

Conceptualizing Childhood in the Qur'an through a Tafsir and Linguistic Analysis of *Walad*, *Şibyān*, *Ṭifl*, and *Ghulām* with Educational Implications

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to examine the concept of childhood in the Qur'an through a tafsir and Arabic linguistic analysis of four key terminologies: *walad*, *ṭifl*, *şibyān*, and *ghulām*. Rather than employing a single, generic notion of "child," the Qur'an uses these terms to represent distinct stages of development, relational contexts, and moral capacities. Using a qualitative literature-based method, this study analyzes selected Qur'anic verses and classical as well as contemporary Qur'anic interpretations to explore the semantic nuances and contextual usage of each term. The findings reveal that *walad* emphasizes familial relations and parental moral responsibility, *ṭifl* denotes early biological dependence and limited social awareness, *şibyān* reflects the emergence of moral and spiritual potential in early childhood, and *ghulām* represents a transitional phase toward independence and responsibility. The novelty of this study lies in its integrative analysis of tafsir and Arabic linguistics to construct a developmental continuum of childhood based on Qur'anic terminology, rather than treating children as a homogeneous category. The result of the study shows the terminological framework provides an original conceptual foundation for contemporary Islamic education, calling for a gradual, contextual, and developmentally sensitive educational approach. By integrating Qur'anic semantics with educational reflection, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of child-centered education within an Islamic framework.

Keywords: *Qur'anic terminology, Childhood, Islamic education, Tafsir Analysis, Child Development.*

INTRODUCTION

Education is the main foundation in the formation of personality, moral values, and human intellectual and spiritual development.¹ In the perspective of Islamic education, children are not understood solely as objects of biological nurturing, but as divine mandates that have the potential of nature that must be developed through a directed and sustainable educational process.² Therefore, a conceptual understanding of children is very important as a basis for formulating goals, approaches, and practices of Islamic education that are relevant to the development of the times.³

The Qur'an as the main source of Islamic teachings pays significant attention to children and their growth process.⁴ However, the concept of children in the Qur'an is not presented in a single term, but through a variety of terminologies, each of which has different nuances of meaning and context of use.⁵ The diversity of these terms shows that the Qur'an views children as dynamic and developed entities according to the stages of life and social relations that are encompassing it.⁶ Therefore, the multifaceted terminology used in the Qur'an reflects a sophisticated and dynamic understanding of childhood, emphasizing that children are viewed through their evolving developmental stages and social contexts.

However, existing studies on Islamic education and childhood often treat Qur'anic references to children in a general and normative manner, without examining the semantic distinctions among Qur'anic terms such as *walad*, *ṭifl*, *ṣibyān*, and *ghulam*. As a result, the conceptualization of children's education tends to overlook the Qur'an's differentiated view of childhood based on developmental stages. To address this gap, a closer examination of the Qur'anic terminology for children is required, particularly in relation to the distinct semantic and developmental meanings conveyed by each term.

Among the terminologies used in the Qur'an to refer to children are *walad*,⁷ *ṣibyān*,⁸ *ṭifl* and *ghulam*.⁹ These three terms are not only lexically different, but also contain semantic differences related to family relationships, developmental phases, and the moral potential of children. These differences indicate that the Qur'an has a rich conceptual framework in looking at children, which cannot be reduced to one a single category without losing its substantive meaning.¹⁰

¹ Abudin Nata, *Ilmu Pendidikan Islam* (Prenada Media, 2016).

² Muhammad Syaiful Islam, "Islamic Education Thought Seyyed Naquib Al-Attas," *Al-Fadlan: Journal of Islamic Education and Teaching* 2, no. 1 (2024): 25–36, <https://doi.org/10.61166/fadlan.v2i1.39>.

³ Siti Nur Hadis A Rahman et al., "Effective Approaches Of The Education Of Children In Forming A Sustainable Family According To Islamic References," *UMRAN - International Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies* 6, nos. 3–2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.11113/umran2020.6n3-2.425>.

⁴ Fazlur Raḥmān and Ebrahim Moosa, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān*, 2. ed (The Univ. of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁵ M. A. Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style* (I. B. Tauris, 2011).

⁶ Saad Jamiu Abdulazeez et al., "The Qur'an's Guidance On Parenting and Child Development: A Comprehensive Analysis of Islamic Principles and Contemporary Applications," *KHAIRUN: Journal of Qur'anic Sciences* Maiden, no. Edision (n.d.): 165–72.

