Folktales as a media for positive character building education in elementary schools (Case Study in Karawang, West Java, Indonesia)

[ID]Anggy Giri Prawiyogi[1*], [ID]Tarpan Suparman[2], [ID]Ayu Fitri[3]
[1,2]Department of Elementary Education, Universitas Buana Perjuangan Karawang, Indonesia;
anggy.prawiyogi@ubpkarawang.ac.id (A.G.P.) tarpan.suparman@ubpkarawang.ac.id (T.S.) ayufitri@ubpkarawang.ac.id (A.F.).

Abstract: The integration of literature into educational curricula has been recognized as a vital component in fostering positive character traits among students. However, many elementary schools in Indonesia have not fully utilized literature as a pedagogical tool, leading to a lack of awareness regarding the application of positive values in daily life. This study aims to investigate the impact of literature learning on the development of positive character traits in elementary school children, identify specific character traits that can be enhanced through literature, and propose effective teaching methods for literature that support character development. A qualitative case study approach was employed, involving three public elementary schools in Karawang. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and thematic analysis to explore the relationship between literature learning and character development. The findings indicate that literature learning significantly contributes to the enhancement of positive character traits such as empathy, honesty, and social responsibility. The study highlights the effectiveness of using local literary works, such as folklore, to engage students and promote moral values. This research underscores the importance of integrating literature into the educational curriculum as a means of character education. By emphasizing the values embedded in literary texts, educators can foster not only academic skills but also the moral and social development of students, ultimately contributing to the formation of a more character-driven younger generation.

Keywords: Elementary school, Literature learning, Positive character.

1. Introduction

Character education is a major focus in the global education system, including in Indonesia. Character education is becoming an increasingly important issue in modern education, especially amidst the moral and social challenges faced by the younger generation [1, 2]. With the moral and social challenges faced by the younger generation, it is important to find effective methods in forming positive characters [3]. Literature learning offers great potential in this regard, because literature invites children to understand various perspectives and human values [4, 5]. Elementary school children are in a critical stage of development, where values and characters begin to form. Literature learning can serve as an effective tool for instilling positive values, considering that literature reflects various human experiences and encourages readers to understand various perspectives [6]. Through stories containing moral conflicts and complex characters, children can learn about empathy, honesty, and responsibility. Literature learning includes various works, including poetry, prose, and drama. Literature not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a mirror of society that teaches ethical and moral values [7]. Positive characters, such as empathy, honesty, and a sense of responsibility, are important elements in children's development. According to several education experts, this character can be instilled through experiences and social interactions gained from learning [8].

