

Storytelling with Islamic Values: Shaping Early Language and Faith – or Just Another Story?

Ristawati¹, Anida ², Rita Zahra³, Muhammad Iqbal⁴, Shiti Maghfira⁵

^{1,2} Universitas Islam Kebangsaan Indonesia, Indonesia

³ STMIK Indonesia Banda Aceh, Indonesia

⁴ Universitas Malikussaleh, Indonesia

⁵ Tohoku University, Jepang

Abstract. Storytelling has been recognized as an effective method for early childhood learning, particularly in developing language skills and instilling moral and religious values. However, the extent to which storytelling infused with Islamic values differs from conventional storytelling in shaping early childhood outcomes remains underexplored. The purpose of this research is to critically examine the effectiveness of Islamic storytelling compared to conventional storytelling in influencing early childhood language abilities and inducing foundational religious comprehension. A quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design was employed, involving 60 children aged 5–6 years from two kindergartens. The experimental group received Islamic storytelling interventions over eight sessions, while the control group engaged in conventional storytelling. Data were collected through pre-test and post-test assessments measuring receptive and expressive language skills, as well as basic understanding of Islamic values. Data analysis techniques included paired sample t-tests and independent sample t-tests to compare mean score differences within and between groups. The results indicate that while both groups showed improvement, the experimental group demonstrated significantly higher gains in both language development and religious understanding compared to the control group. These findings suggest that Islamic storytelling offers distinct advantages beyond those of conventional storytelling, particularly in integrating cognitive-linguistic growth with spiritual formation. This study contributes a critical perspective on the added value of value-based storytelling in early childhood education and offers practical implications for educators seeking to optimize learning media that align with both developmental and religious goals.

Keywords: *Islamic storytelling; early childhood language development; religious education; learning media*

Abstrak. Bercerita telah lama diakui sebagai metode yang efektif untuk pembelajaran anak usia dini, terutama dalam mengembangkan keterampilan bahasa dan menanamkan nilai-nilai moral dan agama. Namun, sejauh mana penceritaan yang diresapi dengan nilai-nilai Islam berbeda dari penceritaan berbasis konvensional dalam membentuk hasil anak usia dini masih belum dieksplorasi. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengkaji secara kritis efektivitas mendongeng Islam dibandingkan dengan mendongeng konvensional dalam mempengaruhi kemampuan bahasa anak usia dini dan pemahaman dasar agama. Pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain kuasi-



eksperimental digunakan, melibatkan 60 anak berusia 5-6 tahun dari dua taman kanak-kanak. Kelompok eksperimental menerima intervensi mendongeng Islam selama delapan sesi, sementara kelompok kontrol terlibat dalam mendongeng konvensional. Data dikumpulkan melalui penilaian pra-tes dan pasca-tes yang mengukur keterampilan bahasa reseptif dan ekspresif, serta pemahaman dasar tentang nilai-nilai Islam. Teknik analisis data termasuk uji-t sampel berpasangan dan uji-t sampel independen untuk membandingkan perbedaan skor rata-rata di dalam dan antar kelompok. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa sementara kedua kelompok menunjukkan perbaikan, kelompok eksperimental menunjukkan keuntungan yang jauh lebih tinggi dalam perkembangan bahasa dan pemahaman agama dibandingkan dengan kelompok kontrol. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa mendongeng Islam menawarkan keuntungan berbeda di luar penceritaan konvensional, terutama dalam mengintegrasikan pertumbuhan kognitif-linguistik dengan pembentukan spiritual. Studi ini menyumbangkan perspektif kritis tentang nilai tambah penceritaan berbasis nilai dalam pendidikan anak usia dini dan menawarkan implikasi praktis bagi pendidik yang ingin mengoptimalkan media pembelajaran yang selaras dengan tujuan perkembangan dan agama.

Kata Kunci: *Penceritaan Islam; perkembangan bahasa anak usia dini; pendidikan agama; media pembelajaran*

Introduction

Early childhood represents a significant phase in human development, generally termed as the "golden age," during which the foundation for cognitive, linguistic, social-emotional, and moral-spiritual growth is established (Hurlock, 2018; Santrock, 2022). This period, spanning from birth to approximately eight years of age, is characterized by rapid brain development and heightened neuroplasticity, rendering children exceptionally receptive to environmental stimuli and learning experiences (Suyadi & Ulfah, 2020; Berk, 2022). Within this critical window, the quality of educational interventions and the nature of learning environments play decisive roles in shaping long-term developmental trajectories (Piaget, 2015; Vygotsky, 1978). In the context of Islamic education, early childhood is also regarded as *fitrah* – a state of innate purity and potential – during which the planting of religious values and moral foundations is considered most effective and enduring (Al-Attas, 2020; An-Nahlawi, 2021; Hasan & Suharto, 2023).

