

Representing Islamic Values: Contemporary Indonesian Children's Literature as a Resource for Religious Literacy

Yenni Hayati*¹, Ridha Hasnul Ulya², Abdurahman³, Nofrahadi⁴, and Rafdisyam⁵

¹⁻⁵ Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia

Abstract

This study examines the representational potential of contemporary Indonesian children's literature for religious literacy and character values in madrasah ibtidaiyah (Islamic elementary schools). Employing a qualitative content analysis, this research analyzes the portrayal of *aqidah* (faith), *akhlaq* (ethics), and *ibadah* (worship) within ten selected novels from the *Kecil-Kecil Punya Karya* (KKPK) series. The content analysis identified a total of 296 textual representations across the corpus, with *akhlaq* emerging as the most predominant category (201 occurrences), followed by *aqidah* (51 occurrences) and *ibadah* (44 occurrences). The findings indicate that these narratives convey Islamic concepts primarily through contextualized daily scenarios rather than explicit didactic instruction. While this study is strictly limited to textual analysis and does not measure instructional implementation or learner outcomes, the observed thematic distribution highlights the potential of children's literature as a supplementary reading material to illustrate moral and religious concepts. Consequently, these findings provide preliminary insights for educators considering the selection of literary texts to support values-oriented reading in Islamic elementary education.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 24 June 2026

Revised : 27 July 2026

Accepted : 24 August 2026

KEYWORDS

Character formation; children's literature; Islamic religiosity; religious literacy

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

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CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

*Yenni Hayati, Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia. Email: yennihayati@fbs.unp.ac.id

Introduction

Over the past decade, the challenges in implementing character education in Indonesian schools have become increasingly complex, paralleling shifts in the social and digital landscape. Although the national curriculum has integrated value-based education, data indicates a significant gap between curricular objectives and the realities of adolescent social behavior. For instance, reports from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) between 2016 and 2020 recorded over 6,500 cases of children in conflict with the law, with a variety of criminal offenses that underscore the urgent need for strengthened ethical literacy and self-regulation within the educational environment. This phenomenon suggests that current pedagogical methods may not yet fully facilitate the internalization of character values adaptive to the dynamics of modern adolescent social interaction. The characteristics of the documented behavioral issues are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Data on Moral Degradation Among Children in Indonesia (2016–2020)

No.	Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL)	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
1	Children as Perpetrators of Physical Violence	108	112	107	121	58
2	Children as Perpetrators of Psychological Violence	39	41	32	26	11
3	Children as Perpetrators of Sexual Violence	146	168	161	183	44
4	Children as Perpetrators of Sodomy/Pedophilia	0	0	0	0	11
5	Children as Perpetrators of Homicide	48	51	54	46	8
6	Children as Perpetrators of Theft	43	57	75	55	22

7	Children as Perpetrators of Traffic Accidents	71	76	82	86	21
8	Children as Perpetrators Weapon Possession	28	52	64	37	11
9	Children as Perpetrators of Kidnapping	8	8	11	7	3
10	Children as Perpetrators of Abortion	48	53	67	44	10
11	Children as Perpetrators of Terrorism	0	4	8	0	0
Total		1314	1403	1434	1251	1098
Overall Total		6500				

Source: Indonesian Child Protection Commission – KPAI

Table 1 presents administrative child-protection and juvenile-justice data compiled from official reports of the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), specifically tracking cases of Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) across an established five-year historical baseline from 2016 to 2020. Examining this specific multi-year period provides essential contextual grounding for understanding long-term behavioral patterns and systemic challenges within juvenile justice prior to post-pandemic policy shifts. Rather than reflecting a generalized moral decline among youth, these documented cases highlight structural vulnerabilities and pedagogical gaps in supporting children's ethical self-regulation. Addressing these complex child-protection challenges necessitates comprehensive educational approaches, including the reinforcement of religious values within Islamic instructional frameworks. Islamic religiosity encompasses both vertical dimensions, which refer to an individual's spiritual devotion to Allah, and horizontal dimensions, which govern social interactions through compassion, solidarity, and social responsibility (Sutrisno & Haron, 2022). Consequently, Islamic value-based frameworks emphasize not merely ritual compliance, but the holistic development of a socially responsible and ethically grounded character (Khumaini, 2019).

Islamic values are generally categorized into three primary components: *aqidah* (creed), *akhlaq* (ethics), and *ibadah* (worship). *Aqidah* forms the foundation of belief in the oneness of God and the obligation to follow His teachings (Khairon et al., 2021; Haerul et al., 2023). *Akhlaq* refers to behaviors driven by conscious and spontaneous impulses aligned with Islamic ethical principles (Sachedina, 2022). *Ibadah*, meanwhile, includes verbal expressions, attitudes, and actions performed solely for the sake of Allah (Edet, 2019). The application of these values such as justice, equality, and tolerance is vital for fostering mutual respect, cooperation, and peace (Ilmi et al., 2023). Achieving internalization of these values among the younger generation requires synergistic efforts from educational institutions and families. The integration of religious values into the curriculum, teaching methods, and school culture is among the most effective strategies for shaping a harmonious and responsible society (Ilmi et al., 2023). *Madrasah ibtidaiyah*, as foundational Islamic education institutions, play a strategic role in instilling moral and spiritual values from an early age (Zuhri, 2025).

