

The Study of Children's Literature: Internalization of Cultural Values and Exploration of Social Issues

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KEYWORDS

children's literature; literary function; dulce et utile; character education; internalization of cultural values; exploration of social issues

ABSTRACT

This research aims to present an in-depth study of the role of children's literature as a medium for internalizing cultural values and exploring social issues. The aspects discussed in this research are obtained from library research on related research, then presented with descriptive analytical methods. Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that children's literature with the mission of dulce et utile (entertaining and useful) plays an important role in the practice of character education, introducing cultural values, and sharpening sensitivity to social issues. The interaction between children and children's literature usually requires the role of adults as facilitators of literary works, especially in the pre-literacy phase which does not allow children to read literacy symbols independently. The practical implications that need to be considered by parents and teachers relate to four major classifications, namely considering the relevance of the work to the child's condition; adjusting the formulation of language content to the language skills of children/learners; using illustrations/intonation in the delivery of literary works (especially for children/learners who are not yet able to read independently); and providing direct assistance when children/learners interact with literary works. The mission of literature as an evocator of human consciousness (especially children, in this context) requires collaboration from various parties. Parents, educators, children's literature writers, and even the government as policy makers need to play an active role and realize the urgency of implementing children's literature in their learning.

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Introduction

Culture is often discussed in a limited way in the form of works that become visual expressions of artistic beauty, such as fine art products, dance performances, theater performances, and so on. In a more complex way, the discussion of culture is closely related to the existence of literary works, because culture and literature are born from the same building blocks, namely human ideas and actions. Culture is the crystallization of the results of human life in society that is made human property through a series of learning processes (Kontjaraningrat, 2009, p. 144) Literature is a

manifestation of aesthetic experience, as well as a manifestation of human experience. (Pujiharto, 2012, p. 19)..

Children's literature as one of the genres in the realm of literary works (Nurgiyantoro, 2010, p. 26) Children's literature, as one of the genres of literature (Nurgiyantoro, 2010, p. 26), acts as a reflection of the culture of the community as well as carrying an important role so that children are facilitated in recognizing cultural values and social issues according to their developmental stage. Through the formulation of children's literature, cultural values and social issues become two topics that will play a crucial role in character building and moral values, in line with the function of literary works dulce et utile/entertaining and useful (Wellek & Warren, 2014, p. 23). Starting from this idea, this discussion aims to present an in-depth examination of the role of children's literature as a way to seek internalization of cultural values, as well as a medium for exploring social issues that are relevant to current life. Although it is not intended to measure the effectiveness of children's literature in changing the world or eradicating socio-cultural problems, the studies of children's literature that will be discussed next have provided evidence that children's literature has a positive contribution to make in introducing cultural values and social issues to children.

Research Methods

This research is a library research conducted through the collection of data from various literatures (books, journals, academic research results, and digital written narratives) that can be accounted for legitimacy. This research uses a qualitative approach, which prioritizes the researcher as the main element (the key to research), so as to create success in the process of collecting and processing data, as well as a critical view that seeks to encourage the realization of a transformative intellectual characterized by the emergence of awareness to be critical of the representations contained in literary texts, as well as the socio-cultural realities that occur in society. Through a literature study of current literature relevant to the study of children's literature, the researcher seeks to present an in-depth study of the portion of children's literature and its mission, children's literature as a medium for internalizing cultural values, a medium for exploring social issues, as well as practical implications in the form of moral and character building for children. The findings are detailed and reorganized using the descriptive analytical method, which describes the facts found and then accompanies them with in-depth analysis, so that a solid scientific construction is built to support the arguments and conclusions regarding the current study of children's literature.

