



## THE USE OF ISLAMIC STORIES AS AN EFFORT TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' RELIGIOUS CHARACTER IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LEARNING

### PEMANFAATAN CERITA ISLAMI SEBAGAI UPAYA MENINGKATKAN KARAKTER RELIGIUS SISWA DALAM PEMBELAJARAN PENDIDIKAN AGAMA ISLAM

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#### Abstract

This study explores the utilization of Islamic stories as an effective strategy to enhance the religious character of students in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Storytelling, rooted in psychological and pedagogical theories, offers a meaningful and engaging learning approach that fosters moral and spiritual development. Teachers play a critical role in selecting relevant stories and applying diverse techniques supported by multimedia to maximize student engagement and comprehension. Despite challenges such as limited instructional time, scarcity of quality materials, and fluctuating student attention, technological advancements present promising opportunities for digital and interactive storytelling. The successful integration of Islamic stories in the curriculum requires well-designed educational frameworks, teacher competencies, and continuous reflection and evaluation to cultivate ethical and religious values effectively among students.

**Keywords :** Islamic stories, religious character, storytelling, Islamic Religious Education, character development

#### Abtrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pemanfaatan cerita Islam sebagai strategi yang efektif untuk meningkatkan karakter religius mahasiswa dalam Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI).



Mendongeng, berakar pada teori psikologis dan pedagogis, menawarkan pendekatan pembelajaran yang bermakna dan menarik yang mendorong perkembangan moral dan spiritual. Guru memainkan peran penting dalam memilih cerita yang relevan dan menerapkan beragam teknik yang didukung oleh multimedia untuk memaksimalkan keterlibatan dan pemahaman siswa. Terlepas dari tantangan seperti waktu pengajaran yang terbatas, kelangkaan materi berkualitas, dan perhatian siswa yang berfluktuasi, kemajuan teknologi menghadirkan peluang yang menjanjikan untuk mendongeng digital dan interaktif. Keberhasilan integrasi cerita Islam dalam kurikulum membutuhkan kerangka pendidikan yang dirancang dengan baik, kompetensi guru, dan refleksi dan evaluasi berkelanjutan untuk menumbuhkan nilai-nilai etika dan agama secara efektif di antara siswa.

**Kata kunci :** Cerita Islam, karakter religius, mendongeng, Pendidikan Agama Islam, pengembangan karakter

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a fundamental pillar in the holistic development of human beings, encompassing intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions. Through education, younger generations are guided not only to become academically capable but also to possess refined character, noble morals, and strong ethical awareness. Religious values are a crucial component of education, especially in a country like Indonesia where the majority of the population practices Islam. Effective education must instill strong religious character from an early age, as childhood and adolescence are critical phases in shaping one's personality and moral compass (Tukmasara, 2023).

Modern challenges such as rapid technological advancement, cultural globalization, and the widespread influence of digital media have significantly shaped the behavior and mindset of today's youth. Many students are exposed to information and lifestyles that contradict religious and moral teachings. As a result, there is a growing concern over the declining religious character among students, which manifests in behaviors such as diminished respect for parents and teachers, increased misconduct, and a lack of social and spiritual awareness. This situation calls for the education sector to continuously innovate its teaching strategies, aiming not only to transfer knowledge but also to touch students' values and attitudes.

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a vital role in building and strengthening students' religious character. Its purpose extends beyond teaching the doctrines of Islam; it also promotes the cultivation of noble conduct, encourages Islamic ways of living, and raises awareness of applying religious values in everyday life. To fulfill this goal, teaching methods must align with the students' psychological development and learning needs. Traditional methods that rely heavily on lectures and memorization often fall short in engaging students emotionally, making it difficult for religious messages to resonate deeply (Al Makhzum, 2025).

One promising approach to address this issue is the use of Islamic stories. Islamic storytelling carries a unique narrative power that captures the imagination, evokes emotional responses, and conveys moral and spiritual lessons in an engaging and memorable way. Stories of prophets, companions of the Prophet Muhammad, and other notable figures in Islamic history offer valuable lessons that students can relate to and draw inspiration from. Through storytelling, students can explore virtues such as honesty, perseverance, responsibility, compassion, and devotion to God in a more meaningful and vivid manner.



Moreover, storytelling allows for a more natural process of internalizing values. When students listen to or read touching and thought-provoking stories, they are more likely to identify with the characters, understand the situations they face, and extract moral wisdom from their experiences. This fosters not only cognitive understanding but also emotional and behavioral change. Teachers can use storytelling to create a warm and reflective classroom environment, build emotional connections, and guide students in contemplating Islamic values more deeply (Suyadi, 2019).

