Children's Good Character Development with Traditional Literature for Conveying Moral Values

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This article presents the role of traditional literary works in shaping children's moral values, as an effort to form children's good character. This study is a library research combined with descriptive-qualitative analysis techniques. The data collection techniques used include documentation and reference digging to explore the moral values contained in traditional literary, in order to form a child's good character. It was found that literary works are transmitted through oral traditions in Indonesia, and parents deliver the literary work to their children while they are sleeping or preparing for bed. The school teaches literature as a form of local wisdom that must be taught by the teacher. The intensity of the delivery of literary works, both at home and at school, makes it quite a significant influence on the formation of children's moral values. Each region has its own local wisdom. This local wisdom serves in a literary work in the form of myths, legends, animal stories, fairy tales, puppet stories and folk songs. Traditional literature is not only delivered orally, but parents and teachers also provide conclusions or draw the red thread of each story, informing the children that this story teaches lessons which are to be emulated. Myths, legends, stories of animals, fairy tales, puppet stories and folk songs are often not explored in their moral wisdom or moral values, even though there are valuable moral values to be found. This article presents how moral values contained in traditional literature can shape children's good characters.

Keywords: *Moral Values, Traditional Literature, and Children's Good Character.*

Introduction

Childhood is a period of development where children's 'black and white' or 'right and wrong' is determined by three basic educational entities: parents, the environment, and the school. If the three education bodies provide inappropriate education, it will certainly educate children with a discourteous personality.

Some figures, such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Freud and Maria Montessori, have explained how important childhood is in character building, because that phase is the phase of development.

According to Havighurst (1972), the developmental phase in children is divided into two components. Namely, the age of 1–6 years is a period referred to as early childhood, and ages 7–12 years constitutes a period referred to as late childhood. He explained that the development of the period "Early Childhood" includes: learning to walk and speak, understand gender, preparing to read, learning to distinguish between right and wrong actions, and developing awareness. Havighurst continues that, learning activities to read, write and count (M3) are a task of future development or occur in the "Late Childhood" period.

In both of these growth periods, traditional literature began to be introduced to children. It was delivered by parents at home through bedtime tales, as well as by school, through Indonesian language lessons which were often tucked into local wisdom through folktales that were taught by teachers at school.

This article will attempt to review the various kinds of traditional literature, as well as the moral values contained in each of the traditional literature. This is undertaken in the hope that with the introduction of traditional literature, we will be able to shape the behaviour and character of students in accordance with the moral message contained in every traditional literary work. Traditional literature in the form of children's stories can be used as media to internalise values to students (Zhang & Morrison, 2010).

The data collection techniques in this study are documentation and library research (Schwandt, 1996). The researcher collected a number of traditional literature consisting of various types, such as myth story, legend story, animal stories, fairy tales, the tales of *wayang*, and folk songs.

Each of the traditional literature mentioned above have their own characteristics in each region and country. Consequently and because there are so many myth stories, legend stories, animal stories, fairy tales, the tales of *wayang*, and folk songs in Indonesia, the

researcher has only taken a portion of the traditional literature which is popular in the community.

Among the traditional literature that is popular in the community are Dewi Sri; Robin Hood; the fairy tales of mouse deer competing with snails, stealing cucumbers, and being with crocodiles; the origin of Tangkuban Perahu mountain; Ciung Wanara; red onion and garlic; Timun Emas; Mahabrata and Ramayana; and songs of *gundhul-gundhul pacul* and *sluku-sluku bathok* (Mu'ammar, 2019).

After the traditional literature was collected (Huberman & Miles, 2012), the researcher explored the various moral values contained in the traditional literature above because traditional literature always contains moral values (Sujinah., Mu'ammar, Affandy, & Supriyanto, 2019). After moral values are explored, moral values are instilled in children after the telling of traditional literary stories, and the parents make lessons that can be learned from stories. Why does it have to be done? Because, children cannot conclude well from every story that parents tell. Therefore, parents must help children to draw the common thread or what lessons can be used as wisdom, so that children follow the good and avoid the wrong examples (Sujinah., Muammar, & Affandy, 2018).

