IMPLEMENTING THE FAITH-BASED BEYOND CENTRE AND CIRCLE TIME (BCCT) LEARNING MODEL THROUGH EARLY CHILDHOOD SCAFFOLDING FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

This comparative case study examines how two early childhood institutions in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, a public Islamic kindergarten (TKIT SAR) and a religious-affiliated *Raudhatul Athfal* (RA P), implement the faith-based Beyond Centers and Circle Time (BCCT) learning model. Despite RA P's explicit Islamic mandate, TKIT SAR demonstrated significantly higher implementation fidelity across all four BCCT scaffolding stages (environmental, pre-play, during-play, and post-play), with an overall score of 3.9 (out of 4) compared to RA P's 1.5. Data from observations, interviews, and document analysis reveal that TKIT SAR's success stems from sustained professional development under the *Sekolah Penggerak* program, which enabled teachers to construct a pedagogical "third space" that hybridises Western constructivist tools with Islamic semantics. In contrast, RA P's partial adoption reflects "symbolic compliance," where religious activities are added to conventional teaching without transforming pedagogy. The findings challenge the assumption that institutional affiliation with the Ministry of Religious Affairs guarantees superior faith-based education; instead, pedagogical competence, institutional support, and deliberate scaffolding are decisive. The study offers practical implications for teacher training, cross-ministerial policy coordination, and designing authentic assessment instruments for spiritual development in early childhood settings.

Keywords: BCCT learning model, faith-based early childhood education, TK-RA comparison, Islamic kindergarten, scaffolding framework, Aceh.

INTRODUCTION

The BCCT learning model (2006) represents an educational effort undertaken by Indonesia to ensure the quality of its future generations in achieving the Golden Indonesia 2045 vision. Indonesia, with its largest Muslim population, serves as a global laboratory for observing how religious values are incorporated into formal education. The implementation of the faith-based BCCT model in Indonesia provides a rich case study of how a majority-Muslim yet democratic nation responds to global demands for quality education (SDG 4) while simultaneously respecting local contexts.

The Beyond Centers and Circle Time (BCCT) model, locally known as *pembelajaran sentra dan lingkaran* (learning centers and circles), is Indonesia's official adaptation of The Creative Centre for Childhood Research and Training in Florida, USA (*Home | CCCRT*, n.d.). Since its widespread dissemination in 2010 through the 2013 curriculum, BCCT has been positioned as the gold standard for active, constructive, and play-based early childhood learning. This model rests on four pedagogical frameworks introduced by Vygotsky, which consist of: (1) environmental scaffolding framework, (2) pre-play scaffolding framework, (3) during-play scaffolding framework, and (4) post-play scaffolding framework. Each framework requires deliberate teacher arrangement to transform play into meaningful learning.

The Indonesian early childhood education landscape is characterized by a unique institutional dualism. Public kindergartens, locally known as *Taman Kanak-Kanak* (TK), operate under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology and follow the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and national early childhood education standards. Conversely, Islamic kindergartens, or *Raudhatul Athfal* (RA), fall under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which integrates Islamic values as its institutional DNA while technically adopting the same national curriculum framework. Both institutions must implement developmentally appropriate, child-centered pedagogy, yet they serve constituencies with different expectations for religious instruction.

Using the BCCT learning model, these two institutions occupy a distinctive position as faith-based learning centers. Unlike cognitive-focused centers (blocks, preparation, science), religious centers explicitly target affective and spiritual development, such as internalizing religious values, habituating worship practices, and cultivating moral character. For TK institutions, this center is optional enrichment; for RA institutions, it is an existential necessity. However, in practice, faith-based BCCT remains critically understudied. How do teachers translate abstract religious doctrine into concrete play experiences? How do they balance structured worship routines with BCCT's principle of child-free choice? And most importantly, does institutional affiliation "TK versus RA" predict implementation quality? These matters certainly require further study.

This research is located in Banda Aceh, the capital of Aceh province, the only region in Indonesia authorized to implement Islamic Sharia law. Acehnese society shows high religious observance through Islamic symbols, dress codes, and Islamic practices that pervade public life. Logically, one might assume that RA institutions in Aceh, operating under the religious ministry, would demonstrate stronger faith-based BCCT implementation than public TK. Data from this study challenges this assumption, revealing a counter-intuitive reality that demands scholarly attention.

While institutional affiliation with the Ministry of Religious Affairs ostensibly gives RA institutions a formal mandate and structural advantage in integrating Islamic values, this presumption of pedagogical superiority warrants empirical scrutiny. The realization of faith-based education depends not on institutional labels or ministerial oversight alone, but on operationalizing curricular frameworks through sustained professional development and pedagogical competence. This study critically examines this assumption by comparing an RA institution with a public TK, challenging

the deterministic view that religious mandate automatically translates to superior instructional quality. By doing so, it addresses a significant gap in the current policy discourse, which tends to conflate institutional identity with pedagogical effectiveness, and offers nuanced insights into how national curricula are locally adapted in Indonesia's unique socio-religious context. Accordingly, this research is not merely a comparative audit of two schools, but a critical inquiry into the enabling conditions that genuinely foster faith-based early childhood education.

