

# Storytelling-Based Character Education for Children at the Indonesian School of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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**Abstract.** Character education is a fundamental aspect of shaping children's moral, ethical, and social values, especially in a multicultural environment. This community service program is carried out at the Kuala Lumpur Indonesian School (SIKL) with the aim of fostering character development through storytelling methods combined with interactive activities. The activity was attended by approximately 27–30 students aged 6–12 from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Methods used include storytelling, discussion, role-playing, and creative expression to strengthen the internalization process of value. A participatory learning approach is applied, with emphasis on values of honesty, responsibility, empathy, and cooperation. The evaluation is conducted by qualitative methods through observation, input from teachers, and analysis of children's responses and creative work. The results of the implementation show that there is an increase in moral awareness, active participation, empathy, and students' prosocial behavior. Values are not only cognitively understood, but also reflected in everyday behavior, such as honesty, responsibility, and mutual help between friends. Although there are challenges in the form of time limitations and differences in student capture, storytelling methods have proven effective in character education. Therefore, this activity is recommended to be implemented continuously with the support of teachers and the use of more varied media.

**Keywords:** character education; empathy; multicultural learning; prosocial behavior; storytelling

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## INTRODUCTION

Character education in children plays an important role in shaping the moral, ethical, and social competencies that are desperately needed in the challenging modern era. In the midst of the rapid flow of digitalization, the storytelling method remains one of the effective and fun ways to instill character values. In addition to serving as a means of entertainment, stories can also foster empathy, self-awareness, and problem-solving skills through storylines and featured characters (Mohd Amin et al., 2024). Various studies have shown that both folklore and fiction are capable of instilling honesty, loyalty, and responsibility from an early age (Rosa, 2019). Unfortunately, the storytelling tradition, which has long been part of children's education in Indonesia and Malaysia, is now beginning to be marginalized due to the dominance of digital games, even though folktales have moral messages and exemplary figures that cannot be replaced by technology (Rosa, 2019).

A variety of empirical evidence further strengthens the effectiveness of storytelling

methods in character education. Research at Mawar kindergarten, Gowa (Nasaruddin et al., 2016) found that storytelling methods significantly improve children's character, evidenced by the comparison of pre-test and post-test results that showed an improvement after this method was implemented ( $p < 0.05$ ) SSRN. (Imam Tabroni et al., 2022) also emphasized that fairy tales are effective in forming early childhood characters, especially if they are continued with the habitation strategy and teacher's example to strengthen internalization of grades. Other studies by (Huda et al., 2022) notes that storytelling not only improves language skills, but also strengthens the value of honesty, responsibility, independence, and manners in children. In the digital context, (Saripudin et al., 2021) proved that digital storytelling media is capable of forming student characters through active involvement, deep reflection, project-based learning, and integration of technology in class. Even local traditions such as the wayang golek show proved effective in instilling moral values through a cultural approach (Carolyn & Ekawati, 2021; Leli

et al., 2020).

In the context of Malaysia's national education, studies show that early character education is essential for fostering moral citizens. The moral education curriculum in Malaysia emphasizes the balance between the formation of virtuous habits and the ability to reason on justice and morality (Gale Article Malaysia elementary character education). Research in Indonesia also emphasized the importance of using modern storytelling methods that utilize digital technology as an effective medium in early childhood character education.

The Kuala Lumpur Indonesian School (SIKL) as a formal educational institution under the auspices of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia (KBRI) in Malaysia, has a strategic role in maintaining the cultural and educational identity of Indonesian children living abroad. SIKL conducts education from elementary to secondary school level with the Indonesian national curriculum combined with the local context of Malaysia. With its location in downtown Kuala Lumpur, SIKL is an important place for children in the Indonesian diaspora to stay connected to the language, culture, and values of the nation, as well as learn to interact in a multicultural environment. The diversity of students' socio-cultural backgrounds makes character education increasingly urgent to help them adapt, build tolerance, and maintain identity as the next generation of the nation.

Through community service activities, SIKL developed a storytelling-based character education program combined with discussion, role-playing, and creative expression. This strategy is designed so that honesty, responsibility, empathy, courage, and social skills can be instilled in a way that is both enjoyable and easy for children to understand. The program's main objectives include: (1) introducing character education to SIKL students through contextual and interesting storytelling methods; (2) fostering children's awareness of the importance of moral and social value in everyday life; and (3) encouraging students' active participation through an interactive approach to character value taught can be completely internalized. Thus, this program is expected to be the first step in forming a younger generation that has empathy, integrity, and is able to contribute positively in a pluralistic society.

## METHODS

This community service program applies a participatory learning approach through interactive storytelling activities. This method was chosen because it is in accordance with the learning characteristics of elementary school-aged children, who are easier to understand moral and social values when conveyed through storylines, characters, and imaginative activities. Several previous studies have also shown that storytelling is effective in helping children internalize the value of honesty, responsibility, and empathy, especially if it is continued with light discussion and simple reflection (Mohd Amin et al., 2024). Therefore, this activity not only conveys stories, but also invites children to understand and practice the moral messages contained in them.

