

Toward an Integrative Framework of Qur'anic Prenatal Education: Quraish Shihab's Interpretation of QS. Āli 'Imrān:35

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Abstract

Growing evidence from developmental psychology, neuroscience, and prenatal health has highlighted the significance of the prenatal period in shaping human development. Nevertheless, studies on Islamic education continue to focus predominantly on postnatal learning, while the Qur'anic foundations of prenatal education remain underexplored. This study aims to reconstruct the concept of Qur'anic prenatal education through Quraish Shihab's interpretation of QS. Āli 'Imrān:35 in *Tafsir al-Misbāh*. Employing a qualitative library research design, the study applies thematic (*mawḍūʿī*) exegesis combined with content analysis to examine Shihab's interpretation in dialogue with contemporary scholarship on prenatal psychology, developmental neuroscience, and maternal well-being. The findings identify three interconnected principles that constitute the foundation of Qur'anic prenatal education. First, parental commitment (*nadhar*) establishes intentional preparation before birth as the ethical basis of educational responsibility. Second, spiritual communication through prayer strengthens maternal emotional resilience and nurtures prenatal attachment between mother and fetus. Third, tawakkul functions as a spiritual coping strategy that promotes maternal psychological well-being, reduces stress, and supports healthy fetal development. Together, these principles demonstrate that prenatal education in the Qur'an is both preventive and formative, integrating spiritual values with psychosocial and biological dimensions of pregnancy. This study contributes to Islamic education by reconstructing a comprehensive framework of Qur'anic prenatal education that bridges classical Qur'anic exegesis with contemporary scientific perspectives, thereby providing a conceptual foundation for Islamic parenting education, prenatal counseling, and faith-based maternal health programs.

Keywords: Qur'anic Prenatal Education; Tafsir al-Misbāh; QS. Āli 'Imrān:35; Islamic Parenting; Prenatal Psychology.

Abstrak

Perkembangan kajian psikologi perkembangan, neurosains, dan kesehatan prenatal menunjukkan bahwa masa sebelum kelahiran merupakan fase yang sangat menentukan bagi perkembangan manusia. Namun, kajian pendidikan Islam masih lebih banyak berfokus pada pendidikan pascakelahiran, sementara landasan pendidikan prenatal dalam Al-Qur'an belum banyak dikaji secara komprehensif. Penelitian ini bertujuan merekonstruksi konsep pendidikan



prenatal Qur'ani melalui penafsiran Quraish Shihab terhadap QS. Āli 'Imrān:35 dalam *Tafsir al-Misbāḥ*. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan dengan metode tafsir tematik (*mawḍūʿī*) dan analisis isi. Penafsiran Quraish Shihab dianalisis secara dialogis dengan berbagai temuan kontemporer dalam psikologi prenatal, neurosains perkembangan, dan kesehatan ibu. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tiga prinsip utama yang membentuk kerangka pendidikan prenatal Qur'ani. Pertama, komitmen orang tua melalui *nazar* menjadi landasan etis bagi perencanaan pendidikan sejak sebelum kelahiran. Kedua, komunikasi spiritual melalui doa memperkuat ketahanan psikologis ibu sekaligus membangun ikatan prenatal antara ibu dan janin. Ketiga, tawakkal berfungsi sebagai mekanisme koping spiritual yang mendukung kesejahteraan psikologis ibu, mengurangi stres, serta menciptakan kondisi yang kondusif bagi perkembangan janin. Ketiga prinsip tersebut menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan prenatal dalam Al-Qur'an bersifat preventif sekaligus formatif dengan mengintegrasikan dimensi spiritual, psikologis, dan biologis kehamilan. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan teori pendidikan Islam melalui rekonstruksi kerangka pendidikan prenatal Qur'ani yang menjembatani tafsir klasik dengan temuan ilmiah kontemporer, sekaligus menyediakan dasar konseptual bagi pengembangan pendidikan pengasuhan Islami, konseling prenatal, dan program kesehatan maternal berbasis nilai-nilai Islam.

Kata kunci: Pendidikan Prenatal Qur'ani; Tafsir al-Misbāḥ; QS. Āli 'Imrān:35; Pengasuhan Islami; Psikologi Prenatal.

Introduction

Prenatal education has emerged as a critical interdisciplinary field of study, situated at the intersection of developmental psychology, neuroscience, and perinatal medicine (Van den Bergh et al. 2020; Kinsella and Buss 2022). Contemporary scientific findings affirm that the prenatal environment, including maternal stress conditions, has a profound impact on the origins of behavior and the mental health of children. In parallel, religious traditions, particularly Islam, offer profound normative and spiritual frameworks concerning the family and the beginning of life, as examined in studies on Islamic parenting (Lubis and Mohamed 2022). Research also demonstrates that religious beliefs can positively influence maternal health practices (Alhazmi and Alyami 2023), while the sacred text of the Qur'an provides fundamental themes regarding creation and parental responsibility (Rahman 2009). The integration of these perspectives serves as a foundation for constructing a comprehensive and holistic concept of prenatal education.

In modern Muslim societies, a significant gap exists between advances in biomedical knowledge about prenatal care and the deep religious understanding of this crucial phase. While medical information about nutrition and pregnancy check-ups is readily accessible, the spiritual and educational dimensions derived from the Qur'an are often neglected or only partially understood. This gap has the potential to create a dichotomy in practice, where prospective parents may feel torn between religious obligations and medical advice (Alhazmi

and Alyami 2023). Consequently, the opportunity to optimize maternal and fetal health through an integrated approach is lost. Therefore, engaging in dialogue between science and religion within the context of prenatal education becomes imperative to address the holistic needs of contemporary society.