Knowing Traditional Literature

Definitively, literature is distinctive writing with the use of distinctive words, writings that operate in a distinctive manner and demand specific readings (Mills & Friesen, 1992). Through the choice of words and their unique delivery of various human conditions, the stories shape our understanding and insight. According to Riris K Toha-Sarumpet, in fact, we can be more human because of literary works; knowing ourselves, others, the environment, and various life problems (Sarumpet & Riris, 2017).

Self-recognition, others, the environment, and various problems will occur only if there is good involvement between books or literary reading with the reader. This means that the reading experience that gives birth to knowledge is also a demand for that involvement. That is literature, a story about life that can humanise humans (Sarumpet & Riris, 2017; Beresneva & Vnutskikh, 2018).

Meanwhile, traditional literature is a form of public expression of the past, which is generally delivered orally (Mitchell, 2003: 228). In human history, we always need facilities to express and convey moral messages. At that time, writing was known as writing, so oral expressions are the most effective to convey the moral messages, and one of them is through traditional literature (McGale, Halford, Harrold, & Boyland, 2016).

On the other hand, traditional literature is a form of verbal speech that emerges and develops from generation to generation, inadvertently to express various ideas that have appeared before. Because it is only inherited orally, Saxby (1987: 92) states that this literature category is a traditional character and at the same time, it is personal. It is called traditional because it originates from or is derived from folklore that has existed for generations. However, this literary story is also personal, because every storyteller has the freedom to choose various forms of language according to his sense (Kirk et al., 2013).

Knows the Culture through Traditional Literature

A developed nation is not a nation that forgets local culture (Soerjoatmodjo, 2015). A developed nation is precisely a nation that preserves local culture, and local culture can be known through traditional literary reading.

Literature can be seen as a culture in action (Rahmawati, Yahiji, Mahfud, Alfin, & Koiri, 2018), and reading traditional literature originates from Java and Sunda. For example, it essentially means learning the Javanese and Sundanese culture through literature. Therefore, by reading literature of a group of society and nation, it can be said to read and study that nation's culture (Yahiji, Mahfud, & Mu'ammar, 2019).

Through traditional literature, as if we were deployed directly to the situation of the social culture of a particular nation society, one can obtain various examples of the manifestation of the operationalisation of cultural concepts in the attitudes and behaviour of daily life, both verbally and non-verbally (Mason, Do, Wang, & Dunton, 2019).

At present, there are abundant varieties of traditional storybooks from various parts of the world. This indicates that by reading and learning traditional stories from various parts of the world, in addition to obtaining the pleasure of reading stories, knowledge, insight and understanding of the culture of the community will be obtained (Norton & Norton, 1994). It means, in the provision of various readings from various parts of the country and the world, it provides opportunities for children to plant and develop multicultural insights that are cross cultural in nature, because literature is an important source in understanding various cultures and at the same time, instiling awareness in oneself that there are many other cultures out there, besides our own culture (Mu'ammar, 2013).

Informing Moral Values with Traditional Literature

In this section, the author will describe the kinds of traditional literature, along with examples, and the role of each traditional literature in forming the moral values of students.

Although there are many kinds of traditional literary forms, the most important essence of all is the content of the meanings, messages, and/or morals offered by the various types of stories. Understanding the content of the story is far more important than just understanding the differences in the types or genres of traditional literature. Below, the author describes six kinds of traditional literature, as well as the moral values offered by each traditional literature in shaping the moral values of students.

Informing Moral Values Through Myth Story

According to Lukens (2003), myths are something that is believed by a particular nation or society which essentially presents supernatural powers. The truth of the story of the myth itself is questionable, especially through the perspective of rationality today (Eidinow, 2016), but generally, society accepts that truth without questioning it. In Western literature, myths are often associated with classical Greek mythology, which raises many stories about gods (Zhao & Romero Arenas, 2019).

