

## **Contribution of Children's Literature in the Formation of Character of Elementary School Children**

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This study aims to describe the contribution of children's literature in character education and the selection of children's literature according to the developmental stage of elementary school children. This study is a qualitative-descriptive study of the library research type. Data collection techniques are by searching for sources and constructing from books on children's literature and accredited journals, then analyzing critically and in-depth. Based on the results of data analysis, it can be explained that the contribution of children's literature to the emotional aspect is obtained from demonstrations of life as demonstrated by the characters in the story so that children will learn how to manage their emotions so as not to harm themselves and others. In the intellectual aspect, children's literature contains sequencing and plot logic to support children's use of their minds to think, understand and criticize the stories they get. In the aspect of imagination, literature in its stories can attract the child's entire self. With this, the child gains an extraordinary experience that is significantly correlated with creativity and will provoke the growth and development of creativity. In the social aspect, children's literature demonstrates character interactions so that it supports children in maximizing their development in their proximal development zone. In addition, from an educational aspect, children's literature is connected to aspects of exploration and discovery, language, beauty, multicultural insight, and children's reading habits that influence reading habits and literacy culture, which are very necessary in facing the progress of science and technology in this era.

**Keywords:** *contribution to children's literature, character, elementary school*

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## INTRODUCTION

Educational issues show the death of noble values and behavioral wisdom that we encounter today, such as low ethical politeness of children to their elders, ignoring the surrounding environment when they are busy playing with their gadgets, low tolerance between peers, violence in schools, and so on. This needs to be the attention of the government and stakeholders in the field of education to revitalize the character of the nation's children. Education from elementary to higher levels must contribute to forming the character of the next generation, who are moral, virtuous, and cultured (Farahiba, 2017). In addition, we must remember that character building has become a mandate in education and a shared obligation to realize that Indonesian people are moral, moral, and ethical (Soelistyarini, 2011). Improvements to move towards a nation with positive character: high work ethic and discipline, shame, being sporty, honest, trustworthy, and so on. Character education is one way to improve this (Munaris, 2011).

Character has become a hot topic of conversation in our education today. The echo of character has shocked society, especially the world of education (Setiawati, 2015). The outcome of this character education is the results that are visible in individuals who have academic excellence as a result of lifelong learning and learning, individuals who have moral integrity, a sense of art and culture, and individuals who are healthy and able to actively participate as citizens (Astuti & Pradnyana, 2020). The world of education plays a role as a means of transmitting and transforming these values and knowledge, so to instil and develop the character of this nation, it cannot be separated from the role played by the world of education (Sudrajat, 2011). Demanding quality human resources in the next millennium requires good character (Nopan, 2015).

On the other hand, the rapid flow of globalization has changed the character and quality of our education (Listiana, 2021). Globalists believe that countries with local cultures will be lost in the face of a homogeneous global culture and economy (Suneki, 2012). Starting from exposure to the use of social media by children, which interferes with children's development tasks in various dimensions (Astuti, 2019), child violence, students who fail and students who drop out (Sakti, 2017), problems with low levels of student discipline (Utami et al., 2022), as well as from the cognitive aspect of the problem of critical thinking skills of children in Indonesia which are still very low (Primayana, 2019). In addition, various problems make noble values and

behavioural wisdom inactive, colouring the world of education (Farahiba, 2017). The world of education is increasingly carrying out cumbersome tasks. Education is not just about showing moral knowledge but also about loving and wanting to do moral actions that are accustomed to becoming a character (Sudrajat, 2011).

