

Internalization Values Through Punakawan Stories in Strengthening Character Education for Elementary School Students

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ABSTRACT

Character education plays an important role in shaping students' personalities, particularly at the elementary school level. However, its implementation in classroom learning often does not fully utilize local cultural values as sources of moral learning. Punakawan stories in traditional wayang culture contain life values relevant to character development, especially struggle values such as courage, resilience, responsibility, and social care. This study aims to explore the internalization of these values through Punakawan stories to strengthen character education among elementary school students. A descriptive qualitative approach was used, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings show that the characters of Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong embody important struggle values. Integrating these stories into learning helps students understand character values more concretely and develop attitudes such as courage, honesty, responsibility, and social awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Education fundamentally serves as a means of humanizing individuals, where academic achievement must align with moral development. Character education is not simply an addition to the curriculum; it is, in fact, integral to shaping students' integrity, responsibility, and positive behavior—preparing them for their roles in society (Sintia & Winarni, 2025). The imperative to embed these values is particularly urgent at the elementary school level, as this period represents a crucial “seeding” phase in which children’s moral foundations are formed in a profoundly significant and enduring way for their future (Salmia et al., 2024).

Despite the importance of character education, its implementation in elementary schools continues to encounter a variety of complex challenges. Numerous research findings indicate that the instilling of character values often remains limited to a cognitive level, failing to be fully integrated into daily teaching practices. This disparity highlights a pressing need for more progressive pedagogical strategies. An approach is required that transcends merely teaching morality as a theoretical concept and effectively internalizes these values within students’ consciousness in a contextual and meaningful manner (Saputri et al., 2025).

A highly relevant paradigm in character building today is the approach that emphasizes local strengths. Regional cultures possess inherent potential to shape students' moral foundations through the values of traditional wisdom handed down across generations (Mukhlisin, 2021). Within the Javanese cultural context, the wayang tradition serves as a credible educational tool; the Punakawan characters embody various dimensions of an ideal personality. Integrating Punakawan stories into the classroom not only enriches cultural literacy but also provides an effective contextual learning medium for subtly instilling character in elementary school students (Zuhriah et al., 2025).

While Punakawan is frequently depicted through a comedic and simplistic lens, these characters are, in fact, true heroes of virtue. Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong embody essential values, including unwavering honesty and a steadfast commitment to truth (Pandanwangi & Nuryantiningasih, 2018). The heroic values they represent align closely with the current need for character education in elementary schools. By utilizing these characters as educational tools, students are encouraged to explore the concepts of responsibility and courage through familiar and engaging figures, facilitating a deeper process of character internalization that leaves a lasting impression on their long-term memory (Sulistiyani, 2020).

In light of its socio-cultural advantages, story-based learning presents a more adaptable approach to the cognitive development of young children. Stories can encapsulate complex moral messages in an engaging and easily digestible format, enabling students to gain insights without feeling lectured. The effectiveness of this internalization arises from the narrative’s capacity to link events with the emotional logic of the students. Consequently, the values of perseverance and wisdom conveyed through these stories do not merely remain

as abstract knowledge; they evolve into attitudes and behaviors that are deeply internalized (Jiwandono & Khairunisa, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have explored character education through the integration of local culture in elementary school instruction. Research by Zuhriah et al. (2025) reveals that the Punakawan characters in the wayang tradition embody fundamental character education values such as honesty, wisdom, and social responsibility. These characters can serve as effective learning tools for elementary school students. The findings affirm that the narratives surrounding the Punakawan hold significant potential for instilling moral values in elementary education.

Research conducted by Nurrahma and Naryaningsih (2016) indicates that the development of learning media grounded in local wisdom, such as the "PUTURE" (Punakawan Adventure) app, serves as an effective tool for character education in young children. The incorporation of Punakawan characters—Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong—within digital media effectively captures students' attention, as these characters exemplify virtues like humility, honesty, and a willingness to help through narratives closely connected to everyday life. This approach has been shown to positively influence the instillation of moral values and reinforce the authentic identity of the Indonesian nation, thereby mitigating the negative effects of technological advancements on children's behavior.

