



Analysis of early childhood character development through the animation show Nussa and Rara episode 4

Suhartini¹✉

Universitas Negeri Malang

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the development of character values in early childhood through the animated series Nussa and Rara, Episode 4. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers, and documentation of children's behavioral responses at Muslimat NU 31 Kindergarten, Group B. The findings revealed five prosocial and religious character behaviors demonstrated in the episode: greeting upon entering the house, asking permission before leaving, helping parents with household chores, reciting bismillah before activities, and demonstrating emotional self-regulation when peers hold things. This study was only conducted on children who had watched episode 4 of Nussa and Rara and then practiced it at home with their parents. The questionnaire results showed varied adoption of these behaviors: 75% consistently greeted and 91.7% consistently asked permission, while helping parents and reciting bismillah showed lower consistency. This study concludes that animation media alone is not sufficient as the main vehicle for character formation in early childhood; collaborative habituation between parents, teachers, and the social environment is essential. Based on social learning theory and an ecological systems perspective, these findings demonstrate that character development is a multidimensional process shaped by multiple contextual factors. This study contributes to the discourse on integrating Islamic-themed digital media into early childhood character education.

Keywords: *Animation Media; Character Development; Early Childhood Education; Nussa and Rara; Social Learning; Parental Mediation.*

✉ Corresponding author: Suhartini

Email Address: tstitinsuhartini@gmail.com

Received 22 February 2026, Accepted 20 April 2026, Published 15 May 2026

Introduction

Early childhood (0–8 years) is the most critical phase of human development, often called the golden age. During this age range, all dimensions of development—cognitive, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual—develop at an extraordinarily rapid rate. Developmental neuroscience has confirmed that optimal stimulation at an early age shapes brain architecture that has a long-term impact on children's learning capacity and social behavior (Son et al., 2024). Therefore, early character development is not merely a pedagogical preference, but a developmental imperative.

Character, from a developmental psychology perspective, refers to stable dispositions that direct individuals to think, feel, and act in accordance with socially accepted moral values. In the context of Islamic education, early childhood character is understood not only as adaptive social behavior but also as a manifestation of moral values derived from religious teachings. Taja et al. (2021) asserted that character education grounded in Islamic religious-ethical values is an effective learning model for shaping children's moral behavior, especially when integrated into holistic, contextual learning experiences. This opinion aligns with Dahliyana et al. (2021), who stated that the challenges of character and moral education for the younger generation of Muslims in Indonesia require an approach that integrates Islamic values with contemporary pedagogical methods.

In today's digital era, mass media—particularly audiovisual content—has become one of the most influential agents of socialization in children's lives. Greitemeyer (2022), in his study on prosocial modeling, showed that exposure to media content depicting prosocial behavior consistently correlates positively with increased helping, sharing, and empathy in children. This modeling effect operates through observational learning mechanisms, in which children observe, symbolically represent, and then reproduce the observed behavior of characters with whom they identify. Therefore, the quality of media content consumed by children has direct implications for their character development (Mauluddia & Yulindrasari, 2024; Nurhayati et al., 2023).

In Indonesia, the Islamic animation content industry for children has experienced substantial growth over the past decade. The animated show *Nussa and Rara*, first published on YouTube in 2018 by The Little Giantz and 4 Stripe Productions, depicts the daily lives of Indonesian Muslim families practicing the Prophet's Sunnah in their daily activities. This show instills various character values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, creativity, religiosity, and social awareness (Fardani & Lismanda, 2019). Sihombing (2023), in a more recent study, confirmed that the animated film *Nussa and Rara* effectively represents positive family communication and relevant Islamic values for early childhood audiences in the digital era.

Although the potential of animated media as a vehicle for character education has been widely discussed in the literature, there remains a research gap regarding how these shows actually influence children's character development, especially in the context of interactions among media, families, and educational institutions. Prayitno et al. (2024) in the *Journal of Pedagogical Research* showed that animation is an effective teaching tool that increases children's interest, motivation, and learning outcomes. However, its effectiveness depends heavily on the quality of adult involvement during and after children watch. Swider-Cios et al. (2023), through their theoretical review of the impact of screen media on early childhood development, emphasize the role of parents as critical mediators in children's media consumption ecosystem.