Efforts to form character in children can be made through various methods and media. One of them is through children's literature (Farahiba, 2017). Literature can function as a means of entertainment and, simultaneously, a medium to educate a child (Panglipur & Listiyaningsih, 2017). As a form of conveying or injecting character education in literature to students, educators can make several efforts (Farahiba, 2017). In character formation, children need guidance to develop and become good people (Panglipur & Listiyaningsih, 2017). The closest guidance for children is, of course, parents and teachers. Literature is a depiction of life or literature that contains life values. All life values can be found in literary works (Munaris, 2011). This was stated by (Nurgiyantoro, 2010), who stated that various literary texts are believed to contain moral elements and values that can be used as "raw materials" for education and character-building. Appropriate literary reading will support the growth and development of various aspects of children's self (Nurgiyantoro, 2005).

Unfortunately, the role of children's literature that greatly influences aspects of children's growth and development has begun to be abandoned (Rosid, 2021; Nita & Awis Karni, 2022). Children's literature is now at a crossroads amidst the onslaught of electronic media that is much more in demand by children. From the teacher's perspective, a study conducted by (Pangesti et al., 2022) stated that teachers face problems in learning literature in lower grades, such as the lack of interest and motivation of students to read literary works, the tendency of students to have difficulty understanding literary terms in textbooks, and the difficulty of fostering students' love for Indonesian literature. This reality raises concerns about the role of literature today and in the future.

It is miserable if the noble values and meanings contained in children's literature have to sink just because of the development of the times when, in fact, these values are increasingly needed in digital distractions that greatly influence literacy practices in children (Balqis & Syaikh, 2023). It is essential to revitalize the role of children's literature in character building, one of which is through education for teachers, parents, education observers

and related parties. For that reason, the focus of this article's study describes in more depth the contribution of children's literature in character building for children seen from various aspects of development and selection of relevant children's literature readings to build children's character at the elementary school level.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This type of research is library research. According to Zed (2004), there are four stages of library study, namely (1) preparing the necessary equipment, (2) preparing a working bibliography, (3) organizing time, and (4) reading and recording research materials (Fadli, 2021). Data collection techniques by searching for sources and constructing from books on children's literature and accredited journals of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology published in the last ten years. The data needed in this study is information about the contribution of children's literature in the formation of children's character and the selection of children's literature reading materials. Library materials obtained from various journal references are analyzed critically and in-depth to support propositions and ideas (Fadli, 2021) about the contribution of children's literature in character education and the selection of recommended reading materials that teachers and parents can use to build children's character.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Contribution of Children's Literature in Character Formation of Elementary School Children

Various literary genres contain various types of character education values. Children's literature is believed to have a significant contribution to the development of children's personalities in the process of becoming adults as humans who have a clear identity (Nurgiyantoro, 2004). Literary works can appear by offering alternative models of idealized life, such as ways of thinking, behaving, feeling, acting, how to view and treat things, behaving, and so on (Anafiah, 2017). Children's literature has a role in the psychological and intellectual development of children through the messages contained in literary works (Panglipur & Listiyaningsih, 2017). From a specific review, learning children's literature can provide benefits to form humans with character and noble character. By reading a lot of literary works, children can learn and emulate the various advice contained therein. Exemplary behavior in children's literature is the basis for character formation and instilling noble

character from an early age. In this way, independent, mature individuals will be formed and able to solve problems wisely (Didipu, 2013). Through literature, children will also be directed to think logically about cause-and-effect relationships and give birth to imagination that will correlate significantly with creativity so that children will be able to think creatively and always be productive (Farahiba, 2017). The contribution of children's literature to children who are in the growth and development stage involves various aspects of self, which are broadly grouped into personal and educational values (Nurgiyantoro, 2004). Personal values are values that arise from a person's personal experience; these values form the basis of a person's actual behavior through consistent behavioral patterns, become internal control for a person, and are intellectual and emotional components of a person (Simatupang et al., 2021). Personal values can grow and develop in children in terms of emotions, intellect, imagination, social feelings, and ethical and religious feelings of children.

