

The Integration of Auto-Education and Itqan Principles in Building Children's Intrinsic Motivation: A Case Study at Firdaus Islamic Course

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Submitted: October 2 nd 2025	Revised: October 21 st 2025	Accepted: October 21 st 2025	Published: October 30 th 2025
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Abstrak

Pendidikan anak usia dini (PAUD) di Indonesia menghadapi paradoks antara tuntutan akademis dini dan tujuan membentuk motivasi intrinsik, sebuah tantangan yang diperparah oleh distraksi digital. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis integrasi konseptual dan praktis antara prinsip Auto-Education Montessori dan etos kerja Islam, Itqan, dalam membangun motivasi intrinsik serta karakter holistik di Firdaus Islamic Course (FIC). Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui triangulasi sumber yang mencakup wawancara mendalam dengan pengelola dan orang tua, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen, yang kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sinergi antara Auto-Education sebagai kerangka bagaimana anak belajar mandiri dan Itqan sebagai landasan mengapa aktivitas itu bermakna secara spiritual menciptakan model pedagogis hibrida yang efektif. Integrasi ini mengubah aktivitas belajar menjadi pekerjaan ('amal) yang bertujuan, yang terbukti secara signifikan meningkatkan kemandirian, tanggung jawab, dan regulasi emosi anak. Dampak positif ini juga tertransfer secara konsisten ke lingkungan rumah, sebagaimana divalidasi melalui testimoni orang tua. Disimpulkan bahwa perpaduan Montessori dan Itqan berhasil membangun motivasi intrinsik yang kokoh dengan membingkai kemandirian sebagai tindakan ibadah yang bermakna, menawarkan solusi holistik untuk tantangan pendidikan kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Auto-Education; Itqan; Motivasi Intrinsik; Montessori Islam

Abstract

Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Indonesia faces a critical paradox that the societal demand for premature academic skills often undermines the educational goal of fostering intrinsic motivation, a challenge exacerbated by digital distractions. This study analyzes the conceptual and practical integration of the Montessori principle of *Auto-Education* and the Islamic work ethic of *Itqan* in cultivating intrinsic motivation and holistic character at Firdaus Islamic Course (FIC). Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through source triangulation, comprising in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis and were analyzed thematically. The findings reveal that the synergy between *Auto-Education* (the *how*) and *Itqan* (the spiritual *why*) creates an effective hybrid pedagogical model. This integration reframes learning as purposeful 'work' ('amal), demonstrably enhancing children's independence, responsibility, and emotional regulation. Crucially, this impact is amplified by a strong parent-school partnership and is consistently transferred to the home environment. The study concludes that this fusion enriches Self-Determination Theory by introducing a

transcendental dimension and successfully cultivates robust intrinsic motivation by framing independence as a meaningful act of worship. It thus offers a potent, culturally-grounded solution to contemporary educational challenges.

Keywords: Auto-Education; Itqan; Intrinsic Motivation; Islamic Montessori

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) globally faces a fundamental paradox between its goal of fostering intrinsically motivated lifelong learners and the prevalent use of practices dominated by extrinsic rewards (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This paradox arises because education often relies on reward systems like grades, praise, or material gifts to encourage learning, which can inadvertently diminish a child's natural interest in knowledge. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) explains that intrinsic motivation stems from the fulfillment of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy refers to a sense of control over one's learning choices, competence to the feeling of mastering tasks, and relatedness to supportive social connections. Conversely, a dependency on external rewards risks extinguishing a child's innate curiosity, which is a phenomenon known as the over justification effect (Lepper et al., 1973). As Lepper et al. (1973) stated, A field experiment was conducted with children to test the 'over justification' hypothesis suggested by self-perception, the theory proposition that a person's intrinsic interest in an activity may be decreased by inducing him to engage in that activity as an explicit means to some extrinsic goal. This effect causes children to lose internal motivation once the reward is removed, making learning dependent on external factors. This challenge is compounded by the massive digital distractions of the modern era, where children are increasingly exposed to devices like smartphones and tablets. Excessive screen time has been shown to reduce concentration and natural curiosity, replacing them with habits of shallow, passive content consumption, such as aimless scrolling or watching short, superficial videos (WHO, 2019). This not only disrupts cognitive development but also emotional growth, as children become less active in real-world exploration.

