

## CRITICIZING MONTESSORI'S METHOD OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION USING ISLAMIC PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

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Received: 09, 2019. Accepted: 12, 2019. Published: 12, 2019.

### ABSTRACT

This study examined critically Montessori's concepts on early childhood education through Islamic Psychology perspective. This research used qualitative methodology with a literature approach. The results showed that (1) Montessori's method pays more attention to the cognitive aspect of children development while children potential doesn't only consist of cognitive, affective, and psycho-motoric aspects, but also spiritual one; (2) reinforcement are not needed in Montessori's method, while in Islamic Psychology, rewards can increase children's learning and punishment is needed to make children become disciplined in carrying out the rules; (3) learning environment should be structured, in order, realistic and natural. This concept is suitable for upper class educational institutions but it would be difficult for middle-low income groups since the materials required by Montessori's method is expensive enough. (4) parents and teachers are required to become observers and interpreters. This role may pose problem on the part of parents and teachers since not all parents and teachers have criteria to act as is it expected by Montessori's method.

Keywords: Islamic Psychology, Early Childhood Education, Montessori's Method

### ABSTRAK

*Studi ini menguji secara kritis konsep Montessori tentang pendidikan anak usia dini melalui perspektif Psikologi Islam. Penelitian ini menggunakan metodologi kualitatif dengan pendekatan literatur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa (1) metode Montessori lebih memperhatikan aspek kognitif perkembangan anak semata sementara potensi anak tidak hanya terdiri dari aspek kognitif, afektif, dan psiko-motorik, tetapi juga spiritual; (2) penguatan (pemberian hadiah dan hukuman) tidak diperlukan dalam metode Montessori, sedangkan dalam Psikologi Islam, hadiah dapat meningkatkan pembelajaran anak dan hukuman diperlukan agar anak disiplin dalam menjalankan aturan; (3) lingkungan belajar harus terstruktur, berurutan, realistis dan alami. Konsep ini hanya cocok untuk lembaga pendidikan kelas menengah atas, sementara lembaga pendidikan kelas menengah ke bawah tidak dapat menikmatinya. Hal tersebut karena lingkungan dan peralatan yang digunakan oleh metode Montessori tidaklah murah. (4) masalah kesiapan orang tua dan guru untuk menjadi pengamat dan juru bahasa. Tidak semua orang tua dan guru memiliki kriteria untuk bertindak seperti yang diharapkan dari metode Mont*

*Kata Kunci: Psikologi Islam, Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, Metode Montessori*

## INTRODUCTION

Some of the latest research in the field of neuroscience and psychology mention the important phenomenon of early childhood education. The results showed that the brains of children at an early age developed to a maximum of 80% of the overall brain development of adults (Suyadi, 2012). Brain development in the first 2 years after birth is extremely dynamic and likely plays an important role in neurodevelopmental on human life (Knickmeyer, Sylvain, Chaeryon, Dianne, & Kathy, 2008). Departing from the results of this research, early age is often termed as the golden age. Early age is the most appropriate age to shape individuals' character. When Children's characters can be formed at this time, they will become a generation that have strong character in adulthood. This is what causes early childhood education to be a strongest foundation for upholding national character in the future. The better the quality of early childhood education, the stronger the building of foundation of the intelligence of the nation's children. Conversely, the weaker quality of education at this level, the weaker the character of the nation's children in the future.

The importance of early childhood education is now beginning to be understood by the people of Indonesia. This is indicated by the growing development of formal, informal and non-formal early childhood education venues throughout Indonesia, in the form of child care centers, play groups or playgrounds, kindergartens and other similar early childhood education (Tangyong, 2009 p. 1). People are increasingly aware that early childhood education is very important given the potential of intelligence and the fundamentals of a person's behavior formed at this age.

One of the things that is very relevant to be used as an important discussion for the operationalization of early childhood education today is the psychological reality of child development as an object of education. As we know that human development certainly cannot be understood as something mathematical, because human existence is basically very unique. Every human being is different one another and the journey of each life is a process of dynamics that is not the same (Tomasello, 2014). Likewise, with the stages of children's readiness in the process of growth and development that cannot be created, accelerated, and simply ignored. Readiness and acceleration of child development is an individual's uniqueness. Understanding the uniqueness principle of individuals can help set expectations that are in accordance with what is the target of developmental stages based on the age range of development, the condition of the child and the stages of growth (Tangyong, 2009)

Based on the thoughts above, it is necessary to approach an education method which is suitable for children's education, which does not force children to learn, focus on growth, development and uniqueness of each child. Among the methods that are currently becoming an educational trend in some early childhood education institutions in both developed and developing countries are the Montessori's method. The Montessori's method was introduced by a female doctor named Maria Montessori. Maria Montessori is an Italian woman who is an expert in Early Childhood Education. The Montessori's method is a learning method taken from its own name as the originator of the idea. This method developed in the 19th century and was widely implemented in both Western and Islamic educational institutions, especially in Early Childhood Education institutions.

