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Islamic Mindfulness-Based Play Activities: Enhancing Child Mental Health in the Post-Pandemic Era

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Abstract
This research focuses on developing Islamic mindfulness-based play activities to mitigate child mental health issues in the post-pandemic context. The study was conducted in Jakarta-Depok kindergartens using a modified Research and development (R&D) approach tailored for educational settings, as per Borg and Gall. The primary aim was to create and evaluate educational tools to foster Islamic mindfulness among young learners. The research involved identifying children's learning challenges post-pandemic and developing and refining educational games and teaching methods. Data collection encompassed observational studies, educator feedback, and direct interaction with children using the developed tools. The analysis evaluated these tools' usability, engagement level, and educational impact. The results highlighted the development of a physical model comprising a 14-chapter guidebook for tea. Still, it is a procedural model that condenses the original ten stages into seven. Essential components include yoga based on prayer movements, activities for enhancing food relationships, self-body awareness exercises, sensory training, gratitude journal writing, and positive affirmations based on *Asmaul Husna*. Evaluations by material and learning design experts and one-to-one teacher tests affirmed the model's quality. A field trial with 20 children showed enjoyment and preference for gratitude journal writing. Conclusively, the research effectively developed a model for Islamic mindfulness-based play activities, demonstrating the potential to enhance children's mental health post-pandemic. However, limitations such as geographic confinement and individual response variability suggest the need for broader application and further research to assess long-term impacts. This study contributes significantly to educational and psychological interventions, offering a culturally sensitive, holistic child development approach integrating mental health, spirituality, and education.

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Introduction

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 unleashed unprecedented global challenges, impacting numerous facets of human life, including the education sector (Dorn et al., 2021; Psacharopoulos et al., 2020; Rasmitadila et al., 2020). Beyond educational disruptions, its ramifications extended to societal, economic, and health domains, with approximately one-third of the global population experiencing quarantine by March 2020 (Kaplan et al., 2020). The crisis illuminated the interconnectivity of international societies and the fragility of existing systems in the face of pandemics. The imperative to address these multifaceted challenges, particularly in the realm of child mental health, has become a pressing concern for the world, the academic discipline of psychology, and a problem necessitating urgent and practical solutions.

Prior research has underscored the significant impact of prolonged school closures on children's development, encompassing physical, psychosocial, cognitive, and mental health aspects (Tso et al., 2020). The rise in domestic violence and child abuse further exacerbated these issues (Cluver et al., 2020), particularly for children in economically disadvantaged households

(Holmes, 2020). Substantial evidence indicates that 28% of children worldwide experienced detrimental changes in mental health due to the pandemic (UNICEF, 2020), with isolation and prolonged home confinement adversely affecting their social development and mental well-being (Agusriani & Fauziddin, 2021; Baggerly et al., 2022; Hu et al., 2021).

The psychological ramifications of the pandemic on children have been profound and multifaceted. Incidences of anxiety, depression, and stress were notably prevalent among children during this period (De Figueiredo et al., 2021). These mental health challenges were compounded by disrupted sleep patterns, with a notable increase in sleep disturbances and difficulties(McElvaney et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2020). The shift to online learning environments further contributed to an uptick in gadget addiction among children, limiting their engagement in diverse activities and increasing screen time (Suhandi & Pamela, 2020). The psychological stressors were not limited to academic pressures but extended to the social isolation imposed by the pandemic, which significantly impacted children's social skills and emotional well-being. The reporting of depression-related incidents among children by the Child Protection Commission (KPAI) underscores the urgency of addressing these mental health concerns (Wijaya, 2021).

In addressing these emergent mental health challenges, mindfulness-based interventions have gained prominence for their effectiveness in educational and therapeutic settings. Research has demonstrated that mindfulness practices significantly enhance emotional regulation, focus, and resilience in children and adolescents(Grossman et al., 2004; Perry-Parrish et al., 2016; Zenner et al., 2014). These interventions have shown promise in alleviating symptoms of trauma, depression, psychological distress, and somatic complaints (Goemans et al., 2020; Li et al., 2023; Stein & Russell, 2021). Additionally, improvements in emotional skills, cognitive focus, and overall psychosocial health outcomes have been observed, highlighting the comprehensive benefits of integrating mindfulness into child and adolescent education (Kallapiran et al., 2015; Keshavarzi et al., 2020; Ruiz-Fernández et al., 2020). The adaptability of these interventions, initially developed for adults, has been successfully demonstrated in school settings, offering a viable pathway for supporting children's mental health in post-pandemic recovery.

