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Enhancing Moral and Religious Values Through Storytelling in Sari Mekar Kindergarten, West Halmahera

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to improve moral and religious values in early childhood through storytelling activities at Sari Mekar Kindergarten in Lako Akediri Village, Sahu District, West Halmahera Regency. The research method used was Classroom Action Research (CAR) conducted in two cycles. The research subjects were 20 children in class A. Data collection wwerecarried out through observation, documentation, and daily assessments, which were then analyzed using data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing, and descriptive qualitative and quantitative verification by calculating the percentage of achievement of moral and religious value indicators. The results of the study showed a significant increase in children's moral and religious values from the pre-action stage to cycle II. In the pre-action stage, 90% of children were in the underdeveloped category and only 5% were in the developed category as expected. After the storytelling activity was implemented, cycle I showed that 85% of children were in the underdeveloped category, 10% were in the beginning to develop category, and 5% had reached the expected developing category. Cycle II showed that 80% of children had reached the expected developing category and were developing very well, while the rest were beginning to develop. These changes were evident in the children's behavior, as they became accustomed to worshipping, understood noble behavior, could distinguish between good and bad behavior, became familiar with religious rituals and holidays, and respected other people's religions. Thus, storytelling activities proved to be effective in instilling moral and religious values in early childhood.

Keywords:
Early childhood, moral and religious values, storytelling activities

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INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) constitutes a fundamental stage in the formation of human character, serving as the earliest structured environment where children begin to internalize values that shape their attitudes, behaviors, and ways of relating to others. Children aged 4–5 years are in a critical developmental phase characterized by rapid growth in emotional awareness, empathy, and social understanding. During this period, children gradually learn to recognize their own emotions, respond to others' feelings, engage in cooperative play, and follow simple social norms in group settings (Hidayah & Khadijah, 2023; Prihati, 2025). These early experiences play a decisive role in shaping children's moral sensitivity and interpersonal competence. In early childhood education institutions, children receive systematic stimulation across multiple developmental domains, including cognitive, physical, social-emotional, language, and moral-religious domains. Among these, the development of moral and religious values holds a particularly strategic position, as it provides the ethical and spiritual foundation that guides children's behavior and decision-making processes throughout their lives (Handayani, 2024).

The cultivation of moral and religious values in early childhood is essential because it shapes children's inner moral compass, which influences how they interpret right and wrong, relate to others, and respond to social situations. When moral and religious values are introduced consistently and meaningfully from an early age, children are more likely to demonstrate positive behaviors such as

honesty, respect, empathy, self-control, and responsibility in their daily interactions (Karima et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2020). Conversely, insufficient guidance, limited parental involvement, and exposure to unsupportive social environments may hinder children's moral development, increasing the risk of behavioral problems and confusion in distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable actions (Yulizha et al., 2023). Therefore, early moral and religious education should not be viewed merely as an additional component of the curriculum, but rather as a core element of character formation that equips children with the values necessary to navigate social challenges and develop into ethically grounded individuals.

Despite the recognized importance of moral and religious education, its practical implementation at home and in educational settings often falls short of expectations. Initial observations conducted at Sari Mekar Kindergarten, a private early childhood education institution located in Lako Akediri Village, Sahu District, West Halmahera Regency, revealed several concerning issues regarding the moral and religious development of children in group A, comprising 20 children aged 4–5 years. During daily learning and play activities, many children demonstrated limited positive social behaviors, such as cooperation, empathy, and respect toward peers. Furthermore, children showed low levels of independence and motivation in engaging in worship practices, as religious activities were often performed only after direct instruction rather than emerging from personal awareness. Observations also indicated that children had difficulty recognizing noble behaviors, distinguishing between good and bad actions, understanding basic religious rituals and religious holidays, and showing respect for religious differences within their social environment.

These observed conditions highlight an apparent discrepancy between the expected developmental standards and the actual moral-religious competencies demonstrated by children. According to the Child Development Achievement Standards (CDAS), children aged 4–5 years are expected to exhibit positive moral behaviors, including politeness, caring attitudes, willingness to help others, and participation in religious practices appropriate to their beliefs (Kemendikbud RI, 2014). When these competencies are not adequately developed, targeted, and systematic interventions become necessary. Such interventions must be accompanied by consistent supervision, reflective teaching practices, and developmentally appropriate, meaningful learning experiences for young children (Sahara & Ali, 2023). Consequently, educators are challenged to identify instructional approaches that align with children's developmental characteristics while effectively fostering moral and religious values.