In Indonesia, this paradox is acutely manifested through intense social and cultural demands for early mastery of academic skills, known as *calistung* (reading, writing, and arithmetic) (Rachman, 2019). This culture is often driven by social competition among parents, where early academic achievement is seen as an indicator of a child's future success. A national survey shows that a majority of parents in major cities expect their children to master *calistung* before the age of six, even though this contradicts ECE curriculum guidelines that emphasize

play-based learning to support holistic development (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). These guidelines promote activities that are free, creative, and oriented toward a child's interests, not rigid academic drills. This pressure often results in the use of inflexible, reward-oriented teaching methods, such as offering excessive praise for every minor achievement, which can diminish a child's natural desire to learn. Lepper et al. (1973) explain that many of the activities we ask children to attempt in school, in fact, are of intrinsic interest to at least some of the children. One effect of presenting these activities within a system of extrinsic incentives, the present study suggests, is to undermine the intrinsic interest in these activities of at least those children who had some interest to begin with. Consequently, children may learn not out of curiosity but to avoid punishment or gain adult approval. Simultaneously, the impact of digital distractions is significant; data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) indicates a rise in attention deficit cases among young children due to gadget use, adversely affecting their learning motivation and emotional development (OECD, 2025). Amidst the pandemic and online learning, gadget use increased drastically, leaving children more vulnerable to attention deficits and a lack of direct social interaction.

Facing the dual challenges of academic pressure, which fosters a dependence on external rewards, and digital distractions, which cultivate passive consumption, a pedagogical intervention is needed that not only changes how children learn but also reinforces why the learning process is meaningful. This intervention must be holistic, combining psychological, cultural, and spiritual elements to build a strong foundation. The Montessori and Itqan approaches were chosen because they are inherently complementary; Montessori nurtures a child's autonomy and intrinsic motivation through directed freedom in learning, while Itqan instills earnestness and a spiritual purpose that aligns with Indonesian cultural and religious values (Lillard, 2017; Khairullah et al., 2022). Montessori's concept of auto-education emphasizes a prepared environment with learning materials that appeal to a child's natural interests, allowing them to learn independently without external coercion. This directly addresses the problem of dependence on extrinsic motivation by restoring autonomy and the drive to learn from within the child. This principle includes the use of sensory materials designed to meet the child's developmental stage, such as geometric blocks or puzzles that encourage free exploration. Meanwhile, Itqan fortifies children against superficial distractions by instilling the values of earnestness, meticulousness, and spiritual purpose in every activity, transforming their work from mere self-gratification into a purposeful act (Widodo & Suryosukmono, 2021), such as viewing learning as an act of worship or a contribution to

society. This integration creates a balance between individual freedom and collective responsibility, which is relevant to the Indonesian cultural context that is rich in religious values.

Although the integration of Montessori pedagogy and Islamic values shows great potential, a significant gap exists in the current scientific literature. Research on Montessori implementation in Indonesia has focused mainly on its effectiveness in secular, urban school contexts (Aisya et al., 2021), such as improving children's independence in significant cities. However, little has been explored about how its fundamental concepts are reinterpreted when they intersect with the rich framework of Islamic values (Hidayat, 2021), such as adapting learning materials to integrate teachings from the Quran or Sunnah. Understanding a hybrid motivation model that blends the fulfillment of psychological needs (intrinsic) with the cultivation of spiritual purpose (transcendental) in the context of Indonesian ECE remains very limited, with few studies exploring its long-term impact on child character.

Stemming from this gap, this research aims to analyze the conceptual and practical synergy between the Montessori learning environment and the work ethic of *Itqan* in building intrinsic motivation and holistic character in early childhood. Specifically, this study will explore how the Montessori method provides the framework for *how* children learn independently, such as through a prepared environment that supports free choice. In contrast, the value of *Itqan* provides the foundation for *why* that activity is spiritually meaningful, for example, by teaching that every task is performed with *ihsan* (the best goodness) as a form of devotion. This research is expected to provide a theoretical contribution by enriching Self-Determination Theory with the addition of a spiritual dimension (Wehmeyer et al., 2020). This dimension could include transcendental elements like a sense of connection to God, complementing SDT's basic needs. Furthermore, it offers a practical contribution as a guide for educators and parents in adapting global learning methods to local values, such as designing an ECE curriculum that combines Montessori with Islamic character education. By involving parental perceptions, this study also encourages stronger home-school collaboration, which is proven to enhance overall child well-being through joint programs like family workshops (Epstein, 2018). This collaboration can create a consistent educational ecosystem, potentially becoming a sustainable solution for shaping a young generation that is independent, motivated, and spiritual, ready to face global challenges while preserving their cultural identity.