One promising educational medium for promoting Islamic character development is children's literature. The integration of Islamic religiosity into contemporary Indonesian children's literature provides an effective avenue for fostering religious literacy and shaping positive character traits among young readers (Mahariah, 2023). As the world's most populous Muslim-majority country, Indonesia has a rich tradition of scholarship and cultural practices grounded in Islamic teachings, which are reflected in contemporary children's literary works (Apriani et al., 2021).

Modern Indonesian children's literature possesses substantial potential to shape children's worldview, provide moral instruction, and introduce cultural and religious values in an enjoyable and accessible manner (Irwansyah et al., 2021). The narratives in children's literature are capable of conveying Islamic themes such as tawhid (monotheism), the pillars of Islam, noble moral conduct, and religious practices such as Ramadan fasting and Eid celebrations, through characters and plots that are psychologically appropriate for young readers (Jamaluddin, 2013; Ibrahim, 2021; Szécsi et al., 2009). This approach enables children to internalize Islamic teachings deeply yet without dogmatism (Asmanto et al., 2023; Nor & Malim, 2014).

Indonesia's education system continues to face challenges in implementing religious value-based character education. Memorization-based and didactic methods often result in students knowing the rules without being able to apply them meaningfully in real-life contexts (Alimah, 2020; Amalia, 2019). Hence, exploring how religiosity is represented in children's literature becomes essential for informing educators, parents, and policymakers about its potential to foster religious literacy and holistic character development in children (Ekawati et al., 2021; Ponno et al., 2022).

As a creative and innovative educational medium, children's literature serves not only to entertain but also to aid in character building and personality development. However, its use in educational settings must be carefully designed to avoid causing disinterest or cognitive overload in students. Therefore, the integration of literature into character education should be proportional and tailored to children's developmental stages, comprehension levels, and interests as primary readers.

Several studies have demonstrated the pivotal role of children's literature in character education. Abdurrahman et al. (2021) found that literary works serve effectively as media for character formation. Zubaidah et al. (2019) similarly concluded that literature instruction has a significant impact on moral education. Hasan et al. (2020) further emphasized that children's literature fosters creativity through imaginative elements embedded in the narratives. Dewi (2017) added that children's literature can reflect human conflicts, moral values, and promote critical engagement among students. In the Indonesian context, prior research has explored religiosity in Islamic education (Febriansyah et al., 2024) and the use of literature for moral development. However, these studies have not specifically investigated the intersection between Islamic religiosity, religious literacy, and character education within contemporary children's literature. For instance, Rochmah et al. (2021) focused solely on Islamic education in Javanese families without examining the role of children's literature in this process.

The use of children's literature as a medium for character education in madrasah ibtidaiyah also poses pedagogical challenges for teachers, particularly regarding training and instructional strategies. As Vethamani & Nair (2009) observed, teachers must be equipped with the skills to design effective learning experiences, including the selection of age-appropriate, culturally relevant, and curriculum-aligned texts (Sidhu et al., 2010; Choudhary, 2016). When supported by appropriate methodologies, children's literature can serve not only as reading material but also as a tool for enhancing students' religious literacy and critical thinking (Abdulridha & Latiff, 2020).

The necessity of addressing these child protection and character development challenges through literature is well recognized in prior scholarship, yet existing studies exhibit specific analytical and empirical limitations. Previous research on Indonesian children's literature has primarily focused on broad thematic analyses of moral values in general fiction (e.g., Abdurrahman et al., 2021; Zubaidah et al., 2019) or examined religious education within localized familial and cultural

contexts without analyzing textual media (e.g., Rochmah et al., 2021). While recent studies have begun to explore religiosity in Islamic educational settings (Febriansyah et al., 2024), they predominantly rely on small, non-systematic corpora and treat religious values as monolithic moral lessons. Specifically, these works lack an explicit analytical categorization that differentiates between *aqidah* (faith), *akhlaq* (ethics), and *ibadah* (worship), nor do they examine how narrative mechanisms facilitate religious literacy among elementary students. By contrast, this study addresses these methodological gaps by examining a systematic ten-novel corpus from the *Kecil-Kecil Punya Karya* (KKPK) series through a structured, multi-dimensional coding scheme based on Krippendorff's (2004) framework. This approach allows for a precise comparative mapping of textual representations, thereby bridging literary analysis with practical pedagogical implications for *madrasah ibtidaiyah* environments.

This research addresses these lacunae by providing a comprehensive analysis of the representation of Islamic religiosity in contemporary Indonesian children's literature, specifically examining its pedagogical implications for religious literacy and character formation within *madrasah ibtidaiyah* settings. The novelty of this study resides in its integrative framework that bridges three domains that have traditionally been treated in isolation: (1) the functional capacity of modern children's literature as an educational medium, (2) the conceptualization of Islamic religiosity, and (3) the application of values-based character development within Islamic instructional environments. Rather than evaluating these elements separately, this study synthesizes them to develop contextual pedagogical strategies. Furthermore, the findings are intended to contribute to the field by producing an evidence-based selection of literary works and a set of practical instructional guidelines, thereby bridging the gap between literary critique and practical classroom implementation.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach, utilizing the framework established by Creswell (2018) to explore the construction of religious meaning within contemporary Indonesian children's literature. The unit of analysis comprises a selected corpus of literary narratives specifically curated for their thematic emphasis on *aqidah* (faith), *akhlaq* (ethics), and *ibadah* (worship). The analysis follows a structured four-stage interpretative process based on Krippendorff's (2004) methodology: (1) data selection and unitizing, (2) development of an inductive coding scheme derived from Islamic pedagogical concepts, (3) systematic thematic extraction, and (4) inferential analysis regarding the functional utility of these narratives for religious literacy in *madrasah ibtidaiyah*. To ensure analytical reliability and validity, a peer-debriefing technique and a systematic audit trail of the coding decisions were maintained throughout the interpretation phase.