This study, therefore, aims to: (1) identify the character values contained in the animated show *Nussa and Rara* Episode 4; (2) analyze the character behavior of children in Group B of Muslimat NU 31 Kindergarten before and after watching the show; and (3) examine the role of environmental factors—parents, teachers, and media—in the process of character formation in early childhood. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of an Islamic digital media-based PAUD curriculum and policies on media use in early childhood character education.

Methods

Research Design

This research uses a descriptive, qualitative approach to provide an in-depth understanding of character formation in early childhood through animation media. This approach

is based on constructivist epistemology, which views social reality as an intersubjective construct that must be understood in its natural context. A descriptive qualitative approach is most appropriate because it allows researchers to capture the complexity and nuances of the character development process that cannot be reduced to numerical data alone.

This design allows triangulation of methods—observation, interviews, and questionnaires—to build a rich, comprehensive picture of the relationship between animation media consumption and character development in early childhood. This approach aligns with Miles et al. (2014) view that rigorous qualitative data analysis through data condensation, presentation, and verification is key to producing credible and transferable findings.

Research Subjects and Locations

This research was conducted at TK Muslimat NU 31, an Islamic-based early childhood education institution under the auspices of Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama. The subjects were all 12 children in Group B, aged 5–6 years. Group B was selected because children aged 5–6 years are at a developmental stage that allows them to process symbolic content in audiovisual media more consciously. In addition to the children, the research also involved the parents of each child (12 people) and two class teachers as supporting informants. Table 1 below presents a complete profile of the research subjects and informants.

Table 1. Profil Subjek dan Informan Penelitian

Informant Category	Total	Roles in Research	Instruments
Group B children (ages 5-6 years)	12 children	Main subject; direct observation of character behavior	Observations and questionnaires (via parents)
Parents of students	12 people	Domestic informants; report children's behavior at home	Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires
Classroom teacher	2 people	Institutional informants; strategies for using animated media	In-depth interviews & classroom observations
Total Informants	26 people	Triangulation of data sources	Multi-instrument

Data collection technique

Data were collected using three complementary instruments designed to capture multiple dimensions of the research phenomenon. This triangulated approach—combining observational, interview-based, and self-report methods—was adopted to strengthen construct validity and ensure data completeness. Table 2 provides an overview of each instrument alongside its purpose, data sources, and procedural details.

Table 2. Overview of Data Collection Instruments

Instrument	Purpose	Data Source	Procedure
Participatory Observation	To record children's natural and instructed character behaviors in classroom and school settings	12 children (Group B, aged 5–6), TK Muslimat NU 31	Structured observation checklist based on five character indicators identified in the animation; 4 sessions over 2 weeks
Semi-Structured Interview	To explore children's home media habits, exposure to Nussa and Rara, and character behavior in domestic contexts; to assess teachers'	12 parents; 2 classroom teachers	Individual interview using a prepared interview guide; parent interviews focused on domestic character routines; teacher interviews focused on media-based pedagogy and character assessment

Instrument	Purpose	Data Source	Procedure
	instructional strategies		
Questionnaire & Documentation	To quantify the frequency of five target character behaviors post-viewing; to corroborate observational and interview data	12 parents (questionnaire); researcher (field notes, activity photos, interview recordings)	Three-point frequency scale (always, sometimes, never) for each of the five character behaviors; documentation maintained throughout all observation and interview sessions

The character Indicator in the observer used as a recommendation for the research observers is based on five indicators of character derived from the content analysis discussion of Episode 4, Nussa dan Rara, which includes saying hello when entering the house, asking permission before leaving, helping parents with household chores, reciting Bismillah to start activities, and showing reactions. Semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded (with consent from participants) before being transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis. After having viewed the VL in the classroom, parents were given a three-point questionnaire, which was returned within one week to minimize recall bias. Documentary materials—field notes, photographs, and audio recordings—served as supporting evidence during the analysis phase, in accordance with the multi-source verification strategy recommended by Miles et al. (2014).

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model of Miles et al., (2014), which includes four stages: data collection, data condensation through thematic coding, data presentation in descriptive narrative form, and conclusion drawing and verification. Codification was conducted inductively at the initial stage, then refined through a deductive framework based on character dimensions found in the literature.

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation (children, parents, teachers) and method triangulation (observation, interviews, questionnaires). Member checking was conducted by validating the researcher's interpretations with key informants to ensure the accuracy and resonance of the findings.