METHOD

This research obtained official permission from the management of the Firdaus Islamic Course (FIC) before data collection. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants were strictly maintained through the use of identity codes to protect their privacy, in accordance with qualitative research ethics standards (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study adopted a qualitative approach with a case study design to deeply understand the phenomenon of integrating Montessori philosophy and Islamic values at FIC. The primary focus was the hybrid pedagogical model that juxtaposes the concept of work in Montessori with the Islamic work ethic of *itqan*, and its impact on children's independence and responsibility. A case study design was chosen as it allows for a holistic and contextual exploration of a phenomenon within its real-life setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research site was FIC, selected for its consistency in implementing this model, with data collection conducted in July-August 2025.

Participants were purposively selected to ensure a richness and diversity of perspectives, thereby yielding rich and valid data. Key informants included the manager, who is also the founder of FIC, and one tutor, both possessing a deep understanding of the philosophy, curriculum, and implementation of the hybrid learning model. Additionally, four parents of children attending FIC were interviewed to capture their perspectives on the program's impact on their children's preparedness, behavior, and responsibility at home. Non-participant observation was conducted on 10 children aged 3–6 years who were active in the FIC program, focusing on their interactions with the learning environment and the development of their independence, as well as social and academic readiness.

Data were collected through the triangulation of methods and sources to ensure the validity, depth, and credibility of the findings. The methods included: (1) participant and non-participant observation in the classroom to observe the spatial layout, use of learning materials, and social interactions; (2) in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the manager, a tutor, and parents to obtain detailed narratives; and (3) document analysis of materials such as FIC's internal curriculum, child development reports, and related notes to support the research context. This triangulation allowed for cross-verification from multiple perspectives, including the manager as a key informant, purposively selected parents, and the non-participantly observed children.

All collected qualitative data were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach based on the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarizing with the data by re-reading interview transcripts and field notes; (2) generating initial codes to identify significant patterns; (3) grouping codes into potential themes; (4) reviewing themes to ensure coherence

with the data; (5) defining and naming themes to clarify the analytical narrative; and (6) writing the final, coherent report to answer the research questions. This process included data reduction, data presentation in narrative and matrix forms, and concluding the verification of key emerging themes. The analysis aimed to uncover patterns of interaction and the meanings behind the implementation of this unique educational model, thereby producing findings that are contextual, credible, and justifiable.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the integration of the Auto-Education principle from Montessori philosophy with the *Itqan* principle from Islamic tradition at Firdaus Islamic Course (FIC) reveals a unique hybrid educational model. This model does not merely adopt Montessori methods wholesale but consciously adapts them through an Islamic theological lens, creating a synergy that enriches the holistic learning experience for young children. At first glance, the Montessori philosophy, born from a European scientific-humanist tradition, and the principle of *Itqan*, from an Islamic theological tradition, might seem distant (Shuriye, 2009). However, a deeper analysis reveals fundamental points of convergence, such as an emphasis on process, order, concentration, and personal responsibility. Both reject superficial, hurried, and instant result-oriented approaches, instead valuing diligence, precision, and the satisfaction derived from a job well done.

The hybrid model at FIC consciously weaves the principle of *Itqan* into Montessori pedagogy, where Auto-Education provides the structure, while *Itqan* provides the spiritual soul. The result is an education that develops independence, cognitive intelligence, a foundation of character, a work ethic, and spirituality from an early age (Darnis et al., 2022). This analysis is divided into two major themes: (1) The Integration of Auto-Education and *Itqan* Principles in Pedagogical Practices at FIC, and (2) The Impact of this Integration on Children's Intrinsic Motivation and Character Formation. This division allows for a more structured understanding of how this synergy is manifested and how it affects the children.

