

**EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (K-3rd GRADE):  
PERCEPTIONS OF PRE-SERVICE JORDANIAN TEACHERS  
REGARDING TEACHING COMPETENCIES IN ISLAMIC  
EDUCATION**

Majedah Fawzy Abu Al Rub\* (PhD), Intisar Ghazy Mustafa (PhD) &  
Lana Yousef Al Naser

**ABSTRACT**

This study examined the perceptions of pre-service Jordanian teachers regarding teaching competencies in the Islamic Education program. Participants were 96 early childhood pre-service teachers in the practicum program at Yarmouk University during the 2015-2016 school year. This study utilized a Likert survey that was developed in 1988 by the Centre for the Study of Learning and Performance at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec. Results indicated that this education program focused on developing learning strategies and teacher competencies in the classroom, since the total scores of students learning strategies and teaching approach competencies were high. Given this finding, most of the pre-service teachers have good skills in teaching the Islamic concepts.

**Keywords:** *Early childhood education, pre-service teacher, Islamic Education, Teaching competencies,*

Primary Education Department  
Yarmouk University,  
Irbid, JORDAN

*majedah@yu.edu.jo*

## INTRODUCTION

Developing teaching competency of pre-service teachers has always been regarded as a critical issue of teacher education programs. Darling-Hammond (2006) pointed out that teacher education programs close the gap between theory and practice. Effective teaching can be defined as a thoughtful process of instructional decision-making grounded in a strong knowledge base (Kindsvatter Wilen, & Ishler, 1996). Educators generally also acknowledge the complexity of effective teaching and learning processes (Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002). For example, Elshout-Mohr (1999) said, "The skilled teacher is supposed to possess a complex knowledge structure composed of interrelated sets of organized actions" (p.58).

Teachers should have the skills to motivate students for learning such as by creating an open and positive climate, as well as helping students feel they are valued members in the teaching and learning process, while not allowing them to feel ignored or punished. The teacher serves as an important agent in guiding generations of students, not only in terms of knowledge and skills, but also to bring them in line with Islamic values, consequently developing peaceful and harmonious societies. Some students seem naturally motivated for learning, but many need their teachers to inspire or challenge them. Effective learning in the classroom depends on the teacher's ability ... to maintain the interest that brought students to the course in the first place (Erickson & Strommer, 1991).

Research on elementary schooling shows young children can work effectively if they have a supportive classroom environment, have a positive and personal relationship with their peers, and have a desire to work together (Hill & Epps, 2010). Teachers should bring out the best by encouraging and challenging each other, keeping each other accountable, and working together in a spirit of excellence and effectiveness. Schools and universities should work hard especially with new teachers to provide good academic programs, train them to manage their classroom and to interact well with their students (Daniels, 2010).

Teaching Islamic values for children living in Islamic cultures is very important in order to develop and promote Islamic and moral character. This foundation is based on the holy Qur'an and Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) Sunna's teachings encouraging Muslims to learn, read, and develop these Islamic concepts. Research studies in Islamic Education emphasized that having good behavior enhances the holistic, balanced and integrated development of children (Halim, 2007). Achieving the level of this personality requires teaching and learning processes (Ambrose et al., 2010).

Islamic Education is the integration of Islamic concepts, practices and activities, and follows what Muslims adopt and carry out in accordance with Islam to educate individuals and groups so that they internalize and practice the Islamic message (Ramzi, 1994, p. 181). Taha et al. (1992) defined Islamic Education as concepts connected with each other in the same conceptual framework according to Islamic values and principles. In schools, Islamic Education means the study of the following subjects: Holy Qur'an, Hadith Shareef, faith in Allah's oneness, the Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) life (seerah), Islamic law (fiqh), explanation of the Qur'an (tafseer) and other Islamic knowledge. Most authors in Islamic education pedagogy consider these subjects as falling within the meaning of Islamic education (Mustafeh, 2002).

