

Integrative Model for Building Good Listening Skills in Islamic-Based Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Early childhood is a crucial stage for shaping foundational character, including listening habits that influence social, emotional, and communication development. In Islamic-based educational settings, listening is viewed not only as a cognitive skill but also as an ethical value rooted in religious teachings, making its cultivation both pedagogical and spiritual. This study aims to develop an integrative model for forming good listener character in early childhood at an Islamic-based kindergarten in Bogor City. Using a qualitative case study, the research found this character formation is not spontaneous, but the outcome of planned, gentle, and meaningful habituation. The “Pillar of Morality” program effectively instilled active listening through songs, games, storytelling, and prayer. This process aligns with Lickona’s three domains including moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral acting—but was expanded in the Islamic context with a fourth domain: spiritual meaning. Thematic analysis produced an integrative model consisting of four character domains (cognitive, affective, behavioral, and spiritual) supported by three main factors: teacher exemplification, routine habituation, and a spiritually enriched environment. This model highlights that character education must operate holistically by integrating role modeling, consistent practice, and spiritual context. The study contributes theoretically to Islamic-based character education and offers practical guidance for fostering a culture of active listening grounded in manners and affection.

Keywords: Active Listening, Character Education, Early Childhood, Habituation, Islamic Values.

1. Introduction

Character education has become one of the main focuses in early childhood education, as this period is a foundational stage for the formation of behaviors, values, and habits that will persist into adulthood. According to Lickona (1991), character education must develop three main components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, which together form an individual of good character. One important character that needs to be instilled from an early age is becoming a good listener, as this ability plays a role in forming attitudes of respect for others, empathy, and effective communication skills (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008).

Research shows that early childhood children often have difficulty with active listening. They tend to be easily distracted, interrupt conversations, or lack focus when the teacher is explaining (Fadillah et al., 2022; Samad et al., 2021). In fact, listening skills are part of socio-emotional development that correlates with self-regulation, empathy, and social responsibility (Blair & Raver, 2015). Children who are accustomed to listening well also tend to have better self-control and cooperation skills in the classroom (Ahmed et al., 2021).

In the context of Islamic education, the ability to listen is not merely a communication skill but also an Islamic manner reflecting noble character. The Quran emphasizes the importance of listening attentively as part of the ethics in seeking knowledge and social



interaction, as stated in Allah's words in Surah Al-A'raf: 204: "And when the Qur'an is recited, then listen to it and pay attention that you may receive mercy." This value of listening etiquette aligns with the principle of moral action in Lickona's theory, which is how moral values are realized in actual behavior in daily life (Lickona, 1991; Makruf & Puspitasari, 2021).

The Islamic-based kindergarten under study is an integrated Islamic educational institution that emphasizes character strengthening through daily thematic activities. Based on preliminary observation, this school has integrated character values such as politeness, responsibility, and good listening through various activities ranging from morning routines, storytelling, to small group discussions. However, the implementation of "good listener" character learning within the context of Lickona's theory has not been extensively studied in depth, particularly regarding teacher strategies, children's responses, and the values internalized in each moral component.

Based on this background, this research was conducted to deeply understand how the implementation of "good listener" character learning is carried out in an Islamic-based kindergarten in Bogor City based on Thomas Lickona's character education theory, by examining the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes conducted by teachers as well as children's responses in the context of daily learning.

Based on the described background, the main problem in this study lies in how the school implements character education with a focus on forming the attitude of being a good listener in early childhood. Although the Islamic-based kindergarten has integrated Islamic character values into daily learning activities, there has been no in-depth investigation into how the components of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action according to Lickona (1991) are actually enacted in classroom practices. Addressing this gap is crucial because Lickona's framework provides a comprehensive and integrative model that connects cognitive understanding, emotional internalization, and behavioral expression. By examining the school's implementation through this lens, the study will not only reveal the effectiveness of current practices but also offer a theoretically grounded pathway for strengthening character education, particularly in nurturing the good-listening attitude as a foundational early-childhood competency.

