STUDENT LEARNING, CHILDHOOD & VOICES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Storytelling through “Wayang Golek” puppet show: Practical ways in incorporating character education in early childhood

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Abstract: Although moral or character education has been widely documented in early childhood education curriculum, the inclusion of character education through storytelling is scarcely undertaken. To fill the void, the present participatory action research aimed at developing practical steps to empower children character in Indonesian kindergarten schooling framed through storytelling with “Wayang Golek” puppet media. Two kindergarten teachers were recruited and 12 kindergarten students ranging from 5 to 6 years old participated in this study. Data of this study were collected primarily from both in and out of classroom observation, classroom interaction record, and photograph analysis. The data of the research were analyzed and interpreted qualitatively through critical discourse analysis as a tool. The findings showcase that practical learning steps including the introduction of themes and character stories, figures of Wayang Golek, storytelling,

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Integrating character education into learning has been widely implemented since early childhood education to develop pupils’ character. This participatory action research aims to empower pupils to internalize the character education mediated by a local puppetry media called Wayang Golek. This research focuses on developing character education values such as responsibility, creativity, healthy behavior, and caring. The data were garnered from the teacher’s observation note, classroom interaction record, and visual artifacts. This research reveals that Wayang Golek was effective in helping pupils internalize character education. Performing Wayang Golek also helps promote meaningful interaction in the classroom and beyond. Finally, engaging pupils in storytelling using Wayang Golek encourages pupils to implement character education in their daily life.
conversations about character education depicted in the content of the story, actualization of character education through either indoor or outdoor play, and reflection on the character development of children were effective in instilling moral values to generate positive responses from children. Thus, the study suggests that storytelling mediated puppet as a pedagogical approach engages students in communicative activities and character building in the early childhood education context.

Subjects: Early Childhood; Classroom Practice; Teaching & Learning

Keywords: character education; early childhood education; storytelling mediated puppet

1. Introduction
Storytelling is inherent with the world of early childhood (Jackman, 2012; Leicester, 2006). While early childhood educators may find it challenging to incorporate the character education in children through storytelling, they are suggested to learn how to become professional storytellers (Jackman, 2012). The importance of storytelling in instilling character education in children is closely related to the purpose of actual education that is character development (Dimerman, 2009; Klann, 2007). Thus, all education activities should lead to character development (Manullang, 2013). While the essence of education is the curriculum (Null, 2011), Arthur (2003) argues that teachers need to translate the curriculum in their teaching practice to help shape the character of the children. This is reasonable because a child with character strength is a future investment (Dimerman, 2009).

From the review of Indonesian latest curriculum document in Early Childhood Education developed and implemented in Indonesia, character education for children includes having healthy behavior, curiosity, creativity, and esthetic features, confidence, discipline, independence, caring, be respectful and tolerant of others, be able to adapt, be responsible, honest, humble, and polite in interacting, productive, creativity, and noble character. This is important in relation to the effort to build a characterized generation, grounded in its philosophy, education is rooted in the culture of the nation to build the life of the nation today and the future (Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Indonesia, 2014).

In the connection with the importance of character education in the curriculum implementation, this study attempted to explore the character education development through storytelling-based pedagogy using the cultural heritage of Indonesia puppetry called Wayang Golek used by the teacher.

2. Literature review

2.1. The superiority of storytelling in incorporating character education
In attempt to develop generation with character strength through learning, of course, many learning methods can be used including storytelling method (Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Indonesia, 2014), and Livo (2003). In the past, storytelling was the main method implemented in the development of early childhood education curriculum (Jackman, 2012; Leicester, 2006; Wright et al., 2008). Children gain many advantages if they hear a lot of stories that it assists children to be able to organize events, experiences, and facts (Jackman, 2012), the ability to hear and speak is well developed, creativity, imagination, and thinking skills will be honed properly (Scott, 2011).