Many myths originating and residing in Java are related to the gods of *Wayang* figures. *Wayang* is the oldest traditional Javanese story, even since prehistoric times, so it is only natural that the *Wayang* characters become myths and legends. Other examples include the myths about Dewi Sri (the goddess of fertility), who descended on the world and was chased by Kalam Gumarang. Dewi Sri then condemned her to become a wild boar, and wild pigs today like to destroy crops, especially rice, in retaliation to Goddess Sri.

Examples of myths that come from the Malays on the Malay peninsula (now Malaysia) include a story that explains why there are many tall trees on the river banks of the Malaysian jungle (Fang, 2018). It is said, that in the jungles of Malaya, inhabited by giant countrymen, was a giant named Kelambi; he was stupid but evil, and people felt threatened. People were tricked to cut bamboo and let it stand upright. Kelambi was frightened because he thought there was another giant that was big and capable of cutting the bamboo. So, he ran to the horizon by inviting everyone. Not wanting to be invited, they were bewitched and became trees. That is why there are many tall and large trees on the banks of the river in Malaya.

The story of the myth above is certainly not an empirical thing, something that cannot be verified scientifically. However, mythical stories are passed down by parents to their children verbally. There are moral values from each of the stories above, which parents want to instil in their children. For example, in regard to the story of a giant on the peninsula of Malaya, the ancestors of the past wanted to convey the message that being large in the physical sense is not enough, if he is not smart. By being big physically but small in mind (stupid), one will be easily defeated by small people that are big in mind (smart).

Informing Moral Values Through Legend Story

The difference between myths and legends is never clear; both display interesting stories with great characters outside the limits of normal human abilities. However, myths are often associated with gods or supernatural powers which are beyond human reach. Otherwise, even though they present great figures, legends do not associate these figures with or as gods or supernatural powers, but with real characters, events, or places that have historical truths (Lukens, 2003). Therefore, people often regard legends as historical stories even though the fact, that is considered a fact, is still often questioned.

An example of a legend is the story of Robin Hood, which has been filmed in several versions. Robin Hood was a historical figure who lived during the reign of King Arthur in England. Another example is the historic sinking of the Titanic at the beginning of the twentieth century; a story regarding a luxury cruise ship which has also been filmed and is now considered a legend.

The legend story also has values that parents want to instil in their children, such as the legend of Robin Hood. Although he likes to steal, behind it all, he fights for the welfare of the small people. It is not the stealing behaviour that you want to instil in children, but the caring for and protecting the weak behaviour; they are the messages that they want to convey.

Informing Moral Values through Animal Stories

Animal stories or fables are one of the forms of traditional story that displays animals as characters. Animal stories are most popular with children among various types of traditional literature. The animals can think and interact like humans; they have logic and can feel, speak, behave, and so on, like humans.

The purpose of the animal story is clear; to provide moral messages (Huck, Helper & Hickman, 1987; Mitchell, 2003). There are many examples of animal stories, but strangely, there are several stories of animals that are similar to the stories of animals from around the world (Fang, 2018). For example, the story of mouse deer competing with snails is found in Java, Malay, India and Europe and the only difference is the character of the animal. In India, the race takes place between turtles and eagles, while in Europe, it occurs between turtles and rabbits.

Although the figures portray differently, they still have the same moral message. That is, they should not act arrogantly and belittle others (Lee & Jung, 2019). A mouse deer, because he felt he could run fast, before the finish he accidentally slept to wait for the snail. However,

because he slept too well, the snail walked slowly and approached the finish line first. Seeing the snail finish first and being defeated by a snail, the deer finally admitted his arrogance. This moral value is instilled in children by parents so that later when they are successful, they should not be arrogant when they are capable, and they should never underestimate others, because everyone has their own strengths (LaSala & Abbot Eng, 2014).

