

Early Childhood Character Development Through Literature

Najwa Salsabila¹, Agus Iryana²

¹Department of Indonesian Language, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Banten-Indonesia

²Department of Indonesian Language, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Banten-Indonesia

email correspondence: 2222210085@untirta.ac.id¹, agus.iryana@untirta.ac.id²

ABSTRAK

The role of literature in shaping character and improving children's critical thinking abilities is undeniable. However, interest in literary reading among children today is still worrying. For this reason, further efforts are needed to develop literature teaching in the educational environment. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method that focuses on strategies and methods that can be applied to increase interest in reading literature and develop understanding and appreciation of literature in children. Apart from that, this journal also discusses the important role of Indonesian language teachers in developing literature teaching in early childhood. When literature becomes an inseparable part of the educational curriculum, the role of Indonesian language teachers becomes very vital in guiding children to understand and explore the richness of literature. By understanding effective strategies, teachers can create a learning environment that supports and stimulates children's interest and understanding of literature. Thus, this research provides an important basis for developing curriculum and teaching approaches that are more effective in strengthening young children's interest and appreciation for literature.

Keywords: *Literature; Early Childhood; Character development; Indonesian Language Teacher.*

INTRODUCTION

The definition of literature has been the subject of ongoing debate, reflecting the complexity and depth contained in literary works themselves. According to Rusyana (1982), literature is an imaginative work that reflects a person's expression and appreciation which is manifested in language. Ahmadi (1980) emphasized that literature, as a form of art that uses language as its medium, is a reflection of life, humans and language itself. Meanwhile, Welles & Warren (1956) describe literature as everything that is written, although this definition is considered too broad or too narrow by some experts (Barnet-Berman-Burto, 1967). In this diversity of views, we discover the richness and complexity of literature as a field that continues to develop and inspire. Literature is not just a subject in school; it has an undeniable role in shaping character and enriching children's critical thinking abilities. Through literary works, children can understand more deeply about the culture, history and human values that shape the world around them. More than that, literature also plays an important role in helping children develop critical, analytical and creative thinking skills. However, the trend of low interest in reading literature among young children is a serious problem that needs to be addressed. Several factors that cause this low interest include a lack of access to relevant literary books, a lack of motivation to read, and a lack of learning strategies that can arouse the interest of young children. Therefore, joint efforts need to be made to develop literature teaching in the educational environment.

One approach that can be taken is to increase access to literary books that are diverse and suit children's interests and needs. Through this diversity, it is hoped that children can find literary works that are relevant and interesting to them, thereby encouraging their overall interest in reading. Apart from that, motivation to read also needs to be increased in various ways. Teachers and educators can adopt interesting and inspiring strategies, such as inviting discussions about interesting stories, inviting writers or cultural figures to talk about their literary works, or holding fun reading activities together. In this way, it is hoped that children will feel more motivated to read and explore the world of literature. No less important is the development of interesting and effective learning strategies in

teaching literature to children. These strategies must be able to enrich children's learning experiences, increase their understanding of literary works, and stimulate their interest and appreciation for literature. Some strategies that can be implemented include the use of interactive approaches, the use of technology in learning, and the use of creative and interesting media. Apart from the efforts above, the role of Indonesian language teachers is also very important in developing literature teaching in schools. Teachers must be able to become facilitators who motivate and inspire their students in exploring the world of literature. They also need to understand their children's interests and needs so they can design appropriate and effective learning. In this way, teachers can play a more active role in increasing interest in reading literature and developing children's understanding and appreciation of literature. Overall, developing literature teaching in schools requires joint efforts from various parties, including teachers, teaching staff, parents and other related parties. With directed efforts and strong synergy, it is hoped that interest in reading literature among young children can increase and their understanding and appreciation of literature can develop significantly.

Developing literature teaching in schools is important in maintaining the sustainability and diversity of a nation's cultural and literary heritage. Literature has an undeniable role in shaping character, broadening horizons, and developing children's critical and creative thinking skills. In this context, the theoretical basis for developing literature in schools includes several key concepts that need to be understood and adopted by educational practitioners.