Thus, the research questions in this study focus on exploring how the process of forming good listener character is implemented in the Islamic-based kindergarten in Bogor City, identifying the values that underlie the development of active listening in early childhood within the context of Islamic education, examining how the roles of the teacher, routine habituation, and spiritual environment support the internalization of this character, and understanding how the conceptual model of good listener character formation is shaped based on the field findings in the Islamic-based kindergarten.

In accordance with the problem formulation above, the objectives of this research are to describe in depth the process of forming good listener character in early childhood at the Islamic-based kindergarten; identify the moral and spiritual values that form the basis for internalizing active listening character in children; analyze the role of the teacher as a role model, routine habituation, and the spiritual environment in shaping children's listening character; and produce an integrative model for forming good listener character that is relevant to the context of Islamic-based early childhood education.

2. Methods

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design, as the research focus was directed at understanding in depth the process of forming good listener character in early childhood at an Islamic-based kindergarten in Bogor City. This approach was chosen to explore the meaning, actual practices, and dynamics of interaction between teachers and children during the learning process. Aligning with Creswell (2018) view, the qualitative approach provides space for the researcher to understand the subjects' experiences naturalistically, in an authentic daily life context.

The researcher acted as the key instrument, actively conducting observation, interviews, and interpretation of phenomena occurring in the field. The researcher's presence was not only as an observer but also as a participant who interacted empathetically with teachers and children, without disrupting the flow of ongoing learning activities. In addition to the key instrument, this study also used observation guides for listening character, semi-structured interview guidelines, and teacher reflection sheets as supporting instruments for data collection.

The data collection process was conducted triangulatively to ensure the validity and depth of the information obtained. Participatory observation was used to observe learning activities that contained the value of active listening, such as when the teacher told stories, engaged in role-playing, or discussed with children. Through this observation, the researcher recorded children's expressions, gestures, and responses to the ongoing interactions. In-depth interviews were conducted with classroom teachers and the principal to further explore their understanding of the meaning of listening from an Islamic perspective, the habituation strategies used, and the challenges faced in the implementation process in the classroom. Documentation such as Weekly Learning Implementation Plans (RPPH), activity photos, observation recordings, and teacher reflection notes were used to strengthen the validity of the findings and provide concrete context for the analysis results.

Data analysis was conducted interactively using the model by Miles et al. (2014), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation were selected, categorized, and analyzed thematically to find meaningful patterns describing the process of forming children's listening character. This analysis process occurred simultaneously with data collection, where the researcher continuously conducted reflection, verification, and cross-validation to maintain the integrity of meaning. To ensure the credibility of the research results, techniques of source and method triangulation, member checks, and peer debriefing were used to strengthen data interpretation and objectivity.

This research was conducted over four weeks in the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The initial stage was carried out through preliminary observation to understand the school's cultural context, teacher-child interactions, and daily activity patterns. After that, the implementation stage involved following a series of thematic activities "Good Listener" prepared by the teacher in the Pillar of Morality program. Each activity was observed in depth, from opening interactions, core learning, to closing reflections. All data were then transcribed, coded, and interpreted to find meanings describing how the value of listening was instilled and internalized in the children.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Research Results

This study shows that the formation of good listener character in an Islamic-based kindergarten in Bogor City is not merely about teaching polite behavior, but a process of habituation designed systematically, gently, and meaningfully. Teachers in this school do not only focus on end results such as children sitting quietly or not interrupting, but strive to instill the meaning behind that attitude, that listening is a form of respecting others and also part of manners loved by Allah.

