



Optimizing Early Childhood Character Education: Management of Learning Models Inspired by Kalimantan Folklore

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Abstract. This study aims to examine the integration of management principles into the development of early childhood character education based on Kalimantan folklore. The research explores the values embedded in Kalimantan folklore and their potential role in shaping early childhood character. Despite its rich cultural heritage, Kalimantan folklore remains underutilized in early childhood education, particularly in kindergartens, where it holds significant potential as a medium for instilling values, norms, and cultural understanding. By incorporating management strategies, this study develops a structured learning model that uses Kalimantan folklore to promote character development in early childhood education. The study employs a Research and Development (R&D) methodology, conducted at PAUD Lab School ULM. Given the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, the research trials were adapted to include teacher visits and home visit strategies. The research followed systematic steps, including: (1) data collection, (2) planning, (3) model development, (4) expert validation, (5) product revision, (6) field trials, (7) final revisions, and (8) dissemination and implementation. The resulting model, named BEKANTAN (Early Childhood Character Learning Based on Local Wisdom in Kalimantan Folklore), is both a conceptual and practical tool for educators. The BEKANTAN model draws inspiration from the proboscis monkey, an iconic symbol of South Kalimantan and a representation of the region's local wisdom. Through stories such as Semangka Emas and Putri Junjung Buih, the model incorporates character education values including teamwork, generosity, sincerity, independence, discipline, honesty, democracy, and responsibility. By integrating robust management strategies into the implementation of the BEKANTAN model, the study demonstrates how local wisdom and folklore can be systematically utilized to foster well-rounded character development in young learners while preserving and celebrating Kalimantan's cultural heritage.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Management of Learning, Optimizing Character

1 Introduction

News reports in electronic and print media frequently highlight instances of deviant behavior among teenagers and adults. Such behaviors include juvenile delinquency, reckless driving, drug abuse, and sexual misconduct. Alarming cases also involve

student-perpetrated violence against teachers or vice versa. Furthermore, the rapid influx of foreign cultures, often inconsistent with local norms and values, exacerbates the erosion of moral integrity [1]. This decline in character and morality among youth and adults stems from various factors, such as the influence of media, films, environmental factors, and an education system that has yet to touch the students' conscience deeply in character learning [2]. The aspiration to nurture individuals with noble character remains far from realization [3]. The ideal identity aims to shape individuals who are faithful, intelligent, creative, innovative, and capable of producing meaningful contributions [4].

The powerful impact of globalization has significantly displaced traditional values rooted in local wisdom [5]. Global culture often manifests as modern symbols or distractions that affect both adolescents and adults. For instance, foreign cultural narratives are increasingly disseminated through digital platforms, including games, gadgets, and internet-based media. These modern tools, while engaging, can inadvertently diminish students' character development [6].

Building individual character is a noble goal for any nation, yet many obstacles remain [7]. One primary challenge is the overwhelming influence of global culture, contributing to the moral deterioration of younger generations. Literature, however, holds a significant opportunity to foster and transform character [8], [9]. Through literary works, individuals can explore human values, emphasizing the interconnectedness between people and their spiritual beliefs in Allah SWT while fostering appreciation for the surrounding world.

As an artistic expression born through a creative process, literature Yasid (2012) [10] holds a broader scope than non-fiction works. According to Suparno (2002)[11] and Untari et al. (2012)[12], Indonesian language and literature education offer a prime opportunity to instill character understanding in young learners through children's stories. Since character development is most effective at an early age, these stories must align with children's growth stages and incorporate essential moral values [11].

Several scholars, including [7], [10], [12], [13], [14], have examined the significance of character education. However, limited research has focused on folklore from NTT (Nusa Tenggara Timur), specifically tales like *Suri Ikun* and *Two Birds*. Previous research by Suriansyah and Aslamiah emphasized the importance of instilling character through meaningful interactions, including inspirational stories, wise sayings, and role models. Such stories, deeply rooted in folk traditions, embody moral wisdom and the essence of character education [15].