Results and Discussion

Children's Literature Review

The specialty of children's literature is the alignment of the work with children as the audience of the literary work. Although conceptually children's literature and adult literature (adult literacy) still contain aspects of feelings, thoughts/ideas, and insights into life, children's literature has a special mission that is closely related to educational practices. (Krissandi, Febriyanto, Cahya, & Radityo, 2018, p. 7).. Literature is often discussed with the innate mission of humanizing humans / educating the whole person (Afriko, Rifma, & Syahril, 2022, pp. 63--64).. The partisanship of children's literature can be seen from the position of children as listeners or readers of the work, with the impact of raising children's awareness as human beings. By considering the alignment of the work to the world of children, the symbols and ornaments present in the work become important things that must be

formulated seriously. This also has an impact on the ideas and images of life presented in literary works as a support in the practice of raising children's awareness as human beings.

The depiction of life in children's literature refers to the circumstances of its main readers, namely children. Children's literature is defined as the best literature that favors the conditions of children in various formulations that contain various themes and formats. (Sarumpaet, 2010, p. 2). The interesting format of children's literature often makes it striking and different from the format of literature in general, starting from the shape of the book, the style of illustration and coloring, and even the typography chosen. (Latifah, Munajah, & Hasanah, 2021, pp. 11-12).. As part of the formulation of literary works, children's literature can also be interpreted as a form of creation of ideas with imaginative depictions and contains didactic elements that play a dominant role in educational practices. Children who are accustomed to reading/interacting with literature (children's reading), will get used to feeling the emotions of the story (empathy) and involve the imagination of the mind so that it is as if they are involved in the story being read. This aesthetic experience will foster critical thinking and emotional sensitivity in him (the child). (Didipu & Masie, 2020, p. 153).

The role of children's literature can begin with adult involvement from the age of 0, even when the child is still a fetus in the womb. Although it is not yet possible for intensive two-way communication to occur, the fetus has been able to respond to sound since the age of 20 weeks in the womb (response to low sounds), while by the 35th week, the fetus is able to provide more complex reactions to low and high tones. (Prawesti, Dr. Ronny Suwento, & Dr. Setyo Handryastuti, 2016).. In other words, the practice of literature from the beginning does require the role and awareness of adults.

Adults' awareness of the important role of literature is crucial. Adults act as facilitators who bridge the introduction of children and literature in an effort to improve children's development, especially in the context of language skills. The nature of language is a symbol, so adults need to play an active role in facilitating children's interaction with symbols (language, letters, numbers, patterns, and certain illustrations) that can support their development. The classification of children's literature is mapped into six divisions, namely realism (realist stories, animal realism, historical realism, and sports stories); formulaic fiction (mystery stories, romance stories, serial novels); fantasy (fantasy stories, high fantasy, and sci-fiction); traditional literature (fables, folktales, myths, legends and hero stories, and folk epic); poetry; and non-fiction. (Lukens, 1999, pp. 14-29). From these six classifications, adults need to consider each work in terms of how the author places children at the center of attention (subject), taking into account their needs and respecting their different experiences and abilities. (Krissandi, Febriyanto, Cahya, & Radityo, 2018, p. 17)..

Nowadays, the involvement of children's literature in educational practice is experiencing a positive trend, characterized by the widespread discussion that children are not miniature adults, so special formulations are needed in communicating with them (children). The awareness of Indonesian society is raised from various directions, ranging from scientific journal articles, workshops, to various campaigns on social media, and the wide selection of children's books available on the market. Although it can be said to be a positive trend, the accessibility of ideal works must still be a special concern, because children's literature is not as simple as being cute and colorful, the suitability of levels is needed so that literature can support educational practices that are entertaining, as well as being educational entertainment.

The positive development of the current literacy ecosystem needs to be followed up and optimally utilized by various parties. Collaborative learning is needed so that literature can be a bridge for introducing and conveying information effectively according to the level of children's language skills. After children are facilitated to interact with works through reading (or listening) activities so as to produce an understanding of certain literary works, there is a space that allows children to apply the moral values obtained from the process of interaction with literary works. (Aminah, 2022, p. 81). Thus, it is important to conduct periodic studies on the effectiveness and reality of the practical and theoretical application of children's literature. This is expected to increase the role of literature in arousing human awareness (especially children in the context of this discussion), so that literature is not just entertainment, but also plays an active role in shaping the morals and character of the nation's next generation (ethical), as well as developing critical thinking skills towards cultural values and social issues that are present around children's lives as empowered humans.