In the content analysis process, communication units such as words, phrases, clauses, or sentences were categorized based on the meanings embedded in character dialogue, behavior, or the author's narration. Each category represented a specific dimension of Islamic religiosity—such as *tawhid*, *ihsan*, *shalat*, or *sabr*—and was processed objectively and systematically to ensure the validity of findings (Krippendorff, 2004). This analytic technique not only facilitated the identification of theme frequency but also enabled contextual and interpretive insight.

The primary data source consists of children's literary works published under the *Kecil-Kecil Punya Karya* (KKPK) series by Mizan Publishing. Established in 2003, this series serves as a platform for child authors aged 6–12. To ensure a systematic and auditable selection process, this study

employed a multi-stage filtering protocol. First, an initial screening of the 1,250 titles published up to 2024 was conducted to identify works containing explicit references to Islamic concepts. This screening yielded a corpus of 300 titles. Second, to mitigate selection bias and ensure the findings represent the diversity of the series, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied: (1) inclusion of works published between 2015 and 2024 to ensure contemporary relevance; (2) exclusion of short story anthologies to maintain narrative depth; and (3) exclusion of non-fictional or strictly educational guidebooks. Finally, from the remaining pool, ten novels were selected using a stratified random sampling approach to ensure the representation of varying narrative themes, rather than focusing solely on pre-identified religious content. The final corpus is detailed in the table below:

Table 2. Children’s Literature from the KKPK Series Used as Research Corpus

No.	Title	Author/Year of Publication
1	Everyday Is Beautiful	Kirei/2010
2	Run, Zahra! Run!	Dian Anggraini/ 2012
3	The Amazing Family	Putri/2018
4	Mata Nazwa	Putri/2018
5	Happy Tutti Frutti	Aughea/2019
6	Little Studygrammer	Sya'bani/2020
7	Para Peraih Mimpi	Dyfka/2021
8	Hafalan Al-Qur'an Namira	Wiangga/ 2024
9	It's a Channel	Tirtayasa/2022
10	Persahabatan Sejati	Lutfiana Rahmadiana/2024

Source: *KKPK Series, Mizan Publisher*

The data corpus consisted of textual segments including dialogue, character actions, and narrative passages that explicitly manifest Islamic values. These data were extracted using systematic content analysis, focusing on linguistic markers related to aqidah (faith), akhlaq (ethics), and ibadah (worship). To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study implemented a rigorous validation protocol beyond mere comparative analysis. We employed investigator triangulation and an audit trail to minimize researcher bias. The reliability of the coding scheme was verified through independent coding, where two researchers independently analyzed a subsample of the texts to calculate inter-coder agreement. Any discrepancies were resolved through reflexive discussions and reference to the established conceptual framework. Furthermore, a detailed audit trail comprising coding logs, reflective memos, and systematic documentation of interpretative decisions was maintained throughout the study to ensure the confirmability and dependability of the results:

- Close reading: Carefully reading and understanding the texts to identify elements containing religious values.
- Identifying meaning units: Segmenting the text into units—words, phrases, or sentences—that express aspects of aqidah, akhlaq, or ibadah.
- Classification and categorization: Grouping the meaning units into major categories that correspond to the dimensions of Islamic religiosity under study.
- Contextual interpretation: Interpreting each category based on the narrative context, cultural background, and alignment with Islamic teachings.

- Reflection and synthesis: Summarizing analytical findings to generate new insights into how children’s literature can serve as an effective medium for religious character formation and literacy development.

Result and Discussion

Result

Based on the analysis of ten modern Indonesian children's literary works from the Kecil-Kecil Punya Karya (KKPK) series used as the primary research corpus, the study found that Islamic religious values consistently appear in various forms through characters’ utterances, thoughts, and behaviors. These findings offer an initial understanding of how contemporary children’s literature contributes to introducing and instilling religious values among young readers, particularly within the framework of Islamic character education in madrasah ibtidaiyah.

Table 3. Frequency of Religious Literacy and Value Representation in Modern Indonesian Children’s Literature

No.	Title	Frequency		
		Aqidah (Faith)	Akhlaq (Ethic)	Ibadah (Worship)
1	Everyday Is Beautiful/ Kirei/2010	10	25	5
2	Run, Zahra! Run!/ Dian Anggraini/2012	7	35	3
3	The Amazing Family/ Putri/2018	3	15	5
4	Mata Nazwa/ Putri/2018	2	15	3
5	Happy Tutti Frutti/ Aughea/2019	3	17	5
6	Little Studygrammer/ Sya'bani/2020	3	18	2
7	Para Peraih Mimpi/ Dyfka/2021	8	18	3
8	Hafalan Al-Qur'an Namira/ Wiangga/2024	10	15	10
9	It's a Channel/ Tirtayasa/2022	2	18	3
10	Persahabatan Sejati Lutfiana Rahmadiana/2024	3	25	5
	Overall Total	51	201	44

Source: Processed Research Data

Table 3 illustrates the emergence of religious values in children's literature, represented through speech, thought, and actions of characters. Additional data were also drawn from narrative elements such as events and setting descriptions provided by the narrator. Among the three categories, akhlaq (ethics) was the most frequently depicted, with 201 occurrences. Aqidah (faith) appeared 51 times, while ibadah (ritual worship) was found in 44 instances.