Language development constitutes one of the most fundamental aspects of early childhood growth, serving as both a cognitive tool and a medium for social interaction (Chomsky, 2019; Tomasello, 2020). Receptive language – the ability to comprehend spoken language – and expressive language – the capacity to produce meaningful communication – develop concurrently during the preschool years, forming the bedrock

for literacy, academic achievement, and social competence (Owens, 2020; Otto, 2021; Purnama & Ningsih, 2024). Research consistently demonstrates that language-rich environments, characterized by meaningful interactions and narrative exposure, significantly accelerate children's linguistic competencies (Dickinson & Morse, 2019; Wasik & Hindman, 2020; Fadilah et al., 2025). Conversely, limited language stimulation during early childhood may result in persistent deficits that affect later learning outcomes (Hart & Risley, 2019; Fernald et al., 2020).

Parallel to language development, the cultivation of religious and moral values occupies a central position in early childhood education, particularly within Islamic educational contexts (Halstead, 2021; Zainal & Abdullah, 2023). Islamic pedagogy emphasizes that children should be introduced to the concepts of *tauhid* (monotheism), *akhlak* (moral character), and *ibadah* (worship) from an early age, as these foundational understandings shape their identity and worldview (Al-Ghazali, 2020; Qardhawi, 2021; Fitriani & Yudha, 2025). The integration of religious education into early childhood settings is not merely about transmitting doctrinal knowledge but rather about nurturing *iman* (faith) and *taqwa* (piety) through developmentally appropriate methods (Abdullah, 2022; Naim & Saada, 2024). This integration is particularly salient in Islamic kindergartens, where the curriculum explicitly aims to harmonize developmental goals with religious objectives (Rahmawati et al., 2024; Junianti et al., 2025).

Among the various pedagogical approaches employed in early childhood education, storytelling has garnered widespread recognition as one of the most effective and developmentally appropriate methods (Isbell et al., 2022; Nicolopoulou et al., 2020). Storytelling engages children on multiple levels—cognitive, emotional, social, and linguistic—making it an ideal vehicle for holistic learning (Zipes, 2021; Gallets, 2020). Through exposure to narratives, children acquire new vocabulary, understand syntactic structures, develop narrative skills, and cultivate imagination (Morrow, 2021; Pramling & Pramling Samuelsson, 2022). Moreover, stories serve as powerful tools for transmitting cultural values, moral lessons, and social norms, as children identify with characters and internalize the messages embedded within narratives (Egan, 2021; Nurgiyantoro, 2018; Oktaviana et al., 2025).

In Islamic educational traditions, storytelling holds a particularly esteemed position. The Qur'an itself employs storytelling—*qasas*—as a primary method of conveying divine messages, moral lessons, and historical accounts (Ibn Kathir, 2020;

Esack, 2022). The stories of prophets, companions, and righteous figures serve as exemplary models for character formation and spiritual development (Al-Qattan, 2021; Khalid & Abdul Rahman, 2023). Contemporary Islamic early childhood educators have increasingly adopted storytelling as a core pedagogical strategy, infusing narratives with Islamic values, prophetic role models, and Qur'anic themes (Hasanah & Suryana, 2023; Zuhri & Mulyani, 2024). These storytelling sessions are often accompanied by illustrations, puppetry, or dramatic enactment to enhance engagement and comprehension (Veryawan & Mawarni, 2025).

Despite the widespread enthusiasm for Islamic storytelling, a critical examination of its distinct effectiveness remains notably absent from the scholarly literature. While numerous studies have affirmed the general benefits of storytelling for language development and moral education (Nicolopoulou et al., 2020; Morrow, 2021; Oktaviana et al., 2025). While other studies have systematically compared storytelling infused with Islamic values against conventional storytelling that does not explicitly embed religious content (Hussain & Bilal, 2025; Rofiqi et al., 2026). This gap is significant because it leaves unanswered the question of whether the integration of Islamic values adds measurable value beyond the inherent benefits of storytelling itself (Rahmah et al., 2025; Fadilah et al., 2025).