One pedagogical approach with strong potential to address these challenges is storytelling. Storytelling aligns naturally with the cognitive and emotional characteristics of early childhood, as young children enjoy imaginative narratives, listening to stories, and identifying with story characters. Through storytelling, abstract moral and religious concepts can be transformed into concrete, relatable situations that children can easily understand. Carefully designed stories with clear moral messages allow children to recognize positive and negative behaviors indirectly, without feeling lectured or pressured (Deiniatur, 2017; Retnasari et al., 2023). This indirect learning process is particularly effective for young children, who tend to learn best through play, imagination, and emotional engagement rather than through explicit instruction.

Beyond moral instruction, storytelling also plays a significant role in nurturing empathy, emotional intelligence, and respect for diversity. By engaging with stories that depict characters from different backgrounds, belief systems, and experiences, children learn to appreciate differences and understand that diversity is a natural and valuable aspect of social life (Budiarti et al., 2022). Storytelling encourages children to reflect on the consequences of actions, consider multiple perspectives, and develop sensitivity toward others' feelings. When implemented effectively, storytelling becomes more than a form of entertainment; it serves as a contextually meaningful medium for character education, integrating moral, religious, and social learning holistically (Ervina et al., 2025). The role of the teacher is crucial in this process, as expressive storytelling, interactive dialogue, and children's active involvement enhance the internalization of values and facilitate their application in everyday behavior (Setiawati et al., 2023).

Previous research has provided substantial evidence of storytelling's effectiveness in fostering moral and religious values in early childhood education. Nurfaidah and Anhar (2021), for instance, examined the implementation of picture-based storytelling for children aged 4–5 years in a kindergarten context. Their qualitative findings demonstrated that storytelling effectively introduced religious and

moral values such as honesty, discipline, politeness, helpfulness, humility, and patience. The use of visual narratives increased children's engagement and comprehension, enabling them to grasp moral messages more easily. Similarly, Saputra (2020) investigated early childhood teachers' pedagogical competence in cultivating social, moral, and religious values through storytelling. Through a literature review approach, the study concluded that storytelling is a highly effective method when supported by strong pedagogical skills, as teachers' ability to convey stories meaningfully plays a decisive role in children's moral internalization.

In line with these findings, Makhmudah (2020) explored the development of religious values in early childhood through storytelling using a qualitative case study design. The study revealed that storytelling activities supported by various instructional media, such as puppets and illustrated images, and reinforced through daily habituation practices, significantly enhanced children's understanding and practice of religious values. These results underscore the importance of integrating storytelling into routine learning activities rather than treating it as a one-time instructional strategy. Collectively, existing studies suggest that storytelling provides meaningful learning experiences that support the gradual and sustainable development of moral and religious behaviors in early childhood. Thus, storytelling has been widely recognized as a relevant and practical pedagogical approach for children aged 4–5 years.

Nevertheless, despite the growing body of literature on storytelling-based moral education, several research gaps remain. Most existing studies have been conducted in relatively homogeneous educational settings, often located in urban or semi-urban areas, where access to educational resources and parental support tends to be more consistent. Limited attention has been paid to early childhood education institutions in rural and remote regions, where distinct social, cultural, and environmental factors may shape children's moral and religious development. Additionally, many previous studies rely heavily on descriptive qualitative methods or literature-based analyses. In contrast, fewer investigations have employed classroom action research designs that systematically address real classroom problems through reflective, cyclical interventions.