Ethical Literacy and Religious Values in Modern Indonesian Children’s Literature

In modern Indonesian children’s literature, religious values particularly those related to akhlaq (ethics)—are often depicted explicitly through characters’ behaviors, attitudes, and dialogue. This is crucial because akhlaq is one of the foundational pillars of Islam, emphasizing not only faith and ritual worship but also the moral embodiment of values in daily conduct. For instance, the following excerpt demonstrates birrul walidain (devotion to parents):

“After eating, I kissed my mother’s hand.” (Anggraini, 2012)

This simple gesture represents a child’s reverence and affection toward their parents—an act strongly encouraged in Islamic teachings, as found in Surahs An-Nisa (4:36), Al-Isra (17:23), and

Luqman (31:14). Such portrayals help young readers grasp that noble character is not an abstract ideal but a tangible part of everyday life. Another example reads:

“After dinner, I helped my mother wash the dishes.” (Anggraini, 2012)

Helping with household chores falls under the category of *ihsan* doing good toward others. In Islamic tradition, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself exemplified this by assisting with domestic duties, making such acts integral to Islamic character education. Family activities such as watching television or playing with younger siblings also reflect emotional bonding and *silaturahmi* (maintaining kinship ties), foundational for social harmony and family resilience. The following excerpt exemplifies these values:

“After helping Auntie prepare the food, Vio sat and waited in the living room.” (Rahmadiana, 2024)

The willingness of the character to help a relative highlights *silaturahmi* and *sabr* (patience) qualities highly esteemed in Islam. The character’s calmness while waiting, despite anxiety, emphasizes that *akhlaq* also encompasses emotional control and composure in seemingly mundane situations. Other relevant expressions of *akhlaq* include social solidarity, as shown in this quote:

“They went to the orphanage to donate part of their earnings.” (Kirei, 2010)

This reflects the value of *jūd* (generosity) and *taqwa* (piety) acts strongly encouraged in Islamic ethics. It reinforces the understanding that wealth is not solely for personal use but includes the rights of others. Singing songs to entertain orphans also illustrates emotional and spiritual compassion, central to *akhlaq karimah* (noble character) in social contexts. Messages of fraternity and tolerance are reflected in the following excerpt:

“Salsa, Abyan, even though Sister Namira is blind, she is still your sister. She has done so much for you. Besides, Sister Namira is a creation of Allah, just like you.” (Wiangga, 2024)

The father’s dialogue delivers a powerful message of *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood) and respect for physical differences. It teaches children not to discriminate and to uphold the dignity of every individual as a creation of Allah. This message is especially relevant in efforts to address psychological abuse and bullying, as noted in KPAI reports from 2016–2020. Finally, greetings such as *salaam*—a social prayer and symbol of peace—are frequently depicted in children’s literature, for example:

“Assalamu ‘alaikum, children,” greeted Ms. Fatimah.

“Wa ‘alaikum salaam, Ma’am!” the children replied in unison. (Kirei, 2010)

The use of *salaam* and its response is a *Sunnah* emphasized in Islam, promoting affection and peaceful coexistence. Narratives like these cultivate politeness and mutual respect among young readers—essential foundations for harmonious social relationships.

Faith Literacy and Religious Values in Modern Indonesian Children’s Literature

In Islamic theology, *aqidah* refers to the core beliefs that form the foundation of a Muslim’s faith. These include the belief in the oneness of Allah (*tawhid*), the acceptance of the prophets, the holy scriptures, the Day of Judgment, and divine decree (*qada* and *qadar*). In modern Indonesian children’s literature, *aqidah* values are often conveyed through characters’ utterances, prayers, and reflections. One expression of *tawhid rububiyah*—the belief that all matters rest in the hands of Allah is found in the following quotation:

“Insya Allah,” said Father. (Anggraini, 2012)

The phrase *insya Allah* (God willing) is a manifestation of the awareness that while humans may plan, the final outcome lies with Allah. This teaches children the importance of entrusting their efforts and hopes to God rather than relying solely on their own capabilities. An example of *tawhid uluhiyah*—the recognition that only Allah is worthy of worship and the source of all help—appears in:

“Ya Allah! Help Your servant!” I cried. (Anggraini, 2012)

This line shows the character turning to Allah in a moment of hardship, representing the core of Islamic worship. Prayer, in this sense, is not merely a ritual act but an expression of human vulnerability and total reliance on God. Such narratives help young readers understand that supplication is a heartfelt and sincere connection with Allah, not merely a prescribed formality. In the novel *Everyday Is Beautiful*, a series of prayers underscores the character’s spiritual intimacy with Allah:

“O Allah, heal my friend, protect her from illness, don’t take her away from me, O Allah...” (Kirei, 2010)

This quote reflects belief in God’s power over life and death and His ability to heal. It also teaches children perseverance, the importance of prayer, and reliance on Allah while continuing to make an effort. In *Namira’s Qur’an Memorization* (*Hafalan Al-Qur’an Namira*), expressions of *insya Allah* and belief in divine decree are embedded in the narrative:

“Namira, *insya Allah*, I will buy you a Braille Qur’an.” (Wiangga, 2024)

This statement contains values of *tawhid rububiyah* and belief in *qada* and *qadar*, as the father acknowledges that all human plans are contingent upon God’s will. Furthermore, his intention to purchase a Braille Qur’an reflects a reverence for the holy book as divine guidance. The concept of divine destiny is also present in:

“It was fate that separated us. Although your father is gone, his contributions to our family were immense.” (Rahmadiana, 2024)

This illustrates acceptance and patience in facing God’s decree and demonstrates the ability to find meaning in life’s trials. Acceptance of *qada* and *qadar* is a key aspect of Islamic faith that fosters emotional resilience and spiritual strength in children.

Worship Literacy and Religious Values in Modern Indonesian Children’s Literature

Modern Indonesian children’s literature features a variety of Islamic religious values, especially those related to acts of worship. Rituals such as prayer (*shalat*), supplication (*doa*), remembrance (*dzikir*), Qur’an reading and memorization, and the wearing of the hijab are explicitly depicted in characters’ speech, behavior, and routines. These depictions go beyond information delivery—they serve as educational tools introducing religious practices to young readers, including the hijab as both an act of worship and an expression of Muslim identity.

Through relatable characters and child-centered narratives, modern Indonesian children’s literature effectively introduces, explains, and motivates young readers to perform religious practices such as prayer, reading the Qur’an, and wearing the hijab. While certain narratives simplify theological meanings, they serve as valuable entry points for further religious education in the home and school settings. In this way, children’s literature functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium for character education and religious literacy aligned with the national educational vision of nurturing a materially and spiritually just society based on Pancasila. One example illustrates this:

“I often wear a hijab. I think of it as an umbrella that protects a Muslim girl from the sun. A hijab is like a wig too. If a girl is bald, she can wear a hijab, right?” (Anggraini, 2012)

From an Islamic perspective, wearing the hijab is not merely physical protection or an aesthetic solution, but an act of devotion to Allah, as commanded in Surah Al-Ahzab: 59 and An-Nur: 31. The primary purposes of the hijab are to preserve modesty, express piety, and reflect Islamic identity. While the character uses a childlike analogy, it reflects how children interpret abstract religious concepts through concrete, lived experiences. It is therefore essential for educators and parents to enrich this understanding with the theological and spiritual dimensions of *ta’abbud*—acts of worship performed solely for the sake of Allah—just as prayer is a central pillar of faith. Several quotations highlight *shalat*, especially the dawn prayer (*Subuh*), as part of the character’s daily routine:

“Good morning all! How are you? Hm... I just woke up. But I already prayed *Subuh*—though ... Well, it’s still *Subuh*! I’m going to pray, clean my room, do fifteen minutes of practice, take a shower, and then go to the competition venue.” (Anggraini, 2012)

These excerpts emphasize that *shalat* is an obligatory act to be performed punctually, often prioritized over other daily activities. In Islamic theology, prayer is considered the pillar of religion (QS. Al-Ankabut: 45), serving as a direct connection between the worshipper and the Divine. Furthermore, references to ritual purity (*wudhu*) illustrate the characters’ internalization of the prerequisites for valid worship. The analysis reveals a recurring thematic focus on prayer practices—specifically the dawn prayer—within the selected narratives. This demonstrates a consistent narrative effort to cultivate worship habits from an early age by contextualizing religious obligations within the children’s daily lives. Complementing these ritual practices, the narratives also frame the recitation and memorization of the Qur’an as essential acts of devotion. A pertinent example from Namira’s Qur’an Memorization underscores this point:

“Namira couldn’t see, so she couldn’t read the Qur’an. She was afraid of being bullied. ‘So how can I ever become a hafizah?’ she asked sadly.” (Wiangga, 2024)

Namira opened the Braille Qur’an with Salsa’s help. She was memorizing Surah Al-Mu’minun, from the 18th juz. She had started memorizing from juz 30, or what we call Juz Amma. This excerpt underscores that Qur’an reading and memorization are fundamental acts of worship in Islam. Despite her physical disability, Namira is encouraged to engage with the Qur’an using Braille. This aligns with the Islamic principle that Allah does not burden a soul beyond its capacity (QS. Al-Baqarah: 286). The narrative conveys that sincere effort and love for the Qur’an are highly valued in Islam and will be rewarded accordingly. This illustrates the educational function of worship as presented in children’s literature.

The representation of worship in modern Indonesian children’s literature fulfills several important roles: familiarizing children with religious practices from an early age; reinforcing the idea that worship is integral to a Muslim’s daily life; providing concrete examples of pious and committed characters; inspiring enthusiasm and devotion through accessible, relatable stories. By embedding religious practices in everyday narrative contexts, children’s literature makes Islamic values more understandable and meaningful for young readers. This narrative approach renders literature an effective tool for developing religious character—emotionally resonant, intellectually accessible, and free from doctrinal rigidity.