Research by Narimo & Wiweko (2017) indicates that the Punakawan characters in wayang performances embody significant philosophical symbolism, including simplicity, courage, and moral responsibility. These values play a crucial role in character education and are pertinent for integration into the learning process within schools.

Despite the wealth of research conducted on character values in general and the utilization of wayang as an educational medium, there remains a notable scarcity of studies specifically addressing the internalization of the value of courage through the Punakawan stories within the realm of character education for elementary school students. Consequently, this study seeks to fill that gap by examining how the courage exemplified in the Punakawan narratives can be integrated into the learning process to enhance students' character education.

Utilizing traditional stories as a medium for learning provides a significant advantage in facilitating students' understanding of ethical values in a tangible manner. Within the Indonesian cultural context, the rich tradition of wayang presents the punakawan characters as highly relevant models for character education (Ranuhandoko & Sidhartani, 2019). The four characters—Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong—embody deep symbolism related to integrity and a fighting spirit. Their unique and relatable traits allow them to transform abstract ethical concepts into practical behavioral examples that elementary school students can readily internalize in their everyday lives (Amalia et al., 2021).

The Punakawan transcend mere mythological figures; they represent resilience in the face of adversity. The values they embody—tenacity in challenging situations and courage in speaking the truth—offer critical inspiration for the implementation of character education today (Anggoro, 2018). These values are not just remnants of the past; they are essential tools for strengthening the character of elementary school students against negative external influences. By establishing these principles of resilience as a foundation, students are encouraged to develop into individuals of integrity, capable of taking responsibility and possessing a strong sense of social solidarity (Rosarineysa et al., 2023).

In the educational process, Punakawan stories can serve as a valuable resource for identifying and discussing important values with students. Educators can facilitate various activities, such as reading the stories, engaging in group discussions, reflecting on moral lessons, and participating in role-playing based on the characters. Through these activities, students not only grasp the content of the stories but also internalize the values of perseverance that they embody.

Integrating the story of the Punakawan into the curriculum presents an innovative approach to enhancing character education that is deeply rooted in cultural identity. This initiative aims to contextualize and internalize the values of heroism, ultimately fostering a positive moral ecosystem among students. The goal extends beyond mere knowledge of the characters; it encompasses the cultivation of an ingrained sense of courage, integrity, honesty, and social awareness. Such qualities serve as a vital foundation for elementary school students, equipping them to confront the challenges of the modern world with a noble and resilient character (Mahendra & Sunarya, 2017).

This study is significant as it explores the potential of Punakawan stories as a medium for instilling heroic values in the character education of elementary school students. While numerous studies have been conducted on character education in elementary schools, the majority tend to concentrate on integrating these values into academic subjects or school activities.

The novelty of this study is underscored by several key aspects: (1) A focus on integrating the value of perseverance within Punakawan stories as a central element of character education. (2) An examination of local wisdom in character education, a subject that has not been extensively explored in the context of elementary education. (3) An analysis of the moral values represented by Punakawan characters, which can serve as a foundation for character education in elementary schools. (4) A model for internalizing values through storytelling that utilizes local culture, particularly in the context of Indonesian language instruction for elementary students. As a result, this study makes a significant contribution to the development of character education strategies grounded in the local cultural context.

