



Enhancing Religious Values and Moral Character in Early Childhood Through Growth Mindset-Based Islamic Storytelling Strategies: A Mixed-Methods Study

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ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the importance of developing religious values and moral behavior in early childhood as a foundation for character formation. One strategy that can be used to instill these values is Islamic stories combined with a growth mindset approach. This study aims to determine the improvement of religious values and moral character in early childhood through a growth mindset-based Islamic story strategy. The study used a mixed methods approach with an explanatory sequential design. The research subjects were 10 children aged 5–6 years. Quantitative data were obtained through observations using religious values and moral character assessment sheets given before (pretest) and after treatment (posttest), while qualitative data were obtained through observations during the learning process and documentation of children's activities. Quantitative data analysis was carried out descriptively and inferentially using the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test method, while qualitative data were analyzed descriptively to clarify the results of the quantitative data analysis. The study showed that the average value of religion and moral character of children increased from 13 in the initial trial to 21.9 in the final trial. The results of the Wilcoxon Test showed that all children experienced an increase in scores after treatment. Qualitative findings indicate that children are more enthusiastic about participating in learning activities, are able to identify good behaviors through Islamic stories, are active in coloring and discussion activities, and are able to practice religious values and morals through role-playing activities. Combining the results of quantitative and qualitative research indicates that a growth mindset-based Islamic story strategy is quite effective in improving religious values and moral attitudes in early childhood. This is achieved through learning experiences that are meaningful, enjoyable, and developmentally appropriate.

INTRODUCTION

Strengthening religious values and moral character in early childhood remains a challenge in educational practice, as implementation has not yet fully achieved the intended goals (Ainiyah, 2021). Instilling religious and moral values from childhood plays a crucial role in shaping a positive personality and character (Rohman, 2018). Early childhood is a pivotal developmental stage, as children experience rapid growth and development across various aspects of life-including cognitive abilities, social skills, emotional regulation, and spiritual development-during this time (Sari, 2025). Therefore, providing appropriate stimulation

regarding religious values and moral character from an early age is essential to establish a foundation for the child's future character formation. Religious values and moral character instilled early on tend to become deeply ingrained, serving as the basis for the child's future behavior. From an Islamic perspective, instilling values such as honesty, patience, responsibility, a spirit of helpfulness, and obedience to Allah SWT forms the primary foundation for cultivating noble character in children (Lestari et al., 2022).

However, the reality on the ground indicates that the development of religious values and moral character in early childhood has not yet yielded optimal results. Instances are still observed of children lacking decorum during acts of worship, failing to demonstrate polite speech, and lacking an understanding of the importance of honesty, patience, and cooperation in daily life (Lubis & Siregar, 2021). This situation suggests that the approaches currently used to teach religious values and moral character are not entirely suited to the learning needs of young children, as they require methods that are concrete, enjoyable, and meaningful (Hardika, 2020). One learning strategy that is relevant and well-suited to the world of children is the use of Islamic stories. These stories convey religious messages and examples of virtuous character indirectly through their characters and plots. Tales of the prophets and exemplary figures in Islam serve as effective tools for instilling religious values and moral character, as they are easy to understand, engaging, and resonate with children's imaginations (Marlina & Wahyuni, 2022).

Nevertheless, the implementation of Islamic storytelling strategies in learning often remains a one-way process, relegating children to the role of passive listeners. Such an approach risks limiting active engagement and hindering children from deeply internalizing religious and moral values (Anantia, 2022). Therefore, there is a need to strengthen Islamic storytelling strategies so that they go beyond mere narration and effectively shape children's mindsets and attitudes in a positive way.

The growth mindset approach offers a relevant alternative for strengthening Islamic storytelling strategies. A growth mindset emphasizes that abilities and positive attitudes can be developed through learning, effort, and perseverance. Recent research by Sigmundsson and Haga (2024) indicates that individuals with a strong growth mindset also exhibit higher levels of passion and grit—key factors in achievement and learning. Through learning about religious values and character, children are guided to understand that behaviors reflecting faith and good character are not formed overnight (Campbell & Lokken, 2023). This process requires consistent practice, determination in facing challenges, and the ability to learn from past mistakes (Mustofa & Illahi, 2022). Through sustained learning experiences, children are expected to develop positive attitudes aligned with religious values and the norms governing daily life (Alkatiri & Susilarini, 2025).