Discussion

The analysis of the selected corpus reveals that the integration of Islamic themes functions through specific narrative mechanisms rather than mere didactic instruction. Across the novels, character development is primarily constructed through situational modeling, where protagonists navigate ethical dilemmas, such as choosing between peer pressure and religious adherence, thereby translating abstract theological concepts into tangible behavioral templates. While earlier titles in the series often utilized explicit didactic moralizing, the more contemporary works analyzed here employ a relatable context strategy, positioning religious practices like *shalat* or qur'anic recitation as natural extensions of the characters' everyday lives. However, differences emerge in how these values are reinforced: some narratives emphasize the internal spiritual struggle, whereas others prioritize the outward socio-ethical performance of faith. These textual variances suggest that modern children's literature does not provide a monolithic view of Islamic identity; rather, it offers a spectrum of religious engagement that allows students in *madrasah ibtidaiyah* to negotiate their own identities between traditional piety and contemporary social realities.

In the context of religious literacy, it is crucial to emphasize approaches that stimulate critical thinking skills. This includes providing opportunities for students to question and analyze religious texts presented in the children's stories they read (Irwansyah et al., 2021). Hutt et al. (2021) affirm that the use of narrative in education can enhance spiritual development and understanding of religious texts. Therefore, teachers must employ responsive, reflective, and adaptive teaching strategies tailored to the developmental stage of *madrasah ibtidaiyah* students.

Modern Indonesian children's literature also reflects the diversity of Indonesian society, making it an ideal vehicle for cultivating mutual respect and appreciation of differences (Setyaningrum et al., 2022). Stories featuring characters from various cultural and religious backgrounds help students develop empathy, strengthen national identity, and promote social solidarity. Cross-cultural perspectives in literature not only support character development but also expand students' awareness of pluralism and peaceful coexistence.

Additionally, literature-based instruction supports the development of critical thinking skills. Through discussion and analysis of story themes and messages, students are encouraged to reflect on the meaning of narratives, consider diverse perspectives, and relate the content to their own lived experiences (Zubaidah et al., 2019). Classroom discussions, for instance, are highly effective for exploring the values embedded in stories and facilitating peer-to-peer idea exchange. Dialogic reading—an approach that fosters interactive dialogue between the reader and the text—can also enhance comprehension and active student participation (Ratminingsih & Budasi, 2018).

Creative writing and storytelling activities based on literature provide students with opportunities to express their thoughts and emotions while deepening their emotional connection to the stories (Hermingrum & Sukmawan, 2020). These approaches not only improve literacy skills but also help students grasp the complexity of moral and ethical values presented through literary works. However, implementing children's literature in Islamic school settings requires careful planning and structured pedagogical approaches. Teachers must select age-appropriate books that are culturally relevant and aligned with curricular objectives (Mandarani & Munir, 2021). An inclusive and supportive classroom environment is also essential to create a safe space where students feel comfortable sharing ideas and engaging in dialogue about the religious values they encounter in texts.

Modern Indonesian children's literature shows great promise as a medium for religious instruction in madrasah ibtidaiyah. These works present values of aqidah, akhlaq, and ibadah through narratives that are easy for young readers to understand (Irwansyah et al., 2021). Featuring relatable characters and everyday situations, children's literature helps students connect Islamic teachings with their real-life experiences. This aligns with the goals of national character education, which aims to build a society that is both materially and spiritually prosperous, grounded in Pancasila. Integrating literature into religious education enables students not only to memorize concepts but also to understand their meaning and reflect on them in daily behavior.

In the madrasah context, religious literacy entails more than understanding sacred texts; it also involves the ability to interpret religious values within one's social and cultural environment. Children's literature is an ideal tool for enhancing religious literacy, as it employs accessible language and engaging storytelling, appealing to students both emotionally and intellectually. For example, expressions like "Insya Allah" or "Ya Allah! Help Your servant!" (Anggraini, 2012) foster an awareness that all affairs depend on Allah, nurturing an attitude of tawakkul and personal devotion. Literature thus serves as a bridge between normative religious texts and their practical application in daily life.

Depictions of noble ethics in children's literature, such as *birrul walidain*, *ihsan*, and *silaturahmi*, play an important role in shaping students' character. Phrases like "After dinner, I helped my mother wash the dishes" (Anggraini, 2012) illustrate the application of *ihsan* within family and school settings. In educational practice, teachers can use such narratives to introduce moral principles aligned with Islamic teachings, including compassion, solidarity, and social responsibility (Ilmi et al., 2023). This is highly relevant to efforts in reducing psychological and physical violence among children, as reflected in KPAI data (2016–2020).

Doctrinal values such as *tawhid rububiyah* and belief in *qada* and *qadar* are also embedded in children's literature. The phrase "Insya Allah" (Wiangga, 2024) is a concrete example of how characters entrust their hopes and plans to Allah SWT. In religious education, such narratives can be used to teach submission to God and encourage patience and acceptance of divine will. This builds an optimistic and trusting mindset among students, essential for navigating life's challenges (Sachedina, 2022). Incorporating stories with theological elements makes the teaching of aqidah more meaningful and less reliant on rote memorization.