The Integration of Auto-Education and *Itqan* Principles in Pedagogical Practices at FIC

The integration of the Auto-Education principle from Montessori philosophy with the *Itqan* principle from Islamic tradition at Firdaus Islamic Course (FIC) creates a unique and coherent hybrid pedagogical model. At its core, Auto-Education emphasizes self-directed education where the child is an active agent in their own learning. Meanwhile, *Itqan* as an Islamic work ethic demanding precision, excellence, and thorough completion provides a

spiritual and moral dimension to this process. An in-depth analysis of practices at FIC reveals that this integration is not merely an addition of Islamic elements to a Montessori framework, but a harmonious synthesis that enriches both. As revealed in a study on Montessori adaptations in Islamic schools, such integration facilitates a holistic early childhood education where religious values like *Itqan* are operationalized through self-directed activities to form responsible character (Rahman & Suryana, 2023). At FIC, this process is clearly visible through the design of the environment, the choice of terminology, the work cycle, and the role of the educator, all of which are designed to build a child's intrinsic motivation.

The concept of the Prepared Environment serves as the primary foundation for this integration. Maria Montessori considered the environment the third teacher after the adult and the child's internal teacher, acting as a catalyst for Auto-Education. At FIC, this environment not only facilitates independence according to Montessori standards with accessible shelves and self-correcting materials but is also adapted with Islamic values to become a vessel for *Itqan*. For instance, the neat and orderly arrangement of the space reflects the *Itqan* principle of orderliness (*tartib*), which aligns with Islamic teachings on maintaining cleanliness and being trustworthy with shared property. This adaptation is similar to those made in Saudi Montessori schools, where the environment is adjusted to socio-cultural and Islamic norms to avoid value conflicts, thereby creating a space that supports child autonomy while instilling a spiritual work ethic (Alhashim, 2023a). At FIC, materials like a minor pitcher for pouring water or tweezers for transferring beans are designed to train precision, which is the essence of *Itqan*, while allowing children to learn independently without excessive intervention. As a result, the environment becomes a stage where the synergy of Auto-Education and *Itqan* is performed, ensuring that every interaction a child has with the environment is not just for cognitive development, but also a spiritual exercise in doing everything to the best of their ability.

The concept of Auto-Education itself, the heart of the Montessori philosophy, is based on the scientific observation that children possess an innate psychological drive to learn and perfect themselves. The child is not an empty vessel to be filled by a teacher, but an active individual with an internal teacher guiding their development. The role of the adult and the environment is merely to facilitate, removing obstacles so this natural drive can flourish optimally. At FIC, this understanding is enriched with *Itqan*, where independence is not just a secular goal but a manifestation of *ihsan* acting with excellence as if seen by God. The emphasis on independence and responsibility as a foundation before formal academics reflects this; the founder of FIC stated that an independent child becomes incredibly receptive to any knowledge

you want to impart, indicating that Auto-Education is a process of forming the brain's executive functions, such as planning and impulse control. The integration with *Itqan* elevates this process to an act of worship, consistent with studies at Islamic Montessori schools like Brainy Bunch, where the Montessori method is used to instill Islamic values like earnestness (*Itqan*) through self-directed activities, thereby significantly increasing children's independence (Mufidah & Wijayanti, 2022). At FIC, when a child chooses an activity, concentrates, and tidies up, they are not only training cognitive skills but also practicing *Itqan* as a mental attitude to work meticulously and professionally, which fuels sustainable intrinsic motivation.

One of the most significant terminological innovations at FIC is the use of the word work (*pekerjaan*) instead of play (*permainan*). This is not a mere semantic difference but a paradigm shift that connects Auto-Education with *Itqan*. In Montessori, work refers to a purposeful, voluntary activity for self-construction, often mistaken for play in conventional education. At FIC, this term is enriched with a spiritual dimension, where work becomes a form of '*amal* (a deed) that has the value of worship. This aligns with *Itqan* as a pillar of the Islamic work ethic, which encourages perfecting tasks with the highest quality. As the FIC manager asserted, "That is not a game... please take your respective work." This elevates the status of a child's activity to a meaningful engagement with responsibility. This adaptation is in line with findings at other Islamic Montessori schools, where terminology like work is integrated with the concept of '*amal* to socialize a work ethic from an early age, leading children to view tasks as morally and spiritually valuable actions (Fahrudin et al., 2025a). At FIC, this shift moves a child's perception from mere fun to purposeful contribution, building intrinsic motivation from a sense of competence and devotion, which aligns perfectly with the spirit of *Itqan*.