First, Abrams (1981) states that literary works reflect people's lives which are inevitably prepared by the conditions of society and the forces of their time. It is important to understand that literature is not just texts taught in class, but is a reflection of society's life and culture. Thus, literature not only teaches children about stories or poetry, but also opens a window to various values, norms and diverse human experiences. Therefore, approaches to teaching literature must take into account the cultural and social context of young children so that they can relate their experiences to the literary works being studied.

Second, teaching literature should not only focus on presenting theory and analysis, but also involve children actively in the learning process. Various participatory strategies, such as group discussions, role plays, or creative projects, can be used to stimulate children's interest and understanding of literature. This concept emphasizes the importance of collaboration between teachers and children/students in creating a conducive learning environment and encouraging optimal cognitive development and social skills of children.

Third, recognizing the important role of teachers as facilitators and guides in developing appreciation of literature in early childhood. Teachers are not only tasked with delivering material, but must also be able to inspire, provide examples, and create a learning environment that is conducive to the development of children's understanding and appreciation of literature. This requires teachers to continuously improve their knowledge and skills in the field of literature, as well as having the ability to identify and respond to children's individual learning needs. In the context of literature learning, Huda, et al (2009) emphasized that literature not only provides knowledge about literary works themselves, but also expands students' inner space. They argue that through studying literature, schools not only act as institutions that teach skills, but also shape students' characters. Along with this, the Ministry of National Education curriculum (2001) emphasizes that literary appreciation learning aims to develop students' personalities, broaden their life horizons, increase students' knowledge and language skills. Thus, literature learning is expected to make a significant contribution in forming individuals with noble character and a deeper understanding of the world and language.

Lastly, the importance of integrating technology in teaching literature in the current digital era. Technology can be a very useful tool for expanding access to various literary reading sources, facilitating communication and collaboration between children, and creating more interesting and interactive learning experiences.

By understanding and applying it, it is hoped that literature teaching in schools can become more effective and relevant for children, and make a significant contribution in forming a cultured, critical and creative generation.

RESEARCH METHODS

Literature has long been at the core of teaching in schools, but the challenge of maintaining young children's interest in literature and expanding their understanding of literary values is still a major concern in education. This research aims to overcome this challenge by exploring strategies and methods that can increase interest in reading literature and develop young children's understanding and appreciation of literature. In this case, the role of Indonesian language teachers is very important, because they are the main agents in guiding children in understanding and exploring the world of literature. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method as an approach to understand and explore strategies and methods that can be applied in the context of teaching literature to early childhood. A qualitative approach was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of young children's experiences, their perceptions of literature, and the impact of particular teaching strategies on their interests and understanding. It is important to note that literature is not just about reading texts in textbooks, but also about understanding and appreciating the cultural and intellectual richness conveyed through literary works. Therefore, this research also highlights the role of Indonesian language teachers in guiding young children to understand and appreciate literary works from various cultural and historical contexts. When literature becomes an inseparable part of the educational curriculum, Indonesian language teachers have a big responsibility in creating a learning environment that stimulates young children's interest and understanding of literature. Through a deep understanding of effective teaching strategies, teachers can create deep and meaningful learning experiences for their students. It is hoped that this research can provide an important basis for developing curriculum and teaching approaches that are more effective in strengthening young children's interest and appreciation for literature. With a better understanding of successful teaching strategies, teachers can present literature in ways that are engaging and relevant to their students, and strengthen the connection between young children and literary works.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The importance of developing literature teaching in schools is a major highlight in efforts to enrich children's learning experiences. Various steps can be taken to achieve this goal. First, increasing access to literary books by providing collections that are diverse and relevant to children's interests. Second, it is necessary to increase children's motivation to read by creating an environment that stimulates their interest and curiosity in literature. Finally, develop interesting and interactive learning strategies to deliver literary material, such as group discussions, role plays, or the use of technology in learning.