This research is significant due to the scarcity of empirical studies comprehensively examining the implementation of growth-mindset-based Islamic storytelling strategies for early childhood. Previous studies—such as those by Fauzi (2022) have largely focused on the general effectiveness of storytelling methods without specifically integrating a growth-mindset approach. Thus, the novelty of this study lies in the integration of Islamic storytelling strategies with a growth-mindset approach to enhance religious and moral values in young children. Meanwhile, research by Durrotunnisa et al. (2022) has demonstrated that psychological variables—such as

resilience, gratitude, and life satisfaction-are interconnected and can be measured and improved through appropriate interventions. This opens up opportunities to further investigate how growth-mindset-based Islamic storytelling strategies can contribute to these aspects, which, in the context of early childhood, are reflected in religious and moral values (Durrotunnisa & Erniati, 2023).

Methods approach to gain a more comprehensive understanding. A quantitative approach will be used to objectively measure the extent of the improvement in children's religious and moral values following the intervention-akin to the study by durrotunnisa et al. (2024), which measured improvements in children's resilience using a "letter box" medium. Meanwhile, a qualitative approach will be utilized to explore in depth the strategy implementation process, children's responses, and the facilitating and inhibiting factors-similar to the qualitative study by durrotunnisa et al. (2022), which deeply explored students' life satisfaction. Thus, the study's findings are expected to provide empirical evidence regarding the strategy's success while also offering a contextual picture of how and why the strategy succeeded (durrotunnisa & atmoko, 2020).

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of a growth-mindset-based Islamic storytelling strategy in enhancing religious and moral values in early childhood, identify children's responses during the learning process, and describe the factors supporting and hindering the implementation of the strategy. The study is expected to yield empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of this strategy and provide recommendations for educators on strengthening religious and moral values in young children.

METHODS

This study employs a mixed-methods approach with a sequential explanatory design. The design process is carried out in two stages: the first involves collecting and analyzing quantitative data, while the second entails collecting and analyzing qualitative data to explain the results derived from the quantitative data (Nursapia, 2020). This method was selected because it not only demonstrates improvements in the religious values and behavior of early childhood learners following the intervention but also describes how that improvement unfolded during the teaching and learning process.

The study was conducted at Idhata Beka Kindergarten in Marawola District, Sigi Regency, Central Sulawesi, during the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The research subjects consisted of 10 children from Group B, aged 5–6 years. A total sampling technique was employed, meaning all children in Group B served as the research subjects. For the qualitative phase, the informants included classroom teachers and selected parents; these individuals were chosen purposively due to their involvement in the learning process and their ability to provide accurate information regarding the children's development throughout the study.

Quantitative data were collected through structured observation using an assessment rubric for religious values and moral character, administered before the intervention (pretest) and after the intervention (posttest). The assessment instrument was developed based on indicators of development in religious values and moral character, covering habits of worship, politeness, honesty, responsibility, cooperation, empathy, patience, and an attitude of diligence and

perseverance. Assessments were conducted using four developmental levels: Not Yet Developed (BB), Starting to Develop (MB), Developing as Expected (BSH), and Developing Very Well (BSB).

Table 1. Rubric for Assessing the Development of Children's Religious Values and Moral Character

Score	Kategori	Assessment Criteria
1	Not yet developed (BB)	The child is not yet behaving as desired, despite having been given examples, instructions, and guidance by the teacher.
2	Beginning to develop (MB)	The child is beginning to demonstrate expected behavior but still requires frequent guidance and reminders from the teacher.
3	Developing as expected (BSH)	A child who is able to demonstrate the desired behavior on their own, even though they may sometimes still require assistance or guidance from the teacher.
4	Developing very well (BSB)	The child consistently displays good behavior without needing reminders and serves as a role model for their friends.