Results and Discussion

Character Values in Nussa and Rara Episode 4

A content analysis of Nussa and Rara Episode 4 identified five clusters of character behavior that can be classified into two main dimensions: religious character and socio-emotional character.

Within the religious character dimension, the episode featured: (a) the habit of saying "assalamu'alaikum" (peace be upon you) upon entering the house; (b) the habit of reciting "bismillah" (the name of God) before starting an activity; and (c) the habit of saying goodbye to parents before leaving the house. Ahnan Azzam & Leany (2024) emphasized that Islamic animated content depicting daily religious practices has significant potential to shape children's Islamic identity from an early age.

Within the socio-emotional character dimension, the episode featured: (d) prosocial behavior in the form of a child's willingness to help parents; and (e) a child's emotional response when a favorite object is accidentally dropped or borrowed by a friend. This classification aligns with the character typology proposed by Brazzelli et al. (2022), which distinguishes between prosocial components based on social cognition (theory of mind, empathy) and components based on emotion regulation.

The Behavior of Children's Character Before Watching Programs

Qualitative pre-intervention interviews revealed that baseline patterns of character behavior were heterogeneous. Most behaviors were still contingent on adult prompting. One mother reported:

"Greeting Meyda when she arrives, saying goodbye, Bismillah (in the name of God), and helping both her parents are always initiated by me and very, very rarely, sometimes my husband as well." When a friend takes her favorite toy, Meyda's response is to cry and become angry." (Meyda's parent)

This baseline data is consistent with Sjöman et al. (2025), who found that preschoolers' self-regulation abilities are highly dependent on scaffolding from adults. This reliance on prompting reflects a normal developmental stage, not a character disability.

Another informant reported a different pattern:

"Zaidan, if he remembers and wants to, will say salam (in the name of God), help his parents, and say Bismillah (in the name of God). His father and I always remind him to say goodbye. Zaidan has a younger sibling at home—thank God, he always gives in and can share toys or food with his younger sibling." (Zaidan's parents)

The presence of younger siblings in the home functions as a contextual factor that facilitates the development of prosocial behavior. Beffel et al. (2023) found that children learn prosocial behavior from one another through regular social interactions (socialization effect), creating a natural laboratory for the development of prosocial competencies.

Distribution of Character Behavior Adoption After Exposure

After children watched Nussa and Rara Episode 4 in class with teacher guidance, questionnaire data revealed a varied distribution of behavior adoption. Figure 1 presents the adoption percentages for the five character indicators.

Figure 1 shows significant variation among the five character indicators. Saying goodbye achieved the highest consistency (91.7%), followed by saying salam (75%), reciting bismillah (50% always), helping parents (25% always), and adaptive emotion regulation (only 16.7%). This pattern reflects a gradation of complexity, from simple, conventional, social behaviors to behaviors that require deep internalization of values.

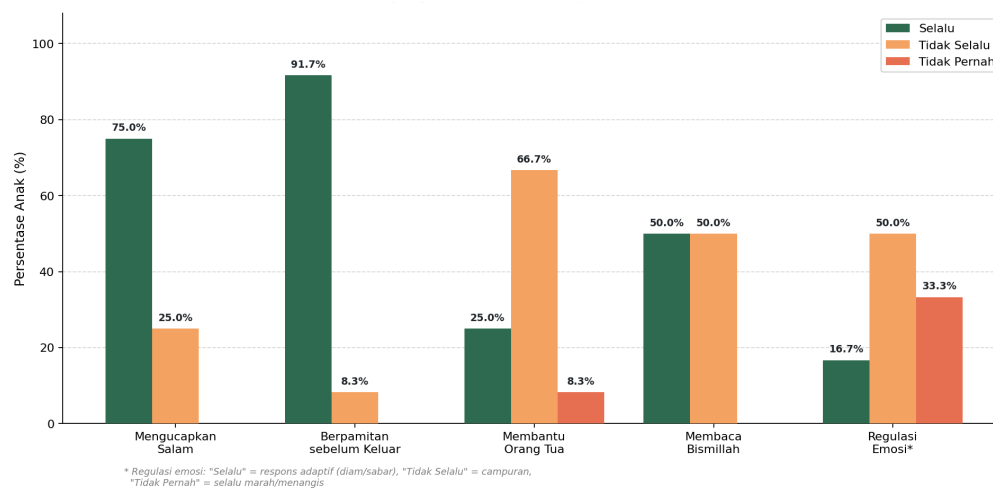


Figure 1. Percentage Distribution of Character Behavior Adoption After Exposure to Nussa and Rara Episode 4 (n=12)

From a prosocial modeling perspective (Greitemeyer, 2022), the high consistency in saying goodbye and greeting behaviors can be explained by vicarious reinforcement mechanisms strengthened by the convergence between media modeling and parental expectations. Conversely, the low consistency in helping parents (25%) confirms the screen-to-real transfer gap identified by Swider-Cios et al. (2023).

