



The Effectiveness of the Storytelling Method in Enhancing Understanding of the Prophet's Exemplary Values among Second-Grade Elementary School Students

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of the storytelling method in enhancing second-grade elementary school students' understanding of the Prophet's exemplary values. The background of this research is the low level of student comprehension of the abstract values of the Prophet's role models, given that conventional teaching methods have been less than optimal in internalizing these values. A quantitative approach with a one-group pretest-posttest design was employed. The research subjects consisted of 28 second-grade students from SDN 2 Adiwarno, East Lampung, selected through total sampling. The research instrument was a test on understanding the Prophet's exemplary values, which had passed validity (Aiken's $V = 0.89$) and reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$) tests. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe mean scores, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values, and learning mastery percentages. Hypothesis testing was conducted using a paired sample t-test at a significance level of 0.05. The results showed that the mean pretest score of 45.36 increased to 82.14 on the posttest, a gain of 36.78 points. The percentage of learning mastery increased from 3.57% (1 student) to 75% (21 students). The paired-samples t-test yielded a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a significant difference between pretest and posttest results. Cohen's d effect size was 2.86, falling into the very large category. In conclusion, the storytelling method is effective in enhancing second-grade elementary school students' understanding of the Prophet's exemplary values. This study recommends the storytelling method as an alternative strategy in Islamic Religious Education learning.

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1. Introduction

Character education is a fundamental foundation for shaping future generations with noble morals and integrity. In the digital society 5.0 era, the role of educators in character formation cannot be replaced by any advanced technology (Balqis, Fatimah, Widowati, & Pratiwi, 2024a). Islamic Religious Education (PAI) holds a strategic responsibility for transforming divine values and the exemplary conduct of Prophet Muhammad SAW and other prophets to students from an early age (Fatimah, Hidayati, Dirmaya, Nasution, & Lubis, 2025). However, the main challenge lies in presenting the Prophet's exemplary values, which are rich in abstract concepts, in a way that second-grade elementary school students—who are in Piaget's concrete operational stage—can understand, internalize, and implement.

Character education not only aims to shape students' positive behavior but also helps them develop moral reasoning to navigate complex social changes (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014; Lickona, 2013). In the context of Islamic Religious Education, character education is an integral part of forming a Muslim personality based on the values of the Qur'an and Sunnah (Halstead, 2007; Sahin, 2018).

Second-grade elementary school students (ages 7-8) have thinking characteristics still tied to concrete objects and direct experiences. They understand concepts more easily through stories, images, and real experiences compared to abstract explanations (Apriniarti, Supatmi, & Suryani, 2025). Unfortunately, PAI instruction on the stories of the Prophet's exemplary conduct is often delivered through monotonous, one-way lectures, leading students to feel bored and struggle to grasp the moral values contained within.

Preliminary studies conducted by the researchers through observation and interviews with second-grade teachers at SDN 2 Adiwarno, East Lampung, indicated that most students had difficulty deeply understanding the meaning of the Prophet's exemplary values. Of the 28 students observed, approximately 60% could not explain examples of honest, trustworthy, and compassionate behavior in daily life, even after receiving lessons on the stories of the prophets. This condition suggests that instruction predominantly reliant on lecture methods has not been fully effective in helping students internalize Islamic values.

The storytelling method emerges as a promising alternative solution. Storytelling is not merely an activity of transferring information but an art of conveying messages through narratives that engage emotions, imagination, and character identification (Yarselina, 2025). When a teacher narrates the struggles of Prophet Ibrahim or the honesty of Prophet Muhammad, students not only listen but also imagine, feel, and place themselves within the story's situation. This identification process bridges the gap between abstract values and students' concrete understanding.

