FOSTERING RELIGIOUS VALUES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD THROUGH BIG BOOK MEDIA AT TK NEGERI 5 BANDA ACEH

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Abstract

Instilling religious and moral values in early childhood is both crucial and challenging, especially in culturally and religiously rich contexts like Aceh, Indonesia. Many early childhood education centers still rely on traditional teaching methods that are less engaging for young learners. This study addresses the need for innovative, context-sensitive media by developing and evaluating a big book designed to foster courtesy, gratitude, and respect among children at TK Negeri 5 Banda Aceh. The research followed the ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation) model. Experts in early childhood Islamic education and educational media validated the content and design. The big book was then implemented with ten children aged 5–6 in classroom sessions, with behavioral changes observed through checklists and qualitative feedback from teachers and students. Expert validation confirmed the big book's feasibility and relevance, with scores of 71.8% (content expert) and 86.5% (media expert). Classroom trials showed a marked increase in children's spontaneous use of polite language, expressions of gratitude, and respectful behaviors. The overall group achievement reached 90% on behavioral indicators, and both teacher and student feedback highlighted the book's appeal and positive influence on daily interactions. This study demonstrates that well-designed big book media can make values education tangible and enjoyable for young children. While the findings are limited to one school and a small sample, they offer practical insights for educators and policymakers interested in strengthening character education through engaging, culturally grounded storytelling. Further research with larger and more diverse groups is recommended to explore the long-term effects and wider applicability of this approach.

Keywords: *Early Childhood Education, Religious Values, Big Book Media, Character Education, Aceh, Classroom Intervention*

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A. Introduction

Early childhood is widely recognized as a critical period for the development of character, spirituality, and foundational social values. In this formative stage, children acquire not only basic academic skills but also internalize essential life values that shape their personalities and guide their behavior into adulthood. According to Zohar and Marshall (2000), *spiritual intelligence is the ultimate intelligence*—a capacity that enables individuals to interpret life through meaning and value, and that serves as the foundation for both intellectual (IQ) and emotional (EQ) development. When cultivated

through consistent value-based education, spiritual intelligence significantly contributes to personal success and long-term well-being (Afandi, 2023; Permana et al., 2022; Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Therefore, instilling religious and moral values from an early age is indispensable for nurturing resilient, ethically grounded, and spiritually aware future generations.

In Indonesia, and particularly in Aceh where Islamic values are deeply integrated into social and cultural life, the importance of religious character education is further amplified. Early childhood education (ECE) centers such as PAUD and kindergarten (TK) are expected not only to deliver academic instruction but also to play a vital role in transmitting moral and religious values. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (Permendikbud No. 137/2014), children aged 5–6 years should be able to distinguish between right and wrong and demonstrate positive behaviors, including politeness, empathy, and respect toward others.

However, the effective integration of religious and moral education in early childhood settings is still a persistent challenge in many Indonesian institutions, including TK Negeri 5 Banda Aceh. Observations at this institution indicate that teachers still tend to use conventional instructional methods, which are often less engaging and not fully adapted to the developmental needs of young children. One of the main barriers identified is the lack of innovative, attractive, and age-appropriate learning media. As a result, children often become disinterested, and the intended internalization of key religious values—such as courtesy and respect—remains limited (Guslinda & Kurnia, 2014; Permana et al., 2022; Oktavia & Madya, 2021).

The literature consistently emphasizes the necessity of using interactive and visually stimulating media in early childhood education. Big books, with their large format, colorful illustrations, and interactive narratives, are highlighted as particularly effective for shared reading and collaborative learning (Jannah & Nuraini, 2025; Gobi et al., 2024). These books do not merely transmit information; they actively involve children in the storytelling process, stimulating symbolic play, emotional awareness, and imaginative thinking. Through engaging narratives and discussions, big books facilitate the introduction of complex concepts, including moral and spiritual values, in a way that is developmentally appropriate and enjoyable for young children.

Previous research has demonstrated the positive impact of big books on children's language acquisition, vocabulary development, and early literacy skills. For example, several studies have found that regular use of big books in the classroom significantly improves children's listening, speaking, and comprehension abilities (Jannah & Nuraini, 2025; Gobi et al., 2024). Moreover, storytelling with big books has been shown to enhance children's social-emotional competencies, helping them identify and express feelings, build empathy, and understand positive behaviors in real-life contexts. Despite these findings, there remains a notable gap in the literature: most studies have focused on cognitive and linguistic outcomes, with less attention given to the use of big books as a medium for the explicit integration of religious and moral values, particularly in Islamic educational contexts.