A key finding of this study is the portrayal of routine acts of worship, such as the dawn prayer (*shalat Subuh*), *dzikir*, and gratitude, in literary characters' daily lives. Phrases like "I already did Subuh prayer, but I went back to sleep afterward" (Anggraini, 2012), while imperfect, reinforce the notion that prayer is a duty to be fulfilled before any other activity. In religious learning, such texts can be used to emphasize consistency in worship, including appropriate timing. Moreover, children's literature can introduce non-ritual acts of worship, such as wearing the hijab and reciting the Qur'an, as shown in *Namira's Qur'an Memorization* (Wiangga, 2024), where a blind character memorizes the Qur'an using Braille. This affirms that every Muslim has the right and opportunity to worship according to their ability (QS. Al-Baqarah: 286).

Social solidarity, as depicted in the line "They went to the orphanage to donate their fortune" (Kirei, 2010), provides moral instruction on generosity (*jūd*) and piety (*taqwa*), virtues highly valued in Islam. In madrasah education, such narratives can cultivate empathy and concern for others, reinforcing the value of *ukhuwah Islamiyah*. Religious education must go beyond rituals and

also aim to develop a compassionate and morally upright spirit (Razak, 2020). Through literature, teachers can invite students to step into the shoes of characters facing moral dilemmas and making choices guided by Islamic values.

To maximize the benefits of children's literature in religious instruction, effective pedagogical strategies are essential. These may include classroom discussions, dialogic reading, and reflective writing activities to explore themes and messages within stories (Ratminingsih & Budasi, 2018). Teachers must select books appropriate to students' literacy levels, ages, and cultural contexts. Creating an inclusive and supportive classroom environment is crucial so that students feel comfortable sharing ideas and experiences related to the religious values they read about. In this way, literature becomes not merely a vehicle for information transfer, but a platform for transformational character formation and deep religious understanding.

The findings extend the conceptualization of religious literacy by demonstrating that it involves more than recognizing doctrines, rituals, and religious vocabulary. Within children's literature, religious literacy operates as an interpretive competence through which readers connect theological principles with characters' motives, moral conflicts, relationships, and decisions. The study therefore supports a shift from a transmission-oriented understanding of religious literacy toward a narrative and contextual model.

This model consists of three interrelated mechanisms: situational modeling, contextual naturalization, and the representation of inward and outward religiosity. Situational modeling places Islamic values within ethical dilemmas; contextual naturalization embeds religious practices in everyday routines; and the distinction between inward and outward religiosity connects personal devotion with socio-ethical responsibility. Together, these mechanisms explain how narratives transform abstract concepts of *aqidah*, *akhlak*, and *ibadah* into forms of lived religious experience.

The findings also contribute to character education theory by indicating that moral learning through literature does not depend solely on idealized characters. Imperfect actions, unresolved tensions, and morally ambiguous situations may provide stronger opportunities for critical reflection. For example, the character who performs the Subuh prayer but subsequently returns to sleep presents both religious commitment and behavioral inconsistency. Such ambiguity allows students to evaluate intention, discipline, and responsibility rather than merely reproduce a predetermined moral message. Narrative-based religious education can thus be understood as a process of guided moral interpretation rather than passive value internalization.

Children's literature should be positioned as a reflective learning resource rather than supplementary reading used only to illustrate religious teachings. Teachers can employ stories to help students identify moral conflicts, examine characters' motivations, evaluate the consequences of their decisions, and connect Islamic values with situations encountered in everyday life. This approach can move religious instruction beyond memorization toward interpretation, reasoning, and contextual application.

Dialogic reading, guided classroom discussion, reflective writing, role-playing, and alternative-ending activities are particularly appropriate for this purpose. Dialogic reading allows students to interact with the text and compare interpretations with their peers (Ratminingsih & Budasi, 2018). Reflective and creative writing can encourage students to reconstruct events from another character's perspective, propose alternative responses to a moral dilemma, or relate a

religious value to personal experience (Hermingrum & Sukmawan, 2020; Zubaidah et al., 2019). These strategies can support the development of religious understanding, critical thinking, empathy, and moral reasoning.

Text selection must nevertheless be undertaken carefully. Teachers should consider students' ages, literacy levels, cultural environments, learning needs, and curricular objectives (Mandarani & Munir, 2021). Texts should present Islamic values accurately while avoiding gender stereotypes, social exclusion, oversimplified moral judgments, and representations that marginalize children with disabilities. The depiction of a visually impaired character memorizing the Qur'an through Braille, for instance, can initiate meaningful discussion about religious participation, perseverance, accessibility, and educational justice.

Teacher mediation ultimately determines whether a story becomes an instrument of one-way moralization or a platform for transformative learning. Teachers therefore need to create a psychologically safe environment in which students can ask questions, express different interpretations, and discuss religious issues respectfully. Responsive questioning should guide students toward deeper analysis without prematurely imposing a single interpretation.

At the curriculum level, children's literature can be systematically integrated into Islamic Religious Education and literacy programs in *madrasah ibtidaiyah*. This integration should not be limited to recommending reading materials. Curriculum documents should specify relevant learning outcomes, suggested literary texts, interpretive questions, learning activities, and assessment criteria related to religious literacy and character development.