Discussion

By implementing the above strategies, it is hoped that young children's interest and understanding of literature can be significantly increased, as well as creating a learning environment that promotes appreciation of literary values.

A. Efforts To Develop Literature in Early Childhood

1. Increasing Access to Literary Books

The first step is to increase access to literary books. This can be done by enriching the school library with diverse and relevant collections. In addition, ensuring that every child has access to explore various types of literary works according to their interests. Other things include holding literary book exhibitions, implementing literary book lending programs and collaborating with book publishers to get cheap literary book prices.

2. Increase Motivation to Read

Increasing children's motivation to read is an important step in developing children's interest in literature and literacy as a whole. This can be done in various ways, for example: through extracurricular activities such as book clubs, theater performances, or writing activities about literature. In this way, young children are encouraged to be actively involved in the world of literature. This helps them find joy in reading and analyzing literary works. Apart from that, giving awards to children

who read diligently, holding poetry reading competitions or other literary works, inviting literary writers to give lectures at school can also help make reading a fun and not boring activity.

3. Developing Interesting Learning Strategies

The teacher's role is very important in this process. They not only deliver the material enthusiastically, but also use innovative approaches to make literature learning interesting and meaningful for children. By relating literary works to children's life experiences, teachers help them understand the relevance and beauty of literature in everyday life. Learning strategies that can be developed by teachers include:

- **Project Based Learning (PBL)**

Project-based learning (PBL) is an approach that encourages children to learn through real experiences and the application of concepts in the context of real life situations. In schools that adopt this approach, learning becomes more meaningful and relevant for children because they are directly involved in challenging and meaningful projects. One of the main advantages of PBL is that it stimulates children's active involvement in the learning process. For example, in a project about the environment, children may be asked to explore the environment or plant plants. Through this project, they not only learn about environmental issues, but also plan and implement concrete actions to make positive changes in their environment. PBL also helps children develop various important skills, such as collaboration, problem solving and communication skills. In collaborative projects, children learn to work together with their team members, discuss ideas, resolve conflicts, and achieve goals together. This helps them understand the importance of teamwork and develops the social skills necessary in everyday life. In addition, PBL allows children to relate their learning to the real world. They see how the concepts learned in class can be applied in real-life situations, which helps them understand the relevance and significance of what they learn. Not only that, PBL also encourages children to develop creativity and innovation. In their projects, they are often asked to create new solutions to existing problems or produce unique products or works. This triggers critical and creative thinking processes that enable children to see problems from different angles and find innovative solutions.

- **Contextual Learning**

Contextual learning is an approach that places learning in a context that is meaningful and relevant for young children. In schools that implement this approach, learning is not only centered on providing information, but also on applying concepts in real situations that have relevance to children's lives. One of the main advantages of contextual learning is that it makes learning more meaningful for children. They can see a direct connection between what they learn in class and their everyday experiences, which makes them more interested and motivated to learn. An example of contextual learning is when children learn mathematics by solving problems related to everyday life, such as calculating costs for shopping in the canteen or using simple props such as colored cubes or geometric shapes to teach concepts such as color, shape or number. By learning mathematical concepts in the context of real situations like this, children can see the relevance and usefulness of what they are learning. Contextual learning also helps children develop a deeper understanding of the concepts being studied. By applying concepts in real situations, children are faced with challenges that require critical thinking and problem solving, which helps them deepen their understanding of the subject matter. In addition, contextual learning helps children develop critical and analytical thinking skills. They are invited to

analyze complex situations, draw conclusions, and make decisions based on available evidence. This helps them become more independent learners and skilled at solving problems in everyday life. With all these benefits, contextual learning is a very effective approach in helping children understand and master the concepts being studied, as well as develop the skills they need to be successful in the real world. This helps create an engaging and meaningful learning environment for children that allows them to grow and develop holistically.