Table 2. Assessment Indicators for Religious Values and Moral Character

Aspect	Indicator
Religious values	Praying before and after activities, exchanging greetings, participating in religious activities.
Honesty	Tell the truth, admit mistakes
Responsibility	Complete the assignments given by the teacher
Cooperation	Willing to share and cooperate with friends.
Empathy	Helping a friend who is facing difficulties
Patience	Wait your turn and control your emotions
<i>Growth mindset</i>	Willing to try again after a setback and not easily giving up, accepting guidance from the teacher to correct mistakes.

Prior to use in the study, the instrument was validated by two experts-an early childhood education specialist and an Islamic religious education specialist-to assess the suitability of indicators, language clarity, and the measurability of the observed aspects. The validation results served as the basis for refining the instrument (Rusydi, 2024). Subsequently, the reliability of the observation instrument was tested via inter-rater agreement using Cohen's Kappa coefficient. The instrument was deemed reliable if the Kappa coefficient fell within the moderate to very strong range ($\kappa > 0.60$).

Qualitative data were obtained through direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and the review of relevant documents (Sugiyono, 2022). Observations were conducted during the learning process to assess the children's level of engagement, their responses to Islamic stories, and behavioral changes reflecting religious values and good manners. Semi-structured interviews

were conducted with classroom teachers and parents to gather information on behavioral changes, the children's responses to learning activities, factors facilitating or hindering the success of these activities, and the application of religious and moral values in daily life-both at school and at home. Documentation-including photographs of learning activities, children's work, coloring sheets, developmental records, and instructional materials-served as evidence to support the findings from observations and interviews (Fauzi, 2022).

Figure 1. *Image of good behavior*



Figure 2. *Simple role-playing medium*



The intervention was administered through learning activities outlined in the Daily Lesson Plan (RPPH), utilizing a growth-mindset-based Islamic storytelling strategy. Instructional media included illustrated storybooks, images depicting positive behaviors, coloring sheets, crayons or colored pencils, and simple role-playing props. Through these activities, children were introduced to religious and moral values-such as honesty, responsibility, patience, cooperation, caring, and perseverance. The growth mindset approach was implemented by providing motivation, positive reinforcement, and habituation practices that encouraged children to believe that positive behaviors can be developed through effort, practice, and learning experiences (Sari, 2019).

Quantitative data analysis employed descriptive statistics to determine the minimum and maximum scores, mean, frequency, and percentage of pretest and posttest results. Subsequently, inferential analysis was conducted using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test-facilitated by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software-to identify differences in scores before and after the intervention. Decision-making was based on a significance level of 0.05. If the significance value (Sig.) was less than 0.05, a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores was indicated, thereby deeming the growth-mindset-based Islamic storytelling strategy effective in enhancing religious and moral values in early childhood. Conversely, if the significance value (Sig.) exceeded 0.05, no significant difference between pretest and posttest scores was found. Meanwhile, qualitative data analysis utilized the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, comprising three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying data derived from observations, interviews, and documentation. Finally, the data were presented in narrative and thematic matrix formats to facilitate understanding. The final stage involved drawing conclusions and iteratively verifying findings until consistent and reliable data were obtained. Data integration took place during the interpretation phase by combining results from the quantitative analysis with findings from the qualitative investigation,

thereby yielding a more comprehensive perspective on the effectiveness of growth-mindset-based Islamic storytelling strategies in enhancing religious values and moral character in early childhood.

This study aimed to determine the improvement in religious values and moral character among early childhood children through the use of Islamic storytelling strategies grounded in a growth mindset. Data were collected by observing 10 children aged 5–6 years before and after the intervention.

The observation results showed pretest scores ranging from a low of 11 to a high of 15, with an average of 13. Following the intervention-which utilized Islamic storytelling strategies based on a growth mindset-posttest results showed a minimum score of 20 and a maximum of 25, with an average of 21.9. These findings indicate that the children's religious values and moral character improved after participating in the learning activities.