Internalization of Cultural Values and Exploration of Social Issues through Children's Literature

Cultural internalization, exploration of social issues, and the existence of literary works are interrelated. Cultural internalization is related to the process of introducing culture as the initial stage of understanding and making it a reference to the values adopted by a person/society. The exploration of social issues through literary works is an effort to introduce social conditions that occur in society. This exploration aims to provide a depiction of reality in order to increase children's awareness of social conditions, train critical thinking, and foster an attitude of empathy and care for the surrounding conditions. In line with this, literary works are present as a representation of the conditions of society that contain various cultural values and social issues, become a reflection of social depictions, as well as being an ideal universe created to criticize the reality of society.

Literature, under a large umbrella, carries a special mission to raise human awareness of its role as a human being. Humans and humanity often lose each other due to various background interests. The presence of literature strives to maintain the connection between humans and humanity so that they do not separate from each other. Children's literature tries to be a bridge for children to understand cultural values, as well as complex social realities according to their level of development. Literary learning provides its own space for students to interpret social differences and the problems faced by society. Literary works with social and political issues can help children to develop critical thinking and empathy towards the social reality around them. (Rizkiah, Jumadi, & Dewi, 2023, p. 86)..

C. Kluckhohn (Koentjaraningrat, 2009, p. 165) classifies culture into seven elements that apply universally. Each of these elements can be found in all cultures in the world. The seven elements are language; knowledge system; social organization; system of living equipment and technology; livelihood system; religious system; and art. Through literature, the seven elements of culture are introduced gradually.

The selection of literary works that are relevant to the child's condition can make it easier for his or her imagination to be involved in the storytelling. In other words, the introduction of cultural values should start from things that are closest to the child (relevant), such as the language used in the neighborhood in communicating, the livelihood system of the community that is commonly found,

and local arts found by children in the surrounding environment. These cultural values will help children recognize and understand their identity. The construction of literary works with cultural values allows children to recognize and understand various traditions, habits, norms rules, and so on, thus forming a wise perspective.

Based on the cultural values that are presented regularly, social issues will certainly accompany them. Children's literature formulations can be reconstructed to introduce the concept of difference and inclusion, introduce an understanding of social justice, and even direct children to empathize in responding to various situations, including bullying that occurs without realizing it. Literature and its mission are linked to efforts to build children's character. Through various ornaments in the story, children are invited to understand the importance of respecting differences, building empathy, and applying other moral values.

As a concrete step, KEMENDIKBUDRISTEK has compiled a Guidebook for the Use of Literature Book Recommendations according to level. It should be noted that the list of books contained are recommendations, so it is important for parents and teachers to sort and select recommended books according to the cultural values and social issues raised before presenting them as children's reading.

The internalization of cultural values, the exploration of social issues, and formal learning practices in schools actually have a unidirectional goal, which is to help and facilitate children to grow as holistic individuals. The cultural values and social issues contained in children's literature certainly have different formulations from those present in adult literature. Although the problems presented are similar, the formulation of children's literature must be presented by considering the aspects of readability (language) and directing positive solutions as a response to the problems contained (didactic). Instead of presenting complex and in-depth explorations like the content in adult literature, children's literature tends to use straightforward language and imaginative stories. This formulation is expected to make it easier for child readers to understand and identify the content contained in literary works.

In other words, children's literature acts as a medium for conveying cultural values and concepts of social issues, while educational practices at school and at home become a space for children's exploration in managing their various developments. Children's literature can be used as a medium in optimizing Indonesian language learning. (Apriyani, Daulay, & Jaya, 2024, p. 441) Children's literature can be used as a medium to optimize Indonesian language learning; as well as a media formulation that can be the basis for living the wisdom of life that comes from cultural values and social issues. (Simanungkalit, Tampubolon, Panggabean, Sihite, & Simanjuntak, 2024, pp. 1447). Through the integration of children's literature in daily learning activities, the educational agenda can support various aspects of development according to the standards of children's developmental achievement levels (especially in the early age phase).