In the Islamic context, mindfulness transcends the conventional psychological framework, incorporating spirituality and religious practice elements. Islamic mindfulness emphasizes total attention and self-awareness, intertwined with the principles of love, compassion, and patience (Dwidiyanti & Sari, 2019). This approach is rooted in Sufi psychology, which focuses on training the *nafs* (ego, self, soul) and offers spiritual remedies for emotional distress (Ismail et al., 2021; Keshavarzi et al., 2020). Practices such as zikr (rhythmic repetition of God's names) are integral to this approach, reinforcing the connection between spirituality and mental well-being (Isgandarova, 2019). Islamic spiritual mindfulness therapy has been shown to impact mental and emotional health positively, offering a unique perspective in addressing the psychological needs of children in Muslim communities (Ganguly, 2018; Hasanović et al., 2017; Usman et al., 2020).

Despite the promising prospects of mindfulness-based interventions, there exist gaps in integrating these practices within a culturally and religiously sensitive framework, particularly in Islamic contexts. Existing literature predominantly focuses on secular mindfulness techniques, with limited exploration of how Islamic principles can be interwoven into these practices for children in Islamic communities. Furthermore, there is a need for empirical research assessing the effectiveness of Islamic mindfulness-based interventions in educational settings and their impact on children's mental health post-pandemic.

This awareness is carried out to enable the children to carry out their activities with full consciousness. Early childhood needs to be accustomed to knowing God as the Creator of the universe. In this case, children are accustomed to relying on everything as God's creation. This concept in Islam is faith, Islam, and *ihsan*. It can take the form of worship, remembering Allah (*zikrullah*), and doing good. Ultimately, the development of Islamic mindfulness-based play

activities can be given to children as a stimulus to face-to-face learning. This will help children enter school physically and mentally healthy to prevent the effects of this pandemic.

This study aims to develop a framework for Islamic mindfulness-based play activities tailored to reduce the adverse mental health impacts of the pandemic on children. This research seeks an innovative, culturally congruent intervention by integrating Islamic spiritual practices with contemporary psychological approaches. The proposed model is anticipated to contribute significantly to the field of educational psychology, particularly in Muslim-majority contexts, by providing a practical, faith-based solution for addressing child mental health issues in the post-pandemic era.

Methods

This study adopted the Research and Development (R&D) methodology, specifically tailored for educational contexts, as defined by Borg and Gall. Conducted in kindergarten (TK) and Raudhatul Athfal (Islamic kindergarten) in Jakarta-Depok, the primary goal was to develop and evaluate educational products, namely Islamic mindfulness-based play activities, to mitigate post-pandemic learning challenges in children. The R&D approach, typically involving ten steps (Gall et al., 1996), was modified in this research to concentrate on the development and feasibility assessment of these educational tools rather than their effectiveness or mass production. The process involved identifying children's learning challenges post-pandemic and creating and refining educational games and teaching methods designed to promote Islamic mindfulness in young learners.

This data collection and analysis involved observational studies, educator feedback sessions, and direct interaction with children using the developed tools. The analysis centered on assessing these tools' usability, engagement level, and educational impact in fostering Islamic mindfulness and addressing learning difficulties. To ensure the reliability and validity of the study, multiple testing and feedback cycles were conducted, focusing on the effectiveness of the products in actual classroom environments and their impact on children's learning and mental health post-pandemic. This approach aligns with the adapted framework from Borg and Gall, emphasizing the development and feasibility evaluation of Islamic mindfulness-based play activities in an educational setting.