Table 3. Categorization of Pretest Results

Category	Frequency	Presentation
Low	2	20%
Currently	5	50%
Tall	3	30%
Amount	10	100%

Table 3 shows that, prior to the intervention, the majority of the children (50%) fell into the medium category regarding religious and moral values. The low category accounted for 20%, while the high category accounted for 30%.

Table 4. Categorization of Post-test Results

Category	Frequency	Presentation
Low	0	0%
Currently	8	80%
Tall	2	20%
Amount	10	100%

Table 4 shows that the children's religious and moral values improved following the implementation of a growth-mindset-based Islamic storytelling strategy. The "low" category, which previously stood at 20%, dropped to 0%. The majority of children (80%) fell into the "medium" category, while the "high" category accounted for 20% (Septiani, 2022).

Results from the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test indicated that all children showed an increase in scores after receiving the intervention. The test results revealed 10 children with positive ranks, zero with negative ranks, and zero with tied or uncalculated results. These findings demonstrate that all study subjects experienced improvement after participating in Islamic storytelling activities that utilized a growth-mindset approach.

In addition to quantitative data, observations made during the learning sessions revealed behavioral changes reflecting an improvement in the children's religious and moral values. These observational data are summarized in Table 5 to illustrate the frequency of positive behaviors exhibited during the learning activities.

Table 5. Frequency of Children's Positive Behaviors During Learning

No	Behavioral Indicators	Frequency (Children)	Persentation
1	Answering questions about the moral of the story	9	90%
2	Mentioning examples of good behavior from story characters.	9	90%
3	Identifying good behavior in the pictures	8	80%
4	Greeting others during role-play	10	100%
5	Helping a friend during group activities.	8	80%
6	Apologizing when making a mistak	7	70%
7	Demonstrating a cooperative attitud	9	90%
8	Wanting to try again after facing difficulties.	8	80%

Based on Table 5, the majority of children demonstrated positive behavior during the learning session. Ninety percent of the children were able to answer questions regarding the story's moral message and cite examples of good behavior modeled by characters in the Islamic stories. All children (100%) were able to offer greetings during the role-playing activity, while 80% demonstrated cooperation, a willingness to help peers, and the courage to try again when facing difficulties (Azhari, 2020).



Figure 3. *Growth Mindset-Based Activity: Children Listening to Islamic Stories*

During the activity of listening to illustrated Islamic stories, the children appeared enthusiastic as they followed the narrative and were able to answer the teacher's questions regarding the characters and the moral lessons conveyed. Most children could identify positive behaviors modeled by the characters, such as speaking truthfully, helping friends, apologizing, and respecting others (Siregar & Anggraeni, 2022).

In the activity involving observing images of positive behaviors and coloring, the children demonstrated the ability to identify actions that align with religious and moral values (Ayuni et al., 2024). They were able to explain their reasons for identifying specific actions as positive behaviors and showed an interest in emulating those behaviors in their daily activities (Boylan et al., 2023).

Observational findings also indicate that simple role-playing activities help children apply the values they have learned through real-life experiences. Children appeared more confident in demonstrating behaviors such as helping peers, offering greetings, apologizing for mistakes, and collaborating on group tasks. These findings align with quantitative results showing an increase in the average score from 13 in the pre-test to 21.9 in the post-test. Thus, the observational data not only illustrate the learning process but also support the statistical results regarding the improvement in children's religious and moral values following the implementation of the growth-mindset-based Islamic storytelling strategy.

RESULT

Research findings indicate that the use of growth-mindset-based Islamic storytelling strategies positively impacts the development of religious and moral values in early childhood. This is evidenced by the increase in students' average scores from 13 in the pre-test to 21.9 in the post-test. Furthermore, assessment results show that all children achieved higher scores after participating in the instructional process.

These quantitative findings are reinforced by observations showing an increase in behaviors aligned with the learning objectives throughout the activity. During the session, the children demonstrated more active participation, listened attentively to the teacher's storytelling, and were able to answer questions regarding the moral and religious values embedded in the stories (Fitriyani, 2021). This indicates that Islamic stories are capable of capturing children's attention while helping them grasp moral messages in a more tangible way.

