



Narrating Values, Shaping Character: The Impact of Islamic Storytelling on Early Childhood Moral Development

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Abstract:

Noble character development in early childhood is essential for establishing positive moral behavior and religious values. However, conventional approaches may not always provide children with meaningful and engaging moral learning experiences. This study examined the effect of Islamic storytelling on the development of noble character among children at Kindergarten X. A quantitative experimental approach with a pretest-posttest control group design was used. The study included 40 children: 20 in the experimental group and 20 in the control group. We collected data through structured observations measuring honesty, responsibility, empathy, obedience, and positive social behavior. We analyzed the data using descriptive statistics and an independent-samples t-test after confirming normality and homogeneity assumptions. The results showed that the experimental group's mean score increased from 62.15 to 82.30, while the control group increased from 61.85 to 70.10. The independent-sample t-test indicated a significant difference, $t(38) = 7.48$, $p < 0.001$. The findings imply that Islamic storytelling can serve as an effective pedagogical strategy for strengthening noble character in early childhood education.

INTRODUCTION

Developing noble character in early childhood is a crucial foundation for shaping individuals' character, social behavior, and integrity in later life. Early childhood represents a strategic developmental period because children possess a high capacity to absorb values, norms, habits, and behavioral patterns from their surrounding environments (Agus & Cholil, 2025; Al-Hawary et al., 2023). Education during this stage should therefore address not only cognitive development but also children's ability to recognize, understand, and practice moral and religious values. Educational experiences provided from an early age can influence children's behavioral patterns and social interactions in everyday life (Haris, 2025; Muthohar et al., 2026). Therefore, strengthening moral character through developmentally appropriate education is a societal need and requires learning approaches that effectively support children's moral and religious development.

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The formation of children's moral character faces increasingly complex challenges amid social changes and the rapid development of digital technology. Young children now have broader access to information and digital content, while not all available content is appropriate for their developmental needs or consistent with moral and religious values (Asrori et al., 2025; Ok et al., 2026). Such exposure may influence how children distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, particularly because young children have limited capacity to evaluate information critically. In educational settings, teachers and parents must provide learning experiences that guide children toward positive behaviors through engaging, developmentally appropriate approaches (Jazuli, 2025; Osman, 2024). Consequently, effective pedagogical strategies are needed to strengthen the internalization of moral values from an early age and to ensure that children develop behavioral foundations consistent with religious teachings and socially valued norms.

Current practices in early childhood education indicate that delivering moral values through learning activities still faces challenges related to children's engagement and understanding. Values such as honesty, responsibility, compassion, patience, empathy, and respect are often communicated verbally but are not always translated into children's observable behaviors (Bahri et al., 2024; Umar et al., 2025). Young children tend to understand concepts more effectively through concrete experiences, characters, visual representations, and narratives connected to their everyday lives. Storytelling therefore represents a potentially effective pedagogical approach because teachers can communicate moral values through engaging narratives that children can easily follow (Marzuki & Tan, 2025; Saputri et al., 2026). Islamic stories can introduce exemplary characters and meaningful events that contain moral and religious lessons. Through such narratives, children may obtain learning experiences that are more contextual, meaningful, and relevant to their moral development.

Previous studies have demonstrated the potential of storytelling to support moral and character development in early childhood. Stories that convey values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, patience, and religious devotion can help children recognize desirable behaviors and understand the consequences of their actions (Alkouatli, 2022; Rizaq, 2022). Narratives concerning the life of Prophet Muhammad and other exemplary figures in Islamic traditions can likewise serve as educational media for introducing religious values to young children. Furthermore, integrating visual and interactive media into storytelling activities may enhance children's attention and engagement in character education (Díaz Lara et al., 2025; Işık & Akbari, 2024). Nevertheless, previous studies vary in their research focus, educational contexts, and indicators of moral development. Several studies have examined storytelling primarily as a learning activity without measuring the extent to which Islamic storytelling influences the development of children's noble character.

The literature on Islamic character education also indicates that religious values should be introduced through learning approaches that match children's developmental characteristics (Formen et al., 2026; Istiyani et al., 2024). Studies on strengthening moderate Islamic values and character education based on religious

moderation emphasize the importance of active, contextual learning experiences in early childhood education (Gianto & Sunanik, 2025; Shams, 2025). However, much of the existing research has focused on describing learning processes, teachers' perceptions, or the general effectiveness of storytelling. Empirical evidence specifically examining the quantitative effect of Islamic storytelling on children's noble character remains relatively limited (Maslani et al., 2025; Rokhmawan & Fitriyah, 2025). This limitation matters because measurable evidence is needed to determine whether systematic exposure to Islamic stories produces observable differences in children's moral development. Such evidence can strengthen the empirical basis for designing more targeted character education practices in early childhood settings.