Given these considerations, the use of Islamic stories in Islamic Religious Education can be an effective strategy to enhance students' religious character. By employing an approach that is communicative, inspiring, and emotionally engaging, storytelling serves as a bridge between educational content and students' real-life experiences. Therefore, it is essential to explore how Islamic stories can be integrated meaningfully into teaching practices and assess the extent to which they influence the development of religious character among students in the school setting.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a library research method as its primary approach. Library research is a method that involves examining and analyzing various sources of literature such as books, academic journals, scholarly articles, and relevant documents that relate to the research topic. This approach was chosen because the focus of the study is not on field observations or data collection from participants, but rather on exploring theories, findings, and scholarly perspectives regarding the use of Islamic stories in enhancing students' religious character (Priadana & Sunarsi, 2021).

The steps involved in this library research include identifying the topic and formulating research questions, collecting relevant and credible literature, conducting content analysis of the selected sources, and synthesizing the findings. The researcher reviews literature related to Islamic Religious Education, religious character development, storytelling-based learning methods, and the educational function of Islamic narratives. Additional sources in educational psychology and religious values formation in schools are also consulted to enrich the analysis.

The data obtained are analyzed using a descriptive-qualitative approach, which involves presenting information systematically and drawing conclusions based on the interrelation of concepts and theories. This analysis aims to explain the extent to which Islamic stories can be used as effective educational tools in instilling religious values in students. Therefore, the results of this study are expected to provide theoretical insights that contribute to the development of more meaningful and spiritually enriching Islamic Religious Education methods.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. The Essence of Religious Character in Islamic Education

Religious character refers to the embodiment of spiritual and moral values in a person's thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors that reflect devotion to God and adherence to religious teachings. According to Lickona (1991), character is a set of psychological traits that motivate and guide an individual to act morally and responsibly. In an Islamic context, religious character emphasizes the integration of faith (*iman*), practice (*amal*), and awareness of divine



presence (*taqwa*) in daily life. Al-Ghazali, a classical Islamic scholar, emphasized that noble character (*akhlaq al-karimah*) is a reflection of internalized religious belief that naturally guides a person toward righteous behavior without coercion (Syaidah & Afrizal, 2024).

Several indicators can be used to assess the presence of religious character in students. These include:

- a) Faith and devotion: Regular prayer, fasting, and other acts of worship that demonstrate commitment to religious obligations.
- b) Moral integrity: Honesty, trustworthiness, and a sense of responsibility in words and actions.
- c) Respect for others: Treating peers, teachers, and parents with kindness and politeness, as a reflection of one's understanding of Islamic ethics.
- d) Social care: Willingness to help others, practice charity, and show empathy, aligning with Islamic values of compassion (*rahmah*) and justice (*'adl*).
- e) Obedience to religious teachings: Willingness to follow Islamic guidelines both in personal conduct and in social interactions.

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a crucial role in shaping and reinforcing students' religious character. It provides not only theoretical knowledge of Islam but also moral and spiritual guidance that helps students internalize religious values. Through various teaching methods including storytelling, discussion, and reflection IRE encourages students to understand, appreciate, and practice Islamic teachings in everyday life (Permana et al., 2019). It fosters an environment where students are guided to recognize the importance of being spiritually grounded, morally upright, and socially responsible. As a result, IRE functions as a transformative medium that not only builds students' knowledge but also molds their character in accordance with Islamic ideals.

## B. Educational Values in Islamic Stories

Islamic stories, or *Qasas Islami*, hold a significant place in the tradition of Islamic education. These stories are derived from various authoritative sources such as the Qur'an, Hadith (the sayings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad), as well as historical accounts of the lives of prophets, companions (*sahabah*), and righteous individuals throughout Islamic history. Far from being simple narratives for entertainment, Islamic stories serve as didactic tools that convey religious, ethical, and spiritual values. They offer vivid illustrations of how faith is practiced in daily life, how individuals faced trials and temptations, and how divine guidance shaped the choices and destinies of believers. In this sense, the scope of Islamic stories is broad they address issues of personal piety, social justice, family relations, leadership, perseverance, and trust in God (*tawakkul*), making them highly relevant across different ages and educational levels (Musthofa et al., 2025).