The BCCT model is epistemologically rooted in Piaget's constructivism (Piaget et al., 2000), Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Gauvain, 2020), Freud's psychoanalytic theory (Lenormand, 2019), and Erikson's psychosocial theory (Erikson, 1993). Piaget proposed that children actively construct knowledge through sensorimotor exploration and symbolic representation, processes optimally facilitated through independent play (Block, 1982). Vygotsky (1978) contributed the crucial concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), wherein children achieve higher cognitive functions through guided interaction with more capable others. The four BCCT scaffolds, employing Vygotskian scaffolding (2021), are: (a) scaffold 1: teachers deliberately arrange the environment, (b) scaffold 2: directing attention and activating prior knowledge, (c) scaffold 3: providing measured assistance during independent exploration, and (d) scaffold 4: consolidating learning through reflective dialogue.

Scaffolding in religious education presents unique theoretical challenges. Religious knowledge is not purely empirical; it involves faith, revelation, and truths that do not require questioning. Piaget viewed young children's religious understanding as preoperational and literal (Gapp et al., 2023); Vygotsky emphasized that religious concepts are acquired through cultural mediation (Tzuriel, 2021). Applying the BCCT model to religious learning requires reconciling children's constructive competencies with the process of learning religious doctrine that remains fixed. Effective faith-based BCCT does not impose dogma but creates experiential contexts in which children discover and internalize religious meaning through culturally embedded play.

However, resolving this pedagogical paradox depends significantly on teachers' epistemological beliefs about knowledge transmission versus knowledge construction. Drawing on Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engeström, 2001), teachers are not merely passive implementers of curriculum but active agents whose historical experiences, training backgrounds, and cultural values shape their classroom practices. In contexts such as RA, where traditional taqlid (transmission-based learning) is culturally ingrained and often expected by parents, shifting toward constructivist BCCT practices requires a fundamental reconceptualization of the teacher's role, from authoritative transmitter to facilitative scaffolder. This reconceptualization is not automatic; it demands deliberate professional development interventions that address teachers' deeply held assumptions about how children learn religious knowledge. Consequently, this study attends not only to the observable stages of BCCT implementation but also to the underlying cognitive and ideological frameworks teachers use to navigate the tension between child-centered discovery and the authoritative nature of religious doctrine.

Previous studies have demonstrated the BCCT model's effectiveness for holistic child development. Soleha & Anjani (2025) showed that BCCT optimizes holistic early childhood development by stimulating multiple intelligences through structured play activities. Bahar (2020) specifically examined Al-Qur'an-based BCCT and found that BCCT learning helps enhance early childhood character values because it can elicit or stimulate children to engage in active, creative, and independent learning while exploring their own thinking patterns. Kurniawati (2024) argued from a neuroscience perspective that religious learning must be concrete and experience-based for young children, principles inherently embodied by BCCT.

TK and RA, as conveyed by Bronfenbrenner, despite having the same national curriculum mandate, constitute different institutional ecologies (Driscoll & Nagel, 2008). TK typically enjoys

greater autonomy in pedagogical innovation; many *Sekolah Penggerak*, such as TKIT Syeikh Abdurrauf, receive intensive BCCT training and mentoring. RA faces conflicting demands: they must meet national PAUD standards and the Ministry of Religious Affairs' expectations of distinct Islamic identity. RA teachers often possess stronger content knowledge in Islamic subjects but may lack BCCT pedagogical training. However, existing literature reveals two critical gaps: comparative research on BCCT implementation between TK and RA is virtually nonexistent; researchers typically study one institution type separately. Second, no study has examined BCCT implementation in RA in Aceh, where mandatory Sharia creates unique expectations for religious education. This study addresses these gaps through systematic cross-institutional comparison.

The adoption of BCCT, originally developed within a Western, secular educational tradition at the Creative Centre for Childhood Research and Training in Florida, presents epistemological challenges for Islamic education. While constructivism aligns with Islam's emphasis on active knowledge-seeking (*talab al-'ilm*), tensions emerge between BCCT's child-centered discovery approach and the transmission-based pedagogy (*taqlid*) historically dominant in Islamic educational institutions. This study conceptualizes "faith-based scaffolding" as a negotiated space where teachers reconcile these competing epistemological commitments through situated practice.

Freire's (2018) critique of "banking education", where teachers deposit knowledge into passive students, resonates with BCCT's rejection of didactic instruction. However, faith-based education introduces unique considerations. Unlike secular knowledge, which can be empirically verified, religious knowledge involves revelation (*wahy*), faith (*iman*), and truths that may not require interrogation through discovery (Amaliah et al., 2026; Arifin & Haqqi, 2024; Husen, 2025). This creates what might be termed a "pedagogical paradox": how can teachers facilitate child-centered discovery of knowledge that, within Islamic tradition, is understood as received rather than constructed?

