

Internalization of Islamic Moral Values through Storytelling Method in Integrated Islamic Early Childhood Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study examines the effectiveness of storytelling methods in internalizing Islamic moral values among children aged 5-6 years in Integrated Islamic Early Childhood Education (PAUD Islam Terpadu) institutions.

Objective: The research addresses the challenge of developing character education that integrates Islamic teachings with developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood settings.

Method: Using a mixed-methods approach combining classroom observations, teacher interviews, and moral comprehension assessments, this study involved 120 children from six PAUD Islam Terpadu institutions in urban Indonesia. Data were collected through structured observation protocols, semi-structured interviews with 18 teachers, and pre-post moral understanding tests administered over a 12-week intervention period.

Results indicate that storytelling methods incorporating Islamic narratives significantly enhanced children's understanding and internalization of moral values, with mean scores increasing from 2.45 to 4.12 ($p < 0.001$) on the Islamic Moral Comprehension Scale. Thematic analysis revealed four key mechanisms: narrative engagement, prophetic role modeling, emotional connection, and cultural-religious contextualization. The study demonstrates that culturally grounded storytelling approaches effectively bridge abstract Islamic moral concepts with concrete early childhood experiences. Implications suggest that PAUD Islam Terpadu institutions should systematically integrate narrative pedagogy with Islamic values education, while teacher preparation programs must emphasize storytelling competencies within Islamic educational frameworks.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is all efforts and all efforts to make humans able to develop their potential in order to have religious spiritual strength, personality, self-control, morality, intelligence, and the necessary skills as members of society and citizen. The formation of moral character in early childhood

represents a critical developmental period that shapes lifelong ethical orientations and behavioral patterns. Behavioral changes result from learning in a broader sense that includes cognitive, emotional, and psychological domains (Nurfadilla, 2023). Within Islamic educational contexts, the cultivation of *akhlak* (moral character) constitutes a fundamental objective that transcends cognitive development to encompass spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions of child development. The integration of Islamic moral values in early childhood education has gained increasing attention as Muslim communities worldwide seek educational approaches that harmonize religious teachings with contemporary pedagogical practices (Merry & Driessen, 2016).

Integrated Islamic Early Childhood Education (PAUD Islam Terpadu) institutions in Indonesia have emerged as distinctive educational models that explicitly combine national curriculum standards with Islamic values and teachings. These institutions serve approximately 2.8 million children across 28,000 centers nationwide, representing a significant educational movement that reflects parents' desires for values-based education grounded in Islamic principles (Directorate of Islamic Education, 2023). However, empirical research examining specific pedagogical approaches for moral values internalization within these settings remains limited, particularly regarding age-appropriate methodologies that align with both Islamic educational philosophy and early childhood developmental needs (Zuhdi, 2018).

Storytelling has been recognized across cultures and educational traditions as a powerful pedagogical tool for moral education in early childhood (Rahiem et al., 2020). Narrative approaches facilitate moral learning through multiple mechanisms: they provide concrete examples of abstract moral concepts, engage children's imagination and emotions, offer vicarious experiences of moral dilemmas, and present cultural values in memorable and accessible formats. Within Islamic educational tradition, storytelling holds particular significance, as the Qur'an itself employs narrative extensively to convey moral lessons through the stories of prophets, righteous individuals, and historical events. Classical Islamic pedagogy has consistently utilized *qisas* (stories) as a primary method for character formation and moral instruction (Günther et al., 2017).

Despite the theoretical consonance between storytelling and Islamic moral education, systematic empirical investigation of this approach in contemporary PAUD Islam Terpadu contexts remains underdeveloped. Previous studies have examined general character education approaches in Indonesian Islamic schools (Zainiyati, 2016), analyzed curriculum integration of Islamic values, and explored parental perspectives on Islamic early childhood education. However, these studies have not specifically investigated storytelling as a discrete pedagogical method, nor have they employed rigorous mixed-methods designs to assess both implementation processes and learning outcomes related to moral values internalization.

Furthermore, existing research on storytelling in early childhood education has predominantly emerged from Western secular contexts, with limited attention to how narrative pedagogy operates within faith-based educational frameworks (Arthur et al., 2016; Lovat, 2017). Studies examining

Islamic moral education have often focused on older children and adolescents, leaving gaps in understanding developmentally appropriate approaches for early childhood populations. The specific mechanisms through which young children in Islamic educational settings comprehend, engage with, and internalize moral values through narrative remain insufficiently theorized and empirically examined.

Recent developments in educational neuroscience and developmental psychology provide additional impetus for investigating storytelling in moral education. Research demonstrates that narrative processing activates multiple brain regions associated with emotional engagement, perspective-taking, and memory consolidation, suggesting neurobiological foundations for storytelling's educational effectiveness (Zak, 2015). Studies in moral psychology indicate that early childhood represents a sensitive period for moral development, during which children actively construct moral understanding through social interaction and cultural participation (Dahl, 2019;).