Myriad of previous studies also revealed that storytelling in early childhood learning has been able to construct many aspects of children development (Al-Jafar & Buzzelli, 2004; Livo, 2003; Saracho, 2004). Storytelling will make children happy to learn and know-how to learn (Leicester,
Children will encounter experience and knowledge about the content, characters, the way to tell stories, to read, and to listen to the story (Lowe, 2007). In addition, storytelling can assist teachers to better understand their students, to be more effective in meeting the social and emotional needs of children, and to be able to create a curriculum that is responsive to the needs and interests of children (Wright et al., 2008). Through storytelling, teachers can transmit virtues from one generation to the next (Jackman, 2012). More importantly, storytelling will be able to provide a rich literacy environment for children (Ryakai et al., 2003). In other words, storytelling-based pedagogy helps develop students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Thus, knowing these benefits of storytelling for young learners, it will be appropriate if teachers wisely utilize this storytelling method to instill the values of character in early childhood education setting.

2.2. The relationship between stories and character education

Generally speaking, story has an educational value that is very important for everyone including for young children. In addition, story contains a variety of expressive content, a series of events, and illustration of a character. In the context of learning, the story can include various contexts (Jackman, 2012; Maureen et al., 2018). The story contains a moral message that is useful in shaping the character of children, as in general children tend to interpret the contents of the story (Cremin et al., 2018).

Furthermore, stories touch the nature of humanity. Stories have such power that do not require humans to do anything rather just need to listen to them. The content of the story can cause joy, sadness, questions, longing, and understanding that spontaneously brings the basic pattern of life. Stories can guide us to understand the complexity of life (Livo, 2003; Maureen et al., 2018). In general, the nature of the story always tells what a strong and fundamental human activity is (Livo, 2003).

Through the story content, children will learn about themselves, other people, and the world. Stories can stimulate children’s language development as well as their confidence, encourage exploration of issues that interest them, develop empathy and understanding toward others and the point of view of others, teach about their world of residence, encourage collaborative activities, help develop positive values, promote attitudes and qualities such as justice, tolerance of difference, goddess, and magic of beauty and the existence of the world (Leicester, 2006; Livo, 2003). A good story is an inspiring story that is capable of conveying knowledge, creating superheroes, heroes, and role models. In other words, story is capable of instilling character education (Livo, 2003; Rich, 2008).

2.3. Storytelling using puppet “Wayang Golek”

Storytelling-based pedagogy in early childhood education can be mediated using puppets. Puppets are always popular in early childhood education classrooms. For storytellers, puppets can be an important and effective tool to keep children's attention, engage children to listen, and provide a visual and kinesthetic experience. Puppets can mediate the process of teaching and entertaining children. One type of puppetry that can be used in storytelling is puppet “Wayang Golek” (Jackman, 2012).

Wayang Golek is part of the ancient world of history, and at the same time, it is also a part of the modern world imagination that is known by foreign countries (Jackman, 2012; Nurgiyantoro, 2011; Sayanto, 2010). For this reason, it is very appropriate if Wayang Golek as the cultural heritage of Indonesia is used by teachers as a medium of storytelling. Well-implemented Wayang Golek will build children's interest. In addition, it can be played communicatively in conveying the moral education to the children. Wayang Golek has three-dimensional shapes which resemble a human figure when played (Jackman, 2012; Risa, 2014). Contextually speaking, by utilizing puppet Wayang Golek show, teachers can transfer the philosophical foundation of education as stated
in Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Indonesia (2014) that education is ideally rooted in the nation’s culture to build the life of the nation today and the future.

3. Method

3.1. Research method
The present research employed a participatory action research (PAR). McKay (2006) defines action research as a research that aims to change, particularly in educational context. The goals of the research were twofold:

(a) To explore how Wayang Golek puppet show can be used to teach character education in early childhood education.

(b) To investigate to what extent the use of storytelling mediated puppet was effective to help develop character education of pupils.