Giroux's (2024) work on border pedagogy offers a framework for understanding how teachers navigate this paradox. Border pedagogy encourages educators to cross cultural and epistemological boundaries, creating spaces where different knowledge traditions can be critically engaged rather than simply transmitted or rejected. In the Indonesian context, this suggests that effective faith-based BCCT implementation requires teachers who can move between Islamic pedagogical traditions and constructivist methodologies, creating "border crossings" that enrich rather than dilute both approaches.

Adopting BCCT from an American institution raises important postcolonial questions about educational dependency and cultural appropriateness. As Bhabha theorized, the "third space" represents a hybrid zone where colonial and indigenous knowledge systems interact, producing new cultural forms that neither replicate the colonizer's models nor remain confined to tradition (Bhandari, 2022). TKIT SAR's successful implementation exemplifies this "third space" pedagogy, creating new cultural forms that neither replicate Western BCCT nor remain confined to traditional Islamic pedagogy.

This hybridity enables successful faith-based BCCT implementation, suggesting that educators should move beyond dichotomous thinking about "secular play" versus "religious instruction." The challenge is not to choose between Western pedagogical models and Islamic educational traditions, but to create productive syntheses that honor both. As postcolonial education scholars have documented, policy borrowing without critical adaptation often results in what has been termed "symbolic adoption", where schools adopt the labels of reform without transforming practice.

Comparative studies of faith-based early childhood education in other Muslim-majority contexts reveal similar tensions. In Pakistan, madrasas have historically emphasized transmission and memorization (*tahfiz*), creating potential tensions with child-centered approaches. Ashraf (2018) documented how Pakistani Islamic schools struggle to reconcile constructivist methodologies with

cultural expectations about religious instruction. Rogoff's (2003) work on cultural variation in learning approaches further illuminates these tensions. She demonstrates that learning approaches are not universal but culturally constituted; what counts as "good learning" varies across communities.

In the Indonesian context, the dualism between TK (under the Ministry of Education) and RA (under the Ministry of Religious Affairs) reflects broader tensions between secular and religious education systems. This institutional dualism creates different affordances and constraints for implementing BCCT, as teachers must navigate competing expectations from different ministry frameworks. Parker et al (2022) documents how this institutional fragmentation creates challenges for coherent early childhood policy implementation.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This research employs a qualitative comparative case study design (Ary et al., 2006). This design enables in-depth contextual analysis of BCCT implementation in two institutions while systematically comparing patterns across cases. The comparison is organized around four theoretically derived dimensions corresponding to the four stages of the BCCT framework: (1) environmental scaffolding, (2) pre-play scaffolding, (3) during-play scaffolding, and (4) post-play scaffolding.

Research Setting and Participants

This study was conducted in Banda Aceh, the capital of Aceh province, Indonesia, between August 2025 and January 2026. Purposive sampling was used to select two institutions representing maximum institutional contrast within the same geographic and cultural context:

1. TKIT SAR - A public integrated Islamic kindergarten operating under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. This institution participates in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program, which provides intensive professional development and resources.

2. RA P - An Islamic kindergarten operating under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This institution has a longer operational history but does not participate in the *Sekolah Penggerak* program.

Participants included 2 classroom teachers from TKIT SAR (both female, teaching experience: 5 and 8 years), 2 classroom teachers from RA P (both female, teaching experience: 7 and 12 years), 2 school principals (1 from each institution), and 4 classroom assistants (2 from each institution).

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection employed three primary techniques: observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The observation instrument consisted of 54 indicators distributed across: (a) opening activities (7 items), (b) environmental support (8 items), (c) pre-play support (6 items), (d) during-play support (5 items), (e) post-play support (9 items). Each indicator was assessed using a 4-

point rubric: (1) Not Observed, (2) Partially Implemented, (3) Adequately Implemented, (4) Fully Implemented. Qualitative field notes supplemented numerical ratings.