Informing Moral Values Through Fairy Tales

Fairy tales are one of the folktales that are quite diverse in scope (Masmuzidin, Jiang, & Wan, 2012). All the old stories, including the three types of stories aforementioned above, are often just called fairy tales. For example, dongeng si kancil mencuri mentimun (tales of mouse deer steal cucumbers), si kancil dan buaya (mouse deer with crocodiles), asal usul terjadinya gunung tangkuban perahu (the origin of Mount Tangkuban Perahu), Ciung Wanara, bawang merah dan bawang putih (Red Onion and Garlic), Timun Emas, and so on.

The term fairy tale can be understood as a story that doesn't really happen and often doesn't make sense in many ways. From this perspective, fairy tales can be seen as fantasy stories; stories that follow fantasy power even though they seem strange, and even though logically it is not acceptable (Nurgiyantoro, 2018: 198).

In addition, generally, fairy tales are not bound by place and time and can occur anywhere and at anytime. This can be seen in the use of the opening words of the timers such as: "in ancient times", "syahdan in ancient times", "at that time", "in ancient times when animals could still speak competent like humans", and others. Likewise, with the setting of a place that is often called: "in the inter-country between", "in a fairyland", "somewhere on the edge of the forest", and others.

However, fairy tales still have the mission of planting moral values within students.

Informing Moral Values through the tales of Wayang

Wayang is a heroic story that adheres to two major works; namely, Ramayana and Mahabrata. The original text of the two stories was written in Sanskrit, and after entering Java, it was then adapted and edited into Old Javanese (Malik, Abidin, & Pramono, 2020). At the same time, it added and was adapted to stories and legends that had become populist at that time, and then the Javanese version of Mahabrata and Ramayana (Nurgiyantoro, 2018: 25). The two works are masterpieces and are now seen as a noble traditional art.

Puppet stories are more inherited through the media, especially shadow puppet shows, rather than through text. Puppet stories are also a condition with moral values; a war between good

and bad, and victory will always be in favour of goodness, and people who have good intentions will certainly reap a victory.

In the story of Mahabrata, the characters with good character are represented through the figures of the Pandavas and their allies. For example, the eldest of the Pandavas, Yudistira, has a very honest character and never lies to anyone about anything. Likewise, with the four younger siblings and the sons of the Pandawa family, they always fight crime, be helpful, dislike, like to seek knowledge, be honest, be faithful to promises, and others who have positive connotations. Meanwhile, the evil characters are represented through the figures of Kurawa and their allies. A wise person and strategist is likened to Krishna, while a person who is evil and likes to persuade towards evil, is likened to Durna (Nurgiyantoro, 2018: 208).

These good and bad conflicts through these two groups are the main basis for the wayang story, which is about the struggle for the country. The Astina State, which belonged to the Pandawa family, was controlled by the Kurawa family. To reclaim the State, it required a major war called the Bharatayuda war. That is, a war among fellow descendants of Bharata.

Informing Moral Values through folk songs

The last traditional literature is folk songs. There are many people who love, especially in Indonesia, and almost every region has its own folk songs. As one of the traditional forms of art, in general, folk songs are unknown to the creator, because when the song is created, a sense of togetherness is still far more important than individual interests.

Folk songs are also sometimes not written down and are instead inherited from generation to generation through an oral tradition. In general, the members of the community who own the songs have a very deep sense of belonging to the various songs in their area. Therefore, folk songs are also seen as one of the identities of the supporting community (Arbona & Chireac, 2015).

In various regions, Indonesian community groups can find various folk songs typical of these regions, such as the songs of the Sundanese, Balinese, Bugis, Maluku, Javanese, and others. Folk songs are commonly referred to as tembang, and the songs themselves are of many varieties. Next, I will describe some examples of tembang or folk songs, as well as the values that can be taken and instilled in students.