The pattern of education that refers to the Montessori-style must be integrated with Islamic education methods. Schools that have an image as modern Islamic schools must be able to absorb and apply the western method by harmonizing teaching methods that refer to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad as our role model based on the Qur'an and the Hadith. The Montessori method is considered good to apply to early childhood teaching when combined with Islamic methods are expected to be able to maximize in building character education in early childhood.

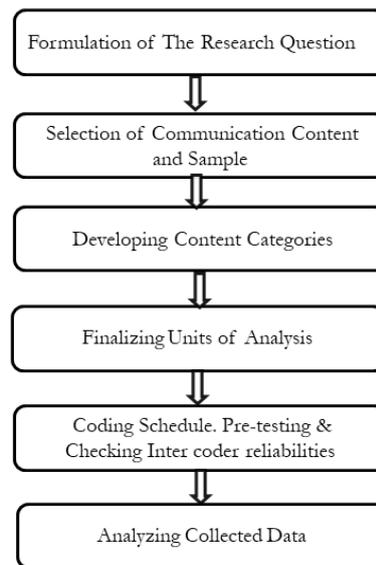
Although the Montessori's method is an educational method introduced by a follower of Catholicism, however, some concepts, methods and principles of education in the Montessori's method have a harmony of values with the principles of Islamic Education Psychology. Maria Montessori used her scientific abilities, experiences, and insights to develop an educational method that fights the patterns of conventional education that are less humanizing for students (Montessori, 1992). The Montessori education system appreciates the unique potential of children, trains the independence of children, and provides free and open space for children to develop themselves, should be explored from the perspective of Islamic Psychology. This is where the significance of this scientific work was written. The role of psychology in Islamic is as a bridge to the process of delivering knowledge to be more effective in accordance with the psychological maturity of each student and the willingness of students to open themselves to new information and knowledge and the willingness to use it in everyday life. Therefore, this paper will examine Maria Montessori's thinking about early childhood education through the perspective of the Islamic psychology. The limit reports of the typical research investigating the same topic especially in Asian context are also the main reason why this study is important to be conducted.

## METHOD

This study uses library research, a study referring to written data or materials related to the topic of the discussion being raised (Davis & William, 2011). In this study, there are two types of sources, primary data sources and secondary data sources. Primary data sources are data sources that directly provide data to data collectors, while secondary is a source that does not directly provide data to data collectors, for example through other people or documents (Sugiyono, 2010). The source of this primary data in this study are the two Maria's writings translated into Indonesian (1) *The Absorbent Mind* translated by Dariyanto, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2008, and (2) *Montessori Method*, translated by Gerald Lee Gutek (ed), Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2013. While secondary data sources were obtained by writer through various documents such as books, newspapers, journals both printed and online. Data collection techniques that writer uses are documentation technique. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge. The documentation technique is a method of data collection carried out by finding data on research variables from various kinds of documentation, both in the form of notes, transcripts, books, newspapers, magazines, journals, etc. (Arikunto, 2010). The writer will collect primary and secondary data sources, then explain Maria's educational methods, then the method will be analyzed by writers from the perspective of Islamic psychology.

The analytical method writer used is content analysis. Methodologically, this analysis tries to offer epistemological assumptions about understanding that not only dwell on text analysis but also emphasize the surrounding context and its contextualization in different periods. To conduct a content analysis on any such text, the text is coded, or broken down, into manageable categories on a variety of levels--word, word sense, phrase, sentence, or theme—and then examined using one of content analysis' basic methods: conceptual analysis or relational analysis. Figure 1 is the brief description of content analysis method conducted in this study.

Figure 1. Six Steps of Doing Content Analysis (Prasad, 2016)



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Maria Montessori and Her Brief Concept on Early Childhood Education**

Maria Montessori is a doctor, anthropologist and also one of the great educators. Maria Montessori was born on August 31, 1870 at Chiaravalle and died in 1952 (Kramer, 1988). She is the only child of Alessandro Montessori, a business manager at the state-owned tobacco monopoly company and her mother Renilde Stoppani, an educated woman from a respected family at the time and is the grandson of a natural scientist and Italian geologist, Antonio Stoppani (Montessori, 1992). Montessori grew up in a family that was very concerned about education, although Alessandro initially often inhibited the decisions made by Montessori, but because he saw the talents and abilities possessed by Montessori, Alessandro finally supported all decisions made by Montessori regarding the education he traveled (Montessori, 1992).

Montessori's educational background in medical department of Rome University introduced her to the scientific method and the importance of clinical observation (Mallet, 2015). In the medical department, she studied clinically to observe, diagnose patients' illness and determine their recovery. When switching to educational research, Montessori applied the clinical observations that she ever studied in the medical department in the contexts of early childhood education to find out exactly when and how they learn (Montessori, 1992). Montessori's Method originated from a specialized population (mental retardation), in which children with special needs have very minimal visual and audiovisual learning abilities and have such limited memory/retention capabilities, those cause limited cognitive development. With such conditions, an approach is created that uses all senses of children and also their kinesthetic/tactile in learning through hands-on experiences to help their growth and development (Harjaningrum & Wicaksono, 2007). From this explanation, it can be understood that the Montessori's pedagogical perspective on early childhood education is increasingly strengthened and supported by the scientific experiences that she has obtained in the field of medicine.