⁷ Ruslan Wahab and Mardiyawati, "Term of Child in Analysis of Languages Various By The Quran," *Journal of Research and Multidisciplinary* 4, no. 1 (2021): 393–400.

⁸ Muhamad Rofingi, "Pendidikan Akhlak Anak: Sebuah Tawaran Kajian Di Pesantren Studi Kitab Simthu al-Iqyan Karya Abdullah Bin Ahmad Basaudan," *Musala : Jurnal Pesantren Dan Kebudayaan Islam Nusantara* 1, no. 1 (2022): 50–63, <https://doi.org/10.37252/jpkin.v1i1.153>.

⁹ Sabiq Noor et al., "Semantic and Science Qur'anic Studies: Relationship Genetic Inheritance and Parental Education Model for Children in Qissah Ibrahim," *Al Muhafidz: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 5, no. 2 (2025): 217–33, <https://doi.org/10.57163/almuhafidz.v5i2.170>.

¹⁰ Leni Rusdiati, "The Concept Of Children's Education In The Perspective Of The Quran," *BRIGHT VISION Journal of Language and Education* 3, no. 1 (2023): 83, <https://doi.org/10.30821/brightvision.v3i1.2998>.

In the study of Islamic education, especially in relation to children's education, the term "child" is often used generically without considering the differences in terminology found in the Qur'an. Many studies have used verses about children as a normative or ethical foundation, but have not examined in depth the linguistic meaning and context of the interpretation of the Qur'anic terms used. As a result, the concept of children's education that is formulated tends to be general and does not reflect the depth of the Qur'an's perspective.¹¹

The study of classical commentary has provided a fairly detailed explanation of the use of the terms *walad*, *ṣibyān*, *tifl*, and *ghulām* in their historical and theological contexts. These interpretations generally emphasize the relational and social meanings of the terms, especially in relation to family, descent, and moral responsibility.¹² Meanwhile, contemporary commentaries have begun to develop a more contextual reading with highlighting the social and educational implications of the Qur'anic verses about children.¹³

On the other hand, the linguistic study of the Qur'an confirms that every word choice in the Qur'an has a precise semantic meaning and cannot be freely exchanged.¹⁴ The linguistic approach allows researchers to explore the root of words, the field of meaning, and the context in which the term Qur'anic is used more systematically. Therefore, linguistic analysis of the terminology of children in the Qur'an is important to understand how the Qur'an constructs the concept of children based on stage of development and its social role. Therefore, this study aims to identify the educational implications that can be derived from the understanding of these terminologies for the development of children's education in an Islamic perspective.

A comprehensive understanding of the terminology of children in the Qur'an has far-reaching implications for the world of education. Children's education is not only concerned with the transfer of knowledge, but also includes the formation of character, the development of moral responsibility, and the cultivation of spiritual values.¹⁵ By understanding the different meanings of *walad* as a child in the relationship of descent and family, *ṣibyān* As a child in a phase of dependence and vulnerability, *tifl* denotes a child in a phase of physical and cognitive dependency, as well as *ghulām* as a child in the phase of growth towards adulthood, educators can formulate educational approaches that are more contextual and appropriate to the child's developmental stage.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the concept of children in the Qur'an through the analysis of Arabic interpretation and language on the terminology of *walad*, *ṣibyān*, *tifl*, and *ghulām*. It is hoped that this research can make a conceptual contribution to the development of Qur'an-based children's education studies that are more in-depth, contextual, and relevant to today's educational needs.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a library research design. This approach was chosen because the focus of research studies is in the form of texts, namely verses of the Qur'an that contain children's terminology as well as their interpretation and linguistic analysis.

¹¹ Kalbi Jafar and Maswati, "Internalisasi Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Islam Pada Anak Usia Dini: Pondasi Pembentukan Karakter Sejak Dini," *Journal of Innovative and Creativity* 5, no. 2 (2025): 19563–72.

¹² Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir Ath-Thabari et al., *Tafsir Ath-Thabari* (Pustaka Azzam, 2007).

¹³ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Mishbah: pesan, kesan dan keserasian Al-Qur'an* (Lentera Hati, 2002).

¹⁴ Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Text Linguistics of Qur'anic Discourse: An Analysis*, Paperback edition (Routledge, 2020).

¹⁵ Muhammad Syaiful Islam, "Islamic Education Thought Seyyed Naquib Al-Attas."