Literature learning in elementary schools has a significant role in improving students' positive character. Through the introduction and learning of literature, children not only learn about language and stories, but also the moral and ethical values contained therein. Research shows that literature learning can be integrated into the education curriculum to support children's character development, especially at an early age known as the "golden age" [9, 10]. One effective approach in learning literature is through the use of interesting and innovative media, such as animated videos and online applications. This media not only makes learning more fun, but can also increase student motivation and engagement [11, 12]. For example, the use of character-themed animated videos can help children understand moral values in a more interesting and easy-to-understand way [13]. In addition, edutainment-based learning has also proven effective in developing various aspects of children's abilities, including creativity and social skills [14, 15]. In the context of literature learning, positive characters can be instilled through stories that contain character education values. These stories not only serve as entertainment, but also as a tool to teach values such as honesty, hard work, and social care [16, 17]. Research shows that well-conducted literature learning can shape children's character in a deeper way, because children can identify themselves with the characters in the story and learn from their experiences [18]. Furthermore, literature learning that is integrated with character education can be carried out through various methods, including group discussions, shared reading, and creative projects [19]. By actively involving students in the learning process, they can more easily internalize the values taught. This is in line with the Tri N concept [20] which emphasizes the importance of direct experience in character learning [21]. Literature learning in elementary schools is not only about teaching language and literacy, but also about shaping students' positive character. With the right approach and the use of innovative media, literature learning can be an effective tool in instilling character values that are important for children's development [22, 23]. Based on the results of an initial survey with interviews with teachers in 2 elementary schools in Karawang, information was obtained on the lack of Literature Integration in the Curriculum, namely that many elementary schools have not utilized literature optimally in teaching. In addition, students are not always aware of how positive values can be applied in everyday life. So, the level of awareness of the importance of positive character is still lacking. Teaching methods that are less varied can cause students to lose interest and motivation in learning. Based on the background and identification of the problem, the problems highlighted in this paper are (1) How does literature learning affect the development of positive character in elementary school children? (2) What positive characters can be improved through literature learning? (3) What are effective literature teaching methods to support positive character development? The objectives of this study are (1) To analyze the effect of literature learning on the development of positive character in elementary school children. (2) To identify positive characters that can be developed through literature learning. (3) To offer effective literature teaching methods to support the formation of positive character. This study offers a new approach to character education by focusing on literature learning as a tool. Although there are previous studies that link character education with various methods, this study provides empirical evidence of the specific impact of literature learning in the context of education in Indonesia, by utilizing local literary works that are relevant and acceptable to students. The results of this study are that literature learning not only improves language skills, but also contributes significantly to the development of positive character. This provides justification for educators and policy makers to further integrate literature into the education curriculum. By emphasizing the values contained in literature, schools can help students not only in academic aspects, but also in their moral and social development. This research supports the idea that literature learning is an effective strategy for forming a younger generation with more character and empathy.

2. Novelty

This study offers an innovative approach by comprehensively comparing the implementation of services for inclusive education in three countries with different backgrounds. This study not only examines differences in policies and practices but also identifies common challenges and possible solutions that can be applied across contexts. The strength of this study is that it provides a new

perspective on how policies and practices that are successful in one country can be applied or modified to other country contexts and identifies critical elements that need to be considered in designing and implementing services for children with special needs. The justification for this study lies in the importance of understanding and improving services for inclusive education to ensure that their rights are met and they get equal opportunities in education and development. The novelty of this paper lies in several key aspects that contribute to the existing body of research on literature learning and character education: (1) The study emphasizes the use of local folklore, such as "Mbah Bongkok," as a medium for literature learning. This approach not only makes the content more relatable and culturally relevant for students but also highlights the importance of integrating local narratives into the educational curriculum. This focus on local literature is less commonly explored in existing research, which often centers on more universal or Western literary texts, (2) By employing a qualitative case study design, the research provides in-depth insights into the specific context of elementary education in Indonesia. This methodological approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how literature learning impacts character development in a particular cultural and educational setting, offering empirical evidence that may not be captured in broader quantitative studies, (3) While previous studies have linked character education with various teaching methods, this paper specifically investigates the direct impact of literature learning on the development of positive character traits. It provides empirical evidence supporting the idea that literature can serve as an effective tool for character education, thereby filling a gap in the literature that often treats these two areas separately, (4) The study not only identifies the benefits of literature learning for character development but also offers concrete recommendations for integrating literary materials into the educational curriculum. This practical focus on curriculum enhancement is a significant contribution, as it provides actionable insights for educators and policymakers looking to improve character education through literature, (5) The paper discusses effective literature teaching methods that can support positive character development, highlighting the importance of innovative and engaging instructional strategies. This focus on pedagogical practices adds a new dimension to the discussion of literature learning, emphasizing that the way literature is taught can significantly influence its impact on students' character.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Approach

This study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative methods through surveys and descriptive statistical analysis with qualitative methods involving in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the policies and practices of education services for children with special needs in Indonesia (Depok and Bogor), Portugal, and Mozambique. The research design used is a qualitative case study. This approach allows researchers to explore in depth how literature learning can improve positive character in students in elementary school environments.

3.2. Research Location

The research was conducted in three different public elementary schools in Karawang Regency, West Java Province. The selection of this location took into account variations in school characteristics, such as the number of students, teacher experience, and teaching approaches applied.