In response to these gaps, the present study offers both contextual and methodological novelty. This research implements storytelling activities as a targeted intervention to enhance moral and religious values among children aged 4–5 years at Sari Mekar Kindergarten in West Halmahera Regency, a rural area with unique educational challenges. By employing a classroom action research approach, this study systematically examines the planning, implementation, observation, and reflection of storytelling activities across learning cycles. Through this approach, the study not only evaluates the effectiveness of storytelling in improving children's moral and religious development but also provides practical insights for teachers working in similar contexts. Ultimately, this research contributes empirical evidence on storytelling as a context-sensitive and actionable strategy for strengthening moral and religious education in early childhood settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Moral and Religious Values and Their Urgency

Moral and religious values in early childhood refer to children’s fundamental understanding of virtues such as honesty, empathy, and responsibility, as well as adherence to religious teachings. For children aged 4–5 years, these values are introduced through concrete, direct experiences, including daily habits, role modelling, and religious stories closely related to their lives. At this stage, children begin to recognize religious symbols, such as prayers and stories of the prophets, which gradually shape their developing identity and form the foundation of moral awareness and behavior (Pandia et al., 2023). In line with this, Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 137 of 2014 emphasizes the achievement of early childhood competencies, including the ability to understand religion, practice worship according to one’s beliefs, demonstrate honesty, helpfulness, politeness, fairness, and respect for others, maintain cleanliness, recognize religious rituals and important religious days, and show tolerance toward people of different religions (Hayati et al., 2022). Therefore, moral and religious values constitute essential components of early childhood education, as they guide children in understanding and practicing appropriate behavior in both social and religious contexts.

The urgency of instilling moral and religious values stems from the understanding that early childhood, particularly ages 4–5, is a golden period for character formation. During this phase, children

are highly receptive to habituation and role modelling, making it an ideal time to cultivate values such as responsibility, discipline, honesty, good manners, and religious awareness (Yuliana, 2015). Through interaction with their environment, children gradually learn to distinguish acceptable from unacceptable behavior in accordance with prevailing moral and religious norms. Religious education in early childhood, therefore, goes beyond introducing the concept of God, as it also lays the foundations of faith, shapes religious attitudes, and encourages behavior consistent with religious teachings. Through consistent guidance and habituation, these values are internalized and later function as references for children's attitudes and decision-making (Fadlillah, 2020). Consequently, moral and religious education in early childhood program plays a crucial role in children's long-term development. It requires active collaboration between educators and parents to ensure effective implementation from an early age (Fitriyah, 2019).

Factors Affecting Moral and Religious Values

The development of moral and religious values in early childhood is influenced by several interrelated factors, including family, school, religious and cultural environment, media exposure, and cognitive development. Among these, the family serves as the primary and most influential agent of moral and religious socialization (Muzakkir et al., 2024). Children observe and imitate their parents' behavior, speech, and attitudes, which form the initial foundation of their moral concepts and religious understanding (Sari et al., 2023). Consistent parental guidance and positive examples play a significant role in the internalization of moral values.

Schools and teachers also play a strategic role in shaping children's moral and religious behavior through structured learning program. Early childhood education institutions support moral development through play-based learning, habituation, storytelling, and positive religious interactions integrated into daily routines (Nisa et al., 2024). Teachers act as role models whose behavior directly influences children's moral learning (Hadi et al., 2025). In addition, the religious and cultural environment, including local traditions and community practices, shapes children's moral patterns (Jadidah et al., 2024). Values such as cooperation, politeness, respect, and tolerance naturally develop through children's interactions within their social environment.

Media and technology further influence children's moral development by presenting diverse moral messages through television, music, and digital platforms (Nurkayatin et al., 2024). Because young children are not yet able to evaluate these messages critically, adult supervision and guidance are essential. Children's cognitive development also affects their capacity to understand moral reasoning, empathy, and different perspectives. Habitual activities such as praying, greeting others, sharing, taking turns, and apologizing are effective strategies for instilling moral and religious values when implemented consistently in early childhood education (Nisa et al., 2024).

The Development of Moral and Religious Values in Early Childhood

The development of moral and religious values is a vital aspect of children's overall growth, as these values serve as fundamental guidelines for living harmoniously within society. A strong moral and religious foundation established from an early age helps shape children's attitudes, behaviors, and social interactions in positive ways (Suyadi et al., 2019). Early exposure to moral norms and religious practices supports the development of self-regulation and awareness of social expectations.

In school settings, moral and religious development can be facilitated through various learning approaches, with role modelling among the most influential. Teachers hold a central position in this process because young children tend to imitate the attitudes, behaviors, and speech of adults in their environment (Apriani, 2024). Therefore, teachers are expected to consistently demonstrate positive moral and religious behavior both inside and outside the classroom. Role modelling thus functions not only as an instructional method but also as a professional responsibility in fostering children's moral and religious development.