Based on Montessori's concern for early childhood education, she established an educational institution that is unique from educational institutions in general. This institution was later known as "Children's House." In this "Children's House" Montessori applied a learning method that she called as the Montessori's Method. Montessori's learning method is a result of an educational system that comes from the pedagogical experiences of Maria

Montessori in dealing with abnormal children, which are then transformed into normal children's education.

In exploring the concept, Maria Montessori uses her scientific abilities, experiences, and insights to develop an educational method that is at odds with conventional educational patterns (Montessori, 1992). As an educational theorist, Montessori appears with a prototype of educators who has scientific integrity. Although Montessori recognizes the importance of educational leaders such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel, but her thought has such differences with those concepts as her concept about a prepared and structured environment. Montessori's thoughts countered Rousseau's thought that freed children to learn in a natural environment that is not structured through Rousseau's romantic flow. As well as Pestalozzi's thought which emphasizes the use of objects with mechanisms that are too formal and is different from the Montessori's Method which put learning process to be more universal and free. In similar with Froebel's thought that relies on philosophical idealism and is not based on science and modern psychology. This is different from the Montessori's Method which adheres to multidisciplinary education (Montessori, 1992)

From the explanation above, it can be seen that Montessori's approach in solving the problem of education and teaching is fairly practical. Her visionary thoughts and practical patterns of work which are in line with her strong commitment to improve the lives of individual children, all of them result in pedagogical methods and educational systems that have become her monumental work until now, known later by Montessori's method.

Among the Montessori's learning methods is to apply height measurements to students, both standing and sitting, which is done once a month calculated on each child's birth date. This is done to clearly know the growth and development of a child, by comparing the development achieved by other children and also to produce better order in the research work of the teacher (Montessori, 1992). In addition, Montessori also observes the family background of students who are also seen to have a profound influence on the development of children's education. Montessori believes that education will affect one's attitudes and behavior. Likewise, the education level of parents (especially mothers) will affect their treatment of their sons and daughters. Mothers who are highly educated usually know more about the importance of education and care for children's development (Ejaz, 2009). The results of this observation are also used by Montessori to provide a holistic understanding of child development. Besides, Montessori also assigned a special doctor, in addition to educators to carry out educational activities at these educational institutions (Montessori, 1992). She also encouraged the managers of educational institutions to interview parents of students about things that were more practical, such as their habits, their income, costs incurred for household needs, and so on. And from all that she can compile a history of each family (Montessori, 1992). This is then used as a reference in providing education to children, which of course has a variety of family backgrounds, and requires a variety of educational treatments as well.

Because of the uniqueness of the Montessori's method and the achievement of educational indicators applied by this method, over the past decade, the use of the Montessori's method has increased rapidly in early childhood programs in public and private schools. The method has now been used by more than three thousand early childhood education programs, including contemporary teaching practices based on Montessori's material and practice (Adisti, 2016).

Montessori's Method is an educational method that focuses primarily on the lives of individual children. According to her, *"Childhood is the richest period. For that reason, the time should be utilized by education as well as possible. If this period is wasted, then this period will never come back again. Our task as parents and educators is to take advantage of these early childhood years with the highest concern,*

*not to waste them.*" (Tsubaki & Matsuishi, 2008). This is because the children have a very absorbent mind about science, but this ability makes children able to teach themselves (Adisti, 2016; Kramer, 1988; Tsubaki & Matsuishi, 2008). This is also as expressed by Montessori as follows:

*"According to her principle of auto-education, a child's freedom made it possible for children to select their own learning activities. Montessori's ability to match the child's readiness to the materials and activities was one of her most significant methodological achievements. Readiness, in turn, was based on children's developmental periods, especially the sensitive period when they were ready to learn and needed to learn."* (Montessori, 1992).

It is clear that Montessori gave great attention to early childhood education. For her, the children's readiness for their own development period should be the basis of Montessori's education, so that it can produce educational methods that are appropriate for the stages and needs of children individually. In fact, according to her, children have the freedom to choose the type of learning activities in a structured environment (Adisti, 2016; Tsubaki & Matsuishi, 2008). The purpose of all learning methods and educational theories of Montessori is to help children become independent and productive human beings when they are adults (Harjaningrum & Wicaksono, 2007). The Montessori's Method emphasizes activities that are able to stimulate children to be more independent early on, develop their sense of discipline, and be full of confidence in a safe and loving atmosphere. For this reason, the programs implemented are more closely related to daily life activities (Harjaningrum & Wicaksono, 2007).

### **A Critical Study of Islamic Psychology Towards the Montessori's Concept**

Conducting a critical overview of an intellectual figure like Montessori from Islamic psychology's perspective is a scientific effort that requires exploring the different benefits and weaknesses of her work. Therefore, the following exploration will focus on the strengths and weaknesses of Montessori's Concept on Early Childhood Education. To highlight particular weaknesses, the writer will put forward Islamic psychology as a critical analysis and a source of values in developing the methods of learning come from western educations.