Furthermore, existing research on Islamic storytelling tends to be descriptive in nature, often focusing on implementation practices or practitioner perceptions rather than employing rigorous comparative designs (Suryana & Wahyuni, 2023; Rahmawati & Fauziah, 2022). Studies that do report positive outcomes frequently lack control groups, making it difficult to attribute observed effects specifically to the Islamic content rather than to storytelling in general (Purnama & Ningsih, 2024; Zuhri & Mulyani, 2024). This methodological limitation underscores the need for research that critically examines whether Islamic storytelling offers distinct advantages or whether it functions merely as conventional storytelling accompanied by religious terminology.

The present study is motivated by this critical gap. It seeks to move beyond the assumption that embedding Islamic values automatically enhances educational outcomes and instead poses a provocative question: Does Islamic storytelling genuinely enhance children's language development and religious understanding, or does it function merely as another storytelling activity without significant added value? This question reflects a broader concern within early childhood Islamic education: the need

for evidence-based practices that demonstrate the specific contributions of religiously infused pedagogies (Al-Attas, 2020; Halstead, 2021; Junianti et al., 2025).

To address this question, the study adopts a quasi-experimental design comparing two groups of children – one receiving Islamic storytelling interventions and the other engaging in conventional storytelling – across eight sessions. This design allows for the isolation of the specific effect attributable to the integration of Islamic values, controlling for the general benefits of storytelling participation (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Fraenkel et al., 2023).

The theoretical framework underpinning this study draws from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which posits that cognitive development occurs through social interaction and the internalization of cultural tools (Vygotsky, 1978; Daniels, 2021). Within this framework, language serves as the primary mediational tool, and narratives function as cultural artifacts that transmit values, beliefs, and ways of thinking from more knowledgeable members of society to children (Rogoff, 2020; Wertsch, 2021). In the context of Islamic storytelling, the narrative becomes a vehicle for transmitting Islamic cultural and religious heritage while simultaneously scaffolding children's language development (Suyadi & Ulfah, 2020; Hasanah & Suryana, 2023).

Additionally, this research is informed by theories of religious development in early childhood, particularly the work of Fowler (2021) on faith development and Hyde (2020) on children's spiritual formation. These theories emphasize that young children construct spiritual understanding not through abstract theological concepts but through concrete experiences, narratives, rituals, and relationships with trusted adults (Ratnasari & Zulminiati, 2024; Naim & Saada, 2024). Stories, therefore, serve as crucial bridges between concrete experience and abstract religious understanding, enabling children to internalize values through identification with characters and engagement with narrative events (Egan, 2021; Zipes, 2021).

The objectives of this study are threefold. First, to compare the effects of Islamic storytelling and conventional storytelling on early childhood receptive and expressive language skills. Second, to compare the effects of Islamic storytelling and conventional storytelling on children's foundational understanding of Islamic values. Third, to determine whether any significant differences exist between the two approaches across these developmental domains.

This study discusses children's education in an Islamic perspective by critically examining how Islamic values are integrated into learning media. It also explores innovations in early childhood education through a comparative analysis of storytelling approaches. In addition, it provides empirical evidence that can inform the development of pedagogical curriculum and practices in Islamic early childhood settings. By adopting a critical perspective that questions assumptions rather than simply affirming them, this study aims to enrich scientific discourse and offer practical guidance for educators who want to optimize learning media that aligns with religious development goals and goals (Oktaviana et al., 2025; Fitriani & Yudha, 2025; Junianti et al., 2025).

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design, specifically the non-equivalent control group design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design was chosen to enable a comparative analysis of the effectiveness of Islamic storytelling versus conventional storytelling in shaping early childhood language development and religious understanding, without the possibility of random assignment due to the natural classroom settings (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002).

The population of this study comprised all children aged 5–6 years (Kindergarten B) in two kindergartens located in Lhokseumawe, Aceh. The sample consisted of 60 children selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) children were enrolled in the kindergarten B level; (2) they had no diagnosed speech or language disorders; and (3) they had not previously received structured Islamic storytelling interventions (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The sample was divided into two groups, with 30 children assigned to the experimental group and 30 children assigned to the control group. Both groups were comparable in terms of age distribution, socioeconomic background, and baseline language abilities as confirmed by pre-test results.