Referring to the Early Years STPPA, children's literature can be presented to shape discussions about tolerance, care for friends and the environment, and social justice (in daily communication). Children's literature is not present as mere entertainment, but also as a means of education with values that can be learned from the conflicts of the characters, as well as their attitudes in solving various problems. (Munggarani, Yulianeta, & Halimah, 2024, p. 614) The Pancasila Student Profile, including cultural reflections and educational tools that contain character education values, is in line with the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile for the next generation of the nation. (Sidabutar, 2024, p. 23).. In addition, literature also provides moral lessons that are integrated with

local wisdom (culture) so that it affects the character building and personal growth of children from an early age. (Simanungkalit, Tampubolon, Panggabean, Sihite, & Simanjuntak, 2024, pp. 1447). Thus, children's literature also plays a role in facilitating children to be able to identify and understand emotions (self and others). This ability plays an important role in understanding surrounding cultural values, building positive social relationships, and understanding complex socio-cultural issues at an advanced level.

Practical Implications of the Application of Children's Literature: Moral and Character Building

Children's literature in its role as a medium for internalizing cultural values and exploring social issues still opens up opportunities to question its usefulness more concretely. Children's literature in the practical realm is needed to provide a deep understanding of cultural diversity, so that children get a solid foundation to grow as open-minded individuals, able to tolerate, and ready to face the complexity of the global world. (Iskandar, Dewi, & Hayat, 2024, p. 793).. In other words, literature as a representation of reality as well as an ideal creation continues to be presented in learning by considering its usefulness for shaping morals and implementing character education for children. Based on the literature of previous studies, it can be extracted that children's literature is still one of the effective media in attracting children's literacy interest, so it is worth using it in supporting learning. (Shevia, Pratikno, & Hanik, 2024, p. 190).. In the midst of the rapid flow of information and developing technology, the formulation of children's literature also continues to undergo transformation. This is done as an effort to maintain the position of children's literature as a support for entertaining educational practices, as well as being educational entertainment.

If it's just for entertainment, it's easy for adults to give children gadgets to avoid boredom and crying. However, the practical implications of children's literature provide a different space for guidance. Children's literature is present and formulated long before children reach the phase of being able to read independently. One of the stimulus/strategies that can be done is to present illustrations, intonation, or both, as a support in the delivery of literary works. The use of illustrations is a strategy that is often used in learning, even at the lower grade level, children more easily understand the story through the illustrations presented. (Ashari, Nasution, Pransiska, & Simanjuntak, 2024, pp. 347-348).. When practicing story reading, facilitators (parents/educators) need to pay attention to expressions and intonation variations to keep children's attention. Involve children in the storytelling process by showing them the illustrations contained in the work, then provide opportunities for them to make observations and provide comments. Symmetrical illustration and narration indicate that the characters' actions are depicted verbally and visually (in continuity), while the dialog is formulated according to their position (characters in the story). (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, pp. 58--59). In other words, children deserve guidance, not demands. Adults should be actively involved as facilitators as well as figures, so that the introduction of children and works can take place optimally.

The assistance of parents and schools will form effective communication that has a positive effect on the success of early childhood education. (Rahmanda & Zulkarnaen, 2024, p. 7). Assistance and direct interaction between adults and children in discussing literary works are fundamental in efforts to realize the internalization of cultural values through children's literature. Reading/listening to readings will be a one-way communication, while deep understanding requires two-way

communication (interactive dialog). Discussion will provide opportunities for children to ask questions, share opinions, obtain in-depth explanations, and connect the pieces of cultural values in the work with the real life realities they experience. Through interactive dialog, children will receive information while being actively involved in forming symbol references in their memory. This has a positive impact on the practice of critical thinking, habitual analysis, and the ability to synthesize information.