Islamic education has its own character, which distinguishes very clearly from all other types of educational theory and practice. This distinguishing feature is due to the influence of the Qur'an and Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The Qur'an is, by the consensus of Muslim opinion, the immutable source of the fundamental tenets of Islam, its principles, ethics and culture. It is also the perennial foundation for Islamic systems of legislation and of social and economic organization. It is the basis of both moral and general education. The adoption of Islam as a complete code of life is a prerequisite for putting any set of Islamic directives into practice through education. It follows that the practices and activities of Muslims have to be Islamic both theoretically and practically. The education process and instructional activities, including training and administration, have to be Islamic by following the Qur'an. Islamic education includes many dimensions such as: internalizing and practicing the Islamic faith; understanding, adopting and applying Islamic concepts; adopting and practicing the Islamic way of life; and being prepared and qualified to disseminate the Islamic message through education.

In Islam, the responsibilities of teachers are very broad and are not limited to conveying knowledge and skills only but include beliefs, attitudes, and ethics in daily life. Teaching competency is seen as an important element of direct relevance to teacher professional competency and the reaction and effect on students. Jallad (2003) argued that teaching Islamic concepts is very important in order to clarify the misunderstanding around these concepts; hence teachers must use a suitable teaching method and attain good competency in teaching them.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

For almost thirty years, the Ministry of Education in Jordan (MOE) (1988) has considered the Education Practicum Program to be a very important part of pre-service teacher training. However, more research in this area of competencies in teaching Islamic concepts needs to be done in Jordan. There is a lack of research in this area relative to its importance. Various studies have investigated teacher education, but the competencies of pre-service teachers was not systematically conducted prior to the present study. Moreover, existing research studies in Jordan examined in-service teachers and their teaching competencies; none looked at pre-service teachers and their teaching of Islamic concepts. Therefore, this research is extremely important to understand and examine pre-service teachers' competencies.

MOE (2010) stated that there is a weakness in developing and teaching Islamic concepts, especially in early childhood grades. Developing Islamic concepts is an important goal for children, therefore pre-service teachers must have the ability to deliver these concepts in suitable forms and ways. However, teachers cannot be expected to have this ability without being trained. This path of reasoning prompted us to conduct the present study which investigated competencies of pre-service teachers who are important assets for developing students' individuality. Therefore, this study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

- 1- What are students' learning strategies as perceived by pre-service Jordanian teachers?
- 2- To what extent do early childhood pre-service teachers believe that they are prepared for teaching Islamic concepts?
- 3- What is the technology experience in teaching Islamic concepts?

### DEFINITION OF VARIABLES

*Teaching competencies:* Best practices, activities, and models of instruction that teachers may utilize in their classroom to help students achieve educational goals as well as deliver new concepts to students. The competencies include planning, implementing, and evaluating the lesson.

*Pre-service student teachers:* Students who are in their last (fourth) year of training in education at university level; they practice teaching and learning processes for one semester. During this semester, they are considered pre-service teachers.

*Perceptions:* The opinions of student teachers in an education training program about their experience of the teaching process.

*Islamic Education:* The study of the holy Qur'an, Hadith Shareef, faith in Allah's oneness (Aqidah), the Prophet's life (Seerah), the Islamic law (Fiqh), the explanation of the holy Qur'an (Tafseer) and Islamic knowledge and concepts.

### METHOD

#### Sampling and Setting

The accessible population of this study consisted of all early childhood pre-service teachers at Yarmouk University in Jordan in 2015-2016. The convenience sample consisted of 96 early childhood pre-service teachers who were in the practicum program in Yarmouk University during the 2015-2016 school year. Females

numbered 86 and the males were 10 since there was imbalance in in the number of males and females; for this reason we did not take gender into consideration.

### Study Design

This study utilized a Likert survey that was developed in 1988 by the Centre for the Study of Learning and Performance at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec. The survey utilized a five-point scale: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree. The survey contained three sections. The first section addresses identifying students' learning strategies. The second section included teaching approach. The third section included questions about technology experiences. To assess the questionnaire reliability we offered the questionnaire to a sample consisting of 20 teachers and offered it for testing again to the same teachers after two weeks. The consistency was calculated using Pearson correlation coefficient between the first and the second application which was 88%. The rationale for using this specific instrument was that it was previously administered in Jordanian research studies and examined the teachers' competencies.