Data collection techniques employed in this study included pre-test and post-test assessments administered to both groups (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019). The instruments used were developed by the researchers and validated by experts in early childhood education and Islamic education. The language development test measured two dimensions: receptive language (listening comprehension and vocabulary recognition) and expressive language (verbal expression, sentence construction, and

storytelling retelling ability), based on the frameworks proposed by Owens (2016) and Vygotsky (1978). The religious understanding test assessed children's basic knowledge of Islamic values, including recognition of Allah's creations, simple prayer recitations, and demonstration of moral behaviors such as honesty and gratitude, adapted from the works of al-Ghazali (2015) and Noddings (2013) on moral and spiritual education.

The research plan was structured over a period of eight weeks. During the first week, pre-tests were administered to both groups to establish baseline data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Over the subsequent six weeks, the experimental group received Islamic storytelling interventions delivered in eight sessions, each lasting approximately 30–40 minutes. The stories used in the experimental group were adapted from Islamic sources, including stories of the prophets, moral tales from the Qur'an, and daily life stories infused with Islamic values such as honesty, gratitude, and compassion (Ibn Kathir, 2000). Each storytelling session was followed by guided discussions and simple question-and-answer activities to reinforce both language comprehension and religious messages (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, & Lowrance, 2004). The control group, during the same period, engaged in conventional storytelling sessions using secular folktales and fables without explicit Islamic content (Zipes, 2012). The duration and frequency of sessions were identical for both groups to ensure consistency. In the final week, post-tests were administered to both groups using the same instruments as the pre-test.

Data analysis techniques were performed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate mean scores, standard deviations, and score improvements for each group (Pallant, 2020). Inferential statistics employed paired sample t-tests to compare pre-test and post-test scores within each group, thereby determining the significance of improvement following the intervention (Field, 2018). Independent sample t-tests were used to compare the mean score differences between the experimental and control groups (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26, with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$. Prior to analysis, assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test and Levene's test, respectively, and both assumptions were met (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, several measures were implemented. Content validity was established through expert judgment by three

validators: two early childhood education lecturers and one Islamic education practitioner (Lynn, 1986). Reliability testing using Cronbach’s alpha yielded coefficients of 0.87 for the language development instrument and 0.84 for the religious understanding instrument, indicating high internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Additionally, to maintain the integrity of the intervention, the same researcher delivered all storytelling sessions across both groups, and a standardized protocol was followed to minimize variability in implementation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020).

Results and Discussion

This study aimed to critically examine the effectiveness of Islamic storytelling compared to conventional storytelling in influencing early childhood language abilities and foundational religious comprehension. The results are presented based on the analysis of pre-test and post-test data from both the experimental group (Islamic storytelling) and the control group (conventional storytelling mode). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired sample t-tests, and independent sample t-tests.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for both groups, including mean scores, standard deviations, and mean improvements for language development (receptive and expressive language combined) and religious understanding.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Variable	Group	N	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	Mean Improvement
Language Development	Experimental	30	52.47 (6.32)	78.93 (5.87)	26.46
Language Development	Control	30	53.12 (6.15)	65.48 (6.24)	12.36
Religious Understanding	Experimental	30	48.73 (7.21)	82.15 (6.43)	33.42
Religious Understanding	Control	30	49.21 (6.98)	58.64 (7.12)	9.43

Source: Primary Data Analysis (2026)

As shown in Table 1, both groups demonstrated improvements from pre-test to post-test. However, the experimental group exhibited substantially higher mean

improvements in both language development (26.46 points) and religious understanding (33.42 points) compared to the control group (12.36 and 9.43 points, respectively).

To determine whether the improvements within each group were statistically significant, paired sample t-tests were conducted. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Paired Sample t-Test Results Within Groups

Group	Variable	Mean Difference	t-value	df	p-value	Significance
Experimental	Language Development	26.46	18.342	29	0.000	p < 0.05
Experimental	Religious Understanding	33.42	22.156	29	0.000	p < 0.05
Control	Language Development	12.36	8.765	29	0.000	p < 0.05
Control	Religious Understanding	9.43	6.432	29	0.000	p < 0.05

Source: Primary Data Analysis (2026)

The paired sample t-test results indicate that both groups experienced significant improvements in language development and religious understanding from pre-test to post-test, with all p-values < 0.05. This suggests that both Islamic storytelling and conventional storytelling were effective in enhancing these outcomes.

To compare the effectiveness between the two interventions, independent sample t-tests were conducted on the gain scores (post-test minus pre-test) of both groups. Table 3 presents these results.

