



# The Influence of Children's Literature on Character Education with an Ethnopedology Approach for Grade VI Students Elementary School

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## Abstract

This study explores the influence of children's literature—particularly Torajan folklore—on character education through an ethnopedagogic approach at SDN 3 Rantepao. Using a qualitative case study method, the research investigates how traditional stories such as *Polopadang* can foster core character values including honesty, hard work, gratitude, and cultural respect among sixth-grade students. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, documentation, and student questionnaires. The findings reveal that integrating local culture into learning activities significantly enhances students' moral development and cultural identity. For example, students' understanding of honesty increased from 16% to 100%, and observable behaviors such as admitting mistakes and completing assignments honestly also improved. The ethnopedagogic approach proved effective in contextualizing moral values within the students' cultural environment, making character education more meaningful and impactful. This study affirms the importance of utilizing local wisdom in education to build character and preserve traditional heritage in the face of modern challenges.

**Keywords:** *children's literature, character education, ethnopedagogy, Torajan folklore, cultural identity, primary education*

## **Introduction**

Character education is one of the main focuses in the Indonesian education system, especially to form a young generation that has a good personality, strong morals, and is able to appreciate and preserve local culture. Along with the development of the times, character education faces various challenges, especially in maintaining cultural identity amidst the flow of globalization. Therefore, an approach is needed that can integrate local cultural values in learning. One relevant approach is ethnopedagogy, which is an educational approach that refers to local wisdom to shape students' character (Sudirman, 2017).

One of the effective media for building character is children's literature, especially folklore. Folklore not only functions as entertainment, but is also full of moral and ethical values that can guide children in understanding concepts such as kindness, honesty, responsibility, empathy, and respect for others and nature. According to Santoso (2019), folklore has the power to shape children's character because these stories often contain strong moral messages, are easy to understand, and interesting for children.

In the context of Toraja culture, folklore rich in local cultural values, such as mutual cooperation, hard work, and respect for ancestors and nature, is very important to be introduced to children in the area. Ethnopedagogy, which emphasizes the use of teaching materials rooted in local culture, provides opportunities for children to learn about traditional values through children's literature that is relevant to their daily lives. As expressed by Suyanto (2020), the use of folklore in education can strengthen children's cultural identity and increase their love for cultural heritage.

Toraja has a rich cultural heritage of moral and cultural values such as children's literature. This story contains a message about the importance of honesty, hard work, gratitude, and respect for nature. According to Toraja Tourism (2014), Ulelean Pare teaches values such as honesty, hard work and gratitude through interesting and meaningful stories. However, in learning practices at SD 3 Rantepao the use of children's literature is still rare. Children tend to be more familiar with modern stories than folk tales rooted in local culture. In fact, stories such as children's literature can be an effective means of shaping students' characters and preserving Toraja culture.

SDN 3 Rantepao, located in North Toraja Regency, has the main goal of forming a young generation that is not only academically intelligent but also has a strong character and noble character. Character education in this school is designed by integrating local Toraja cultural values and universal moral principles, so that students can grow into responsible, honest, and caring individuals.

The main objective of character education is to instill the value of honesty. In this case Character education aims to build honest attitudes in students in every aspect of life, both in the school environment and outside of school. Honesty values

of honesty can also be taught through children's literature and can be practiced directly in everyday life, such as admitting mistakes or returning friends' belongings. The second goal is to preserve local Toraja culture. One important goal is to introduce and preserve Toraja cultural values, such as togetherness, gratitude, and respect for ancestors. Local literature, such as Pa'ssura' and folklore, are used as a medium to instill a love of local culture and identity. Third, develop discipline and responsibility. Through character education programs, students are taught to be disciplined in carrying out tasks, obeying rules, and being responsible for their actions. This is implemented through activities such as class duty, flag ceremonies, and school greening programs. The fourth goal is to increase social awareness.

Character education also aims to foster a sense of caring for others and the environment. Students are invited to be active in social activities, such as helping friends in trouble, sharing with those in need, and maintaining the cleanliness of the school environment and surroundings. Fifth, forming a generation with integrity. SDN 3 Rantepao targets students to become individuals with high integrity, namely consistent in words and deeds. This value is taught through real examples from teachers, inspirational stories, and the habituation of good behavior at school. Sixth, strengthening spirituality and ethics through a religious and customary-based approach, students are educated to respect God and others, and to uphold ethical values in everyday life. Traditional ceremonies or joint prayers are often used as a means to instill spiritual values. and the seventh is to create harmony between formal education and traditional values.