Storytelling is defined as a way of delivering learning materials through systematically arranged narratives of events, characters, or experiences involving educational elements (Yarselina, 2025). The uniqueness of this method lies in its ability to touch both the cognitive and affective aspects of students. A good storyteller not only conveys facts but also conveys the character's emotions, creates tension, and leaves space for listeners to reflect on the story's meaning (Balqis, Fatimah, Widowati, & Pratiwi, 2024b). The storytelling method has also been proven to enhance learning motivation, emotional engagement, and internalization of Islamic values in elementary school students (Idharudin, Nurhasanah, Rahman, & Arsyadi, 2021; Nugroho, 2018).

The storytelling method possesses three main characteristics relevant to early childhood learning. *First*, stories are concrete because they present clear characters, settings, and times. *Second*, stories build causality (cause-and-effect), so children understand the consequences of each action. *Third*, stories stimulate imagination without abandoning the roots of reality (Apriniarti et al., 2025). In the context of PAI learning, storytelling can be applied through various variations: direct storytelling by the teacher, students retelling stories, role-playing, or using audiovisual media (Burhani, 2025).

The development of digital media further strengthens the effectiveness of storytelling in Islamic Religious Education learning by enhancing student engagement visually and emotionally. Digital storytelling enables students to understand Islamic values through a combination of narrative, images, sounds, and animations that are more attractive and suited to the learning characteristics of elementary school-aged children (Ardani & Mwila, 2025).

The Prophet's exemplary values refer to the noble traits and virtuous behaviors exemplified by Allah's messengers, especially Prophet Muhammad SAW, as *uswatun hasanah* (a good example). For second-grade elementary students, these values need to be simplified without losing their essence. Based on the Merdeka Curriculum and teaching modules for Islamic Cultural History, the exemplary values appropriate for second graders' cognitive development include: (1) honesty (*shiddiq*), (2) trustworthiness (*amanah*), (3) love of cleanliness, (4) compassion for others, (5) patience, and (6) courage to convey the truth.

The importance of internalizing these values from an early age cannot be ignored. Fatimah et al. (2025) assert that understanding Islamic values at the elementary school age forms a character foundation that will persist into adulthood. A child accustomed to stories of Prophet Muhammad's honesty from a young age will have a strong moral reference when facing situations testing their own honesty.

The effectiveness of the storytelling method in enhancing value comprehension can be explained through several psychological mechanisms. *First*, Bandura's social learning theory emphasizes the role of observation and imitation in behavior formation. Children learn not only from direct experience but also from observing models (in this case, the Prophet figures) and the consequences of the model's behavior. Stories provide "symbolic models" that can be observed and imitated without risk (Nismar, Jazrizal, & Supriyadi, 2025).

Second, information processing theory states that information presented in narrative form is more easily stored in long-term memory compared to isolated declarative information. Stories have a coherent structure (beginning, middle, end) that facilitates encoding, storage, and retrieval processes (Lelasari & Nasution, 2024). Apriniarti et al. (2025) add that the combination of visual and auditory elements in storytelling (especially with animation assistance) reduces cognitive load and enhances memory retention.

Third, storytelling evokes positive emotions such as curiosity, empathy, and joy. Positive emotions have been shown to broaden an individual's thought and action repertoires (broaden-and-build theory), facilitate cognitive flexibility, and strengthen connections between concepts. Balqis et al. (2024b) reinforce that a teacher who tells stories "from the heart" can create an emotional resonance that allows the moral message to be absorbed more deeply. Research by Ritonga et al. (2025) confirms that the storytelling method can build empathy and emotional understanding of Islamic values. Meanwhile, Aulia (2025) reported that although not always showing statistically significant effects, the

storytelling method has been proven to increase children's learning interest and instill exemplary values.

Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of the storytelling method in similar contexts. Yarselina (2025) found that applying the storytelling method to the story of Prophet Ibrahim AS in second grade significantly improved learning outcomes, with mean pretest scores rising from 43.75 to 85.50 on the posttest. Nismar, Jazrizal, and Supriyadi (2025) also reported an improvement in religious character among students at SDN 015 Rambah through the storytelling method in a classroom action research cycle. Lelasari and Nasution (2024) confirmed these findings, reporting an increase in mean scores from 67.5 in cycle I to 85.3 in cycle II after implementing the story-based method.

