

**CULTIVATING EMPATHY THROUGH CHILD-FRIENDLY ISLAMIC
PEDAGOGY: A CASE STUDY AT MADRASAH IBTIDAIYAH DARUL ULUM
BANYUANYAR, INDONESIA**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how child-friendly Islamic pedagogy cultivates students' empathy at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Darul Ulum Banyuanyar, Indonesia. Employing a qualitative single-case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with school leaders, Islamic education teachers, a guidance and counselling teacher, and students, complemented by classroom observations and document analysis. The data were analysed thematically through coding, categorisation, cross-source comparison, and interpretive synthesis. The findings reveal that empathy was cultivated through an integrated educational ecosystem grounded in *rahmah*, justice, *ta'awun*, *ukhuwah*, positive discipline, student participation, teacher role modelling, dialogical learning, cooperative activities, religious reflection, and social engagement. Islamic narratives, case studies, role play, *tadabbur*, peer tutoring, restorative conflict resolution, and *Friday Sharing* enabled students to recognise others' emotions, adopt different perspectives, and translate concern into prosocial action. The study formulates the *Rahmah Model*, comprising relational safety, perspective activation, dialogical collaboration, religious meaning-making, caring action, and holistic reinforcement. The model demonstrates that empathy develops not through isolated moral instruction but through sustained interaction among classroom pedagogy, institutional culture, counselling support, family involvement, and community partnership.

Keywords: child-friendly Islamic pedagogy, empathy development, *rahmah Model*.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana pedagogi Islam ramah anak menumbuhkan empati siswa di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Darul Ulum Banyuanyar, Indonesia. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus tunggal. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan pimpinan madrasah, guru Pendidikan Islam, guru bimbingan dan konseling, serta siswa, yang dilengkapi dengan observasi pembelajaran dan analisis dokumen. Data dianalisis secara tematik melalui pengodean, kategorisasi, perbandingan lintas sumber, dan sintesis interpretatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa empati ditumbuhkan melalui ekosistem pendidikan terpadu yang berlandaskan rahmah, keadilan, ta'awun, ukhuwah, disiplin positif, partisipasi siswa, keteladanan guru, pembelajaran

dialogis, kegiatan kooperatif, refleksi religius, dan keterlibatan sosial. Kisah-kisah Islam, studi kasus, role play, tadabbur, tutor sebaya, penyelesaian konflik restoratif, dan kegiatan Jumat Berbagi membantu siswa mengenali emosi orang lain, mengambil perspektif yang berbeda, serta menerjemahkan kepedulian ke dalam tindakan prososial. Penelitian ini merumuskan Model Rahmah yang terdiri atas relasi aman, aktivasi perspektif, kolaborasi dialogis, pemaknaan religius, aksi kepedulian, dan penguatan holistik. Model ini menegaskan bahwa empati berkembang melalui interaksi berkelanjutan antara pedagogi kelas, budaya madrasah, layanan konseling, keterlibatan keluarga, dan kemitraan masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: *pedagogi Islam ramah anak, pengembangan empati, Model Rahmah.*

A. Introduction

Empathy is a fundamental social-emotional competence in child development because it enables students to recognize others' feelings, understand different perspectives, and respond with care and responsibility. In school settings, empathy is closely associated with cooperation, trust-building, conflict resolution, and prosocial behavior. Its development is shaped not only by children's individual characteristics but also by the quality of peer relationships, teacher–student interactions, and the learning climate they experience daily. Therefore, cultivating empathy should be positioned as an integral objective of primary education (Calandri et al., 2025; Castro et al., 2025; Rizkyanti & Mufiedatussalam, 2026).

Primary education represents a strategic stage for cultivating empathy because children are developing their

abilities to understand emotions, adopt others' perspectives, regulate personal responses, and connect moral judgment with social action. Empathy does not develop automatically through age progression alone; it requires learning experiences involving dialogue, cooperation, role modelling, reflection, and opportunities to help others. Developmentally appropriate educational interventions can strengthen empathic responses, while inclusive character-education strategies encourage participation, care, and students' sense of belonging within the school community (Kappelmayer et al., 2023; Spinrad et al., 2023).