The Javanese people often make pasemon (parable) in Javanese songs (song, lelagon). For example, in tembang gundhul-gundhul pacul, the complete lyrics are as follows:

Gundhul-gundhul pacul, gembelengan (2x)
Nyunggi-nyunggi wakul, gembelengan (2x)
Wakul glimpang segane dadi sak ratan (2x)

The meaning of the song is a 'pepeling' (warning). If being a leader in accepting the mandate (nyunggi wakul) is not reckless (wrestling), it is not arbitrary, and consequently, later the entire order and rules of society can be damaged, and the state conditions are out of control. (Mu'ammar, 2019: 72-73).

Even in the relationship between man and his God, as well as the obligations of humans while living, there are Javanese songs that are full of meaning. Namely, the song sluku-sluku batok. The complete lyrics are as follows:

Sluku-sluku bathok
Bathoke ela elo
Si rama menyang sala
Oleh-oleh e payung motha
Mak Jentit lolo lobah
Wong mati ora obah
Nek obah medeni bocah
Nek urip golek o duwit

Sluku-sluku bathok, bathoke ela elo, comes from Arabic: *ghuslu-ghuslu bathanaka*; meaning bathe your mind — Wash yourself first before cleansing your soul.

Bathoke ela elo, batine La Ilaha Illallah, means to always say 'dhikr' as a remembrance of Allah, in times of pleasure and in times of difficulty, when healthy and when struck by calamity, because all events that afflict humans must contain wisdom. The *rama menyang sala*, bathe wash, then do the prayer. As a manifestation of the word of allah: "I have not created a jin and a human being except to serve me".

Oleh-olehe paying Motha, La ilaha illaallah hayyun mauta, dhikr to Allah while we are still alive, repent before the coming of death. *Mak jenthit lolo lobah, wong mati ora obah, nek urip medeni bocah. Nek urip golek o dhuwit.* When death picks up, the dead person is only "sak jenthit jenthit" (one topsy-turvy), after that it remains stationary forever. If he moves, he will frighten small children, while if he is still alive, it is his job to make a good and lawful living for his family.

Wewarah, in the form of pasemon, is also found in the meaning of the hoe and consists of three parts. The first part is the hoe itself. The second part is attached to the tip of the hoe, in

the form of an iron circle, where the doran attaches. That part is called the bawak. Lastly, the third part is the doran, the handle of the hoe from the wood itself (Mu'ammar, 2019).

Conclusion

The delivery of traditional literature to children, so far, is quite instrumental in shaping their moral values, as outlined as follows:

First: Traditional literature is taught during the development of children, namely during the "Early Childhood" (1–6 years) and "Late Childhood" (7–12 years) phases. During this development period, children will be very easily formed by the various interactions they experience, both through what they see, who they are with, and what they experience.

Second: The delivery of traditional literature, based on the observations and experiences of the author, is often conveyed by parents as a "bedtime" activity. This time is quite effective in instilling "knowledge" and "doctrines" with children, because at this time, in psychology, children are experiencing waves of "alpha" and "theta". Namely, brainwaves that occur when someone experiences relaxation or starts resting. In this situation, children will be able to easily listen to something and it will penetrate into their memories and not easily be forgotten. In this condition, children are very fast at learning and can easily receive words from others as they are. This brainwave also causes an extraordinary imagination for children.

Third: Growing the value of tolerance and mutual respect early on. By getting to know various traditional literature from various parts of the world, children are automatically getting to know their culture and customs. The occurrence of intolerance actually leads to a person's lack of understanding of the religion and culture of others. If it was introduced in childhood that there are many cultures and customs and also diverse religions, all of which have their own local values and wisdom, undoubtedly, when children become adults, these insights will be easily developed because they have been introduced and educated with diversity since childhood.

Fourth: The delivery of traditional literature to children will be able to preserve local culture and traditions. This is very important; in the midst of an ever-evolving era and advancing technological advances, local culture can be eroded and disrupted. Therefore, traditional literature is highly instrumental in instilling a sense of belonging and love of local culture to the millennial generation, so that they can continue to preserve it in the midst of rapid technological progress.

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