Activities in the Practical Life area serve as the clearest examples of this integration. Activities like pouring water, transferring beans, peeling carrots, or hanging miniature laundry are designed to train fine motor skills, coordination, and concentration, core Montessori objectives. However, at FIC, there is a deeper goal: to instill a meticulous and responsible work ethic through *Itqan*. Each work cycle, taking a tray, performing the activity with focus, solving problems like spills, and then cleaning up and returning the material, is a mini-exercise in *Itqan*. The process begins with free choice (Auto-Education), where the initiative comes from within the child. During execution, *Itqan* is applied through careful, patient, and neat concentration, such as moving beans without dropping them. Completion emphasizes thorough responsibility, including cleaning up any consequences, while returning the material teaches orderliness and trustworthiness. A case study in an Islamic Montessori school shows that such practical

activities are effective in integrating Islamic values, where daily tasks become an arena for practicing *Itqan* for emotional and social development (Aminah, 2022). At FIC, framing these as work makes children feel their activity is important, shifting their satisfaction from excitement to successful completion, the foundation of intrinsic motivation rooted in competence and spiritual contribution.

Daily interactions at FIC embody this synergy through the educator's role as a facilitator and a role model of values. Unlike in traditional teaching, the teacher at FIC acts as a guardian of the environment and the process, demanding high skills of observation and patience. The practice of presentation, slow, precise, and minimally verbal demonstrations, allows the child to try on their own, aligning with Auto-Education's respect for the child's internal teacher. Observation showed tutors being effective without excessive intervention, providing space for children to learn from their mistakes, to develop perseverance and self-confidence. This role extends to the emotional realm: when a child cries, the approach is to give them space for expression, such as approaching with a soft voice to build a connection. This is paradoxical, where non-intervention demands deep engagement, consistent with Islamic *tarbiyah* (upbringing), which emphasizes *uswah hasanah* (a good role model). The teacher becomes a model of patience and respect, integrating *Itqan* as a professional attitude in education (Khairullah et al., 2022). As in the case of a Montessori school in Lebanon, the teacher's role as a role model aligns with Islamic values to build holistic character. To synthesize this integration, a table is presented as follows:

Table 1.
Activity, Principle, and Impact Matrix

Activity at FIC	Auto-Education Principle Involved	Itqan Principle Instilled	Form of Intrinsic Motivation Cultivated
Using a work mat.	Freedom within limits; Respecting personal space and concentration.	Upholding the rights of others (haqqul adam); Respecting the workspace as a trust (amanah).	Initiative to not disturb peers; Genuine respect for the work of others.
Cleaning a water spill independently.	Responsibility for the environment; The complete work cycle.	Cleanliness is part of faith; Completing a task thoroughly without complaint.	A sense of ownership over the environment; Satisfaction from tidying up and resolving a problem.
Presentation of multiplication with apparatus.	Concrete learning before abstract; Learning at one's own pace.	Deep conceptual understanding, not just rote memorization; Precision when working with materials.	Intellectual curiosity; The drive to explore mathematical concepts further due to a solid understanding.

Asking for permission to join a friend's work.	Structured social interaction; Development of negotiation skills.	Proper etiquette (adab) in interaction; Respecting the will of others and not being forceful.	The ability to collaborate voluntarily; Emotional resilience in handling rejection.
Returning tools to the shelf in the correct place.	External order to support internal order; Responsibility towards the community.	Amanah (guarding shared property); Orderliness and tidiness as a reflection of faith.	The habit of maintaining order without being told; A sense of pride in being a responsible community member.

This table illustrates how daily activities at FIC systematically integrate Auto-Education with *Itqan* to build intrinsic motivation. For example, cleaning a spill is not a mundane task, but a manifestation of *Itqan* as cleanliness is part of faith, which aligns with the Auto-Education principle that promotes independent responsibility. This kind of practice, consistent with studies on Montessori-Islam adaptations in Saudi Arabia, shows that the principle of *Itqan* has become the soul that animates the Montessori method at FIC. The relationship between the two has proven to be symbiotic; the demands of Montessori work become micro-scale exercises in *Itqan*, and success in performing them strengthens a child's intrinsic motivation through a reinforcing loop. Thus, FIC has successfully created an educational ecosystem where the learning process is not only about academic mastery but also a holistic and meaningful journey of character formation.

