in their entirety, whether human or animal, in the form of dolls or cartoons. For instance, we do not draw the eyes, eyebrows, nose, mouth, or any facial features. There is a hadith that prohibits drawing living beings in their entirety, which means that drawing such beings is forbidden because accountability will be asked in the hereafter (HR. Bukhari Muslim).

3.4. Sports According to the Sunnah

Based on the interview with the principal, RA Ummah 5 only conducts healthy gymnastics on Fridays, which they consider compatible with Islamic teachings. In addition, this RA organizes sports activities during outbound programs typically held in Karanganyar as part of outing classes. The activities chosen follow the Prophet's Sunnah, such as swimming, archery, and horseback riding. The principal emphasized that these activities are based on the Prophet's hadith. The sports are carried out alongside the outing class, with parents invited to observe their children's activities.

"Kita memilih olahraga sesuai yang dipraktekkan Rasulullah Saw. Kita tidak melakukan olahraga khusus, misalnya senam kita pake senam yang sesuai Islam namanya intifadah. Biasanya olahraga sesuai sunnah itu kita mengadakan outbound di Karanganyar dan kami juga mengajak orang tua siswa."

(We choose sports in accordance with those practiced by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). We do not conduct special sports, for example, our gymnastics follow an Islamic style called intifadah. Typically, we organize outbound activities in Karanganyar, which include Sunnah sports, and we invite the students' parents.)

This aligns with documented records of sports activities, including horseback riding. On another occasion, the researcher observed RA Ummah 5 conducting gymnastics in the schoolyard on Friday. According to the principal, the gymnastics performed were Islamic gymnastics called *intifadah*. This form of gymnastics is inspired by the Palestinian struggle against colonization and includes movements accompanied by Islamic expressions such as *Allahu Akbar*.

3.5. Clothing According to Islamic Guidelines

RA Ummah 5 encourages children, teachers, and parents to wear clothing in accordance with Islamic principles, such as long garments and hijabs. Based on school regulations, teachers are required to wear *syar'i* attire. Observations revealed that the female teachers at RA Ummah 5 wore long hijabs covering the chest, loose-fitting long dresses (*gamis*), foot coverings, and some also wore face veils (*niqab*).

Several studies note that this Middle Eastern style of clothing is one of the rules and recommendations promoted by certain Islamic groups in Indonesia. Clothing not only carries symbolic meaning but also functions within specific discursive contexts. It shapes subjective perceptions of character and personality, while also serving as a medium for intercultural debates on idealized figures. Clothing is regarded as one of the most powerful means of expressing identity in daily life. By entering everyday life spaces, clothing styles signify uniqueness and transcend their original cultural boundaries. Thus, clothing becomes an effective tool of control and contestation.

In an interview conducted on July 13, 2022, the principal of RA Ummah 5 stated:

"Pentingnya semua pihak di sekolah termasuk siswa, orang tua, dan guru untuk menerapkan kebijakan ini sebagai contoh bagi lingkungan, terutama bagi wali murid agar mengenakan pakaian muslimah. Kesalehan yang terlihat dari identitas fisik ini dijadikan sebagai kebiasaan yang dapat ditiru oleh lingkungan sekitar. Pernyataan tersebut sesuai dengan pernyataan kepala RA, bahwa salah satu contoh dari perubahan orang tua yang sebelumnya tidak mengenakan jilbab menjadi berjilbab syar'i. Kepala RA berpendapat, bahwa penampilan yang menunjukkan lekuk tubuh adalah kurang pantas dan menjadi salah satu penyebab permasalahan."

(It is important for everyone in the school community—including students, parents, and teachers—to uphold this policy as an example for the environment, particularly for parents, so that they adopt Muslim attire. Visible piety through physical appearance becomes a habit that can be emulated by the surrounding community).

This statement is consistent with cases in which some parents who previously did not wear hijab began to adopt syar'i attire. The principal argued that appearances revealing the body's shape are inappropriate and may cause problems.

At RA Ummah 5, the rules on wearing uniforms are not explicitly explained to children as a way of following the Prophet's Sunnah; instead, they are taught through teachers' role modeling and the preservation of Islamic spirit within the school, where children learn to become good Muslims.