In practicing the library research, the researcher followed several systematic steps:

1. *Data Identification*, it was conducted by searching for specific keywords (*walad*, *ṣibyān*, *ṭifl*, *ghulām*) throughout the Qur'an using concordances.
2. *Data Classification*, it was conducted categorizing the identified verses based on their thematic contexts.
3. *Critical Analysis*, it was conducted analyzing each term using semantic tools to uncover nuanced meanings, followed by a comparative study of classical and contemporary interpretations.
4. *Synthesis*, it was conducted integrating the linguistic findings with the principles of Islamic education to formulate a comprehensive concept of childhood.

The source of research data consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data comprise Qur'anic verses that contain the terms *walad*, *ṣibyān*, *ṭifl*, and *ghulām*. Secondary data include classical and contemporary tafsir works, as well as relevant literature on Arabic linguistics and Islamic education. Classical interpretations employed in this study include *Jāmi' al-Bayān* by al-Ṭabarī and *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* by Ibn Kathīr,¹⁶ which provide foundational exegetical explanations of Qur'anic terminology. Meanwhile, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* by Fazlur Rahman¹⁷ is selected as a representative contemporary interpretive work due to its thematic and contextual approach, which emphasizes the ethical and conceptual dimensions of Qur'anic terms beyond literal exegesis. Other tafsir and scholarly works are used as comparative theoretical references to support, contextualize, and critically engage the main analysis.

The data collection technique was carried out through literature search and identification of Qur'anic verses that are relevant to the focus of the research. Data analysis was carried out by integrating thematic interpretation analysis and linguistic-semantic analysis of the terminology of *walad*, *ṣibyān*, *ṭifl*, and *ghulām*. The results of the analysis were then studied comparatively to identify conceptual differences regarding children in the Qur'an and were associated with the implications of children's education in the perspective of Islamic education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the analysis of Arabic interpretation and language on children's terminology in the Qur'an, namely *walad*, *ṣibyān*, *ṭifl*, and *ghulām*, and discusses the educational implications that can be derived from the understanding of each of these terms. The discussion began with a mapping of the verses of the Qur'an which contained the three terminologies to provide an overview of the context of its use and the nuances of its meaning. Furthermore, each term is analyzed in more depth through a commentary and linguistic-semantic approach, then its implications for the conceptualization of children's education in an Islamic perspective are discussed. Through this structure, the Results and Discussion section is expected to be able to show how the different Qur'anic terminology about children forms a conceptual framework for children's education that is gradual, contextual, and relevant to contemporary Islamic educational practices.

¹⁶ Ibn Kathir and Ismail Ibn Umar, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm* (Dār Ṭayyibah, 1999).

¹⁷ Raḥmān and Moosa, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān*.

Tabel 1. Mapping of Qur’anic Child-Related Terminology in the Qur’an

Terminology	Qur’anic Form & Representative Verses	Dominant Context of Use	Linguistic–Semantic Nuance	Educational Implications
<i>Walad</i>	walad / awlād – QS al-Baqarah [2]:233; QS al-An‘ām [6]:140	Lineage, family relations, parental responsibility	Relational term emphasizing biological descent and the parental–child bond	Family-based education; parental responsibility in nurturing moral and spiritual development
<i>Şibyān</i>	şabiyy (singular form of <i>şibyān</i>) – QS Maryam [19]:12; QS Maryam [19]:29	Childhood in moral–spiritual context	Refers to a young child characterized by immaturity yet capable of moral discernment and divine communication	Early moral and spiritual education; recognition of children’s moral potential
<i>Ṭifl</i>	ṭifl / atfāl – QS an-Nūr [24]:31; QS al-Ḥajj [22]:5	Early childhood, dependence, limited awareness	Denotes a child in a phase of physical and cognitive dependency	Protection, care, and gradual socialization in early educational settings
<i>Ghulām</i>	ghulām – QS Maryam [19]:7; QS Yūsuf [12]:19; QS aş-Şāffāt [37]:101	Growth, transition, emerging maturity	Indicates a child approaching maturity with developing strength and responsibility	Education oriented toward character formation, responsibility, and preparation for adulthood

As summarized in Table 1, the Qur’an employs different terminologies, including *walad*, *şabiyy/şibyān*, *ṭifl*, and *ghulām* to describe children across distinct relational, developmental, and moral contexts, each of which carries specific educational implications.

