

The Role of Islamic Calligraphy Extracurricular Activities in Developing Visual-Spatial Intelligence of Primary School Students

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Islamic calligraphy extracurricular activities in developing students' visual-spatial intelligence in a primary Islamic school (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah). Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research explores how the extracurricular program is planned, implemented, and evaluated, as well as its contribution to students' cognitive, creative, and spiritual development. Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews with the school principal, calligraphy instructor, and students, and documentation analysis. The findings reveal that Islamic calligraphy extracurricular activities were systematically implemented through structured instructional stages, including demonstration, guided practice, and independent work. Students demonstrated increased visual-spatial awareness, particularly in recognizing proportions, spatial arrangements, and visual balance in calligraphic compositions. Supporting factors included institutional support, instructor competence, and high student motivation, while inhibiting factors involved limited facilities and time constraints. The integration of aesthetic and spiritual elements further enhanced students' engagement and learning experiences. This study concludes that Islamic calligraphy serves as an effective educational medium for fostering visual-spatial intelligence and holistic development when supported by effective management and instructional strategies. The findings contribute to the discourse on multiple intelligences and provide practical implications for optimizing extracurricular programs in Islamic primary education.

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in shaping human potential, not only in terms of cognitive achievement but also in character formation, creativity, and the development of multiple intelligences. In the context of contemporary education, schools are no longer viewed merely as institutions that transfer knowledge but as spaces that facilitate holistic student development, encompassing intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, and aesthetic dimensions (Syafri & Zen, 2019). This holistic orientation is explicitly aligned with the Indonesian National Education System, which emphasizes the development of learners' potential to become individuals who are faithful, knowledgeable, creative, independent, and responsible citizens (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003).

One strategic effort to realize these educational objectives is the implementation of extracurricular activities. Extracurricular programs function as complementary educational spaces that support students' interests, talents, and personal development beyond formal classroom instruction. According to national policy, extracurricular activities at the primary and secondary education levels are designed to develop learners' character, creativity, collaboration skills, and talents in various fields (Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia Nomor 62 Tahun 2014). Therefore, extracurricular activities are not peripheral elements of schooling but integral components of educational management and learning processes (Suryosubroto, 2002; Nuryanto, 2017).

Among various extracurricular programs implemented in Indonesian Islamic schools (*madrasah ibtidaiyah*), Islamic calligraphy has gained increasing attention. Islamic calligraphy is not merely an artistic expression but also a form of spiritual art deeply rooted in Islamic tradition and culture. Calligraphy reflects the aesthetic manifestation of Qur'anic verses and Islamic values through harmonious visual forms, balance, rhythm, and proportion (A.R., 2016; Utomo, 2017). As an art form, Islamic calligraphy integrates visual creativity with spiritual contemplation, making it particularly relevant in Islamic educational settings.

From an educational perspective, Islamic calligraphy holds significant potential in supporting the development of students' visual-spatial intelligence. Visual-spatial intelligence refers to the ability to perceive, analyze, and mentally manipulate visual patterns, shapes, colors, and spatial relationships (Gardner, as cited in Yaumi, 2013). Learners with strong visual-spatial intelligence tend to excel in activities involving drawing, designing, imagining forms, and interpreting visual information. Educational scholars argue that this type of intelligence can be nurtured through systematic exposure to visual arts, creative activities, and spatial problem-solving experiences (Musfiroh, 2017; Rachmawati & Kurniati, 2011).

Islamic calligraphy, as a visual art discipline, provides a meaningful medium for cultivating visual-spatial intelligence among students. The process of learning calligraphy requires learners to recognize letter forms, understand proportional rules, manage spatial composition, and harmonize visual elements such as line, shape, and balance. These activities inherently train students' visual perception, spatial awareness, and creative imagination (Setiawati, 2020; Shiddiq, 2021). Moreover, calligraphy learning encourages patience, discipline, and aesthetic sensitivity, which contribute to both cognitive and affective development.