Efforts to cultivate empathy require an educational environment that is both physically and psychologically safe. The child-friendly school framework places

respect for children's rights, protection from violence and discrimination, student participation, and inclusive learning at the centre of educational provision. Within this approach, children are not merely objects expected to comply with school regulations but subjects whose dignity, voices, needs, and development must be respected. Accordingly, child-friendly schooling encompasses institutional policies, teaching practices, educator competence, safe facilities, family participation, and supportive social relationships (Fitriani et al., 2021; Kholidiyah & Amala, 2024).

Research conducted in Indonesia indicates that applying child-friendly school principles can contribute to character formation, student well-being, participation, and social awareness. Programmes implemented through habituation, role modelling, individual assistance, collaborative activities, and inclusive environments can strengthen positive behaviour among children. Nevertheless, their implementation should not be limited to administrative compliance, anti-violence declarations, or the provision of physical facilities. A child-friendly

school acquires pedagogical significance only when protection, justice, participation, and respect are genuinely embodied in students' learning experiences and daily interactions (Iskandar et al., 2024; Sa'diyah & Nurhayati, 2023).

Within the madrasah context, child-friendly principles need to be integrated with the foundations of Islamic education. Islamic education is not solely oriented toward the acquisition of religious knowledge but also toward personal development, moral and social formation, and the responsible use of knowledge. The values of *Rahmah*, justice, respect for human dignity, mutual assistance, brotherhood, and care provide an ethical foundation for fostering students' empathy. Islamic pedagogy should therefore not be practised through pressure, fear, or demeaning communication, but through guidance that connects religious knowledge with tolerant, caring, and diversity-respecting behaviour (Aderibigbe et al., 2023; Al-Attas (Syed.), 1991; Sayyi, Muslimin, et al., 2025).

Empathy-oriented Islamic pedagogy requires a shift from merely transmitting moral rules toward providing learning experiences

through which students can experience, discuss, and practise values. Teachers occupy a central position as value transmitters through their language, communication patterns, classroom management, disciplinary practices, and responses to student differences. When teachers listen attentively, correct students without humiliating them, promote cooperation, and resolve conflicts fairly, empathy becomes part of the lived curriculum. Studies show that teachers' value-related educational goals interact with school climate, while teacher empathy contributes to positive learning environments and bullying prevention (Bross et al., 2026; Murphy et al., 2018; Oeschger et al., 2024).

Based on this framework, *child-friendly Islamic pedagogy* can be understood as an approach that integrates the fulfilment of children's rights with the moral and spiritual orientation of Islamic education. It is manifested through compassionate pedagogical relationships, dialogical learning, role modelling, positive discipline, cooperative activities, moral reflection, and student participation in madrasah life. Its purpose is not merely to create an enjoyable

atmosphere but to guide students in understanding others' experiences and translating such understanding into caring action. Religious education thus becomes a space for learning Islamic values and applying them through dialogue, respect, and socially just relationships (Fitriani et al., 2021; Sijamhodžić-Nadarević, 2023).

Previous studies have generally examined child-friendly schools from the perspectives of policy, protection, character education, inclusion, and student well-being. Meanwhile, research on empathy has predominantly been situated within social-emotional learning, interpersonal relationships, and bullying prevention. These two bodies of scholarship have not sufficiently explained how Islamic educational values, child-friendly practices, and empathy formation are integrated within learning at the primary madrasah level. Further empirical explanation is therefore needed concerning the pedagogical mechanisms connecting teacher role modelling, classroom communication, religious habituation, student cooperation, positive discipline, and the development of empathic character (Castro et al., 2025; Hanifah

& Muthmainah, 2024; Sa'diyah & Nurhayati, 2023).

Addressing this gap, the present study aims to analyse how child-friendly Islamic pedagogy is implemented to cultivate students' empathic character at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Darul Ulum Banyuanyar, Indonesia. The study focuses on the integration of Islamic values and child-friendly principles in teaching, teachers' strategies for developing students' understanding of others' emotions and perspectives, the role of madrasah culture in habituating social care, and the factors supporting or constraining implementation. Its novelty lies in conceptualising child-friendly Islamic pedagogy as a learning ecosystem connecting protection, compassionate relationships, participation, moral formation, and students' everyday practices of empathy.

B. Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative single-case study design at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Darul Ulum Banyuanyar, Pamekasan, Indonesia. Fieldwork was conducted from 10 December 2025 to 15 February 2026. The case was bounded by the

implementation of child-friendly Islamic pedagogy and its contribution to cultivating students' empathy within classroom instruction and the wider madrasah environment. Data collection focused operationally on teacher–student communication, positive discipline, student participation, religious habituation, peer cooperation, conflict management, and caring behaviour. The single-site design enabled the researchers to examine these interconnected practices within their actual institutional and cultural context (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

Seventeen informants were selected purposively according to their direct involvement in curriculum management, Islamic instruction, student guidance, and learning activities. They comprised the headmaster, vice principal for curriculum, teachers of Aqidah Akhlak, Fiqh, Qur'an and Hadith, Islamic Cultural History, a guidance and counselling teacher, and ten students. Adult informants were selected because they designed, implemented, supervised, or evaluated child-friendly educational practices. Student participants were selected from those who had consistently participated in

the observed lessons and school activities and were able to describe their experiences of teacher support, peer relationships, classroom participation, and caring practices. Participant adequacy was determined by the relevance and richness of information obtained (Hamilton & Finley, 2019; Malterud et al., 2016).

Data were collected through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted during *Aqidah Akhlak*, *Fiqh*, *Qur'an* and *Hadith*, and Islamic Cultural History lessons, as well as during religious routines and student interactions outside the classroom. The observation guide recorded teachers' language, responses to student differences, disciplinary practices, collaborative activities, student voice, and displays of empathy. Interviews explored policies, instructional strategies, student experiences, supporting conditions, and implementation barriers. With participants' permission, interviews were recorded and transcribed. Documents examined included teaching modules, ATP documents, student learning materials, assessment records, and institutional

policies concerning child protection, discipline, and learning practices (Yin, 2017).

The data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were first read repeatedly to identify meaningful statements related to child-friendly pedagogy and empathy development. Initial codes were then generated and compared across participant groups and data sources. The researchers combined inductive coding, which allowed patterns to emerge from the field data, with deductive coding informed by child-friendly education, Islamic moral pedagogy, empathy, student participation, and positive discipline. Related codes were organised into preliminary themes, reviewed against the complete dataset, refined, and developed into interpretive findings. A cross-source matrix was used to connect each theme with interview excerpts, observation evidence, and documentary records (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Maxwell, 2005; Nowell et al., 2017).

Research quality was strengthened through source and method triangulation, participant confirmation, peer discussion,

contextual description, and an audit trail. Statements from school leaders, teachers, and students were compared with classroom observations and institutional documents. Factual interview summaries were returned to relevant informants for clarification, while coding decisions, theme revisions, and interpretive notes were documented throughout the analysis. Ethical procedures included institutional permission, voluntary informed consent from adult participants, parental or guardian consent and child assent for student participants, pseudonymisation, and secure data storage. Students were informed that participation was voluntary and would not influence their academic evaluation or relationship with teachers (Coulston et al., 2025; Kaur et al., 2025).

C. Results and Discussion

1. Institutionalising *Rahmah* within a Child-Friendly Madrasah Ecosystem

The findings indicate that child-friendly Islamic pedagogy at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Darul Ulum Banyuwangi was not understood merely as an isolated teaching

technique. Instead, it functioned as an institutional orientation connecting the madrasah's vision, child-protection policies, pedagogical interactions, and character formation. The headmaster stated, "*We want the children to grow into individuals who can feel what others feel and are moved to help them.*" This vision was translated into prohibitions against physical, verbal, and psychological violence, compassionate teaching, accessible complaint mechanisms, and student participation in developing classroom rules. Empathy was therefore positioned not as an additional competence but as a moral objective guiding the entire life of the madrasah.

Philosophically, these policies repositioned children from objects of discipline into moral subjects possessing feelings, voices, dignity, and the capacity for responsibility. A child-friendly approach does not eliminate teacher authority; rather, it reconstructs authority from coercive power into ethical authority that protects, guides, and educates. Within Islamic education, the values of *Rahmah*, justice, *ta'awun*, *ukhuwah*, and *ihsan* provide a normative foundation through which respect for children's rights is not perceived as

external to Islamic tradition. Child-friendly education gains theological legitimacy when compassion is manifested through protection, equal opportunities, and respect for human differences (Aderibigbe et al., 2023; Fitriani et al., 2021).