The educational function of Islamic stories is multi-dimensional. First, they act as a bridge between abstract religious concepts and practical human experiences. For instance, the concept of *sabr* (patience) becomes more tangible when students learn about the endurance of Prophet Ayyub (Job) during his prolonged suffering. Second, storytelling is known to engage not only the intellect but also the emotions and imagination. This emotional engagement is crucial in value formation, as it allows students to internalize lessons more deeply than through mere theoretical instruction. Third, stories are memorable and easy to relate to, which makes them effective in reinforcing moral lessons over time. In the classroom setting, Islamic stories can be used as a strategy to stimulate critical thinking, ethical reflection, and spiritual



awareness. They allow teachers to initiate discussions, pose moral dilemmas, and encourage students to evaluate decisions from the perspective of Islamic ethics.

The moral and spiritual values embedded in Islamic stories are diverse and profound. They promote core virtues such as honesty, sincerity, humility, patience, justice, compassion, and gratitude. For example, the story of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) teaches forgiveness and integrity despite betrayal and injustice. His unwavering faith in God during hardship serves as a model of spiritual resilience. The story of Luqman and his advice to his son imparts values of monotheism (*tawhid*), respect for parents, humility, and ethical conduct. Similarly, the life of Prophet Muhammad is rich with stories that highlight his mercy, fairness, wisdom, and ability to forgive even his enemies (Asari et al., 2023). These narratives do not merely describe moral behavior they demonstrate it in action, offering students concrete role models to emulate. Moreover, Islamic stories often emphasize the consequences of actions, illustrating how righteousness leads to divine reward, while arrogance or injustice invites loss and punishment. This cause-and-effect framework helps learners grasp the significance of ethical decision-making within an Islamic worldview.

In sum, Islamic stories serve as a powerful medium for the transmission of religious and moral values in Islamic education. They enrich the learning experience by connecting doctrinal teachings with lived human experiences, encouraging both emotional and intellectual engagement. By presenting timeless lessons through compelling narratives, Islamic stories nurture the religious character of students, inspire personal transformation, and contribute to the cultivation of a morally conscious and spiritually grounded generation.

### C. Story-Based Learning Theory (Storytelling) in Education

Storytelling is one of the oldest and most effective methods of teaching and transmitting knowledge. In the field of education, storytelling is recognized not merely as a tool for entertainment but as a pedagogical strategy that leverages the human brain's natural affinity for narratives. From a psychological standpoint, stories engage multiple areas of the brain stimulating both emotional and cognitive responses thereby enhancing memory retention and comprehension. Jerome Bruner, a cognitive psychologist, emphasized that human beings understand the world more easily through narrative structures than through abstract logic alone. Stories help learners connect new information with existing knowledge, evoke empathy, and develop a sense of moral reasoning. Pedagogically, storytelling aligns with constructivist theories of learning, where students build their own understanding through meaningful, contextual experiences. It also supports Vygotsky's theory of social learning, where interaction, language, and culture play key roles in cognitive development. (Fahmi & Susanto, 2018)

Compared to conventional teaching methods that often rely on rote memorization, lectures, or didactic explanation, storytelling presents a more dynamic and impactful learning experience. One major advantage of the storytelling method is its ability to engage both the heart and the mind. While traditional methods tend to focus on delivering information, storytelling activates emotions, imagination, and critical thinking, thus promoting holistic learning. Additionally, storytelling fosters stronger teacher-student interaction, as stories often encourage questions, discussions, and reflection. For younger students or those with lower motivation, stories can be more accessible and appealing than abstract explanations. Stories also provide context, which helps learners see the relevance of what they are learning and how it applies to real-life situations. In religious education specifically, storytelling is particularly





effective because it humanizes moral and spiritual values, making them relatable and memorable (Syaidah & Afrizal, 2024).

In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), storytelling can be implemented through various strategic approaches to enrich the learning process. Teachers can begin lessons by narrating stories from the Qur'an, Hadith, or the lives of prophets and righteous individuals, followed by guided discussions to extract values and lessons. These discussions can include reflective questions such as: "What would you have done in this situation?", "What can we learn from this character?", or "How can we apply this value in our lives today?" Another strategy is to integrate multimedia tools such as animations, audio stories, or drama reenactments to make the storytelling experience more immersive (Musthofa et al., 2025). Teachers can also encourage students to retell stories in their own words, write reflective journals, or create skits based on Islamic stories to reinforce learning through active participation. The goal is not only to inform but to transform to cultivate religious character and ethical awareness in ways that are deep, lasting, and meaningful to students.