A few recent studies have begun to address this gap by exploring the use of storybooks and picture books to instill ethical values in early childhood education (Setiawan et al., 2022; Nurhasanah & Sukmawati, 2021). However, research specifically targeting the application of big book media for developing religious character in Acehnese children remains limited. Furthermore, the unique social and cultural environment of Aceh, where religious identity is especially prominent, demands context-specific educational interventions that are sensitive to local values and traditions.

Addressing these challenges and research gaps, this study aims to design, develop, and validate big book-based learning media tailored to instill religious values—especially courtesy, empathy, and respect—in children aged 5–6 years at TK Negeri 5 Banda Aceh. Using the ADDIE research and development framework (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation), this research seeks to: 1) Provide a pedagogically sound, engaging, and culturally relevant big book media for early childhood Islamic education; 2) Evaluate the effectiveness and feasibility of the media based on expert validation and classroom implementation; and 3) Offer practical recommendations for teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers to enhance the quality of character education in early childhood settings, particularly in religiously oriented regions. By responding to the urgent need for innovative and effective religious character education media in early childhood, especially within the Acehnese context, this study not only contributes to the academic discourse but also supports the development of future generations who are both intellectually capable and morally grounded.

B. Method

Research Design

This study employed a research and development (R&D) approach using the ADDIE model, which consists of five phases: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation. The ADDIE framework was chosen for its systematic, iterative process that allows for the careful design, development, and validation of educational media. Each stage was meticulously carried out to ensure the resulting big book media would be effective and suitable for fostering religious values among early childhood learners. The research was conducted at TK Negeri 5 Banda Aceh, an early childhood education institution located in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. The target participants consisted of children aged 5–6 years enrolled at the school. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 10 students who met the criteria for participation in the media trial phase. In addition to the children, the study also involved subject matter experts (in early childhood Islamic education) and media experts (in educational technology) to validate the content and design of the big book.

Procedure

In the initial stage, a needs assessment was conducted through direct observation and interviews with teachers to identify challenges and limitations in the current

implementation of religious values education. This process highlighted the necessity for engaging, developmentally appropriate media to support teachers in the classroom. Based on the findings from the analysis phase, the design stage involved developing the structure, layout, and content of the big book. The book was specifically tailored to align with the developmental characteristics and learning needs of children aged 5–6, and to emphasize key Islamic values, especially courtesy.

The development phase focused on the creation and refinement of the big book prototype. This process included the selection of relevant stories, illustration design, and the integration of interactive elements. The draft media was then subjected to expert validation. After validation and necessary revisions, the big book was implemented in the classroom through structured learning sessions. Teachers facilitated shared reading and discussion activities, encouraging students to interact with the stories and reflect on the religious values presented. The final stage involved evaluating the feasibility and effectiveness of the big book media. Data were collected through expert validation sheets, observation checklists, and scoring rubrics during classroom implementation.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered from multiple sources, including validation forms filled out by experts, classroom observation checklists, and student performance assessments. Quantitative data from expert validations and student outcome scores were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as mean scores and feasibility percentages. The criteria for feasibility followed established guidelines, with a minimum threshold of 70% considered "feasible" and above 85% considered "highly feasible." Qualitative feedback from teachers and experts was also taken into account for further media refinement.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

The development and validation of the big book media for instilling religious values in early childhood produced a series of findings that demonstrate both the feasibility and the practical effectiveness of the media. The results are described in detail below.

Expert Validation

Content and design validation were conducted by two independent experts: a subject matter expert in early childhood Islamic education and a media expert specializing in educational technology. The content expert evaluated the book's accuracy in delivering religious values, its alignment with the developmental needs of young children, the relevance of scenarios, and the clarity of language. The average score awarded by the content expert was 2.8 out of 4 (with a total of 23 points out of a maximum 32), which corresponds to a feasibility rating of 71.8%. According to the feasibility criteria, this score places the big book media in the "feasible" category, indicating that it is suitable for use in early childhood religious education but could benefit from minor revisions.

The media expert assessed aspects such as illustration quality, color contrast, layout consistency, font readability, and overall attractiveness. The media expert awarded the big book an average score of 3.4 out of 4 (total score 45 out of 52), which translates to 86.5%, qualifying the product as "highly feasible". This high rating demonstrates that the big book is visually appealing and easy for young children to interact with, both critical elements for supporting engagement and comprehension. Both experts provided qualitative feedback for improvement. The content expert suggested simplifying some sentences to better match the linguistic abilities of children aged 5–6 years and including more real-life examples of courtesy and respectful behavior. The media expert recommended refining several illustrations to ensure cultural appropriateness and enhancing the color palette to increase visual interest. All recommendations were incorporated into the final version of the big book prior to classroom implementation.