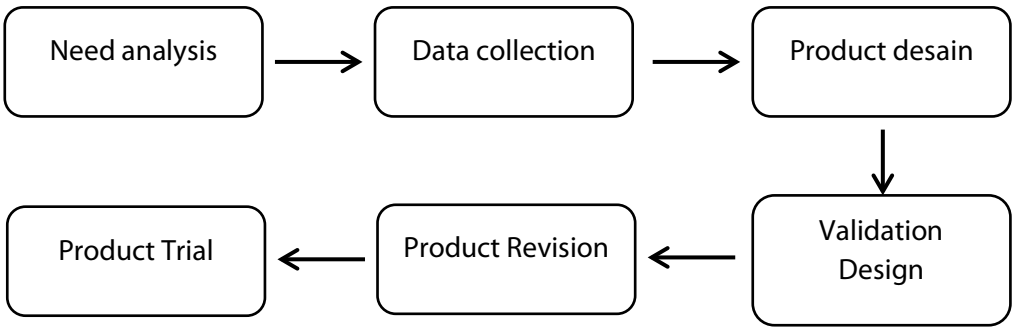

Figure 1. Schematic of the research process for developing Islamic mindfulness-based play activities, adapted from Borg and Gall (Gall et al., 1996).

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Result

This section discusses the development results in physical models, procedural models, and individual expert evaluations consisting of learning materials experts, learning design experts, and teachers.

3.1. Physical Model

The design model in this study is a physical model in the form of an Islamic mindfulness-based play activity guide for teachers in designing and implementing play activities for children. The developed play activities consist of 14 chapters in the book.

Figure 1. Cover and Table of Contents of the Book "Islamic Mindfulness-Based Play Activity"

The physical model is depicted in the following flow:

Figure 2. Physical model flow

3.2. Procedural Model

The main objective of this research is to produce a product and determine its feasibility. Furthermore, it can measure a child's readiness to face face-to-face learning. The researchers simplified and reduced the ten stages to seven. It is developing Islamic mindfulness-based play activities for children in kindergarten/RA. The development of a model of children's play activities based on Islamic mindfulness is explained in the following steps.

Table. 1. Model of children's play activities based on Islamic mindfulness

No	Islamic Mindfulness	Children's daily activities	Play activities based on Islamic mindfulness
1	*Zikr*	Breathing exercise	Yoga with prayer movements
		Snack time	Engage with food
		Getting dressed	Body Awareness
2	*Tadabbur*	Play	My Amazing Sense
3	*Muraqabah*	Prayer	Yoga with prayer movements
4	*Muhasabah*	Gratitude	Gratitude Journal Writing
		Silence	Sitting time to recite istighfar

3.3. Need Analysis

Researchers conducted preliminary research in the form of needs analysis in developing Islamic Mindfulness play activities. The researchers found several indications of children's mental health problems from our observations in several kindergartens in the Depok and Jakarta areas, such as children are always scared to enter the classroom if they are not accompanied by their parents when left by their parents, they cry and lie down and want to pee. However, they want to go out to their parents. However, when given a task, the child can complete it thoroughly and successfully. They are being a good boy to his friends. Often angry, alone, and disturbing friends, they become upset and cry when their parents go away, not participating in learning activities and disturbing their friends, like to scream suddenly.

From the children's mental health status, researchers also found that post-pandemic facilities, infrastructure, and play activities were almost the same as their usual daily activities. In this context, to reduce the above-mentioned mental health problems of children after the pandemic, schools and kindergarten teachers need references to develop play activities for early childhood based on an Islamic mindfulness approach. Based on the results of this preliminary study, it can be concluded that no activities or media are found on Islamic mindfulness for children, so parents and teachers need this development model.

3.4. Product development

The product in question is an innovative play guide tailored for early childhood, emphasizing mindfulness activities that cater to various aspects of a child's development. The first activity this guide highlights is Yoga, which uniquely incorporates movements from traditional prayer practices. These movements are known for inducing deep relaxation, enhancing self-confidence, and fostering a capacity for positive thinking. Research published in the "Early Childhood Education" journal underscores the multifaceted benefits of yoga, which include but are not limited to improved self-control, emotional regulation, and the development of empathy. The prayer movements that form the foundation of these yoga practices, such as standing upright, bowing, and prostrating, closely resemble stretching exercises. They benefit physical health and significantly contribute to spiritual and mental well-being.