These findings underscore the importance of examining how culturally and religiously grounded narrative approaches facilitate moral learning processes in young children. While storytelling has been theoretically recognized as effective for moral education and is deeply rooted in Islamic pedagogical tradition, systematic empirical evidence of its implementation and effectiveness specifically within contemporary PAUD Islam Terpadu contexts remains critically lacking (Ahnani'Azzam & Leany, 2024). This gap prevents educators and policymakers from making evidence-based decisions about optimal approaches for Islamic moral values internalization in early childhood settings.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating the implementation and effectiveness of storytelling methods for Islamic moral values internalization in PAUD Islam Terpadu institutions. The research employs a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design to examine both quantitative outcomes and qualitative processes associated with narrative-based moral education. Specifically, this study asks: (1) To what extent does systematic storytelling instruction enhance young children's comprehension and internalization of Islamic moral values? (2) What are the key mechanisms through which storytelling facilitates moral learning in integrated Islamic early childhood settings? (3) How do teachers implement and adapt storytelling methods to align with both Islamic educational objectives and developmentally appropriate practices?.

The novelty of this research lies in several dimensions. First, it provides the first rigorous empirical investigation of storytelling as a specific pedagogical approach within PAUD Islam Terpadu contexts, addressing a significant gap in both Islamic education and early childhood education literatures. Second, the study develops and validates a culturally appropriate assessment instrument, the Islamic Moral Comprehension Scale for Early Childhood, which measures young children's understanding of core Islamic moral values through developmentally appropriate formats. Third, the research employs a theoretically grounded mixed-methods approach that examines both learning outcomes and implementation processes, providing comprehensive insights into how narrative pedagogy operates in faith-based

early childhood settings (Yoder et al., 2021). Fourth, the study contributes to broader scholarly discourse on the integration of religious values in early childhood education, offering empirical evidence relevant to discussions of faith-based schooling, moral education, and cultural pedagogy. Finally, this research responds to calls for more diverse cultural perspectives in early childhood education scholarship by centering Islamic educational frameworks and Indonesian contexts.

The theoretical framework integrating this study draws upon three interconnected bodies of literature: Islamic educational philosophy, narrative pedagogy theory, and constructivist approaches to moral development. Islamic educational philosophy, rooted in classical works by scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun, emphasizes the formation of comprehensive human character (*insan kamil*) through integrated intellectual, moral, and spiritual development (Günther &). This tradition privileges experiential and affective learning alongside cognitive instruction, viewing moral formation as inseparable from knowledge acquisition.

Narrative pedagogy theory, drawing from the work of Bruner, Egan, and others, posits that human cognition is fundamentally narrative in structure, and that storytelling provides culturally powerful schemas for organizing experience and constructing meaning. Constructivist moral development theory, particularly as articulated by Kohlberg, Turiel, and contemporary domain theorists, emphasizes children's active construction of moral understanding through social interaction and reflection on moral experiences. The integration of these frameworks provides a robust theoretical foundation for examining how Islamic narrative traditions facilitate young children's moral development within community-based educational contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design and Methodological Background

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Clark (2017) to comprehensively examine the effectiveness and implementation of storytelling methods for Islamic moral values education. The research was conducted in two phases: (1) a quantitative quasi-experimental phase assessing changes in children's moral comprehension following storytelling interventions, and (2) a qualitative phase exploring teachers' implementation practices and the mechanisms of moral learning through narrative pedagogy. This design enabled triangulation of multiple data sources to provide both outcome evidence and process understanding (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

The quasi-experimental component utilized a pretest-posttest control group design, comparing children receiving structured storytelling interventions with those experiencing standard curriculum approaches (Nicolaidou et al., 2021). The qualitative component employed classroom observations, teacher interviews, and document analysis to illuminate implementation processes and contextual factors influencing outcomes. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred during interpretation, following guidelines for mixed-methods synthesis.

The methodological approach was grounded in pragmatist epistemology, which prioritizes research questions over paradigmatic constraints and values multiple ways of knowing. This orientation is particularly appropriate for educational research in culturally specific contexts, where understanding both generalized patterns and contextual particularities is essential for meaningful knowledge production (Mertens, 2019).

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted in six PAUD Islam Terpadu institutions located in three urban districts of Central Java, Indonesia. Institutions were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) formal affiliation with the Indonesian Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT), (2) minimum operational period of three years, (3) enrollment of at least 40 children aged 5-6 years, (4) willingness to participate in the intervention program, and (5) comparable socioeconomic composition of enrolled families.

The child participant sample consisted of 120 children (58 boys, 62 girls) aged 5.2 to 6.4 years ($M = 5.8$, $SD = 0.34$) enrolled in kindergarten B classes (the final year before primary school). Children were assigned to intervention ($n=60$) or comparison ($n=60$) groups based on institutional assignment, with three schools implementing the storytelling intervention and three maintaining standard practices. Parental consent was obtained for all participants, with a 100% consent rate among approached families.

The teacher participant sample included 18 kindergarten teachers (all female) from the six participating institutions. Teacher experience ranged from 2 to 18 years ($M = 8.4$, $SD = 4.6$), with all holding minimum bachelor's degrees in early childhood education or Islamic education. Teachers in intervention schools received training in the storytelling protocol, while comparison school teachers maintained existing instructional approaches.