### Instrument Translation

The instrument was translated from English to Arabic by an individual proficient in both languages (English and Arabic), and then retranslated back from Arabic to English by another individual also proficient in both languages. The translated versions were reviewed and examined by a three-person committee experienced in the research topic and competent in both Arabic and English languages. The committee considered the equivalence of terms, clarity and cultural adaptation. Modifications were made according to the committee recommendations.

### Validity and Reliability

In the current study, a panel of experts in educational research was consulted and their recommendations and suggestions were followed. Content validity was obtained through the panel of experts in educational research. Internal consistency was calculated first from the pilot study and then also from the main study. The original survey showed internal consistency with alpha coefficient of .73. The internal consistency of the *Teaching and Learning Strategies Questionnaire* in this current study was between .64 and .87. This result means that the reliability coefficient was satisfactory for the purpose of this study.

### Data Collection

After obtaining permission to conduct the study, we contacted the research sites set up a time and explain the study to the participants, obtain their consent, and administer the survey. The consent forms and surveys were distributed to pre-service early childhood teachers in the middle of March 2016, which marks the middle of the school year for universities in Jordan. To prevent teaching schedule disruption, the surveys were administered during the last workshops supervisors held in the university for the student teachers to evaluate their teaching and learning.

Participants were asked to rate the degree to which they gained knowledge from theoretical courses and their practicum field while demonstrating and applying these teaching skills in the classroom based on their total knowledge and experience in education training.

### Data Analysis

After survey completion the data were compiled; we coded the participants' responses and entered them into the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program. The data were checked for accuracy. We did preliminary tests to find mean and standard deviation. Variables and their measurement levels were identified during the data entry process. Descriptive statistical analysis of means and standard deviations were also used in order to answer the research questions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to answer the first question concerning "What are students' learning strategies as perceived by pre-service Jordanian teachers?" means and standard deviations were computed as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that Item 9 "Work well with other students" received the highest mean (4.36) regarding the degree of agreement followed by item 8 "Are motivated to learn" with mean 4.28. Meanwhile, item 4 "Revise goals when necessary" was ranked last with a mean of 3.54. The total mean for all items in this section was 4.01. This suggests that students in k-3rd grades have good learning strategies and their teachers have effective teaching experience in developing these strategies as reported by pre-service teachers. For example, they work well with their peers, have motivation to learn, can improve their work and so forth (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations for Students' Learning Strategies Items Ranked in Descending Order*

Rank	#	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
<b>In my class students generally</b>					
1	9	Work well with other students.	4.36	.756	High
2	8	Are motivated to learn.	4.28	.691	High
2	15	Revise versions of their work to improve them.	4.28	.879	High
4	6	Can articulate what is expected of them.	4.26	.700	High
5	5	Monitor their progress towards achieving goals.	4.20	.829	High
5	20	Adjust their actions on their own to achieve goals.	4.20	1.012	High
7	19	Attribute their success to their efforts.	4.19	.772	High
8	11	Give constructive feedback to their peers.	4.15	.794	High
9	7	Document the processes they use when working on tasks.	4.14	.969	High
10	17	Evaluate their own work.	4.04	1.045	High
11	12	Use feedback from their teacher to improve on their work.	4.03	.864	High
12	13	Use feedback from their home to improve on their work.	3.99	.912	High
13	14	Use feedback from their peers to improve on their work.	3.98	.917	High
14	2	Set their own process goals (e.g., determine what tasks are required to achieve their learning goals)	3.97	1.000	High
15	10	Modify or adapt unsuccessful strategies	3.86	1.032	High
16	16	Reflect on their process of achieving their goals.	3.83	1.033	High
17	18	Know how they are being evaluated.	3.76	1.013	High
18	1	Set their own learning goals (e.g. determine what they need to learn).	3.60	1.138	Average
19	3	Identify strategies for achieving their goals.	3.59	.980	Average
20	4	Revise goals when necessary.	3.54	.983	Average
		Total	4.01	.426	High