The school's uniform policy spans Monday to Saturday, with different variations: green-white, blue batik, green-white, Muslim attire (specified by the school), and sportswear. The principal clarified that in general, the uniform policy is similar to other early childhood institutions, but the difference lies in the special Muslim attire worn on Fridays: long *gamis* and hijabs in orange and red. Observations showed that male and female students wore similar uniforms (blue pants and white shirts), with all female students wearing hijabs and male students wearing *peci* (caps). The same applied to batik uniforms. In one instance, a child in Class A2 wore a *niqab*, though it was not used during class activities.

3.6. Gender Segregation

Gender segregation implemented at RA Ummah 5 is evident in the separation of classes between boys and girls. The school has four classes: Class A consists of A1 and A2, while Class B consists of B1 and B2. Class A1 is designated for girls and Class A2 for boys, as is the case with Class B1 and B2. Unlike most schools, where boys and girls are placed together in the same class, RA Ummah 5 enforces a clear separation.

Based on an interview with the principal of RA on July 13, 2022, it was stated:

"Pemisahan kelas laki-laki dan perempuan dilakukan dengan sengaja, mengingat kondisi pergaulan anak-anak saat ini yang dianggap beresiko. Banyak kejadian yang terjadi akibat anak-anak yang sudah mengenal lawan jenis atau terlibat dalam hubungan "pacaran" yang dipengaruhi oleh penggunaan handphone dan televisi. Situasi ini sangat mengkhawatirkan, sehingga menurut kepala RA penting untuk mengajarkan nilai-nilai Islam ini sejak dini salah satunya dengan memisahkan kelas antara laki-laki dan perempuan agar mereka tidak bercampur. Pemisahan kelas ini juga dilakukan agar perempuan tidak menyerupai laki-laki dan sebaliknya. Oleh karena itu, tidak ada aktivitas yang dilakukan secara bersama antara siswa laki-laki dan perempuan."

(The separation of boys' and girls' classes is intentional, given the current social conditions of children, which are considered risky. Many incidents occur because children are already familiar with the opposite sex or involved in 'dating' relationships, which are influenced by the use of mobile phones and television. This situation is very concerning; therefore, we believe it is important to instill Islamic values from an early age, one of which is by separating boys' and girls' classes so that they do not mix. This separation is also meant to prevent girls from resembling boys and vice versa. As a result, there are no activities conducted jointly between male and female students).

In addition to daily school practices, gender segregation is also reflected in *Cermai* magazine, where no activities involving both boys and girls together are depicted. The guidebooks used likewise include gender-related narratives that present exemplary stories of Muslim women such as Khadijah, Asiyah (the wife of Pharaoh), Fatimah binti Muhammad, and Maryam. These figures are portrayed as devout Muslim women who fully support their husbands and play essential roles in family life.

4. Discussion

The concept of *hexis* refers to the way individuals embody and internalize cultural norms and values through repeated practices and disciplines. In the context of bodily discipline applied at RA Ummah 5 for early childhood, this carries complex meanings. Citing Ware, in Islamic educational institutions, knowledge is transmitted more through bodily practices than through words. Imitating the bodily gestures and behaviors of teachers becomes part of the learning process, just as texts must be read. Memorizing texts such as the Qur'an is not merely an act of recollection but a form of internalizing revelation into the self, becoming part of or united with the body. This is reflected in the saying, "a human being is the book, just as the Prophet is the walking Qur'an." This statement contains the idea that revelation can be embodied in human existence. Humans become living mediums for revelation rather than passive readers (Rudolph T., 2014). Thus, Islamic knowledge is not only theoretical but manifested through action.

4.1. Bodily Hexis and Its Interpretation at RA Ummah 5

The first manifestation is learning without music and songs in early childhood education at RA Ummah 5. In particular, music has long been a subject of debate among Muslim communities and Islamic movements worldwide. This debate arises from differing interpretations related to religious teachings, cultural traditions, and philosophical considerations, which produce a range of perspectives on the legitimacy of music and its application in Muslim societies (Halstead, 1994).