3.3. Research Subjects/Informants

The research subjects consisted of 6 (six) teachers who teach in 3 (three) elementary schools in Karawang Regency, West Java. Teachers selected as subjects/informants based on the following criteria: (1) Have experience teaching literature at the elementary school level, (2) Able to provide in-depth insights into literature teaching and its impact on student character.

3.4. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three main techniques, namely: (1) Observation, where the researcher conducted direct observation of the literature learning process in the classroom. The focus of the observation included interactions between teachers and students, teaching methods used, and how positive values were taught and received by students. (2) Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six teachers to explore their views on literature teaching and its influence on positive character development. Interview questions were designed to encourage teachers to describe experiences, challenges, and successes in teaching literature. (3) Documentation, collecting documents such as lesson plans, teaching materials, and student work related to literature learning. These documents provide additional context and concrete evidence of how literature is taught.

3.5. Data Validity

To ensure data validity, this study uses triangulation: (1) Technique triangulation: Using a combination of observation, interviews, and documentation to obtain a more comprehensive picture [24] (2) Source triangulation: Obtaining data from several informants (six teachers) to obtain diverse perspectives and reduce bias [25].

3.6. Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis process includes the following steps: (1) Familiarization, which is reading interview transcript data and observation notes to understand the overall context, (2) Coding, which is marking themes that emerge from the data, such as positive characters developed through literature learning [26] (3) Theme Grouping, which is by grouping similar codes into main themes that describe the influence of literature learning on positive characters [27] (4) Interpretation: Compiling and discussing findings by referring back to the research questions, and linking them to relevant literature [28].

3.7. Research Ethics

This research pays attention to ethics in obtaining approval from the school and informants before data collection, and guarantees the confidentiality and anonymity of informant data.

4. Result

One of the literary lessons used in class is folklore. The story of "Mbah Bongkok". The story of Mbah Bongkok tells of a legendary figure named Bongkok who became a freedom fighter and spreader of Islam in the southern region of Karawang. Bongkok's arrival in the southern region was aimed at converting the people of Karawang to Islam. This was because the southern people still adhered to the religion of their ancestors. However, when spreading Islam, Bongkok encountered obstacles from the Dutch colonialists because at the same time the Dutch had entered the southern region of Karawang. But with the power he had, Bongkok managed to expel the Dutch colonialists from the southern region. Several residents finally decided to convert to Islam as an expression of gratitude. Furthermore, residents helped Bongkok build a surau as a place of worship. After that, residents began to flock to Islam. Residents not only studied religious knowledge but also martial arts. Until the end of his life, Bongkok continued to spread Islam and guide the community to learn martial arts. Since then, the community has known Mbah Bongkok as an ancestor who has contributed to the lives of the people of southern Karawang [29]. The excerpt from the story above is one version of the story of Mbah Bongkok that has developed in the Tegalwaru community. The story of Mbah Bongkok has an influence on the lives of the Tegalwaru community. For example, it becomes a space for instilling character education values, local cultural assets that are rich in value content; and a medium of reflection for the community to love the natural, social, cultural, and spiritual environment in their area. However, the lack of documentation of the story of Mbah Bongkok and the increasing neglect of the younger generation towards folklore are feared to be able to eliminate the existence of the story of Mbah

Bongkok. Therefore, it is important to conduct a study of the folklore of Mbah Bongkok as an effort to help save it from extinction. Folklore plays a role as a means of increasing the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor potential of students. The values in folklore can inspire and motivate students to take commendable actions [30, 31]. The behavior of the characters can spur students to achieve their desired desires, such as intensifying learning to achieve academic achievement; attending workshops to hone interests and talents; to maximizing hobbies as business opportunities [32]. This shows that the values in folklore become sublimations that not only reach the cognitive level, but also touch the internalization level (affective) and the practical level (psychomotor), namely in the form of application in the lives of students both at school, family, and society [33]. Folklore must be maintained because it provides space for instilling character education values. Based on the results of observations at school, teachers have not maximized local folklore. In fact, local folklore has a functional value as an effort to preserve local cultural assets, introduce regional advantages and local values that educate while forming character, and a medium of reflection for students to love the natural, social, cultural, and spiritual environment in their area [34]. After discussing, students were asked to draw and retell the positive values they gained from the story. The results of observations showed that students were more active in participating and showed more positive changes in their attitudes in social interactions.