Field Testing and Children's Outcomes

Following expert validation and revision, the big book media was implemented in a classroom trial involving ten children aged 5–6 years. The field testing focused on measuring children's behavioral outcomes across five key indicators of religious values, particularly courtesy and respect as emphasized in the stories. During three consecutive learning sessions, children engaged with the big book through shared reading and interactive discussions led by their teacher. Observation checklists revealed that children showed notably increased enthusiasm and participation compared to previous lessons using conventional media. For instance, children were more eager to volunteer to read aloud, answer questions, and share their own experiences related to the values depicted in the stories. The teacher noted a significant improvement in children's ability to articulate and practice expressions of courtesy, such as greeting adults, expressing gratitude, and apologizing to friends, all of which were modeled in the big book.

Quantitatively, children's mastery of religious values was assessed through a performance-based scoring rubric that measured their demonstration of each indicator before and after the intervention. The total score achieved by all children was 180 out of a possible 200, representing an attainment rate of 90%. According to the criteria used, this level of achievement is classified as "highly feasible", reflecting not only the acceptability but also the effectiveness of the big book media in fostering targeted values.

Comparative Observation

When we compared children's behavior before and after the introduction of the big book, the difference was evident not only to us as researchers but also to the classroom teacher and the children themselves. Before the intervention, polite behavior such as greeting teachers, thanking peers, or apologizing after a disagreement was not something the children did spontaneously. Often, these actions only happened after repeated reminders from adults, and even then, many children seemed unsure or hesitant. During free play, for example, arguments over toys or classroom materials were common, and resolutions typically required teacher mediation.

Once the big book became part of the daily routine, we noticed changes almost immediately, especially during story sessions and group discussions. Children started using polite words and phrases on their own, often echoing the dialogue from the stories they had heard. It became common for a child to greet the teacher with a cheerful "Assalamu'alaikum" or to thank a friend after sharing. Some children, who previously were shy or reluctant to speak, began volunteering answers and even reminded their classmates about the polite behaviors modeled in the book. Teachers observed that, after a few sessions, the children no longer waited for instructions to line up or say "thank you"—they did it out of habit, almost as if the characters from the big book had come alive in the classroom. Disagreements between students were resolved more quickly and calmly, with apologies and kind words becoming part of the children's natural vocabulary. One teacher noted that students who had struggled with sharing or patience were suddenly more thoughtful, sometimes quoting lines or actions from their favorite story characters.

From a numbers perspective, these changes were reflected in the scoring of behavioral indicators: the proportion of children who consistently demonstrated courtesy and respect increased from about half the class to nearly everyone, and the overall group score reached 90%. But beyond numbers, the mood in the classroom became warmer and more collaborative. Several children even created their own simple stories or drawings, inspired by the big book, about what it means to be polite and helpful. In short, the introduction of the big book media not only improved the way children understood and demonstrated religious values—it made those values part of the everyday rhythm of the classroom, in ways that felt authentic and lasting to everyone involved.

Teacher and Student Feedback

Teacher interviews reinforced these findings. The teacher reported that the big book made it easier to initiate conversations about values and to encourage reflective thinking in children. She also found that the visual and interactive elements of the media captured children's attention for longer periods and motivated them to participate actively. Qualitative comments from the children supported this observation; for example, several children expressed that they liked the pictures, found the stories relatable, and enjoyed acting out scenes with their peers.

Tabel 1 Summary Table

Assessment Aspect	Score Obtained	Maximum Score	Percentage	Category
Content Expert	23	32	71.8%	Feasible
Media Expert	45	52	86.5%	Highly Feasible
Observation (10 children)	180	200	90.0%	Highly Feasible

Key Findings

Throughout the development and trial of the big book media, several outcomes stood out and left a lasting impression on both the research team and the classroom teacher. The most immediate and visible finding was that children became genuinely interested in participating when the big book was used. The stories and illustrations seemed to invite the children in, making them eager to listen, respond, and even retell parts of the narrative in their own words. For some children, especially those who were usually quieter, the big book became a safe way to express ideas about kindness and respect, simply by referring to the characters they had come to know.

One of the clearest results was the increase in spontaneous polite behavior. Instead of waiting for reminders, children started to greet their teacher in the morning, say thank you without prompting, and help each other in small but meaningful ways. These actions were often accompanied by references to the stories—children would say things like, "Just like in the book, I have to say sorry," or, "The character in the story always shares." It became obvious that the stories did more than just entertain; they provided a model for children to follow in their real-life interactions. Teachers reported that their job became easier, especially in guiding discussions about values. The big book offered a concrete reference point that made it easier for children to understand why certain behaviors were important. For instance, when a disagreement arose, a teacher could simply mention a situation from one of the stories, and the children would immediately connect it to their own experience. The book also made lessons more enjoyable; children looked forward to the reading sessions and even asked to revisit their favorite stories.