Moral and Religious Values Assessment Indicators

National education regulations guide the assessment of moral and religious values in early childhood education. Regulation No. 58 of 2009 states that moral development falls within the scope of religious and moral values education (Kusnilawati, 2018). These standards provide a framework for evaluating children's moral and religious development in a manner appropriate to their age.

For children aged 5–6 years, moral and religious development can be observed through indicators such as understanding basic religious teachings, developing worship habits, distinguishing between good and bad behavior, recognizing religious rituals and important religious days, and showing respect for people of different religions (Mulyana et al., 2022). These competencies are assessed primarily through observation of children's daily behavior rather than formal testing (Istiyani et al., 2024). As a result, observation-based assessment becomes a key method for evaluating moral and religious development in early childhood settings.

Storytelling and Its Urgency

Storytelling is a learning activity that uses narratives as a systematic and purposeful medium for conveying messages, values, and learning objectives engagingly. In early childhood education, storytelling supports the development of language and logical thinking, fosters empathy and emotional understanding, enhances concentration, memory, and imagination, and instills moral and religious values such as honesty, cooperation, and obedience through children's identification with story characters (Hendry, 2021). When implemented effectively, storytelling provides meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences aligned with children's developmental characteristics.

The urgency of storytelling lies in its ability to integrate cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development simultaneously. Storytelling supported by visual media, such as picture-based stories, creates an engaging learning atmosphere that increases children's participation and comprehension of moral and social values embedded in narratives (Rohimah et al., 2023). Active involvement during storytelling encourages children to reflect on characters' behavior, thereby facilitating deeper internalization of values.

Empirical studies further confirm the effectiveness of storytelling in early childhood education. Setiantono (2012) reported that storytelling implemented through classroom action research significantly improved children's empathetic behavior, including respecting peers, waiting for turns, and helping others. Similarly, Zein and Puspita (2021) found that thematic storytelling enhanced children's listening and speaking skills, highlighting its contribution to language development and social interaction. Larasati et al. (2025) also emphasized that children's stories function as an effective medium for character education, enabling the internalization of moral, social, and religious values. These findings indicate that storytelling is a relevant and practical approach for fostering holistic development, particularly moral and religious values, in early childhood education.

Types of Storytelling Activities in Early Childhood Education

Storytelling in early childhood education can be implemented in various forms, each offering distinct pedagogical benefits. Oral storytelling enables emotional interaction between teachers and children, making moral messages more straightforward to understand and internalize (Suyadi, 2018). Through voice, expression, and gestures, teachers can adjust storytelling delivery based on children's responses.

Active involvement in storytelling also encourages children to think, engage in dialogue, and make simple decisions within the story (Wang et al., 2025). Additionally, the use of multimedia enriches storytelling activities by stimulating imagination and enhancing concentration (Ghofur & Nurhayati, 2023). The combination of different storytelling forms supports diverse learning styles and maximizes learning outcomes in early childhood education.

Principles for Conducting Storytelling Activities

To ensure effectiveness in instilling positive values, storytelling activities must follow several key principles (Putri et al., 2025). First, relevance is essential; stories should match children's age, experiences, and everyday realities. Second, storytelling should have clear objectives, with each story conveying specific moral or religious values such as honesty, empathy, responsibility, or religious awareness.

Third, creative delivery is necessary to maintain children's attention through expressive intonation, gestures, and movements. Fourth, storytelling should be participatory, encouraging children to engage in dialogue and respond to characters. Finally, consistency is crucial so that storytelling becomes a regular activity, reinforcing and embedding moral and religious values in children's daily habits.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design with a qualitative approach. The study emphasized the research process, direct observation, and an in-depth understanding of children's behavior. Statistical calculations were not the primary focus, as the research aimed to improve classroom teaching practices. Based on the model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1998), CAR was conducted through four stages in a cyclical and iterative process.

The first stage is planning, which involves preparing lesson plans, storytelling media, observation instruments, and indicators of moral and religious values. The second stage is action, which involves implementing storytelling activities to instill moral values such as honesty, empathy, and religious awareness in the learning process. The third stage is observing, which involves recording children's responses, religious behavior, participation, and observable changes during activities using observation sheets and documentation. The fourth stage is reflecting, which involves analyzing the results of the action to identify its strengths and limitations. The findings from this stage serve as the basis for improving the next cycle. This cycle was repeated until the predetermined indicators of success were achieved to the maximum extent possible.