Recent literature in Qur'anic studies and exegesis has begun to touch upon themes related to children and the family, with several studies focusing on the concept of *fitrah* (innate human nature), child education, and the role of prayer in Qur'anic narratives (Miskiyah 2020; Fauzi and Nurjanah 2022). These studies generally examine verses thematically, such as the stories of the births of prophets or the concept of progeny. However, their focus tends to remain on the postnatal phase or child education in general, rather than specifically on the prenatal period. On the other hand, there is growing interest in employing thematic exegesis methods and contextual approaches to extract educational values from the Qur'an (Fadhli 2022). This indicates a shift from purely textual interpretation towards more applicable and responsive interpretations.

Nevertheless, research specifically examining prenatal education from the perspective of Qur'anic exegesis remains very limited. Some studies may touch upon aspects of prayer during pregnancy or the concept of fetal protection, but they have yet to build a systematic conceptual framework (Hafidz 2023). The majority of existing studies also rely heavily on classical commentaries such as those by Ibn Kathir or al-Tabari and involve less contemporary exegesis that is responsive to scientific developments. The dominant methodological tendency is qualitative library research with content analysis, but often without triangulation with interdisciplinary scientific findings (Saeed 2014). Thus, the current research landscape has not yet fully bridged the discourse of exegesis with the needs of holistic prenatal education.

Based on the research map outlined above, a primary gap has been identified: the lack of integration between contextual and contemporary Qur'anic interpretation and the construction of prenatal education theory. Most studies remain focused on textual analysis without developing applicable models that can be operationalized in modern settings. Furthermore, contextual exegesis such as the work of Quraish Shihab in *Tafsir al-Misbāḥ*—known for its linguistic, sociological, and scientific approach—is rarely used as a primary source to deeply dissect the concept of prenatal education (Shihab 2020). Yet, this type of interpretation offers a perspective relevant to contemporary realities and can address interdisciplinary challenges.

Therefore, the novelty of this research lies in its systematic effort to fill this gap by making *Tafsir al-Misbāḥ* the primary lens through which to analyze QS. Āli 'Imrān:35 and construct a comprehensive concept of prenatal education. This study not only provides an exposition of the interpretation but also synthesizes it with insights from prenatal psychology and medicine to produce an integrative framework (Braun and Clarke 2023). Thus, this research offers both depth in exegetical analysis and breadth in interdisciplinary application, aspects that have remained separate in the literature.

Based on this gap, this study aims to conceptualize prenatal education from a Qur'anic perspective through an analysis of the interpretation of QS. Āli 'Imrān verse 35 by Quraish Shihab in *Tafsir al-Misbāḥ*. Specifically, this research is designed to answer three questions: (1) How is QS. Āli 'Imrān:35 interpreted by Quraish Shihab using his contextual approach? (2) What principles of prenatal education can be extracted from this interpretation? (3) How do these principles contribute to the development of an integrative framework for prenatal education that combines Islamic values with contemporary scientific knowledge? By answering these questions, this study seeks to provide a solid theoretical foundation based on the authority of the sacred text and its relevant interpretation.

The contribution of this article is twofold. Theoretically, this research enriches the hermeneutics of Islamic parenting by introducing the often-overlooked prenatal dimension, while simultaneously demonstrating a method for integrating contextual exegesis with scientific insights. Practically, the research findings will be directed toward developing a guidance model or educational module on prenatal education for Muslim parents and family counselors, which can be used in pregnancy support programs based on Islamic values. This article is also expected to stimulate further dialogue among exegesis scholars, educational practitioners, and health professionals in developing holistic prenatal interventions. The subsequent structure of the article will systematically present the methods, results, discussion, and conclusion.

This study hypothesizes that Quraish Shihab's contextual interpretation of QS. Āli 'Imrān:35 reveals a coherent framework of prenatal education centered on tawhid, where parental spiritual commitment ('nadzar'), divine response ('istijābah'), and the goal of devotional freedom ('muḥarraran') form an integrative model that aligns with contemporary findings in developmental psychology and neuroscience."

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for exploring, understanding, and constructing meaning from sacred texts and their interpretations in depth. Specifically, the method applied is the thematic exegesis method, which is a method of Qur'anic interpretation that collects all verses related to a particular theme to be analyzed comprehensively in order to produce a coherent concept (Fadhli 2022). In this context, the main theme under investigation is "prenatal education," with QS. Āli 'Imrān:35 as the central verse. This method allows the researcher not only to understand the verse in isolation but also to see its connections with other verses and the broader context, so that the resulting educational principles are more grounded and systematic.

The primary data source for this research is M. Quraish Shihab's interpretation of QS. Āli 'Imrān:35 in his work *Tafsir al-Misbāḥ* (Shihab 2020). M. Quraish Shihab is a prominent contemporary Indonesian exegete known for his contextual, integrative, and communicative approach. The main characteristic of his exegesis is the effort to connect the message of the Qur'an with contemporary realities, using rigorous linguistic analysis, considering socio-historical aspects, and being open to findings from modern science (Shihab 2021). The selection of *Tafsir al-Misbāḥ* as the object of analysis is based on its relevance for addressing the contextual needs of modern prenatal education, where interpretation is not merely textual but also applicable and responsive to scientific developments (Saeed 2014).

The data collection procedure began with the identification and compilation of Qur'anic verses directly or indirectly related to the prenatal phase, birth, prayer, and parental responsibility, with QS. Āli 'Imrān:35 as the starting point. The next step was conducting an in-depth study of the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation) and the historical context of the verse by referring to classical exegetical and historical sources. In parallel, a systematic search of secondary literature was conducted through academic databases using keywords related to prenatal education, perinatal psychology, Islamic parenting, and Qur'anic hermeneutics. The collected literature was then selected based on relevance, currency, and publisher credibility.