4.1. The Influence of Literature Learning on Positive Character

The results of this study are that through stories and characters in literature, students are invited to understand the feelings of others. This increases their ability to empathize with friends and the surrounding environment. Many literary stories feature the value of honesty as a main theme. Discussions about characters and their actions provide opportunities for students to reflect on the importance of honesty in everyday life [35]. Group activities in literature learning, such as discussing or presenting literary works, help students learn to work together and be responsible for the tasks given [36]. Several studies have shown that literature learning, especially through stories that emphasize the theme of gratitude, can help students understand these values. For example, a study by Smith, et al. [37] found that students who were involved in discussions about stories that tell about gratitude tended to be better able to apply an attitude of gratitude in everyday life [38]. Through reflection and group discussions, students can explore the meaning and benefits of gratitude, which has a positive impact on their emotional well-being. Research examining the theme of justice in literature also shows significant impacts. Rachcova conducted a study on literary learning related to social issues and justice [39]. The results showed that students who were involved in analyzing stories with the theme of social justice were more sensitive to issues of injustice around them. Discussions about characters who fight for justice trigger empathy and social awareness, which can encourage students to act more fairly in their daily interactions [40, 41]. Other studies have shown that literary learning can increase students' sense of independence. Some research found that characters in literature who face challenges and succeed in fighting to achieve their goals can be role models for students [42-44]. Through teaching that involves character and situation analysis, students are taught to make decisions and take responsibility for their choices [45]. The results of this study indicate that students who are involved in literary learning that focuses on independence show an increase in independence and self-confidence.

The study identified several specific character traits that were enhanced through literature learning, including: *Empathy*, Literature encourages children to understand and share the feelings of others by exploring diverse perspectives and moral conflicts within stories. *Honesty*, Engaging with characters and narratives that emphasize truthfulness helps instill the value of honesty in students. *Social Responsibility*, Literature often reflects societal issues and encourages children to think about their roles and responsibilities within their communities, *Independence*, characters in literature who face challenges and succeed can serve as role models, promoting a sense of independence and self-confidence among students.

5. Discussion

5.1. Literature as a Catalyst for Character Development

The study's results align with the theoretical frameworks of character education, which emphasize the importance of integrating moral values into the educational curriculum. As noted by Rudiyanto [1] character education is essential in addressing the moral and social challenges faced by today's youth. Literature, with its rich narratives and complex characters, provides a unique opportunity for students to engage with ethical dilemmas and reflect on their values. Folklore often contains strong moral messages, such as honesty, hard work, courage, loyalty, and respect. These stories provide concrete examples of how positive character is applied in everyday life situations. Children can learn from the actions of the characters in the story and understand the consequences of good or bad behavior.The findings of this study corroborate previous research that indicates literature can effectively foster empathy, honesty, and social responsibility among students [2, 4].

5.2. Empathy and Moral Understanding Through Literature

One of the most profound impacts of literature learning identified in this study is the enhancement of empathy. The narratives within literary works allow students to step into the shoes of diverse characters, experiencing their struggles and triumphs. In folklore, children are often introduced to characters who experience difficulties or conflicts, and how they resolve them can foster empathy. Children learn to understand the feelings of others, as well as the importance of helping others, which can encourage them to become more caring and virtuous individuals. Folktales often depict the struggles of the main characters in facing challenges or difficulties. In this way, children learn to face obstacles in their lives with a positive attitude and strong determination, as well as the importance of not giving up in the face of problems. This aligns with the findings of Sukatin, et al. [43] who demonstrated that literature-based instruction significantly improved students' empathetic understanding. By engaging with characters facing moral conflicts, students learn to navigate their emotions and develop a deeper understanding of others' perspectives, which is crucial for their social development.

