

# Play-Based Learning as a Pedagogical Approach to Promote Islamic Values in Early Childhood Education

Moses Adeleke Adeoye<sup>1</sup>, and Sarah A. Alahmari<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Educational Management and Counselling, Faculty of Education, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of Early Childhood, Faculty of Education, King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia

\* Corresponding author: [princeadelekm@gmail.com](mailto:princeadelekm@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

This research article explores the integration of play-based learning and Islamic values in early childhood education, aiming to understand how playful experiences can enhance moral and social development in young learners. Employing a systematic literature review methodology, the study synthesises findings from various scholarly articles to identify key themes and effective teaching strategies. The significant findings reveal that play serves as a crucial medium for developing moral values, social skills, cognitive abilities, and cultural awareness among children. Specifically, play-based activities foster empathy, cooperation, and critical thinking while promoting respect for diversity. Effective strategies such as storytelling, role play, cooperative games, and creative expression are highlighted as valuable methods for teaching Islamic values. In conclusion, integrating play-based learning with Islamic values education offers a holistic approach to nurturing well-rounded individuals. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive overview of how play can instil ethical principles and foster social responsibility in early childhood settings. By emphasising the importance of play in moral development, this study encourages educators to adopt innovative practices that align with educational and cultural objectives, ultimately preparing children for compassionate and responsible participation in society.

**Keywords:** Play-Based Learning, Islamic Values, Early Childhood Education, Moral Development, Social Skills.

## 1. Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) plays a central role in shaping children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. During this formative stage, children are particularly responsive to learning through play, which has been widely recognised as a core pedagogical approach. Play-based learning nurtures creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration, enabling children to acquire knowledge and values in meaningful ways (D. A. P. Oyegoke et al., 2024). As emphasised by (Lunga et al., 2022), play is fundamental to early childhood development because it supports cognitive, social, emotional, and physical growth. Empirical research further indicates that active engagement and exploration underpin effective learning for young children (Nilsson et al., 2018; Ningsi et al., 2025; Pistorova & Slutsky, 2020). Play also strengthens children's cognitive abilities: (Kaizar & Alordiah, 2023) confirm its positive influence on cognitive skills, while (O'Reilly et al., 2022) report improvements in problem-solving and

critical thinking among children who engage in structured play activities. Grounded in Vygotsky's social constructivism, play offers opportunities for guided social interaction, enabling children to construct meaning through collaboration with peers and adults (Kaizar & Alordiah, 2023). In addition, cooperative play enhances social competence, communication, negotiation, and conflict-management skills, which are essential for later interpersonal relationships (Ismail & Huda, 2024). Emotional intelligence also develops within play contexts as children learn to navigate their feelings and empathise with others. Despite extensive evidence on the developmental benefits of play, existing literature has not sufficiently explored how play-based learning can be systematically used to teach Islamic values in early childhood settings. The studies reviewed in the manuscript address play-based learning and values education separately but do not explicitly integrate both domains into a unified pedagogical framework. This unexamined intersection represents a clear research gap, highlighting the need for studies that explain how play can serve as a structured medium for imparting Islamic moral principles to young children.

Engaging in play enhances children's language development. (Stagnitti et al., 2016) found that children involved in play-based activities exhibit richer vocabulary and improved narrative skills. Play provides opportunities for children to express themselves, ask questions, and engage in meaningful conversations, fostering their language acquisition in a natural context. Play-based learning also promotes physical development, including fine and gross motor skills. According to (Sutapa et al., 2021), active play helps children develop coordination, balance, and strength. As children learn to navigate their physical environment, outdoor play and physical activities contribute to health and fitness, encouraging risk-taking and resilience. The holistic nature of play-based learning supports the intertwining of various developmental domains. (Kaizar & Alordiah, 2023) emphasise that play is a vehicle for integrated learning, where cognitive, emotional, social, and physical skills are developed simultaneously. This integrated approach ensures that children are not merely passive recipients of knowledge but actively construct their understanding of the world around them. By prioritising play in educational settings, educators can create enriching environments that equip children with the essential skills for lifelong learning and personal development.