Efforts to enhance the moral character of younger generations have included multidisciplinary approaches to assess and apply character values. Despite these efforts, moral decline persists, with some cases reaching critical levels of degradation. Afandi (2011)[16] highlighted the success of character education initiatives in countries like China, America, Japan, and Korea, where early and systematic implementation of character-building programs has positively impacted academic achievement [17], [18].

To foster imagination and creativity, introducing children to literary works from an early age is essential [19]. This approach requires intentional and structured efforts to develop literacy skills and cultivate students' potential in literature [10], [20].). Notable research by Oktavianus, Ike Revita, and Dian Astri (2014) explored character values embedded in Minangkabau proverbs, demonstrating their relevance to anti-corruption education and broader moral development.

Children's literature is specifically designed for young readers, with content tailored to their world and interests while respecting their emotional and intellectual development [21]. Unlike adults, children possess limited experiences and maturity, along with a simpler grasp of language. Thus, early childhood literature requires straightforward vocabulary, sentence structures, and expressions to align with their developmental stage [22]. The tradition of storytelling plays a pivotal role in early childhood education, as it not only entertains but also instills personal and educational values, nurturing a child's imagination, emotions, intellect, social awareness, ethics, and spirituality [13], [23]. Parents and educators must thoughtfully select stories that match a child's developmental needs to maximize these benefits.

The integration of character education into the management of early childhood learning is a critical foundation for Indonesia's educational goals [24]. Character, encompassing behavior, habits, and moral actions, can be cultivated through consistent practice and habituation. Indonesian language learning, with its focus on listening, speaking, reading, and writing, is an effective tool for character education [25]. Schools can reinforce character development through daily behaviors such as environmental care, empathy, and fostering noble attitudes [14]. According to the Ministry of National Education, key character values to be instilled in young children include religiosity, honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, creativity, independence, democracy, curiosity, national pride, achievement, friendliness, peace, love of reading, care for others and the environment, and responsibility [26].

Ikhwan (2013)[27] identifies three essential components of character education: knowing, feeling, and acting on moral goodness. From an early age, children should be taught to understand and appreciate virtuous actions, cultivate love for doing good, and practice positive habits that eventually become ingrained in their daily lives. However, implementing character education programs for young children remains a challenge for educators. Research by Marni and Eliza (2020)[28] emphasizes the importance of enabling children to develop insights into their cultural realities, think critically, conceptualize social challenges, and understand their personal experiences alongside those of others. This forms the basis for metacognitive abilities, such as self-awareness, evaluation, and practical problem-solving [29].

Teachers play a crucial role in introducing children to cultural elements that align with their developmental context, thereby fostering critical thinking and social understanding [30]. To address these needs, this study develops a character learning model rooted in the local wisdom of Kalimantan folklore. These stories, reflective of

the Banjarmasin community's life and values, serve as educational material for kindergartens. Integrating folklore into lesson plans allows children to engage with their cultural heritage, experiencing traditional language and societal values through active participation. This approach aligns with research suggesting that cognition and cultural understanding are deeply interconnected [31], [32].

Incorporating Kalimantan folklore into early childhood education provides a platform for moral dialogue, enabling children to explore and internalize ethical values through participatory learning. This engagement fosters the discovery of moral principles and nurtures the capacity for moral reasoning, emphasizing dialogue and interaction rather than imposing idealized notions of morality. The result is the BEKANTAN model (Learning Model for Early Childhood Character Development Based on Local Wisdom in Kalimantan Folklore), which offers an innovative framework to enhance character education by leveraging the rich cultural narratives of Kalimantan. Through this model, children not only connect with their heritage but also develop a strong foundation of character traits necessary for their personal and social growth.

2 Theoretical Review

2.1 Kalimantan Folklore and Educational Values

Children's stories are a form of literary creation widely produced as content tailored for young readers. According to Kipling, fairy tales not only provide entertainment but also serve as an enjoyable medium for delivering educational messages. Thus, children's stories can function as a valuable tool for fostering an appreciation of moral and cultural values [33]. The Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) defines a story as a narrative that describes actions, experiences, or events—whether real or fictional. Stories can entertain while conveying information to readers [34].