This action research is participatory because the researchers collaborated with two teachers in a local kindergarten in West Java, Indonesia. They agreed that they voluntarily participated in this study to gain insight on how storytelling-based pedagogy mediated by Wayang Golek was implemented. This research was conducted 4 days in a week from Monday to Thursday for one semester, excluding semester break and public holidays. Each lesson lasted an hour and a half and was guided through three stages, namely, pre-teaching, while-teaching, and post-teaching stage. The while-teaching activities were designed by introducing themes and stories, telling story based on character education with puppet show media, and reflecting on the content of the story. Furthermore, the activities were followed up by presenting actual character education through playing both in and out of the classroom and ended with reflecting on the activities and strengthening the cultivation of character education to the children. Haslip et al. (2019) argue that “individuals can actualize positive psychology is to more consistently use the character strengths already present in their personality (p. 533).” In other words, the potential positive character of the participating pupils in this study is empowered to strengthen their character focusing on a single character education, namely, the value of caring character.

3.2. Research participants
The present research was collaborative in nature conducted between researchers and two kindergarten teachers of a local kindergarten school. The participating teachers had more than 10 years of experience in teaching kindergarten students. To meet the purpose of this study, as the outsiders, the researchers provided them with a month training on how to compose stories that contained the value of characters that would be implanted in children, to choose puppet characters relevant to the content of the story, and to determine whether the puppet show would be played either as a character or as a figure of the story. They were also trained to design learning tasks as a follow-up of the storytelling in order to create a reflective practice. In addition, 12 children between the ages of 5 and 6 years old (seven females and five males) participated in this study. They were B2 pupils, meaning that they were in the second year and had passed B1 class in the Indonesian kindergarten schooling system. They were nurtured to develop their language skills, socio-emotional skills, cognitive skills, psychomotor skills, art, and spiritual and moral character. Pupils’ engagement during the research was consistently appreciated for their potential. Prior to this study, a formal meeting with the pupils’ parents was conducted and a consent letter detailing the goals of the research and agreement of participating in the research was distributed. From this, the pupils’ parents understood that their children were in a study, the data garnered were confidential, and they could withdraw the study even without any notification. Therefore, they agreed to sign and provide their support to this research and no pupils withdrew until the study ended. Although the children’s photographs were allowed to be taken, their faces were blurred. The researchers greatly considered the issues related to safety and respect of the children’s representation in the photographs (see Ford et al., 2017).
3.3. Data collection and analysis
In this study, approaches to data collection technique were done through classroom observation, classroom interaction record, and photograph analysis as learning artifacts. Through participant observation, researchers have the opportunity to be directly involved in observing the learning process in the classroom. The data of research participant-activities observation during the learning process gained by jotting down the participants’ engagement while the teacher was telling a story, and the response of the children’s activity while playing and learning in actualizing the character value. Meanwhile, classroom interaction record refers to teacher-pupil’s interaction to figure out the children’s response to the story and the attractiveness of the storytelling done by the teacher. It was done during classroom interaction and voice recorded. The classroom interaction guided by questions that followed each story theme. For examples:

1. What’s the character’s name?
2. How is he or she? Is she or he good?
3. What should you do to be like him/her?

The result of classroom interaction record was transcribed and translated into English. The last technique in collecting data is through photography. Photographs were taken during the implementation of the research. Gibson and Brown (2009) pinpoint that the use of photographs is beneficial for “sparking ideas, comparing perspectives and generating alternative analyses” (p. 82). By depicting the photographs during the implementation of teaching and learning using Wayang Golek, it will help researchers to conduct learning evaluation. Additionally, the photographs serve as learning artifacts that help researchers to conduct reflection both on and in action. Finally, all data collected were transcribed and interpreted using critical discourse analysis (CDA). Gibson and Brown (2009) mention an approach employed by Fairclough that CDA can be done “by examining transcribed sections of interactive talk and looking for the types of assumption and ‘social bias’ that can be seen within the exchanges (p. 22).” Thus, the use of CDA is significant for interpretative analysis and to help for coding and theming all of the transcribed data which were later analyzed and interpreted in accordance with the objective of the research.