#### **1. The Meaning and Purpose of Education**

According to Montessori, Education is a tool that can help the process of development and children life. Through education, children can be prepared to become mature humans. To reach a mature human being when a conducive environment is needed can develop all the potential that exists in the child. Through a structured environment, children get the opportunity to choose an activity freely without interference from adults. Because of that, the main purpose of education is to prepare children to go through life by emphasizing normal and maximum child development processes. This is in line with Montessori's statement, that education is ideally based on the natural conditions of brain absorption and the development of the sensitive period of spontaneity of children to support physical and psychological development, and directs children to be healthy and free" (Hainstock, 1997).

Montessori's thought above is very limited to the recognition of mere intellectual development. The cognitive aspect gets the most important proportion in Montessori's thought. It certainly cannot cover all human potential that not only consists of cognitive, affective, and psychomotorical aspects, but also spiritual one. While the purpose of Education in Islamic Psychology is as a methodology based on divine values (*Manhaj Rabbāni*). It paid attention to all aspects owned by humans. Education is a means of developing a child's personality towards *Shari'a* of Allah, maintaining a comprehensive nature and implementation of Islam. In Islamic Psychology, cognitive, affective, and psychomotor developments are only meaning of realizing the highest educational goals for children, namely servitude and obedience to God (Muthmainah, 2017). In the other words, the purpose of education is the

realization of servitude to God in human life, both individually and socially, so that it is in line with the nature and purpose of human life as God's servants and caliphs.

Among the several goals of education in Islamic Psychology are self-actualization and all developments for children both physical and non-physical developments including spiritual development. Therefore, education is considered as a means of preparing children to live in the world and the hereafter. In the Qur'an, it is explicitly stated that any action done by humans must be associated with Allah. In accordance with the word of God in QS. Al-An'ām [6]: 162: "*Say: Verily my prayer, my worship, my life and my death are only for Allah, the Lord of hosts*" This verse explains that the purpose of education in Islamic Psychology in general is to achieve the goals of Muslim life, to grow human consciousness as creatures of God Almighty, so that they grow and develop into human beings who are noble and worship to their God (A. Mujib & Daradjat, 1999). On the other words, the purpose of education in Islamic Psychology must be in line with the Islamic view of man, that is, Allah's noble creatures so that they deserve to be the caliphs of Allah on earth.

From the description above it can be concluded that the purpose of education in Islamic Psychology perspective is very broad and deep, as wide and as deep as the needs of human life as individual beings and as social beings who are subservient to the God by being inspired of religious values. Therefore, the aim of education in Islamic Psychology aims to foster a pattern of human personality that is unanimous through psychological training of brain intelligence, reasoning, feeling, and senses. This education must serve human growth in all aspects, both spiritual, intellectual, emotional, imagination, physical, scientific and language aspects. And this education encourages these aspects towards virtue and achieving the perfection of life.

## 2. Freedom with Limitation

Among the main concepts of Montessori's education method is the concept of freedom. According to Montessori, the word freedom which is meant here is not unlimited freedom, nor does it allow children to do anything or behave as they wish without any control from adults. Freedom is meant here is having a certain duration of time, which is when parents let their children explore and exist when parents have to stop children's activities.

This concept of freedom for Montessori is the most preferred educational method. The core of the increasing development of children is to provide free and open space for children to develop themselves. Montessori said that, "Real freedom is a consequence of development". In other words, if children are provided with the right environment, and given the opportunity to them to freely respond individually to the environment, then the natural growth of children is open in their lives " (Gettman, 2016). Educating children should not force children when they want to learn something. Educating children is also giving children the freedom to be able to choose the learning activities they want without any pressure and coercion from anyone. Children will learn according to their own stages and developments. They are also always given the choice to do things they like or not.

Along with the concept of freedom, there are two words that are closely related to this concept, namely the concept of discipline and independence. Montessori said that discipline must arise through independence. If the discipline is based on freedom, then the discipline itself must be active. Educators often assume that someone is in a state of discipline only when he/she is made like a mute person and made motionless like a paralyzed person. According to Montessori, this method is not disciplining, but nullifying humans (Adisti, 2016).

Montessori argued that when children are given structured freedom and the appropriate environment, children can freely manifest their needs but remain in control. With that freedom obtained, children will follow their interests happily in an activity, and in the end will create self-discipline in children. The children did the activity because they liked it. Children move freely and try to perfect and master the task of their own choice, creating their own

discipline. In this context, a system of reward and punishments is no longer needed, because children no longer need to be attracted to something that adults offer because they have chosen themselves according to their interests. Self-discipline and self-control are what lead children to develop their positive character (Kramer, 1988; Montessori, 1992).

In terms of the independence of children means they are free to do things that make them free from adult interference. For children, independence means being able to do something entirely by themselves (Adisti, 2016). Independence which is based on the freedom to be self-active, is the foundation for the values of perseverance in a task, resilience in doing something so that they can do it well. Therefore, the freedom that children have becomes a harmony. Clear rules are needed which serve as a fence that protects freedom from chaos. Because what is meant by child interactions are not activities that are random and not directed but the activities needed to build independently. Montessori believed that by giving freedom to children, they will survive with their activities or tasks and on their own initiative, they will keep repeating them until they can master them well. In other words, when children are given the freedom to choose their own material to be explored, choose their own activities and learning materials, and also the freedom to determine the duration to explore something, then at that time the child will be motivated by themselves and cause children independence in carrying out activities (Adisti, 2016).