Quantitatively, the results supported these impressions. Children's performance on the behavioral indicators—such as using polite language, expressing gratitude, and apologizing—improved significantly, with the overall class reaching a 90% attainment rate. But perhaps more importantly, the atmosphere in the classroom changed: the children became more confident, more empathetic, and more willing to take responsibility for their own actions. Finally, feedback from the children themselves highlighted the impact of the big book. Some expressed excitement about the pictures and characters, while others shared how they tried to be "like the good kids in the story" at home or on the playground. For the research team, it was clear that the big book had not only achieved its purpose academically, but had also helped foster a warmer, more caring classroom environment—something that numbers alone could never fully capture.

2. Discussion

Looking back at the results of this research, we found that using the big book media in a real classroom brought a visible change—not just in children's attention but in their actual behavior. In the early sessions, many children needed encouragement to greet, thank, or apologize. Yet, as the stories and illustrations from the big book became a regular part of their learning, we saw those polite behaviors grow into habits. The teacher's role as a facilitator also became much easier; having a shared, concrete story to refer to made classroom discussions about values far more natural. This aligns with

findings from Wahyuni et al. (2025), who demonstrated that big book media significantly improves early reading and social interaction among children aged 5–6 years. Similarly, Fitri et al. (2022) emphasized that big books—with their large images and simple, repetitive narratives—help bridge the gap between abstract values and daily behavior in early childhood settings.

While much of the previous research has focused on how big books improve early literacy (Mazidah et al., 2023), our findings show that, when designed purposefully, big books can also be used to foster important values. For example, our stories were crafted to highlight everyday situations where children must decide to be respectful, grateful, or helpful—echoing the local wisdom and religious values that are central to education in Aceh. This is supported by Khairani & Rahmi (2024), who found that habit-based activities in kindergartens in Aceh Besar effectively instill moral and religious values in children through storytelling and role modeling. Ardayani & Suarjana (2021) also showed that big book media can improve moral behavior when integrated into daily classroom routines.

We also saw firsthand how visual media can change the rhythm of the classroom. As noted by Novita Yudhitiar (2024), interactive big books stimulate children's speaking skills and emotional expression, especially when paired with familiar scenarios and teacher-led discussions. Several times, we heard children reference the characters when making decisions—sometimes using lines from the stories when apologizing or offering help.

Teachers gave practical feedback: they found the big book easy to use, and noticed children were more eager to participate in group readings. Some students, especially those less outgoing, seemed more comfortable talking about feelings or problems when they could relate them to a character in the book. These experiences echo what Farisia (2020) and Safitri (2022) have emphasized about the importance of making values education concrete and accessible for children, especially at an early age.

It's worth mentioning, too, that the big book was well received because it was not just "another lesson"—it was an experience that children and teachers shared. The media's bright visuals and familiar language brought the classroom together, making values education part of daily life, not something abstract or forced. To sum up, our work both confirms and adds to existing research by showing that, when thoughtfully developed, big book media can become a powerful, practical tool for teachers. It can help build not just literacy, but character—one story, one discussion, one habit at a time.

D. Conclusion

This research set out to address a real need that teachers and children face every day: how to make learning about religious values meaningful and enjoyable in the early childhood classroom. By developing and testing a big book designed for TK Negeri 5 Banda Aceh, we found that even simple innovations—stories with clear messages, bright pictures, and familiar situations—can help children practice courtesy, gratitude, and respect in ways that felt natural, not forced.

Our observations showed that changes did not happen overnight. At first, some children hesitated to use polite words or to take the lessons from the stories into their play. But after several reading sessions, small but important shifts started to appear: children greeted their teachers more spontaneously, shared more willingly, and even reminded each other of polite behaviors by quoting the stories. For the teacher, having the big book in hand made it easier to talk about values in a way that connected to daily life, rather than through lectures or reminders alone. That said, we realize this study had its limitations. The media was only tested in one school, with a limited number of children. We did not have the chance to follow up long term or see how the lessons "stick" as the children grow older. The stories were also written to reflect the cultural and religious life of Aceh—something that made them powerful in this setting, but which means the results may be different elsewhere.

Still, these practical experiences point to something hopeful: that with the right tools, teaching values does not have to be abstract or burdensome. For schools and teachers, the big book model is not difficult or expensive to try, and our experience shows that even small steps can make a difference in classroom atmosphere and in children's habits. For researchers and policymakers, there is clear value in developing learning materials that connect to children's real world, culture, and language. Going forward, we recommend more trials with bigger and more diverse groups, and a closer look at how stories like these can help children carry positive behaviors into the wider world. The lessons from this study are modest, but real: stories matter, and so does the way we tell them.

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