The state of the art of this study lies in its empirical examination of the relationship between Islamic storytelling delivered through the storytelling method and the development of noble character among young children. Unlike studies that primarily describe storytelling as a learning medium or explore children's responses to narrative activities, this study positions noble character development as an observable and measurable outcome. This approach enables the study to provide quantitative evidence regarding differences in children's moral development following exposure to Islamic storytelling. The character dimensions examined focus on moral and religious behaviors appropriate to early childhood development. This focus matters because it strengthens the empirical foundation for teachers to select character-building strategies that are systematic, measurable, developmentally appropriate, and relevant to children's moral and religious needs.

Based on these problems and research gaps, this study addresses the extent to which Islamic storytelling delivered through the storytelling method influences the development of noble character among young children at Kindergarten X. It also examines whether significant differences exist in children's character development between those exposed to Islamic storytelling and those who are not exposed to it. The central argument is that Islamic storytelling can provide concrete, engaging, and meaningful learning experiences that help children recognize, understand, and imitate behaviors reflecting Islamic moral values. Accordingly, this study is expected to provide empirical evidence concerning the effectiveness of Islamic storytelling as a pedagogical strategy for strengthening noble character in early childhood. The findings may contribute to character education research and provide practical implications for teachers seeking evidence-based approaches to moral development.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a quantitative approach with an experimental pretest-posttest control group design. This design was selected because it enables the researcher to systematically measure children's moral character before and after the intervention. The study involved two groups: an experimental group that received an intervention through Islamic storytelling and a control group that

participated in regular learning activities without the specific intervention. The researchers administered a pretest to both groups before the treatment to identify their initial levels of moral character, and a posttest after the intervention to identify subsequent changes. This design enables a comparison of changes between the two groups, thereby providing an empirical and objective basis for examining the effect of Islamic storytelling on the development of noble character.

The study was conducted at Kindergarten X, which was purposively selected because its students' characteristics fit the research objectives, it had student groups that could be assigned to an experimental and a control group, and the institution was willing to support all stages of the research. The research setting was selected because its early childhood learning environment provided an appropriate context for implementing storytelling as part of character and religious education. The participants included 40 children: 20 in the experimental group and 20 in the control group. The selection of the research setting and participants aimed to create a relatively homogeneous educational context and minimize the influence of external factors. The study was conducted with school approval and parental or guardian consent for children's participation.

Data were collected through structured observation using a moral-character observation sheet developed based on behavioral indicators, including honesty, responsibility, empathy, obedience, and other positive behaviors relevant to early childhood development. The instrument was designed to capture observable changes in children's moral behavior before and after the intervention. Data collection involved 40 participating children from Kindergarten X and was conducted during regular learning under similar conditions for both groups. Before the intervention, researchers administered a pretest to identify the children's initial moral-character levels. The experimental group subsequently received a structured Islamic storytelling intervention, while the control group participated in regular learning activities without the specific intervention. After the intervention, researchers administered a posttest to both groups to identify changes in moral-character development. The researchers validated the observation instrument before use to ensure the indicators were relevant and appropriate for measuring children's moral behavior.

Data analysis involved several stages of data management, including data condensation or reduction, which involved selecting and organizing observation results according to the predetermined moral-character indicators; data display, which involved presenting pretest and posttest scores in tables to facilitate comparison between groups; and data verification, which involved checking the completeness, consistency, and accuracy of the collected data before statistical testing. The data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics and an independent-samples t-test to examine differences in scores between the experimental and control groups. Prior to hypothesis testing, normality and homogeneity tests were conducted to assess the statistical assumptions. Data trustworthiness was ensured through expert validation of the instrument, instrument piloting, reliability testing, clearly defined behavioral indicators, and consistent observation procedures across both groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Effect of Islamic Storytelling on Noble Character

This study examined the effect of Islamic storytelling on the development of noble character among early childhood students at Kindergarten X. A total of 40 children participated in the study, consisting of 20 children in the experimental group and 20 children in the control group. The children's moral character was assessed through structured observation covering five main behavioral indicators: honesty, responsibility, empathy, obedience, and positive social behavior. The experimental group received Islamic storytelling activities integrated into the learning process, while the control group participated in regular learning activities. Pretest and posttest measurements were conducted to identify changes in children's moral-character development and to determine whether the intervention produced a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Pretest and Posttest Scores