Madrasah authorities and curriculum developers should establish transparent criteria for selecting literary materials. These criteria should include theological appropriateness, literary quality, developmental suitability, cultural relevance, inclusivity, and the capacity of a text to stimulate reflection. Collaboration among Islamic education scholars, children's literature specialists, teachers, librarians, and child-development experts would help ensure that recommended texts are both religiously responsible and pedagogically meaningful.

Professional-development programs are also required to strengthen teachers' competence in literature-based religious instruction. Training should cover dialogic reading, critical questioning, facilitation of sensitive religious discussions, inclusive text selection, and assessment of reflective learning. School libraries should provide diverse and accessible collections, including Braille, audio, digital, and large-print materials, so that students with different needs can participate equitably.

These implications are also relevant to broader character-education policy. Literature can connect Islamic values with Pancasila-oriented principles such as social responsibility, mutual respect, solidarity, and peaceful coexistence. However, policy frameworks should avoid treating literature as an automatic solution to behavioral problems. Its contribution depends on sustained teacher facilitation, adequate learning time, appropriate assessment, and support from the school environment.

The novelty of this study lies in explaining not only which Islamic values appear in modern Indonesian children's literature, but also how those values are narratively constructed and made meaningful for young readers. Previous studies have generally emphasized the identification or classification of religious values. The present study moves beyond thematic inventory by examining the mechanisms through which literature mediates belief, worship, ethical conduct, identity, and social engagement.

Four specific contributions emerge from the analysis. First, the study identifies situational modeling as a mechanism that translates theological principles into observable decisions and consequences. Second, it demonstrates a transition from explicit didactic moralizing toward the contextual integration of religious practices within everyday life. Third, it distinguishes between narratives emphasizing inward spirituality and those foregrounding the outward socio-ethical performance of faith. Fourth, it introduces inclusion and accessibility into discussions of children's religious literature through the representation of a visually impaired Qur'an learner.

Collectively, these findings provide a narrative-contextual framework for understanding literature-based religious education. The framework positions children's literature as a bridge between normative Islamic teachings and the social realities experienced by students. It also explains how literary narratives may create opportunities for students to negotiate religious identity between traditional piety, contemporary social life, cultural diversity, and inclusive participation.

This study has several limitations. First, its conclusions are derived from a selected textual corpus and should not be generalized to all Indonesian children's literature. The themes and narrative mechanisms identified may reflect the publication periods, genres, authors, or publishers represented in the corpus. Second, textual interpretation is influenced by the researchers' analytical perspectives, although systematic coding can reduce inconsistency. Third, the study examines pedagogical possibilities embedded in texts but does not provide empirical evidence that reading these works directly improves students' religious literacy, critical thinking, empathy, or behavior.

The temporal comparison between earlier and more recent works should also be interpreted cautiously because differences may be influenced by genre, authorship, target readership, or editorial policy rather than publication period alone. Moreover, translated excerpts may not fully preserve the linguistic, cultural, and theological nuances of the original Indonesian expressions.

Future research should expand the corpus across publication periods, regions, publishers, genres, and author backgrounds. Comparative studies could examine differences between Islamic children's literature, general Indonesian children's literature, and children's literature from other religious or cultural traditions. Reader-response studies involving students and teachers are needed to investigate how religious messages are interpreted in actual classroom settings.

Classroom-based qualitative, experimental, or mixed-methods research should also evaluate the effects of dialogic reading, reflective writing, and literature-based instruction on religious literacy, moral reasoning, empathy, and critical thinking. Further studies may investigate how students with different social, cultural, gender, and disability backgrounds respond to representations of Islamic identity. Such research would test and refine the narrative-contextual framework proposed in this study while providing stronger evidence for its pedagogical and policy applications.

Conclusion

This qualitative content analysis demonstrates that contemporary Indonesian children's literature serves as a structured repository for representing Islamic religiosity across the dimensions of *akhlaq*, *aqidah*, and *ibadah*. The empirical analysis reveals *akhlaq* as the primary dominant category, indicating that these narratives prioritize socio-ethical behaviors, such as devotion to parents, benevolence, and maintaining kinship ties, as tangible templates for daily moral conduct. Concepts of *aqidah* and *ibadah* complement this ethical foundation by embedding theological principles and

ritual practices within relatable childhood scenarios rather than formal instruction. Conceptually, this study contributes an empirical taxonomy illustrating how modern children's fiction translates abstract Islamic tenets into accessible narrative representations for elementary religious education.

The findings of this study carry several significant theoretical and practical implications. The integration of children's literature into the curriculum represents an effective strategy for enhancing both religious literacy and moral development. In addition, these findings support the urgent need for curriculum innovation that aligns literature with character education based on Islamic values, in accordance with the national educational vision grounded in Pancasila. Despite its significant insights, this study also presents certain limitations. The research scope was confined to selected titles within the Kecil-Kecil Punya Karya (KKPK) series and specific novels, thus excluding a broader range of genres and themes found in contemporary Indonesian children's literature. Future studies should expand the corpus and adopt a more comprehensive analytical scope. Furthermore, the present analysis employed a descriptive and interpretive approach, without providing quantitative data or statistical evidence regarding the direct impact of children's literature on student behavior. Employing a mixed-methods approach in future research would yield a more holistic understanding of the pedagogical value and real-world influence of children's literature in Islamic primary education.

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