SDN 3 Rantepao seeks to integrate character education with the national curriculum. This aims to ensure that students not only excel in academic subjects but are also able to maintain harmony between modernity and tradition. This study aims to examine the influence of the use of Torajan folklore, especially children's literature in learning on the formation of student character at SD 3 Rantepao with an ethnopedagogical approach. It is hoped that the results of this study can contribute to the development of culture-based education that can strengthen students' character and cultural identity, while preserving the noble values of Toraja among the younger generation.

The application of children's literature fairy tales to sixth grade students of SDN 3 Rantepao can provide various significant benefits, especially in character building and preserving local culture. Through children's literature, students can understand noble values such as gratitude, hard work, and the importance of maintaining harmony with nature. In addition, children's literature is also an interesting learning medium to introduce Torajan culture from an early age, so that students not only know folk tales, but also understand the philosophical meaning contained therein. By listening to and studying children's literature, students can appreciate ancestral traditions that have been preserved from generation to generation so that they can strengthen their sense of pride in Torajan cultural identity. Indirectly, children's literature can also improve students' literacy skills

through reading, listening, and discussion activities. Moreover, the introduction of children's literature in the school environment can encourage the preservation of cultural heritage amidst the increasingly modern era.

Based on the background description that has been presented above, the general problem of this research can be formulated as follows:

1. How is it? Implementation of character education through children's literature with an ethnopedagogical approach at SDN 3 Rantepao?
2. How does children's literature influence character education values with an ethnopedagogical approach at SDN 3 Rantepao?

## **Method**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Qualitative research was chosen because it will provide an in-depth understanding of the role of children's literature in fostering honest character in students through an ethnopedagogical approach.

The purpose of qualitative research is to obtain a satisfactory picture or information. According to Moleong (2005:6), qualitative research is research used to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by research subjects such as behavior, actions, and motivations by means of description using words and language according to a certain context that is useful for various scientific methods. The descriptive approach is a method used by researchers in conducting interviews through data and information collection by going directly to the field to meet respondents or informants.

The learning approach used is ethnopedagogy, which integrates Toraja local wisdom in the learning process. The research method applied is descriptive qualitative, which aims to observe and analyze the influence of the use of children's literature on the formation of student character. With this limitation, the research is expected to be more focused in examining the influence of children's literature on the formation of student character through an ethnopedagogical approach.

Primary data obtained directly from field observations on research subjects are known as primary data. In this study, primary data were collected through direct observation of the implementation process or application of character education through children's literature with an ethnopedagogical approach at SDN 3 Rantepao. The researcher observed the learning process, teacher-student interactions and the use of children's literature as learning materials in character education. In particular, the researcher saw the use of children's literature in the form of Toraja folklore to teach students character values such as honesty, hard work, gratitude, respect and others.

The observation process was conducted in a participatory manner in class VI. The researcher was present to record the process of implementing character education through children's literature with an ethnopedagogical approach and

how the character values were internalized by students. This observation provides important information to understand the original and correct context of the implementation of the ethnopedagogical approach in character education at SDN 3 Rantepao.

Complementary data obtained from other sources relevant to the research subject and not obtained directly from field activities are referred to as secondary data. Secondary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with class teachers, principals and sixth grade students of SDN 3 Rantepao.

In the ethnopedagogical approach, interviews are used to explore teachers' perspectives, experiences, and approaches in using children's literature as a character education tool. Meanwhile, documentation is used to obtain written or visual evidence that supports the findings of interviews and observations, such as the use of children's literature as teaching materials based on folklore, student character evaluation records, and school activity schedules based on local wisdom.

Then the questionnaire was also distributed to grade VI students of SDN 3 Rantepao to assess the perception and understanding of character values taught through children's literature learning. The purpose of this questionnaire was to find out how much students absorbed and internalized values such as honesty, hard work and respect for culture from the folklore they learned.