The second activity, Engaging with Food, is designed to forge a healthier and more mindful relationship between children and their eating habits. This activity is particularly beneficial in the contemporary context, where children are often overwhelmed with packed schedules and extracurricular commitments. Engaging with food involves teaching children to be fully present during meals, helping them to recognize signals of hunger and fullness, and encouraging slower, more mindful eating. This approach has the potential to mitigate common problems such as eating disorders, overeating, and associated weight gain. By focusing on the

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mind-body connection with food, this activity aims to instill lifelong healthy eating habits in children.

Self-body awareness is the third activity proposed in the guide. It involves a series of activities that employ scripts and music to guide children through recognizing, breathing into, and relaxing different parts of their bodies. This practice can be integrated into daily routines, whether at school or home, and is particularly effective in moments of tension, anger, or anxiety. The time investment for this activity is minimal, requiring only 10-15 minutes each day, but the benefits of heightened body awareness and emotional self-regulation are substantial. The guide also suggests a range of meditation options on platforms like YouTube, offering a diversity of durations and styles to suit different needs and preferences.

The fourth activity, My Amazing Senses, is a versatile exercise to train children's five senses to enhance their awareness and presence at any moment. This sensory engagement encourages children to observe and interact with their environment attentively, cultivating mindfulness that permeates their daily activities.

Gratitude Journal Writing, the fifth activity, is a mindfulness technique that involves children reflecting on and recording aspects of their day for which they are grateful. This practice helps children focus on the positive elements of their day-to-day life and nurtures a sense of gratitude and contentment. Journaling encourages children to stay grounded in the present moment and fosters a deeper appreciation for the world around them.

The final activity in the guide is the practice of Positive Affirmations based on *Asmaul Husna*. These affirmations are positive statements that, when repeated regularly, have the power to alter thought patterns, enhance self-esteem, and bolster confidence. Such affirmations are particularly impactful for children, aiding in developing creative thinking, self-esteem, and a growth mindset. By teaching children to adopt a positive outlook and utilize affirmations, parents and teachers provide invaluable personal and emotional development tools to benefit them throughout their lives.

Affirmations for children should be as exciting and straightforward as those for adults. Positive affirmations for children The following is a list of positive affirmations based on Asmaul Husna to help children recognize the Creator, themselves, and their environment.

Positive Affirmations Based on *Asmaul Husna*
I have a God who is Most Compassionate and Merciful.
I am intelligent, extraordinary, and strong because Allah gives me intelligence and strength.
I do not need to worry because Allah is always with me.
Learning is fun; may Allah guide me.
I am unique because Allah is the Great Creator.

Table 2. Positive Affirmations Based on *Asmaul Husna*

3.5. One-to-one Expert Result

Several experts consist of early childhood learning materials experts and learning design experts. All experts provide suggestions for improvement according to their areas of expertise based on the expert review evaluation phase results.

3.5.1. Material Expert

Material expert testing is conducted after the completion of product development in the form of Islamic Mindfulness-based playful learning material. Material testing determines the materials' suitability to guide teachers and parents so that children can understand the activity's essence and focus on doing it. Materials expert from Doctor of Learning Technology, Jakarta State University. The Islamic mindfulness-based play activity learning material is good enough because it has been prepared based on the needs of children, is suitable for their development, and is good for reducing mental health. Still, it needs to be developed for pandemic cases and children's daily activities. For educators and parents to understand the stages children must master coherently, a sub-discussion on competency maps must be added. Overall, this learning

material deserves to be a reference for teachers and parents to accompany children in any activity. The expert validation of the material showed a total score of 62 with a percentage of 95.38% and an average score of 4.77 in the "outstanding" category.

3.5.2. Learning Design Expert

Learning design experts have also assessed the learning materials for the Islamic Mindfulness-based Play Activity. This assessment is done to see whether the learning materials are according to the learning development rules and according to the child's needs. Evaluation by Doctor of PG-PAUD Jakarta State University. The results of the assessment provide the following indications: (1) The researchers want to give the impression of systematic and structured learning by preparing learning with the Dick & Carey learning model. A systematic learning approach requires researchers to formulate clear objectives by the needs analysis and to want maximum results. (2) The preparation of Islamic mindfulness-based play activity learning materials is good enough. However, it would be better to go deeper so that this book is not only a handbook but also a learning reference book that can be used not only by teachers and parents but also by the general public and practitioners as well as students. (3) Preparation of Islamic Mindfulness-based Play Activity Learning materials should be supplemented with tables for each activity showing the sequence of activities or the hierarchy; this is to make it easier for readers and also makes it easier for educators to incorporate it into learning designs in schools.