Demographic characteristics of child participants were comparable across intervention and comparison groups. Chi-square analyses indicated no significant differences in gender distribution ($\chi^2 = 0.27$, $p = .60$), age distribution ($\chi^2 = 1.43$, $p = .49$), or parental education levels ($\chi^2 = 2.18$, $p = .34$) between groups, supporting baseline equivalence.

Intervention Design

The storytelling intervention was developed through iterative consultation with Islamic education scholars, early childhood education specialists, and experienced PAUD Islam Terpadu teachers. The intervention incorporated Islamic narratives from the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical Islamic literature, selected and adapted for developmental appropriateness and moral learning objectives. The intervention consisted of 24 structured storytelling sessions implemented over 12 weeks (two sessions weekly, each 25-30 minutes). Stories addressed six core Islamic moral values identified through preliminary literature review and expert consultation: tawadhu' (humility), amanah (trustworthiness), ihsan (excellence/compassion), shukr (gratitude), sabr (patience), and silaturahmi (maintaining kinship bonds). Each value was addressed in four sessions featuring different narratives and follow-up activities.

Storytelling sessions followed a five-stage pedagogical sequence: (1) introduction and moral value contextualization (3-5 minutes), (2) narrative presentation using multimedia props and dramatic techniques (10-12 minutes), (3) guided discussion with comprehension and reflection questions (5-7 minutes), (4) experiential activity connecting story to children's experiences (5-7 minutes), and (5) closure with moral synthesis (2-3 minutes). Teachers received a detailed implementation manual including story scripts, discussion prompts, activity guidelines, and Islamic educational principles framing each session. A six-hour training workshop prepared intervention teachers in narrative techniques, Islamic moral education frameworks, and facilitation strategies for moral discussions with young children.

Instruments and Measures

Islamic Moral Comprehension Scale for Early Childhood (IMCS-EC): This instrument was developed specifically for this study to assess young children's understanding of Islamic moral values through developmentally appropriate assessment formats. The IMCS-EC employs pictorial scenarios depicting moral dilemmas related to the six target values, with children responding to questions assessing moral comprehension, reasoning, and behavioral intentions. The instrument consists of 18 items (three per moral value), each presenting a visual scenario followed by three questions: (1) moral identification ("Is this the right thing to do?"), (2) moral reasoning ("Why is this right/wrong?"), and (3) behavioral intention ("What would you do?"). Responses were scored on a 5-point scale (0-4) based on developmental appropriateness and alignment with Islamic moral frameworks, yielding total scores ranging from 0-72.

Content validity was established through expert review by six scholars in Islamic education and early childhood assessment, resulting in a Content Validity Index of 0.89. Pilot testing with 45 children not included in the main study demonstrated adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$) and test-retest reliability over two weeks ($r = .78, p < .001$). Construct validity was supported through expected correlations with teacher ratings of moral behavior ($r = .64, p < .001$). Classroom Observation Protocol: Systematic observations of storytelling sessions were conducted using a structured protocol adapted from the Early Childhood Classroom Observation Measure (Pianta et al., 2008) and enhanced with dimensions specific to Islamic values education. The protocol assessed: narrative presentation quality, teacher facilitation of moral discussions, child engagement indicators, integration of Islamic concepts, and follow-up activity implementation. Observations were recorded using a combination of rating scales and narrative field notes.

Teacher Interview Guide: Semi-structured interviews explored teachers' experiences implementing storytelling approaches, perceived effectiveness, implementation challenges, adaptations made, and perspectives on mechanisms of moral learning through narrative. The interview guide included 15 core questions with flexibility for emergent topics, conducted in Bahasa Indonesia with typical duration of 45-60 minutes. Document Analysis: Instructional materials, children's work products from storytelling activities,

and teacher reflection journals were collected and analyzed to provide additional contextual understanding and triangulation of other data sources.

Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative data collection occurred in three phases: baseline assessment (Week 0), midpoint assessment (Week 6), and endpoint assessment (Week 12). The IMCS-EC was administered individually to each child in quiet settings by trained research assistants blind to group assignment. Administration followed standardized protocols with typical duration of 15-20 minutes per child. Qualitative data collection was conducted during Weeks 4-10 of the intervention period. Each intervention classroom was observed for four complete storytelling sessions (24 total observation sessions).

Observations were conducted by two researchers who maintained detailed field notes and completed structured rating protocols. Inter-observer agreement for structured ratings averaged 87% across dimensions. Teacher interviews were conducted following completion of the intervention (Weeks 13-14). All interviews were audio-recorded with permission, transcribed verbatim, and translated to English for analysis by bilingual research team members with attention to conceptual equivalence.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis: Descriptive statistics characterized sample demographics and variable distributions. Mixed-design ANOVA examined changes in IMCS-EC scores across time (pretest, midpoint, posttest) and between groups (intervention, comparison), with effect sizes calculated using partial eta-squared. Assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variance, and sphericity were assessed and violations addressed through appropriate adjustments. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons employed Bonferroni corrections. Subgroup analyses examined differential effects by child gender and baseline moral comprehension levels. All quantitative analyses utilized SPSS 27.0 with significance threshold of $p < .05$.