This improvement occurs because the strategy of using Islamic stories creates an enjoyable learning process and provides children with valuable insights (Handayani, 2023). Storytelling activities incorporating Islamic values offer children a clear picture of behaviors aligned with religious teachings-such as honesty, responsibility, politeness, mutual respect, and care for others (Hasanah, 2019). Such learning helps children understand these values while also fostering the habit of applying them in their daily lives (Azka et al., 2024). Stories presented in picture books make it easier for children to grasp moral messages, as they align with the cognitive style of early childhood, which relies on concrete thinking (Herlina et al., 2024).

The use of visual aids depicting positive behaviors, combined with coloring activities, can support children's understanding of religious and moral values. Through these activities, children actively participate in identifying, comprehending, and recalling examples of commendable behavior, making these values easier to grasp and apply in daily life (Magdalena, 2022).

In this context, adopting a growth mindset approach enables children to understand that abilities and positive behaviors can be developed through effort, practice, and habituation (Macnamara & Burgoyne, 2023). During the activities, teachers provide positive reinforcement when children strive to demonstrate good behavior. Such reinforcement helps children build self-confidence, develop resilience, and gain the courage to correct their mistakes (Dweck, 2016).

Qualitative findings indicate that simple role-playing serves as an effective method for reinforcing understanding and internalizing the values that have been learned (Medrofa et al., 2024). Children not only grasp moral messages as abstract concepts but also learn to apply them in their daily behavior and interactions with peers. Throughout the learning activities, children are guided to cultivate a spirit of cooperation and sharing, acknowledge mistakes by apologizing, and demonstrate care and empathy toward their social environment (Rahman & Fitriani, 2019).

Observations made during the study reveal that the children are more engaged and enthusiastic about the learning process; they are able to recount the messages from the stories and exhibit behavioral changes that reflect religious values and good manners (Durrutunnisa et al., 2025). The children are increasingly accustomed to praying before activities, offering greetings, waiting for their turn, sharing with friends, and attempting to correct their mistakes when guided by the teacher.

Synthesized data from quantitative and qualitative research indicates that the improvement in religious and moral values-observed in pre- and post-test results-is supported by actual behavioral changes occurring during the learning process (Fadilah, 2021). Thus, the Islamic storytelling strategy employing a growth mindset approach not only enhances assessment outcomes but also plays a role in optimizing child development; it helps instill character values and fosters positive behaviors in early childhood through meaningful learning experiences (Hardiyanti et al., 2022).

Consequently, an Islamic storytelling strategy grounded in a growth mindset can serve as an effective educational option for strengthening early childhood understanding of religious values and prosocial behavior (Haryaningrum, 2024). Integrating Islamic stories, engaging instructional media, and a growth mindset approach can render the learning process more enjoyable, meaningful, and aligned with early childhood development.

CONCLUSION

Research findings demonstrate that a growth-mindset-based Islamic storytelling strategy is effective in enhancing religious and moral values among early childhood students at TK Idhata Beka. Quantitative analysis reveals an increase in the average score from 13 in the pre-test to 21.9 in the post-test. The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test further indicates that every child showed score improvement following the instructional intervention. These quantitative findings are supported by observational data showing positive behavioral changes, such as increased habits of prayer, offering greetings, cooperation, responsibility, sharing with peers, and respecting others. The children also displayed greater active engagement and enthusiasm throughout the learning process. A growth-mindset-based Islamic storytelling strategy serves as an effective instructional alternative for reinforcing religious and moral values in early childhood education. These results imply that early childhood education institutions and teachers should integrate Islamic stories and a growth-mindset approach into learning activities to support character development.

Future research is recommended to test the strategy's effectiveness with larger sample sizes and within different educational settings. Subsequent studies could also focus on developing more specific instruments to measure growth mindset in young children and examining the strategy's long-term impact on character development.

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