Table 3. Independent Sample t-Test Results Between Groups

Variable	Mean Difference (Exp - Control)	t-value	df	p-value	Significance
Language Development	14.10	7.892	58	0.000	p < 0.05
Religious Understanding	23.99	12.456	58	0.000	p < 0.05

Source: Primary Data Analysis (2026)

The independent sample t-test results reveal that the experimental group demonstrated significantly higher gains in both language development (mean difference = 14.10, p < 0.05) and religious understanding (mean difference = 23.99, p < 0.05)

compared to the control group. These findings indicate that Islamic storytelling is more effective than conventional storytelling in enhancing early childhood language development and religious understanding.

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that storytelling infused with Islamic values offers distinct advantages over conventional storytelling in shaping early childhood language development and religious understanding. This discussion addresses the research question: Does Islamic storytelling genuinely enhance children's language development and religious understanding, or does it function merely as another storytelling activity without significant added value?

The results unequivocally demonstrate that Islamic storytelling is not merely "just another story." The experimental group, which received Islamic storytelling interventions, showed significantly greater improvements in both language development and religious understanding compared to the control group. This finding directly answers the provocative question posed in the title: Islamic storytelling does indeed shape early language and faith in ways that conventional storytelling does not. The added value lies not only in the content but also in the integrative nature of the intervention, which simultaneously addresses cognitive-linguistic and spiritual-moral development (Al-Ghazali, 2015; Noddings, 2013).

The significantly higher gains in language development among children in the experimental group can be attributed to several factors inherent in Islamic storytelling. First, the narratives used in the experimental group were rich in repetitive linguistic structures, rhythmic patterns, and culturally familiar vocabulary derived from Islamic traditions (Ibn Kathir, 2000). These linguistic features facilitate vocabulary acquisition and syntactic development, as posited by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of meaningful social interaction in language development. The guided discussions following each storytelling session provided children with opportunities for dialogic interaction, a key mechanism for language scaffolding (Isbell et al., 2004; Bruner, 1983).

Second, the thematic coherence of Islamic stories—centered on values such as honesty, gratitude, compassion, and patience—created a meaningful context that enhanced children's engagement and motivation. When children are emotionally invested in a story, their cognitive processing deepens, leading to better language retention and comprehension (Zipes, 2012; Engel, 1995). This aligns with the concept of

meaningful learning proposed by Ausubel (1968), which posits that new information is more readily acquired when it connects to existing cognitive structures and personal experiences.

Regarding religious understanding, the experimental group's superior performance can be explained by the intentional integration of Islamic values into the storytelling process. Unlike conventional storytelling, which may convey moral lessons implicitly, Islamic storytelling explicitly connects narrative events to theological concepts such as Allah's attributes, prophetic examples, and moral responsibilities (Al-Qur'an, 2020; al-Ghazali, 2015). This explicit connection facilitates children's comprehension of abstract religious concepts by anchoring them in concrete story events—a pedagogical strategy supported by Piaget's (1962) theory of cognitive development, which emphasizes that young children learn best through concrete experiences rather than abstract instruction.

Furthermore, the repetitive exposure to Islamic values across multiple storytelling sessions reinforced children's internalization of these concepts. This finding is consistent with Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which suggests that moral and spiritual behaviors are acquired through observation, modeling, and reinforcement. In the context of Islamic storytelling, children observed characters demonstrating virtuous behaviors, discussed these behaviors with their peers and teacher, and were encouraged to apply them in their own lives.

The findings of this study corroborate and extend previous research on storytelling in early childhood education. Isbell et al. (2004) found that storytelling significantly enhanced children's oral language complexity and story comprehension compared to story reading. The present study extends this finding by demonstrating that the content of the story matters: Islamic storytelling yields greater language gains than conventional storytelling, suggesting that the integration of value-based content may amplify the linguistic benefits of storytelling.

Similarly, research by Nicolopoulou et al. (2015) demonstrated that storytelling and story-acting practices promoted narrative development and literacy skills in young children. The present study adds to this body of literature by highlighting the role of culturally and religiously grounded narratives in supporting not only language development but also moral and spiritual formation—a dimension often overlooked in mainstream early childhood research.

In the context of Islamic education, this study aligns with the work of Abdullah (2017) and Hamidah, Mulyani, and Nurhayati (2020), who found that Islamic storytelling positively influenced children's moral reasoning and religious attitudes. However, the present study contributes novelty by providing quantitative evidence of Islamic storytelling's dual effectiveness in simultaneously enhancing language development and religious understanding, using a quasi-experimental design with control group comparison.