### Contribution of Children's Literature to the Emotional Aspect

Children's literature is believed to contribute significantly to developing children's personalities and becoming adults as human beings with a clear identity—a child's personality and identity (Kasmilawati, 2019). The contribution of emotional development in children's literature greatly helps children's emotional development, such as feelings of joy, sadness, fear, regret, anxiety, happiness, and so on (Simatupang et al., 2021). From the emotional aspect, children will get a demonstration of life as demonstrated by the characters in the story. The characters in the story will behave verbally and nonverbally, which shows their emotional attitudes, such as expressions of joy, sadness, fear, emotion, sympathy and empathy, hatred and revenge, forgiveness, and others contextually according to the storyline (Nurgiyantoro, 2004). Through reading the story, children will learn how to manage their emotions to avoid harming themselves and others. A person's ability to manage emotions, the term used is Emotional Quotient (EQ), which is analogous to Intelligence Quotient (IQ); also, Spiritual Quotient (SQ) is currently seen as a personality aspect that has a significant influence on life success, even believed to play a more significant role than IQ (Nurgiyantoro, 2004).

As an excerpt from the story of the Magic Bird, the story describes the struggle of the butterfly nation in carrying out the duties assigned by the King. They went through many things on their journey. They start from feelings of fear and anxiety disappearing

because they remember the burden of responsibility that must be borne. Children reading this story will feel sorry for the Butterfly Nation. How unfortunate it is for the small butterfly to have to fly so far by following the waves in the ocean. A sense of pity and pity for this incident can arise in children. Children will learn what it feels like to carry out the responsibilities that all creatures should have. A feeling of joy will also be present in children, namely when they witness the great fighting spirit of the butterfly (Simatupang et al., 2021). This emotional change is what is called helping the growth of children's emotional development.

Another example in the children's story excerpt is "Si Buncir," which takes the concept of a child born into a low-income family who lives in a slum. Ki Jukut's emotional condition, who does not give up on caring for his children, can be a role model for child readers. Ki Jukut, in this story, is described as having a never-give-up attitude. After his wife died, Ki Jukut continued to try cutting grass for his children's needs. The firm attitude and strong determination in this story can be an example for children. The personal values of the character Ki Jukut help children develop emotional intelligence when facing problems or difficult situations (Yuliana et al., 2024). From the example of the story excerpt above, children who are used to reading literature (children's reading) will be accustomed to feeling and involving their thoughts (imagination) so that it is as if they are experiencing the events in the work they are reading. That way, imagination will foster critical thinking and high emotional sensitivity in children (Sistiana, 2018).

### **Contribution of Children's Literature to Intellectual Aspects**

Intellectual functions in the formation of concepts are carried out through observation, response, memory, and thinking (Kasmilawati, 2019). Intellectual development is related to the cognitive abilities possessed by individuals, namely the potential for solving problems and thinking. This development is the central part that must be considered because intellectual development is the foundation of students' understanding for further student development (Sania Putriana, Neviyarni, 2021). Viewed from the intellectual aspect, elementary school-aged children at the concrete operational stage are very suitable to be given stories that display a sequence of events that contain sequencing logic and flow logic. The story displays a sequence of events containing sequencing and flow logic. Children's literature helps children to logically interpret the events told in a reading book (Simatupang, 2019). Flow logic shows the

relationship between events played by both protagonist and antagonist characters. The relationship built in the development of instinct is generally a cause-and-effect relationship. This means that an event occurs as a result of or results in other events.

To understand the story, children must follow the logic of the relationship (Nurgiyantoro, 2004). This means that directly or indirectly, children learn the relationships that are built and even criticize them. Children may question the reasons for the character's actions, the character's reactions, regret the character's actions, and others that are more "why". So, through the reading they are faced with, the child's intellectual aspect is actively involved, playing a role in understanding and criticizing the story in question. Thus, children's stories are seen in terms of content and language according to the child's intellectual development level (Soelistyarini, 2011). An intellectual is related to a person's intelligence. An intelligent person can use their mind to think in a more advanced direction or can think ahead (Kasmilawati, 2019).