Children's Emotional Responses to Possession Situations

Emotion regulation indicators show the most complex patterns. Figure 2 shows the distribution of children's emotional responses when a favorite object is borrowed or dropped by a friend.

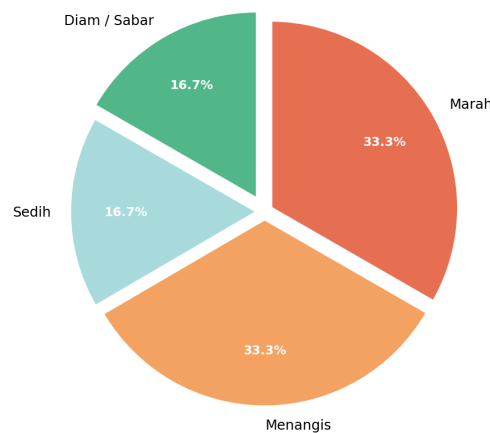


Figure 2. Distribution of Types of Children's Emotional Responses When Favorite Objects Are Borrowed or Dropped by Friends (n=12)

Figure 2 shows that the majority of children (66.6%) reported unregulated negative emotions—either crying (33.3%) or anger (33.3%). Only 16.7% demonstrated an adaptive response (silence/patience). This finding is consistent with the study by Sjöman et al. (2025), which found that emotion regulation in preschool children is highly dependent on adult scaffolding and cannot be developed through a single media exposure.

van Riet et al. (2022) add that adaptive emotional socialization must be contextual and flexible—parents need to respond differently depending on the situation and the child's specific emotional needs. This wide variation in responses reflects the unique character and parenting background of each child.

The Role of Teachers and School Institutions

Observations at Muslimat NU 31 Kindergarten revealed that teachers applied appropriate pedagogical principles in the use of animated media: preparing a conducive physical environment (projectors, laptops, speakers), conducting opening activities in the form of stories and question-and-answer sessions, and engaging in reflective discussions after the screening. This practice aligns with the principle identified by Prayitno et al. (2024) that animation effectively supports children's cognitive and social development when supported by active adult interaction.

Billeaud, (2024), in a comprehensive review of animation in education, found that animated videos are effective in increasing motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes across various educational contexts. The combination of quality animated content, responsive teacher pedagogy, and an Islamic value-based school environment creates a learning ecosystem conducive to character development.

Synthesis: Character as a Product of a Multisystem Ecology

The findings above demonstrate that children's character development is a product of dynamic interactions between multiple systems. Figure 3 presents an ecological model of character formation that integrates all agents involved.

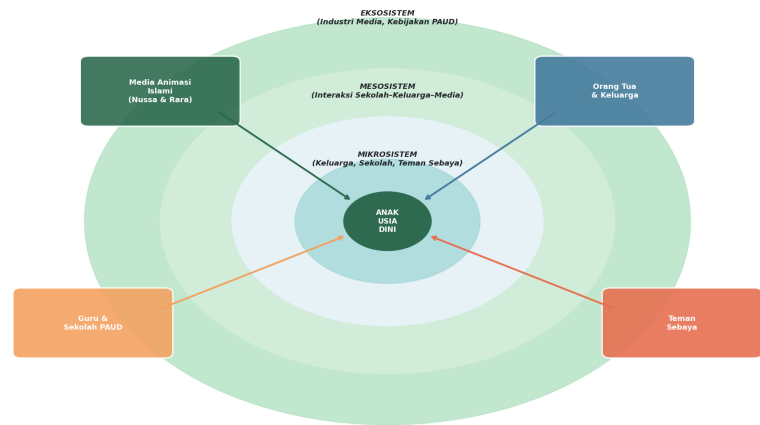


Figure 3. Ecological Model of Early Childhood Character Formation through Islamic Animation Media (adapted from the bioecological perspective in Swider-Cios et al., 2023).