Essentially, stories are narratives that recount real or imaginary events, aiming to entertain and educate audiences through prose or poetry. Children's stories, specifically, are romantic narratives that explore the lives of children in a way that resonates emotionally with young readers [35]. Wimanjaya elaborates that these stories are not limited to depicting children's lives but are crafted in ways that feel vivid and deeply moving, capable of touching a child's innermost feelings. They are designed for children aged six to seven, using simple language and short, complete episodes. These stories might include biographies, historical fiction, humor, or narratives that help children navigate differences in themselves and others. Ultimately, children's stories combine entertainment with moral or educational messages, presented through concise, relatable formats [36].

Traditionally, parents have instilled character in their children by sharing fairy tales at bedtime—a practice passed down through generations. These oral traditions often carried moral lessons that profoundly impacted children, nurturing their inherent moral potential and shaping their spiritual perspectives aligned with kindness [37]. Stories are

favoured by moral educators as effective teaching tools because they captivate attention and foster emotional connections. Storytelling also allows individuals to share personal experiences in ways that resonate deeply with listeners [38].

Introducing Kalimantan folklore to kindergarten students provides an opportunity to familiarize children with their cultural heritage and values. Repeatedly reading such stories enables children to internalize these values, consciously or unconsciously. Storytelling also serves as a method for teaching social and moral lessons. Historically, storytelling has been employed to both educate and entertain children. By engaging in discussions and questions after reading stories, educators can stimulate children's comprehension and appreciation of narratives [35]

Dialogue and interaction during storytelling enhance various developmental aspects, including language skills, cognition, personality, and social behavior. Scholars like Howard Gardner and Brian Sutton-Smith have explored the emotional and cognitive responses of children to stories and fairy tales. These narratives offer layers of meaning that encourage children to reflect on the moral and cultural elements embedded within the tales [39].

2.2 Management of Children Character

Children's character development can begin with teachers focusing on three main steps: developing moral knowledge, cultivating moral feelings, and practicing moral actions. According to Ryan & Lickona, character development in children involves instilling values and morals through three main components: (1) moral knowledge, (2) moral feelings, and (3) moral actions [40]. **Management of childhood character education** refers to a systematic approach to effectively instilling these values from an early age.

1. **Moral Knowledge.** Moral knowledge includes understanding moral values that are passed down through generations. For example, children need to understand concepts like cooperation, politeness, and other values. By comprehending these values, children have a foundation for internalizing them into their everyday behavior [40]. Moral knowledge also involves moral reasoning, which is the ability to analyze and understand the reasoning behind these values [41].
2. **Moral Knowledge.** Moral knowledge includes understanding moral values that are passed down through generations. For example, children need to understand concepts like cooperation, politeness, and other values. By comprehending these values, children have a foundation for internalizing them into their everyday behavior [40]. Moral knowledge also involves moral reasoning, which is the ability to analyze and understand the reasoning behind these values [41].
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The management of childhood character education focuses on a structured process to help children understand moral values, internalize moral emotions, and apply them in everyday actions. This approach allows children to build a strong moral identity, ensuring that values of goodness become an integral part of their lives.

3 Method

The research utilizes a qualitative approach to explore and analyze how Kalimantan folklore can be used effectively as a medium for character education in early childhood. Below is an overview of the qualitative methodology applied in the study:

1. **Research Design.** The study adopts a descriptive qualitative design, focusing on understanding and interpreting the cultural and educational significance of Kalimantan folklore in shaping children's character. The researchers investigate the integration of folklore into educational practices and its impact on character development.
2. **Data Collection Methods**
 - **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews with early childhood educators, cultural experts, and parents were conducted to gather insights into their perceptions and experiences regarding the use of folklore in character education.
 - **Observation:** Direct observations of teaching and learning activities were carried out in classrooms where the BEKANTAN model was implemented. These observations provided data on how educators incorporate Kalimantan folklore into lessons and the children's responses to these activities.
 - **Document Analysis:** The researchers reviewed Kalimantan folklore texts, teacher lesson plans, and educational resources to analyze the character values embedded in these stories and how they are applied in teaching.
3. **Data Analysis.** The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes related to character education and local wisdom. The process involved:
 - Organizing and transcribing data from interviews and observations.
 - Coding data into categories such as moral values, teaching strategies, and student behavior.
 - Interpreting the findings to understand how folklore contributes to the development of character education.
4. **Participants and Context.** The study involved educators from early childhood education institutions (PAUD) in South Kalimantan, parents of young children, and cultural experts familiar with Kalimantan folklore. The cultural and educational context of South Kalimantan was considered a crucial element in understanding the relevance and effectiveness of the BEKANTAN model.
5. **Trustworthiness and Validity.** To ensure the credibility of the findings, the researchers applied triangulation by cross-verifying data from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Peer debriefing and member checks were also conducted to validate interpretations and conclusions.