The Montessori's thought above exceeded the opinions of previous education experts. In the education system, in general, the application of the concept of Montessori's discipline is very different from the concept of discipline which is generally accepted. The writer was just wondering on how could someone be disciplined in a class of free children. This is a big revolution of thought and also difficult for followers of public-school methods to understand, even implement it, especially if it is contextualized with the reality of the process of children's education in recent days.

In Indonesian context, giving of freedom to children in the education process was also carried out by Ki Hajar Dewantara, but the freedom given by Dewantara was still limited by certain rules, while Montessori was wilder in giving freedom to children in a cultural context that was difficult to control. What's more, in terms of educators in the class. Montessori once said that to practice this method, it required teachers with several criteria: (a) they must prepare themselves as guardians of the environment; (b) they must maintain their imagination to stay alive; (3) they must pay more attention to the task than to be distracted by the noise of children (Gijubhai, 2008). According to Montessori, it is important for parents and educators to understand that children's freedom will have a good impact on children if they apply it correctly. And this is what adults should realize, the need for trust and patience that children can do their own tasks. Therefore, according to Montessori, the task of the teacher is to work, to master the challenges from the outside, to stimulate a sense of fulfillment of the task and a sense of independence of the child (Muthmainah, 2017).

Looking at the psychological and socio-economic conditions of teachers in Indonesia, it will be very difficult to get a figure of perfect educators who have all the criteria as well as the criteria set by the Montessori. Because of the minimal welfare of teachers in schools, many educators are pragmatic in carrying out their duties in teaching. Teaching activities become a routine activity without meaning and purpose. Therefore, it is not an easy thing for them to let their children move freely especially as adults, anxious and forbidding instinct often appear to face children attitudes (Julita, 2018).

Besides, the aspect of children as educational actors presents another problem. It is undeniable that the development between one child and the other will be different according to their respective stages of development. The Qur'an has explained that in educating children, it must be in accordance with their nature. As Allah said in QS. ar Rum [30]:30 which

means; *"The nature of God who has created man according to that nature. There is no change in God's nature. That is a straight religion but most people don't know it."* This verse clearly reveals that all of God's creations are in accordance with their nature. Therefore, educating children must be in accordance with their nature. Children are a mandate that has been bestowed by Allah SWT that we must educate as well as possible and we will be accountable later. Allah SWT forbids us to burden children with things that will make it difficult for them (Abdul Mujib, 2014).

It can be said elaborately that the Montessori's Method might be suitable to be implemented in a certain group of children, but it is not necessarily suitable to be implemented in a group of other children. Because individual differences in children will need different treatments. This is where the weakness of the Montessori's method. The method generalizes the personality of each child who is considered the same when they are given freedom of activity, without definite direction.

### 3. Reward and Punishment

In the learning concept, Montessori strongly disagrees with the existence of reward and punishment. According to Montessori, the reward and punishment system must be eliminated. If children have been able to carry out disciplines based on independence or freedom, the main desire of these children is to carry out more and more those activities as accurately as they want. Children who are accustomed to activities, they will appreciate gifts that do not underestimate their ability to do things, because they realize that the development of inner abilities and independence is the origin of their activities. Based on children psychology, when they succeeded in doing their job well it was the best gift for them. Montessori got this concept through her long observations and interactions with children at Casa Dei Bambini, so that Montessori concluded that children did not need rewards and punishment. Any punishment, given by the teacher to children, will not change the habits of these children. As well as praise and appreciation will not take children's attention. Children will not be proud of those rewards, but children will be more interested in the activities they want to do (Tsubaki & Matsuishi, 2008).

Based on the mindset above, it appears that the Montessori's method emphasizes the freedom of children in their activities and the success of carrying out their duties which is a separate reward as an internal motivation for children. In other words, the results of children's exploration and satisfaction with their efforts are priceless gifts for children. If this internal motivation has been built continuously, then the children no longer need external motivation, including giving rewards from teachers and parents. Because, according to Montessori, reward and punishment aside from disturbing the learning process, it can also have a negative impact on the psychological development and discipline of the child. By eliminating the reward and punishment system, it will create children who have self-discipline and independence (Rosida, 2017).

Montessori's thought was not in line with several learning methods that implement a system of reward and punishment as carried out by the existing education system. It is opposite to the expression that says every human being needs appreciation and recognition (Mulkhan, 2016). Likewise, with the existing educational methods in Islamic Psychology which assume that the method of reward and punishment can be an alternative way of educating children.

In Islamic Psychology, Educators need to appreciate all good deeds or achievements in the form of speech or gifts, because it can increase children's motivation in learning. Likewise, penalties need to be given so that children become disciplined in carrying out existing rules. In Islamic psychology, there are requirements in giving these rewards and punishments. The form of appreciation given as 'reward' is not in the form of excessive material, but it can be in many forms that can increase students' motivation such as praise, flattery, smile and all the

words and behaviors that show appreciation for the behavior that children have done (Nuridin, 2017).