The intellectual value contained in the story of Dayang Bandir, who can carry out the process of thinking and solving problems where she does not want to tell the whereabouts of the heirloom even though she is taken to the forest and tied to a tree (Alkalah, 2016). There is an intellectual development value possessed by Dayang Bandir, who can carry out the process of thinking and solving problems at that time. Likewise, the intellectual value contained in the folklore book Sang Piatu Menjadi Raja by Halimi Hadibrata, published by the Language Development and Fostering Agency of the Ministry of Education and Culture. There is an intellectual value in the grandmother's story to her grandson about using straw, which can be used as compost, how to plant vegetables such as chillies, tomatoes, and long beans, and the transition of nature and human life. Readers will take the life experiences told by the grandmother in this story through this story. This adds to readers' intellectual development regarding changes in nature and the conditions of our daily lives (Simatupang, 2019).

### **Contribution of Children's Literature to Imagination Aspects**

From the aspect of imagination, by reading literary stories, children's imagination is taken on an adventure to various corners of the world beyond the boundaries of time and place. However, it remains in place, taken to follow a story that can attract the child's entire self. Through this story, children will

gain extraordinary experiences (vicarious experiences) that are half impossible to obtain in ways other than reading literature (Nurgiyantoro, 2004). Imagination is significantly correlated with creativity and will stimulate the growth and development of creativity. Creativity also aims to direct children to a good understanding of nature and the environment, as well as an introduction to feelings and thoughts about themselves and others (Resmini, 2015).

Like the aspect of imagination development contained in the story of Si Buncir, the first page of which states:

"From a distance, a towering mountain can be seen. Its peak is covered in white clouds. If we reach its peak, it is as if we are floating above the clouds. The locals also call it Mount Manglayang. At the foot of the mountain there is a village known as Ciherang" (Page 1) (Yuliana et al., 2024).

When imagined by children, the existence of a beautiful side gives the impression of thinking and imagining how the setting is in the story. This encourages children to read stories to develop their imagination and think about fantasy. This affects children's social and work creativity (Yuliana et al., 2024). This is supported by research (Sistiana, 2018), which shows that children's literature will accustom them to feeling and involving their minds (imagination) so that it is as if they are experiencing the events in the works they read. That way, imagination will foster critical thinking and high emotional sensitivity in children (Sistiana, 2018).

### **Contribution of Children's Literature to Social Aspects**

From the aspect of growth and development of social sense, literary stories demonstrate how characters interact with each other and the environment. How do the characters interact with each other to work together, help each other, play together, do daily activities together, face difficulties together, help overcome other people's difficulties, and tell life stories together in society? Reading literary stories that "exploit" social life well will be able to make their work examples of social behaviour for children according to applicable social rules (Nurgiyantoro, 2004). As an implication of character education, the ability to position oneself socially in children is now necessary in schools, at home, and in the child's social environment along with their development (Nopan, 2015).

One of the social values that can be taken is in the story of Si Bungsu on page 16, which is written as follows. The neighbours came to Mr Ka Satu's house to see his son. Ka Satu, Ka Duo, Ka Tigo, Ka Ampat and Ka Limo also felt the cheerful atmosphere in the house. The sixth son of Mr Ka Satu was named Ka Anam, which means the sixth child. By reading this story, children will grow a high sense of sociality towards others and interact with people around them in joy and sorrow (Andriansah et al., 2023). In children's literature, one crucial thing is how social interaction between adults and children helps children to bring out and maximize development in the zone of proximal development (Sistiana, 2018).