Certain non-mainstream groups often advocate for or prohibit music because it is perceived as potentially disrupting religious devotion or containing morally inappropriate elements. Such groups are characterized by a strong emphasis on purifying Islam from any form of innovation or practices absent during the time of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions (Kosasih & Firmansyah, 2018; Sanjaya et al., 2022). They adhere strictly to the Qur'an and Sunnah in a literal sense and seek to emulate the Prophet's life in every respect. Within this framework, *hexis* involves training children to avoid auditory stimuli considered inappropriate, shaping their sensory experiences and preferences.

Among the reasons music is prohibited by Salafi communities are concerns about its negative influence, as music is believed to distract children from worship and other positive activities. Salafi-based schools tend to focus more intensively on religious learning, which is considered more important for children's development. As a result, greater emphasis is placed on memorizing the Qur'an, hadith, and daily prayers (Suardi & Rudiyanto, 2021). Furthermore, there is apprehension that music may provoke emotions or behaviors deemed uncontrollable or inconsistent with Islamic values (Anshori, 2025).

In contrast, moderate Muslim groups permit music under certain conditions (Krisnawati et al., 2019). At RA Ummah 5, the principal explained that music cannot be combined with memorization. The concern is that music might affect children's behavior, as evidenced by one student who sang a song considered inappropriate according to Islamic values, reportedly influenced by songs encountered on social media platforms such as TikTok.

According to Herrera Linda, the method of singing without music reflects the hybrid nature of "post-Islamic schools," in which various values and interests coexist within complex institutional structures, setting them apart from both traditional Islamic schools and general public schools. This represents an alternative model, though not entirely distant from the educational frameworks already implemented by the government (Herrera, 1999).

Second, Qur'anic memorization is the primary goal that all children at RA Ummah 5 are expected to achieve. Certain Islamic groups strongly encourage children and young people to begin memorizing the Qur'an from an early age (Krisnawati et al., 2019). There are various perspectives regarding memorization, particularly in early childhood. On the positive side, memorizing the Qur'an is viewed as a highly esteemed act before Allah and within the Muslim community (Mohamed & Rashidi Abbas, 2021). On the other hand, some critiques highlight that a heavy focus on rote memorization may neglect the deeper meaning and understanding of the text (*On Al-Jazeera's Children's Channel: Debate on Corporal Punishment in Koran Schools*, n.d.).

At RA Ummah 5, Qur'anic memorization is considered a flagship program and a graduation requirement. During their time at the school, children are required to memorize two *juz* of the Qur'an. If a student has not achieved the expected target by the time of graduation, the school provides special tutoring sessions to extend memorization hours until the target is reached. In addition to these special sessions, teachers encourage parents to collaborate by maximizing *muroja'ah* (repetition) at home. This is also part of the school's commitment to maintaining its image as an institution with excellence in *tahfidz*. The principal strongly encourages Qur'anic memorization, seeing it as a sign of pious children and believing it will bring a noble reward in the Hereafter, namely a crown of honor for their parents.

Third, the prohibition of drawing complete representations of living beings. Visual depictions of living beings have been a matter of debate in Islam, particularly in certain non-mainstream communities. This debate arises from interpretations of specific Qur'anic verses and hadith. These communities adhere to strict readings of hadith that explicitly prohibit drawing living creatures, often framed as warnings. A key concern is that such images might lead, even unintentionally, to shirk (associating partners with Allah) (Sanjaya et al., 2022).

To avoid these potential dangers, many scholars within these communities prohibit any complete depictions of living beings. Their position is rooted in the aspiration to follow what they consider "pure Islam," as practiced by the earliest generations of Muslims (Madali, 2020). Based on observations, RA Ummah 5 trains children to avoid drawing complete faces of living beings and refrains from using books containing full depictions. Although the school does not explicitly explain to children why such drawings are forbidden, teachers repeatedly enforce this rule in class during the learning process. The principal explained that creating images resembling living beings is forbidden because those who draw them will be held accountable in the Hereafter, citing a hadith that states: "Those who depict living creatures will be punished in the Hereafter, and it will be said to them: 'Bring to life what you have created.'" (HR Bukhari Muslim).