5.3. The Role of Role Models in Literature

The study also found that literature provides role models for students, particularly through characters who demonstrate resilience and independence. Many folklore teaches the importance of cooperation, helping each other, and how to build harmonious relationships. Children who listen to or are involved in learning folklore will find it easier to understand concepts such as tolerance, togetherness, and respecting differences [46]. Folktales also introduce children to their cultural heritage and traditions. By being exposed to local folktales, children will feel more connected to their cultural roots and this can increase their sense of pride and self-identity. This can develop an attitude of respect for their own culture and other cultures. Folktales often contain elements of fantasy and imagination that stimulate children's thinking. Involvement in these stories not only hones literacy skills, but also stimulates children's creativity and imagination in solving problems and seeing the world from different perspectives [46]. This finding is consistent with the work of Aradottir et al. (2021), which emphasizes the importance of characters overcoming challenges as a means of inspiring students. By analyzing these characters, students can learn valuable lessons about perseverance and self-confidence, which are essential traits for personal growth. The portrayal of characters who embody positive values serves as a guide for students, encouraging them to emulate these traits in their own lives.

5.4. Innovative Teaching Methods and Engagement

The integration of innovative teaching methods, such as multimedia and interactive activities, was highlighted as a key factor in enhancing literature learning. The study supports the notion that engaging students through various media can make literary themes more accessible and relatable [9].

This approach not only enriches the learning experience but also fosters deeper discussions about character traits and ethical values. By utilizing animated videos, group discussions, and literature-based projects, educators can create a dynamic learning environment that promotes active participation and critical thinking. The findings of this study have significant implications for curriculum development in elementary education. As emphasized by Putu and Sari [10] there is a pressing need for educational policymakers to incorporate literature more comprehensively into the curriculum. By integrating literary works that emphasize positive values, schools can create an environment that supports both academic achievement and character development. This study advocates for a curriculum that not only focuses on language skills but also prioritizes the moral and social development of students.

5.5. Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights into the impact of literature learning on character development, it also opens avenues for future research. Longitudinal studies could explore the long-term effects of literature learning on students' character traits and moral reasoning. Additionally, research could investigate the influence of the social and cultural environment on the effectiveness of literature as a tool for character education. Understanding these dynamics could further enhance the integration of literature into educational practices.

6. Conclusion

Literary learning from folklore such as "Mbah Bongkok" as a local story has proven effective in improving positive character in elementary school children. With proper teaching, literature not only enriches language knowledge, but also forms moral values that are important for children's character development. This study recommends that the education curriculum be integrated with more literary elements to support the development of positive character among students. The recommendations put forward by the author are: 1) Schools should consider integrating more literary materials into the education curriculum. 2) Schools facilitate training for teachers on effective literature teaching techniques in building positive character. 3) Further research is needed to explore the long-term impact of literature learning on students' character development.

The results of research on improving positive character through literature learning in elementary schools have a number of practical implications for academic professionals, including:

1) The results of the study can encourage academic professionals to recommend the integration of more literary materials into the educational curriculum. A curriculum that includes literary works with themes of positive values will better support the development of students' character.

2) This study shows the importance of teaching literature in shaping character. Therefore, training programs for teachers need to be developed to improve their skills in teaching literature with an approach that emphasizes positive values.

3) This study can inspire academic professionals to design more interactive and creative teaching methods, such as group discussions, literature-based projects, and reflective activities that support the learning of character values.

4) Development of Evaluation Instruments: This study can encourage the development of evaluation instruments that measure not only academic skills but also the development of students' character, so that character education becomes an integral part of educational assessment.

5) The results of the study can be used to develop extension programs that involve parents and the community in supporting the development of positive character through literature. This creates collaboration between schools, families, and the community.

6) The findings of this study open up opportunities for further studies on the long-term impact of

literature learning on students' character. Academic professionals can explore other relevant topics, such as the impact of the social and cultural environment on literary learning

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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