Despite its potential benefits, the implementation of Islamic calligraphy as an extracurricular activity in primary Islamic schools still faces several challenges. Previous studies indicate that extracurricular programs often encounter managerial issues such as limited facilities, insufficient instructional planning, lack of trained instructors, and minimal evaluation mechanisms (Khairunnisa, 2018; Gesi et al., 2019). In addition, some schools tend to treat calligraphy activities as purely artistic hobbies without integrating them into broader educational goals, particularly in relation to intelligence development and character education.

Several empirical studies have examined the role of calligraphy extracurricular activities in educational contexts. For instance, Ariyani (2020) and Atiqo' (2022) found that Islamic calligraphy activities positively influenced students' visual-spatial abilities when implemented through structured learning strategies. Similarly, Muwafiroh (2020) reported that consistent participation in calligraphy extracurricular programs contributed to students' creativity, focus, and visual sensitivity. However, many of these studies emphasize outcomes without sufficiently exploring how the extracurricular activities are managed, implemented, and evaluated within the school system.

Educational management plays a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of extracurricular programs. Management functions such as planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating activities determine whether educational programs achieve their intended objectives (Hasibuan, 2006; Winoto, 2020). In the context of extracurricular calligraphy, effective management involves curriculum planning, instructor coordination, student recruitment, learning strategies, facility provision, and continuous assessment of learning outcomes. Without systematic management, the potential educational value of calligraphy activities may not be optimally realized.

In Islamic educational institutions, extracurricular programs also function as instruments of da'wah and character education. Artistic activities such as calligraphy serve as media for internalizing Islamic values, fostering love for the Qur'an, and strengthening students' spiritual identity (Aziz, 2019; A.R., 2016). Through calligraphy, students engage not only in artistic practice but also in reflective learning that connects aesthetics with religious meaning. This dual dimension distinguishes Islamic calligraphy from other visual art forms and reinforces its relevance within madrasah education.

Given these considerations, there is a growing need for in-depth qualitative research that examines the implementation of Islamic calligraphy extracurricular activities and their role in developing students' visual-spatial intelligence. Qualitative approaches allow researchers to explore educational phenomena in their natural contexts, capturing participants' experiences, perceptions, and interactions (Abdussamad, 2021; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Through observation, interviews, and document analysis, qualitative research can reveal how calligraphy activities are planned, conducted, and experienced by students and educators.

This study is positioned within that research gap. It focuses on the management and implementation of Islamic calligraphy extracurricular activities in a madrasah ibtidaiyah setting and examines their contribution to the development of students' visual-spatial intelligence. By analyzing planning strategies, instructional processes,

student engagement, and learning outcomes, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how calligraphy extracurricular programs function as educational interventions.

The significance of this study lies in its theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it enriches the discourse on multiple intelligences by highlighting the role of Islamic visual arts in intelligence development. Practically, it offers insights for school administrators, teachers, and policymakers regarding effective strategies for managing and implementing extracurricular programs that support holistic student development. Furthermore, the findings are expected to inform future research and serve as a reference for Islamic educational institutions seeking to optimize their extracurricular offerings.

In conclusion, Islamic calligraphy extracurricular activities represent a promising yet underexplored educational practice within primary Islamic education. When managed and implemented effectively, these activities have the potential to enhance students' visual-spatial intelligence, creativity, and spiritual awareness. Therefore, systematic investigation into their educational value and management is essential to ensure that such programs contribute meaningfully to the goals of national and Islamic education.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive-analytical approach. Qualitative research was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of social and educational phenomena within their natural contexts, emphasizing meaning, process, and participant perspectives rather than numerical measurement (Abdussamad, 2021; Hardani, 2020). The qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for examining the implementation of extracurricular activities, as it allows researchers to understand how programs are planned, conducted, and experienced by students and educators in real educational settings (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

The research focused on the implementation of Islamic calligraphy extracurricular activities and their role in developing students' visual-spatial intelligence at the primary Islamic education level (*madrasah ibtidaiyah*). A descriptive design was applied to systematically describe management practices, learning processes, and observed outcomes related to students' visual-spatial development. This approach aligns with educational research objectives that seek to analyze processes rather than test hypotheses (Arikunto, 2006).