1. *Walad*: Qur’anic Usage and Context

The term *walad* in the Qur’an is used to refer to children in the context of hereditary and family relations.¹⁸ The use of this term emphasizes the biological relationship between parent and child, while also containing the dimension of moral responsibility inherent in that relationship. In the verses that contain the term *walad*, the Qur’an not only describes the existence of children as a

¹⁸ Kathir and Umar, *Tafsīr Al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*.

result of the birth process, but also places children in a wider network of social, ethical, and educational relations.¹⁹

One of the main contexts of the use of the term *walad* is found in QS al-Baqarah [2]:233, which discusses the responsibility of parents in the upbringing and breastfeeding of children. This verse emphasizes the obligation of fathers and mothers to *walad* from the early phases of life, both in terms of meeting physical needs and making decisions related to children's welfare.²⁰ In this context, *walad* is understood as a subject that is completely dependent on parents, so that the relationship between parents and children becomes the main foundation in shaping the child's life in the future.

The use of the term *walad* also appears in QS al-An'ām [6]:140, which criticizes the actions of parents who harm or sacrifice their children due to ignorance and deviation of values. In this verse, *walad* is placed as a disadvantaged party due to the failure of parents in carrying out their moral and spiritual responsibilities. This context suggests that the relationship of descent does not automatically guarantee the goodness of education, but is highly dependent on the values, awareness, and ethical choices of parents.²¹

From a linguistic perspective, the term *walad* comes from the root *w-l-d* which lexically means "to give birth" or "to be born". This basic meaning emphasizes the dimensions of biological origin and generational continuity.²² However, in the use of the Qur'an, *walad* does not stop at the biological meaning alone, but develops into a relational term that is loaded with ethical consequences. Children as *walad* are always present in relationships with parents, families, and the social structures that surround them.

When compared to other terms of child in the Qur'an, *walad* emphasizes more aspects of hereditary relations and family responsibilities, rather than the child's developmental phase or individual capacity. In contrast to *tifl* which describes biological dependence or *ghulām* which marks the transition phase to adulthood, *walad* serves as an umbrella term that binds children in the family value system. Thus, the main focus of *walad* is not on the age or maturity level of the child, but on the role of parents and the family environment in shaping the child's life.

In the context of education, the use of the term *walad* has important implications for the conceptualization of children's education in Islam. Children's education, at this stage, is understood as a fundamental family responsibility and cannot be transferred completely to a formal institution. Parents are positioned as the first and foremost educators responsible for physical upkeep, the formation of moral values, as well as the instillation of spiritual foundations in children. Thus, *the concept of walad* affirms that children's education in the perspective of the Qur'an is firmly rooted in family relations and the ethical responsibility of parents.

¹⁹ Wahab and Mardiyawati, "Term of Child in Analysis of Languages Various By The Quran."

²⁰ Bustanul Karim et al., "The Concept of Child and Parent Relationships from the Perspective of Qur'anic Parenting in Tafsir Al Munir," *Bulletin of Early Childhood* 2, no. 2 (2023): 75, <https://doi.org/10.51278/bec.v2i2.1122>.

²¹ Mujiyatmi, "Peran Dan Tanggung Jawab Orang Tua Terhadap Pendidikan Anak Dalam Perspektif Islam," *TA'LIM : Jurnal Studi Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 1 (2023): 1–16.

²² Jamaluddin, "Perbandingan Konsep Walad dalam Kewarisan Islam Menurut Teori Hudud Syahrur dan Ulama Mazhab Fiqh," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 7, no. 4 (2024): 113–29.

2. *Şibyān*: Qur'anic Usage and Context

The term *şibyān* in the Qur'an appears through its singular form, *şabiyy*, which linguistically derives from the root *ş-b-y* and refers to a young child who has not yet reached physical or social maturity. In contrast to *the walad* which emphasizes the relationship of heredity and parental responsibility, the use of *şabiyy* in the Qur'an highlights the internal condition of the child, especially in the moral and spiritual aspects, even though the child is still in a very young age phase.²³

The explicit use of the term *şabiyy* is found in Qur'an Maryam [19]:12, which describes the Prophet Yahya as a child who was endowed *with ḥukm* (wisdom or moral authority) from an early age. This verse presents a unique picture of the child, because *şabiyy* is not positioned solely as a passive and immature individual, but rather as a subject who has the capacity to receive guidance and moral responsibility. In this context, *şabiyy* points out that youth is not always synonymous with the absence of value, awareness, or moral potential.