The main analytical instrument in this research is the interpretive framework employed by M. Quraish Shihab himself, as manifested in *Tafsir al-Misbāḥ* and elaborated in his methodological work (Shihab 2021). This framework is holistic and multidimensional, encompassing linguistic analysis of keywords such as "*nadzar*" (vow) and "*istijābah*" (response/acceptance of prayer), a literary approach to understand the beauty and message of the verse's narrative, socio-historical context, and a scientific approach that connects the

verse's message with findings from modern science. These four dimensions serve as lenses to dissect the meaning of the verse and extract the values of prenatal education comprehensively.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic content analysis techniques. First, coding was conducted on M. Quraish Shihab's explanations in *Tafsir al-Misbāḥ* to identify concepts, principles, and values related to prenatal education. These codes were then grouped into larger themes. To strengthen the validity of the interpretation, hermeneutic triangulation was performed, which involved comparing and contrasting Shihab's interpretation with interpretations from selected classical exegetes such as Ibn Kathir to examine consistency and the development of meaning, as well as with recent findings from the literature on prenatal psychology and medicine (Braun and Clarke 2023). This process yielded a rich and well-grounded synthesis of interpretations.

To maintain the credibility and validity of the data in this qualitative research, peer debriefing was conducted, where initial findings and interpretations were discussed with colleagues who are experts in the fields of exegesis and developmental psychology to obtain critical feedback. The entire citation process was carried out rigorously following academic ethics guidelines, including complete source attribution and the avoidance of plagiarism. Every statement originating from another person's ideas or words was cited using the 9th edition Turabian format. This research is purely a literature study and therefore did not involve human subjects, which minimizes ethical risks related to participants.

Results and Discussion

A. Historical Context and Asbāb al-Nuzūl of QS. Āli 'Imrān Verse 35

Verse 35 of Surah Āli 'Imrān was revealed in the context of dialogue between the Muslims and the People of the Book in Medina, who were debating the virtues of the prophets and their descendants (Ibn Kathir 2019; Rippin 2009). Specifically, this verse narrates the vow of the wife of 'Imrān, known in Islamic tradition as Hannah, the mother of Mary. The social context at that time indicates an established tradition among the Children of Israel to dedicate their children to Bayt al-Maqdis to serve as attendants of the sacred house (al-Zuhayli 2018). According to historical investigation, this condition reflects an established religious practice and demonstrates the devout social standing of the family of 'Imrān (Sirry 2014). Understanding this asbāb al-nuzūl is crucial as it shows that the verse was not revealed in a vacuum, but as part of the Qur'anic narrative that builds authority and the continuity of Divine messages (Muhtador 2024).

The narrative in this verse begins with a direct call, indicating that this event is presented as an exemplary model to be reflected upon by the nation of Muhammad. Classical exegetes such as Ibn Kathir (2019) note that the wife of 'Imrān was a righteous woman from prophetic lineage, who had been barren for a long time. Her vow to dedicate the child in her womb to Allah represents a form of total submission and acknowledgment of His power. This context opens up interpretive space suggesting that prenatal education begins with the awareness and intention of the parents, even before conception occurs. Thus, this verse establishes the parents' spiritual commitment as the first foundation of a child's life journey.

B. Linguistic Analysis: Deconstructing the Keywords "*Nadzar*" and "*Istijābah*"

The first keyword analyzed is "*nadzar*". Lexically, this word means a "promise" or "pledge" uttered voluntarily to perform an act of worship or obedience to Allah, usually with certain conditions (al-Zuhayli 2018). In the verse's structure, "*nadzar*" appears in the past tense verb form, indicating completeness and firmness of action. Its semantic meaning is deeper than an ordinary promise; it contains an element of commitment that is spiritually and socially binding. The vow of the wife of 'Imrān affirms the principle that a child is a trust from God, returned to Him from the womb—a concept that becomes the philosophical foundation of Islamic education.

The second keyword is "*istijābah*", derived from a root meaning to answer or fulfill. In the verse, its form is "*fastajāba*", which is a past tense verb with Allah as the subject. This indicates a Divine response that is immediate and certain to sincere prayer (Ibn Kathir 2019). Syntactic analysis shows that "*istijābah*" is a direct consequence of sincere "*nadzar*", creating a cause-and-effect relationship between human commitment and Divine mercy. The meaning of "*istijābah*" here is not limited to the granting of the request for a child, but also encompasses the acceptance of the vow and the preparation of the best destiny for the child to be born.

Furthermore, the term "*muharraran*", meaning "freed from worldly affairs" or "dedicated exclusively to worship," is the object of the vow. This word originates from a root connoting freedom and purity. The use of this term indicates that the intended goal of prenatal education is to liberate the child from the shackles of mere worldly interests and dedicate them to the service of Allah (al-Zuhayli 2018). Thus, the linguistic analysis of these three keywords reveals a conceptual framework: parental commitment, responded to by God, to produce a child dedicated to Him.

C. Quraish Shihab's Interpretation of Prayer and Prenatal Commitment

In *Tafsir al-Misbāḥ*, M. Quraish Shihab (2020) emphasizes that the prayer of the wife of 'Imrān was not merely a request for a child, but rather a spiritual contract or covenant with Allah. Shihab highlights that this vow was uttered before the child was conceived, demonstrating an exceptionally high level of parental planning and awareness. According to him, this represents the earliest form of education, where parents establish the vision and purpose of their child's life even before their physical existence. This interpretation shifts the paradigm from education as a postnatal activity to deliberate and conscious pre-birth planning and commitment.