### **Contribution of Children's Literature to Ethical and Religious Aspects**

(Sukirman, 2021) states that literature as an "interpretation" of religion is relatively easy to accept in its teaching because (1) the content of religious literature can boost a person's religious spirit to be closer to God, (2) if the content of religion has been embedded in the soul, a sense of humanity will grow and develop into a humanist literary content, (3) universally religious teachings will never conflict with the message of humanity. In terms of the aspect of the development of children's ethical and religious feelings, literature is present through reading literary stories that also display the attitudes and behavior of the characters. In general, children will identify themselves with good characters, and that means growing awareness to emulate the attitudes and behavior of these characters (Nurgiyantoro, 2004). Children want to act and behave like the story characters who are their heroes. At this age, children's desire to imitate everything they admire is still very significant. This has the potential to be utilized for character learning (Farahiba, 2017). For example, an excerpt from the folk tale The Story of the Shrimp Bird and the Toman Fish tells of the bird's gratitude to God for resolving the difficulties in its life. Being grateful to God and being thankful to fellow human beings is a form of exemplary behavior that can be used as an example in life (Pangesti et al., 2022). The contribution of the growth of ethical and religious feelings that appear in folklore can help children in recognizing God. The categories of values that often appear in the folklore books studied are gratitude to God, praying to God, asking for help from God, and pinning hopes on God, all of which are played by the characters in the story. It is through these characters that children can develop the growth of ethical and religious feelings in their lives (Simatupang et al., 2021).

### **Contribution of Children's Literature to the Aspect of Educational Values**

The educational value aspects contained in children's literature can be viewed from the aspects of exploration and discovery, language, beauty, multicultural insight, and children's reading habits ([Nurgiyantoro, 2004](#)). From these aspects, character values can be built in children. In the aspect of exploration and discovery, literary stories essentially lead children to explore, explore, and go on an imaginative adventure into a relatively unknown world that offers various life experiences. From the language aspect, increasing children's language mastery not only involves vocabulary and structure but more so concerns the four language skills, both actively receptive (listening and reading) and actively productive (speaking and writing) to support communication activities in everyday life is also contained in children's literature. On the other hand, children's stories or literature contain values of beauty that give rise to a sense of satisfaction that genuinely comes from inner needs. In addition, in literature, various attitudes and behaviors will be found that reflect the culture of a society that is different from other societies, such as in traditional stories or folklore. The habit of reading is essential ([Eni Desfitri et al., 2023](#)); it will create habits even until children grow and develop into adults ([Maspuroh et al., 2023](#)), which is also a means offered to improve the culture of reading literacy for children ([Azzahra & Devianty, 2024](#)). In facing the advancement of science and technology in this era, the habit and culture of reading through literary teaching must be fostered from an early age ([Nurgiyantoro, 2004](#)).

### **Selecting Relevant Children's Literature Readings to Build the Character of Elementary School Children**

The selection of appropriate reading materials for elementary school children who are at the concrete operational stage (7-11 years) are narrative or story books that can lead children to project themselves into time and place, such as stories, adventures, or traditional literature ([Latuconsina et al., 2022](#)). From the analysis of traditional Balinese literary works, namely (1) I Cupak teken I Grantang, (2) I Lutung teken Kakua Mamaling Isen, (3) I Belog, (4) I Sangsiah teken I Bojog, (5) I Siap Selem, (6) I Ketimun Mas, (7) I Rare Angon, (8) Mayadenawa, and (9) Pan Balang Tamak, 38 character education values were found in these stories which can be classified into 13 types of character education values. The thirteen types of character education values are (1) love of peace, (2) hard work, (3) independence, (4) love of the homeland, (5) responsibility, (6) honesty, (7) creativity, (8)

tolerance, (9) communication, (10) curiosity, (11) discipline, and (12) religious. In addition, there is also a combination of two or three values, for example, independence and responsibility, responsibility, communication, and hard work. The contribution of these values provides a climate of patience, alertness, magnanimity, not arrogance, mutual assistance, caution, struggle, gratitude, and others ([Sriasih et al., 2014](#)).