4. Findings and discussion
Based on the results of analysis, utilizing Wayang Golek to teach character education values in early childhood education has unpacked three major findings in this research, they are 1) internalizing character education through storytelling mediated puppet; 2) promoting meaningful interaction both in the classroom and beyond; and 3) encouraging pupils to implement character education in their daily life.

4.1. Internalizing character education through storytelling mediated puppet
Wayang Golek was chosen as a puppetry media to teach character education because of its uniqueness and popularity in the region. It was also used in teaching the pupils to introduce them with the heritage of local culture. In the classroom, they were engaged in an interactive storytelling practice. They listened to the story and watched the Wayang Golek performance with a great enthusiasm. Two characters of Wayang Golek were chosen, they were Gatotkaca and Cepot. Gatotkaca was a popular character in Mahabarata history which symbolized strengths and braveness. Meanwhile, Cepot was a character which symbolized humor. In every Wayang Golek story, every figure has its own character, namely, good character that is generally referred by society to be model of and model for children in thinking of character values (Hadi, 2015; Nurjyantoro, 2011). The process of developing character education to the young learners is depicted through the following teacher’s notes.
In this picture, two teachers were telling a story using Wayang Golek (cast, Gatotkaca and Cepot). The aim of using the Wayang Golek puppetry media was to give a model as well as to inspire students to learn about the character education value. While the teachers were telling the story, they asked the pupils to listen to the story while watching the Wayang Golek performance. From this picture, it can be seen that the students were interested and enthusiastic in listening to the story told by the teacher, and even were curious to play the puppets. They smiled and built an interaction with the storytellers. (Teacher's observational notes)

From the data of teacher's observational note, it was found out that the use of Wayang Golek has built pupils' interest, joy, and enthusiasm in learning. It also helped exercise pupils' imagination that triggered curiosity. It was successful to get the pupils' attention because “storytelling is a natural way of communicating with young children” (Maureen et al., 2018, p. 372). To support this, teachers should be able to integrate many dimensions including the knowledge dimension regarding the need of children's development and their interests, the content dimension and curriculum development approach, its implementation, and assessment, including the dimensions of the life culture of the community in which the child lives (Cooper, 2009; Gestwicki, 2011; Jackman, 2012; McLachlan et al., 2010). The pupils' attempt to build an interaction with the storytellers indicates the internalization of character education value such as creativity and productivity. The following vignette of teachers-pupils' interaction showed how students could build their understanding of the importance of character education.

Gatotkaca (teacher 1): Hello my lovely pupils, do you think taking care of plants important for our life?
Pupils: Yes ...
Gatotkaca: What do you think Cepot? Do you agree with them?
Cepot (teacher 2): I am not sure Gatotkaca. But why taking care of plants is important for our life? Do you think these lovely pupils know Gatotkaca?
Gatotkaca: Hello dear pupils, do you know how to take care of plants in your house?
Pupil 1: Grow it in the ground
Pupil 2: Water the plant
Cepot: Marvelous!

Vignette 1. Talking about plants
Based on the Vignette 1, it can be seen that the use of Wayang Golek was effective to engage pupils in meaning-making activities among the storytellers and pupils. The pupils could be encouraged to pool ideas on how to talk about taking care of environment. Thus, framing story scenario used by the teachers could engage pupils in such an interactive story that internalizes character education of care value. To clarify, stories need to be authentic, related to what is taught, and meaningful to the children involved in learning (Cremin et al., 2018; Sale, 2015).

4.2. Promoting meaningful interaction beyond the classroom
School is a miniature of social enterprise. Pupils engaged in everyday interaction with their classmates and teachers. In early childhood education, particularly, pupils need to be nurtured on how to build interaction, maintain the interaction, and interact meaningfully situated in the classroom and beyond. For this reason, it is important for children to play in the outdoor environment as stated by Moser and Martinsen (2010), Fjæroft (2001), and Garrick (2009) that the outdoor environment serves as a pedagogical landscape for pupils to play, learn, and develop. In this research, the teachers invited the pupils to learn outdoor so that they could experience more authentic space whenever they learned the topic about environment. The teachers chose the two characters of Wayang Golek, namely, Cepot and Semar. As previously mentioned, Cepot was known as a humorous character, while Semar was a character which symbolized a wise man. In this learning stage, the pupils were encouraged to talk about how to take care environment. The process of building interactive storytelling was described through the following teacher’s observational notes.