Various previous studies indicate that the storytelling method can improve learning outcomes, learning motivation, and the religious character of elementary school students. Yarselina's (2025) research showed that applying the storytelling method to the story of Prophet Ibrahim significantly improved second-grade elementary students' learning outcomes. Research by Nismar, Jazrizal, and Supriyadi (2025) found that storytelling influenced the improvement of religious character in elementary school students. Meanwhile, Lelasari and Nasution (2024) reported an increase in students' understanding of the stories of the prophets through story-based learning.

Nevertheless, several research gaps still require further investigation. *First*, most previous studies have focused more on improving general learning outcomes or religious character, while research specifically measuring understanding of the Prophet's exemplary values remains relatively limited. *Second*, most research was conducted in urban school settings with different student characteristics and learning facilities. *Third*, few studies have measured understanding of the Prophet's exemplary values through integrated indicators of knowledge, comprehension, and application of values in lower-grade elementary students.

Based on this background, this study aims to: (1) describe the level of understanding of the Prophet's exemplary values among second-grade students at SDN 2 Adiwarno before implementing the storytelling method; (2) describe the level of understanding after implementing the storytelling method; and (3) test the effectiveness of the storytelling method in enhancing understanding of the Prophet's exemplary values. The hypothesis proposed is that there is a positive and significant effect of the storytelling method on improving students' understanding of the Prophet's exemplary values.

2. Method

This study employed a quantitative approach with a one-group pretest-posttest design. This design was chosen as it aligns with the research objective of testing the effectiveness of a treatment (storytelling method) on a single group of subjects by comparing conditions before and after the treatment (Creswell, 2014).

The research was conducted at SDN 2 Adiwarno, Batanghari District, East Lampung Regency, during the odd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The research subjects consisted of 28 second-grade students, comprising 15 boys and 13 girls. Since the entire population served as research respondents, the sampling technique used was total sampling (saturated sampling) (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

The research was conducted in three main stages. The *pretest* stage was conducted before the treatment to measure students' initial understanding of the Prophet's exemplary

values. The instrument consisted of a written test with multiple-choice and short-answer questions totaling 15 items that had been validated.

The first stage was the pretest, which aimed to measure students' initial understanding of the Prophet's exemplary values. The second stage was the treatment, involving the application of the storytelling method over four sessions. Each session lasted 2×35 minutes and covered different exemplary themes: the honesty of Prophet Muhammad SAW, the patience of Prophet Ayyub AS, the compassion of Prophet Muhammad SAW towards children, and the courage of Prophet Ibrahim AS (Yarselina, 2025; Sugiyono, 2019).

The storytelling implementation followed several steps: (1) apersepsi (initial engagement) and eliciting students' prior experiences; (2) expressive delivery of the story using varied intonation, facial expressions, and body movements; (3) discussion of the moral values contained in the story; (4) reflective question-and-answer session; and (5) retelling activities by students. During the learning process, the teacher used illustrative pictures and character cards to aid student understanding. The third stage was the posttest, conducted after all treatments were completed. The posttest instrument used the same indicators as the pretest, but with rearranged questions to minimize repetition effects.

The research instrument was a test of understanding the Prophet's exemplary values, consisting of 15 multiple-choice and short-answer questions. The instrument was developed based on three indicators of value understanding: (1) factual knowledge of the Prophet's exemplary values; (2) comprehension of the meaning of the values; and (3) ability to apply the values in daily life (Lelasari & Nasution, 2024; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2019).