The Impact of Integration on Children's Intrinsic Motivation and Character Formation

The integration of the Auto-Education principle from Montessori philosophy with the concept of *Itqan* from Islamic tradition at Firdaus Islamic Course (FIC) creates a unique educational approach for early childhood. This approach combines Montessori's learning independence with work perfection (*Itqan*) based on Islamic values, yielding a profound impact on children's intrinsic motivation and character formation. This impact is significantly amplified by the synergistic partnership between parents and the institution, which serves as a primary foundation in creating a coherent educational ecosystem. This partnership is built upon a shared belief system and Islamic spiritual values, which create an implicit moral contract between FIC and the parents. FIC's identity as an Islamic Course attracts parents with a similar commitment to these values, enabling close collaboration through continuous communication. Teachers teach *adab* (etiquette) in the classroom, while parents model similar values at home, forming a 24/7 learning ecosystem that consistently reinforces the internalization of values like independence, responsibility, and *adab* in both of the child's primary environments. Intrinsic motivation, which arises from within without external coercion, is strengthened through this synergy, while character formation encompasses cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual

aspects. The impact is visible in increased independence, responsibility, emotional regulation, and the internalization of spiritual values, which are not confined to school but are also transferred to daily life at home. This analysis is supported by theoretical frameworks such as Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes the fulfillment of needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as well as Erikson's psychosocial development theory, which focuses on the resolution of the autonomy crisis (Crain, 2015). Empirical evidence from observations, parent testimonials, and research at Islamic Montessori schools in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia shows an increase in intrinsic motivation up to 25-30% higher than in conventional approaches, due to the addition of a spiritual dimension that strengthens a child's sense of purpose and competence (Alhashim, 2023; Rahman & Suryana, 2023). This multidimensional impact shapes the lifetime education envisioned by FIC, where children grow into holistic individuals aligned with Islamic values, ready to face life's challenges with a strong work ethic and self-driven motivation.

The synergy between Montessori Auto-Education and Islamic *Itqan* forms a robust conceptual foundation where the *how* of Montessori's self-directed learning process unites with the *why* of spiritual perfection from *Itqan*. Auto-Education emphasizes a child's internal drive to learn through a prepared environment, where children freely choose activities and learn from their own mistakes via a control of error feature (Lillard, 2017). Meanwhile, *Itqan*, derived from a hadith of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stating, Verily, Allah loves that when one of you does a job, he perfects it (narrated by al-Bayhaqi), adds an ethical and spiritual layer, transforming learning activities into a form of devotion and worship. The parent-school partnership strengthens this process by ensuring that values like gratitude and independence are internalized through simultaneous reinforcement at home and school, creating a high-trust, high-consistency system. This trust is built because parents are entrusting not only academic education but also moral and spiritual upbringing (*tarbiyah*), making the partnership a primary engine that drives the transformative impact.

The shift from play to work at FIC is a brilliant adaptation that integrates Montessori with Islamic *tarbiyah*. The word work respects a child's internal concentration, while in Islam, '*amal*' (deed/work) is central to worship and accountability. Labeling activities as work connects daily tasks to '*amal shaleh*' (righteous deeds), socializing the universal values of responsibility and a strong work ethic. This adaptation is seen in other Islamic Montessori schools, such as in Malaysia, where the integration strengthens holistic education without altering the essence of

Montessori (Fahrudin et al., 2025). The synergy between these two philosophies is realized because Islamic values are not merely attached; they become the very soul of the method itself.

Fundamentally, *Itqan* functions as the framework of meaning behind the Montessori methodology. The Montessori method provides the means for independence, while *Itqan* adds a transcendental motivation where the goal is not just self-mastery, but excellence as an expression of faith. This combination creates a reinforcing cycle: a child chooses work due to an internal drive (Auto-Education), which demands precision (*Itqan*), and success provides a satisfaction that strengthens the motivation for new challenges. The principle of *Itqan* is clearly manifested in the Practical Life area, such as transferring beans, which trains precision and patience, or cleaning a spill as an act of responsibility for one's imperfections. At FIC, the reinterpretation of work is enriched with a spiritual dimension: it is not forced labor, but a freely chosen activity that fulfills an internal drive, aligning with the Islamic concept of *niyyah* (intention), where an action holds transcendental value if the intention is pure. Pedagogical strategies like please take your respective work emphasize autonomy, filling the gaps of SDT with a transcendental dimension that enhances perseverance and holistic creativity. This integration enriches learning and builds a resilient moral foundation.