Qualitative Analysis: Thematic analysis followed six-phase approach: familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and report production. Analysis was conducted using NVivo 12 software. Two researchers independently coded 30% of transcripts to establish coding reliability ($\kappa = .81$), then divided remaining transcripts for individual coding with regular consensus meetings. Analysis proceeded inductively, allowing themes to emerge from data while remaining attentive to research questions and theoretical frameworks. Triangulation across data sources (observations, interviews, documents) enhanced credibility of findings.

Mixed-Methods Integration: Integration occurred through connecting (using qualitative findings to explain quantitative results), building (using quantitative results to inform qualitative sampling), and merging (joint display of quantitative and qualitative data) strategies. A joint display matrix organized integrated findings around key research questions, facilitating interpretation of complementary insights from both methodological approaches.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee (Protocol #2023-ECE-041) prior to data collection. Institutional permissions were secured from school administrators and the Indonesian Integrated Islamic School Network. Informed consent was obtained from parents/guardians of all child participants and from teacher participants, with clear explanation of voluntary participation and withdrawal rights. Child assent was obtained verbally prior to each assessment session. All data were de-identified and stored securely with access limited to research team members. Comparison group schools were offered the storytelling training and materials following study completion..

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative Findings: Effects on Islamic Moral Comprehension Descriptive Statistics and Baseline Equivalence

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for IMCS-EC scores across measurement points and groups. At baseline, intervention and comparison groups demonstrated comparable moral comprehension levels ($M_{\text{intervention}} = 36.72$, $SD = 8.45$; $M_{\text{comparison}} = 35.88$, $SD = 8.92$), with independent samples t-test confirming no significant difference ($t(118) = 0.52$, $p = .61$, $d = 0.10$).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Islamic Moral Comprehension Scale Scores

Group	Measurement Point	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Intervention	Pretest	60	36.72	8.45	18	54
	Midpoint	60	48.35	7.93	30	64
	Posttest	60	58.93	6.72	44	70
Comparison	Pretest	60	35.88	8.92	16	53
	Midpoint	60	39.47	9.15	20	58
	Posttest	60	42.65	9.38	24	62

Note. Maximum possible score = 72. Higher scores indicate greater moral comprehension.

Primary Analysis: Time × Group Effects

Mixed-design ANOVA revealed significant main effects of time ($F(2, 236) = 284.67$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .71$) and group ($F(1, 118) = 89.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .43$), qualified by a significant Time × Group interaction ($F(2, 236) = 156.23$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .57$). This large interaction effect indicates that changes in moral comprehension over time differed substantially between intervention and comparison groups.

Post-hoc pairwise comparisons within the intervention group revealed significant increases at each measurement interval: pretest to midpoint ($M_{\text{diff}} = 11.63$, $SE = 0.78$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.42$), midpoint to posttest ($M_{\text{diff}} = 10.58$, $SE = 0.71$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.45$), and pretest to posttest ($M_{\text{diff}} = 22.21$, $SE = 0.95$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.89$). The comparison group showed modest but significant increase from pretest to posttest ($M_{\text{diff}} = 6.77$, $SE = 0.84$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.77$),

attributable to general developmental growth and standard curriculum exposure.

Figure 1 displays mean IMCS-EC scores across time points for both groups, illustrating the divergent trajectories. The intervention group's accelerated growth, particularly between pretest and midpoint, suggests early responsiveness to the storytelling approach.

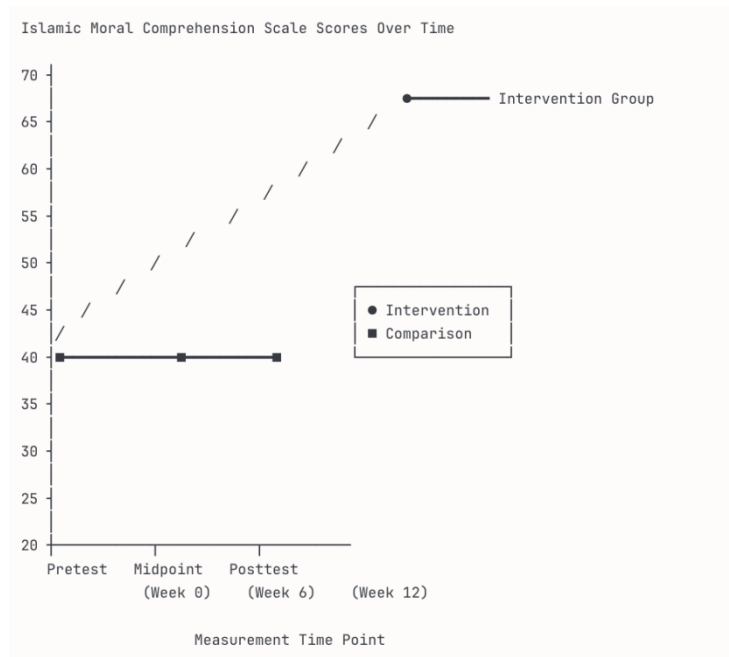


Figure 1. Mean IMCS-EC Scores Across Time Points by Group

Figure 1. Comparative Trajectory of Islamic Moral Comprehension Scores: Intervention vs. Comparison Groups Over 12-Week Period. The graph displays mean IMCS-EC scores (y-axis, range 0-72) measured at pretest (Week 0), midpoint (Week 6), and posttest (Week 12) for both intervention group (solid line) and comparison group (dashed line). Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