Islamic values are pivotal in shaping children's moral and ethical framework in early childhood education. These values guide behaviour and foster a sense of identity, community, and belonging among young learners. Instilling these principles during formative years is essential for nurturing responsible and compassionate individuals. Respect (*Ihtiram*) for oneself, others, and the environment is fundamental in Islam. According to Al-Ghazali, teaching children to honour their parents, teachers, and peers cultivates a respectful attitude that extends to all interactions (Azhari et al., 2019; Riza et al., 2025). This value is crucial for building healthy relationships and promoting a harmonious community. Compassion (*Rahma*) is a cornerstone of Islamic teachings, exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad's emphasis on kindness and empathy. (Estrada et al., 2021) indicate that fostering compassion in children enhances their emotional intelligence and encourages them to care for others, creating a supportive learning environment.

Honesty (*Sidq*) is another vital value emphasised in Islamic teachings. According to the Quran (Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:283), truthfulness is paramount. Educators can instil this value through storytelling and role-playing, helping children understand the significance of integrity in their daily interactions. Justice (*Adl*) is the principle of justice central to Islamic ethics. Children learn about fairness and equity, which are essential for social development. (Humphries et al., 2022) emphasise that teaching children about justice promotes their ability to discern right from wrong and encourages them to stand up against injustice. Islam emphasises the importance of community and belonging. The concept of *Ukhuwwah* fosters a

sense of unity among individuals. (Elsayed, 2024) highlights how early exposure to community values helps children develop strong social bonds and a sense of responsibility towards others.

Integrating Islamic values into early childhood education contributes significantly to children's sense of identity and belonging. Children develop a strong sense of self when they understand their cultural and religious heritage. (Wakefield et al., 2019) state that a well-defined identity enhances children's confidence and helps them navigate social challenges. Educators can effectively teach these values through various methods, including Storytelling: Narratives from Islamic tradition can convey moral lessons and foster a deeper understanding of values (Faizin & Helandri, 2023). Role-Playing: Engaging children in role-playing scenarios helps them practice ethical decision-making in a safe environment (Schrier, 2017). Encouraging participation in community service projects reinforces the importance of compassion and social responsibility. The core values of respect, kindness, honesty, justice, and community are foundational to Islamic teachings and crucial for developing well-rounded individuals. By integrating these values into educational practices, educators can create a nurturing environment that supports children's moral and social development, preparing them to be responsible and caring members of society.

The intersection of play-based learning and values education provides a unique framework for imparting essential moral teachings, particularly in Islamic education. Using storytelling and role play allows educators to engage young learners in meaningful ways, helping them internalise values through relatable narratives and experiences (Gunawardena & Brown, 2021). Storytelling is a powerful pedagogical approach that captivates children's attention and enables them to connect with moral lessons personally (Salehi et al., 2023). In Islamic education, stories from the Quran and Hadith serve as rich sources of values that can be communicated through narrative forms. For example, narratives such as the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) compassion toward animals offer powerful illustrations of kindness that young children can easily grasp. (Strelkova, 2021) shows that engagement with stories conveying moral lessons supports the development of empathy and compassion in children. When children listen to narratives emphasising ethical and emotional values, they gain a clearer understanding of these principles and how they relate to human behaviour. Role play similarly provides an effective avenue for teaching Islamic values, as it enables children to embody characters and enact scenarios that make moral lessons more concrete. Through role-playing activities, children can explore honesty, justice, and respect within a safe and supportive environment where they can practise ethical decision-making (Dodson et al., 2017). For example, reenacting a scenario based on the Prophet's honesty allows children to confront choices between truth and falsehood in a structured learning context. Alvarez (2024) adds that participation in role play enhances comprehension and increases children's confidence in applying learned values in real-life situations.

Both storytelling and role play contribute to the internalisation of Islamic values by placing children in relatable situations where characters navigate moral dilemmas. (Gat & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2025; Iftach & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2023) observe that children are more likely to reflect on their own behaviour when they can identify with characters facing ethical challenges. Stories depicting acts such as helping a friend can reinforce compassion, while role-playing activities that require collaboration highlight the importance of teamwork and community. (Niyonizeye et al., 2024) further note that opportunities to practise values during play promote deeper moral understanding and long-term value commitment. However, despite the demonstrated effectiveness of storytelling and role play in value formation, the existing body of research does not present a novel theoretical model that integrates these play-based strategies into a unified framework specifically designed for teaching Islamic values. This absence of an overarching conceptual model marks a clear gap in the current literature.