One form of implementation was clearly visible in the Weekly Pillar of Morality Program Plan with the theme “Good Listener,” which lasted for five days, every morning for 15 minutes. In this program, learning was structured following the four domains of character development according to Thomas Lickona’s theory (moral knowing, moral feeling, moral acting) and in the Islamic context, one important dimension was added: spiritual meaning. These activities were designed to be very concrete and contextual for early childhood. Children were not only told “must listen well” but were invited to recognize the concept of the “Body of a Great Listener.” Through simple songs, pictures, and games, children learned that being a good listener means using their whole body such as eyes that look at the speaker, ears that listen, a quiet mouth, calm hands, and a body facing the person speaking. The weekly program structure, detailed in Table 1, was intentionally designed to address each of the four character domains in a sequential and interconnected manner, ensuring that children experience a balanced integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, moral acting, and spiritual meaning throughout the learning week.

Table 1. Weekly Pillar of Morality Program Plan: “Good Listener”

Day	Focus Value (Lickona’s Domain)	Main Activity	Media/Tools	Observed Behavioral Indicators
Monday	Moral Knowing	Song and picture “Body of a Great Listener”	Poster, song	Child recognizes body components for listening
Tuesday	Moral Feeling	Storytelling “Aisyah Becomes a Good Listener”	Paper Doll	Child shows empathy towards the character
Wednesday	Moral Acting	Chain instruction game	Music, flashcard	Child follows instructions without errors
Thursday	Moral Action	Role Play “Talking Circle”	Stickers, symbols	Child waits their turn to speak politely
Friday	Spiritual Meaning	Reflection & joint prayer	Daily prayer	Child understands the meaning of listening manners

The structure of this program, detailed in Table 1, was meticulously designed to target each domain of character development over the course of a week. On the first day (Monday), the teacher introduced this concept through pictures and an affirmation song with the tune of “My Two Eyes.” The children seemed enthusiastic about following the movements while laughing, but the interesting moment was when the teacher asked: “If we talk at the same time, who can hear?” Spontaneously, several children answered, “No one, Umi!” and they began to realize the important meaning of being silent and focused. Recent research shows that

listening is the main “vehicle” through which children learn, and that listening ability is often misunderstood in educational practice (Mealings et al., 2023).

The second day focused on feeling (moral feeling). The teacher used a paper doll named Aisyah to tell the story “Aisyah Becomes a Good Listener” as shown in Figure 1. In this story, Aisyah, who initially liked to interrupt, finally learned that when she listened, her friends became happy and wanted to play with her again. The children seemed emotionally connected to the character Aisyah. One child even said softly, “I’m like Aisyah too, often impatient.” This innocent statement is evidence that the approach used by the teacher successfully fostered awareness from within the child, not just external obedience. Previous research also shows that storytelling is effective not only for language but also for the internalization of character values (Huda et al., 2022).



Figure 1. Teacher using a paper doll

On the third day, the children were invited to play a chain instruction game. The teacher gave simple commands like “Touch your cheek” as shown in Figure 2, “Pat your friend’s shoulder on your right,” to more complex commands like “Hold your ear while waving your hand.” This activity trained focus, concentration, and active listening skills. Children who did not pay attention usually made wrong movements, but the teacher did not scold them, instead demonstrating again with a smile. The children laughed, repeated, and learned from mistakes without fear. This aligns with findings that learning media and concrete activities are vital in developing listening and speaking abilities in early childhood (Jannah et al., 2025).



Figure 2. Teacher as facilitator of the chain instruction game

The fourth day focused on social skills (moral acting). In the role-play activity “Talking Circle” as shown in Figure 3, children were asked to raise their hands before speaking and wait for their turn. The teacher gave symbolic rewards in the form of “I Am a Good Listener” stickers. Here, the transformation in the children’s behavior was clearly visible; they began spontaneously raising their hands before speaking, waiting for each other, and even politely reminding their friends, “Wait, I haven’t finished.” Research on Islamic-based early childhood character education models in 2023 affirms that the integration of character values with routine activities, symbolic reinforcement, and peer interaction strengthens character internalization (Samsinar et al., 2023).