The effectiveness of the synergy between Auto-Education and *Itqan* at FIC can be explained through Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that intrinsic motivation grows when the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The FIC environment is designed to meet these needs through a lens of faith, making the motivation more resilient. Autonomy is fulfilled through the freedom to choose activities independently without teacher coercion, such as after circle time, aligning with the Montessori principle that enhances a sense of ownership (Lillard, 2017). Competence is built through supportive teacher facilitation, such as individual presentations and a non-judgmental response to mistakes (It is okay, let us tidy it up), creating a safe environment to try. Relatedness is fostered through Grace and Courtesy lessons, rules for respecting workspaces, and the Islamic value of *ukhuwah* (brotherhood), which encourages prosocial behaviors like helping one another.

By integrating *Itqan*, the basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are no longer seen merely as self-fulfillment but are elevated to a divine trust (*amanah*), an act of worship, and a sacred bond of brotherhood. This layer of transcendental meaning becomes the driving engine of intrinsic motivation, a phenomenon empirically shown to increase motivation by up to 35% in the context of Islamic schools (Mufidah & Wijayanti, 2022). In the FIC

environment, this principle is translated into real practice, where the learning process itself is the highest reward. A simple activity like cleaning a spill is framed as an embodiment of cleanliness, which is part of faith, shifting the focus from the outcome to the spiritual value of the effort itself. Ultimately, effort based on *Itqan* aligns with the concept of *ihsan*, which cultivates perseverance because every action is seen as a form of devotion (Khairullah et al., 2022). The tangible impact of this spiritual reinforcement is then validated by the findings from the field.

Empirical evidence from observations and parent testimonials confirms the impact of this synergy on intrinsic motivation and character. Parents reported significant increases in independence and self-confidence, with the transfer of values to the home: children independently tidying their rooms, regulating their emotions within three months, or saying, Thank you, Mama, for helping me get clean. Observations showed children following instructions even while crying and routinely returning items without being told. This aligns with Montessori research showing self-regulation scores 20% higher than in traditional schools (Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006). The partnership strengthens this impact by ensuring values like gratitude and *adab* are consistently applied at home, forming a solid character foundation. Parents' appreciation for the process-over-results approach shifts a child's source of satisfaction from external validation to a sense of internal achievement, aligning with SDT and supporting the resolution of Erikson's autonomy crisis (Crain, 2015). This phenomenon is confirmed by studies in Malaysian and Saudi Arabian Islamic schools, which show an increase in holistic character through spiritual integration (Alhashim, 2023; Rahman & Suryana, 2023). At FIC, *Itqan* enriches this by framing independence as a spiritual trust, so motivation stems from internal devotion.

Table 2.

Synthesis of Parental Perceptions on the Impact of the FIC Program on Children's Behavior at Home

Developmental Domain	Key Findings from Parent Interviews & Anecdotes	Specific Reported Behaviors
Independence & Initiative	Children showed a significant increase in becoming more independent and self-confident.	He'll grab a stool. When it's time to wash dishes, he genuinely washes the dishes. His room is clean; he does it all by himself.
Responsibility & Self-Discipline	What is taught at FIC is applied at home.	Rolling up a rug at home, mimicking the practice at the course. Applying the work cycle (tidying up) at home.
Social Skills & Adab	A very deep improvement in social skills, politeness, and cooperation.	Reminds parents about the proper etiquette (<i>adab</i>) for yawning. Says thank you for small things. Proactively apologizes.

Emotional & Spiritual Readiness	The applied Islamic values greatly help children become more emotionally and spiritually ready.	Shows empathy and gratitude. Initiates spiritual practices at home.
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This table presents a synthesis of qualitative findings from interviews and anecdotes shared by parents regarding the impact of the Firdaus Islamic Course (FIC) program on their children's behavior at home. The collected data consistently indicate that the program's impact is not limited to the course environment but is significantly transferred into daily family dynamics.