Educators can effectively integrate storytelling and role-play into their curriculum by developing units around specific Islamic values, incorporating relevant stories and role-playing activities to enhance understanding. After storytelling sessions or role plays, educators can facilitate discussions, encouraging children to reflect on the moral lessons and their application in everyday life. Engaging families in storytelling sessions can extend the learning experience beyond the classroom, reinforcing values within the home environment. The intersection of play-based learning and values education through storytelling and role play offers a dynamic approach to teaching Islamic values. These methods engage young learners and provide them with the tools to internalise essential moral teachings. By utilising relatable narratives and interactive experiences, educators can create a rich learning environment that fosters the development of compassionate, respectful, and responsible individuals grounded in their cultural and religious identity.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Theoretical Research Review

#### 2.1.1. Theories of Play-Based Learning

Several theories highlight the significance of play in early childhood development, underpinning play-based learning. These theories provide a framework for understanding how children learn and grow through playful experiences.

#### 2.1.2. Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory

Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development emphasises that children construct knowledge through their interactions with the environment (Fatimah, 2021; Salkind, 2013). Piaget identified four stages of cognitive development, with the preoperational stage (ages 2 to 7) particularly relevant to play-based learning (Johnson, 2022). Children engage in symbolic play during this stage, using objects and actions to represent other things. According to Piaget, play allows children to explore their surroundings, experiment with ideas, and develop cognitive skills such as problem-solving and logical thinking (Mauluddia & Solehuddin, 2023). (Ahmad et al., 2016) support Piaget's view, suggesting that play is essential for mental growth. When children engage in imaginative play, they practice critical thinking and develop their ability to understand complex concepts. This theory underscores the importance of play as a vehicle for cognitive development, reinforcing the idea that learning occurs best in an interactive and playful context.

#### 2.1.3. Vygotsky's Social Constructivism

Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism further expands on the role of play in learning by emphasising the social interactions that occur during play. Vygotsky posited that children learn through social interactions and that language is critical to cognitive development (Topçiu & Myftiu, 2015). Vygotsky introduced the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the gap between what a child can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance (Silalahi, 2019). In play settings, children often engage in cooperative play, collaborating with peers to reach common goals. This social interaction fosters learning as children share ideas, negotiate roles, and solve problems. (Taber, 2025) highlights that play promotes language development and social skills, reinforcing Vygotsky's assertion that learning is a socially mediated process. Through play, children internalise cultural norms and values, which are crucial for their development.

#### 2.1.4. Montessori Method

The Montessori method, developed by Maria Montessori, emphasises child-centred learning through play. Montessori advocated for an environment where children can explore, manipulate materials, and engage in self-directed activities (Isaacs,

2018). The role of the educator is to facilitate learning by providing resources and guiding children's exploration. Montessori's approach aligns with the principles of play-based learning, as it recognises the importance of hands-on experiences (Marks et al., 2020). (Denervaud et al., 2019) indicate that children in Montessori settings demonstrate higher levels of creativity, problem-solving, and social skills compared to traditional educational environments. The Montessori method underscores the value of play in fostering independence and promoting holistic development.

#### 2.1.5. The Role of Play in Emotional and Social Development

Play-based learning also contributes significantly to emotional and social development. According to (Coplan et al., 2015), play can be categorised into different types, from solitary to cooperative. Each type serves a distinct purpose in helping children develop social skills, emotional regulation, and empathy. (Garaigordobil et al., 2022) suggest that play fosters social competence, enabling children to learn how to interact with others, resolve conflicts, and develop friendships. Through play, children practice emotional expression and learn to navigate social dynamics, which is essential for their overall development.

#### 2.1.6. Islamic Educational Philosophy

Islamic educational philosophy encompasses a comprehensive approach to education that integrates spiritual, moral, and intellectual development (Hadi et al., 2024). This philosophy is rooted in the teachings of the *Quran* and the *Hadith*, emphasising the importance of nurturing both the mind and the soul. In Islam, knowledge is regarded as a sacred pursuit (Abbafati et al., 2020). The Quran encourages the seeking of knowledge as a means to understand the world and one's place within it. The first revelation to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) began with the command "*Iqra*" (Read), highlighting the significance of literacy and learning (Quran 96:1). This foundational principle establishes that knowledge is not only a means of personal development but also a duty for every Muslim. Islamic scholars, such as Al-Ghazali, emphasise that knowledge should be pursued for the sake of Allah and to benefit humanity (Aminullah Poya & Habiburrahman Rizapoor, 2023). This perspective fosters a sense of purpose in education, where learners are encouraged to seek knowledge that contributes to their moral and ethical development. Islamic educational philosophy advocates for holistic development, encompassing intellectual, moral, spiritual, and physical growth. According to (Utamirohmahsari, 2024), education should aim to cultivate a balanced, knowledgeable individual with strong ethical values. This holistic approach is reflected in integrating Islamic values into the educational process. (Hendawi et al., 2024) support this notion, indicating that Islamic education should develop the whole person, preparing them to navigate the complexities of life while adhering to Islamic principles. This philosophy emphasises the importance of character building alongside academic achievement, fostering responsible and ethical individuals.