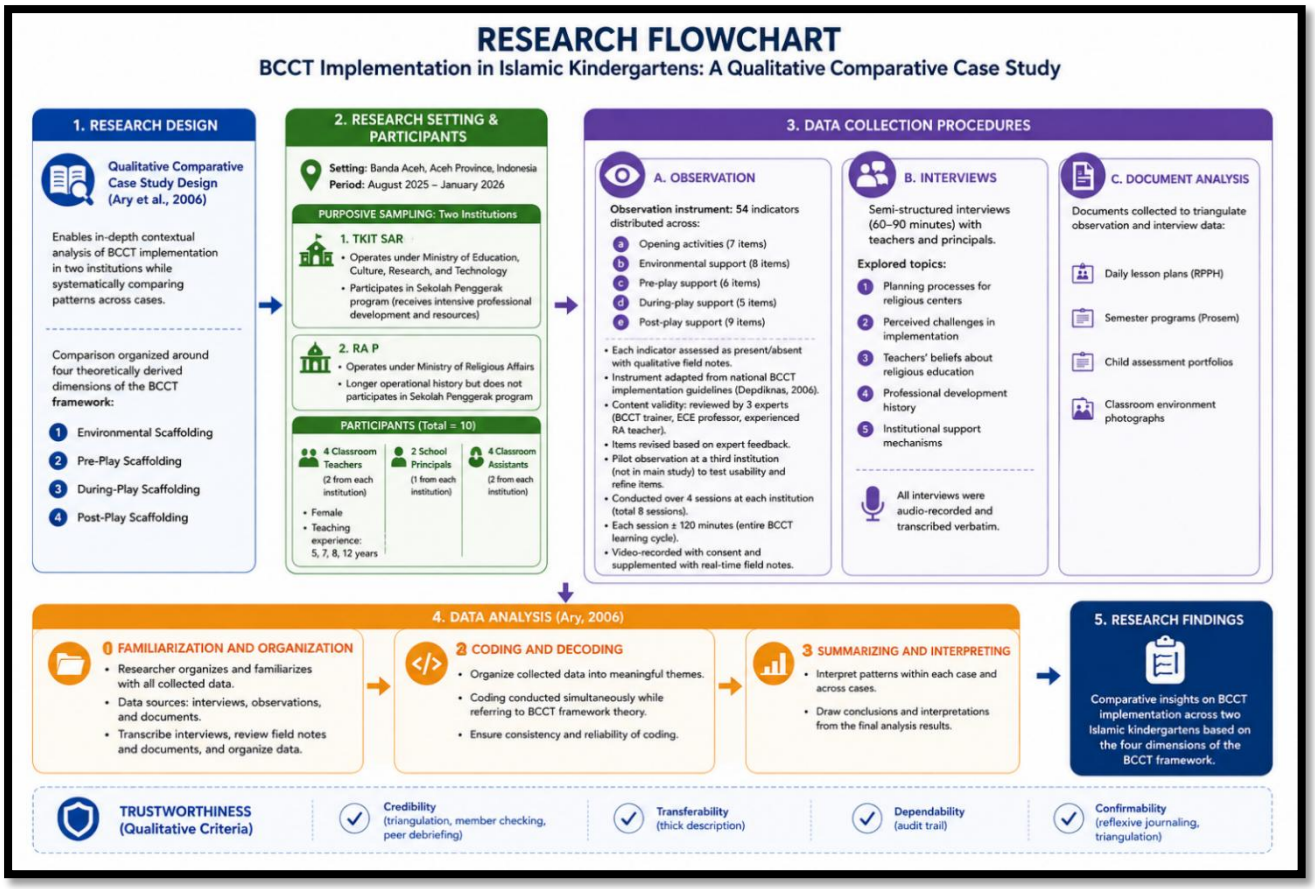
Table 1. BCCT Implementation Rubric

Score	Category	Description	Interpretation
4	Fully Implemented	Indicator is consistently observed in all sessions with evidence of quality execution	Exemplary implementation; no significant gaps
3	Adequately Implemented	Indicator is observed in most sessions but may have minor inconsistencies	Satisfactory implementation; minor improvements needed
2	Partially Implemented	Indicator is observed in some sessions but not consistently	Partial implementation; significant improvements needed
1	Not Observed	Indicator is not observed in any session	No implementation; foundational changes required

The 54-item observation instrument was developed by adapting the national BCCT implementation guidelines (Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2006). To establish content validity, three experts reviewed the instrument: one BCCT trainer, one early childhood education professor, and one experienced RA teacher. Based on their feedback, the researchers revised items for clarity and relevance. A pilot observation was conducted at a third institution (not included in the main study) to test the instrument's usability and identify any ambiguous items. Observations were conducted over four sessions at each institution (total 8 observation sessions), each lasting approximately 120 minutes (covering the entire BCCT learning cycle). Observations were video-recorded with teacher consent and supplemented with real-time field notes.

Then, a semi-structured interviews for 60-90 minutes with teachers and principals explored: (a) planning processes for religious centers, (b) perceived challenges in implementation, (c) teachers' beliefs about religious education, (d) professional development history, (e) institutional support mechanisms. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Furthermore, documentation contained daily lesson plans (RPPH), semester programs (Prosem), child assessment portfolios, and classroom environment photographs, which were collected to triangulate observation and interview data.

Data analysis followed three key stages according to Ary (2006): (1) familiarization and organization, (2) coding and decoding, and (3) summarizing and interpreting. The first stage was conducted by the researcher when attempting to organize and familiarize themselves with all collected data. The collected data came from interview results, observations, and documents. The coding and decoding stages were conducted simultaneously when organizing collected data into themes that remained referenced to the BCCT framework theory. After completing the coding, the authors drew conclusions and interpretations from the final analysis results.



Picture 1. Research Flowchart

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Case 1: TKIT SAR: Fidelity and Integration

TKIT SAR demonstrated comprehensive implementation of the faith-based BCCT model across all four scaffolding stages. Implementation was characterized by systematic planning, rich materials, deliberate pedagogical planning, and reflective closing activities.