Figure 3. “Talking Circle” role-play activity

The culmination on Friday, the teacher reaffirmed the spiritual meaning of listening well. The children were invited to reflect together that being silent and listening when someone is speaking is a form of politeness loved by Allah and His Messenger. A joint prayer closed the activity: “O Allah, make me a child who easily listens and understands good advice.” In this moment, the children were quiet not because they were told to be silent, but because they truly understood the meaning being discussed.

Observation results also showed that teachers played a major role in fostering an emotionally safe and affectionate atmosphere. Teachers not only taught with words but also demonstrated listening attitudes every time a child spoke. The teacher bent down, looked at the child, and gave a gentle response. These small gestures proved to be very powerful. Children who previously tended to interrupt or talk simultaneously began to imitate the teacher’s style of looking at friends when listening or waiting their turn patiently. Related research shows that teachers as active listening models have a positive impact on student well-being and participation (Petkou et al., 2025).

From in-depth interviews with teachers, it was revealed that this process did not happen instantly. The teacher mentioned, “At first, it was very difficult for them to be quiet. But after we made it a routine activity, gradually they memorized the song and movements of the ‘great listener’ by themselves. From there, they began to realize that listening is part of manners, not just a classroom rule.” Documentation of activities and teacher reflection notes also strengthened these results. The teacher recorded changes in the children’s attitudes from week to week, for example, “the child began to be able to focus for 5-7 minutes during storytelling” and “the child showed empathy when their friend was speaking.” These small changes are real

indicators of the development of self-regulation and moral internalization, two important aspects in early childhood character formation.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that when character education is delivered in a concrete, warm, and emotionally touching way, the value will grow naturally from within them. As conveyed by Lickona (1991), strong character is not formed through punishment or memorization of values, but through meaningful and consistent moral experiences. This was very visible in the children at this Islamic kindergarten in Bogor, they were not just “quiet because told to be,” but began to understand why being quiet is important, and for whom they are learning to listen. Or as one teacher said in an interview: “Nowadays, when I start telling a story, the children immediately say to their friends: ‘Let’s be quiet, listen to Umi. So that Allah is pleased.’ Well, that means they are starting to understand, not just obey.”

3.2. Discussion

The results of this study show that the formation of good-listener character in Islamic-based early childhood education institutions is not a spontaneous process, but the result of planned, repeated habituation rooted in spiritual values. This finding aligns with Lickona’s (1991) framework, which emphasizes that character develops through the integration of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action rather than through cognitive instruction alone. In the context of this study, moral knowing is fostered through storytelling and guided conversations that help children understand why listening is important. Moral feeling is strengthened through nurturing interactions, spiritual reflection, and songs that create positive emotional associations with being attentive and respectful. Meanwhile, moral action is cultivated by structured play and daily routines in the “Pillar of Morality” program, where children repeatedly practice listening behaviors in authentic social situations. By linking these practices to all three aspects of the model, the findings reveal that the school’s approach offers a coherent and holistic pathway for developing good-listener character in early childhood.

The model in Figure 4 presents an integrative framework for developing good-listener character in the Islamic-based kindergarten. It combines Lickona’s three domains of character development (moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral acting) with an additional domain, spiritual meaning, supported by three key factors: the teacher as a role model, routine habituation, and a spiritually grounded environment (Halim et al., 2023; Samsinar et al., 2023). This model underscores that early childhood character formation is inseparable from the teacher’s role as a moral exemplar who consistently demonstrates active listening behavior (Habibie et al., 2025). Routine habituation serves as the mechanism for value internalization through repeated positive experiences in an emotionally secure setting, while the spiritual environment deepens the transcendental significance of listening as both social etiquette and an act of worship to Allah (Syahroni & Sunardi, 2025).