As well as the punishment that will be given to the children, it must be noted that there are no other ways except punishment to make children aware of doing wrong. Punishment is allowed, however there are rules to limit so punishment that purpose is to educate does not turn into torture. It is important for parents to praise each of their children's good actions as an expression of appreciation. And when children make mistakes, parents should not be directly scold and punish them. Educators should start giving understanding to the child, that the action taken by children is wrong. Therefore, in Islamic Psychology, rewards and penalties are allowed as long as they can help children in the learning process (Adisti, 2016).

Among the figures of Islamic psychology, Imam al-Ghazali reinforced the importance of reward and punishment. According to him, educators should give advice to their students with gentleness. Teachers are required to play a role as parents who can feel what their students feel, if children show progress, teachers should praise the results of their students' efforts, thank them, and support them especially in front of their friends. Teachers need to take a tiered procedure in educating and punishing children when they make mistakes. If at one time children violate commendable behavior, educators should not dismantle and expose their mistakes. Uncovering their mistakes in front of their friends might make them more brave in breaking the rules. If children repeat the same mistakes, the teacher's job is to reprimand them smoothly and show where their mistakes are and also the reason why they can't repeat these mistakes. Al-Ghazali also reminded that reprimanding, criticizing and bringing up the mistakes at all times made children become dissidents. In connection with this, al-Ghazali stressed *"Do not criticize too much at all times because words no longer affect the hearts of children. Teachers or parents should guard the authority of their advice."* (Budaiwi, 2002).

Another Muslim psychology, Ibn Khaldun put forward the problem of reward and punishment in his book *al-Muqaddimah*. He mentioned that an educator must know the stages of development of human reason so that educators are able to carry out children's cognitive development with their methods of teaching students. He advised educators not to be rude in treating young students, pinching the body in teaching, using harsh words and all behaviors that could reduce the development of children's psychology. Abusive and violent treatment of young children can cause laziness and encourage them to lie and turn away from science and teaching. Therefore, educators must treat students with tenderness and affection and firmly at times that are needed for that (Falah, 2018).

The same thought was also expressed by Ibnu Jama'ah who considered that reward and punishment could encourage students to achieve better success and achievements. However, Ibn Jama'ah considered that giving rewards was stronger and more influential on children's education than punishment. He gave strict rules to the teachers when they would give a punishment that must be returned to its orientation, that is directed at giving guidance and changing students' behavior to be better. Punishment should be controlled with compassion. He really avoided the application of punishment that could tarnish the glory of humans and demean the dignity of the teacher. Punishment is needed when it is given on the basis of good education and sincerity in work, not based on hatred and anger (Budaiwi, 2002).

#### 4. Prepared Environment and Materials

Setting up a learning environment is one of important aspects in the Montessori's method. According to Montessori, the environment is a secondary element of the child's education process. Environment plays a significant role as media or facilities that provide a place for children to learn many things, gain experience and can grow and develop. The preparation of the environment according to Montessori is not only a learning environment that is suitable for the age of the child, but also includes parents and teachers who need to

prepare themselves to become observers and interpreters of children's needs. Adults and teachers in schools are also included in the secondary environment for children, because they are able to meet the needs of children without correcting. They must also prepare their psychology and spirituality so that they can recognize their own mistakes without a defense (Gijubhai, 2008). Because as adults, they must be able to control each of their behavior in front of children, and the nature of children who have a natural tendency to imitate whatever they see and hear.

Besides that, the Montessori's method also emphasizes the element of beauty from the learning environment. The classroom environment must be designed in such a way so that it looks attractive, beautiful, and clean. Likewise, the color theme used in the classroom must imply warmth, excitement and relaxation so that children can learn happily and invite children to feel at home in it. The learning environment must have a good design and quality. The atmosphere of the room must be clean, relaxed and warm. The purpose of creating this atmosphere is to make children feel happy when entering the class and invite them to participate in the learning process in the classroom. Likewise, the activities carried out outside the classroom must also be arranged so that the atmosphere is full of beauty. Montessori believed that the environment must be a pleasant place (loving area), a place that is conducive (nourishing) to foster development, a place where teachers or adults can observe their development and make changes according to their development needs.

Another thing as a complement to the learning environment is Montessori's playing tools (Montessori's materials). Montessori Materials are not merely playing tools. The purpose of all objects is not external, to teach children skills. But the main purpose is internal, that is to help the physical development and self-development of children. Montessori said, the first important thing about child development is concentration. They have to find ways to concentrate, and because of that they need things that can make children concentrate (Gijubhai, 2008).

Montessori's thought about the element of beauty from the learning environment is very harmonious with the concept of education in Islamic Psychology. Muhammad stated in the Hadith, that *"Indeed God is good, loves kindness, that Allah is clean, Allah likes cleanliness, He is the Most Noble who likes glory, He is Beautiful likes beauty, therefore clean your places."* (HR. Turmuzi). This hadith explains that Allah SWT is The Essence of the Good, the Most Holy, and the Most Beautiful. Allah SWT loves kindness, purity, glory and beauty.

