



Building early childhood character through storytelling as an educational communication strategy

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doi <https://doi.org/10.31603/ce.15985>

Abstract

Character building in early childhood requires delivery methods that are engaging yet meaningful. This community service program aims to strengthen character education at PAUD Sehat Ceria Kutajaya through the implementation of structured storytelling as an educational communication strategy. The partner faced challenges in delivering effective moral messages and lacked story media relevant to the children's social context. The approach included needs analysis, developing value-based story modules, training educators in narrative communication techniques, and classroom practice mentoring. The results demonstrated two primary impacts: 1) Increased educator competence in designing plotlines and interactive vocal techniques; and 2) Positive changes in child response, marked by increased attention span, the ability to retell moral messages, and expressions of empathy during storytelling sessions. The program produced a character-based storytelling module ready for replication to ensure the sustainability of value education through a participatory and contextual communication approach.

Keywords: Early childhood; Storytelling; Character education; Educational communication; Value internalization

Membangun karakter anak usia dini melalui storytelling sebagai strategi komunikasi edukatif

Abstrak

Pembentukan karakter pada usia dini membutuhkan metode penyampaian yang menyenangkan namun bermakna. Kegiatan pengabdian ini bertujuan memperkuat pendidikan karakter di PAUD Sehat Ceria Kutajaya melalui implementasi storytelling terstruktur sebagai strategi komunikasi edukatif. Mitra menghadapi kendala dalam menyampaikan pesan moral yang efektif dan minimnya media cerita yang relevan dengan konteks sosial anak. Pendekatan yang digunakan meliputi analisis kebutuhan, penyusunan modul cerita berbasis nilai, pelatihan teknik komunikasi naratif bagi pendidik, serta pendampingan praktik kelas. Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan dua dampak utama, yaitu 1) Peningkatan kompetensi pendidik dalam merancang alur cerita dan teknik vokal yang interaktif; dan 2) Perubahan positif pada respon anak, yang ditandai dengan peningkatan durasi atensi (fokus), kemampuan menceritakan kembali pesan moral, serta ekspresi empati saat sesi bercerita berlangsung. Program ini menghasilkan luaran berupa modul storytelling berbasis karakter yang siap direplikasi untuk menjamin keberlanjutan pendidikan nilai melalui pendekatan komunikasi yang partisipatif dan kontekstual.

Kata Kunci: Anak usia dini; Storytelling; Pendidikan karakter; Komunikasi edukatif; Internalisasi nilai

Contributions to
SDGs



Article History

Received: 15/12/25

Revised: 22/01/26

Accepted: 31/01/26

1. Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) constitutes a critical foundation for shaping children's character, social attitudes, and emotional development. During early childhood, children undergo a sensitive developmental period in which moral values, empathy, and prosocial behaviors are formed primarily through interaction, modeling, and meaningful communication processes rather than through abstract instruction alone (Green & Brock, 2000; Kerry-Moran & Aerila, 2019; Slater et al., 2006). Previous studies consistently show that participatory and narrative-based learning approaches are more effective for character education than one-way instructional methods, as narratives engage children's cognitive, affective, and social dimensions simultaneously (Cremin et al., 2016; Maureen et al., 2020; Nicolopoulou et al., 2015).

Sehat Ceria Early Childhood Education Center, Kutajaya, Tangerang, is an early childhood education institution that provides learning activities focused on children's cognitive, social, emotional, and character development. In daily classroom practices, Sehat Ceria PAUD has attempted to instill character values such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and empathy through various activities, including storytelling. However, storytelling activities have not yet been systematically designed as an educational communication medium aligned with specific character education objectives.

Based on preliminary observations and discussions with educators, several key problems were identified at Sehat Ceria PAUD. First, there is a lack of structured storytelling content specifically designed for character education, as storytelling is often conducted incidentally without clear narrative planning or moral focus. Second, educators have limited competencies in applying communicative and interactive storytelling techniques, including narrative delivery, verbal and nonverbal expression, and active child engagement. These conditions hinder the optimal internalization of character values among early childhood learners (Halimah & Kurniawati, 2022; Latifah et al., 2025; Nicolopoulou et al., 2015; Wasik & Hindman, 2020).

To address these challenges, this community service program proposes the development and implementation of structured storytelling content for character education, accompanied by educator training and mentoring in applying storytelling as an educational communication strategy. Previous research indicates that storytelling-based activities not only promote narrative and moral engagement but also support the construction of classroom community and children's social integration through co-constructed storytelling interactions in early childhood settings (Wright et al., 2013).

Khatima et al. (2025) demonstrate that systematically designed storytelling enhances children's social competence, empathy, and moral understanding through active narrative engagement. Halimah & Kurniawati (2022) report that character-based storytelling effectively instills values such as honesty, responsibility, and cooperation when supported by intentional content design. Furthermore, Wasik & Hindman (2020) emphasize that the effectiveness of storytelling depends heavily on educators' competencies in delivering stories interactively and meaningfully.