Research Sample or Participants

The research participants were 20 children in Class A, aged 4–5 years, at Sari Mekar Kindergarten. The kindergarten is located in Lako Akediri Village, Sahu District, West Halmahera Regency. This study employed a total sampling technique, meaning that all children in Class A were included as research subjects.

Sari Mekar Kindergarten was selected as the research site based on preliminary observations. These observations indicated that the development of moral and religious values among the children had not yet reached an optimal level. Therefore, the setting was considered appropriate for implementing classroom action research through storytelling activities.

Instruments and Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in several stages. The first stage involved preliminary observations to identify the initial condition of children's moral and religious values before the action was implemented. This stage provided baseline information for the study. The second stage was carried out during cycle I and cycle II. During these cycles, data were collected through direct classroom observations, documentation of learning activities, and daily assessments conducted during storytelling sessions. The final stage involved compiling and verifying all collected data. This process aimed to obtain comprehensive findings regarding improvements in children's moral and religious values following the storytelling intervention.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive qualitative methods, with the following steps: data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing, and verification. Quantitative observation results were analyzed using the percentage of achievement of moral and religious value indicators:

$$\text{Value} = \frac{\text{Number of points obtained}}{\text{Maximum number of points}} \times 100\%$$

To obtain a classical score, the following formula is used:

$$\text{Nilai} = \frac{\text{Number of children with maximum moral and religious scores}}{\text{Total number of scores in 1 class}} \times 100\%$$

The individual value categories based on percentage are as follows :

$81\% - 100\%$: Developing Very Well
$71\% - 80\%$: Developing as Expected
$51\% - 70\%$: Starting to Grow
$< 50\%$: Not yet developed

The success of the action was determined using predetermined criteria based on the achievement of moral and religious value indicators. It was deemed successful if the average class percentage score for moral and religious values among children was 80%.

RESULTS

Pre-Action Results

The results of the initial data recapitulation of children's moral and religious values prior to the intervention are presented in Table 1. The table indicates that most children aged 4–5 years at Sari Mekar Kindergarten, located in Lako Akediri Village, Sahu District, West Halmahera Regency, were still at an early stage of moral and religious development. Of the 20 children observed, 18 children (90%) were categorized as not yet developed (NYD), indicating that they had not yet demonstrated an understanding or consistent application of moral and religious behavior in their daily interactions. Meanwhile, one child (5%) was classified as starting to grow (SG), and one child (5%) had reached the developing as expected (DE) category. These findings suggest that, prior to the implementation of the storytelling intervention, the overall level of moral and religious values among the children remained relatively low and required targeted instructional support.

Table 1. Recapitulation of Pre-Action Data

Percentage of Moral and Religious Values	Criteria	Number of Children	Percentage of Children
81%-100%	Developing very well	0	0
71%-80%	Developing as expected	1	5%
51%-70%	Starting to grow	1	5%
>50%	Not yet developed	18	90%



Figure 1. The Process of Learning Moral and Religious Values Pre-Action Storytelling Activity

The learning process of moral and religious values before the implementation of storytelling activities is illustrated in Figure 1. Figure 1 depicts the classroom learning situation prior to the intervention, in which children had not yet actively demonstrated moral and religious behaviors, such as practicing worship, displaying polite behavior, or responding appropriately to moral guidance during learning activities. This condition indicates that the development of moral and religious values had not been optimal before the storytelling method was applied.

Results of Cycle I

The Table 2 presents a comparison of children's moral and religious values between cycle I meeting I and meeting II. In meeting I, 90% of the children were categorized as NYD, whereas in meeting II this percentage decreased to 85%. Children classified as SG accounted for 5% in meeting I and increased to 10% in meeting II. Meanwhile, the proportion of children in the DE category remained unchanged at 5% in both meetings, indicating no improvement in this category. In addition, no children

reached the developing very well (DVW) category in either meeting I or meeting II. These results suggest that, although slight progress was observed in the SG category, overall improvement in children's moral and religious values during cycle I remained limited and required further refinement of the instructional approach.