Shihab (2020) also associates the term "*muḥarraran*" with the concept of true freedom. The child dedicated through the vow was not intended to become a "slave" at Bayt al-Maqdis in a physical sense, but to be free from all forms of worship other than to Allah and from the shackles of worldly desires. In the prenatal context, this means parents commit to creating a physical, emotional, and spiritual environment free from things that could tarnish the child's innate nature, such as prolonged stress, exposure to sin, or purely materialistic values. In other words, the vow is the parents' pledge to become the first filter and protector for the fetus, an educational responsibility that begins at conception.

Furthermore, Shihab interprets Allah's response "*fastajāba*" as a guarantee that Allah not only grants the request for a child but also accepts the vow and will accompany the process. This provides a profound psychological dimension: parents who make a spiritual prenatal commitment are not alone. They are in partnership with the Almighty, Who will ease the path and provide guidance in the subsequent parenting process (Shihab 2020). This interpretation reinforces that faith-based prenatal education can become a source of tranquility and psychological resilience for parents, especially mothers, during the challenging period of pregnancy.

D. The Concept of Spiritual Prenatal Education in *Tafsir al-Misbāḥ*

From Shihab's interpretation, several key themes of spiritual prenatal education can be organized. First, the Theme of Self-Surrender and Hope. The vow of the wife of 'Imrān represents the pinnacle of self-surrender. She surrendered control over her child—who typically becomes the pride and worldly hope of a family—entirely to Allah. In prenatal education, this principle of self-surrender is translated into the attitude of parents who accept pregnancy and the future child as they are, without the burden of excessive worldly expectations, and who rely on Allah at every stage. Despite this surrender, the prayer remains filled with hope. Shihab (2020) points out that the wife of 'Imrān did not despair; rather, she

actively pleaded with the certainty that her prayer would be answered. In the educational context, this is the principle of building a positive outlook. A mother who places her full hope in Allah radiates positive energy that can scientifically influence her hormonal and psychological state, which in turn impacts fetal development. Prenatal education, therefore, involves the mental training of parents to always think positively and hold good assumptions about Allah.

Second, the Theme of Responsibility as a Trust and the Purpose of Devotion. The child in the womb is described as something that is "vowed," meaning it is the object of a sacred pledge. Shihab asserts that this elevates the child's status from mere biological outcome to a Divine trust that must be diligently safeguarded (Shihab 2020). The educational consequence is that parents have a moral and spiritual obligation to prepare themselves—intellectually, financially, mentally, and spiritually—to receive this trust. Prenatal education begins with the self-education of the parents themselves. The purpose of the vow is "*muḥarraran*", dedicated to worship. This provides a clear concept of the ultimate goal of education: to produce a human being who is free and worships Allah. In the prenatal phase, this goal is manifested by acclimating the fetus to an atmosphere of worship, for example, by reciting the Qur'an, communicating while mentioning Allah's names, and maintaining the mother's behavior within the bounds of obedience. Parents work to create environmental cues aligned with the purpose of life established for their child. These principles can be seen in the following table summary:

Table 1: Principles of Prenatal Education in the Tafsir al-Misbāḥ

Principle	Source in QS. Ali Imran: 35	Practical Implications
Parental commitment (nadzar)	Verse 35	Pre-conception planning, intention, joint prayer

Principle	Source in QS. Ali Imran: 35	Practical Implications
Spiritual communication (prayer)	Verse 35	Reading the Qur'an, dhikr, communication with the fetus
Self-surrender (tawakkal)	Fastajāba	Reducing anxiety, positive coping
Goal of devotion (muḥarraran)	Verse 35	Freeing the child from materialistic values

E. The Psycho-Social Dimensions of the Divine-Mother Interaction in the Verse

Shihab (2020) elaborates that the dialogue between the wife of 'Imrān and Allah reflects an intimate relationship with profound psychological impact. The acknowledgment that her prayer was answered provides certainty and reduces the anxiety that typically accompanies pregnancy, especially after a long wait for a child. This certainty becomes the foundation for the mother's tranquility, which is medically known to lower cortisol levels and enhance a healthy intrauterine environment for fetal growth. Thus, prenatal spiritual practice functions as an adaptive coping mechanism.

Socially, this vow was not merely a private act but possessed a public dimension. By dedicating her child to serve at Bayt al-Maqdis, the wife of 'Imrān essentially incorporated her child into a broader socio-religious contract (Shihab 2020). This implies that prenatal education also involves making parents aware of the social role and future contribution of the child to society. Parents begin to consider not only how the child will become personally righteous but also how their righteousness can benefit the community, ultimately shaping an early sense of purpose for the child.

Furthermore, Shihab notes that Allah's response, which produced Mary—a chosen woman—demonstrates that the fruits of sincere prenatal commitment can surpass initial expectations. From the perspective of maternal psychology, the child's extraordinary achievement becomes a source of happiness, pride, and validation of the mother's efforts. This creates a positive psychological cycle: commitment, tranquility, good outcomes, satisfaction, and reinforcement of commitment for subsequent education. The Divine-Mother interaction in this verse, therefore, builds a resilient and productive psycho-spiritual model for family development.

F. Initial Implications for the Pregnancy Phase and Birth Preparation

Based on the interpretation of QS. Āli 'Imrān:35, several applicable principles for the pregnancy phase can be formulated. First, the Principle of Intention-Based Pre-Conception. Prenatal education begins even before conception, through the process of purifying the parents' intention and commitment to educate the child in the path of Allah. This can be manifested through joint prayer, deliberation on family vision, and physical-spiritual preparation for pregnancy. This stage emphasizes mental and spiritual readiness as the foundation.