The research was conducted at a *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* that actively implements Islamic calligraphy as an extracurricular program. The selection of the research site was based on purposive sampling, considering the school's consistency in organizing calligraphy activities and its relevance to the research focus. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select information-rich cases that provide deep insight into the phenomenon under investigation (Usman & Purnomo, 2001).

Research participants included the school principal, the extracurricular calligraphy instructor, classroom teachers, and students who participated in the calligraphy extracurricular activities. These participants were selected because of their direct involvement in planning, implementing, and experiencing the program. The

diversity of participants enabled data triangulation and contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the extracurricular activity from managerial, instructional, and learner perspectives (Miles et al., 2014).

Data were collected using three primary techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. These techniques are commonly employed in qualitative educational research to ensure data depth and credibility (Arikunto, 2006; Nashrullah, n.d.). Observations were conducted to examine the implementation of Islamic calligraphy extracurricular activities directly. The researcher observed learning sessions, instructional strategies, student engagement, use of learning media, and classroom interactions. Both participant and non-participant observation techniques were utilized to capture natural behaviors and learning dynamics. Field notes were systematically recorded to document visual-spatial learning activities such as letter composition, spatial arrangement, and artistic creativity demonstrated by students.

Moreover, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the school principal, calligraphy instructor, and selected students. Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility while maintaining focus on predetermined research themes (Abdussamad, 2021). Interview questions explored program planning, instructional objectives, teaching strategies, perceived benefits, challenges, and evaluation mechanisms related to the extracurricular activity. Student interviews focused on learning experiences, motivation, and perceived changes in visual-spatial skills and creativity.

Documentation analysis was used to support observational and interview data. Documents analyzed included extracurricular program plans, attendance records, student artworks, evaluation sheets, photographs of learning activities, and school policy documents related to extracurricular implementation. Documentation provided tangible evidence of program management and learning outcomes and helped validate findings obtained from other data sources (Hardani, 2020).

Data analysis followed an interactive qualitative analysis model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, as proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). This analytical framework allows continuous interaction between data collection and analysis throughout the research process. Data Reduction involved selecting, simplifying, and organizing raw data from observations, interviews, and documentation. Relevant data related to program management, instructional processes, and visual-spatial intelligence development were coded and categorized. Next, data Display was conducted by organizing the reduced data into narrative descriptions, matrices, and thematic groupings. This process facilitated the identification of patterns, relationships, and recurring themes across data sources.

Conclusion Drawing and Verification involved interpreting the displayed data to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the effectiveness of Islamic calligraphy extracurricular activities. Conclusions were continuously verified through cross-checking data sources and participant perspectives to ensure consistency and credibility.

To ensure data validity and trustworthiness, this study applied several qualitative validation strategies, including triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member checking. Triangulation was achieved by comparing data obtained from

different sources and techniques, such as observations, interviews, and documentation (Miles et al., 2014). Prolonged engagement in the research setting allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the extracurricular activities and reduce potential bias. Member checking was conducted by confirming key findings with participants to ensure that interpretations accurately reflected their experiences and perspectives (Abdussamad, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Islamic Calligraphy Extracurricular Activities

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic calligraphy extracurricular activities were systematically implemented and integrated into the school's educational program. The activity was conducted on a regular basis outside formal instructional hours and involved students who voluntarily registered based on interest and talent. The planning stage included scheduling, determination of learning objectives, preparation of materials, and coordination between the school management and the calligraphy instructor. This finding supports the view that extracurricular activities require structured management to function effectively as educational programs rather than informal leisure activities (Hasibuan, 2006; Nuryanto, 2017).