Group	N	Pretest Mean	Pretest SD	Posttest Mean	Posttest SD
Experimental	20	62.15	4.82	82.30	5.21
Control	20	61.85	4.67	70.10	5.08

Table 1 shows that the experimental and control groups had relatively similar initial levels of moral-character development. The experimental group obtained a mean pretest score of 62.15, while the control group obtained 61.85. After the intervention, the experimental group's mean score increased to 82.30, an increase of 20.15 points. Meanwhile, the control group increased from 61.85 to 70.10, representing an increase of 8.25 points. The greater improvement observed in the experimental group indicates that children who participated in Islamic storytelling experienced more substantial development in moral-character scores than those who participated in regular learning activities. Further statistical testing determined whether this difference was statistically significant.

Table 2. Normality and Homogeneity Tests

Test	Statistic	p-value	Interpretation
Shapiro-Wilk – Experimental Pretest	0.965	0.642	Normal
Shapiro-Wilk – Control Pretest	0.971	0.761	Normal
Shapiro-Wilk – Experimental Posttest	0.958	0.508	Normal
Shapiro-Wilk – Control Posttest	0.967	0.677	Normal
Levene's Test	0.083	0.775	Homogeneous

Table 2 shows that the pretest and posttest scores of both the experimental and control groups were normally distributed, as indicated by Shapiro-Wilk significance values greater than 0.05. The homogeneity test also yielded a significance value of 0.775, which exceeded the 0.05 threshold, indicating that the posttest variances between the two groups were homogeneous. These results demonstrate that the data satisfied the assumptions of normality and homogeneity required for parametric analysis. Therefore, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether the difference in posttest moral-character scores between the experimental and control groups was statistically significant.

Table 3. Independent-Samples t-Test of Posttest Scores

Comparison	Mean Difference	t	df	p-value	Interpretation
Experimental vs. Control	12.20	7.48	38	< 0.001	Significant

Table 3 shows that the independent-samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in posttest moral-character scores between the experimental and control groups, $t(38) = 7.48$, $p < 0.001$. The experimental group obtained a higher mean score of 82.30 compared with 70.10 in the control group, with a mean difference of 12.20 points. This result indicates that children who participated in Islamic storytelling demonstrated greater improvement in noble-character development than those who participated in regular learning activities. The estimated Cohen's d of 2.37 further indicates a large effect, suggesting that Islamic storytelling was associated with substantial improvements in children's observable moral behaviors.

The experimental group showed increases across the observed dimensions of noble character. After participating in the storytelling intervention, children showed more frequent behaviors reflecting honesty, responsibility, empathy, obedience, and positive interactions with peers and teachers. Islamic stories provided concrete examples of desirable behavior through characters, events, and moral consequences that young children could understand. The storytelling activities also created opportunities for teachers to reinforce the moral messages contained in the narratives through questions, repetition, and discussion. In comparison, the control group demonstrated improvement, but the increase was comparatively smaller. This suggests that regular learning activities may contribute to children's development, while the structured use of Islamic storytelling can provide an additional stimulus for strengthening moral-character development.

Overall, the findings demonstrate a significant difference in moral-character development between children who received the Islamic storytelling intervention and those who participated in regular learning activities. The substantially higher posttest score in the experimental group, together with the significant t-test result, provides quantitative evidence supporting the effectiveness of Islamic storytelling in early childhood character education. The findings indicate that storytelling can serve not merely as entertainment but also as a pedagogical medium for introducing and reinforcing moral and religious values. Through repeated exposure to exemplary characters and positive behavioral models, children can be encouraged to recognize and practice desirable behaviors in their daily interactions. Thus, Islamic storytelling represents a potentially effective instructional strategy for strengthening noble character during early childhood development.

Discussion

The findings show that Islamic storytelling significantly affected children's noble-character development, as reflected in the experimental group's higher posttest scores than the control group's. This result aligns with previous research showing that storytelling can support young children's internalization of moral values (Abdullah & Mirzā, 2025; Sai et al., 2025). Al Kufiyyah & Salamah (2026), for

example, reported positive behavioral changes after implementing storytelling for Islamic character development, particularly in honesty, responsibility, empathy, and politeness. Similarly, recent research by Agustina (2025), found significant improvements in children's moral reasoning following Islamic storytelling activities. The present findings therefore strengthen existing evidence by demonstrating the effect through a quantitative comparison between experimental and control groups.