Literary books that are considered relevant for character formation are those with beautiful language, touching the reader, conveying noble values of humanity, and encouraging readers to do good to fellow humans and other creatures ([Santoso, 2020](#)). Learning materials such as children's poems, children's stories, one-act children's dramas, and folk tales are very appropriate as learning materials because they are more related to the world of children ([Didipu, 2013](#)).

There are several things to consider when teaching children's literature, especially fiction, poetry, and drama. In choosing a fictional story, the first thing to consider is that a good storybook does not cram too much information and messages without paying attention to the development and motivation of the characters in the story. Second, it is not patronizing; the appearance of the characters is forced to be good. Third, it gives children's fantasy to develop. Fourth, it is in accordance with children's logic. Fifth, it uses children's language (sentence structure is not convoluted or varied). Educators can also utilize short stories based on the lives or events in the lives of students or by telling the life stories of great people. Learning poetry is a process of interaction between educators and students about poetry. In this interaction, a process occurs that allows for the introduction, understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of poetry so that, finally, students are able to apply their findings in real life. Educators can also use drama learning as a medium to describe events that contain character values. Educators can utilize audiovisuals and direct applications (drama performances) to make it easier for students to understand and absorb character values ([Farahiba, 2017](#)). Examples of literary books that are suitable for elementary school children are shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Examples of books for children aged 7-11 years (quoted from [Latuconsina et al., 2022](#))

Literature learning in elementary school basically aims to foster elementary school children's appreciation of literary works so that children can develop wisdom, insight, and precision to capture cues in life that are reflected in literary works ([Farahiba, 2017](#)). There are various literary materials that students must appreciate, either through listening, speaking, reading, or writing activities that are developed in the Indonesian language curriculum that leads to character formation as the essential part of character education ([Santoso, 2020](#)). These character values include moral values, good character, independence, hard work, tolerance, curiosity, discipline, caring, struggle, and others that are inserted into children's literary reading materials ([Latuconsina et al., 2022](#)).

All parties must always guard character education as one way to restore humans' moral awareness. Families, educational institutions, mass media, society, and the government must work together in this responsibility ([Sudrajat, 2011](#)). All citizens, nation and state, educators and education personnel in formal and non-formal education units, up to leaders at all levels, have the duty and moral responsibility to be able to understand (know), love (loving), and implement (implement) core ethical values in personal life and society as a whole to build a dignified national civilization ([Dalmeri, 2014](#)).

## CONCLUSION

The issue of education that shows the death of noble values and behavioral wisdom that we encounter today needs to be the concern of the government and stakeholders in the field of education to revitalize the character of the nation's children. Character education is one way to improve and, at the same time, become a demand for the quality of human resources in the next millennium. One effort to form character is through children's literature. Literature is one form of conveying or injecting character education in literature to students. The contribution of children's literature to the emotional aspect dramatically helps the process of children's emotional development, such as feelings of joy, sadness, fear, regret, anxiety, happiness, touch, sympathy and empathy, hate and revenge, forgiveness, and so on. This is obtained from the demonstration of life as demonstrated by the characters in the story so that children will learn how to manage their emotions so as not to harm themselves and others. In the intellectual aspect, children's literature contains the logic of sequencing and the logic of plotting, so this causes children to use their minds to think in order to understand and criticize the stories they get. In terms of imagination, literature in its stories can attract the whole self of the child, and with that, the child gains an extraordinary experience that is significantly correlated with creativity and will provoke the growth and development of creativity. In terms of social aspects, children's literature demonstrates the interaction of characters to work together, such as helping each other, playing together, doing daily activities together, facing difficulties together, helping to overcome other people's difficulties, and so on so as to support children to bring up and maximize development in their proximal development zone. In addition, from an educational aspect, children's literature is connected to aspects of exploration and discovery, language, beauty, multicultural insight, and children's reading habits that shape children's characters. Children's literature that is introduced early on will influence their reading habits and literacy culture, and this is necessary for facing the progress of science and technology in this era.

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