Second, the Principle of Spiritual Communication During Pregnancy. The verse encourages making prayer and supplication the primary means of communication between parents and Allah concerning their fetus. Practices such as regularly reciting the Qur'an, speaking to the fetus while mentioning the beautiful names of Allah, or habituating oneself to specific remembrances are operational forms of this principle. These activities aim to build a spiritual bond between the parents, the fetus, and God.

Third, the Principle of Preparing a Free and Sacred Environment. During pregnancy, parents are obligated to create an environment that is free and sacred, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. This environment is the realization of the word "*muḥarraran*", as an effort to liberate the fetus from negative disturbances from the very beginning. Preparation for welcoming the birth is also carried out with the spirit of welcoming a trust, not a burden, involving strong prayer and trust in God, as reflected throughout the verse's narrative.

G. Core Interpretation: Prenatal Education as the Epistemological Foundation of *Tawhid*

1. Prayer as a Method of Communication and Mental Reinforcement for the Mother

Shihab's interpretation reveals that prayer is not merely a ritual of supplication, but a method of transcendental communication that functions as an active coping mechanism. In

the prenatal context, prayer becomes a channel for the mother to manage emotions, express hope, and reduce anxiety in a structured manner. This finding aligns with empirical research demonstrating that spiritual-based interventions, including prayer, significantly improve well-being and reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety in pregnant women (Nurjanah and Fauzi 2023). Thus, the practice of prayer exemplified in the verse serves a dual function: as vertical worship and as preventive psychological therapy that builds the mother's mental resilience from an early stage.

2. "*Nadzar*" within the Framework of Parental Responsibility and Planning

The concept of "*nadzar*" interpreted by Shihab as a spiritual contract transforms the understanding of pregnancy from a passive biological event into a deliberate educational project. The vow represents conscious parental planning involving long-term commitment and the determination of the child's life vision. This aligns with modern parenting principles emphasizing intentional parenting, where parents actively design the values and environment they wish to cultivate (Audi 2023). However, this exegetical perspective transcends the secular framework by adding a sacred dimension and transcendental accountability, making such planning an integral part of worship and responsibility before the Divine.

3. The Concept of "*Istijābah*" and Its Impact on Maternal Psychology

The guarantee of acceptance from Allah emphasized by Shihab creates a unique psychological foundation: a theological secure base. The belief in a definite Divine response to sincere commitment can reduce feelings of helplessness and uncertainty that often accompany pregnancy. In developmental psychology theory, the feeling of security is a prerequisite for healthy attachment. By extending this to the spiritual realm, belief in "*istijābah*" can build theological security in the mother, which in turn supports the creation of secure attachment with the fetus and optimal emotional tranquility for fetal development.

4. Prenatal Character Education: Preparing a Sincere Generation

The ultimate goal of the vow—a child dedicated to worship—according to Shihab, leads to the formation of sincere character. This indicates that prenatal education in Islam aims to shape a personality that is genuine and free from hypocrisy, with devotion to Allah as the intrinsic motivation. This philosophy resonates with the goals of contemporary character education that seeks to instill intrinsic values and moral autonomy (Audi 2023). The difference lies in the foundation of sincere character being *tawhid*, which makes awareness of Allah's

surveillance the primary controller of behavior—a concept offering a character-building approach based on transcendent awareness rather than mere social reward and punishment.

5. The Relationship between Maternal Spiritual Health and Fetal Development

Shihab's holistic interpretation implicitly connects maternal spiritual health with fetal development. The tranquility resulting from the vow commitment and belief in "*istijābah*" creates favorable psychophysiological conditions. Recent epigenetic findings support this, showing that the mother's mental and emotional state can influence gene expression and the development of the fetal nervous system (Smith 2023). Thus, prenatal spiritual practice can be viewed as a positive environmental epigenetic intervention. The mother's spiritual health, manifested through tranquility and optimism, has the potential to create an optimal intrauterine environment for the biological and neurological development of the fetus.

6. Holistic Approach: Integration of Faith, Knowledge, and Action in Prenatal Practice

Shihab's interpretation of QS. Āli 'Imrān:35 offers a concrete example of a holistic approach. He does not separate linguistic-historical explanations from psychological and social implications. In the application of prenatal education, this approach translates the principle of *tawhid* into actual behavior aligned with scientific knowledge. For instance, the intention to surrender the child to Allah must be followed by efforts to seek knowledge about pregnancy health and to practice healthy lifestyles and positive communication with the fetus. This integration addresses the challenge of dichotomy in modern Muslim societies, where religion and science are often placed separately, by demonstrating that both synergize in building the quality of generations.

7. Reconstruction of a Prenatal Education Model Based on *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*

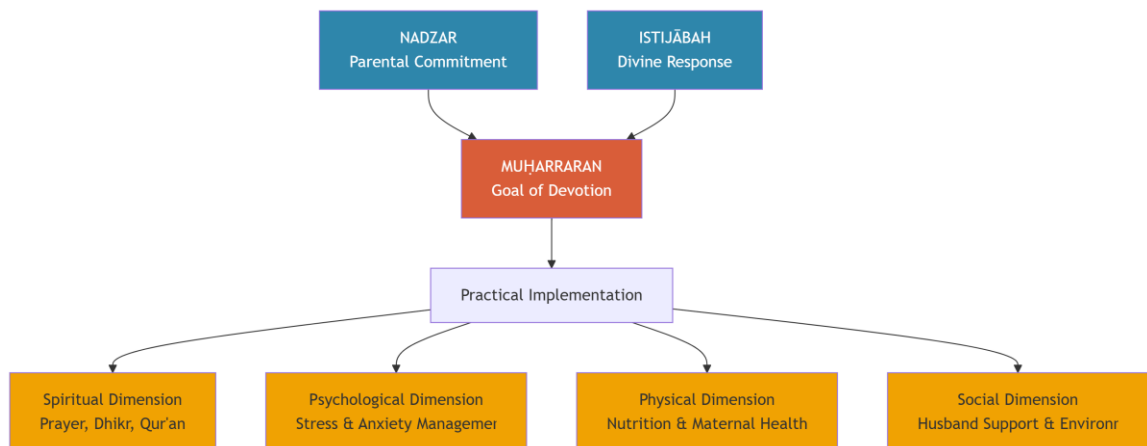
The findings of this research invite the reconstruction of a prenatal education model using the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. Hafidz (2023) explains that family education aims to achieve public welfare encompassing the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. Based on the interpretation of the verse, prenatal education directly contributes to the protection of religion through the inculcation of *tawhid* from the womb, the protection of life through efforts to create maternal mental health and fetal physical health, and the protection of lineage through the commitment to produce righteous offspring. Thus, the model constructed is not merely procedural but also teleological, possessing clear objectives aligned with the hierarchy of Islamic values.