6. **Ethical Considerations.** The research adhered to ethical standards, ensuring informed consent from all participants, maintaining confidentiality, and respecting the cultural heritage of Kalimantan.

By employing this qualitative methodology, the study effectively uncovers the potential of Kalimantan folklore as a resource for character education and provides insights into how educational institutions can integrate local wisdom into teaching practices.

4 Result and Discussion

The research delves into how local cultural narratives, particularly those from Kalimantan, can be used to improve character education in early childhood. This study focuses on the development of a learning model that integrates traditional folklore into the curriculum to foster character development in young children. By utilizing stories from Kalimantan's rich cultural history, the research aims to establish a framework where children not only learn about moral values but also experience these values through stories that resonate with their cultural backgrounds.

The research highlights that Kalimantan folklore, which is rich in moral lessons and cultural values, offers a unique and effective tool for early childhood educators. The model developed in this study is centered around the idea that storytelling, specifically folklore, serves as a powerful medium for instilling essential character traits such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, empathy, and respect. The stories, often passed down through generations, carry deep moral messages that align with the goals of character education—helping children understand right from wrong, building social consciousness, and forming ethical behaviors.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes that incorporating these traditional stories into early childhood education not only benefits the children in terms of moral development but also provides them with a sense of connection to their cultural roots. As children hear and engage with folklore from their own culture, they gain a deeper understanding of their heritage, which fosters a sense of pride and belonging. These stories provide a mirror through which children can see their cultural identity reflected, reinforcing the importance of their traditions and values in their day-to-day lives.

In terms of educational management, the study identifies the need for a structured approach to incorporating folklore into learning models. Teachers need to be trained to use these stories effectively to promote character education. This involves not only storytelling but also guided discussions, activities, and reflections that help children internalize the values presented in the stories. By creating an environment where these values are consistently reinforced, both in the classroom and at home, children are more likely to adopt them as part of their behavior.

The research also points to the emotional and cognitive benefits of using folklore in character education. The emotional aspect of storytelling helps children connect with

the characters and situations, fostering empathy and emotional intelligence. At the same time, the cognitive aspect—such as understanding the structure of the stories, recalling events, and recognizing moral lessons—enhances their thinking skills and ability to make ethical decisions.

The study concludes by proposing that the management of early childhood character education can be greatly enhanced by incorporating local wisdom through folklore. It suggests that such an approach provides a holistic educational experience that not only develops children's moral and ethical framework but also nurtures their social skills, emotional intelligence, and cultural identity. As such, using Kalimantan folklore in the classroom can serve as an effective and meaningful way to cultivate well-rounded, culturally grounded, and morally responsible individuals from an early age.

As a nation that values character education, it is essential to establish foundational principles for defining character values. Character education helps shape morals and behaviors that distinguish one individual from another [46]. Research has shown that folklore is an effective medium for instilling character values in early childhood, highlighting the importance of consistent practice and positive role models in nurturing children's character development.

The BEKANTAN Model (Development of Early Childhood Character Learning Models Based on Local Wisdom of Kalimantan Folklore) focuses on performance, eliciting, and constructing narratives, rather than merely presenting the stories themselves [47]. This model uses storytelling as a tool for communication and knowledge sharing. Through stories, children are not only entertained but also gain valuable moral lessons that help to develop their understanding of good behavior.

In the learning process, the BEKANTAN model instills character and moral values by teaching children about proper conduct, while also providing examples of positive characters through the narratives. For example, in the Kalimantan folktales "Semangka Emas" (Golden Watermelon) and "Putri Junjung Buih" (Princess Junjung Buih), children can learn important virtues such as compassion, hard work, and respect.