A similar context is also seen in QS Maryam [19]:29, when the Prophet Isa spoke to his people while still in the cradle. Although this verse does not explicitly mention the word *şabiyy*, the mufassir understand the event as part of the *category of şabiyy*, i.e. a child who is biologically immature, but spiritually endowed with special abilities. This event reinforces the Qur'anic portrayal of *şabiyy* as a child who is in the early phases of life, but still has the potential to be involved in the moral and religious dimensions.

From a semantic perspective, the term *şabiyy* contains nuances of physical and social immaturity, but does not automatically negate the spiritual or moral capacity of a child. The Qur'an, through the use of this term, indicates that the child in the *şibyān* phase is in a biologically "unfinished" state, but remains open to values, learning, and guidance. Thus, *şibyān* is not understood as a value-empty phase, but rather as an initial phase of the formation of moral and spiritual consciousness.²⁴

When compared to *ṭifl*, which emphasizes more dependence and social unawareness, *şibyān* presents a picture of a child who begins to have the capacity to receive moral messages, despite being at a very young age. This difference shows that the Qur'an uses different terms to mark the nuances of a child's development, not just a chronological age difference. In this context, *the şibyān* occupies an important position as the initial transitional phase between full dependence and the emergence of value awareness.²⁵

In an educational perspective, the concept of *şibyān* has significant implications. Children's education in this phase cannot be understood solely as a process of physical maintenance or protection, but also as an effort to instill moral and spiritual values gradually. The Qur'an, through its description of *şabiyy*, provides the conceptual basis that children from an early age have the potential to be introduced to values, meanings, and moral orientations. Thus, education in the *şibyān*

²³ Jami'un Nafi'in et al., "Konsep Pendidikan Anak dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an (Surat Luqman Ayat 12-19)," *Edudeena : Journal of Islamic Religious Education* 1, no. 1 (2017): 9–19, <https://doi.org/10.30762/ed.v1i1.443>.

²⁴ Nadia Futhira et al., "Instilling Islamic Values in Early Childhood through the Story of Prophet Yusuf: A Literature Review," *Nak-Kanak: Journal of Child Research* 2, no. 3 (2025): 113–22, <https://doi.org/10.21107/njcr.v2i3.160>.

²⁵ Zaitun Zaitun et al., "Early Children Character Education: Analysis of The Message of The Quran in Forming Human Morality," *Afkaruna: Indonesian Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Studies* 19, no. 2 (2023): 282–97, <https://doi.org/10.18196/afkaruna.v19i2.18203>.

phase requires an age-sensitive approach, while still recognizing the capacity of the child as a subject of moral and spiritual learning.²⁶

3. *Tifl*: Qur'anic Usage and Context

The term *tifl* in the Qur'an is used to refer to a child in the early phase of life characterized by physical dependence and limited social awareness. Linguistically, *tifl* is derived from the root *t-f-l* meaning "soft," "smooth," or "immature," which hints at the condition of the child as an individual who is still in the early stages of biological and cognitive development. In contrast to *ṣibyān* which highlights the moral and spiritual potential of children, *tifl* emphasizes more on the condition of dependence and unpreparedness of children in fully understanding social norms.²⁷

The explicit use of the term *tifl* is found in QS an-Nūr [24]:31, which mentions *atfāl alladhīna lam yazharū 'alā 'awrāti al-nisā'* (children who do not yet understand the aurat of women). This verse places *tifl* in the context of the social unconscious, especially regarding the boundaries of norms and ethics. In this context, *tifl* is understood as a child who does not yet have the cognitive and social capacity to understand the moral consequences of certain actions or observations. Thus, this term emphasizes the phase of child development that is still under the full protection of adults.²⁸

The term *tifl* also appears in QS al-Ḥajj [22]:5, which describes the stages of human development from creation, birth, childhood, to adulthood and old age. In this verse, *tifl* is used to denote the early phases of human life characterized by physical growth and total dependence on the surrounding environment. This use of *tifl* in the context of biological development reinforces the understanding that the term refers to the universal developmental phases experienced by every human being, regardless of his social or spiritual background.²⁹

From a semantic perspective, *tifl* marks the most basic developmental phase in the Qur'anic conceptualization of the child. In this phase, the child is not positioned as a subject with moral or social responsibility, but rather as an individual who needs full protection, nurturing, and mentoring. The Qur'an does not associate *tifl* with a specific social role or moral capacity, but rather places it within the framework of a natural and gradual development.³⁰

When compared to *ṣibyān*, the difference between the two becomes clearer. *Ṣibyān* refers to a young child who, although not yet physically mature, has been shown in the Qur'an as a subject who can receive moral values and guidance. In contrast, *tifl* describes the child in a phase before such social and moral consciousness is formed. This difference shows that the Qur'an uses different

²⁶ Ovi Arieska et al., "Pengembangan Kecerdasan Emosional (Emotional Quotient) Daniel Goleman Pada Anak Usia Dini Dalam Tinjauan Pendidikan Islam," *Al-Fitrah: Journal Of Early Childhood Islamic Education* 1, no. 2 (2018): 103, <https://doi.org/10.29300/alfitrah.v1i2.1337>.