The institutionalisation of these values was also evident in teacher training, classroom supervision, monthly evaluation meetings, and the weekly *Koloman Guru* (Majelis Ta'lim Guru). This forum functioned as a collective space for discussing teaching experiences and identifying students requiring particular attention. The headmaster explained that students experiencing difficulties were not immediately blamed; teachers first examined the underlying causes before determining suitable assistance. This practice is significant because child-friendly pedagogy cannot be sustained if it depends solely on the personal kindness of individual teachers. A value-based orientation requires an institutional structure enabling educators to reflect on practice, establish shared principles, and avoid fragmented responses to students' needs.

The physical and psychological environment of the madrasah also

created a safe space for empathy development. Clean surroundings, bright classrooms, a small playground, adequate sanitation facilities, and a counselling room were accompanied by a policy rejecting labels such as "naughty child" or "stupid child." Student testimony supported this finding. S1 described the madrasah as resembling a home because "*the teachers and friends are kind,*" while S2 stated that she felt accepted and regarded her teachers as parental figures. These statements show that safety is not merely the absence of violence but a relational experience of being accepted, listened to, and protected from humiliation. Positive school climate and high-quality relationships are closely associated with children's social-emotional development (Castro et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, institutionalisation remained challenged by tension between compassionate educational principles and the belief among some parents that effective education requires pressure and harshness. The headmaster identified changing parental mindsets as the primary challenge, alongside limited resources. This finding demonstrates that a child-friendly madrasah cannot

be developed solely through internal regulations because children's experiences are also shaped by family and community values. Inconsistency between the madrasah's approach and parenting practices at home may create contradictory moral messages. Therefore, parent meetings, collaborative social activities, and communication concerning character development must be regarded as substantive components of pedagogy rather than merely administrative programmes.

2. Transforming Islamic Education Content into Empathic Experiences

Cross-subject findings reveal that empathy was not cultivated by introducing a separate lesson but by reinterpreting Aqidah Akhlak, Fiqh, Qur'an and Hadith, and Islamic Cultural History as moral experiences connected to students' lives. Teaching modules and learning-goal sequences incorporated discussion, reflection, case studies, storytelling, role play, *tadabbur*, and action planning. This structure indicates a shift from religious education as information transmission toward learning that integrates knowledge, perspective-

taking, emotional responsiveness, and social action. Learning success was therefore not limited to students' ability to reproduce religious teachings but extended to their capacity to understand others' suffering and respond appropriately.

In Aqidah Akhlak lessons, the teacher used stories, open-ended questions, role play, reflection, and a method called "How Would You Feel?" The teacher explained, *"I want students not only to know about Islam but also to experience Islamic compassion through the way I teach."* During a Grade 6 observation, a story about the Prophet Muhammad's concern for orphans was followed by questions about how an orphan might feel and what students could do to help. One student shared an experience of assisting an elderly and lonely neighbour, which the teacher then transformed into collective reflection. Narrative thus acted as a bridge between abstract religious teachings, emotional identification, and perspective-taking (Brügge-Feldhake et al., 2024; Gasser et al., 2022).

Fiqh learning demonstrated an equally important transformation. The teacher did not restrict Fiqh to rules

concerning worship, zakat calculations, or categories of lawful and unlawful actions. Instead, these concepts were related to public benefit and the experiences of other people. Zakat lessons, for example, encouraged students to consider the feelings of recipients, while lessons concerning neighbours' rights used cases involving an ill neighbour or one who was never greeted. This strategy shifted Fiqh from legal-formal compliance toward relational ethics. Case studies and simulations enabled students to recognise that Islamic law has social objectives, including preserving dignity, reducing suffering, and establishing interpersonal responsibility.

In Qur'an and Hadith lessons, empathy development occurred through *tadabbur*, dialogue, and action planning. The teacher did not stop at reading and memorisation but invited students to contemplate the meaning of verses and hadith and relate them to social realities. An observation of a lesson concerning compassion for orphans created a deeply emotional space; one student cried while remembering an orphaned neighbour, after which the teacher and classmates provided emotional

support. This moment illustrates how religious learning can become a safe space for acknowledging emotions rather than demanding that students conceal vulnerability. However, emotional experiences must be accompanied by critical reflection and action so that empathy does not remain a momentary feeling of pity.