Results indicated that “students working well with other students” was ranked the highest comparing to other students’ learning strategies as perceived by their pre-service teachers. Overall, these learning strategies were high perceived by the pre-service teachers. This supports the idea that the learning outcomes are empirically constructed in the pre-service teacher education practicum program. In other words, the education practicum program is focused on developing these learning strategies and provide an effective learning environment for students to work effectively with their peers and to be motivated in learning; the study by Johnson, Johnson, and Stanne (2000) emphasized that students working together had higher scores than students working individually. When students work together they benefit from peer feedback and suggestions and they have different ideas for solving problems. As a result, students’ participation in the teaching process helps with social development. For example, they can learn to respect each other, collaborate in groups, play with peers, and share ideas. And these leaning strategies were emphasized by Islam.

Also, results indicated that students had the second highest mean for item 8 “Are motivated to learn.” This result indicates that a majority of the teachers are providing a reward to their students based on the best performance as a kind of motivation.

In order to answer the second question concerning “To what extent do early childhood pre-service teachers believe that they are prepared for teaching Islamic concepts?” means and standard deviations were computed as presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviations for Approach to Teaching Items Ranked in Descending Order*

Rank	#	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
<b>In my class I teach students how to:</b>					
1	40	Work well with other students.	4.51	.725	High
2	29	Adjust their actions on their own to achieve goals.	4.47	.632	High
3	25	Be motivated to learn.	4.42	.691	High
4	37	Evaluate their own work.	4.34	.693	High
5	28	Monitor their progress toward achieving goals.	4.30	.618	High
5	32	Use feedback from their teacher to improve on their work.	4.30	.822	High
5	35	Revise versions of their work to improve them.	4.30	.682	High
8	22	Set their own process goals (e.g., determine what tasks are required to achieve their learning goals)	4.27	.788	High
9	27	Document the processes they use when working on tasks.	4.25	.821	High
10	31	Give constructive feedback to their peers.	4.23	.672	High
10	36	Reflect on their process of achieving their goals.	4.23	.801	High
12	26	Can articulate what is expected of them.	4.17	.749	High
13	33	Use feedback from their home to improve on their work.	4.16	.850	High
13	39	Attribute their success to their efforts.	4.16	.799	High
15	34	Use feedback from their peers to improve on their work.	4.14	.790	High
16	30	Modify or adapt strategies that are unsuccessful.	4.13	.771	High
17	23	Identify strategies for achieving their goals.	4.11	.928	High
18	21	Set their own learning goals (e.g. determine what they need to learn).	4.05	1.009	High
19	38	Know how they are being evaluated.	4.03	.956	High
20	24	Revise goals when necessary.	4.02	.894	High
		Total	4.23	.434	High

The Section 2 (approach to teaching) results indicated that item 40 "Work well with other students" received the highest mean (4.51) regarding the degree of agreement, followed by item 29 "Adjust their actions on their own to achieve goals" (with mean of 4.47). Meanwhile, item 24 "Revise goals when necessary" was ranked last ( $M = 4.02$ ). The total mean for all items in this section was high(4.23). This suggests that teachers teach their students how to work well with their peers, how to adjust their actions to improve learning, and how to be motivated to learn, and so forth. These are good competencies needed by teachers to focus on the teaching and learning process. Gillies's (2003) study emphasized that teachers have good skills and competencies in promoting group work and changing their actions to achieve their goals.

To answer the third question concerning " what is the technology experience in teaching Islamic concepts?" we present the results in Table 3.

Results indicated that pre-service teachers were comfortable and proficient in using technology tools (Table 3). Item 43 "I feel comfortable using technology tools in my classroom" received the highest mean (4.11) regarding the degree of agreement, followed by item 44 "I am very proficient in using a wide variety of applications in my classroom" with a mean of 3.97. Meanwhile, item 41 "I have no experience with them" was ranked last ( $M = 2.68$ ). The total mean for all items in this section was within average (3.42). This suggests that pre-service teachers have a good experience and capability in using technology tools. This also means that teachers use technology well to motivate students to learn Islamic values and attitudes and that pre-service teachers were well prepared with technology in the theoretical and practical education program.