The data sources in this study came from teachers, principals, students and parents of grade VI students of SDN 3 Rantepao through interview techniques and documentation in the form of photos and recordings. Interviews were conducted to support the research results aimed at class teachers, principals, students and parents of students. Then the data sources were also supported by documentation in the form of photos of the learning process, school profiles and student activities. The recordings referred to in this study are recordings of interviews conducted about the process of implementing children's literature in learning to shape student character at SDN 3 Rantepao.

The research was conducted at SDN 3 Rantepao, Rantepao Village, Rantepao District, North Toraja Regency, South Sulawesi Province with a research period of January 13-March 17, 2025. Observations of learning activities using children's literature as a teaching material at SDN 3 Rantepao based on ethnopedagogy. Analyzing relevant literature related to ethnopedagogy and character values in children's literature based on Toraja folklore, namely Ulelean pare. In-depth interviews with teachers, principals, students and parents of students to obtain information about the implementation of children's literature based on Toraja folklore, namely ulelean pare in learning to shape students' characters.

One of the important instruments in this study is a questionnaire, which is used to collect direct data from grade VI students of SDN 3 Rantepao, the main subject of the study, which focuses on the implementation of character education through children's literature with an ethnopedagogical approach at SDN 3 Rantepao. By using a questionnaire, the main objective is to find out how students

see, understand and experience things subjectively about the character values instilled during the learning process through children's literature with an ethnopedagogical approach. Documentation in the form of photos and notes related to learning activities using children's literature as teaching materials based on folklore, namely bitter melon paste.

Data analysis used in this study uses descriptive analysis model data analysis techniques. The analysis method is carried out by describing the facts which are then followed by analysis. Analysis is carried out before and after the study. Data analysis version of Miles and Huberman (1992), that there are three activity flows, namely data reduction, data presentation, drawing conclusions and verification.

Data reduction was carried out since the beginning of data collection in the field such as observation results, interviews, documentation and student questionnaires. The researcher selected information that was relevant to the research subject, namely how character education is implemented through children's literature originating from Toraja folklore. For example, the researcher's observation recorded the learning process in which character values such as honesty, cooperation, mutual respect, respect for others, worship, responsibility and others. Meanwhile, from the interview findings, the researcher selected quotes that showed the strategies used by teachers to convey character values to students.

In addition, the results of the student questionnaire were reduced by grouping responses that reflected the character values they learned from the folklore lesson. To maintain focus and integrity, data analysis that was irrelevant or did not answer the problem formulation was discarded. After the data was reduced, the researcher presented the information systematically in the form of a descriptive story. Observation results, interview quotes and questionnaire results that supported each other were combined in the data presentation. For example, the observation results showed that students actively talked about the meaning of honesty in Torajan folklore.

The data was also presented by displaying excerpts of interview transcripts and student responses that showed internalization of character values. This presentation was done in a narrative style to make it easier for readers to understand the learning context and student responses to local culture-based materials or ethnopedagogical approaches. Drawing conclusions from the data presented is the final stage of the analysis. The researcher concluded, for example, that children's literature based on Torajan folklore is effective in teaching students about character values, based on how often the theme appeared in observations, interviews and questionnaires.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **a. Ethnopedagogical approach as a foundation in character education**

The implementation of character education is applied at SDN 3 Rantepao through children's literature using Torajan folklore, especially the Polopadang story, as a source of character values. One way to implement character education through Torajan folklore is Polopadang using an ethnopedagogical approach. This approach is a learning approach that applies a contextual education approach and local wisdom as a source of values.

The ethnopedagogical approach recognizes that local culture is an important source for character education because it contains life wisdom, moral values, and social ethics that have been tested across generations. Ethnopedagogy is an approach that utilizes local values to shape students' mindsets and characters to be more down-to-earth, moral, and have a strong cultural identity, according to Sugara & Sugito (2022). Folk tales such as Polopadang in Toraja teach values such as honesty, hard work, gratitude, and respect.

Polopadang story was chosen because it presents conflicts and resolutions that reflect moral principles relevant to students' lives. The characters in the story are described as honest, patient, and steadfast. Widayati (2020) stated that this type of traditional children's literature story is important for instilling character values in children because it is based on the collective experiences of society and is easily accepted by children.