Figure 4. Integrative framework model for forming good listener character

This model affirms that the character formation process does not occur partially, but as an interacting and mutually reinforcing system (Fransisca, 2024). The teacher acts as the center of exemplification, facilitating value internalization through meaningful habituation in a living spiritual atmosphere (Siahaan et al., 2022). Consistent habituation helps children link moral knowledge with emotional experience and real action, while the spiritual environment provides transcendental meaning that guides children to understand that listening is part of manners and worship (Ningtyaz et al., 2025). Thus, this model serves as a conceptual basis for the six main findings elaborated in the following discussion section, starting from the process of habituation and value internalization, the role of emotion and empathy, to the integration of Islamic values in children's behavioral transformation.

3.2.1. Habituation and Internalization of Moral Values

The "Good Listener" program demonstrates how the process of character formation in early childhood proceeds through the stages of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral acting, expanded with the dimension of spiritual meaning. This approach is in line with the theory of value internalization, which states that children will adopt moral behavior not because of external pressure, but due to understanding and feeling emerging from within themselves (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008). Activities such as affirmation songs and simple instruction games strengthen children's self-regulation through sensorimotor, emotional, and social engagement. According to Vygotsky, concrete and social experiences are the foundation for the formation of higher mental functions. In this context, the teacher acts as a more knowledgeable other who guides children in growing moral awareness through warm and supportive interaction.

3.2.2. The Role of Emotion and Empathy in Character Education

The second day of the program, which emphasized the aspect of moral feeling through the story of the Aisyah doll, shows the importance of an emotional approach in character education. The story about Aisyah not only conveyed a moral message but also helped children identify and manage their own feelings. Huda et al. (2022) affirms that storytelling is effective in instilling character values because it stimulates children's empathy, emotional reasoning, and moral imagination. The spontaneous reaction of children relating themselves to the character Aisyah indicates the occurrence of initial self-reflection, which according to Eisenberg (2010) is the basis for the development of empathy and self-control. This means the teacher successfully transformed the concept of listening from mere behavior into a meaningful emotional experience.

3.2.3. Meaningful Activities as a Means for Forming Self-Regulation

The activity on the third day, the chain instruction game, implicitly developed children's executive function abilities, such as attention, working memory, and impulse control. This activity contributes to active listening ability, which is a main component in effective communication and learning (Mealings et al., 2023). This strengthens the findings of Jannah et al. (2025) which show that concrete and repeated activities in a fun atmosphere can improve children's listening and speaking abilities. Further, the teacher's attitude of patiently demonstrating without harsh reprimands created a safe emotional climate that encouraged children to learn from mistakes without fear which is a vital principle in humanistic education.

3.2.4. The Teacher Model as a Key Factor in Character Formation

Observation results confirm that the teacher is the primary model in shaping children's listening behavior. The teacher's attitude of bending down, looking at the child, and giving gentle responses not only built effective communication but also instilled a sense of being

valued. Consistent with the findings of Petkou et al. (2025), the teacher's active listening behavior directly influences children's socio-emotional well-being and participation in the learning process. In the context of Islamic education, the teacher's action of listening to children also represents the morality of *rahmah* (compassion), which is the core of value-based education. The teacher does not merely give commands but demonstrates listening manners as part of *uswah hasanah* or a living example before the children.

3.2.5. Integration of Islamic Values in Character Formation

The spiritual dimension instilled on the last day of the program is a key differentiator of character education in Islamic-based kindergartens. The joint reflection and prayer "O Allah, make me a child who easily listens and understands good advice" shows a process of transcendence, linking moral values with a relationship to Allah. According to Samsinar (2023), the integration of Islamic values in routine activities such as prayer, symbolic rewards, and social reinforcement can strengthen children's intrinsic motivation to do good. This process shows that Islamic character education does not stop at obedience but aims for sincerity, the awareness that listening is an act of worship and a form of respect for others.