Figure 1. Learning process of Islamic calligraphy extracurricular activity

Observational data revealed that each calligraphy session followed a consistent instructional sequence, beginning with a brief introduction to the lesson objectives, followed by demonstration of letter forms, guided practice, and independent student work. The instructor emphasized fundamental elements of Islamic calligraphy such as letter proportions, line accuracy, spacing, and overall composition. These elements are essential components of visual-spatial training, as they require students to perceive spatial relationships and translate them into visual representations (Musfiroh, 2017; Shiddiq, 2021).

Learning Environment and Instructional Strategies

The learning environment during calligraphy extracurricular sessions was observed to be conducive to creativity and concentration. Students were provided with basic calligraphy tools, including pencils, rulers, calligraphy pens, and practice sheets. Although the facilities were relatively simple, they were sufficient to support the learning process. The instructor adopted a demonstration-based and practice-oriented teaching strategy, allowing students to directly observe and imitate correct letter formations.

Interview data from the calligraphy instructor indicated that instructional strategies were intentionally designed to enhance students' visual sensitivity and spatial awareness. The instructor stated:

"In teaching calligraphy, I focus on helping students recognize letter proportions and spacing. They are trained to see balance and harmony, not just write letters." (Interview with Calligraphy Instructor, translated)

This statement highlights that the instructional focus extended beyond technical writing skills to include visual analysis and spatial reasoning. Such an approach aligns with theories of multiple intelligences, which emphasize learning experiences that engage specific cognitive domains through appropriate activities (Yaumi, 2013; Thomas Armstrong, 2002).

Moreover, the results showed high levels of student engagement during the extracurricular sessions. Observations indicated that students demonstrated enthusiasm, focus, and persistence while completing calligraphy tasks. Many students spent extended periods refining letter shapes and correcting spatial arrangements, suggesting an active engagement in visual-spatial processing. Student interview data further supported these observations. One student explained:

"I like calligraphy because it makes me think about shapes and space. If the letters are too close or too far, it doesn't look good." (Student Interview, translated)

This response illustrates students' growing awareness of spatial relationships and aesthetic judgment. According to Rachmawati and Kurniati (2011), such reflective engagement is a key indicator of creative and visual intelligence development in children.

Development of Visual-Spatial Intelligence

One of the central findings of this study is that participation in Islamic calligraphy extracurricular activities contributed positively to the development of students' visual-spatial intelligence. This development was evident in students' improved ability to organize visual elements, maintain proportional accuracy, and create balanced compositions.

Observational data showed a progression in students' work over time. Early calligraphy products often displayed inconsistent letter sizes, uneven spacing, and limited compositional balance. However, as students continued participating in the program, their works demonstrated clearer letter forms, more consistent spacing, and enhanced visual harmony. These improvements indicate increased visual discrimination and spatial reasoning skills, which are core components of visual-spatial intelligence (Musfiroh, 2017; Yaumi, 2013). The school principal also acknowledged these developments during the interview:

"We see changes in students' creativity and neatness. Their drawings and writings in class have improved since joining calligraphy activities." (Interview with School Principal, translated)

This observation suggests that the benefits of calligraphy extracurricular activities extended beyond the activity itself and influenced students' overall learning performance, particularly in tasks involving visual representation and organization.



Figure 2. Calligraphy artwork featuring Qur'anic verses

Another significant finding is the integration of spiritual values within the calligraphy learning process. The instructor often selected Qur'anic verses or Islamic phrases as calligraphy materials, which introduced students to religious texts while engaging them in artistic practice. This integration reflects the dual function of Islamic calligraphy as both an artistic and spiritual medium (A.R., 2016; Aziz, 2019). Students were encouraged to reflect on the meaning of the texts they wrote, fostering a deeper emotional connection to the learning material. This approach not only enhanced motivation but also reinforced the spiritual dimension of learning, which is a distinctive feature of Islamic education (Syafri & Zen, 2019).

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research that highlights the role of calligraphy extracurricular activities in developing students' visual-spatial intelligence (Ariyani, 2020; Muwafiroh, 2020; Atiqo', 2022). The structured learning process, emphasis on visual composition, and repeated practice created a learning environment conducive to visual-spatial development.