In this picture, a teacher was telling a story using Wayang Golek (cast, Semar and Cepot) outside of the classroom. In telling the story, the teacher acted the character of Cepot and Semar symbolizing persons who cared with the environment used to inspire students to build the character education of care. While the teacher was telling the story, the pupils were asked to listen to the story and observed the performance. From the picture, it can be seen that the pupils were sitting in a circle listening to the story attentively. The teacher as the storyteller frequently asked them questions and sang a song along with the pupils in the middle of the story to build interaction. The pupils responded eagerly to the questions and sang the song together.

From the teacher observational note, it indicates that the teachers picked the characters of Wayang Golek which fit to the topic of the story. For example, to support the story theme of environmental care, the teachers picked the character of Semar which was known for his wisdom. It was also expected that by choosing such character, the pupils could be inspired by the message given. In addition to this, while children were playing and learning outdoor, they looked very happy and active to engage in the
actualization of their moral education. This was evidence that stimulating children to play and study outdoor means providing high-quality educational services to children (Broda, 2011; Bilton, 2010; Day & Midbjer, 2007; Dimerman, 2009; Moser & Martinsen, 2010). Of course, while children were playing outdoor teachers played a role as a helper in providing understanding that children can make to their surroundings (Al-Jafar & Buzzelli, 2004; Ryokai et al., 2003). The pupils’ interaction during Wayang Golek performance was also recorded in the following vignette.

Cepot (teacher 1): Semar, I was worried that flood would occur since the river was littered by some children. It’s dangerous.

Semar (teacher 2): I see ... but I believe those children have not learned about the importance of keeping environment. If they are aware of it, they won’t do it. Hello dear students, do you agree with me?

Pupils: Yes, Mr. Semar.
Pupil 1: What is flood?
Pupil 2: Why is it dangerous?
Cepot: Flood is when you have much water around you. It is dangerous because it can damage people’s house and hurt human
Semar: Water becomes our friend when it is little, but it becomes a monster when it is big. Do you like a monster kids?
Pupil 3: No, I am afraid of a monster
Cepot: Haha ... I am the monster
Pupils: Nooo ...

Vignette 2. Talking about environment

The vignette shows that the use of Wayang Golek, cast Cepot and Semar, to mediate the storytelling practice. Questions were used by the storyteller to engage students in an interaction. In addition, the storytellers employed cause and effect relation to channel ideas. Lexical items used also emphasized through which the targeted message was delivered. From this analysis, it can be seen that the power of questions and lexical items plays a significant role to build communication and maintain interaction.

4.3. Encouraging pupils to practice character education

This study attempted to help the children learnt from the story and did what they learnt, also known as learning by doing. In addition, the goal of this study is to encourage pupils to practice the character education from what they heard from the story. Widodo et al. (2018, p. 134) argue that “one of the educational goals spelled out in Indonesia’s educational policy and curriculum documents is to cultivate students’ character virtues and moral values.” In this respect, nurturing students’ character virtues and moral values can be done through providing students with activities around the school environment such as watering flowers, cleaning the schoolyard, and planting trees. These activities contain character virtues and moral values such as environmental sensitivity, social awareness, friendliness, responsibility, and cultural identity. For this reason, it is teachers’ responsibility to give broad opportunity for students outside of the classroom to practice good character through service program, clubs, and peer tutoring (DeRoche & Willimi, 1998; Lickona, 1991; Ryan & Bohlin, 1999).