Content validity of the instrument was tested using Aiken's V through assessment by three validators: two lecturers in Islamic Religious Education and one elementary school teacher. The test results yielded an Aiken's V value of 0.89, which falls into the very high category (Aiken, 1985). Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha produced a coefficient of 0.86, so the instrument was declared reliable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Research data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis was used to obtain mean scores, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values, and the percentage of learning mastery. Inferential analysis began with a normality test using Shapiro-Wilk (Shapiro & Wilk, 1965). Subsequently, hypothesis testing was conducted using a paired sample t-test at a significance level of 0.05. To determine the magnitude of the treatment effect, the effect size was calculated using Cohen's d (Cohen, 1988; Field, 2018).

3. Finding and Discussion

Finding

Initial Understanding of the Prophet's Exemplary Values (Pretest)

The results showed an increase in understanding of the Prophet's exemplary values among second-grade students at SDN 2 Adiwarno after the implementation of the storytelling method. A summary of the pretest and posttest results is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Pretest and Posttest Results

Variabel	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Pretest	28	45,36	12,47	18,75	78,13
Posttest	28	82,14	13,28	37,50	100

Source: Research Data Analysis.

Based on Table 1, the mean score of students' understanding before the storytelling method was 45.36 with a standard deviation of 12.47. After the treatment, the mean score increased to 82.14 with a standard deviation of 13.28. This represents an increase of 36.78 points, indicating a change in students' understanding of the Prophet's exemplary values.

In addition to the increase in mean scores, the percentage of learning mastery also improved. Before the treatment, only 1 student (3.57%) achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM = 75). After the treatment, the number of students achieving mastery increased to 21 students (75%).



Figure 1. Storytelling Method Activities

Observational results during the learning process indicated that students became more active participants. At the beginning of the instruction, most students were passive listeners. However, after several storytelling activities, students began to show courage in asking questions, answering the teacher's questions, and retelling the stories they had heard in their own words.

Results of Prerequisite Analysis

Before hypothesis testing, data normality was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test.

Table 2. Normality Test Results

Variable	Sig.	Description
Pretest	0.124	Normally distributed
Posttest	0.087	Normally distributed

Source: Research Data Analysis

The significance value for the pretest was 0.124, and for the posttest was 0.087. Both values are greater than 0.05, indicating that the data are normally distributed. Therefore, analysis could proceed with the parametric paired sample t-test.

Hypothesis Test Results

Testing the effectiveness of the storytelling method was conducted using a paired sample t-test.

Table 3. Paired Sample t-Test Results

Variabel	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest–Posttest	36,78	-15,238	27	0,000

Source: Research Data Analysis

Based on Table 3, a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05) was obtained; thus, H_0 is rejected, and H_a is accepted. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between pretest and posttest results after implementing the storytelling method (Field, 2018). To determine the magnitude of the treatment effect, Cohen's d effect size was calculated.

Table 4. Effect Size Results

Effect Size (Cohen's d)	Category
2,86	Very Large

Source: Research Data Analysis

The Cohen's d value of 2.86 indicates that the storytelling method has a very large effect on enhancing understanding of the Prophet's exemplary values among second-grade students at SDN 2 Adiwarno.

Discussion

Effectiveness of the Storytelling Method in Enhancing Understanding of the Prophet's Exemplary Values

The results show that the storytelling method is effective in enhancing elementary school students' understanding of the Prophet's exemplary values. The increase in mean scores from 45.36 to 82.14 demonstrates that storytelling can help students understand Islamic values more deeply compared to instruction relying solely on verbal explanation.

This finding aligns with Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which states that children aged 7-8 years are in the concrete operational stage (Piaget, 1970). At this stage, children understand concepts more easily when presented through concrete examples, illustrations, and imaginable experiences. Stories present characters, conflicts, and events concretely, making it easier for students to grasp the meaning of values such as honesty, trustworthiness, patience, and compassion.

These findings also reinforce Bandura's social learning theory, which explains that individuals learn through observation and imitation of models. In this research context, the Prophet figures serve as symbolic models providing examples of ideal behavior to students. Through stories, students can observe the characters' behavior, understand the consequences of their actions, and then use those behaviors as references in their daily lives.