From a management perspective, the successful implementation of the program demonstrates the importance of planning, organization, and instructional clarity in extracurricular activities (Winoto, 2020; Gesi et al., 2019). Although resource limitations were present, effective instructional strategies and student motivation compensated for these constraints.

Moreover, the integration of aesthetic and spiritual elements supports the argument that Islamic calligraphy offers a unique educational contribution that combines cognitive, affective, and spiritual development. This holistic impact reinforces the relevance of calligraphy extracurricular activities within Islamic primary education.

Supporting Factors in the Implementation of Calligraphy Extracurricular Activities

The findings indicate that several supporting factors contributed to the effective implementation of Islamic calligraphy extracurricular activities and the development of students' visual-spatial intelligence. One of the most significant supporting factors was institutional support from school management. The school principal played an active role in facilitating the program by allocating time, approving learning schedules, and encouraging student participation. This managerial support aligns

with educational management principles that emphasize leadership commitment as a key determinant of program sustainability (Hasibuan, 2006; Winoto, 2020).

Another supporting factor was the competence and dedication of the calligraphy instructor. Observations and interviews revealed that the instructor possessed not only technical skills in Islamic calligraphy but also pedagogical awareness in guiding elementary-level students. The instructor demonstrated patience, provided individual feedback, and adapted teaching strategies to students' abilities. Such instructor competence is crucial in extracurricular learning contexts, where instructional quality directly influences student engagement and learning outcomes (Gesang, 2019; Sagala, 2017).



Figure 3. Student participation and engagement during calligraphy sessions

Student motivation also emerged as a strong supporting factor. Many students voluntarily joined the extracurricular activity due to personal interest in art and drawing. This intrinsic motivation enhanced their persistence and focus during learning sessions. According to Rachmawati and Kurniati (2011), intrinsic motivation plays a vital role in fostering creativity and sustained engagement in artistic learning. The voluntary nature of extracurricular participation thus created a positive learning atmosphere conducive to visual-spatial development.

Inhibiting Factors and Challenges

Despite its overall effectiveness, the implementation of Islamic calligraphy extracurricular activities faced several inhibiting factors. One of the primary challenges identified was limited facilities and learning resources. Observational data showed that the availability of calligraphy tools, paper, and reference materials was still minimal. As a result, students often had to share tools or rely on basic materials. This limitation reflects a common issue in extracurricular program implementation, particularly in primary schools with constrained budgets (Khairunnisa, 2018; Nuryanto, 2017).

Time constraints also posed a challenge. The extracurricular activity was conducted outside regular instructional hours, which sometimes led to reduced attendance due to students' fatigue or conflicting activities. The limited duration of each session restricted opportunities for in-depth practice and individualized instruction. Previous studies have similarly noted that time allocation is a critical factor influencing the effectiveness of extracurricular programs (Yayan Inriyani et al., 2017).

Additionally, variations in students' initial abilities presented instructional challenges. Some students demonstrated strong visual-spatial skills from the outset, while others required more intensive guidance. Managing these differences within a single extracurricular group required careful instructional planning. This finding underscores the importance of differentiated instruction in extracurricular learning environments, especially when the objective is cognitive development rather than mere participation (Musfiroh, 2017).

The results of this study reinforce theoretical perspectives on multiple intelligences, particularly visual-spatial intelligence as conceptualized by Gardner and elaborated by Yaumi (2013). The observed improvements in students' ability to perceive spatial relationships, maintain proportional accuracy, and produce balanced visual compositions indicate that Islamic calligraphy functions as an effective medium for visual-spatial training.

These findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating that artistic activities involving drawing, design, and spatial organization significantly contribute to visual-spatial intelligence development (Ariyani, 2020; Shiddiq, 2021). Unlike conventional classroom instruction, calligraphy extracurricular activities provide experiential learning opportunities that directly engage students in visual analysis and creative problem-solving.