Overall, this learning material deserves to be used as a reference by teachers and parents to accompany children in each activity. The learning design expert validation results showed a total of 133 with a percentage of 95% and an average score of 4.86 in the "outstanding" category.

3.5.3. One to one teacher

The results of the one-to-one teacher tests using a survey of 3 kindergarten and RA teachers. Regarding the completeness of material on the topic according to the curriculum, two teachers said it was perfect (66.7%), and one teacher put it in the excellent category (33.3%). About the indicator of the breadth of material on the subject by the curriculum, five teachers stated that it was perfect (100%). As for the indicator of the depth of the subject matter in the syllabus, two teachers noted that this was very good (66.7%), and one teacher classified this as good (33.3%). From the indicators of the accuracy of the pictures, illustrations, and diagrams used for learning, three teachers stated that they were perfect (100%). Indicators of the suitability of the material to the child's needs: 2 teachers said it was perfect (66.7%), and one teacher rated it in the excellent category (33.3%). Three teachers said they were perfect for the indicators using examples appropriate to everyday life (100%). Of the most recent indicators, one teacher said it was perfect (33.3%), and two teachers placed it in the excellent category (66.7%).

3.5.4. Field Trial

The play activities have been a trial for 20 children in several schools in Depok and Jakarta.

Figure 3. Field Trial at TK A

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Figure 3. Field Trial at TK B

The qualitative results of the children's studies showed that children enjoy play activities based on Islamic mindfulness. As expressed by SZ, "I am happy, teacher," the same was conveyed by S, "I'm happy too, ma'am."

The activity the child likes the most is gratitude journal writing because, besides being active, the child is free to describe what he wants and dislikes that day, so his emotions are channeled into the activity.

HA said, "I like finding a way (red. maze) to my house, teacher."

Children who have difficulty understanding many lessons and school tasks. Children having difficulty understanding the learning material provided by the teacher during BDR is one of the reasons why children become stressed. Most teachers offer new material without a clear understanding, so children do not understand.

Discussion

The Islamic Mindfulness-based Play Activity Model addresses the critical need for interventions in the post-pandemic era, particularly for child mental health. This need arises from the profound impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education sectors, notably affecting students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds who faced significant educational and social disruptions(Baker & Bakopoulou, 2023; Chandramohan & Pramila, 2022). The pandemic's effect on families and caregivers, lacking adequate material and time to support children's learning, further exacerbated these challenges (Humphreys, 2023; Toquero, 2021). Consequently, there emerged an urgent requirement for mental health services, especially for vulnerable groups like children with disabilities and those experiencing increased stress and anxiety due to altered educational environments (Farfán-Latorre et al., 2023; Wilson et al., 2023).

The study's findings reveal a successful development of a physical and procedural model for Islamic mindfulness-based play activities tailored for post-pandemic mental health improvement in children. This model simplifies ten stages to seven, ensuring practical applicability in educational settings (Material Expert; Learning et al.). Notably, gratitude journal writing emerged as the most favored activity among children, indicating its potential effectiveness in enhancing positive thinking and emotional well-being (Field Trial). These results align with previous research emphasizing the importance of mindfulness and spiritual activities in improving mental health and resilience in children (Dunning et al., 2019; Kallapiran et al., 2015).

The experience of stress in children often arises from a lack of adequate parental support, particularly noticeable during the pandemic. One significant barrier is parents' limited understanding of educational material. Parents struggle to aid their children's learning effectively without providing additional explanations for online lessons teachers offer. Compounding this issue is parents' limited time to accompany their children due to work commitments. This lack of direct guidance and support can leave children feeling confused and stressed, exacerbating the challenges they face in their educational and personal development.