In addition to international empirical evidence, community-based studies conducted in Indonesian early childhood education settings further support the effectiveness of storytelling-based interventions. Research published in community service journals

indicates that shared storybook reading and storytelling activities significantly improve children's early literacy skills, narrative comprehension, and active participation in classroom interactions. These improvements not only strengthen language development but also create meaningful opportunities for children to engage with moral messages embedded in stories, thereby supporting the internalization of character values through daily learning activities. Moreover, community empowerment programs emphasize the importance of collaboration between educators and educational institutions in building a sustainable literacy culture, which reinforces the consistent implementation of storytelling as an educational communication strategy (Nurhillal et al., 2025).

Based on these findings, the proposed solution is designed through an integrated and sustainable approach. The program includes the development of a character-based storytelling content module, training educators in communicative and interactive storytelling techniques, and mentoring classroom implementation to ensure consistent application of character education practices. Accordingly, the objective of this community service program is to strengthen early childhood character education at Sehat Ceria Early Childhood Education Center, Kutajaya, Tangerang, by enhancing educators' competencies and providing structured storytelling content that functions as an effective, participatory, and sustainable educational communication medium.

2. Method

This community service program employed a participatory and communicative approach grounded in community-based educational intervention models that emphasize active stakeholder involvement to ensure program sustainability (Kemmis et al., 2014; Putri & Utaminingsih, 2024). Within this framework, educators, parents, university students, and facilitators were positioned as active partners throughout all stages of the program rather than as passive recipients.

The program was conducted at Sehat Ceria Early Childhood Education Center (PAUD Sehat Ceria), Kutajaya Village, Tangerang, in December 2025, and involved a total of 46 participants, consisting of 16 early childhood learners, 16 parents, 7 university students, and 7 lecturers. Educators, parents, and facilitators were positioned as active partners throughout the program rather than passive recipients (Baldwin, 2012; Kemmis, McTaggart, et al., 2014). aligning with community-based educational intervention models that emphasize active stakeholder involvement to ensure sustainability (Suwandi et al., 2024). Educators, parents, and facilitators were positioned as active partners throughout the program rather than passive recipients.

The implementation consisted of five stages: (1) needs assessment through classroom observation and informal interviews; (2) development of character-based storytelling content aligned with values such as honesty, empathy, responsibility, cooperation, and discipline (Halimah & Kurniawati, 2022; Tian & Solomon, 2025); (3) educator training focusing on communicative storytelling techniques; (4) classroom mentoring during the implementation of storytelling activities; and (5) evaluation and reflection.

2.1. Observation

Followed by an analysis of the partners' needs. During this stage, the community service team observed classroom learning processes, conducted brief interviews with educators, and identified communication methods currently used to convey character values.

Observations indicated that storytelling activities had been conducted, but had not yet been structured into storytelling content specifically designed for character education.

2.2. Designing storytelling content

The community service team creates stories containing character values, such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, cooperation, and discipline. The stories are designed using simple language, characters relatable to children, and narrative lines that emphasize symbolic moral messages. From a communication science perspective, this stage emphasizes message design so that the character values are received persuasively and emotionally by children.

2.3. Training for early childhood educators

The training focuses on improving educators' communication skills in storytelling, including vocal techniques, expression, gestures, and two-way interaction with children. Furthermore, educators are provided with an understanding of the role of storytelling as a symbolic communication medium in character development in early childhood. Beyond simply telling stories, the training for educators also focuses on how to package stories into engaging content, enabling them to utilize social media as a means of sharing storytelling content, facilitating the distribution of educational materials to parents and educators, enabling children to continue to be exposed to character values outside of formal classroom hours, and broadening the context of character learning in everyday life.

2.4. Mentoring the implementation of storytelling

At this stage, educators implement storytelling content into classroom learning activities with guidance from the community service team. This guidance is provided to ensure effective storytelling techniques and that the character values are well-received by the children.

2.5. Evaluation and reflection

Evaluation was conducted through systematic observation of children's responses during storytelling activities, reflective discussions with educators, and assessment of changes in children's engagement and social interactions. This reflective evaluation process aligns with participatory and action-based approaches that emphasize continuous reflection to improve educational practices (Katz et al., 2014; Kemmis, Heikkinen, et al., 2014). The evaluation results were then used to refine storytelling content and instructional methods, as well as to formulate recommendations to support the sustainability of the program. As a final output, this activity produced a character education-based storytelling content module that can be sustainably utilized by Sehat Ceria PAUD.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Activity implementation

The implementation of character-based storytelling activities demonstrated positive outcomes in early childhood learning processes at Sehat Ceria Early Childhood Education Center (Figure 1). The results indicate that storytelling functioned not only as a pedagogical activity but also as an effective educational communication strategy for conveying character values in early childhood education settings.

The implementation phase focused on applying storytelling through participatory and communicative methods. The activities included interactive storytelling sessions, singing, storytelling-based coloring activities, ice-breaking exercises, and question-and-answer sessions delivered through mini games. These activities were collaboratively facilitated by lecturers and university students, with PAUD educators acting as co-facilitators to ensure contextual relevance and continuity within classroom learning practices.