The activity was held at the Kuala Lumpur Indonesian School (SIKL) involving around 30 students aged 6–12 years. Most of the participants were children of Indonesian migrant workers with diverse social and cultural backgrounds. This multicultural situation is actually a strength, because it gives different colors in the learning process. Prior to implementation, the service team worked with the school to prepare schedules, prepare materials, and choose stories that fit the purpose of character formation. Prioritized values are honesty, responsibility, courage, empathy, and social skills.

Learning sessions are designed interactively by combining storytelling activities, light discussions, role-playing games, and creative expressions. When telling stories, storytellers use variations in voice intonation, facial expressions, and visual media to attract children's attention. After the story is finished, students are invited to discuss characters and storylines, then asked to identify the moral values contained in them. Furthermore, they are given the opportunity to play roles so that these values can be practiced in simple situations that resemble everyday life. Activities are then closed with creative activities, such as drawing characters or writing short moral messages. This approach is in line with the findings of (Hayati et al., 2021), who emphasized that storytelling combined with participatory activities can improve children's social and language abilities.

To see how far this program worked, the team did not just tell the story and then stop there. During the course of the activity, they really pay attention to how children are involved: anyone who actively answers questions, how they respond in the discussion, comes to the creative work produced after the storytelling session. In addition, SIKL teachers are also asked to give notes about changes in students' behavior after the activity, whether they look more honest, braver to cooperate, or more responsible in daily life.

The observation results are then analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach. The focus is not only on what children say, but also how they imbue role-playing games, how enthusiastically they respond to moral messages, and how they are reflected in images, writings, or other simple works. In this way, the evaluation is not limited to numbers or checklists, but a real picture of how storytelling methods really have an impact on students' understanding and behavior.

This approach is in line with the views of (Nurhaliza et al., 2025), which emphasizes that character education will be more effective if children are given direct experience and a real example. Thus, the values presented are not only understood, but also exemplified and applied in everyday life.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Community service activities with the theme of children's character education through storytelling method at the Kuala Lumpur Indonesian School (SIKL) have been carried out well according to the planned purpose. The entire series of activities, from storytelling, interactive discussions, role-playing games, to expressive activities, earn students' high enthusiasm. The number of participants ranged from 27–30 children with diverse social backgrounds, making the learning atmosphere more vibrant and dynamic. Children are actively involved in each session, while accompanying teachers respond positively to the benefits of this activity for the development of student character. This reinforces the view that storytelling is an effective strategy for instilling moral and social values, especially in multicultural environments.



**Figure 1.** Group photo of the USM Community Service team with SIKL students

### Raise Character Awareness

The implementation of activities at SIKL shows a real improvement in children's awareness of the importance of moral and social values. Through stories that are contextual and close to everyday experience, students can more easily understand the meaning of honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and concern for others. This understanding not only stops in the cognitive domain, but also touches the emotional side of the child. The findings are in line with the results of an experimental study in Karangasem Regency that proves that storytelling methods can significantly improve children's moral development (Adnyani & Landrawan, 2020). A similar point was shown in a study in Tehran that storytelling activities are effective in improving moral intelligence in elementary school-level female students (Kahrizeh et al., 2018).

In line with the activities at SIKL, a qualitative descriptive study at TKABA Warungboto, Yogyakarta, found that storytelling by utilizing traditional folklore can foster learning enthusiasm as well as encourage honest, responsible, and independent attitudes to children (Nugraheni, 2023). These results further strengthen the view

that storytelling is not just a means of delivering messages, but also an effective medium to grow internalization of character values in depth. This is in line with the purpose of the program at SIKL which focuses on the formation of children's moral awareness in everyday life.



**Figure 2.** Storytelling activity by the USM Community Service team for SIKL students

Furthermore, findings from a scoping review highlighted that media-based storytelling, such as using puppets, can significantly enhance prosocial

behavior in early childhood, including cooperation and empathy (Carolin & Ekawati, 2021). This aligns well with the practices at SIKL, where stories were delivered interactively and tailored to the social experiences of diaspora children. Taken together, these scientific findings support the outcomes observed at SIKL: children were not only able to understand character values through stories, but also began connecting them to real-life experiences. Whether in honesty during play, cooperation with peers, or helping each other at school or at home, storytelling allowed children to transfer values from narrative to practice. By presenting familiar characters and relatable situations, storytelling strengthened children's sense of connection and made character internalization more natural, achieving the very goals of this community service activity.

### Active Participation and Engagement

Character education activities at the Kuala Lumpur Indonesian School (SIKL) with storytelling method went smoothly and were enthusiastically welcomed by the students. Since the beginning of the story, children have been paying close attention to the way the Semarang University PKM team delivers fairy tales. The simple intonation of sound, expressive body movements, and the use of visual media make the story more vivid and understandable. The class atmosphere warms up as children scramble to answer questions, repeat moral messages from story characters, and confidently participate in the role play. This shows that storytelling combined with a participatory approach is able to maintain focus while also encouraging students' learning spirit.

Student involvement is also evident from simple things. Children who usually keep quiet start to speak up during discussions. Others express their understanding through drawings of story characters or write moral messages in the form of small notes. One of the teachers who participated in this activity even revealed that many students seemed more confident when presenting ideas in front of their friends.