Islamic Cultural History lessons used storytelling, discussion, hypothetical questions, and mini-dramas to bring students closer to the emotions of historical figures. Stories concerning the Prophet Muhammad's treatment of prisoners, Abu Bakr's generosity, and Umar ibn al-Khattab's concern for hungry citizens were used to develop moral imagination. Historical narratives enabled students to cross temporal distance and imagine human perspectives in different circumstances. Nevertheless, empathic history teaching should not oversimplify figures as individuals without dilemmas. Stories need to open dialogue concerning context, moral choices, and consequences so that students do not merely admire historical figures but learn to reason about why particular actions are considered just and humane

(Purwowidodo, 2024; Riani et al., 2025; Sayyi, Asmuki, et al., 2025).

3. Dialogue, Collaboration, Role Modelling, and Restoration as Pedagogical Mechanisms

Dialogical learning emerged as an important mechanism for transforming empathy from a normative message into the capacity to listen. Teachers used questions such as “What do you think?”, “How would you feel?”, and “What would you do?” to invite students to enter perspectives different from their own. The vice principal for curriculum described discussion circles as spaces in which students shared experiences and listened to classmates’ views. Dialogue did not merely increase classroom participation; it trained students to recognise that an individual’s experience cannot be fully represented through another person’s viewpoint. Listening therefore became an ethical act before becoming a communication skill.

Collaborative activities added a behavioural dimension to this process. Poster projects, hadith discussions, historical drama, peer tutoring, and social-action planning placed students

in situations of interdependence. Each participant received a role, making group success dependent upon contribution and responsiveness to classmates’ needs. Cooperative learning does not automatically produce empathy when students merely sit together without structured responsibility. At MI Darul Ulum Banyuanyar, role distribution and peer tutoring transformed cooperation into concrete practice in giving assistance, accepting limitations, and valuing others’ contributions. Research likewise indicates that cooperative learning can strengthen peer support, interpersonal relationships, and classroom engagement (Ngoc Tuong Nguyen & Thi Kim Oanh, 2025).

Teacher role modelling connected declared values with students’ lived experiences. Observations showed teachers greeting students with smiles, listening without interruption, allowing sufficient thinking time, and correcting answers through expressions such as, “*That is almost correct; let us look at this part again.*” When students became disruptive, teachers responded gently without publicly humiliating them. These practices demonstrate that positive discipline does not imply the

absence of boundaries; rather, it involves maintaining boundaries while protecting children's dignity. Supportive teacher-student relationships are associated with empathy development, while teachers' empathic capacities are important for preventing bullying and creating safe classroom climates (Fithriyah, 2023; Murphy et al., 2018).

The restorative approach applied by the guidance and counselling teacher extended positive discipline into the management of peer conflict. Rather than focusing primarily on identifying and punishing the guilty party, the counsellor brought students together, invited each participant to explain their experience, helped them understand the consequences of their behaviour, and facilitated relationship repair. Programmes such as "Caring Friends," the anonymous "Sharing Box," group guidance, and individual counselling provided structured support for students experiencing social-emotional difficulties. Restorative practices can strengthen belonging, accountability, relationship healing, and group cohesion when implemented consistently and without compromising victim safety (Mpofu et al., 2024; Spinrad et al., 2023).

Although dialogical spaces had been developed, student voice had not yet become a fully institutionalised component of decision-making. Students reported that they were frequently allowed to express opinions but were only "sometimes" involved in decisions such as establishing classroom rules or duty schedules. This reveals a distinction between pedagogical participation and democratic participation. Listening to students' answers during lessons does not necessarily mean recognising them as actors entitled to influence classroom life. Future development should extend participation to rule formulation, evaluation of learning comfort, planning of social programmes, and problem-solving. Child-friendly pedagogy gains greater depth when children's voices are not merely heard but influence decisions.

4. Empathy as a Lived Culture and Social Practice

Empathy at the madrasah extended beyond classroom instruction and was institutionalised through morning routines, *Friday Sharing*, moral instruction, assistance for orphans and disadvantaged families, and community

service. Observation of *Friday Sharing* showed students bringing food or money, packing donations, visiting economically disadvantaged households, and interacting directly with recipients. One student donated all of his pocket money to purchase food for distribution. Such experiences transformed empathy from an ability to imagine suffering into a willingness to share personal resources. The madrasah culture therefore provided a pathway from emotional sensitivity toward observable prosocial action.

Student experiences demonstrated relatively consistent patterns. They reported comforting sad classmates, helping peers complete learning tasks, challenging students who mocked others, reporting bullying to teachers, and apologising after wrongdoing. S1 explained that when seeing a sad friend, he would “*comfort them and ask what happened,*” while S4 reported accompanying and helping a classmate who could not complete homework. These accounts reveal three dimensions of empathy: recognising another person’s emotional condition, experiencing affective concern, and providing a prosocial response. However, because the evidence is narrative and does not include pre- and post-

intervention measurement, these findings should be interpreted as indications of empathy development rather than definitive causal proof.