Fourth, sports based on the Sunnah of the Prophet. RA Ummah 5 emphasizes sunnah-based sports as a way of emulating the Prophet's lifestyle and preserving Islamic traditions practiced by earlier generations. Sports such as archery, horseback riding, and swimming are considered by certain Islamic communities to have historical precedence in Islam and to promote values consistent with Islamic teachings (Kizar, 2018; Salahudin & Rusdin, 2020). Additionally, they avoid sports perceived as inconsistent with Islamic values, such as those involving immodest clothing or mixed-gender participation (Winter & Smith, 2011). RA Ummah 5 selects sports aligned with the Prophet's Sunnah because the school is grounded in the Qur'an and hadith, making adherence to Islamic values central in multiple aspects, including physical activity.

Fifth, one of the defining characteristics of certain non-mainstream communities is their literal adherence to the Qur'an and hadith, which is reflected in distinct practices concerning dress codes and gender segregation (Muaidi & Badarudin, 2021). These practices must be understood through deeper exploration of the theological foundations, socio-cultural contexts, and historical processes that shape Salafi perspectives (Munawwir, 2021). Dress regulations for men and women often stem from interpretations of modesty and religious obligation, serving as markers of identity and commitment to Islamic principles. Clothing is not merely a personal preference but carries symbolic significance, embodying attachment to specific interpretations and traditions of Islam (Nisa, 2012).

For these groups, Islamic dress ideology is closely tied to their broader understanding of *shari'ah* as a comprehensive guide for all aspects of life (Madali, 2020). The concept of *aurat*—the

parts of the body that must be covered—plays a central role in shaping clothing rules for men and women. Women are expected to wear loose garments covering the entire body, while men are required to cover the area between the navel and the knees (Ali Muhammad & Sumardi, 2019). Interpretations of *tabarruj*—excessive adornment or displaying beauty in a way that may cause temptation—also influence clothing rules, leading women to avoid revealing attire (Wati & Saputra, 2018).

Nevertheless, the concept of *syar'i* dress has been critiqued for reinforcing patriarchal norms, restricting women's freedom and autonomy (Mehjabin, 2020). At RA Ummah 5, dress regulations are applied similarly to those in other early childhood education institutions, where children are required to wear Muslim attire. The most visible bodily symbol among teachers is their clothing style: long, loose *gamis*, often in dark colors, with some wearing *niqab*, large headscarves covering the chest, and socks. For children, a distinctive Friday uniform consists of long *gamis* and headscarves in red and yellow for girls, while boys wear trousers and shirts in red and yellow combinations. According to Khudaeri, clothing carries not only symbolic meaning but also discursive significance, shaping subjectivity about personality and character, while serving as a medium of cultural dialogue over idealized identities. Clothing is considered one of the most powerful tools for expressing identity in daily life (Hudaeri, 2016).

Sixth, gender segregation is frequently found in non-mainstream communities and extends into various aspects of life, including education, worship, and public gatherings. This segregation is justified through interpretations of religious texts emphasizing the importance of women maintaining modesty and preventing sources of temptation, thereby preserving social order and moral purity (Halim, 2009). While segregation is intended to protect women and foster a pious community, it has also been criticized for restricting women's access to education, employment, and social engagement.

At RA Ummah 5, children are separated by gender in both classroom arrangements and activities. The principal explained that this separation is important to teach children from an early age that boys and girls should not mix and to prevent them from imitating the opposite gender. The principal also stated that this rule aligns with Islamic *shari'ah* based on the Qur'an and hadith.

4.2. The Project of Piety and Coherence

The bodily *hexis* of early childhood students at RA Ummah 5 has been systematically conceptualized to encourage children to practice religious rituals, routines, and ways of thinking in line with the institution's established ideology. Most of the bodily *hexis* implemented at RA Ummah 5 is textually grounded in the Qur'an and Hadith as its ideological foundation. Consequently, little attention is given to Western critiques or educational theories regarding the practices applied. RA Ummah 5 strives to shape society in accordance with the Islamic traditions practiced by the Prophet and the first three generations after him. This reflects a form of coherence, whereby RA Ummah 5 aims to shape the present community by applying earlier Islamic traditions in order to construct a future aligned with the Islamic past—what Talal Asad terms the “discursive Islamic tradition” (Asad, 2025). Bodily practices that appear ordinary in everyday life are not merely biological expressions; rather, they convey values to be cultivated and purposes to be achieved by a particular Muslim community. Thus, it is important to recognize that what is embodied in the body signifies a complexity of meanings. In this sense, the school seeks to instill strong monotheistic faith (*tauhid*) in children while, implicitly, bodily practices also serve as a critique of secularism—emerging as a response to the marginalization of spiritual values within modern systems.