The results also support the argument that narrative-based learning provides children with concrete representations of abstract moral concepts. Through Islamic stories, children encounter characters, actions, consequences, and moral choices that can make values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, and obedience easier to understand (Nadya & Irma, 2026; Sunandar et al., 2026). This interpretation corresponds with research indicating that storytelling facilitates moral internalization through narrative engagement, character identification, and emotional connection. The present study extends these findings by showing that the improvement was not limited to children's understanding of moral values but was also reflected in observable moral-character behaviors (Alkouatli, 2022; Rizaq, 2022). Theoretically, this finding supports the view that learning experiences involving meaningful narratives can connect cognitive understanding with behavioral expression during early childhood development.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce social learning principles because children can observe desirable behaviors through story characters and recognize the consequences associated with particular actions. Islamic storytelling consequently functions not merely as an instructional technique but as a form of moral modeling (Gilman Mawardi Nurul Khoirunnisa, Fauziah Habibilah, 2025; Wadi et al., 2023; Zazin et al., 2025). This interpretation is compatible with previous research showing that stories based on prophetic narratives can communicate values such as honesty, patience, responsibility, compassion, and religiosity in developmentally appropriate ways. However, the present study adds a more explicit experimental perspective by comparing children who received Islamic storytelling with those who engaged in regular learning activities (Arifin et al., 2025; Mulyadi Mulyadi Mar'atun Sholihah, Sahrizal Vahlevi, 2025). The significant difference between groups provides empirical support for using culturally and religiously relevant narratives in early childhood moral education.

Practically, the findings suggest that early childhood teachers can integrate Islamic storytelling systematically into daily learning activities rather than treating storytelling as supplementary entertainment (Asrori et al., 2025; Ok et al., 2026). Teachers can select stories based on targeted character indicators, such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, and obedience, and deliver them through expressive narration, questions, discussion, and simple reflection (Baharun, 2025; Baharun et al., 2025; Khomairohtusshiyamah et al., 2025). Previous studies similarly emphasize the importance of expressive techniques, visual aids, reflective discussion, and teacher involvement in strengthening storytelling's impact (Fikriyati et al., 2023; Mustaqim et al., 2025). The present findings therefore provide

practical guidance for teachers to transform Islamic stories into structured character-learning experiences. Schools can also support implementation through teacher training, appropriate storytelling materials, and consistent reinforcement of the values introduced through stories.

The main contribution of this study lies in providing quantitative evidence that Islamic storytelling can produce measurable differences in children's noble-character development. While several previous studies have used qualitative, descriptive, or mixed-methods approaches to examine storytelling and moral development, this study uses a pretest-posttest control-group design to identify intervention-related differences (Abdullah & Mirzā, 2025; Manurung et al., 2024). This contribution strengthens the empirical basis for integrating Islamic storytelling into early childhood character education. At the same time, interpret the findings in the context of the study participants and intervention setting. Future research could involve larger samples, longer intervention periods, multiple schools, and additional measures of behavioral change to examine whether the observed effects remain consistent across different early childhood educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Islamic storytelling has a significant positive effect on children's noble-character development, as shown by the experimental group's higher posttest scores than the control group. The main lesson is that moral values are internalized more meaningfully when children encounter them through engaging narratives that connect values with concrete characters, actions, and consequences. Scientifically, this study contributes quantitative empirical evidence to the literature on Islamic character education by demonstrating the measurable effect of storytelling through an experimental comparison. Practically, the findings imply that teachers can integrate structured Islamic storytelling into early childhood learning to strengthen honesty, responsibility, empathy, and obedience. However, the study was limited by its small sample and single-school setting. Future research should use larger, more diverse samples, longer interventions, and broader measures of behavioral development to examine the consistency and sustainability of these effects.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares no financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest that could influence the conduct, analysis, or publication of this study.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

During the development of this manuscript, the author utilized AI-assisted tools, including ChatGPT, Gemini, AI-based translation tools, and Grammarly, to support language editing, translation, grammar improvement, sentence restructuring, and the organization of academic content. These technologies served only as complementary writing aids and did not replace the author's scholarly judgment, interpretation, or responsibility for the research. The author critically reviewed, edited, and verified all AI-assisted content to ensure its accuracy, consistency, and conformity with the research evidence. The author retains full responsibility for the manuscript's originality, academic integrity, ethical standards, and scientific validity.

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