In response to these challenges, educators and researchers have developed various methods to teach children mindfulness, adapting these techniques to suit different age groups, from preschoolers to teenagers. In early childhood education, activities stimulate children's growth in multiple domains, including moral, religious, cognitive, language, physical-motor, and social-emotional development. Techniques such as yoga movement-based prayer, food engagement, body awareness activities, exercises focusing on the five senses, gratitude journaling, and positive affirmations rooted in *Asmaul Husna* are employed. These methods aim to cultivate holistic growth and mindful awareness, allowing children to understand and appreciate their Creator, practice kindness towards others, control their emotions, understand their religion, and respect the beliefs of others. This comprehensive approach is crucial in early childhood, as it aligns with the Islamic principles of iman, Islam, and *Ihsan*, encouraging worship, remembrance of Allah (*zikrullah*), and performing good deeds.

The findings align with previous studies that highlight the importance of mindfulness and spirituality in mitigating mental health issues (Abdul-Hamid & Hughes, 2015; Hipolito et al., 2014). Incorporating Islamic concepts in mindfulness activities, such as using *Asmaul Husna* for positive affirmations, resonates with the idea that spiritual practices can enhance coping mechanisms and psychological well-being (Cruz et al., 2017; Uyun et al., 2019). However, contrary to some studies suggesting the limited impact of the pandemic on social skills and student well-being (Chandramohan & Pramila, 2022), the current research underscores the necessity of targeted interventions for mental health, especially in educational settings.

The effectiveness of the Islamic Mindfulness-based Play Activity Model in enhancing self-awareness and socio-emotional competence among children is evident (Bokoch, 2017; Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). This model's success in the post-pandemic context is crucial, given the varied impact of the pandemic on children's mental health and social development across different demographic and socioeconomic strata (Lorthe et al., 2023; Martineau & Bakopoulou, 2023). The positive response to the mindfulness activities, particularly gratitude journal writing, underscores the potential of such interventions in fostering resilience and emotional well-being in children (Field Trial).

An exciting aspect of the findings is the model's focus on integrating Islamic spiritual elements into mindfulness activities, which has been less explored in previous literature. This integration appears to have a positive impact on children's mental health, aligning with studies that emphasize the protective role of spirituality in coping with mental health disorders (Abdulkerim & Li, 2022; Weber & Pargament, 2014). However, the uniqueness of the Islamic mindfulness approach necessitates cautious interpretation, as its applicability and effectiveness may vary across different cultural and religious contexts.

The significance of the study lies in its contribution to the understanding of how Islamic mindfulness-based activities can be tailored for children's mental health improvement, especially in a post-pandemic world. This approach, bridging the gap between spiritual practices and mental health interventions, offers a novel perspective on child psychology and educational interventions (Dwidiyanti et al., 2021; Harianti et al., 2022). However, it is essential to consider the long-term effects and adaptability of such interventions in diverse educational and cultural settings.

The implications of this study are far-reaching, particularly in the context of educational and psychological interventions post-pandemic. The Islamic Mindfulness-based Play Activity Model presents a viable approach to addressing the mental health issues faced by children in a culturally sensitive manner. Its success in the study suggests the potential for broader application in educational settings, offering a holistic approach to child development that integrates mental health, spirituality, and education(Alimah, 2020; Komariah et al., 2023). Future research could explore its adaptability and effectiveness in diverse cultural contexts, contributing to a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of child mental health interventions.

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Conclusion

This research effectively developed and implemented an Islamic Mindfulness-based Play Activity Model aimed at ameliorating post-pandemic child mental health issues. Centered on a physical model comprising a 14-chapter guidebook and a procedural model that simplifies ten stages to seven, the research catered to the urgent need for mental health interventions among children in Depok and Jakarta. Key components of the model include yoga based on prayer movements, engaging activities with food, self-body awareness exercises, training of the five senses, gratitude journal writing, and positive affirmations rooted in *Asmaul Husna*, each contributing uniquely to enhancing children's relaxation, self-confidence, healthy habits, sensory skills, and positive thinking. The model's validation through expert assessments and one-to-one teacher tests, coupled with its successful field trial involving 20 children across several schools, underscored its effectiveness and appropriateness. However, the research acknowledges limitations such as its confined geographical scope and variability in individual responses. It suggests further research to explore the model's applicability in diverse cultural contexts and its long-term impact on children's mental health. This study thus presents significant implications for educational and psychological interventions in the post-pandemic era, offering a culturally sensitive, holistic approach to child development that integrates mental health, spirituality, and education while highlighting the necessity for ongoing research in this critical field.

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