Through assistance provided by parents and educators, it is possible for children's literature to be reconstructed independently. Children's literature can be formulated in accordance with the conditions of children/students, starting from self-identity (character names, characterizations, etc.), socio-cultural settings that are contained in the story, conflicts that often occur and are close to children's reality, to ideal solutions offered by parents/educators as a response to certain problems. For example, in one of the children's novels entitled *Mata dan Rahasia Pulau Gapi* (2018) read to 2-3 year old children, parents cannot read the entire book at one time, use explicit terminology and vocabulary, and ask children to provide meaning. The book can be read gradually, the storytelling narrative will be simplified, as well as the storyline, such as conveying information on natural conditions in Ternate with the help of book illustrations or the use of internet-based digital media (through the help of search engines).

Children who are accustomed to seeing the adults around them interacting with literature will form a similar pattern of interaction: the child picks up a book (or other reading), opens it page by page, and then seems to be reading - although what happens is that the child tries to interpret the symbols according to the references they have. The use of children's literature in the educational agenda is a long process, children will not necessarily be able to read and understand the meaning of each word at one time. Being accustomed to seeing the symbols of the alphabet and numbers is the beginning of children's awareness of the concept of letters, words, and even interpreting more complex writing - such as sentences and paragraphs - at the next level of language skills.

Language as a symbol is used by humans to communicate. Every human - including children/learners - needs a reference in their memory to translate symbols captured by the senses. For example, on one occasion, the word "table" is interpreted by children as an object that can support something, is round/square, has balanced legs. On another occasion, the child may interpret the table as a symbol of objects with various unique models commonly found in the living room or classroom, with various sizes and colors. Both are very likely to be interpreted by two children in the same age phase.

The difference in symbol references in a person's (child's) memory makes a difference to his/her interpretation of symbols (language) in the work. In other words, the suitability of language in each phase of a child's development may differ, which is influenced by the introduction of certain symbol references and their functions to children, as often as possible in communication. Stimulation can be provided by introducing the names of objects and explaining their functions, thus enriching the child's vocabulary. The stimulus provided must be concrete: can be seen, held, experienced / done directly. (Krissandi, Febriyanto, Cahya, & Radityo, 2018, pp. 36-37)..

Children aged 2-3 years are not yet able to use prefixes (me-see, ber-run, ter-read), suffixes (play-an, his house, color-i) and other types of affixation, while children at the age of 4-5 years are able to process and form new words with affixes. (Al-Rasyid & Siagian, 2023, p. 6267). Thus, adults need to pay careful attention to the selection of vocabulary and sentence structure contained in the

work. This does not mean that complex vocabulary should not be presented at all, but complex word patterns need to be presented proportionally. Literary works for children 2-3 years old should not contain many compound words, but still need to be presented as an early introduction to the language structure and meaning of complex language.

Children's literature plays an important role in shaping children's character from an early age. Storybooks provide flexibility for children to encounter moral messages and life values, which can help them understand abstract concepts through meaningful experiences reading literary works. (Kharani, Harahap, & Marsella, 2024, p. 6229).. The involvement of children's literature in educational practices will provide space for various cultural representations and social issues to be conveyed. This will affect the internalization of moral values and character education informally for children readers. (Habsari, 2023, p. 639).. Thus, the practical implications of children's literature involvement can be narrowed down to one major area, namely the formation of children's morals and character and the various good behaviors that come with it.

Conclusion

Children's literature with its *dulce et utile* (entertaining and useful) mission acts as a means of optimizing cultural internalization and exploration of social issues based on children's developmental stages. Both roles are narrowed down to the practical implications of literature in the form of literature's involvement in shaping children's morals and character. Through the internalization of cultural values and the content of social issues, children are invited to have critical thinking skills and be sensitive to surrounding problems. These skills and sensitivity are expected to lead children to be able to respond in the form of humanist behavior based on children's awareness as empowered human beings. Adults (parents and teachers) are needed to play an active role in becoming facilitators as well as figures in interactions with literary works, especially in the pre-literacy phase which does not allow children to be able to read literacy symbols independently. Based on the in-depth review conducted, the role of adults in providing assistance must be directly proportional to the readiness of adults to sort and select literary works with cultural values and relevant social issues. Thus, children's literature can be a gateway to awareness and the formation of humanist morals in the next generation of the country (children).

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