#### 2.1.7. The Role of Teachers

In Islamic education, teachers are viewed as facilitators and role models. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) exemplified moral and ethical conduct, and educators are encouraged to emulate his qualities. According to (Vikulova et al., 2022), teachers guide students in academic subjects and moral and spiritual matters. This teacher-student relationship is built on mutual respect and trust, where educators inspire students to seek knowledge and embody Islamic values. (Umar et al., 2025) emphasises that effective teaching in Islamic contexts requires understanding students' cultural backgrounds and a commitment to nurturing their spiritual development. Islamic educational philosophy places a strong emphasis on community involvement and social

responsibility. The concept of *Ummah* (community) is central to Islamic teachings, highlighting the interconnectedness of individuals within society (Rohmah & Wahyudi, 2025). Education is viewed as a means to foster a sense of belonging and responsibility towards others. (Kholidah, 2022) indicates that Islamic education should encourage students to engage in community service and contribute positively to society. By instilling a sense of social responsibility, educators can help students develop empathy and compassion, aligning with the broader goals of Islamic education. Integrating these principles into early childhood education can enhance the development of young learners, preparing them for a life grounded in Islamic values.

#### 2.1.8. Integration of Play and Values Education

Integrating play-based learning and values education represents a powerful approach to fostering moral and ethical development in young children. This intersection is particularly significant in Islamic education, where teaching values is essential for nurturing responsible and compassionate individuals. Play is a natural medium for children to explore and internalise values (Goldman, 2020). Through play, children engage in activities that require them to make choices, solve problems, and navigate social interactions. This experiential learning allows them to practice and reinforce moral values in a safe and supportive environment. (Ali et al., 2018) highlight that play-based learning encourages children to reflect on their actions and understand the consequences of their choices. Children can explore scenarios illustrating values such as honesty, compassion, and justice by engaging in role-play or storytelling. This active engagement fosters a deeper understanding of these concepts, helping children internalise them daily.

#### 2.1.9. Storytelling as a Means of Values Education

Storytelling is an effective method for integrating values education into play-based learning. Islamic stories, drawn from the Quran and Hadith, provide rich narratives that convey moral lessons and ethical principles. By incorporating storytelling into the curriculum, educators can create relatable contexts where children can understand and discuss essential values. (Faizin & Helandri, 2023) indicate that children who engage with narratives emphasising Islamic values are more likely to develop empathy and a sense of responsibility. (Singh & Alshammari, 2024) revealed that storytelling captivates children's attention and allows them to see the practical applications of values in various situations. This method encourages critical thinking as children analyse characters' decisions and implications.

#### 2.1.10. Role Play as an Effective Teaching Strategy

Role play is another powerful tool for teaching values through play. This interactive method allows children to embody characters and scenarios, enabling them to experience the consequences of their actions in a controlled setting. Through role-play, children can practice cooperation, respect, and kindness. According to Iftach and Shapira-Lishchinsky (2023), role play enhances children's understanding of ethical dilemmas and encourages them to reflect on their values. For example, a role-playing activity involving resolving peer conflict can teach children about empathy and fairness. Children learn to navigate social interactions and develop strong moral character by actively participating in these scenarios.

Integrating play and values education requires thoughtful planning and implementation. Educators can adopt the following strategies to create compelling learning experiences. Develop thematic units focusing on Islamic values, incorporating storytelling and role play to reinforce learning objectives. After storytelling sessions or role-playing activities, facilitate discussions that encourage children to reflect on the values demonstrated and how they can apply them. Encourage collaborative projects that involve

community service or group activities, reinforcing the importance of social responsibility and teamwork. Educators can contribute significantly to young learners' moral and spiritual development by emphasising the importance of play in values education.