Figure 3 illustrates that early childhood is at the center of a multi-layered, interacting ecological system. The microsystem—which includes family, school, animated media, and peers—exerts the most direct influence. Islamic animated media such as Nussa and Rara are positioned as one element within the microsystem, which needs to synergize with other agents to achieve optimal character development.

This proposition is supported by Swider-Cios et al. (2023), who asserted that parents as role models and parental mediation are central elements in children's media ecosystems. Padilla-Padilla-Walker et al. (2024) corroborated this by finding that parents' own prosocial behavior directly influences children's prosocial development. Table 3 below presents a comprehensive synthesis of the findings.

Table 3. Synthesis of Findings: Adoption Rate, Transfer Difficulty, Primary Mechanism, and Practical Implications per Character Indicator

Character Indicator	Adoption Rate (%)	Transfer Difficulty	Primary Mechanism (Theory)	Practical Implications
Greeting upon entry (Salam)	75% Always	Moderate	Vicarious reinforcement (Greitemeyer, 2022)	Establish entry-greeting routine at home and school
Asking permission before leaving	91.7% Always	Low	Convergent reinforcement: media + parental expectation (Padilla-Walker et al., 2024)	Maintain consistency; extend the behavior to other departure contexts
Assisting parents with household tasks	25% Always	High	Screen-to-real transfer gap (Swider-Cios et al., 2023)	Parental instructional mediation; structured post-viewing discussion
Reciting Bismillah before activities	50% Always	Moderate	Religious habituation requiring consistent adult modeling (Taja et al., 2021)	Teacher and parent modeling; contextual verbal reminders before each activity
Emotion regulation toward peer possession	16.7% Adaptive	Very High	Co-regulation scaffolding dependent on adult proximity (Sjöman et al., 2025)	Structured co-regulation intervention; parental emotion-coaching training

Table 3 confirms that the level of adoption of character behaviors is inversely proportional to the level of complexity of the required value internalization. Behaviors with low complexity (saying goodbye, greeting) show high adoption due to simultaneous reinforcement from the media and the family environment. Conversely, behaviors that require deep internalization of

religious values (bismillah) and emotional regulation capacity (ownership response) require more structured and sustained interventions from all ecological agents.

In the context of emotional regulation, Zimmer-Gembeck et al. (2022) showed that parents' emotional regulation skills ($r = 0.25\text{--}0.35$) significantly predict parenting quality and children's development of emotional regulation. It implies that interventions to improve the quality of early childhood character education need not only target children directly but also consider parents' emotional regulation capacity and parenting skills.

Conclusion

This study yielded three main conclusions. First, the animated show Nussa and Rara Episode 4 contains rich, relevant character values for early childhood education, encompassing both religious dimensions (greeting, saying bismillah, saying goodbye) and socio-emotional dimensions (helping parents, emotional regulation). These values are presented through engaging character modeling and contextual narratives, meeting the criteria for quality educational content as established by Billeaud (2024) and Swider-Cios et al. (2023).

Second, exposure to Islamic animated shows positively contributed to the adoption of character behaviors, but with varying degrees reflecting differences in value complexity. Conventional social behaviors (greetings: 75%; saying goodbye: 91.7%) were more widely adopted than behaviors requiring deep internalization of values. These findings confirm the propositions of Greitemeyer (2022) and Padilla-Walker et al. (2024) that animation media are a supporting, not a determining, instrument in character formation.

Third, early childhood character formation is an ecological process that requires synergistic collaboration among multiple agents: parents who consistently practice and model character education at home, teachers who integrate character values into daily pedagogy, and media that provide high-quality content. Zimmer-Gembeck et al. (2022) and Rudnova et al. (2023) support this conclusion, stating that the quality of parental mediation is a critical moderating factor determining the overall effectiveness of the character-building ecosystem.

This study recommends: (a) developing instructional parental mediation guidelines to support the consumption of Islamic animated media; (b) integrating Islamic educational animated programs into the early childhood education curriculum in a structured manner with clear pedagogical guidelines; and (c) strengthening school-family partnerships to build consistent character education. Further research with longitudinal designs and control groups is needed to establish stronger causal effects.

Acknowledge

The author has a master's degree in early childhood education. She is actively teaching at an early childhood school. Now She is teach in Universitas Terbuka in Indonesiaas a lecture about development of early childhood education.

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