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations for Technology Experience Items Ranked in Descending Order*

rank	#	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
1	43	I feel comfortable using technology tools in my classroom.	4.11	.881	High
2	44	I am very proficient in using a wide variety of applications in my classroom.	3.97	.945	High
3	45	I often integrate technology tools in my teaching activities.	3.76	1.149	High
4	48	I feel comfortable using digital portfolios with my class.	3.72	1.203	High
5	47	I often use our school lab.	3.07	1.496	Average
6	46	I often use my classroom computers.	3.06	1.336	Average
7	42	I have attempted to use technology tools in my classroom but I still require help on a regular basis.	3.02	1.306	Average
8	41	I have no experience with technology tools	2.68	1.269	Average
		Total	3.42	.653	Average

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results showed that this education program focused on developing learning strategies and teacher competencies in the classroom, since the total scores of student learning strategies and teaching approach competencies were high. Most of the pre-service teachers have good skills in teaching Islamic concepts. Overall, the data presented here provide support that the practicum education program at Yarmouk University can increase the extent to which pre-service teachers adopt learning and teaching skills as a strategy that maximizes student roles. Regarding teachers' technology experience, based on the results pre-service teachers were proficient and comfortable in using technology and computers in their teaching.



In light of the findings of this study, we recommend that researchers identify the relationship between student learning strategies and pre-service teachers' competencies, emphasize on developing these competencies in all subjects theoretically and practically, and study the impact of the practicum education program on developing the learning strategies and teaching competencies.

## REFERENCES

- Ambrose, A.S, Bridges, M. W, DiPietro, M, Lovett, M.C, Norman, K.M, and. Mayer .E. R.(2010). *How learning works: Seven research-based principles for smart teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Daniels, E. (2010). Creating motivating learning environment: What we can learn from researchers and students. *English Journal*, 100(1), 25-29.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). *Powerful teacher education: Lessons from exemplary programs*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Elshout-Mohr. (1999). Mapping situations in classroom and research: Eight types of instructional learning episodes. *Learning and Instruction*, 9, 57-75.
- Erickson, B. L., & Strommer, D. W. (1991). *Teaching college freshmen*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Gillies, R. M. (2003). Structuring cooperative group work in classrooms. *International Journal Educational Research*, 39, 35-49.
- Halim, A. T. (2007). Islamic education teachers' perceptions of the teaching of akhlaq in Malaysian secondary schools. *Journal Moral Education*, 36(3), 371-386. doi: 10.1080/03057240701553347
- Hill, M. C., & Epps, K. K. (2010). The impact of physical classroom environment on student satisfaction and student evaluation of teaching in the university environment. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, 14(4), 65-79.
- Ibrahem, S. T. (1986) *Islamic Education and its teaching methods*. Amman, Jordan: Dar Al-Aeqem.
- Jallad, M. Z. (2003). *Studies in Islamic Education*. Amman, Jordan: Dar Al-Razi.
- Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Stanne, M. E. (2000). *Cooperative learning methods: A meta-analysis*. University of Minnesota, Minneapolis: Cooperative Learning Center.
- Kane, Sanretto, & Heath (2002). Telling half the story: A critical review of research on the teaching beliefs and practices of university academics. *Review of Educational Research* 72 (2), 177-228.
- Kindsvatter, R., Wilen, W., & Ishler, M. (1996). *Dynamics of effective teaching* (3rd ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Mustafeh, I. G. (2002). *Islam in the curriculum in Jordan and England: A comparative study*. (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Exeter, England).
- Ministry of Education. (2010). *Statistics Report 2003-2010*. Amman, Jordan: Author.
- Ramzi, A. (1994). *Islamic education in understanding of present day Muslim educationists*. (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Durham)
- Taha, T., AlAshqar, J., Masri, M., Hamodeh, M., Sawafteh, W., & Mahfood, N. (Eds.) (1992). *Islamic Education teaching methods*. Amman, Jordan: Dar Al feker.