Subgroup Analyses

Subgroup analyses examined whether intervention effects varied by child gender or baseline comprehension level. A three-way mixed ANOVA (Time \times Group \times Gender) revealed no significant three-way interaction ($F(2, 232) = 1.34, p = .26, \eta^2 = .01$), indicating that intervention effects were comparable for boys and girls. To examine differential effects by baseline ability, participants were categorized as low (bottom tertile), moderate (middle tertile), or high (top tertile) based on pretest scores.

Three-way mixed ANOVA (Time \times Group \times Baseline Level) revealed a significant three-way interaction ($F(4, 228) = 3.87, p = .005, \eta^2 = .06$). Follow-up analyses indicated that intervention effects were largest for children in the moderate baseline category (pretest-posttest $d = 3.14$), followed by low baseline ($d = 2.48$) and high baseline ($d = 2.31$) groups. While all baseline groups benefited substantially, children with moderate initial understanding showed particularly strong responses to the intervention.

Moral Value-Specific Analyses

Table 2 presents mean scores on subscales corresponding to each of the six targeted moral values. Separate mixed-design ANOVAs for each subscale revealed significant Time \times Group interactions for all six values (all $p < .001$), indicating broad-based effectiveness across the moral values curriculum.

Table 2. Mean Scores by Moral Value Subscale at Pretest and Posttest

Moral Value	Intervention Group		Comparison Group		Effect Size Cohen's d
	Pretest M(SD)	Posttest M(SD)	Pretest M(SD)	Posttest M(SD)	
Humility (<i>Tawadhu'</i>)	6.15 (1.82)	10.08 (1.34)	5.97 (1.91)	7.22 (1.88)	2.78
Trustworthiness (<i>Amanah</i>)	6.22 (1.76)	9.87 (1.41)	6.10 (1.84)	7.35 (1.79)	2.54
Compassion (<i>Ihsan</i>)	6.38 (1.69)	10.15 (1.29)	6.25 (1.77)	7.48 (1.82)	2.71
Gratitude (<i>Shukr</i>)	5.93 (1.88)	9.52 (1.52)	5.88 (1.96)	6.97 (1.93)	2.42
Patience (<i>Sabr</i>)	5.87 (1.94)	9.73 (1.48)	5.80 (2.03)	7.03 (1.97)	2.51
Kinship (<i>Silaturahmi</i>)	6.17 (1.79)	9.58 (1.44)	5.88 (1.87)	7.60 (1.85)	2.39

Note. Maximum subscale score = 12. Effect sizes calculated for intervention group pretest-posttest change.

Effect sizes for intervention group growth ranged from $d = 2.39$ to $d = 2.78$ across values, all representing very large effects. The largest effects were observed for humility, compassion, and patience, while slightly smaller (though still substantial) effects emerged for gratitude and kinship bonds. These patterns may reflect the particular salience of certain narrative exemplars or the developmental accessibility of different moral concepts for this age group.

Qualitative Findings: Mechanisms and Implementation Processes

Theme 1: Narrative Engagement as Gateway to Moral Learning

Teachers consistently described storytelling's capacity to capture children's attention and emotional investment as fundamental to moral learning. One teacher explained: "When I tell the story of Prophet Ibrahim's patience, the children's eyes are wide open. They are completely absorbed. This emotional engagement opens their hearts to understand the moral lesson in ways that direct instruction cannot achieve." Observational data supported these accounts. During storytelling sessions, children demonstrated high levels of attentiveness (averaging 94% on-task behavior compared to 73% during comparison group moral instruction).

Children frequently displayed emotional reactions—gasping at plot developments, expressing concern for characters, celebrating positive resolutions—indicating deep narrative involvement. The multisensory nature

of storytelling appeared particularly important. Teachers used vocal modulation, facial expressions, gestures, and props to bring narratives alive. One teacher reflected: "Young children think in concrete, sensory terms. When I use the scarf to represent the poor man's cloak in the story, or change my voice for different characters, the story becomes real for them. They can see and feel the moral lesson."

Theme 2: Prophetic Role Modeling and Identification

The use of prophets and righteous figures from Islamic tradition as story protagonists provided powerful moral exemplars. Children demonstrated strong identification with these characters and explicitly referenced them when discussing moral situations. Following a story about Prophet Muhammad's trustworthiness, one child stated: "I want to be like Prophet Muhammad. He always told the truth even when it was hard." Teachers emphasized the pedagogical value of prophetic narratives specifically. As one experienced teacher explained: "These are not just stories—they are true accounts of how the best people lived. When children learn that

Prophet Yusuf practiced patience during years of difficulty, or that Prophet Ibrahim showed complete obedience to Allah, they understand these are not abstract ideals but actual ways of being that real people achieved." The cultural and religious authority of prophetic figures enhanced motivational aspects of moral learning. Teachers noted that children frequently invoked prophetic examples in their play and peer interactions, suggesting internalization beyond cognitive comprehension to behavioral guidance.