The data also revealed the integration of Madurese cultural values, namely *andhep asor*, *ngabuleh*, *estoh*, and *song-osong lambhung*. These values provide contextual depth to the Islamic principles of *Rahmah*, *ukhuwah*, and *ta’awun*. *Andhep asor* may be interpreted as humility that prevents students from degrading others; *ngabuleh* as willingness to serve; *estoh* as sincere affection; and *song-osong lambhung* as readiness to carry collective burdens. Nevertheless, local values must be critically interpreted so that respect does not become unquestioning submission. Within child-friendly pedagogy, tradition gains legitimacy when it supports dignity, care, and justice rather than sustaining hierarchies that silence children’s participation.

Empathy assessment was conducted through behavioural observation, anecdotal records, self-assessment, peer assessment, student interviews, counselling records, and parental feedback. Teachers also provided specific

feedback, such as reinforcing acts of helping or encouraging students to offer assistance in future situations. This approach is advantageous because empathy is evaluated through actual behaviour and multiple perspectives. However, the study did not identify a developmental rubric systematically connecting emotion recognition, perspective-taking, response regulation, and prosocial action. Assessment should therefore be developed longitudinally so that the madrasah can differentiate temporary behaviour, compliance with teacher expectations, and relatively stable internalisation of empathy.

Empathy development ultimately occurred within an ecology extending beyond the madrasah. Leadership support, teacher collaboration, counselling programmes, parental involvement, and community interaction acted as enabling factors. Conversely, disharmonious family backgrounds, beliefs that education should be harsh, resource limitations, and social-media influences were identified as constraints. These findings caution against treating character as the product of a single teaching method. Empathy develops through interaction among children's

dispositions, relational experiences, family culture, school climate, and broader social contexts. Programme effectiveness should consequently be interpreted as an ecological outcome rather than a linear effect of one activity (Castro et al., 2025; Fithriyah, 2026).

5. The *Rahmah* Model: Child-Friendly Islamic Pedagogy for Cultivating Empathy

Based on the synthesis of interviews, observations, and documents, this study proposes the *Rahmah* Model as an analytical construction of child-friendly Islamic pedagogy. The model is not an official programme name established by the madrasah but a conceptual development derived from the institution's "Heart-Based Education" approach. *Rahmah* comprises six interconnected components: Relational safety grounded in *Rahmah*; Activation of perspective and emotion; Habituation through dialogue and collaboration; Meaning-making through religious reflection; Action for social care; and Holistic assessment and partnership. Together, these components form a cycle connecting safety, moral

understanding, emotional experience, religious reflection, practical action, and ecosystem support.

The first component, Relational safety grounded in *Rahmah*, constitutes the prerequisite for the entire process. Students are more likely to express feelings and understand others when they are not afraid of humiliation or harm. The second component, Activation of perspective and emotion, is developed through Qur'anic stories, hadith, Islamic history, Fiqh case studies, "How would you feel?" questions, and lived experiences. At this stage, students are invited to move beyond an egocentric perspective and enter another person's emotional world. The association between teacher-student relationships and empathy development indicates that interpersonal safety is not merely the background of learning but a mechanism enabling perspective-taking (Castro et al., 2025; Ismail et al., 2025; Sayyi, Afandi, et al., 2023).

The third component, Habituation through dialogue and collaboration, transforms understanding into social practice through discussion, dialogue circles, peer tutoring, teamwork, projects, and

drama. Students learn that differing viewpoints need not end in domination but can be managed through listening and cooperation. The fourth component, Meaning-making through religious reflection, links those experiences to *Rahmah*, *ta'awun*, *ukhuwah*, justice, *ihsan*, and public benefit. Reflection, *tadabbur*, and action planning prevent empathic activities from becoming pedagogical games without moral direction. Islamic values function as a moral horizon explaining why concern for others constitutes an integral element of religious responsibility (Aderibigbe et al., 2023; Sayyi, Gaffar, et al., 2023).