In the picture, four pupils were outside of the classroom. Two pupils were watering the plants, while two other paying attentions to them to learn watering process. They were working and learning together to achieve one goal, care about the environment. From the picture, it could be seen that the pupils were enthusiastic about the activity. Two pupils were smiling and two other were waiting for their plants to be watered. This activity promoted sense of belonging and showed the implementation of character value of care towards environment after the teacher told a story using Wayang Golek (Cast, Si Cepot and Gatatkoca) in a story of “Alzena Suka Merawat Tanaman” (Azalena likes to take care of plants).
Based on teacher’s observation note, it shows that pupils implemented the character values in the form of watering the plants. In this respect, students not only learned character education from the story mediated by Wayang Golek but also acted out the character education in an authentic way. This meaningful experience becomes learning resources for both teachers and students. Dewey (1940) argued that it is always “transactional,” that is, our experience is part of what it means to “be in the world,” necessarily connecting us with our past, through the present, and into the future. With this in mind, students learned to link what they have learnt from the story with what they are doing (watering plants: caring) and what they will benefit from watering plants in the future. By doing so, students learn to reflect their experience implicitly. Additionally, Ord (2012) contended that to make experience educative it must be meaningful, and the educator must make deliberate attempts to understand the meaning of the experiences of those he is attempting to educate. The pupils’ interaction during learning—to-care activity was also recorded in the following vignette.

Pupil 1: Let’s water the plant.
Pupil 2: Yes, please water this plant (pointing at plant in front of him)
Pupil 3: How about my plant?
Pupil 1: Just a minute, friend.
Pupil 3: OK ... never mind.
Cepot (Teacher 1): Hello my lovely students ....
Pupils: Hi ......
Cepot: Gatot Kaca, Why do we need to water the plants?
Gatot Kaca Teacher 2: Because we need plants and plants are source of oxygen which is important in our daily lives. Is it right, students?
Pupils: Yes .......
Cepot (Teacher 1): Do you like watering plants darling?
Pupils: Yes ........we like it
Gatot Kaca (Teacher 2): Why darling?
Pupil 4: My school becomes green
Cepot (Teacher 1): Well done, honey ...

The vignette indicates that the use of Wayang Golek, casted Cepot and Gatot Kaca, scaffolded students to understand the message (caring) depicted in the talk. The storyteller actively engaged in plants watering activity to build students’ awareness about the environment as well as train students to think critically. From this analysis, it can be seen that students’ action “watering the
plants” symbolizing the character education “caring or environmental sensitivity” from which students were provided with wider chances to practice good character. Haslip et al. (2019) suggest that teachers can involve pupils in many meaningful ways to practice the character strengths.

5. Conclusion
This paper has presented in what ways character virtues and values are internalized among pupils through Wayang Golek-mediated storytelling. The study reveals that Wayang Golek-mediated storytelling activity provides pupils with important moral values that pupils can learn from such as friendliness, democracy, environmental sensitivity, charity, patriotism, humanism, etc. This implies that teachers and students can learn such values from story. Additionally, Wayang Golek used as media was able to attract pupils’ attention and to engage them actively in storytelling process. They showed enthusiasm and participation in active and interactive ways. The present study also demonstrates that character education can be meaningfully practiced out of the classroom for example, by watering plants together which represents the value of “caring” and “friendliness.” Pedagogically speaking, the pupils engaged in the process of learning by doing mediated by the puppetry media such as Wayang Golek. This evidence has pedagogical implications that in-service kindergarten teachers can consider. First, it is important for teachers to use a story to teach pupils such values and consider using puppet, e.g., Wayang Golek as media to tell the story in an attractive way so that pupils can actively engage in character virtues and values construction process. Additionally, teachers are encouraged to provide students with a wider opportunity to practice character education through meaningful activity both inside and outside the classroom. By providing pupils with these meaningful experiences, they are encouraged to learn from their past experience and link it with present and future life. With this in mind, it is expected that they will learn to reflect and to learn the character values based on the experiences gained.

In spite of the study merits, this cannot be used to overvalue the pedagogical approach employed considering time and scope limitation. Therefore, future longitudinal research on how puppetry media can be used to facilitate the development of pupils’ character strengths is worth future investigation. Moreover, a study on how puppetry media can be used to engage pupils in storytelling practice to develop pupil’s socio-cultural awareness, for example, can also be considered.

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