8. From Text to Context: Application in Contemporary Muslim Social Reality

Translating the values in QS. Āli 'Imrān:35 into the contemporary context requires creative contextualization. The concept of "*muḥarraran*" in modern times does not necessarily mean physically dedicating a child to a place of worship, but can be interpreted as parents' efforts to liberate their children from digital addiction, excessive materialism, and extreme secular values (Amalia 2024). Prenatal commitment can be manifested in the form of a parenting plan that incorporates spiritual goals, curation of media content consumed by the mother, and the father's involvement in joint prayer. This application demonstrates that the essence of Qur'anic prenatal education is universal and adaptive, capable of being implemented in diverse socio-cultural settings as long as the principles of *tawhid* and commitment are maintained.

9. Integrative Model of Prenatal Education

Based on the principles outlined, this study formulates an integrative prenatal education model that connects parental commitment (*nadzar*), divine response (*istijābah*), and the purpose of worship (*muḥarraran*) with practical spiritual, psychological, physical, and social dimensions. This model can be visualized as follows:



F. Critical Discussion

1. Dialogue with Global Literature: Convergence and Uniqueness of the Contextual Exegesis Perspective

The findings from the exegesis regarding the importance of maternal tranquility demonstrate strong convergence with neuroscience and prenatal epigenetics. Research indicates that high maternal stress can alter the development of fetal brain structures,

particularly the amygdala and prefrontal cortex, which are associated with emotion regulation (Van den Bergh et al. 2020). Smith (2023), in his epigenetic studies, affirms that the prenatal environment, including maternal stress, can influence fetal gene expression through DNA methylation mechanisms. These findings provide a scientific foundation for the importance of maternal mental health during pregnancy. The practices of prayer and self-surrender recommended in the exegesis can be viewed as emotion regulation strategies that reduce stress responses, thereby potentially protecting fetal neurological development. Research in cognitive psychology also demonstrates that religious practices such as prayer can function as effective emotion regulation strategies by shifting focus from stress sources to transcendental beliefs. Van den Bergh et al. (2020) note that good emotion regulation during pregnancy correlates with lower cortisol levels and more optimal fetal neurological development. The exegetical perspective complements these findings by explaining the source of transcendental tranquility accessible to mothers through spiritual practices such as prayer and remembrance. The integration between epigenetic findings and the concept of tranquility in exegesis demonstrates that prenatal education is not merely about avoiding stress, but actively building belief-based tranquility that has measurable biological impacts. It is here that the exegetical perspective provides an explanation of theological mechanisms that complement the generally secular biomedical explanations.

The concept of planning through "*nadzar*" aligns with the theory of intentional parenting in positive psychology, which emphasizes the importance of deliberate goals and values in parenting. Similarly, the emphasis on spiritual communication with the fetus enriches the concept of prenatal attachment, namely the emotional bond that parents build before birth. Studies show that strong prenatal attachment is associated with better pregnancy outcomes and more responsive postnatal parenting (Kinsey and Hupcey 2013). The exegetical perspective adds a third dimension to the formation of this bond: in addition to the parent-fetus bond, there exists a shared bond with God, creating a unique triadic attachment model that has not been extensively explored in Western psychological literature. Western literature on prenatal attachment tends to focus on the mother, with the father's involvement often considered secondary. Shihab's interpretation of the wife of 'Imrān's vow, although centered on the mother, implicitly assumes the husband's support and agreement. Contemporary studies are beginning to show that father involvement during pregnancy contributes positively to perinatal outcomes and child development (Kinsey and Hupcey 2013). This exegetical

perspective can strengthen the push to involve fathers more in prenatal education, not merely as supporters, but as active partners in spiritual commitment and parenting planning.

Modern family sociology extensively examines the transformation of parental roles and social pressures on pregnant women. The commitment of "*nadzar*", being personal and voluntary, can function as a counterbalance to social pressure and the excessive commercialization of pregnancy by redirecting focus toward intrinsic and spiritual values. Compared to studies on religious families in general, which might only examine the frequency of attendance at places of worship, this exegetical analysis reveals the internal logic and specific psycho-spiritual mechanisms within the Islamic tradition, involving direct negotiation between the individual and God, rather than merely religious institutions. Prenatal spirituality is found in many religious and cultural traditions, such as mantra practices in Hinduism or certain meditations in Buddhism. Comparative studies show that although their forms differ, their psychological functions are often similar: providing a sense of control, hope, and connection (Amalia 2024). The uniqueness of the Qur'anic exegetical perspective, particularly through Shihab's lens, lies in its emphasis on the concept of covenant and accountability. The vow is not merely about supplicating or self-soothing, but about making a pledge that creates binding moral responsibility. This offers an active, contract-oriented model of prenatal spirituality, distinct from more passive models or those focused solely on acceptance.