Abdurrahman et al. (2020) stated that ethnopedagogy not only improves the quality of education but also serves as a useful tool to foster students' social and spiritual intelligence. This is due to the fact that ethnopedagogy places local values as the basis for thinking and acting, not just as words or cultural symbols.

When the Polopadang story is used in lessons, students are not only introduced to moral aspects, but also closer to the Torajan cultural identity. This is in line with the idea put forward by Rahmawati et al. (2020), which states that ethnopedagogy connects academic dimensions with community culture, so that learning becomes more contextual and relevant.

As part of children's literature, folklore is considered an effective tool for teaching character because it is packaged in an interesting and easy-to-understand story form. Nurgiyantoro (2021) said that folklore has educational power because moral values are conveyed implicitly in the context of a story rich in imagination and cultural closeness. Students receive moral messages cognitively and emotionally.

Thus, the ethnopedagogical approach in character education at SDN 3 Rantepao helps students learn intellectually and affectively. Learning that comes from local culture fosters a sense of belonging to cultural identity, increases the desire to learn, and strengthens the integrity of students' character in real life, according to Oktavianti and Ratnasari (2018).

- b. The process of implementing character education through children's literature with an ethnopedagogical approach in learning at SDN 3 Rantepao

### **1) Contextual opening and cultural introduction**

Learning begins with a contextual opening where the teacher relates the subject matter to students' personal experiences and Torajan cultural values. An example is by asking students "Who has heard the Polopadang story from your parents?" This question is one example of a reflective question asked by the teacher. This question is not only a motivational tool but also an educational strategy to connect classroom learning with students' local cultural experiences in everyday life. Widayati (2020) stated that this method is effective in increasing student participation because students believe that learning comes from their own cultural identity.

Then *suru* indirectly creates a strong affective and social foundation by exploring cultural experiences in students. This is in line with the idea of Rahmawati et al. (2020) that starting learning by including the cultural context of students can increase student involvement in learning and foster self-confidence as members of the local community. Students tend to be more open and active in adopting moral principles when their own culture is used as learning material.

In the ethnopedagogical approach, teachers must act as facilitators and understand the context of their students' lives. According to Sugara and Sugito (2022), so that the values conveyed are not foreign or vague, teachers who use a local culture-based approach or ethnopedagogical approach must be able to re-explore students' daily experiences into the learning context. At the beginning of learning, teachers at SDN 3 Rantepao had succeeded in creating a dynamic and meaningful learning space.

Furthermore, the introduction of culture in this learning helps to form students' "cultural awareness" from an early age. Students begin to realize that their local culture is not only a historical legacy but can be used as a source of knowledge and character building. Students' identity and pride in their origins are built through the integration of local culture in education, which is very important in the era of globalization, according to Oktavianti and Ratnasari (2018).

Therefore, the contextual learning opening stage functions as not only an opening activity, but also as a basis for strengthening character values in local culture. This shows that character education is a process of acculturation through internalization of meanings that are close to students' lives.



## **2) Reading the Polopadang story**

The teacher reads the story about Polopadang expressively first in the local language, before translating it into Indonesian. The goal is to maintain the local nuance and ensure that students understand it. The use of two languages is a method of literacy and cultural preservation in the learning process. Nurgiyantoro (2021) states that language in folklore functions not only to communicate but also to spread character values and cultural identity.

In the learning process, the teacher acts as a narrator and mediator of values during the story reading process. Questions such as "Why did Polopadang reject the gift?" or "What is the meaning of loyalty in this story?", are examples of important questions asked by teachers to encourage students to stimulate students. According to Abdurrahman et al. (2020), this interactive approach is very effective in improving critical thinking skills and building awareness values.

Polopadang is described by people as honest, not greedy, and patient in the face of injustice. These characters provide examples to students indirectly. Characterization in folklore functions as a "mirror of values" in literary pedagogy, helping students reflect on moral choices and actions (Widayati, 2020). Because students come from a familiar cultural environment, characters in folklore are often more down to earth and related to students' daily lives.