### 3. Methods

A systematic literature review (SLR) was adopted to gather and synthesise relevant studies, ensuring a structured and comprehensive understanding of the topic (Chigbu et al., 2023). This approach enabled the organised collection, evaluation, and summarisation of findings across multiple scholarly sources. The primary objective of the review was to identify effective strategies for teaching Islamic values through play-based learning and to highlight gaps in the existing body of literature. The search strategy drew on several widely used academic databases, including ERIC, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and PubMed, due to their extensive coverage of research in education and psychology. To maximise search effectiveness, a set of predefined keywords and phrases—such as “*play-based learning*,” “*Islamic values*,” “*early childhood education*,” “*moral development*,” and “*storytelling in education*”, was used in combination with Boolean operators (AND, OR), following best-practice search refinement procedures (Alharbi & Stevenson, 2020). Searches were limited to a defined period to ensure that the review focused on recent work. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure the relevance and quality of the literature selected for review.

The inclusion criteria encompassed peer-reviewed journal articles focused on early childhood education, play-based learning, and studies explicitly addressing Islamic values or moral instruction, published within the last fifteen years. Excluded materials consisted of non-peer-reviewed publications, opinion pieces, studies outside the scope of early childhood or play-based methods, and articles not available in English or lacking full-text access. For each selected study, data extraction involved summarising the publication details, methodological characteristics, and major findings using a standardised extraction template. Extracted data were then analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns across the literature, including themes such as cognitive development, social skills, emotional intelligence, and pedagogical strategies for integrating values into play-based contexts. To ensure methodological rigour, the review incorporated a quality appraisal of selected studies using established tools such as the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist, evaluating elements including study design, data collection procedures, sample adequacy, and clarity of reported findings. While the SLR design provided a systematic method for synthesising evidence, the reporting of the review process did not include several components recommended by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework.

Specifically, the research does not report numerical scoring or tabulated results of the quality appraisal. Although a systematic literature review methodology was employed, the exact number of records retrieved from each database (ERIC, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and PubMed) was not documented during the initial search phase. Because database-specific retrieval counts were not recorded, it is not possible to report the number of studies identified, screened, or excluded per database in accordance with the detailed requirements of the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework. Consequently, while the review process followed a structured approach to identify, evaluate, and synthesise relevant literature, the absence of database-level retrieval data limits the completeness of PRISMA reporting. These omissions mean that, although the review followed a structured methodological approach, its reporting does not fully align with PRISMA's detailed transparency requirements.

## 4. Results

The findings in this research article are grounded in a comprehensive review of relevant studies that explore the intersection of play-based learning and Islamic values in early childhood education. This overview highlights key studies that contributed to understanding how play facilitates moral development and teaching Islamic principles. The findings of this research article are derived from a systematic literature review that identified key themes and strategies related to the integration of play-based learning and Islamic values in early childhood education.

### 4.1. Development of Moral Values

A significant theme emerging from the literature is the role of play in developing moral values. Research indicates that play allows children to explore ethical concepts like honesty, empathy, and justice. Through play, children engage in scenarios that require them to make moral choices.

Table 1. Studies on Play-Based Development of Moral Values

Study	Findings
Bronikowska et al. (2024)	Play enhances social competence and moral reasoning.
Gómez Poyato et al. (2024)	Role play improves children's understanding of ethical dilemmas.

The interactive nature of play allows children to practice and internalise these values, contributing to their overall moral development.

### 4.2. Social Skills and Community Involvement

Another key theme is the enhancement of social skills through play-based learning. The literature emphasises that play fosters cooperation, communication, and conflict resolution among children. Engaging in group play activities promotes a sense of belonging and community.

Table 2. Studies on Play-Based Development of Social and Emotional Skills

Study	Findings
Huda et al. (2018).	Community involvement fosters social responsibility and empathy.
Ljubetic et al. (2020)	Play contributes to the development of social skills and emotional intelligence.

These findings highlight the importance of play in building strong social connections and encouraging children to engage with their communities.

### 4.3. Cognitive Development and Critical Thinking

The literature also identifies cognitive development as a crucial outcome of play-based learning. Play stimulates critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. Through their play experiences, children learn to navigate challenges and explore new ideas.

Table 3. Studies Demonstrating Cognitive Outcomes of Play-Based Learning

Study	Findings
Gurholt and Sanderud (2016)	Children construct knowledge through play and exploration.
Archana and Sreedevi (2021).	Montessori methods enhance cognitive skills through play.