²⁷ Asrul Asrul, "The Concept of Child Identity Education Perspective of the Qur'an; Thematic Study of Term Thifl Quranik," *At-Ta'dib* 16, no. 1 (2021): 61, <https://doi.org/10.21111/at-tadib.v16i1.5673>.

²⁸ Nurul Hikmah, "Early Childhood Social and Emotional Development in Islamic Education," *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 13, no. 01 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v13i01.6330>.

²⁹ Salami Mahmud et al., "Phases of Human Development: Comparing Western and Islamic Theories and the Implication in Islamic Education," *Atfalunā Journal of Islamic Early Childhood Education* 6, no. 2 (2023): 52–67, <https://doi.org/10.32505/atfaluna.v6i2.7192>.

³⁰ Asrul, "The Concept of Child Identity Education Perspective of the Qur'an; Thematic Study of Term Thifl Quranik."

terms to mark the nuances of a child's development, not just synonymous variations without conceptual meaning.³¹

In the context of education, *the concept of tīfl* has important implications. Education in this phase focuses on meeting the basic needs of children, creating a safe environment, and establishing an initial foundation for physical and cognitive development.³² The educational approach to *tīfl* demands sensitivity to the child's limitations, as well as an emphasis on protection and mentoring, rather than on moral demands or social responsibility. Thus, the term *tīfl* provides the Qur'anic basis for an educational approach that is appropriate to the child's early developmental stage.

4. *Ghulām*: Qur'anic Usage and Context

The term *ghulām* in the Qur'an is used to refer to children who are in the phase of growth towards adulthood, which is the transition phase between early childhood and moral and social maturity. Linguistically, *ghulām* comes from the root word *gh-l-m* which means growth, power that begins to emerge, and readiness to assume a certain role. In contrast to *tīfl* which marks total dependence, and *ṣibyān* which highlights early moral potential, *ghulām* depicts the child as an individual who is developing towards independence and responsibility.³³

The use of the term *ghulām* is evident in QS Maryam [19]:7, which tells the good news about the birth of the Prophet Yahya as *ghulām*. In this verse, *ghulām* does not only refer to the birth of a son, but also hints at the future potential that the child will carry. The news of *the birth of ghulām* is accompanied by hope, prayer, and affirmation of the moral role that will be carried out, so that this term is loaded with prospective meanings.

Another context of the use of *ghulām* is found in the Qur'an of Yūsuf [12]:19, when the Prophet Joseph is referred to as *the ghulām* invented by the travelers. In this verse, *ghulām* describes a child who has passed through the initial phase of dependence, is able to interact in social spaces, and begins to engage, albeit passively in broader social dynamics. The term *ghulām* here signifies the position of the child who is between the helplessness of the child and the demands of the adult world.

The use of *ghulām* in QS aṣ-Ṣāffāt [37]:101 further emphasizes the dimension of transition and moral readiness inherent in this term. The verse describes the Prophet Ishmael as *a ḥalīm ghulām*, which is to have the qualities of patience and calmness. This implusion shows that *ghulām* refers not only to the stage of age, but also to the qualities of character that are beginning to take shape and are morally relevant. In this context, *ghulām* is positioned as a subject who is able to understand, respond, and engage in decisions of ethical value.

From a semantic perspective, *ghulām* marks a phase of a child's development characterized by physical growth, early emotional maturity, and readiness to assume responsibilities gradually. The Qur'an uses this term to describe a child who is no longer fully in dependence, but also has not fully entered the world of adults. Thus, *ghulām* represents the liminal phase in human development, that is, the transitional phase that is fraught with potential and risk.³⁴

³¹ Asrul, "The Concept of Child Identity Education Perspective of the Qur'an; Thematic Study of Term Thifl Quranik."

³² Jack P. Shonkoff et al., "The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress," *Pediatrics* 129, no. 1 (2012): e232–46, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2011-2663>.

³³ Nafi'in et al., "Konsep Pendidikan Anak dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an (Surat Luqman Ayat 12-19)."