In addition, students' emotional involvement in the story is presented by the teacher with an expressive and empathetic reading method. This increases the affective aspect of character learning. Emotional involvement in the characters or events of the story will increase the likelihood of students internalizing the values contained in the story, Sugiyanto (2019). Then, reading the story functions as an important tool to convey the noble values of Toraja culture to students. This is more than just entertainment or a means of learning. However, the Polopadang story is told in a conducive and contextual classroom atmosphere.

## **3) Discussion of values and character reflection**

After reading the story, the teacher asks students to talk about the moral values found in the Polopadang story. Students can exchange ideas and deepen their understanding because this discussion is done in groups. In this process, a constructivist approach is applied in character education, which allows students to build knowledge through social interaction (Rahmawati et al., 2020).

The teacher guides students to discuss with open-ended questions such as, "If you were in Polopadang's position, what would you do?", this question is an example of a reflective question used by teachers to encourage students to find character values in the story through their own experiences. Reflection plays an important role in character education, according to Nurgiyantoro (2021), because it bridges cognitive understanding and attitude change.

In addition, this group discussion instills the principles of cooperation, respect for other people's opinions, and empathy. The ethnopedagogical approach, according to Sugara and Sugito (2022) must encourage social learning, where students learn from their own social and cultural contexts. In class VI of SDN 3 Rantepao, the discussion showed that the process was going well.

Students can mention traits such as honesty, modesty, and hard work shown by the Polopadang character from the discussion. In addition, students can apply these values in everyday life. For example, students can play honestly when playing and help their parents without being asked. This shows that the discussion not only assesses understanding, but also internalization of values.

Therefore, discussion of values and reflection on character are important steps in implementing literature-based character education for children. In this effort, students' affective and cognitive aspects are combined to help students understand and live culturally and contextually relevant character values.

#### **4) Reinforcement through reflective activities**

The teacher gives the student's head an assignment to write a journal every day as a form of reinforcement. Students are asked to write something in a journal that shows various character traits such as honesty, hard work, or gratitude and others. Carried out for one week, the purpose of this activity is to instill positive behavior in everyday life. One effective method to foster self-awareness and moral responsibility in children is reflective writing, according to Oktavianti and Ratnasari (2018).

Journal writing also serves as an evaluation tool that not only allows to measure students' knowledge but also to change students' behavior. Teachers check journals in an appreciative manner, provide positive feedback, and encourage students to do good things consistently. Abdurrahman et al. (2020) emphasized that the process of internalizing values requires constructive feedback.

In addition, this activity shows that learning does not only occur in the classroom. According to Sugiyanto (2019), the character education process does not stop at home and the student's environment. This is in accordance with the principle of ethnopedagogy that learning must involve the social and cultural environment in which students grow up. Character education is more effective when parents are indirectly involved in the learning process by supporting school programs in terms of strengthening student character.

In interviews, some students said that after journaling, they became more self-aware in their daily lives. They were more likely to admit mistakes, help their parents at home, and be more polite to friends. This suggests that reflective activities can successfully reach the conative dimension, or students' desire to change.

Therefore, reinforcement through reflective activities supports children's literature as a medium for learning values and changing student behavior. This process shows the relationship between classroom learning and learning that occurs in the real world of students, which is an important part of ethnopedagogy in character education.

## **Conclusion**

At SDN 3 Rantepao, an ethnopedagogical approach is used to implement character education through children's literature. The Torajan folktale, Polopadang is included in the learning process. There are several parts to this process, such as opening contextual learning, reading stories in local languages, talking about moral principles, and getting support through reflective activities such as writing journals. The ethnopedagogical approach ensures that local cultural values are the basis for learning, and teachers function as facilitators who connect the stories to students' daily lives. As a result, students not only learn about character traits such as honesty, hard work, and responsibility, but they also apply them in their daily lives.

This study reveals that children's literature, especially the Polopadang story, has a significant influence on the formation of students' character education values. Pre-test and post-test research showed an increase in students' understanding of honesty from 16% to 100%. Observations also showed an increase in behavior, such as an increase in honesty in doing assignments (from 17% to 93%) and a willingness to admit mistakes (from 50% to 90%). Interviews with students, teachers, and parents showed that this story helped students understand moral values and relate to their cultural context. This effect was strengthened by the ethnopedagogical approach by using local wisdom as a relevant and meaningful learning medium.

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