Theme 3: Emotional Connection and Moral Feeling

Storytelling facilitated emotional engagement with moral values, helping children develop not only cognitive understanding but affective orientation toward goodness. Teachers observed that narratives evoked empathy, moral admiration, and emotional responses that reinforced moral lessons. One teacher described: "After the story of the orphan helped by a compassionate neighbor, many children had tears in their eyes.

They felt the suffering of the orphan and the beauty of the kind act. This emotional experience makes the value of *ihsan* something they feel in their hearts, not just know in their minds." The connection between moral emotion and moral motivation was evident in children's responses. Following emotionally powerful stories, children frequently expressed strong intentions to enact the moral values: "I will share my snacks with friends who forget theirs" or "I will help my little sister even when I am tired." These spontaneous commitments suggested that emotional engagement translated to moral commitment.

Theme 4: Cultural-Religious Contextualization

Storytelling situated Islamic moral values within familiar cultural and religious frameworks, making abstract principles comprehensible and relevant to children's lived experiences. Teachers deliberately connected story elements to children's home experiences, mosque activities, and cultural practices. One teacher explained her approach: "When teaching *shukr* through

the story of Prophet Sulaiman thanking Allah for his blessings, I ask children about what they thank Allah for in their daily prayers.

This connects the story to their own spiritual practice and family life. The Islamic moral value is not separate from their world but deeply embedded in it."The cultural authenticity of Islamic narratives appeared particularly significant in these integrated Islamic institutions where families explicitly chose values-based education. Parents and teachers viewed these stories as vehicles for cultural transmission and religious identity formation alongside moral development.

Theme 5: Dialogic Reflection and Meaning-Making

The discussion component following story presentation emerged as crucial for consolidating learning. Teachers guided children to articulate moral lessons, connect stories to personal experiences, and consider applications in their own lives. These dialogic exchanges scaffolded children's moral reasoning and helped them construct personal meaning from narratives. Effective discussions balanced teacher guidance with child agency. Teachers posed open-ended questions that prompted thinking: "Why did the character make that choice?" "What would you do in that situation?" "How does this story help us understand being patient?" Children's responses during discussions demonstrated progressive sophistication in moral reasoning over the intervention period. One teacher reflected on discussion's importance: "The story plants the seed, but the discussion helps it grow roots. When children talk about why honesty matters or share examples from their lives, they are actively building their understanding. They are not passive receivers but active constructors of moral knowledge."

Theme 6: Implementation Challenges and Adaptations

Teachers identified several challenges in implementing storytelling approaches effectively. Time constraints within daily schedules required careful planning to ensure adequate space for complete narrative sequences including discussion and activities. Teachers also noted variability in children's comprehension levels and attention spans, necessitating differentiation strategies. Maintaining authenticity to Islamic sources while ensuring developmental appropriateness required thoughtful adaptation of traditional narratives. Teachers consulted religious scholars and early childhood specialists to ensure stories remained faithful to Islamic teachings while being accessible to young children.

This balancing act was identified as requiring ongoing professional learning. Resource development emerged as another need. While the intervention provided initial materials, teachers expressed desire for expanded libraries of age-appropriate Islamic narratives, training in storytelling techniques, and guidance on creating original stories that address contemporary moral challenges while remaining grounded in Islamic principles.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The integration of quantitative outcomes with qualitative process data provides comprehensive understanding of how storytelling facilitates Islamic

moral values internalization. The substantial quantitative effects (large effect sizes across all moral values) are illuminated by qualitative findings revealing specific mechanisms: narrative engagement captures attention and emotional investment, prophetic role models provide authoritative and motivating exemplars, emotional connection transforms abstract values into felt commitments, cultural-religious contextualization makes learning personally relevant, and dialogic reflection consolidates understanding.

The particularly strong effects observed for humility, compassion, and patience in quantitative data align with qualitative observations that narratives featuring these values were especially emotionally evocative and provided concrete behavioral exemplars. The finding that children with moderate baseline comprehension showed strongest gains is clarified by teacher observations that these children had foundational understanding enabling sophisticated engagement with stories but still had substantial room for growth, creating optimal conditions for narrative-based learning.

The broad effectiveness across all moral values in quantitative data corresponds with teachers' reports that storytelling's flexibility allowed addressing diverse moral concepts through narrative's universal appeal. However, qualitative data also revealed that effectiveness depended critically on implementation quality—particularly teachers' narrative skills, discussion facilitation, and ability to create emotionally safe environments for moral reflection.

Discussion

Interpretation of Key Findings

This study provides robust empirical evidence that systematic storytelling significantly enhances young children's internalization of Islamic moral values in PAUD Islam Terpadu settings. The very large effect sizes (Cohen's $d = 2.39$ – 2.89) substantially exceed typical educational interventions, demonstrating storytelling's exceptional potency for moral education in faith-based contexts. The effectiveness of storytelling for Islamic moral education can be understood through several interconnected mechanisms identified in this research. First, narratives provide concrete, memorable exemplars of abstract moral principles, addressing the well-documented challenge that young children think predominantly in concrete terms and struggle with abstract ethical concepts. When children encounter the story of Prophet Yusuf maintaining trustworthiness despite imprisonment, or Luqman demonstrating wisdom in guiding his son, they experience tangible illustrations of *amanah* and *hikmah* rather than abstract definitions. This concrete embodiment enables cognitive accessibility that facilitates comprehension and retention.