³⁴ Sulieman Ibraheem Shelash Al-Hawary et al., "The Education of Children in an Islamic Family Based on the Holy Qur'an," *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 79, no. 3 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i2.8273>.

In the context of education, the concept of *ghulām* has significant implications. Education in this phase is directed at strengthening character, forming responsibility, and preparing social roles. Children are no longer treated solely as objects of protection, but are beginning to be positioned as subjects who are able to dialogue with, be trusted, and be involved in decision-making according to their capacity.³⁵ Thus, the term *ghulām* provides a Qur'anic basis for an educational approach that emphasizes a gradual and meaningful transition to adulthood.

5. Comparative Discussion of Qur'anic Child Terminology

A comparative analysis of the terminology of *walad*, *ṣibyān*, *tifl*, and *ghulām* shows that the Qur'an does not use the term child generically or interchangeably without any difference in meaning. Rather, each term represents a different dimension of the child's development, relationships, and capacities, thus forming a gradual and contextual conceptual framework regarding the child in the Qur'anic perspective. This terminological difference confirms that the concept of children in the Qur'an is dynamic and layered, not static or homogeneous.³⁶

Comparatively, *walad* occupies a position as a relational term that emphasizes the attachment of children to parents and family structure. The main focus of *walad* is not on the stage of child development, but on the ethical responsibility of parents towards their offspring. Thus, *walad* frames children in the family value system and places education as a moral obligation inherent in the relationship of *nasab*. Within this framework, the success or failure of a child's education is largely determined by the parents' awareness and ethical choices.

In contrast to *walad*, the term *ṣibyān* (through the form *ṣabiyy*) shifts the focus from family relations to the internal condition of the child, especially on the moral and spiritual dimensions. Children in the *ṣibyān* category are described as biologically young individuals, but have the potential to receive value guidance and even involvement in religious experiences. This shows that the Qur'an recognizes the moral capacity of children from an early age, even though this capacity has not yet been fully developed. In the context of education, *ṣibyān* marks the importance of instilling moral and spiritual values gradually from the beginning of a child's life.

Meanwhile, *tifl* represents the most basic phase of development, which is characterized by physical dependence and limited social awareness. In contrast to *ṣibyān* which opens up space for moral capacity, *tifl* describes the child as an individual who is not yet ready to understand social norms or ethical responsibilities. This distinction is important because it shows that the Qur'an distinguishes between the phase of biological dependence and the initial phase of moral consciousness. In education, the concept of *tifl* demands an approach that focuses on the protection, nurturing, and fulfillment of basic needs, rather than on premature moral or social demands.

The term *ghulām* occupies a transitional position in the terminological spectrum of Qur'anic children. *Ghulām* describes a child who has passed through the initial phase of dependence and begins to show physical, emotional, and moral readiness to assume responsibility gradually. In contrast to *tifl* and *ṣibyān*, *ghulām* is positioned as a subject that begins to engage in a broader social and ethical space. In this context, *ghulām* represents a transitional phase to maturity, which is loaded with potential character formation and readiness to face social responsibility.

³⁵ Ibraheem Shelash Al-Hawary et al., "The Education of Children in an Islamic Family Based on the Holy Qur'an."

³⁶ Zaitun et al., "Early Children Character Education."

If arranged comparatively, the four terms form a continuum of child development in the perspective of the Qur'an. *Walad* emphasized the foundations of family relationships and responsibilities; *ṭifl* describes the phase of biological dependence; *ṣibyān* marks the emergence of moral and spiritual potential; and *ghulām* represents a phase of transition to independence and responsibility. This continuum shows that children's education in the Qur'anic perspective cannot be standardized, but must be adapted to the child's developmental stage and social context.

The implication of these comparative findings is that children's education in Islam demands a sensitive approach to the child's developmental stages, social relations, and moral capacity.³⁷ The Qur'an, through the differentiation of children's terminology, provides a conceptual basis for education that is gradual, contextual, and oriented towards the formation of the whole human being. Thus, a comparative study of *walad*, *ṣibyān*, *ṭifl*, and *ghulām* not only enriches the understanding of Qur'anic terminology, but also offers a relevant conceptual framework for the development of children's education in the perspective of contemporary Islam.

While previous studies on Islamic education often refer to Qur'anic verses about children in a general normative sense, this study demonstrates that the Qur'an employs differentiated terminologies to conceptualize childhood based on developmental stages and capacities. By systematically analyzing *walad*, *ṭifl*, *ṣibyān*, and *ghulām* through tafsir and linguistic perspectives, this study offers a more nuanced conceptual framework for understanding children's education in the Qur'anic tradition.