Table 2. Comparison of Cycle I Recapitulation for Meeting I and Meeting II

Percentage of Moral and Religious Values	Criteria	Meeting I		Meeting II	
		Number of Children	Percentage	Number of Children	Percentage
81%-100%	DVW	0	0	0	0
71%-80%	DE	1	5%	1	5%
51%-70%	SG	1	5%	2	10%
>50%	NYD	18	90%	17	85%



Figure 2. Moral and Religious Values Learning Process Storytelling Activity Cycle I Meeting I

The learning process of moral and religious values through storytelling activities in cycle I meeting I is illustrated in Figure 2. Figure 2 shows that the teacher began implementing the storytelling method by introducing moral and religious messages embedded in the narrative, while the children were observed listening attentively and responding to the teacher's guidance. During this meeting, some children were able to follow the storyline and respond to questions, indicating initial engagement with the learning activity. However, several children remained passive and still required direct assistance from the teacher to demonstrate appropriate moral and religious behaviors. This finding suggests that, at this stage, the learning outcomes had not yet been optimally achieved and that further instructional support was necessary.



Figure 3. Moral and Religious Values Learning Process Storytelling Activity Cycle I Meeting II

The learning process of moral and religious values through storytelling activities in cycle I meeting II is illustrated in Figure 3. Figure 3 shows an improvement in children's participation compared to the previous meeting, as more children began to respond to the teacher's storytelling and demonstrate moral and religious behaviors, such as paying attention, following instructions, and displaying polite attitudes. This improvement indicates that children were becoming more engaged with the storytelling activities. However, several children still required guidance from the teacher, suggesting that further instructional refinement was needed before optimal learning outcomes could be achieved.

Results of Cycle II

A comparison of children's moral and religious values in cycle II meeting I and meeting II is presented in Table 3. The table shows a substantial improvement in children's moral and religious

values, as the percentage of children categorized as NYD decreased from 25% in meeting I to 0% in meeting II. At the same time, the proportion of children in the DE category increased markedly from 5% to 55%. In addition, the DVW category emerged in meeting II, with 25% of the children achieving this level. These results indicate that the storytelling activities implemented in cycle II were effective in improving children's moral and religious values and contributed to more optimal learning outcomes.

Table 3. Comparison of Recapitulation of Cycle II Meeting I and Meeting II

Percentage of Moral and Religious Values	Criteria	Meeting I		Meeting II	
		Number of Children	Percentage	Number of Children	Percentage
81%-100%	DVW	0	0	5	25%
71%-80%	DE	1	5%	11	55%
51%-70%	SG	14	70%	4	20%
>50%	NYD	5	25%	0	



Figure 4. Moral and Religious Values Learning Process Storytelling Activity Cycle II Meeting I

The learning process of moral and religious values through storytelling activities in cycle II meeting I is illustrated in Figure 4. Figure 4 shows that children were more actively engaged in the learning process compared to cycle I. They paid closer attention to the storytelling, followed the teacher's instructions more consistently, and began to demonstrate appropriate moral and religious behaviors during classroom activities. This improvement indicates that the revised actions implemented in cycle II contributed to more effective learning outcomes.



Figure 5. Moral and Religious Values Learning Process Storytelling Activity Cycle II Meeting II

The learning process of moral and religious values through storytelling activities in cycle II meeting II is illustrated in Figure 5. Figure 5 shows that children demonstrated optimal participation during the learning process, as they actively listened to the storytelling, followed classroom rules, and consistently displayed positive moral and religious behaviors independently. These findings indicate that the implementation of storytelling activities in cycle II meeting II successfully improved children's moral and religious values and met the predetermined success criteria of the study.

A comparison of children's moral and religious values before the intervention, during cycle I, and during cycle II is presented in Table 4. The table shows a substantial and consistent improvement in children's moral and religious values across all stages of the classroom action research. In the pre-intervention stage, most children were categorized as NYD, with only slight improvements observed in cycle I. A significant increase occurred in cycle II, as more children reached the DE and DVW categories. These results indicate that storytelling activities were effective in enhancing the moral and religious values of children aged 4–5 years.