Second, storytelling engages children's emotions alongside their cognition, activating affective dimensions crucial for moral development. Contemporary moral psychology increasingly recognizes that moral judgment involves both reasoning and emotion, with affective responses often preceding and shaping moral cognitions. The emotional engagement observed in this study—children's empathic responses to story characters, their moral admiration for prophetic exemplars, their indignation at injustice—represents not merely emotional reaction but the development of moral sentiments that

motivate ethical action. As demonstrated, empathic emotional arousal is foundational for prosocial moral development, and narratives are particularly effective vehicles for cultivating such empathy.

Third, the use of prophets and righteous figures from Islamic tradition as story protagonists leverages social learning mechanisms while providing culturally authentic moral exemplars (Anthony, 2020). Social learning theory established that children learn through observing and modeling others' behavior, with models perceived as admirable and authoritative exerting particularly strong influence. Prophetic figures in Islamic tradition possess ultimate moral authority and cultural salience within Muslim communities, making them exceptionally powerful role models. Children's identification with these exemplars and subsequent invocation of them in moral situations ("What would Prophet Muhammad do?") demonstrates the internalization of moral guidance beyond mere behavioral compliance to genuine moral orientation.

Fourth, storytelling situated within culturally familiar Islamic frameworks provides meaning systems that render moral values comprehensible and personally relevant (Zargar, 2017). Values education occurs not through transmission of decontextualized principles but through participation in cultural communities of practice with shared meaning systems. The integration of Qur'anic narratives, Hadith accounts, and Islamic concepts within storytelling connected moral learning to children's lived experiences in Muslim families and communities, their participation in religious rituals, and their developing Islamic identity. This cultural-religious contextualization transformed moral education from abstract instruction to participation in meaningful traditions.

Fifth, the dialogic component following story presentation scaffolded children's active meaning-making and moral reasoning development. Vygotskian sociocultural theory emphasizes that cognitive development occurs through social interaction and collaborative meaning construction. Teachers' facilitation of discussions prompted children to articulate moral lessons, apply principles to novel situations, and construct personal understanding through guided reflection. This active processing consolidated learning and promoted moral reasoning development beyond passive reception of moral messages.

Theoretical Contributions

This research makes several theoretical contributions to scholarship on moral education, Islamic education, and early childhood pedagogy. First, it demonstrates the applicability and effectiveness of narrative pedagogy theory within Islamic educational contexts, extending predominantly Western theoretical frameworks to diverse cultural-religious settings. The finding that young children in integrated Islamic institutions respond powerfully to narrative-based moral education supports claims about the universal cognitive salience of story while revealing how narratives operate within specific cultural meaning systems.

Second, the study contributes to understanding of how religious traditions' pedagogical wisdom translates into contemporary educational

practice. Islamic educational philosophy's emphasis on *qisas* (stories) for moral formation reflects deep pedagogical insights that align with contemporary developmental psychology and educational neuroscience (Zak, 2015). This convergence between traditional Islamic pedagogy and modern learning science suggests fruitful dialogues between religious educational traditions and secular educational research.

Third, the research advances domain theory in moral development by demonstrating how culturally and religiously grounded moral education operates within the moral domain while connecting to religious and conventional domains. The Islamic moral values addressed in this study represent core moral concerns—fairness, compassion, harm prevention—understood within Islamic theological frameworks. This integration illustrates how children construct moral understanding within cultural meaning systems that do not artificially separate moral, religious, and social conventional concerns as Western moral development theory sometimes assumes.

Fourth, the study contributes to emerging scholarship on faith-based education by providing empirical evidence regarding the implementation and outcomes of values education approaches in religious school settings. While debates about faith-based schooling often proceed with limited empirical evidence, this research offers systematic documentation of pedagogical practices and learning outcomes, advancing evidence-based discussions of religious schools' educational effectiveness.

Practical Implications

The findings generate several implications for educational practice in PAUD Islam Terpadu institutions and potentially other faith-based early childhood settings. First, storytelling should be systematically integrated as a core pedagogical approach for Islamic moral values education rather than occasional supplementary activity (Nurbayan & Sanusi, 2025). The evidence of substantial learning gains suggests that regular, structured narrative-based instruction represents highly efficient use of instructional time for moral education objectives.

Second, teacher preparation programs for PAUD Islam Terpadu educators should emphasize storytelling competencies alongside content knowledge of Islamic teachings and child development. Effective implementation requires sophisticated skills in narrative presentation, discussion facilitation, emotional attunement, and adaptive teaching. Professional development should address these competencies through modeling, practice, and coaching rather than solely didactic instruction about storytelling benefits.