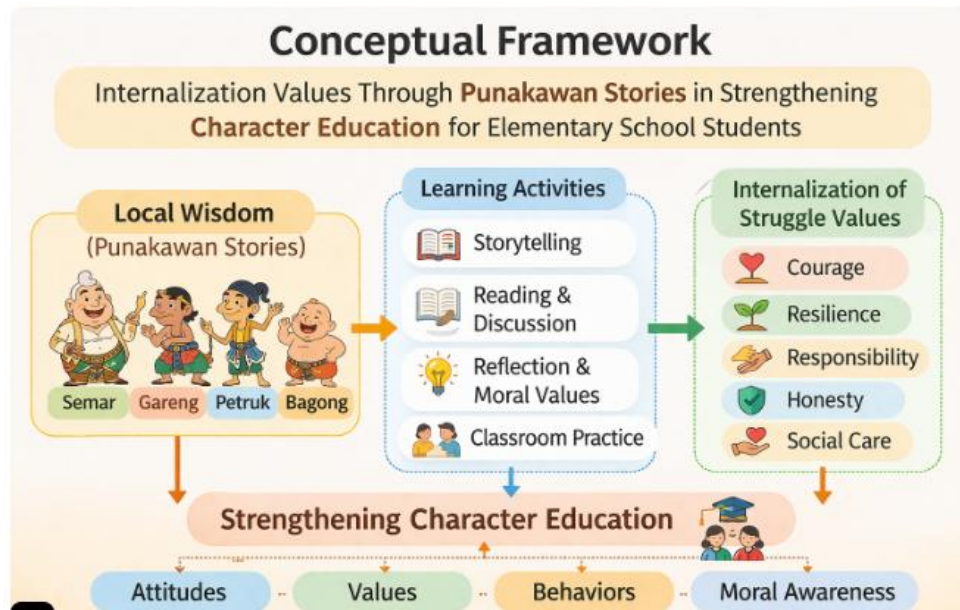


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of this research about Punakawan Stories

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of internalizing the value of struggle through the Punakawan stories.

The research participants include:

1. Classroom teachers
2. Elementary school students
3. Learning materials related to Punakawan stories

Data collection methods consist of:

1. Observation
Observing the learning process that integrates the Punakawan stories.
2. Interviews
Conducted with both teachers and students to evaluate their comprehension of the values of perseverance depicted in the stories.
3. Documentation
This includes storybooks, learning materials, and teaching aids utilized in the instruction.

The data analysis process involves the following steps:

1. Data reduction
2. Data presentation
3. Drawing conclusions

To ensure data validity, triangulation of sources and methods is employed.

RESEARCH RESULT

The research findings suggest that the narratives of the Punakawan incorporate a range of heroic values that can be integrated into elementary school

education. The heroic attributes evident in the Punakawan characters are as follows:

1. Semar; Represents wisdom, simplicity, and a deep concern for others. Students can learn from Semar the values of humility and responsibility.
2. Gareng: Embodies caution and honesty, highlighting the importance of integrity in one's life.
3. Petruk: Exemplifies creativity and the courage to face challenges.
4. Bagong: Symbolizes the bravery to speak the truth and fosters a critical mindset.

These values reflect the essence of struggle, which includes:

1. Courage
2. Resilience
3. Responsibility
4. Honesty

Research findings also suggest that incorporating Punakawan stories into the classroom enhances students' understanding of character values in a more tangible manner. This aligns with studies that emphasize character education as a systematic initiative aimed at shaping students' moral behavior through a learning process infused with essential life values, such as social responsibility. Stories, as a medium of instruction, possess the unique ability to convey moral messages implicitly. Through their plots and characters, students can grasp moral values without feeling as though they are being lectured.

*Internalization of Values through Punakawan Stories
in Strengthening Character Education*



Figure 2. The Internalization of Values of Punakwan Stories that promote students' character education

The incorporation of local culture into the educational process enhances the material's relevance to students' lives. Learning rooted in local wisdom aids students in recognizing their cultural identity while also reinforcing their national character. In the context of basic education, the integration of Punakawan stories into Indonesian language instruction can be effectively implemented through the following activities:

1. Reading folk tales
2. Discussing moral values
3. Writing reflections
4. Engaging in role-playing

These strategies not only enable students to comprehend the stories but also facilitate the internalization of values such as perseverance in their everyday lives.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that Punakawan stories are rich in heroic and moral values directly applicable to character education for elementary school students. Each Punakawan character embodies specific virtues that provide essential moral guidance in students' daily lives. Semar exemplifies wisdom, humility, and a deep concern for others, underscoring the importance of responsibility and moral leadership. Gareng champions honesty and carefulness, highlighting the critical significance of integrity and ethical behavior. Petruk illustrates creativity and courage in overcoming challenges, inspiring students to cultivate resilience and confidence. Meanwhile, Bagong represents honesty and the courage to speak the truth, fostering a critical mindset and moral fortitude among learners. These characteristics unequivocally show how traditional cultural narratives serve as powerful sources of moral instruction.