Table 4. Comparison of Recapitulation of Moral and Religious Values of Children Before Intervention, Cycle I and Cycle II

Percentage of Moral and Religious Values	Criteria	Preliminary action		Cycle I		Cycle II	
		Number of Children	Percentage	Number of Children	Percentage	Number of Children	Percentage
81-100%	DVW	0	0	0	0	5	25%
71-80%	DE	1	5%	1	5%	11	55%
51-70%	SG	1	5%	2	10%	4	20%
<50%	NYD	18	90%	17	85%	0	

Based on the data presented in the pre-intervention, cycle I, and cycle II comparison tables, there was a significant improvement in the moral and religious development of children aged 4–5 years at Sari Mekar Kindergarten in Lako Akediri Village, West Halmahera Regency. In the pre-action stage, only 5% of the children were categorized as DE and DVW, indicating a generally low level of moral and religious development. After the implementation of cycle, I through storytelling activities with an environmental theme, the proportion of children in the DE and DVW categories increased to 15%. In cycle II, this percentage rose substantially to 75%, demonstrating that most children had achieved optimal moral and religious development. The increase of 15% from the pre-intervention stage to cycle I, followed by a total increase of 75% from the initial condition to cycle II, provides clear evidence that the storytelling method was effective in fostering children's moral and religious values. To further illustrate the progression of children's moral and religious development across the pre-intervention, cycle I, and cycle II stages, the data are presented in Figure 6.

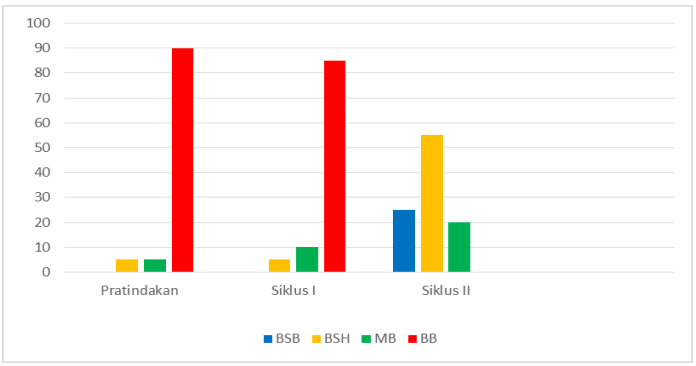


Figure 6. Children's Moral and Religious Values in Storytelling Activities Before Intervention, Cycle I, and Cycle II

Based on the graphs and data obtained at the final stage of the study, the children's moral and religious values were found to have met the success indicators established in this classroom action research. A total of 80% of the children reached the DE and DVW categories. These children were able to demonstrate religious behaviors such as practicing worship regularly, understanding appropriate behavior, distinguishing between good and bad actions, recognizing religious rituals and important religious days, and respecting people of different religions.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of storytelling activities contributed positively to the improvement of moral and religious values among children aged 4–5 years at Sari Mekar Kindergarten. These results highlight the importance of using learning methods that are aligned with the developmental characteristics of early childhood. At this age, children learn most effectively through concrete, engaging, and emotionally meaningful approaches. Storytelling fulfils these criteria by combining narrative, imagination, and moral messages in a form easily understood by young learners. This finding supports the view that early childhood education should prioritize creative and innovative learning strategies to enhance children's active participation and meaningful learning experiences. Nurhidayah and Citrasukmawati (2022) emphasize that the use of creative learning

methods can improve the quality of the learning process by encouraging children to be more involved and responsive during classroom activities.

The results also align with the view that moral and religious values in early childhood cannot be developed solely through direct instruction. Instead, they require consistent habituation and positive role models for children to observe and imitate. Ardiansari and Dimyati (2022) argue that religious values are most effectively instilled in early childhood through daily routines and role modelling, rather than through abstract explanations. In this study, storytelling functioned as a medium that naturally integrated moral messages into familiar situations, allowing children to internalize values through identification with story characters. As a result, children were able to relate the values presented in the stories to their own daily experiences.

However, the findings from cycle I indicate that the improvement in children's moral and religious values was still limited at the initial stage of implementation. This condition suggests that instilling moral and religious values requires time, repetition, and reinforcement. Children need multiple opportunities to listen, observe, and practice moral behaviors before they become habitual. Azizah et al. (2024) emphasize that learning methods, including storytelling, must be carefully planned and adapted to classroom conditions to ensure that children can fully understand the intended messages. In cycle I, some children were still adjusting to the storytelling activities, and their ability to grasp the moral content varied by developmental level. Rizqina and Suratman (2020) further explain that routine habituation plays a crucial role in shaping children's moral and religious behavior, as values are gradually internalized through repeated experiences rather than instant instruction.