The findings of this study have significant implications for theory development in early childhood education. First, the results support an integrative theoretical framework that bridges cognitive-linguistic development with spiritual-moral education. While traditional theories such as Piaget's (1962) cognitive development theory and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory have primarily focused on cognitive and linguistic dimensions, the present study suggests that spiritual and moral content can serve as a powerful scaffold for cognitive-linguistic growth. This finding calls for the development of more holistic theoretical models that recognize the interconnectedness of developmental domains in early childhood.

Second, the study extends the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010), to include religious responsiveness. The effectiveness of Islamic storytelling in this study underscores the importance of aligning educational content with children's cultural and religious backgrounds. When learning materials resonate with children's lived experiences and belief systems, engagement deepens and learning outcomes improve. This finding supports the growing body of literature advocating for culturally and religiously responsive pedagogies in diverse educational settings (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017).

The findings of this study offer practical implications for early childhood educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers. For educators, the results suggest that integrating Islamic values into storytelling activities can serve as a powerful pedagogical strategy for simultaneously promoting language development and religious formation (Zurriyati et al., 2023). Teachers should be trained not only in storytelling techniques but also in selecting and adapting stories that effectively convey Islamic values in developmentally appropriate settings (Rahman et al., 2025).

For curriculum developers, the findings highlight the need for structured Islamic storytelling programs that provide teachers with a repository of high-quality stories,

discussion guides, and assessment tools. Such programs should ensure that stories are authentic, linguistically rich, and theologically sound while remaining engaging and accessible to young children (Iqbal et al., 2023).

For parents, the study reinforces the importance of storytelling as a tool for both language development and religious education. Parents can be encouraged to incorporate Islamic stories into their daily routines, using storytelling as a natural and enjoyable way to transmit values and build language skills simultaneously.

While this study provides robust evidence of the effectiveness of Islamic storytelling, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted in a specific geographical context (Lhokseumawe, Aceh) with a predominantly Muslim population, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other cultural and religious contexts. Future research should explore whether similar effects are observed with storytelling infused with other religious or cultural traditions in diverse settings.

Second, the study employed a relatively short intervention period of eight sessions over six weeks. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine whether the gains observed are sustained over time and whether continued exposure to Islamic storytelling yields cumulative benefits.

Third, the study focused on quantitative outcomes; future research could incorporate qualitative methods such as classroom observations, interviews with teachers and children, and analysis of children's narrative productions to provide richer insights into the mechanisms through which Islamic storytelling influences language and faith development.

Finally, future studies could explore the differential effects of various types of Islamic stories (e.g., stories of the prophets, moral fables, daily life stories) on specific language sub-skills and aspects of religious understanding. Such research would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how to optimize Islamic storytelling for maximum educational impact.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study aimed to critically examine whether storytelling infused with Islamic values genuinely enhances early childhood language development and religious understanding or merely functions as another storytelling activity without significant added value. Through a quasi-experimental design involving 60 children aged 5–6 years,

the findings reveal that Islamic storytelling is not merely "just another story." Children in the experimental group demonstrated significantly greater improvements in language development (26.46 points) and religious understanding (33.42 points) compared to the control group (12.36 and 9.43 points respectively), with statistical analyses confirming these differences as significant ($p < 0.05$). The effectiveness of Islamic storytelling lies in its integration of linguistically rich narratives, explicit connection between story events and Islamic values, and repetitive exposure to value-based content, which together facilitate both language acquisition and spiritual formation. This study affirms that Islamic storytelling shapes early language and faith in ways conventional storytelling alone cannot achieve.

Based on these findings, several suggestions are offered. Educators should incorporate Islamic storytelling into daily routines supported by training in storytelling techniques and guided discussions. Curriculum developers should design structured programs providing resources such as storybooks aligned with Islamic values and assessment tools. Parents should embrace storytelling at home as a natural way to support children's language and religious development. Educational institutions and policymakers should prioritize professional development for teachers and integrate storytelling approaches into early childhood education standards.

For future research, longitudinal studies are needed to examine the sustainability of gains over time. Qualitative research employing classroom observations and interviews would provide richer insights into the mechanisms through which Islamic storytelling influences child development. Comparative studies across diverse cultural contexts and investigations of various story types would further strengthen the evidence base. By implementing these suggestions, stakeholders can maximize Islamic storytelling as a powerful pedagogical approach that nurtures early childhood language development and religious understanding in an integrated manner.

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