When compared with other contemporary interpretations, such as in *Sayyid Qutb's Fi Zilāl al-Qur'ān* or *Hamka's Tafsir al-Azhar*, Shihab's interpretation is more explicit in drawing psychological and educational implications applicable to the current context. Qutb emphasizes more on aspects of ideological struggle and the formation of the Muslim community, while Hamka highlights moral and historical dimensions. The strength of Shihab's approach lies in his ability to bridge classical meanings with the language and concerns of modern science, such as developmental psychology, making his exegesis highly relevant for constructing an interdisciplinary theory of prenatal education.

Some literature may question the effectiveness of prenatal education, viewing it as a form of hyper-parenting or excessive stimulation. However, the interpretation of the verse demonstrates that the essence of prenatal education in Islam is not about coercive early cognitive stimulation, but rather about preparing a conducive environment and mental-spiritual conditions. The focus is on shaping an environment aligned with human nature, not

on direct teaching to the fetus. This addresses such concerns by offering a paradigm of prenatal education that is ecological and non-burdensome.

The "conscious conception" movement in modern wellness also emphasizes mental, emotional, and spiritual readiness before conception. There is convergence in the emphasis on intention and self-purification. However, the divergence lies in the source of authority and ultimate purpose. This movement often originates from New Age spirituality or humanistic psychology with the goal of self-actualization. Meanwhile, prenatal education based on Qur'anic exegesis is rooted in divine revelation and aims at devotion to God and social contribution. These ontological and teleological differences result in fundamentally distinct motivational and evaluative frameworks.

The international discourse on children's rights emphasizes the child's right to grow up in a good environment from an early age. This exegetical perspective strengthens that discourse by providing a strong moral-religious basis for parents' responsibility to provide such an environment even from the pre-birth stage. This makes the fulfillment of children's rights not merely a legal or secular moral obligation, but also a religious duty. Thus, this approach can mobilize deeper commitment from Muslim parents, as it is connected to their belief system and accountability in the afterlife. Contemporary bioethics discourse extensively discusses the moral status of embryos and fetuses, as well as the ethical implications of prenatal interventions. The concept of *amanah* (trust) in Shihab's interpretation offers an ethical perspective different from the individual rights framework dominant in Western bioethics. In this view, the fetus is not merely an individual with rights, but a Divine trust whose acceptance involves a spiritual contract. This provides a strong ethical foundation for parental responsibility, while simultaneously opening dialogue between Islamic ethics and global bioethics. Audi (2023), in his study of moral philosophy, emphasizes the importance of a solid moral foundation in character education. Shihab's interpretation of the ultimate goal of the vow—producing a child who is free and ultimately sincere—aligns with efforts to build character based on intrinsic values. However, the exegetical perspective adds a transcendental dimension by making awareness of Divine surveillance the mechanism for internalizing values. This offers a more robust model of character education than secular approaches that rely solely on the internalization of social norms.

Hafidz (2023) elaborates that the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* approach in family education can serve as a comprehensive evaluation framework. The application of this framework to prenatal education demonstrates that practices such as maintaining the mother's physical health

contribute to the protection of life, while habituating *tawhid* values contributes to the protection of religion. Thus, a *maqāṣid*-based prenatal education model does not focus solely on cognitive or physical aspects, but encompasses all dimensions of humanity that Sharia aims to protect. Amalia (2024), in her ethnographic study in Indonesia, discovered diverse local practices related to pregnancy, such as *selamatan* (thanksgiving meals) and communal prayers. These practices often represent the inculturation of Islamic values with local wisdom. Shihab's interpretation, which emphasizes essence over form—for example, interpreting "*muḥarraran*" as liberation from worldly shackles rather than merely physical devotion at a place of worship—provides space for creative contextualization. Universal values such as commitment, self-surrender, and the purpose of devotion can be manifested in various cultural forms, as long as the essence of *tawhid* is preserved. This addresses the question of how Qur'anic values can be applied cross-culturally without losing their authority.

Global trends indicate an increasing prevalence of perinatal depression and anxiety, which negatively impact both mother and child. Nurjanah and Fauzi (2023), in their randomized clinical trial, demonstrated that Islamic-based spiritual counseling is effective in reducing depressive symptoms in pregnant women. This finding reinforces the relevance of spiritual practices such as prayer and remembrance as therapeutic interventions. Shihab's interpretation of the tranquility resulting from spiritual commitment provides theological justification for integrating the spiritual dimension into maternal health services. Thus, exegesis-based prenatal education can become part of a comprehensive solution to the maternal mental health crisis.

2. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this research contribute significantly to Islamic education theory by explicitly introducing and mapping the prenatal phase as the first and fundamental stage in the lifelong educational process. Thus far, Islamic education literature has tended to focus on the childhood, adolescent, and adult phases. By grounding itself in the authority of Qur'anic exegesis, this research affirms that Islamic education begins with parental planning and intention, thereby expanding its theoretical scope to become more comprehensive and proactive. This also enriches the concept of *fitrah* by demonstrating that the prenatal environment is the first layer influencing the purity and direction of that *fitrah*'s development. Saeed (2014) advocates for a contextual approach in Qur'anic interpretation that is responsive to contemporary developments. Shihab's interpretation in *Tafsir al-Misbāḥ* is a concrete example of this approach, where classical messages are dialogued with findings from modern

science. In the context of prenatal education, this approach enables the extraction of timeless principles from the Qur'an, which are then operationalized by utilizing contemporary insights from psychology, medicine, and neuroscience. This demonstrates that contextual exegesis can serve as an epistemological bridge between Islamic tradition and modernity, producing a relevant framework without sacrificing the authority of the text. Ultimately, the dialogue between the exegesis of QS. Āli 'Imrān:35 and various modern scientific disciplines paves the way for the development of an interdisciplinary Islamic education science. Fadhli (2022) emphasizes the need for integrating hermeneutics with contextual analysis in thematic exegesis research. This study demonstrates how this can be accomplished, by making exegesis the source of normative principles and then dialoguing them with empirical findings from various disciplines. This model can be replicated to examine other educational themes in the Qur'an, thereby enriching the treasury of Islamic education with robust and relevant interdisciplinary insights.