One of the most significant findings of this research is the deep appreciation from parents for an approach that prioritizes process over results, where conceptual understanding is valued more highly than the mere mastery of early academics (*calistung*). This shift in focus proved to be key, as it effectively changed the source of a child's satisfaction from external validation to a sense of internal achievement. This phenomenon aligns with the core of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that this shift to the internal is what gives birth to the most authentic and enduring drive to learn (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The impact is even more fundamental than motivation alone; theoretically, the experience of achieving success independently supports the favorable resolution of the Autonomy vs. Shame developmental crisis according to Erikson, which ultimately becomes the foundation for forming willpower and solid self-confidence (Crain, 2015). This transformative phenomenon is not an anomaly occurring only at FIC. Various studies in Malaysian and Saudi Arabian Islamic schools also confirm that integrating spiritual values into similar educational models consistently fosters a holistic improvement in child character (Alhashim, 2023; Rahman & Suryana, 2023).

Although the integration model at FIC is theoretically effective in fostering intrinsic motivation, field observations identified an implementation challenge that created pedagogical friction. One of the main challenges is the practice of using stickers as a form of assessment or reward at the end of an activity. This practice is fundamentally at odds with the Montessori philosophy, which rejects extrinsic rewards to protect a child's internal motivation, or what is known as the joy of work (Lillard, 2017). This contradiction can be explained through psychological literature, particularly the overjustification effect, which states that giving external rewards, such as stickers, for an activity that is inherently interesting to a child can reduce their intrinsic interest (Deci et al., 1999). The child's focus risks shifting from the internal satisfaction gained from the process and mastery of skills to the pursuit of external rewards.

Based on interviews with teachers and management at FIC, the use of stickers is implemented as physical evidence of effort and achievement that is easily understood by young children. As a Montessori-inspired model, FIC has the flexibility to make cultural adaptations, especially to meet the expectations of parents who are accustomed to reward-and-punishment systems in conventional education. A teacher explained that stickers are used as a favorable reinforcement to increase a child's enthusiasm for participating in learning activities, consistent with the findings of Rahmawati and Suryana (2019). Their research showed that stickers were effective in increasing the learning motivation of 5-6-year-old children because they function as a symbol of recognition that makes children feel valued. Furthermore, Deci et al. (2001) acknowledge that stickers, as a form of positive feedback, can motivate young children due to their visual, appealing, and collectible nature, although the risk to intrinsic motivation remains. The existence of this contradiction does not necessarily indicate a failure of the model, but rather highlights the complexity of implementing a counter-cultural approach. The founder's strong commitment, consistently emphasizing the importance of internal achievements like independence and responsibility, shows that the institution's philosophical foundation remains solid. Therefore, this pedagogical friction can be seen as an important opportunity for evaluation and improvement, in line with the recommendations of Montessori research that emphasize the gradual elimination of extrinsic elements to purify and maximize the positive impact on a child's internal motivation.

Ultimately, the transformative impact observed in the children did not occur in a vacuum but was strongly mediated by this alignment of values. This shared spiritual foundation created a coherent educational ecosystem where the principles of independence, responsibility, and *adab* were ceaselessly reinforced. This serves as proof that FIC has successfully planted the seeds of lifetime education, an education whose impact does not stop at the school gate but permeates into family dynamics and forms the foundation of character that a child will carry throughout their life.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the integration of the Montessori principle of Auto-Education (as the framework for *how* children learn independently) with the Islamic work ethic of Itqan (as the foundation for *why* an activity is meaningful) successfully creates an effective hybrid pedagogical model at Firdaus Islamic Course. This synergy explicitly addresses a research gap concerning Montessori implementation in an Islamic context, demonstrating that this hybrid model can build robust intrinsic motivation by framing independence not merely as

a psychological achievement, but as a meaningful act of worship. The main finding shows that when children understand the spiritual purpose behind their work, their independence, responsibility, and emotional regulation increase significantly, with positive impacts transferring to the home environment.

Theoretically, this research enriches Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by demonstrating that a spiritual dimension, in this case, Itqan, can function as a transcendental amplifier that complements the basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This results in a more resilient intrinsic motivation because it is grounded in a higher purpose. On a practical level, this model can serve as a guide for educators and parents to adapt global learning methods to local values, where a strong parent-school partnership founded on shared values proves to be the key to success in creating a consistent and holistic educational ecosystem.

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