6. Implications for Contemporary Islamic Education

The findings of this study suggest that the differentiation of children's terminologies in the Qur'an, *walad*, *ṭifl*, *ṣibyān*, and *ghulām* has significant implications for the development of contemporary Islamic education. The Qur'an does not view children as a single, homogeneous category, but rather as educational subjects who are in different stages of development, each with distinctive educational needs, capacities, and approaches. Therefore, Islamic education based on the Qur'anic perspective requires a gradual, contextual, and sensitive approach to child development.³⁸

At the *walad* stage, the implications of education mainly lie in strengthening the role of the family as the main foundation of children's education. The Qur'an places children in a hereditary relationship that is full of ethical responsibilities of parents, so that children's education cannot be separated from the quality of nurturing, example, and values instilled in the family environment. In the context of contemporary Islamic education, these findings confirm that formal educational institutions cannot replace the role of the family, but rather need to synergize with parents as the main educators in the formation of children's character and spiritual values.

The concept of *ṭifl* provides important implications for children's education in the early stages of development. At this stage, education is more accurately understood as the process of maintaining, protecting, and creating a safe and supportive environment for children's growth and development. The Qur'an does not burden *ṭifl* with premature moral or social demands, so the educational approach in this phase should avoid over-emphasizing the cognitive aspects or moral discipline that are not yet in accordance with the child's capacity. Islamic education at the *ṭifl* stage is oriented towards the fulfillment of basic needs and the formation of the initial foundation for further development.

Meanwhile, the concept of *ṣibyān* implies that the child, although still at an early age, has the potential to receive moral values and guidance. The educational implications of this concept are

³⁷ Mahmud et al., "Phases of Human Development."

³⁸ Rusdiati, "The Concept Of Children's Education In The Perspective Of The Quran."

the importance of gradually introducing moral and spiritual values from an early age, without ignoring the limitations of the child's age. Islamic education in the *ṣibyān phase* focuses not only on physical protection, but also on the habituation of values, the formation of moral orientation, and the development of religious awareness that is appropriate to the stage of development of the child.

The concept of *ghulām* provides the Qur'anic foundation for education in the transition phase to adulthood. At this stage, the child begins to be positioned as a subject who has the capacity to assume responsibilities gradually and engage in broader social roles. Islamic education in the *ghulām* phase is directed at strengthening character, developing moral responsibility, and preparing for social roles. A dialogical educational approach, trust-giving, and involvement of children in decision-making according to their capacity become relevant at this stage.

Overall, the educational implications of differentiating children's terminology in the Qur'an underscore the importance of an Islamic educational approach that is not uniform, but adaptive to the child's developmental stage.³⁹ Education that relies on a one-size-fits-all approach has the potential to ignore children's needs and capacities at some stage. By referring to the terminological framework of the Qur'an, contemporary Islamic education can develop a more holistic, balanced, and oriented approach to the formation of the whole human being, both physically, morally, and spiritually.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Qur'an employs distinct terminologies, including *walad*, *tifl*, *ṣibyān*, and *ghulām* to conceptualize children in different relational and developmental contexts. These terms are not interchangeable, but rather reflect a dynamic and stage-based understanding of childhood in the Qur'anic perspective. Through tafsir and linguistic analysis, the findings indicate that *walad* emphasizes familial relations and parental responsibility; *tifl* represents early childhood marked by dependency and limited social awareness; *ṣibyān* highlights the emergence of moral and spiritual potential; and *ghulām* denotes a transitional phase toward maturity and responsibility. Together, these terminologies form a developmental continuum that underpins a Qur'an-based framework of childhood. The educational implication of this framework is that Islamic education should adopt a contextual and developmentally sensitive approach, rather than a uniform model applied across all stages of childhood. By grounding educational practices in Qur'anic terminology, contemporary Islamic education can develop more holistic and age-appropriate approaches to nurturing children's moral, spiritual, and social development. Future studies may extend this conceptual framework through empirical research or comparative analysis with contemporary developmental theories.

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³⁹ Mahyudin Ritonga et al., "Islamic Education Interventions in Children: Study Using the Al-Qur'an Approach," *JIE (Journal of Islamic Education)* 9, no. 2 (2024): 541–62, <https://doi.org/10.52615/jie.v9i2.413>.

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