- **Cooperative Learning**

Cooperative learning is an approach where children work together in small groups to achieve shared learning goals. In schools that implement cooperative learning, cooperation and collaboration between children becomes the main focus in the learning process. One of the main advantages of cooperative learning is that it allows children to learn from each other. In small groups, children have the opportunity to share their knowledge, thoughts and experiences, which helps them understand the concepts they are learning better. It also helps broaden their view of the world and appreciate other people's perspectives. Apart from that, cooperative learning also helps develop children's social skills and cooperation skills. In teamwork, children learn to listen to other people's opinions, express their ideas clearly, and resolve conflicts well. This helps them become more effective learners and better members of society in the future. Cooperative learning also helps strengthen social relationships between children. When working together in groups, children build trust and positive relationships with each other, which creates a safe and supportive learning environment. It also helps reduce social isolation and provides a platform for children from different backgrounds to interact and learn from each other. Apart from the social aspect, cooperative learning is also effective in improving children's academic achievement. In small groups, children have more opportunities to engage in active discussions, ask questions, and receive feedback from their peers, all of which help improve their understanding of the subject matter. With all these benefits, cooperative learning is a very effective approach in promoting active, inclusive and meaningful learning for young children. This helps create a collaborative and supportive learning environment, allowing each young child to develop personally and academically.

- **Learning With Technology**

Learning with technology, or e-learning, is a learning method in which information and communication technology is used to deliver lesson material and facilitate interaction between children and teachers online. In schools that adopt learning with technology, the use of software, applications and online platforms becomes an integral part of the learning process. One of the main advantages of learning with technology is its flexibility. Children can access learning materials anytime and anywhere, as long as they have access to the internet. This allows children to learn according to their own rhythm and learning style, increasing their learning independence and responsibility. In addition, learning with technology allows for variations in teaching methods. Teachers can use various types of media, such as videos, animations, and simulations, to explain difficult concepts in a way that is more visual and attractive to young children. This helps capture a child's attention and makes learning more fun and meaningful for them. The use of technology also allows for interaction and collaboration between children and teachers online. Through online learning platforms, children can participate in discussions, group assignments, and other collaborative activities with their peers and their teachers. This helps build a dynamic and supportive

learning community among children and teachers. Learning with technology also allows for more up-to-date and responsive assessments of children's progress. Teachers can use software and apps to provide immediate feedback to children about their performance in real time. This allows children to track their own progress and identify areas that need improvement. However, it is important to remember that the use of technology in learning also has its own challenges. Not all children have the same access to devices and the internet, which can lead to gaps in learning. In addition, it is important for teachers to ensure that the use of technology supports learning goals and does not replace direct interaction between young children and teachers. Thus, learning with technology becomes a valuable tool in increasing access, flexibility and interactivity in learning. By utilizing it effectively, schools can create a dynamic, inclusive and meaningful learning environment for all young children.

4. The Role of Indonesian Language Teachers

Atmazaki explained that the essence of learning Indonesian is to provide students with an understanding of Indonesian language skills that are in accordance with their goals and functions. According to him, Indonesian language subjects aim to enable students to communicate effectively and efficiently, both orally and in writing, in accordance with applicable ethical norms. Apart from that, they are also expected to appreciate and feel proud of using Indonesian as the language of unity and the state language. Indonesian language learning also aims to equip students with the ability to understand and use Indonesian appropriately and creatively in various contexts, as well as using Indonesian as a means to improve intellectual, emotional and social abilities. Apart from that, Atmazaki also emphasized the importance of students enjoying and utilizing literary works as a means of broadening their horizons, improving their character, knowledge and language skills. More than that, learning Indonesian is also directed at appreciating and taking pride in Indonesian literature as part of the cultural and intellectual treasures of Indonesian people. Khair (2018) The role of Indonesian language teachers in developing literature in schools is very important and multidimensional. They are not only teachers who deliver material, but also become facilitators, mentors and inspirations for children. The following are some of the key roles played by Indonesian language teachers in the development of literature in schools:

- **Knowledge Guide**

Indonesian language teachers are responsible for teaching children about various literary works, from poetry, short stories, novels, dramas, to essays. They help children understand literary elements such as theme, plot, character, and language style.