During the implementation process, children actively participated by listening attentively to stories, responding to questions, and expressing opinions related to the characters and moral messages presented. This level of participation indicates that storytelling activities delivered through structured and interactive approaches can create a conducive learning environment for character education in early childhood contexts.



Figure 1. Coloring and storytelling activity (Source: Authors' documentation, 2025)

3.2. Material dissemination and theoretical integration

The storytelling materials disseminated during the program were designed based on narrative communication principles and supported by empirical research. Storytelling functions as a meaning-making process that enables children to internalize values through emotional engagement rather than direct instruction (Wang et al., 2021). Previous studies have consistently shown that narrative-based learning contributes to the development of moral reasoning and social competence in early childhood (Maureen et al., 2020; Nicolopoulou et al., 2015).

Relevant national and international studies also support the effectiveness of storytelling in PAUD contexts. Research published in the *Early Childhood Education Journal* highlights that storytelling integrating moral, social, and emotional values can foster responsibility, empathy, and prosocial behavior among young learners (Listyowati & Astuti, 2025; Wright et al., 2013). Furthermore, community-based storytelling programs involving educators and parents have been shown to strengthen the sustainability of character education initiatives.

In addition to face-to-face storytelling activities, the dissemination of materials incorporated digital storytelling components. Digital media platforms were introduced as tools for documenting and sharing storytelling content, thereby extending character education beyond classroom boundaries. This approach aligns with previous findings indicating that digital narratives enhance language development and moral understanding when delivered through engaging multimedia formats (Hwang et al., 2023; O'Byrne et al., 2018). Similarly, social media has been identified as an effective

medium for reinforcing character values within family environments (Andajani et al., 2024; Budiarti & Yasmin Adar, 2023)

3.3. Impact and measurable outcomes of the community service program

The impact of the community service program was observed at both the child and educator levels. Among children, observable outcomes included increased attention during learning activities, higher levels of participation in storytelling sessions, and improvements in social behaviors such as sharing, turn-taking, and expressing empathy toward peers (Figure 2). These behavioral indicators were consistently identified during interactive activities, particularly in storytelling-based coloring sessions, where children demonstrated imitation of positive behaviors modeled by story characters.

From the educators' perspective, the program resulted in improved communication competencies, particularly in narrative delivery skills. Educators demonstrated greater confidence in utilizing vocal intonation, facial expressions, and body gestures to convey moral messages effectively. In addition, educators developed skills in designing and packaging storytelling content into educational digital media materials, enabling them to produce content that supports both pedagogical objectives and institutional communication needs.

The outputs of this program included: (a) a character education-based storytelling content module for PAUD educators; (b) improved storytelling-based communication competencies among educators; (c) observable positive behavioral changes among children; and (d) documented learning activities that support evaluation and dissemination processes. These findings indicate that storytelling content functions not only as an instructional medium but also as a means of empowering educators as key communicators in early childhood education, thereby supporting the sustainability of character education programs.



Figure 2. Training activities (Source: Authors' documentation, 2025)

3.4. Sustainability and program development

The sustainability of the program is ensured through the integration of storytelling content modules into routine learning activities at Sehat Ceria PAUD. Educators are encouraged to independently develop new storytelling materials by adapting character values to specific learning objectives and classroom contexts. To maintain consistency and quality in storytelling practices, continuous mentoring and follow-up activities are recommended.

This capacity-based partner approach positions storytelling as a scalable and replicable model for strengthening early childhood character education from a communication

science perspective. The model has the potential to be applied not only within Sehat Ceria PAUD but also across other PAUD institutions in Kutajaya and surrounding areas.

4. Conclusion

This community service program successfully strengthened early childhood character education at Sehat Ceria Early Childhood Education Center, Kutajaya, Tangerang, through the development of structured character-based storytelling content and the enhancement of educators' competencies. The results show that educator training and classroom mentoring improved narrative communication skills and confidence in delivering character values through interactive storytelling.

Storytelling functioned as an effective, participatory, and meaningful educational communication medium, fostering children's engagement, emotional responses, and social interaction. The integration of a storytelling content module into routine classroom practices supported consistent and sustainable implementation of character education. Overall, this program demonstrates that a capacity-based storytelling approach is effective and has strong potential for replication in other early childhood education settings.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express sincere gratitude to all individuals and institutions that contributed to the completion of this community service article. Special appreciation is extended to colleagues and academic peers for their valuable insights, constructive feedback, and support throughout the planning, implementation, and writing stages of the program. The authors also acknowledge the support of the partner institution, Sehat Ceria PAUD, Kutajaya, Tangerang, including educators, parents, and children who actively participated in the community service activities. Appreciation is further extended to the university students and lecturers who contributed to the implementation and documentation of the program.

Author Contributions

IA, TAS, RIK, RP, LS, SAW, and S contributed to the conceptualization and program design of this community service activity. Implementation, data collection, and field coordination were conducted collaboratively by all authors. Data analysis and interpretation were carried out jointly by the authors. Manuscript drafting and revision were also performed collaboratively. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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