For instance, in "Semangka Emas," the character Derma shows compassion by caring for a sad parakeet, teaching children the importance of helping others. Derma's actions reflect a caring attitude that extends not only to people but also to animals and the environment. Teachers can use Derma's example to instill the importance of kindness, sensitivity to the needs of others, and the value of helping those in need. Additionally, the story of Derma highlights the concept of compassion and selflessness, reinforcing the idea that helping others with sincerity is crucial for a harmonious society.

Moreover, Derma exemplifies the values of diligence and hard work. In the story, Derma plants watermelon seeds given by the parakeet, tending to the plants with care and consistency. This behavior teaches children the significance of perseverance and

the effort required to achieve goals. Hard work, dedication, and discipline are key virtues that the BEKANTAN model seeks to cultivate in young learners.

By incorporating these narratives and lessons into early childhood education, the BEKANTAN model plays a crucial role in shaping children's character, instilling essential moral values that they can carry into their daily lives. Through the repetition of these stories and the accompanying character education, children learn not only the importance of good behavior but also how to apply these values in real-world situations.

a) Respect for Others

Respecting others and appreciating their gifts is a fundamental aspect of character education, reflecting gratitude for the Creator. In the story, Derma accepts the watermelon seeds from the Parakeet with gratitude, recognizing them as a token of appreciation for the care and kindness he has shown. This demonstrates that when we live with goodness, we receive positive rewards in return. As part of managing children's character education, it is essential for parents and educators to instill the value of gratitude and respect from an early age. Encouraging children to engage in positive actions—such as praying, studying, or helping others—helps them develop a sense of respect for both people and the world around them. By teaching these values, we guide children to live a life of kindness, which in turn enhances their spiritual growth and sense of responsibility to others, both from a human and divine perspective [48].

b) Positive Attitude

Fostering a positive attitude in children is key to their character development. Unlike Takir, who displays stinginess and negative thoughts, Derma shows compassion by helping the Parakeet when it is in distress. Through this act, Derma learns that kindness brings rewards, as the Parakeet gives him a watermelon seed filled with gold and gems. This teaches children that kindness, even in the face of adversity or ill treatment, brings positive outcomes. It is essential for children's character education to encourage a positive outlook, a sense of goodwill, and the importance of treating others with kindness, regardless of their behavior. Instilling these attitudes helps children develop empathy, love for others, and positive interpersonal relationships, all of which are crucial to their moral growth [43], [49].

c) The Value of Cooperation and Togetherness

The concept of cooperation and unity is vividly demonstrated in the tale of "Putri Junjung Buih," where Lambung Mangkurat enlists the help of his retainers to fulfill the request of Princess Junjung Buih. This collaborative effort showcases the importance of working together to achieve common goals. In managing children's character education, it is vital to instill the value of teamwork and mutual support, which are foundational to the Indonesian cultural philosophy of *gotong royong*. *Gotong royong* emphasizes working together selflessly and voluntarily, a concept deeply rooted in Indonesian tradition. This spirit of cooperation not only helps children learn the value of collaboration but

also teaches them that collective effort leads to shared success, fostering a sense of community and mutual respect [49].

d) Religious Value

Religious values play a crucial role in shaping an individual's character, particularly in the context of children's character education, as they define a person's relationship with God. These values encompass aspects such as worship, gratitude, patience, and others [50]. In the story of "Putri Junjung Sirih," the character of Prince Mangkurat demonstrates patience while waiting for his child, showing his dedication to prayer each day in hopes of being blessed with offspring. For young children, religious values can be instilled through practices such as praying before learning, asking God for ease in their studies. This practice, embedded within the framework of the BEKANTAN model and story texts, helps children connect with spiritual values from an early age and fosters an understanding of worship as part of their daily life.

e) Discipline Value

Discipline is a fundamental character value that encourages an individual to follow rules and regulations in an orderly manner, which is crucial for future success [51]. Teaching discipline from an early age helps children understand the importance of following schedules and adhering to rules. This concept is illustrated in the story of "Putri Junjung Buih," where Paduka Patmaraga commands Datuk Pujung to complete a task within an hour, emphasizing the value of time management and discipline. Without discipline, the consequences could be severe, as seen in the story. In the context of children's character education, stories like these provide practical examples of discipline, which educators can use to instill the habit of punctuality and responsibility in children. Furthermore, using real-life examples and storytelling encourages children to internalize these values and practice them in their daily routines. Habit formation is critical in early childhood, as it allows children to spontaneously engage in positive behaviors, such as helping others and following rules. Thus, teaching discipline through repeated practice and exemplification is vital for children's moral and character development.