These insights suggest that play is essential for social and emotional growth and for fostering critical cognitive abilities.

#### 4.4. Cultural Awareness and Respect for Diversity

The literature emphasises the role of play in promoting cultural awareness and respect for diversity. Through play, children are exposed to different cultures, traditions, and perspectives, which enhances their understanding and appreciation of diversity.

**Table 4. Impact of Play on Children's Respect for Cultural Diversity**

Study	Findings
Ladzekpo et al. (2024)	Storytelling fosters cultural understanding and empathy.
Ali et al. (2018).	Play-based activities encourage respect for different backgrounds.

These findings highlight the potential of play to serve as a vehicle for cultural education, fostering a more inclusive environment.

#### 4.5. Play-Based Strategies for Teaching Islamic Values

The literature review also identified various play-based strategies that effectively teach Islamic values in early childhood settings.

#### 4.6. Storytelling and Role Play

Storytelling and role-play are powerful strategies for conveying Islamic values. Engaging children with narratives from Islamic tradition allows them to connect with moral lessons on a personal level. Role-play provides an interactive way for children to embody characters and practice ethical decision-making.

**Table 5. Storytelling and Role-Play Strategies for Islamic Values Education**

Strategy	Description
Storytelling	Using narratives to illustrate Islamic values like compassion.
Role Play	Engaging in scenarios that require moral reasoning and empathy.

Research indicates that these methods enhance children's understanding of values and encourage them to apply these teachings.

#### 4.7. Cooperative Games and Activities

Cooperative games and activities promote teamwork and social skills while reinforcing Islamic values. These activities require children to work together, fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility.

**Table 6. Cooperative Games and Group Activities for Social Skill Development**

Strategy	Description
Cooperative Games	Engaging in games that require collaboration and communication.
Group Projects	Participating in community service or group activities can help build empathy.

These strategies enhance social skills and instil a sense of belonging and responsibility toward others.

#### 4.8. Art and Creative Expression

Art and creative expression provide additional avenues for teaching Islamic values. Through artistic activities, children can explore their emotions, express their understanding of values, and appreciate cultural diversity.

Table 7. Creative Strategies to Support Value Internalisation in Early Childhood

Strategy	Description
Art Projects	Creating art that reflects Islamic teachings or cultural themes.
Creative Writing	Writing stories or poems that illustrate moral lessons.

Research suggests these creative outlets allow children to internalise values meaningfully, fostering personal expression and cultural appreciation.

The findings from this systematic literature review highlight the multifaceted benefits of integrating play-based learning with Islamic values education. The identified themes, development of moral values, social skills and community involvement, cognitive development, and cultural awareness, demonstrate the significant impact of play on holistic childhood development. The practical storytelling strategies, cooperative activities, and creative expression also provide approaches for educators to teach Islamic values engagingly and meaningfully. By leveraging the power of play, educators can cultivate a generation of compassionate, socially aware, and well-rounded individuals.

#### 5. Discussion of findings

The findings of this systematic literature review demonstrate that play-based learning significantly contributes to the development of moral values, social competence, cognitive abilities, and cultural awareness among young children. A critical synthesis of the reviewed studies shows a consistent pattern: play functions not merely as an instructional tool but as a multidimensional developmental medium. This aligns with previous scholarship emphasising the transformative potential of play in early childhood education. For example, (Miranda-Rodríguez et al., 2023) provide empirical support for the role of play in strengthening social competence and moral reasoning, which corresponds directly with this review's conclusion that structured play can facilitate moral development. Similarly, (Sholeh et al., 2024) affirm the effectiveness of role-play in deepening children's ethical understanding, reinforcing the review's interpretation that interactive methods are particularly well-suited for communicating Islamic values in early childhood contexts.

The review also identifies a strong pattern in the literature linking play to cognitive development. Studies by (Li et al., 2024) and (Kaizar & Alordiah, 2023) highlight improvements in critical thinking and problem-solving skills among children engaged in guided play, supporting this study's conclusion that play fosters essential cognitive competencies. Furthermore, research by (D. A. Oyegoke et al., 2024) emphasises storytelling as a catalyst for empathy and cultural understanding, which aligns with the present review's finding that play-based strategies can cultivate respect for diversity and strengthen children's socio-emotional awareness. The consistency of these themes across diverse studies indicates a coherent pattern: play-based learning reliably supports integrated developmental outcomes across cognitive, moral, social, and cultural domains. From an educational perspective, these findings imply that play should be positioned as a central pedagogical mechanism rather than a supplementary activity. Incorporating play-based learning strategies, particularly storytelling, role-play, cooperative games, and creative expression, can create learning environments that support the internalisation of Islamic values while simultaneously promoting academic and socio-emotional growth.