3.2.6. Behavioral Transformation and Developmental Implications

The change in children's behavior from external compliance towards internal awareness indicates the occurrence of deep moral internalization. Children are no longer quiet because they are told, but understand the reason and value behind that silence. This is an indicator that the children's self-regulation and empathic responsiveness functions are beginning to mature. This change aligns with the framework of children's moral development according to Kochanska (2002), which states that the internalization of moral values develops when children experience warm attachment with moral authority figures (teachers/parents) and receive coherent explanations about the meaning of behavior. Thus, the practices carried out by teachers in this kindergarten not only shape behavior but also cultivate a character foundation that will last long-term.

4. Conclusion

This study reveals that the formation of good listener character in early childhood at an Islamic-based kindergarten is an integrative process encompassing four main domains: moral knowing, moral feeling, moral acting, and spiritual meaning. This process does not operate separately but interacts within an educational system centered on the teacher as a role model, routine habituation, and a supportive spiritual environment.

First, the research results show that habituation and value internalization are the main foundation for instilling active listening character. Through routine activities such as affirmation songs, instruction games, and simple reflections, children learn to connect listening behavior with profound moral and spiritual values. Second, emotion and empathy play an important role in strengthening the value internalization process. Stories and symbolic games foster children's ability to recognize and manage their own and others' feelings, which forms the basis for empathy and self-control. Third, meaningful activities prove effective in developing children's executive function, such as attention, working memory, and impulse control. These activities directly strengthen active listening ability, which is the basis for effective communication in early childhood.

Fourth, the teacher as a moral and spiritual model plays a central role in cultivating listening behavior through exemplification, full attention, and gentle communication. The teacher's attitude of respecting children creates an emotionally safe and affectionate climate,

which in turn encourages children to imitate positive behavior. Fifth, the integration of Islamic values expands the meaning of character formation from merely social morality to transcendental morality. Children understand that listening is not only a social obligation but also a form of worship and a manifestation of manners towards others. Sixth, a transformation in children's behavior occurs from external compliance towards internal awareness. Children listen not out of fear of punishment, but because they understand the good value behind the behavior. This indicates the formation of self-regulation and moral autonomy as indicators of mature character development. Thus, the model of good listener character formation found in this study illustrates a holistic process that integrates cognitive, affective, behavioral, and spiritual aspects within a humanistic and meaningful Islamic educational context.

The theoretical implications of this study highlight an expansion of Lickona's character development model through the addition of the spiritual meaning dimension as a central component in Islamic character education. This integration strengthens moral internalization theory by incorporating a transcendental perspective, demonstrating that children's morality can develop more consistently when connected to spiritual meaning and their relationship with God. Practically, the findings underscore the importance for early childhood educators to serve as role models in active listening and to create learning routines that nurture children's moral and spiritual growth.

For Islamic educational institutions, the results offer a foundation for developing character-based curricula rooted in manners, emphasizing habituation, spiritual reflection, and meaningful social activities. For parents, the study reinforces the need for strong collaboration between home and school to support the habituation of listening values as part of family moral education. In terms of recommendations, future research is encouraged to quantitatively test the proposed model to determine its effectiveness in enhancing specific character indicators such as empathy, self-control, and communication skills. Further investigation is also needed to explore the role of family and community in broadening character development beyond the school environment. Additionally, early childhood teacher training programs should integrate spiritually grounded character education to better equip teachers in guiding children through an approach that balances humanistic and religious values.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that open avenues for further research. The findings are based on a single Islamic-based kindergarten, which may limit generalizability to broader early childhood contexts. The study also relied on qualitative observations and teacher narratives without longitudinal tracking, making it difficult to assess the long-term stability of children's moral knowing, moral feeling, moral action, and spiritual meaning. Additionally, parental involvement was explored only descriptively, leaving the interaction between home and school environments insufficiently examined. Future research should test the proposed model quantitatively across multiple institutions, incorporate longitudinal designs, and investigate the influence of family and community settings to provide a more comprehensive understanding of character formation in early childhood.

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