But unfortunately, the media and environment required in the Montessori's method are only suitable if implemented in the context of educational institutions that are materially and financially established. But this is not the case for early childhood education institutions born from middle-low income groups. Montessori is a media tool that is difficult to reach because the price is not cheap. Because of that, educational institutions with the Montessori's method can only be felt by the middle class and above, while for the lower middle class, they can't. The lower and middle class of society only have to get access to makeshift education, environment and media. Not to mention, the problem of readiness of parents and teaching staff as a secondary part of the learning environment as mentioned above. Montessori Less takes into account the ability of parents and qualified teachers to become observers and interpreters. Because not all parents and teachers have the capacity to act as expected by the Montessori's method. Therefore, intensive training is needed in order to strengthen the insight of parents and teachers of their important role in the Montessori's education system.

Besides that, in the concept of Islamic Psychology, what was called by the learning environment was not only parents, or even educators, but also the first child, friends and community also included in the environment. One of the factors supporting the success of education, according to Islamic Psychology, is a conducive environment. The conducive

environment in Islamic Psychology is the role of good (*ṣālih*) parents (Abdul Mujib, 2014). The focus of education on the first child will later become an example that will be emulated by his younger sibling, and the last is to prepare or direct children to associate with good friends, because friends also influence in preparing a conducive environment for children (Ulwan, 2012).

#### 5. Learning System must be Structured and in Order

Another point of Montessori's concept on early childhood education is her thought about structure and order. Montessori argued that the structure and order of the universe must be reflected in the classroom environment. Through regularity, children will learn to believe in the environment and learn to interact with the environment in a positive way. Through regularity, children will know how to find the toys they want. Therefore, the placement of educational tools and games must be adapted to the conditions of the children. For example, educational tools and games must be placed in easily accessible places for children so that when children need these tools, they will easily reach them. It looks simply but it has meaning, namely training children to have an attitude of responsibility and independence while studying. Therefore, through a properly designed environment, children can categorize their perceptions, which in the end, children will form their correct understanding of realistic world (Chattin, 1998). Another example is in the material prepared by Montessori. All materials are arranged and placed according to the level of difficulty, from left to right and from top to bottom. Another example of learning from simple to complex is system of teaching writing that is done before reading. This is because children are considered able to read if they can write, because the ability to read is more complex than the ability to write.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that in the learning system applied by Montessori, everything starts from a simple matter and then moves on to more complex things, from easy things to difficult ones (Muthmainah, 2017). The structured and gradual Montessori learning system is in line with the concept of education according to Islamic Psychology. In the QS. al-Insyiqāq [84]:19-20, Allah SWT said, "*Surely you go through level by level (in life), so why are they not believers?*" From the word of Allah SWT, it can be interpreted that the learning process should be carried out in stages by starting an easy lesson (concrete) before heading to a difficult (abstract) lesson. In other words, the verse of the Qur'an also instructs parents to educate children in a wise way that is to provide opportunities for children to learn according to their respective stages ranging from easy to difficult ones (Samsudin, 2015). The characters of the children to be achieved from this method is independence, discipline, and responsibility characters. Independence for children to take things themselves. Discipline and responsibility for children to return the objects they took to their original place. The role of teachers and parents is to help children in the learning process by facilitating them to learn everything. This is of course in accordance with the principle of the Montessori education method, which is to teach children learn according to their order, from easy to difficult ones.

QS. al-Insyiqāq [84]:19-20 is reinforced by the Bukhari and Muslim's Hadith narrating from Anas ra, that the Prophet Muhammad said, "*Make it easy and do not complicate it. Be happy and don't make other people run away.*" This hadith can also be interpreted that in educating children we should not complicate with the burdens or targets in learning. Make them happy when the learning process takes place. By making it difficult for children to learn, as a matter of fact, we have already tyrannized them. Allah SWT said, "*Allah does not burden a person but according to his/her ability.*" (QS. al-Baqarah [2]: 286).

In another verse, Allah also says in the QS. al-Insyirāh [94]: 7 which is, "*So if you are free, still steadfastly work hard!*" This verse can be interpreted that in learning science let it be complete after that we just switch on other sciences, so that children have deep scientific

specifications. This is in accordance with the concept of Montessori education, which teaches children to experiment in learning and practicing independence for children when learning something (Ulwan, 2012).

From the legitimacy of the verses of the Qur'an and the Hadith above, it appears that Montessori's concepts about the learning system that must be set in stages and structured is not something new. This concept has long been implemented in the Islamic education system. The difference is that Montessori is able to make this concept more practical, simple and operational so that it can truly be systemized in early childhood learning, which has not been able to be developed by other contemporary educations on similar concepts (Adisti, 2016).

#### 6) Learning Systems must be based on Reality and Natural.

Next aspect of the concept of early childhood education is realistic and natural. According to Montessori, *"Humans belong to nature, and so do children. They need a picture of the world they will face later through nature. All things needed to develop their soul and body are the real world."* (Hainstock, 1997). Therefore, the learning environment in the Montessori's method is based on this realistic and natural principle, so everything must be designed in such a way as natural and realistic as possible, both in indoor and outdoor environments because children need a picture of the world they will face later through nature.