Overall, children's character education can be enriched by incorporating folklore from Kalimantan that highlights key virtues such as honesty, responsibility, creativity, and independence. Teachers can enhance the effectiveness of these lessons by creatively reading and interpreting the stories, allowing children to absorb and apply these values in their everyday lives [52].

Integrating folklore into the BEKANTAN model serves as an impactful tool in managing children's character education, providing valuable experiences during the learning process. This approach supports cognitive development and is instrumental in advancing children's language skills. Folklore, deeply rooted in community culture and history [53], is recognized as an effective educational medium due to its rich representation of diverse cultural values Novianti, N. (2022)[54] emphasize that

folklore's narratives reflect the unique cultural and historical richness of Indonesia's regions, making it an ideal resource for character education.

Through folklore, children can develop cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills while internalizing moral messages embedded within the characters and storylines. Indarti (2017) [55] and Setyawan et al. (2017) [56] highlight four critical aspects of storytelling in education: enhancing memory retention of critical information, promoting role-play understanding, sequencing events logically, and instilling moral and ethical values by distinguishing good and bad behaviors. These elements collectively help in building a child's moral compass.

Implementing the BEKANTAN model in early childhood education enhances learning outcomes by fostering motivation and encouraging positive behavioral changes [57]. Early childhood is a phase for exploration, play, and development, and the integration of local wisdom through regional folklore introduces children to the cultural and moral excellence of their surroundings while shaping their behavior [58]. This approach ties character education to local wisdom, embedding values such as mutual help, sincerity, generosity, independence, teamwork, honesty, and responsibility, as illustrated through stories like *Timun Emas* and *Putri Junjung Buih* [59].

The success of such character education is influenced by several factors, including school support, the availability of appropriate facilities, and a conducive learning environment [60]. Local wisdom plays a crucial role in kindergarten learning by ensuring themes and activities resonate with the regional culture, promoting holistic child development [61], [62]. By aligning themes with cultural values, educators can create meaningful learning experiences that stimulate children's growth and preserve regional heritage [63].

Furthermore, integrating local wisdom into the educational framework not only enriches the learning experience but also fosters character values that are vital for societal development [64]. As Jaedun (2020) [65] and Ramdhani (2019) [58] argue, preserving cultural traditions within education counters the influence of external forces such as technological advancements and westernization, which can otherwise dilute local values. By prioritizing regional strengths in early education, schools can ensure the long-term success of character education programs [46]. Thus, folklore and local wisdom serve as powerful instruments in nurturing well-rounded individuals who embody both moral and cultural excellence.

5 Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of managing character education in early childhood through the development of learning models rooted in the local wisdom of Kalimantan culture. The findings reveal that Kalimantan's folklore, legends, and traditional stories, such as *Semangka Emas* and *Putri Junjung Buih*, contain diverse character values that are essential for shaping children's personalities from an early age.

These values include helping others, being generous, sincere in assisting, avoiding greed, independence, teamwork, discipline, honesty, democracy, and responsibility. The BEKANTAN model, designed based on Kalimantan's local wisdom, has proven effective in instilling these values through storytelling, habituation, and exemplary behaviors. This model not only enhances children's understanding of moral values but also motivates them to apply positive behaviors in daily life. Managing character education using this model requires comprehensive support, including school commitment, adequate facilities, and the creation of a conducive learning environment. In conclusion, implementing learning based on local wisdom through Kalimantan folklore enriches children's learning experiences and supports the development of strong, virtuous characters. With proper management, this model can serve as an effective strategy for sustainable and relevant early childhood character education.

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