What happened at SIKL is in line with the research results (Hayati et al., 2021), which say that storytelling combined with discussion and role-playing can improve children's social and language abilities. The same thing was conveyed by (Hamzah & Syaodih, 2019) who considered storytelling to be effective as a character education medium because children tend to imitate the emotions and behaviors of story characters.

Meanwhile, (Ningsih & Nurhayati, 2020) emphasized that the active involvement of children in storytelling activities strengthens the internalization of moral values because the learning process is fun and does not feel patronizing.

From this experience, it is clear that storytelling is not just a means of telling stories, but an interactive approach that can involve students, foster confidence, and deepen their understanding of character values.



**Figure 3.** Photo with one of the active SIKL students

### **Development of Empathy and Prosocial Behavior**

One of the real effects of character development education activities at the Kuala Lumpur Indonesian School (SIKL) is the development of children's sense of empathy and prosocial attitudes. In role play sessions, the service team invites children to play characters who face moral situations, such as helping a difficult friend, showing honesty in a game, or sharing with others. This activity not only fosters children's courage to appear, but also helps them feel the position of others directly so that empathy scores are easier to internalize.

The news of the activity at SIKL confirmed that the children were very enthusiastic about

participating in the role play, even giving support to each other when their friends performed. The children who were initially shy also tried to play a role, and afterward discussed how the characters felt when helped or abandoned. This shows that the method of storytelling combined with role - playing gives children room to learn to understand the perspective of others and the importance of cooperation.

This finding is in line with Carolin and Ekawati's 2023 study, which states that cultural-based storytelling, such as the use of traditional wayang or fairy tales, is effective in fostering prosocial behavior in early childhood, including cooperation, empathy, and social concern. The same thing was also shown by the research of (Ningsih & Nurhayati, 2020) who found that storytelling activities can strengthen children's understanding of moral values while encouraging them to apply these values in everyday interactions.

Support from international research also strengthened this conclusion. Research in Tehran by (Kahrizeh et al., 2018) proved that storytelling has a significant effect on the moral development of elementary school students, especially in fostering empathy, honesty, and responsibility. In line with that, (Hamzah & Syaodih, 2019) emphasized that storytelling is an effective medium in character education because it can involve children emotionally in the learning process.

Thus, storytelling activities and role-playing games at SIKL proved effective in fostering children's awareness of the importance of empathy and prosocial attitudes. Children not only understand these values cognitively, but also experience them affectively by placing themselves in the position of others. This is an important step in character formation, especially in multicultural environments where social skills such as empathy, cooperation, and care are needed.

### **Internalization of Moral Values in Daily Life**

Character values obtained by SIKL students through storytelling do not stop at cognitive understanding alone, but begin to appear to be internalized in everyday behavior. The teacher who accompanied the activity reported that after the storytelling session, the children became more easily reminded of the importance of honesty, responsibility, and cooperation. In a variety of simple situations, both inside and outside the classroom, they spontaneously associate their actions with the stories they have heard. For

example, there are children who take the initiative to return items that do not belong to them, share learning tools with each other, or remind their friends to be orderly when playing together.

This phenomenon suggests that storytelling is an effective means of internalizing moral values. Children not only understand the message cognitively, but also emotionally involved so that it is more inherent in memory. As emphasized by (Nurhaliza et al., 2025), learning characters that are contextual and strengthened with teacher exemplary will make it easier for children to imitate and to respect positive behavior.

Other research results helped to strengthen this finding. (Hayati et al., 2021) explained that storytelling combined with reflection activities can encourage children to associate story messages with everyday life experiences, so that moral value does not stop as an abstract concept. The same was found by (Wuryandani & Yulianti, 2018) who showed that local wisdom-based stories were effective in instilling honesty, cooperation, and responsibility scores in elementary school students. In line with that, (Ningsih & Nurhayati, 2020) proved that storytelling activities can strengthen children's moral attitudes because it gives them an opportunity to translate value into real action in everyday life.

Thus, storytelling activities at SIKL not only build intellectual understanding, but also encourage real changes in children's attitudes and behavior. This process of internalizing moral values forms an important cornerstone for the formation of strong characters, especially in a multicultural environment where honesty, responsibility, and cooperation are urgently needed in social interaction.

## CONCLUSION

The activities of community service through storytelling methods at SIKL have proven to contribute positively to the development of children's character. Storytelling is effective in raising children's awareness of moral and social values, promoting active involvement in the learning process, and fostering empathy and prosocial behavior. Furthermore, the character values acquired by the child are not only understood at the cognitive level, but also begin to be internalized in real behaviors, such as courage to be honest, a sense of responsibility, and an attitude to help each other. Nevertheless, the challenges encountered indicate the need for a

sustainability strategy so that the impact of activities can be sustained in the long term. Therefore, it is recommended that storytelling be part of the school's regular program, strengthened by teacher involvement as a role model, and enriched by variations in learning media that match the characteristics of children. With continuous implementation, storytelling methods have the potential to be an effective instrument in shaping Indonesia's young generation who are characterized, empathetic, and adaptable in a multicultural environment.

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