Table 2. Implementation summary for TKIT SAR

Scaffolding Stage	Indicators Present	Implementation Score	Quality Category
Environmental Scaffolding	8/8 (100%)	4.0	Fully Implemented
Pre-Play Scaffolding	6/6 (100%)	4.0	Fully Implemented
During-Play Scaffolding	5/5 (100%)	3.8	Fully Implemented
Post-Play Scaffolding	9/9 (100%)	3.9	Fully Implemented
Overall	**28/28 (100%)**	**3.9**	**High Implementation**

1. Environmental Scaffolding: The Prepared Islamic Environment

The religious center environment was deliberately designed as a mini-Islamic ecosystem. Before children arrived, teachers arranged 4-5 different play options representing each of three required play types:

Table 3. BCCT Types of Play

Play Type	Faith-Based Materials	Developmental Target
Sensorimotor	Hijaiyah letter puzzles, tactile prayer bead strings, matching *wudhu* sequence cards	Fine motor, visual discrimination, symbolic recognition
Role Play	Mini-sajadah, imam's robe, toy microphone for adhan, "family prayer time" props	Social-emotional, empathy, worship practice
Construction	Miniature mosque blocks, Kaaba replica, wooden hajar aswad	Spatial reasoning, symbolic representation, religious identity

The teacher clearly explained the environmental arrangement: "Children learn religion not by listening to lectures, but by holding, feeling, and playing. These small prayer mats they take turns using to be the imam, they learn prayer while playing roles." This demonstrates that environmental scaffolding at TK IT is not merely about providing learning materials but also instilling religious meaning through the availability of the materials themselves. The environment here functions as the "third teacher" in the Reggio Emilia tradition, yet infused with Islamic semantics.

2. Pre-Play Scaffolding: Orienting Heart and Mind

The pre-play circle time functioned as theological and pedagogical orientation. The teacher consistently performed six scaffolding movements: 1) Ritual opening: Greeting, learning prayer, recitation of short surahs; 2) Affective bridging: "Who performed Maghrib prayer in congregation at home last night?"; 3) Concept introduction: Explaining today's religious theme (e.g., "Today we learn about *wudhu*, Allah loves those who purify themselves"); 4) Material demonstration: Showing how to use new center materials; 5) Rule co-construction: "How do we take turns using the prayer mat?" (Children propose rules); and 6) Prayer for learning: Collective prayer for understanding and blessings.

Observation data showed that pre-play scaffolding indicators were 100% consistently performed across all four observation sessions. Teacher interview data also confirmed that pre-play scaffolding activities must not be skipped: "If the pre-play scaffold is skipped, children play without direction. They remain happy, but the religious learning doesn't reach them."

3. During-Play Scaffolding: Calibrated Assistance

During children's independent exploration, the teacher performed three roles simultaneously: observer, documenter, and strategic intervener. Documented observation data showed: a) Active observation: Teacher circulated, knelt beside children, observed without interrupting; b) Anecdotal recording: Documenting specific behaviors, utterances, social interactions. Scaffolding processes were adjusted based on ZPD theory which are: (a) For struggling children: modeling ("Try to watch, start by holding the prayer card this way"); (b) For developing children: questioning ("After reading the mealtime prayer, what should we do?"); and (c) For proficient children: extending ("Can you teach this prayer to your friend?").

The teacher ensured each child completed at least three play activities during the session, rotating through different play types. This density of experience, called play intensity in BCCT literature, was deliberately managed through gentle encouragement and interest-based invitations. During-play support was differentiated not only by ability but also by religious familiarity. Children from more religiously observant families received additional challenges; children with minimal religious exposure received concrete modeling and positive reinforcement.

4. Post-Play Scaffolding: Making Meaning Through Recalling Activities

Post-play scaffolding transformed play experiences into conscious religious learning. The closing activities at TK IT were structured yet responsive to children: 1) Clean-up: Framed as responsibility and trust; 2) Circle formation: Physical signal transitioning from play to reflection; 3) Sharing: Teacher invited 3-4 children to share their play experiences; 4) Probing questions: "How did you feel when you were the imam?" "Why should we read bedtime prayers?"; 5) Value extraction: Teacher explicitly articulated the religious values embedded in play: "Earlier, Umar patiently waited his turn; that is noble character. Allah loves those who are patient."; 6) Closing prayer: Gratitude for learning, prayer for perseverance. The teacher also used recalling responses as authentic assessment data, documenting children's verbal expressions of religious understanding in anecdotal records and portfolios.

Case 2: RA P: Partial Adaptation and Conventional Drift

RA P displayed a contrasting implementation profile. Although religious activities were abundant, they were not consistently delivered through the BCCT framework. This RA employed what we term "implementation by addition," where religious content was added to conventional teaching methods rather than transforming pedagogy through BCCT principles.