Practically, the principles extracted from the exegesis can serve as a foundation for developing an integrative prenatal curriculum model for parent mentoring classes. This model would combine modules on spiritual preparation, emotional and mental well-being, physical health linked to the concept of preserving the trust of the body, and knowledge about child development from an Islamic perspective. Such a curriculum could be adopted by maternal and child health clinics, religious study groups, or community programs to provide holistic guidance.

These findings provide a basis for advocating public health policies that are more culturally and religiously inclusive. Ministries of Health and healthcare institutions may consider integrating spiritual counseling or psycho-religious support aligned with patients' beliefs into standard antenatal care protocols. Training for midwives and healthcare workers could include understanding positive spiritual practices that impact maternal mental health, enabling them to support this aspect during counseling. Shihab's interpretation of the vow, although uttered by the wife of 'Imrān, implicitly assumes the husband's support and agreement. This opens space for emphasizing the active role of fathers in prenatal education. The practical implication is the development of materials and programs specifically encouraging father involvement, such as joint prayer, leading communication with the fetus, and creating a conducive home environment. Strengthening the father's role from this phase can enhance family cohesion and improve child development outcomes.

3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis focuses on one primary contextual exegesis. Although triangulated with classical exegesis, deeper comparison with more contemporary interpretations from various schools of thought could provide richer nuances. Second, this research is a textual-normative study. Claims about psychological and physiological impacts proposed based on literature convergence still require further testing through interdisciplinary empirical research. Based on these limitations, a future research agenda is essential. First, experimental or quasi-experimental studies are needed to test the effectiveness of prenatal education interventions based on this exegetical model on outcomes such as maternal stress levels, quality of prenatal attachment, and birth outcomes. Second, phenomenological qualitative research could explore the experiences of mothers and fathers who consciously practice these principles. Third, the development and validation of measurement instruments to assess "prenatal spiritual commitment" or "spiritual health of pregnant women" within an Islamic context is urgently needed for the advancement of research in this field. These findings also affirm the necessity of incorporating value-based prenatal education into pre-marital education curricula. The material should cover not only jurisprudence but also the philosophy and practice of child education from pre-conception. For family counselors, this framework provides a conceptual tool to assist couples experiencing pre-pregnancy or during-pregnancy anxiety, by offering an integrated, belief-based approach.

Ultimately, the discussion of QS. Āli 'Imrān:35 through the lens of *Tafsir al-Misbāḥ* invites us to reconstruct the paradigm of motherhood and fatherhood. The mother is not merely a biological vessel, but a party who makes a sacred covenant with the Creator. The father is not merely a provider, but a partner in fulfilling the trust of that vow. The child is not a blank slate or merely a genetic product, but a Divine trust agreed upon to be guided towards a transcendental purpose. This paradigm, reasoning based on *tawḥīd*, has the potential to transform the experience of pregnancy from a mere medical process into a meaningful spiritual journey, while laying a solid foundation for the formation of a generation that is not only healthy and intelligent, but also possesses a spirit of devotion and true freedom.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of *Tafsir al-Misbāḥ*, this study concludes that M. Quraish Shihab's interpretation of QS. Āli 'Imrān:35 offers a robust concept of prenatal education centered on *tawḥīd*. First, Shihab interprets this verse as a model of spiritual contract between parents and Allah, manifested through the vow as commitment, prayer as communication, and *istijābah* as the guarantee of Divine response. Second, the educational principles extracted

include self-surrender, cultivation of positive hope, awareness of responsibility as a trust, and determination of life goals oriented toward devotion. Third, these principles form an integrative framework that combines maternal spiritual tranquility, fetal psychophysiological health, and family social responsibility, thereby bridging Qur'anic values with findings from contemporary science.

Theoretically, this article contributes to enriching the discourse on Islamic education by definitively introducing and mapping the prenatal phase as the first epistemological foundation in the Islamic educational process, while simultaneously expanding the application of contextual exegesis hermeneutics into the realms of developmental psychology and public health. Practically, the resulting synthesis provides a normative-spiritual foundation for developing intervention modules and pregnancy support policies that are holistic and religiously sensitive. This model can guide Muslim parents beyond merely pursuing physical health toward building a meaningful pregnancy ecosystem, while providing a framework for healthcare professionals and counselors to offer comprehensive support. This research also calls for a reorientation of Muslim family education by positioning the prenatal phase as a strategic starting point, where parents are encouraged to begin their parenting journey with awareness and spiritual contract, while educators and pre-marital program facilitators are expected to integrate these insights into their curricula.

This study has a primary limitation in its scope, focusing on a single exegetical work, although triangulation has been conducted. Generalization of findings requires broader comparative studies with other exegetes from various Islamic intellectual traditions. Therefore, further research is highly recommended: first, experimental studies to test the impact of interventions based on this model on maternal well-being and perinatal outcomes; second, qualitative research to explore experiences of prenatal spiritual practices in diverse Muslim communities; and third, the development of standardized instruments to measure key constructs such as prenatal spiritual commitment and spiritual health of pregnant women within an Islamic context. Policymakers are also invited to design maternal health services that nurture not only the body but also the soul and spirit of a generation that is just beginning.

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