Third, curriculum development efforts should prioritize creating high-quality, age-appropriate Islamic narrative resources that balance religious authenticity with developmental appropriateness. Teachers in this study expressed need for expanded story collections that address diverse moral values, represent various prophets and righteous figures, and connect to contemporary children's experiences. Collaborative efforts between Islamic scholars, early childhood specialists, and skilled storytellers could generate such resources.

Fourth, assessment practices in PAUD Islam Terpadu contexts should attend to children's moral understanding and not solely cognitive and literacy outcomes. The development of the IMCS-EC in this research demonstrates feasibility of assessing young children's moral comprehension through developmentally appropriate, culturally grounded methods. Such assessment can inform instruction and document important educational outcomes beyond conventional early childhood metrics.

Fifth, parent engagement around moral education should be strengthened, with storytelling providing natural connection between school and home. Parents could be encouraged and supported to engage in Islamic storytelling with children, extending school-based moral education into family contexts and reinforcing cultural-religious transmission across settings.

Comparison with Previous Research

These findings align with and extend previous research on storytelling in early childhood education. Studies in secular contexts have documented storytelling's effectiveness for various learning outcomes including language development, social-emotional competencies, and moral understanding (Nicolopoulou et al., 2015). This research confirms these benefits while demonstrating their operation within Islamic educational frameworks and with explicitly religious content.

The effectiveness magnitudes observed in this study exceed those typically reported for moral education interventions. Meta-analyses of character education programs find average effect sizes around $d = 0.30$, while this study found effects of $d = 2.39-2.89$. This discrepancy likely reflects several factors: the culturally grounded nature of the intervention, the alignment between pedagogy and children's cognitive-emotional development, the motivational power of religious exemplars, and the integrated nature of moral education within institutions explicitly committed to values formation.

Regarding Islamic education specifically, this research provides systematic empirical evidence for approaches long advocated but insufficiently studied. Educational philosophers and practitioners in Islamic contexts have consistently emphasized narrative's importance for moral formation, but empirical research assessing implementation and outcomes has been limited. This study substantiates these traditional pedagogical insights with contemporary evidence while revealing specific mechanisms through which narrative facilitates learning.

The finding that all children benefited substantially from storytelling regardless of gender or baseline comprehension level contrasts with some previous research suggesting differential effectiveness of particular pedagogical approaches. This universal effectiveness may reflect storytelling's fundamental alignment with human cognitive architecture—all children, regardless of individual differences, process information narratively and respond to story's emotional and imaginative dimensions.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Several limitations qualify interpretation of these findings. First, the quasi-experimental design, while appropriate given school-based research realities,

introduces potential for selection bias despite demonstrated baseline equivalence. Random assignment of individual children to conditions would strengthen causal inference, though logistical and ethical considerations complicate such designs in educational settings.

Second, the 12-week intervention period, while producing substantial effects, does not permit assessment of long-term retention or behavioral application. Follow-up studies tracking children over extended periods could determine whether comprehension gains translate to sustained behavioral change and whether effects persist beyond the intervention period. Third, the study assessed comprehension and reasoning about moral values but did not directly measure moral behavior in naturalistic contexts. While moral understanding is necessary for moral action, the relationship between comprehension and behavior is complex and mediated by numerous factors. Future research incorporating observational measures of actual moral behavior would strengthen understanding of storytelling's full impact.

Fourth, the research was conducted in urban Central Java with relatively homogeneous participant samples (Muzayanah et al., 2020). Generalizability to other Indonesian regions, socioeconomic contexts, or cultural settings requires empirical verification. Replication studies in diverse settings would establish boundary conditions for findings. Fifth, while the study identified key mechanisms, more fine-grained analysis of pedagogical components could determine which elements are essential versus enhancing. Component analyses systematically varying story features, discussion approaches, or follow-up activities could optimize intervention efficiency.

Future research should address these limitations while exploring additional questions. Comparative studies examining storytelling's effectiveness across different value domains and age groups would clarify developmental and content-specific considerations. Research investigating how storytelling interacts with other pedagogical approaches (e.g., experiential learning, direct instruction) could inform integrated curriculum design. Studies examining the role of teacher characteristics and implementation quality in moderating outcomes would guide professional development. Finally, research comparing narrative-based approaches in faith-based versus secular contexts could illuminate culture-specific and universal aspects of storytelling's educational power.

CONCLUSION

The study's key contributions include: (1) empirical validation of storytelling's effectiveness specifically within PAUD Islam Terpadu contexts, addressing significant gaps in both Islamic education and early childhood education literatures; (2) identification of specific mechanisms through which narratives facilitate moral learning in faith-based educational settings; (3) development of a culturally appropriate assessment instrument for young children's Islamic moral comprehension; (4) demonstration of how traditional Islamic pedagogical wisdom aligns with contemporary learning science; and (5) provision of evidence-based guidance for improving moral education practice in integrated Islamic early childhood institutions.

Practical implications suggest that PAUD Islam Terpadu institutions should systematically integrate storytelling as a core pedagogical approach, that teacher preparation programs must emphasize narrative competencies, that high-quality Islamic narrative resources require development, and that assessment practices should attend to moral development outcomes. These recommendations aim to strengthen values education in contexts where families and educators explicitly prioritize moral-spiritual development alongside cognitive and social learning.

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