Through a realistic and natural pursuit environment, children do not only have mere imagination both physically and psychologically, but are also free to interact with nature. This also relates to educational tools and games used. All educational tools and games on the Montessori's education pattern are based on the concept of reality, namely using actual tools. For example, they will interact directly with plants, animals, use actual tools such as glasses, plates, knives, scissors, etc. but using all these media remains under the supervision of the teacher. This realistic and natural pattern of education makes children become tough in dealing with anything later when they are adults because they are used to interact and face real problems, not based on mere imagination only.

The concept of Montessori Education actually articulates the following message of the Prophet Muhammad: *"Whoever does not love creatures who are on earth does not love those who are in the sky"*. In the context of children's education, this hadith implies that the education process should encourage children to interact with the surrounding environment and be realistic in learning. Bringing children closer to nature is one manifestation of the implementation of education in children to love fellow creatures of God who live on this earth (Abdul Mujib, 2014).

Other Islamic legacy reinforces the Montessori's concept. Al-Munawi (1989: 239) in *Syarb al-Hikam* stated that *"A person dreams of meeting his dead brother, then he asks about the matter. What has God done to you? His brother replied, Allah forgives me and loves me, it is because I go through the streets in Baghdad was in heavy rain, I watched a cat get cold, I felt sorry then I took and put it behind my clothes."* This story proves that introducing children to the concept of compassion among living beings can lead to a spirit of sensitivity, sympathy, and empathy for others. They will learn to deal with something realistic and concrete not limited to mere imagination (Ulwan, 1992).

The message of the prophet and the story of the companion of the prophet above clearly explains that realistic and natural learning has been embodied in the guidance of Islamic teachings. Because of that, Montessori thinking is again not a new thing. However, Montessori's intelligence to formulate natural and realistic concepts into operational concepts in the world of early childhood education can make it an applicative educational theorist. Through this concept, Montessori can direct educational orientation to shape children's personality and initiate the birth of sympathy and empathy for children to have love and affection for others. Besides children are also taught to be brave figures because they are accustomed to interacting with things that are real, not limited to fairy tales, illusions, or mere

imaginations. Through this learning, it is expected that someday children will be able to solve their own problems, not merely running away from the problem at hand.

## CONCLUSION

Montessori's thought is not in line with several learning methods that implemented in existing Islamic educational system. Some Muslim Psychologists believed that every human being needs appreciation, recognition and punishment those can be an alternative way of educating human. Teachers need to appreciate all good deeds or achievements for students, because it can increase children's motivation in learning. Likewise, penalties need to be given so that children become disciplined in carrying out existing rules. However, in Islamic psychology, there are requirements in giving these rewards and punishments. The form of appreciation given as 'reward' is not in the form of excessive material, but it can be in many forms that can increase students' motivation such as praise, flattery, smile and all the words and behaviors that show appreciation for the behavior that children have done. As well as the punishment can be given when there is no other ways except punishment to make children aware of doing wrong. Punishment is permissible, however there are rules that limit this so punishment whose purpose is to educate does not turn into torture.

Montessori's thought on limited freedom exceeded the thought of previous education experts. In the education system, in general, the application of the concept of Montessori's discipline is very different from the concept of discipline is generally accepted. The writer was just wondering on how could someone be disciplined in a class of free children. It depends on the teacher and children.

On the other hand, Montessori once said that to practice this method, it required teachers with several criteria: (a) they must prepare themselves as guardians of the environment; (b) they must maintain their imagination to stay alive; (3) they must pay more attention to the task than to be distracted by the noise of children (Gijubhai, 2008). Looking at the psychological and socio-economic conditions of teachers in Indonesia, it will be very difficult to get a figure of perfect educators who have all the criteria as well as the criteria set by the Montessori. Because of the minimal welfare of teachers in schools, many educators are pragmatic in carrying out their duties in teaching. Teaching activities become a routine activity without meaning and purpose. Therefore, it is not an easy thing for them to let their children move freely especially as adults, anxious and forbidding instinct often appear to face children attitudes. Montessori's method might be suitable to be implemented in a certain group of children, but it is not necessarily suitable to be implemented in a group of other children. Because individual differences in children will need different treatments. This is where the weakness of the Montessori's method. The method generalizes the personality of each child who is considered the same when they are given freedom of activity, without definite direction.

Montessori's other concept is about learning system and environment that should be Structured, in order, realistic and natural. This concept is not new in the system of Islamic education. It has long been implemented in some Islamic education institutions. The difference is that Montessori is able to make this concept more practical, simple and operational so that it can truly be systemized in the process of teaching and learning, which has not been able to be developed by other Islamic education institutions on similar concepts. Besides, Montessori have enough income to implement this concept. That's why the media and environment required in the Montessori's method are only suitable for upper class early childhood educational institutions, but this is not the case for early childhood education institutions born from middle-low income groups. The apparatus, media material required by Montessori's learning system is not cheap enough in price. The problem of readiness of

parents and teaching staff as a secondary part of the learning environment as mentioned above. Montessori Less takes into account the ability of parents and qualified teachers to become observers and interpreters. Because not all parents and teachers have the capacity to act as expected by the Montessori's method. Therefore, intensive training is needed in order to strengthen the insight of parents and teachers of their important role in the Montessori's education system.

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