A more significant improvement was observed in cycle II after refinements were made to the storytelling activities. During this cycle, teachers delivered stories more expressively, used supporting media, and actively involved children through interactive strategies such as question-and-answer sessions and imitation of story characters' behavior. These adjustments enhanced children's engagement and understanding of the moral messages embedded in the stories. The increased level of participation observed in cycle II indicates that interactive and expressive storytelling can strengthen children's emotional connection to learning content. This finding is consistent with Ningsih (2024), who states that strategies for instilling religious values in early childhood are more effective when implemented through role modelling, habituation, and interactive activities. Storytelling, when conducted interactively, provides a meaningful context for these strategies to operate simultaneously.

The results of this study also support Makhmudah's (2020) findings, which reported that storytelling significantly enhances the internalization of religious values in early childhood. In this study, children did not merely listen to stories; they were encouraged to observe characters' actions, imitate positive behaviors, and practice them during classroom routines. Through this process, moral and religious values were transformed from abstract concepts into concrete actions. Children became more familiar with behaviors such as praying, showing respect, following rules, and distinguishing between good and bad actions. This finding reinforces the idea that storytelling serves as an effective bridge between moral knowledge and moral practice in early childhood education.

Furthermore, storytelling activities provided concrete, meaningful learning experiences. Children were engaged not only cognitively but also emotionally and socially, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of the learning process. Gea and Zega (2025) emphasize that creative learning methods, including storytelling, increase children's emotional and social engagement, making it easier for them to understand and apply learning content. When children are emotionally involved, they are more likely to remember moral messages and translate them into daily behavior. In this study, increased engagement was reflected in children's improved ability to practice religious habits and demonstrate positive moral behavior independently.

The findings are also consistent with Hudah's (2019) research, which showed that storytelling is compelling in instilling religious values and noble character in young children. Through engaging narratives, children are more receptive to values such as politeness, good manners, and religious practices when they are presented in a non-coercive, enjoyable way. Children do not feel pressured or instructed explicitly; instead, they learn naturally through stories that capture their interest and imagination. This approach aligns with the principles of early childhood education, which emphasize learning through play, exploration, and meaningful interaction.

Overall, the significant improvement observed in cycle II indicates that storytelling is a relevant, effective, and appropriate method for fostering moral and religious values in early childhood

education. The consistent increase in children's moral and religious development demonstrates that storytelling, when implemented thoughtfully and interactively, can support sustainable character development. These findings suggest that storytelling should be considered not only as a supplementary activity but as an integral part of moral and religious learning in early childhood settings.

CONCLUSION

Based on the implementation of classroom action research conducted across two cycles, it can be concluded that storytelling activities effectively improved the moral and religious values of children aged 4–5 years at Sari Mekar Kindergarten in Lako Akediri Village, Sahu District, West Halmahera Regency. This improvement was evident from the pre-intervention stage, when 90% of the children were categorized as NYD, followed by a modest increase during cycle I and a substantial improvement in cycle II. By the end of cycle II, 80% of the children had reached the DE and DVW categories. These findings indicate that storytelling is not merely a medium for delivering moral messages but also an effective learning strategy for shaping children's moral and religious values through enjoyable, contextual, and meaningful learning experiences.

The findings of this study have important implications for early childhood education practice. Teachers can utilize storytelling activities as an effective instructional method to foster moral and religious values in early childhood education settings. By presenting stories expressively, using appropriate supporting media, and actively involving children through discussion, questioning, and role imitation, teachers can facilitate a deeper internalization of moral and religious values. Therefore, storytelling should be consistently integrated into daily learning activities as an integral component of character education program in early childhood education.

Despite the study's positive outcomes, several limitations should be acknowledged. The research was conducted in a single kindergarten with a relatively small number of participants, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader educational contexts. In addition, the study's duration was relatively short, limiting a more comprehensive assessment of long-term changes in children's moral and religious behavior. Future research is recommended to involve larger sample sizes, longer observation periods, and more diverse educational settings. Such efforts would strengthen the evidence base and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of storytelling activities in developing moral and religious values in early childhood.

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