- **Facilitate Discussion**

Indonesian language teachers create space for children to discuss the literary works they study. This discussion allows children to share their understanding, interpretations and perspectives about the literary work.

- **Encouraging Literary Appreciation**

Indonesian language teachers help children develop an appreciation for literary values, such as the beauty of language, cultural wisdom, and human reflection contained in literary works. They create learning experiences that allow children to experience joy and admiration for literature.

- **Open the knowledge**

Indonesian language teachers help children relate literary works to the cultural, historical and social contexts in which they were created. They illustrate how literature reflects societal conditions and inspires change.

- **Encouraging Creativity**

Indonesian teachers encourage children to express themselves through creative writing. They provide assignments that encourage children to create their own literary works, such as poetry or essays.

- **Become a role model**

Indonesian language teachers are examples for children in appreciating and enjoying literature. By demonstrating their own love of literature and active involvement in learning, teachers help motivate and inspire them.

By playing these roles well, Indonesian teachers can help create a learning environment that promotes understanding, appreciation, and a deep love of literature among them. This not only helps improve their literary literacy, but also shapes them as cultured, critical and creative individuals.

CONCLUSIONS

The development of literature in schools is an important foundation in increasing interest in reading literature and developing literary appreciation in young children. In this effort, there are several key steps that can be taken to achieve this goal.

First of all, increasing access to literary books is a crucial first step. By providing a diverse collection of literary books in the school library, children have more opportunities to explore various types of literary works according to their interests. Easier access to literary books can also encourage children to read more and more often.

Next, increasing motivation to read becomes the main focus. Teachers can use various strategies, such as engaging use of technology, theatrical performances, or creative projects, to make reading more interesting and relevant for children. By developing a strong interest in reading, children are more likely to be actively involved in literary learning.

Apart from that, developing interesting learning strategies is also key in developing literature in schools. Teachers can use active, collaborative, and project-based approaches to facilitate deep and meaningful learning. Through discussion, analysis, and creative writing, children can develop a deeper understanding of the literary works they study.

Finally, increasing the role of Indonesian language teachers is very important. Teachers are not only teachers, but also facilitators, mentors and inspirers in the development of literature in schools. By showing their love of literature and being actively involved in learning, teachers can motivate and inspire them to develop a deep interest and appreciation for literature.

By implementing these steps effectively, schools can create an environment that supports and stimulates young children's interest and appreciation for literature. This will not only help improve their literary literacy, but also shape them as cultural, critical and creative individuals.

Based on the results of the research and discussion, several important suggestions are put forward for the development of literature in early childhood. For Indonesian Language Teachers, it is recommended that they use various interesting and innovative learning strategies and methods to increase children's interest and appreciation for literature. Teachers are expected to be role models in loving and reading literature, as well as making literature learning more contextual by linking it to children's daily lives. Apart from that, giving children the opportunity to be creative through writing poetry, short stories or drama scripts is very important. Teachers are also expected to collaborate with literary writers, literacy communities and book publishers to support the development of literature in schools. For schools, steps such as increasing access to literary books by providing literary books in school libraries, holding literary book exhibitions, and establishing collaboration with book publishers are highly recommended. Schools can also give awards to children who excel in literature to increase their motivation. Organizing activities related to literature such as poetry reading competitions, short stories and other literary works will be very helpful. In addition, providing training to Indonesian Language Teachers on innovative literary learning strategies and methods is very important to improve the quality of learning. For the government, issuing policies that support the development of literature in early childhood is very necessary. This can be done by including a more comprehensive literature curriculum and providing funding for literary development activities in schools. The government can also collaborate with various parties such as literary organizations, literacy

communities and book publishers to support the development of literature in schools. The development of literature in schools is a joint responsibility between Indonesian Language Teachers, schools and the government. With good cooperation between these three parties, it is hoped that children's interest and appreciation for literature can increase, so that they can give birth to a literate and cultured generation.

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