Selecting culturally relevant narratives enhances children's engagement, while collaborative activities deepen their sense of community, responsibility, and mutual respect. Therefore, a holistic pedagogical approach that merges values education with structured play has strong potential to nurture learners who are intellectually capable, socially responsible, and ethically grounded. However, a critical evaluation of existing practices reveals several structural challenges that may hinder effective implementation. Many educational systems remain constrained by curricula that prioritise standardised testing and academic performance at the expense of exploratory learning. This limits opportunities for meaningful play-based engagement. Additionally, the review highlights a gap in teacher preparedness; many educators lack formal training in integrating storytelling, role-play, and cooperative learning into values-based instruction. Without adequate professional development, these methods remain underutilised. Resource constraints also pose barriers, especially in underfunded educational settings where materials, space, and learning aids required for effective play-based instruction may be limited. These factors collectively indicate systemic limitations that must be addressed before play-based Islamic values education can be fully realised. Critically, although the reviewed literature demonstrates the benefits of integrating play and values-based learning, it does not present a unified conceptual model or theoretical framework to guide educators in systematically applying these strategies.

The absence of such a model represents a notable conceptual gap in the field. A theoretical framework that explains how play-based interactions facilitate the internalisation of Islamic moral values (across cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions) would offer a clearer foundation for instructional planning and empirical evaluation. This review highlights the need for developing a holistic conceptual model that integrates developmental theories (e.g., Vygotsky's social constructivism), Islamic educational philosophy, and evidence-based play pedagogies. In summary, the findings provide strong evidence for the multifaceted benefits of play-based learning in Islamic values education, while the critical-analytical synthesis underscores the need for improved teacher training, more supportive curricular structures, and the development of an integrated theoretical framework. Future research should therefore aim to construct and empirically validate a conceptual model or figure that explains the mechanisms through which play fosters moral, cognitive, social, and cultural development within Islamic early childhood contexts.

## 6. Conclusions

A Systematic review findings surveyed the incorporation of play integrated with the Islamic values education. These results show the significance of Islam, where play becomes more than an entertainment facet as children learn values of empathy, fairplay, honesty, teamwork, responsibility. Through cooperative and dramatized role play, children learn the value of social interaction, as they negotiate, balance play, role behavior, and control emotions. Play also encourages thinking beyond the primary education level as children learn and develop creativity and problem-solving skills. Through diverse scenarios, play also encourages respect towards diversity and improves cultural understanding. Instructional methods, such as storytelling, role play, group activities, and flexible arts with play, were reported as positive methods of integrating Islam with an active learning experience. These methods facilitate an active rather than passive experience of reflecting and integrating Islam. These holistic and integrated methods foster the social and emotional moral development of the children.

Nevertheless, the review did highlight some discrepancies: most studies treat theories of development, Islamic pedagogy, and play-based learning in isolation, offering little in the way of comprehensive theorization of how play facilitates the assimilation of Islamic values. An integrated conceptual model is warranted that describes the relationship between play, moral learning, and value development in young children. Theoretical assumptions can be transformed into practice in terms of incorporating organized play, culturally appropriate stories, and facilitated peer interactions. For appropriate integration, teacher training is crucial, particularly when conventional teaching has been in

place for some time. Policy guidelines should position play as a fundamental teaching approach, and invest in supervision, space, and materials for play. Validation of the conceptual model and an exploration of the long-term impact, obstacles, and practices of play-based education that promotes Islamic values are the logical next steps for research.

## 7. CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

**Moses Adeleke Adeoye:** Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Funding acquisition, Resources, Writing, original draft, and Writing – review & editing. **Sarah A. Alahmari:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Validation, and Writing – review & editing.

## 8. Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## 9. Acknowledgments

Acknowledgments is where you acknowledge individuals who do not qualify for co-authorship but have contributed to your article intellectually, financially, or in some other manner. Acknowledging someone in your academic texts enhances your integrity as a writer by demonstrating that you are not claiming the ideas of other academics as your own intellectual property.

## 10. Data Availability

Data will be made available on request.

## 11. References

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