#### **D. The Role of Teachers in Integrating Islamic Stories into Islamic Religious Education (PAI)**

The role of teachers is crucial in effectively integrating Islamic stories into the learning process of Islamic Religious Education. A teacher's competency in selecting appropriate stories greatly influences the educational impact. Competent teachers understand the developmental stages and interests of their students, ensuring that the stories chosen are age-appropriate, culturally relevant, and aligned with the learning objectives and curriculum standards. Furthermore, teachers must have deep knowledge of Islamic teachings to accurately interpret and convey the moral and spiritual lessons embedded in the stories. This competency allows them to clarify complex concepts, answer students' questions, and guide meaningful discussions that foster critical thinking and character building (Permana et al., 2019).

In delivering Islamic stories, teachers should utilize diverse techniques and supportive media to enhance engagement and understanding. Storytelling can be combined with visual aids such as illustrations, storybooks, videos, or digital animations to capture students' attention and make abstract religious values more concrete. Techniques like dramatization, role-playing, or group discussions can encourage active participation and reinforce the internalization of lessons. Teachers can also incorporate technology, such as interactive storytelling apps or multimedia presentations, to accommodate different learning styles and keep students motivated. The choice of technique and media should be flexible and responsive to the classroom dynamics, promoting an interactive and immersive learning environment.

Reflection and evaluation are essential components of story-based learning to measure the effectiveness of the educational process. Teachers should encourage students to reflect on the moral and spiritual lessons learned from the stories, both individually and collectively (Permana et al., 2019). This can be done through reflective journals, question-and-answer sessions, or group presentations. Evaluations should not focus solely on rote memorization but rather assess students' understanding, attitudes, and behavioral changes that demonstrate internalization of religious values. Formative assessment methods, such as observation and feedback during storytelling activities, can provide ongoing insights to help teachers adjust their strategies. Ultimately, the teacher's role extends beyond delivering stories; it includes fostering a reflective learning atmosphere where students can connect Islamic teachings with their daily lives and personal growth.



### E. Challenges and Opportunities in Utilizing Islamic Stories in Schools

The integration of Islamic stories into school curricula presents both significant challenges and promising opportunities. One major challenge is the limitation of time within the school schedule, where multiple subjects compete for instructional hours, leaving limited space for storytelling activities. Additionally, the availability of quality Islamic story literature that is suitable for various age groups and aligned with educational goals remains a concern. Often, teachers face difficulties in sourcing authentic, well-structured, and culturally relevant stories that can effectively convey religious and moral values. Another common issue is maintaining students' attention and engagement during storytelling sessions, especially in an era dominated by fast-paced digital entertainment. Without innovative delivery methods, students may find traditional storytelling less appealing, leading to reduced impact on character formation (Suyadi, 2019).

Despite these challenges, there are vast opportunities for the development and utilization of Islamic stories in modern education. Advances in digital technology have opened new avenues for creating interactive and multimedia Islamic story content, such as animated stories, audio books, and educational apps (Fahmi & Susanto, 2018). These digital formats can cater to different learning styles, increase accessibility, and enhance student engagement by combining visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements. Furthermore, the incorporation of interactive features like quizzes, role-playing, and gamification can transform passive listening into active learning experiences, thereby strengthening understanding and retention of values. Schools can leverage these innovations to revitalize Islamic storytelling as a vibrant and relevant pedagogical tool.

To implement Islamic stories more effectively within the curriculum, several recommendations are proposed. Firstly, curriculum designers and educators should collaborate to integrate storytelling as a structured component of Islamic Religious Education, ensuring it aligns with learning objectives and assessment criteria. Teacher training programs must include modules on selecting, adapting, and delivering Islamic stories using diverse methods and technologies. Schools should invest in developing or procuring quality Islamic story resources, both in print and digital forms. Moreover, a flexible approach that allows storytelling to complement other teaching methods can maximize its benefits. Finally, regular monitoring and evaluation should be conducted to assess the impact of storytelling on students' character development, enabling continuous improvement and innovation in teaching practices.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Integrating Islamic stories into Islamic Religious Education offers a powerful approach to fostering students' religious character by combining emotional engagement and moral reflection. Teachers play a vital role in selecting appropriate stories, using diverse techniques and media to make lessons meaningful and memorable. While challenges such as limited time, resource availability, and student attention exist, the rise of digital and interactive storytelling presents promising opportunities to enhance learning experiences. Effective implementation requires curriculum support, teacher training, quality resources, and ongoing evaluation to ensure that storytelling not only imparts knowledge but also nurtures the spiritual and ethical growth of students in a modern educational context.



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