Table 4. Implementation summary for RA P

Scaffolding Stage	Indicators Present	Implementation Score	Quality Category
Environmental Scaffolding	3/8 (37.5%)	2.0	Partially Implemented
Pre-Play Scaffolding	2/6 (33.3%)	1.8	Partially Implemented
During-Play Scaffolding	1/5 (20%)	1.4	Partially Implemented
Post-Play Scaffolding	0/9 (0%)	1.0	Not Observed
Overall	**6/28 (21.4%)**	**1.5**	**Low Implementation**

1. Environmental Scaffolding: Availability Without Utilization Capacity

RA P practice is still conventional, focusing on routine activities like reading the *Iqra* and practicing *wudhu* and prayer, without systematic management of learning centers. The document notes that the provision of sensorimotor and construction play did not meet the recommended standards (a minimum of 3-5 choices for each type of play). This directly impacts the ability to implement the BCCT model effectively. Learning activities are still largely teacher-directed, so active child involvement is not yet evenly distributed. The teacher's scaffolding is not yet consistently planned to develop children's religious understanding through play. Furthermore, the implementation of the pre-play and post-play scaffolding steps is not yet consistent, especially in reinforcing religious goals and reflecting on activities.

Table 5. BCCT Types of Play at RA P

Play Type	Faith-Based Materials	Developmental Target
Sensorimotor	No specific sensorimotor materials mentioned	The school's learning is still conventional, focusing on routine activities like reading *Iqra*, rather than structured sensorimotor play.
Role Play	Mini prayer rugs (sajadah), props for prayer (shalat) and adhan (call to prayer) practice.	Children practice religious routines such as *wudhu* (ablution), prayer, and adhan. However, these are not yet integrated into a systematic learning center (sentra) model.
Construction	No specific construction materials mentioned.	The learning process is still largely teacher-centered and classical, lacking the structured construction play that fosters spatial reasoning.

RA P possessed dedicated religious center facilities: a prayer room (*mushala*) with prayer mats, *Iqra* book sets, and a *wudhu* practice area. However, observations revealed that a) Limited play variation: Only 1-2 play options per session, predominantly *Iqra* reading and *wudhu* practice; b) Absence of sensorimotor and construction play: No *hijaiyah* puzzles, mosque blocks, or tactile religious materials; c) Teacher-directed access: Children did not independently choose materials; the teacher distributed books and led collective practice.

This gap was acknowledged by the Principal "We have worship center facilities, but their utilization is not yet optimal. Teachers are more comfortable teaching *Iqra* classically because Quran reading targets are parental pressure." This demonstrates that infrastructure availability does not guarantee BCCT implementation. The existence of spaces named "centers" without pedagogy aligned with the BCCT framework merely represents symbolic adoption rather than substantive implementation.

2. Pre-Play Scaffolding: Ritual Without Orientation

Religious opening rituals were consistently performed, such as greetings, prayers, and occasional Islamic songs. However, essential scaffolding elements were absent. It showed a) no connection between previous experience and new learning; b) no demonstration of new play materials (because few new materials were available); c) no co-construction of play rules; and d) no explicit articulation of religious values to be learned through play.

A teacher explained, "We usually go straight to practice. Children already know the prayers; they just need to practice them. If we explain at length, they get bored." This perspective reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of the BCCT pre-play framework. The framework's purpose is not information delivery but cognitive and motivational orientation, activating children's agency rather than merely announcing activities.

a. During-Play Scaffolding: Supervision Without Framework

During center activities, the teacher performed supervision (monitoring order, correcting pronunciation) but not scaffolding (calibrated assistance for ZPD progress). Observed practices included: a) Correcting children's *Iqra* reading errors through direct correction; b) Physically guiding

wudhu movements without verbal explanation; and c) No documented observation notes or systematic assessment during play. This distinction matters because supervision ensures task completion, and scaffolding supports development. RA P's practices during play reflected the former, not the latter.

b. Post-Play Scaffolding: Closure Without Reflection

Post-play activities were brief and structured, such as collecting books, lining up, and returning to the classroom. Systematic recalling processes, where children share, reflect, and collectively construct meaning, were not observed in any session. When asked about evaluation, the teacher referred to summative assessments (Quran reading progress at semester's end) but could not explain formative assessment practices capturing learning during play.