4.3. Research Contribution

This study provides deeper insights into the complex relationship between embodied *hexis* and the project of piety in early childhood education at RA Ummah 5, an Islamic preschool in Solo. The findings highlight the significant role of the body in the piety project, particularly in shaping children's religiosity and moral behavior within the context of Islamic early childhood

education. RA Ummah 5 has become a strategic arena for transmitting and preserving a particular Islamic identity by embedding it from an early age through structured institutional programs.

The main argument of this study is that deliberate and consistent bodily practices—such as specific dress codes, Qur'an memorization, prohibitions against drawing complete living figures, and similar practices—serve as means of instilling deep and enduring religious and moral discipline. The debates surrounding bodily practices at RA Ummah 5 cannot be simply reduced to forms of intolerance; rather, the phenomenon illustrates how the institution intentionally shapes children according to its established ideology.

The implications of these findings extend to educational practice, underscoring the importance of a deeper understanding of how bodily discipline contributes to the formation of religiosity and moral behavior in early childhood. For curriculum developers, while religious content remains essential, it is equally important to take into account the advancement of contemporary knowledge. For readers, bodily practices within educational institutions reveal a level of complexity, as they embody meanings that may not be immediately visible. In this sense, bodily practices in schools can also function as instruments of politics.

4.4. Limitations

This study seeks to provide an understanding of bodily *hexis* and practices of piety as implemented at RA Ummah 5, yet it acknowledges several limitations. Based on its research design, the study was conducted in only one early childhood education institution with an in-depth analysis, which limits the ability to generalize the diversity of early childhood education institutions in Indonesia, particularly in the Solo Raya region. The relatively narrow sample also restricts the breadth of conclusions that can be drawn. Furthermore, the study primarily emphasizes observable behaviors and articulated beliefs, which leaves internal factors—such as the lived experiences and motivations of the children involved—less fully captured.

4.5. Suggestions

For future researchers, similar studies could be conducted with a larger number of research sites so that the data collected is more diverse and representative of the variety of early childhood education institutions in Indonesia. In addition, subsequent researchers should engage in a deeper exploration of the targeted Muslim communities. Such an approach is expected to provide greater flexibility in interaction and facilitate data collection, thereby producing more comprehensive findings. This also opens opportunities for larger and more exploratory sampling.

5. Conclusion

These findings contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how embodied practices in early childhood are repeatedly performed as a project of piety. This project is carried out to introduce and shape children with religiosity and moral behavior in line with the ideological principles being cultivated. The bodily practices implemented at RA Ummah 5 carry meanings that go beyond mere symbols of child development. They function as a means of shaping children's understanding and habits according to an ideology grounded in the Qur'an and Hadith, following the practices of the Prophet and the legacy of the *Salaf al-Saleh*.

This phenomenon demonstrates a coherence in which RA Ummah 5 seeks to instill Islamic values in children across all aspects of life, aiming to create a future aligned with Islamic traditions of the past. The bodily discipline found at RA Ummah 5 indirectly encourages children to develop strong monotheistic faith (*tauhid*) and to resist secular values.

These findings contribute to scholarly debates on religion, embodiment, and education by showing how early childhood institutions can serve as strategic arenas for transmitting religious identity through embodied practices. This study highlights that embodied discipline is not only a pedagogical tool but also a cultural and ideological medium through which communities negotiate modernity, secularism, and tradition. As such, it offers valuable insights for comparative studies in education, religious pedagogy, and childhood development worldwide.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Nur Tanfidiyah is the initiator of the idea of an active piety project that involves the significant role of the body in early childhood education in the Solo region. Sangkot Sirait contributed by helping to guide the data in the article and by discussing the theoretical framework used. All authors engaged in discussions on the research topic, the data collected, and the data analysis.

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The dataset generated and analyzed during the research is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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All authors declare that they have no financial or personal interests that could influence the work presented in this manuscript.

Additional information

Correspondence and material requests should be addressed to nur.tanfidiyah@staff.uinsaid.ac.id.

ORCID

Nur Tanfidiyah  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0691-1898>
Sangkot Sirait  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7633-1709>

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