The heroic attributes represented by the Punakawan characters align closely with key values identified in this study: courage, resilience, responsibility, and honesty. These values are fundamental components of character education, particularly in fostering students' moral awareness and social responsibility. The narrative structure of Punakawan stories presents these values in a tangible and relatable way, enabling students to understand moral concepts with ease. Rather than grappling with abstract moral lessons, students engage with these values through characters, actions, and conflicts in the stories. This narrative approach compels students to reflect on moral dilemmas and internalize ethical values through observation and interpretation.

Furthermore, this research confirms that storytelling is an exceptionally effective pedagogical strategy for character education. Stories are powerful educational tools that engage students on emotional and cognitive levels simultaneously. Through storytelling, students connect with characters and envision real-life situations requiring moral decision-making. As a result, the moral messages conveyed through stories are not only more accessible but also more memorable than direct moral instruction. This aligns with previous studies

that assert narrative-based learning promotes moral reflection and helps students develop empathy and social awareness.

Another vital aspect highlighted in this study is the pivotal role of local culture in enhancing the relevance of learning materials. Integrating local wisdom into classroom instruction enables students to connect educational content with their cultural backgrounds and social contexts. When students encounter stories from their own cultural traditions, their sense of familiarity and engagement with the material intensifies. This cultural relevance not only boosts motivation to learn but also plays a crucial role in preserving local cultural heritage. Therefore, the use of Punakawan stories in education decisively supports both character development and cultural identity formation among students.

In the realm of elementary education, integrating Punakawan stories into Indonesian language learning should be executed through various student-centered activities. Engaging in activities such as reading folk tales, discussing moral values, writing reflective responses, and performing role-plays empowers students to actively engage with the narratives and interpret their meanings. Through reading exercises, students enhance their literacy skills while familiarizing themselves with traditional narratives. Discussions encourage critical analysis of the moral messages contained in the stories, allowing students to express their own perspectives. Reflective writing facilitates connections between the values in the stories and students' personal experiences, while role-playing immerses them in the characters' situations, enabling them to practice moral decision-making.

These learning strategies create powerful opportunities for students to transcend basic comprehension of the story and toward deeper internalization of valuable lessons. As students actively engage with the behaviors and decisions of the Punakawan characters, they begin to embody the values depicted in the narratives. Over time, these values will undoubtedly influence their attitudes and behaviors in everyday life. Consequently, integrating Punakawan stories into classroom learning not only enhances literacy skills but also plays a crucial role in cultivating perseverance, honesty, responsibility, and social awareness among elementary school students.

Overall, the findings of this study assert the potential of local cultural narratives as vital tools for character education. By fully integrating Punakawan stories into the learning process, educators can create meaningful experiences that merge cultural heritage, moral education, and literacy development. This approach clearly demonstrates that character education can be effectively implemented through rich, culturally relevant narratives.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Punakawan stories present a promising avenue for character education rooted in local wisdom within elementary schools. The characters Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong exemplify essential values such as courage, resilience, responsibility, honesty, perseverance, and social awareness, which are crucial for students' character development. Incorporating Punakawan stories into classroom learning enables students to grasp these moral values more concretely

through narrative experiences and reflective activities. In practice, these stories can be integrated into Indonesian language lessons through activities such as reading folk tales, discussing moral themes, engaging in reflective writing, and participating in role-playing. These methods encourage students to actively interact with the stories and internalize the values they represent. Consequently, teachers are encouraged to leverage narratives based on local wisdom as part of their character education strategies in schools. Additionally, future research should aim to develop innovative learning tools, such as digital storytelling or illustrated storybooks featuring Punakawan tales, to enhance student engagement and strengthen character education in a culturally relevant context.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This study acknowledges several limitations. Firstly, it centers on a qualitative exploration of struggle values in Punakawan stories within a specific educational context, meaning the findings may not be representative of all elementary school settings. Factors such as cultural differences, school environments, and teaching strategies may impact the effectiveness of integrating Punakawan stories into character education. Secondly, the study does not assess the long-term effects of these activities on students' behavioral development. Future research is recommended to employ quantitative or mixed-method approaches to evaluate learning outcomes. Additionally, researchers are encouraged to create innovative media, such as digital storytelling or interactive storybooks based on Punakawan stories, to enhance student engagement and foster character development.

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