Table 6. Cross-Case Analysis: Explaining Differences

Implementation Dimension	TKIT SAR	RA P	Analysis
BCCT Training History	Comprehensive, ongoing, *Sekolah Penggerak* cohort	Minimal, one-time workshop, no follow-up	Most critical factor; TKIT teachers possess pedagogical grammar of BCCT; RA teachers lack conceptual framework
Faith-Play Integration Schema	Strong: Religious values embedded within play affordances	Weak: Religious activities separate from play	Epistemological difference: faith as experience vs. faith as content
Leadership	Principal is BCCT champion, actively mentors	Principal delegates, no pedagogical supervision	Leadership determines whether BCCT remains innovation or becomes routine
Material Resources	Rich, varied, aligned to play types	Basic, limited to *Iqra* and *wudhu*	Resource constraints real but not determinative; creativity can substitute
Parental Expectation Management	School educates parents about play-based learning	Parents demand visible Quran reading progress	External accountability pressure shapes pedagogical choices
Institutional Identity	Sekolah Penggerak = innovation expected	RA= Islamic identity assumed	Identity without pedagogical competence produces symbolic compliance

Table 7. Cross-Case Analysis: Indicators as per Scaffold

Implementation Dimension	TKIT SAR	RA P	Key Observation
Scaffolding 1: Environment	8/8 indicators present	3/8 indicators present	TKIT: rich material variety; RA: limited to *Iqra* and *wudhu*
Scaffolding 2: Pre-Play	6/6 indicators present	2/6 indicators present	TKIT: systematic orientation; RA: ritual without orientation

Scaffolding 3: During Play	5/5 indicators present	1/5 indicators present	TKIT: differentiated scaffolding; RA: supervision without scaffolding
Scaffolding 4: Post-Play	9/9 indicators present	0/9 indicators present	TKIT: reflective recall; RA: no systematic recall

DISCUSSION

The most striking finding is the reversal of expected institutional advantage. RA P, operating under the Ministry of Religious Affairs with an explicit Islamic identity, implemented faith-based learning less systematically than TKIT SAR, a public TK. This paradox challenges what could be termed the "institutional assumption" in faith-based education policy, where the belief is that religious institutional affiliation automatically ensures superior faith-based pedagogical practice (Ashraf, 2018).

This finding aligns with previous research on educational policy implementation, which demonstrates that institutional mandates alone are insufficient to ensure pedagogical change (Parker et al., 2022). The gap between policy intent and classroom practice, often termed the "implementation gap," is well-documented in education research (Deniz, 2026). In the Indonesian context, this gap is particularly pronounced given the institutional dualism between TK and RA systems.

TKIT SAR's status as a Sekolah Penggerak provided certain perks, such as: a) Ongoing high-quality BCCT training; b) Mentoring from expert teachers; c) Peer learning communities across the Sekolah Penggerak network; d) Accountability for implementation fidelity; and e) Resources for material development. This status provided intensive, ongoing professional development that enabled teachers to construct what Bhabha (2022) terms a pedagogical "third space", which is a hybridized zone that neither replicates Western BCCT models nor remains confined to traditional Islamic pedagogy. This "third space" pedagogy, as observed at TKIT SAR, shows that effective faith-based BCCT implementation requires not just adopting the model but actively, critically adapting it.

The 'third space' concept describes hybrid pedagogical practices when teachers navigate competing knowledge traditions (Heugh et al., 2021). At TKIT SAR, this is vividly exemplified through Bhabha's (2022) hybridized zone, where teachers neither replicate the secular American BCCT model wholesale nor rigidly adhere to traditional Islamic didacticism. Instead, they actively construct a new pedagogical grammar by infusing Western constructivist tools (scaffolding, free choice, play-based learning) with Islamic semantics (prayer rituals, prophetic values, and Islamic ethics). This process also operationalizes Giroux's (2024) border pedagogy, as TKIT teachers act as border-crossers between child-centered discovery and faith-based instruction, ultimately creating a transformed practice that is both developmentally appropriate and theologically grounded.

Meanwhile, RA P, despite its longer institutional history and higher accreditation, lacked access to this innovation ecosystem. Their partial BCCT adoption reflects what Rice & Rogers (1980) call reinvention without fidelity, adopting the label while modifying (and reducing) core components. The absence of such "third space" construction at RA P is attributable to the lack of sustained

professional development. RA teachers, despite possessing stronger content knowledge in Islamic subjects, lacked the conceptual frameworks to translate religious content into BCCT pedagogy. This finding aligns with research by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), which shows that professional development is the strongest predictor of pedagogical change in early childhood education. RA P's reliance on supervision rather than scaffolding reflects what Freire (2018) calls the "banking model" of education, where knowledge is treated as static content deposited into children's minds. In the religious education context, this manifests as treating Islamic knowledge as a body of facts to be transmitted (through *Iqra* reading, prayer memorization, and *wudhu* practice) rather than as a living faith constructed through play and experience.

Drawing on Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), the differential outcomes at TKIT SAR and RA P can be understood as a function of different institutional activity systems (Engeström, 2001). At TKIT SAR, the *Sekolah Penggerak* program provided not just training but an entire innovation ecosystem including mentoring, peer learning communities, accountability mechanisms, and resource support. This system transformed the school's "object" (the goal of education) from merely covering religious content to facilitating meaningful religious learning through play. At RA P, the activity system was characterized by what Engeström (2001) terms "contradictions" between competing demands: the Ministry of Religious Affairs' expectations for distinct Islamic identity, parents' demands for visible Quran reading progress, and the national PAUD standards requiring child-centered pedagogy. Without resolution of these contradictions through professional development and institutional support, RA teachers defaulted to conventional, didactic instruction in what Ashraf (2018) documents as a common pattern in Islamic educational institutions that adopt Western pedagogical models without critical adaptation.