Moreover, the integration of repeated practice and visual feedback played a crucial role in skill development. As noted by Thomas Armstrong (2002), learners develop specific intelligences most effectively through sustained engagement in relevant activities. In this study, students' progressive improvement over time illustrates how consistent participation in calligraphy activities supported cognitive growth in the visual-spatial domain.

Managerial Implications for Extracurricular Programs

From a managerial perspective, the findings highlight the importance of systematic planning and evaluation in extracurricular activities. Although the calligraphy program was implemented effectively, the absence of formal assessment instruments for visual-spatial intelligence limited the ability to measure learning outcomes objectively. Educational management literature emphasizes that program evaluation is essential for continuous improvement and accountability (Firman et al., 2023; Winoto, 2020).

The study suggests that schools should develop simple evaluation frameworks to assess students' progress in extracurricular activities. For calligraphy programs, evaluation criteria may include visual accuracy, spatial composition, creativity, and consistency. Such evaluation not only supports instructional improvement but also reinforces the educational legitimacy of extracurricular programs within the school system (Gesi et al., 2019).

In addition, resource allocation emerged as a critical managerial issue. While limited resources did not prevent program implementation, improved facilities and learning materials would likely enhance learning quality. School management is therefore encouraged to collaborate with parents, communities, or external institutions to support extracurricular development. This collaborative approach aligns with

contemporary educational management practices that emphasize stakeholder involvement (Nickels et al., 2019).

An important contribution of this study is its emphasis on the integration of pedagogical and spiritual dimensions in Islamic calligraphy extracurricular activities. Unlike secular visual arts programs, Islamic calligraphy inherently incorporates religious content, making it a powerful medium for value-based education. Through writing Qur'anic verses and Islamic phrases, students engaged in reflective learning that combined aesthetic appreciation with spiritual meaning (A.R., 2016; Setiawati, 2020).

This integration enhanced students' emotional connection to learning and increased their respect for religious texts. From an educational standpoint, such integration supports holistic learning, which addresses cognitive, affective, and spiritual development simultaneously (Syafri & Zen, 2019). The findings thus position Islamic calligraphy not only as an artistic activity but also as a form of character and spiritual education within madrasah contexts.

Furthermore, the results of this study are in line with earlier research conducted by Muwafiroh (2020) and Atiqo' (2022), which found that calligraphy extracurricular activities positively influenced students' creativity and visual-spatial intelligence. However, this study extends previous findings by providing a more detailed analysis of managerial processes, instructional strategies, and contextual challenges.

Unlike some studies that focus primarily on outcomes, this research emphasizes the importance of implementation quality and institutional support. This distinction is significant, as it highlights that the success of extracurricular programs depends not only on activity type but also on how programs are managed and integrated into the school system (Nuryanto, 2017; Gesang, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, this study concludes that Islamic calligraphy extracurricular activities play a meaningful role in developing students' visual-spatial intelligence in primary Islamic education. Through structured implementation, consistent practice, and instructor guidance, students demonstrated improved spatial awareness, visual organization, and aesthetic sensitivity.

The study also concludes that effective management is essential for optimizing the educational value of extracurricular programs. Institutional support, instructor competence, and student motivation emerged as key supporting factors, while limitations in facilities and time allocation posed challenges. Despite these constraints, the integration of pedagogical and spiritual dimensions strengthened the overall impact of the calligraphy program.

The findings have important implications for educational practice and policy. Schools are encouraged to view extracurricular activities as integral components of holistic education rather than supplementary programs. In Islamic educational institutions, calligraphy extracurricular activities offer a unique opportunity to integrate cognitive development, creativity, and spiritual values.

Future research is recommended to explore quantitative measurements of visual-spatial intelligence development and to examine the long-term impact of calligraphy extracurricular participation on academic performance and creativity. By

strengthening research and practice in this area, Islamic calligraphy can be further established as a valuable educational intervention within primary education. The research conclusion is presented briefly, narrative and conceptual which describes the research findings and its impacts. Please avoid using bullets.

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