The fifth component, Action for social care, is realised through helping classmates, preventing mockery, apologising, participating in *Friday Sharing*, providing charitable assistance, and serving the community. This stage is essential because empathy confined to emotion may become passive sadness without responsibility. The sixth component, Holistic assessment and partnership, involves observation, anecdotal records, self-reflection, peer assessment, counselling services, supervision, and cooperation with families and communities.

Assessment asks not only what students know but how they treat others across different social spaces. Effective empathy interventions require developmental appropriateness, opportunities for practice, and reinforcement within consistent environments (Mpofu et al., 2024; Sayyi & Fithriyah, 2025; Spinrad et al., 2023).

The theoretical contribution of the *Rahmah* Model lies in its integration of children's rights, relational pedagogy, Islamic values, and local culture within a coherent learning cycle. It rejects two forms of reductionism: religious education limited to doctrinal mastery and child-friendly schooling understood merely as the absence of violence. Child-friendly Islamic pedagogy requires a deeper transformation in which religious knowledge becomes a relational experience generating concern and action. Nevertheless, this model remains a conceptual product of a single case study. Further testing in other madrasahs, longitudinal assessment, and complete documentation of all planned participants are required before broader transferability can be claimed.

Table 1. Philosophical and Operational Application of the *Rahmah* Model

<i>Rahmah</i> component	Core principle	Key application	Empathy outcome
Relational safety	<i>Rahmah</i> and child dignity	Compassionate communication, non-violent discipline, counselling support	Trust and emotional openness
Affective activation	Perspective-taking	Islamic stories, case studies, role play, "How would you feel?" questions	Emotional recognition and concern
Dialogical habituation	Mutual recognition	Discussion circles, peer tutoring, group projects, collaborative learning	Listening, cooperation, and respect
Religious meaning-making	<i>Ta'awun</i> , <i>ukhuwah</i> , justice, and <i>ihsan</i>	<i>Tadabbur</i> , reflection, moral dialogue, and personal action plans	Moral and spiritual awareness
Social action	Empathy as responsibility	<i>Friday Sharing</i> , helping peers, preventing mockery, restorative conflict resolution	Prosocial behaviour and solidarity
Holistic reinforcement	Shared educational responsibility	Observation, peer assessment, counselling, supervision, and family partnership	Consistent and sustainable empathy

Source: Synthesised from interview, observation, and document data at

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Darul Ulum Banyuanyar

The table demonstrates that the *Rahmah* Model operates as a cyclical process: safe relationships enable perspective-taking; perspective-taking is strengthened through dialogue and religious reflection; reflection is translated into social action; and action is sustained through holistic assessment and institutional partnership.



Figure 1. The *Rahmah* Model of Child-Friendly Islamic Pedagogy for Cultivating Students' Empathy

This figure presents the *Rahmah* Model as a constructive and applicative framework for cultivating students' empathic character within a child-friendly Islamic pedagogical environment. The model is organised into six interconnected components: Relational Safety, Perspective Activation, Dialogue and Collaboration, Religious Reflection, Caring Action, and Holistic Reinforcement. These components operate sequentially and recursively, moving from the creation of a safe and compassionate learning relationship toward students' capacity to recognize others' emotions, engage in reflective moral understanding, and translate empathy into prosocial action. The model ultimately positions empathic character expressed through sensitivity, care, and prosocial conduct as the outcome of an integrated pedagogical cycle grounded in *rahmah*, participation, and sustained educational support.

D. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that child-friendly Islamic pedagogy at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Darul Ulum Banyuanyar operates as an educational ecosystem integrating

rahmah, justice, *ta'awun*, *ukhuwah*, teacher role modelling, child protection, dialogue, collaboration, religious reflection, and social action. Empathy is not taught as an isolated concept but cultivated through safe learning relationships, Islamic narratives, case studies, role play, *tadabbur*, peer tutoring, positive discipline, restorative conflict resolution, and *Friday Sharing*. These practices encourage students to become emotionally sensitive, caring, helpful, reflective, and prosocial in their everyday interactions.

The *Rahmah* Model conceptualises empathy formation through six interconnected components: relational safety, perspective activation, dialogue and collaboration, religious reflection, caring action, and holistic reinforcement. Its sustainability depends on consistent institutional policies, teacher competence, counselling services, character assessment, family involvement, and community partnership. Although the findings indicate positive development, this study remains limited to a single case and predominantly narrative evidence. Future research should therefore test

the model across diverse madrasah settings through longitudinal designs and more systematic measures of empathy.

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