The centrally developed national BCCT curriculum must be adapted to accommodate local religious practices. At the same time, local institutions must adapt their heritage practices to align with national pedagogical standards. TKIT SAR's successful adaptation strategies encompass four key areas: adoption, material localization, ritual integration, and value articulation. In terms of adoption, the national BCCT framework is translated into an Islamic pedagogical vocabulary, where scaffolds become *ta'lim* and recalling becomes *muhasabah*. Material localization infuses universal play materials, such as blocks and puzzles, with Islamic symbolism, including mosque miniatures and *hijaiyah* letters. Ritual integration merges circle time activities with local prayer and greeting traditions, while value articulation is achieved by having teachers explicitly name the Islamic values embedded in play. In contrast, RA's adaptation faces significant challenges: pedagogical conservatism, content pressure, and a competency gap. Specifically, highly structured classical teaching methods resist BCCT transformation, external expectations for Quran reading achievement clash with its play-intensive approach, and the absence of a conceptual framework hinders the recognition of proper BCCT implementation.

Conversely, RA P's failure to progress from supervision to scaffolding reflects Freire's (2018) 'banking model,' where faith is static content to be deposited rather than a living experience built through play. Lacking professional development to 'cross borders,' RA teachers remained confined to classical instruction, producing symbolic compliance, where BCCT was verbally endorsed but pedagogically absent. This confirms that the 'third space' is not automatically accessible through

religious materials alone; it demands deliberate pedagogical agency and sustained institutional support.

These findings carry clear implications for policy, practice, and future inquiry. The Ministry of Religious Affairs should prioritize targeted BCCT professional development for RA, as generic TK training proves inadequate; RA teachers need concrete models for operationalizing Islamic values through play. Similarly, the *Sekolah Penggerak* program's implementation gap validates its theory of change, yet benefits remain concentrated in participating schools, requiring cross-institutional knowledge-transfer mechanisms, particularly from TK to RA, across ministries. In teacher education, preparation programs must strengthen pedagogical content knowledge for faith-based early childhood education, equipping teachers with dual competencies in Islamic developmental psychology and constructivist play facilitation. Assessment frameworks also need revision, as current PAUD instruments do not adequately capture faith-based learning outcomes; new tools should assess children's spiritual development through authentic documentation of play-based religious experiences.

Regarding study limitations, the two-case design restricts generalizability, calling for multi-site research across diverse geographic and institutional contexts. Future studies should also measure child outcomes, specifically the differential impact of full versus partial BCCT implementation on religious knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, and employ longitudinal designs to track whether RA P's current transitional state evolves toward full implementation or stabilizes in partial adaptation.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the quality of faith-based BCCT implementation is determined not by institutional religious identity but by pedagogical capacity, professional development, and systematic scaffolding. TKIT SAR, a public kindergarten under the Ministry of Education, outperformed RA P, a school explicitly mandated to integrate Islamic values, by fully enacting all four BCCT stages through a culturally adapted “third space” that merges child-centred discovery with Islamic teachings. RA P, despite its religious resources, remained trapped in conventional, teacher-centred instruction, treating faith as content to be transmitted rather than as living experience to be constructed through play.

These results debunk the “institutional assumption” that ministry affiliation automatically ensures pedagogical excellence. They underscore that the *Sekolah Penggerak* programme’s intensive mentoring and peer-learning ecosystem is far more influential than administrative oversight. For RA institutions to fulfil their distinctive mission, they need not only stronger Islamic content knowledge but also sustained, contextualised training in BCCT methodology, training that addresses the unique tension between constructivist play and received religious doctrine.

Practically, the Ministry of Religious Affairs should develop targeted professional development models for RA, drawing on TKIT SAR’s successful adaptation strategies. Cross-institutional knowledge transfer between TK and RA, facilitated by inter-ministerial collaboration, can bridge the current implementation gap. Teacher preparation programmes must equip future educators with dual competencies in Islamic developmental psychology and

constructivist facilitation, while assessment frameworks should be redesigned to authentically capture children's spiritual growth through play.

Methodologically, the two-case design limits generalisability; hence, multi-site and longitudinal studies are needed to explore how partial adaptations evolve and how child outcomes differ under full versus partial BCCT implementation. Ultimately, this research affirms that faith-based early childhood education in Indonesia is not a fixed attribute of institutions but a dynamic, practice-based achievement, one that requires deliberate pedagogical agency, institutional commitment, and ongoing professional learning to transform religious values into meaningful, developmentally appropriate experiences for young children.

Declaration On the Use of AI

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT-4 for language refinement, grammar checking, and improving writing structure. The AI tool also assisted with literature searching and organizing references. After using the AI tool, the authors conducted a comprehensive review and made necessary edits to the content, and assume full responsibility for the final version of the published article. The authors independently conducted all intellectual content, research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

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