The improvement occurred not only in the knowledge aspect but also in students' ability to explain the meaning of values and provide examples of their application in daily life. This indicates that storytelling not only helps students remember the story's content but also facilitates the internalization process.

Theoretically, these results support Bruner's view of narrative learning, which positions stories as an important means of meaning-making (Bruner, 1986). According to Bruner, humans understand the world through two modes of thought: logico-scientific thinking and narrative thinking. For elementary school-aged children, the narrative approach is more effective because it aligns with how children naturally understand experience.

When students listen to the story of Prophet Muhammad's honesty, they do not merely receive information that the Prophet was an honest figure. They also understand the situation the Prophet faced, the reasons he remained truthful, and the positive consequences of that behavior. This process helps students build a deeper understanding than merely memorizing a definition of honesty.

This finding aligns with research by Yarselina (2025), Nismar et al. (2025), and Lelasari and Nasution (2024), which showed that the storytelling method can improve learning outcomes and religious character in elementary school students. However, this study has a distinct contribution because it specifically measured understanding of the Prophet's exemplary values through three main indicators: knowledge, comprehension, and application of values.

The Teacher's Role in Storytelling Success

The success of the storytelling method in this study was inseparable from the teacher's ability to deliver stories engagingly and interactively. During the learning process, the teacher used variations in vocal intonation, facial expressions, body movements, and reflective questions that maintained students' attention.

This condition supports the findings of Balqis et al. (2024), which emphasized that the effectiveness of storytelling is strongly influenced by the teacher's competence as a storyteller. The teacher not only acts as an information deliverer but also as a facilitator, helping students discover the meaning behind the story.

Furthermore, the retelling activities performed by students also strengthened their understanding. These activities allowed students to reconstruct the information they had received, resulting in deeper and more durable comprehension.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study have both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study reinforces social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), cognitive development theory (Piaget, 1970), and narrative learning theory (Bruner, 1986) in the context of Islamic Religious Education in elementary schools.

Practically, this study demonstrates that the storytelling method can serve as a primary strategy in Islamic Religious Education learning, particularly in materials related to character formation and the Prophet's exemplary values. This aligns with the findings of Samdini & Fihayati (2025) that the paired storytelling learning model can train students to be more skilled and confident in speaking, as well as practice articulation, intonation, expression, and vocabulary acquisition through storytelling activities. Teachers need to develop their storytelling skills through training, workshops, and the development of learning media that support the storytelling process. Research by Rikmasari & Hakim (2023) also revealed that the application of the paired storytelling model is effective in improving elementary school students' speaking skills, with all reviewed articles (100%) showing improvement and positive impacts from using the paired storytelling learning model.

Research Limitations

This study has several limitations. *First*, the use of a one-group pretest-posttest design without a control group means that external factors might also have influenced the improvement in student learning outcomes. *Second*, the measurement focused solely on cognitive understanding; it cannot directly describe changes in student behavior. *Third*, the study was conducted at only one school, so generalizations of the findings should be made cautiously.

Therefore, future research is recommended to use a quasi-experimental design with a control group, involve a larger sample size, and measure changes in student behavior through longitudinal observation.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the storytelling method is effective in enhancing understanding of the Prophet's exemplary values among second-grade students at SDN 2 Adiwarno, East Lampung. This effectiveness is evidenced by: (1) a significant increase in the mean score from 45.36 (*pretest*, low category) to 82.14 (*posttest*, good category); (2) an increase in the percentage of learning mastery from 3.57% to 75%; (3) the results of the paired sample t-test with a significance of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), confirming a meaningful difference; and (4) an effect size of 2.86 (very large category). These findings confirm that

expressively and interactively delivered stories can transform abstract values into concrete experiences that are easily internalized by young students.

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