



Volume 17, Nomor 2, Tahun 2026

Halaman 123–128

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21831/jpka.v17i2.100747>

p-ISSN: 2089-5003

e-ISSN: 2527-7014

## Novels as a Medium for Character Education in Elementary Schools: A Literature Review on Implementation and Relevance in Learning

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**Abstract:** Character education is a crucial aspect of shaping students who possess not only academic competence but also noble character, a sense of responsibility, and social awareness. Novels serve as an effective learning medium to support character education, as they embody various life values conveyed through characters, plot, conflict, and setting. This article examines the role of novels as a medium for character education in primary schools, the character values embedded within them, implementation strategies for instruction, and their advantages and limitations. The study employs a literature review method, analyzing relevant books and scholarly articles. The findings indicate that novels contain values such as religiosity, honesty, discipline, responsibility, hard work, independence, social awareness, tolerance, mutual cooperation, and integrity—values that can be internalized through reading, discussion, reflection, and presentation activities. Furthermore, the use of novels enhances literacy skills, critical thinking, and empathy, while supporting the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum) and the strengthening of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila (Pancasila Student Profile). Thus, novels are a viable and effective learning medium for fostering character development among primary school students.

**Keywords:** novel; learning medium; character education; primary school; literacy

### Introduction

Character education is a fundamental element in the implementation of education in elementary schools. Education is not merely directed toward achieving academic competence, but also aims to shape students who possess a religious, honest, disciplined, responsible, caring, and independent character, as well as the ability to coexist harmoniously within a pluralistic society. Strengthening character education is increasingly necessary alongside rapid advancements in information technology, globalization, and social changes that impact children's patterns of thinking and behavior. Phenomena such as low social awareness, declining reading culture, bullying, and unwise digital media usage underscore the urgent need to continuously enhance character education through meaningful learning processes (Kemendikbudristek, 2022; Suriansyah et al., 2023).

The execution of character education in schools is the shared responsibility of all school members, particularly teachers as learning facilitators. Teachers are demanded to be capable of determining learning strategies, methods, and media that not only elevate students' cognitive abilities but also foster affective and moral dimensions. One learning medium considered highly supportive of achieving these objectives is literary work, particularly novels. As extended prose narrative works, novels present diverse life experiences through characters, conflicts, settings, and plot lines, thereby assisting students in understanding life values in a more contextual and reflective manner (Nurgiyantoro, 2022; Adisaputera, 2012).

Engaging in novel reading provides students with opportunities not only to gain literacy experiences but also to internalize various moral values portrayed through characters' actions. Characters in novels illustrate the consequences of every action, enabling readers to distinguish between exemplary behaviors that ought to be emulated and negative behaviors that should be avoided. This stage assists students in training critical thinking skills, empathy, social concern, and decision-making abilities based on moral values. Consequently, novels possess significant potential as learning media capable of simultaneously integrating literacy development and character education (Dalman, 2021; Sari, 2022).

Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated that novels contain rich character education values. Harahap et al. (2023) revealed that the novel *Si Anak Kuat* by Tere Liye contains religious values, discipline, hard work, independence, curiosity, and social awareness. Julianti's (2022) study showed that the novel *Laskar Pelangi* by Andrea Hirata incorporates religious, honest, disciplined, hard-working, reading-oriented, socially caring, and patriotic values. Other research has similarly uncovered that the novel *Ayah* by Andrea Hirata contains responsibility, honesty, communication, hard work, and social care values relevant for integration into elementary school instruction (Wadiah et al., 2021). Furthermore, recent scholarship demonstrates that novel-based literature learning significantly enhances literacy skills while reinforcing students' character through reading, discussion, reflection, and collaborative learning activities (Rahmawati et al., 2024; Yuliana et al., 2023).

However, the vast majority of prior studies have predominantly focused on analyzing character values within specific individual novels. Synthesized literature reviews investigating novels as systematic learning media for character education implementation in elementary schools remain relatively limited. Teachers require a comprehensive and structured understanding regarding effective novel selection, instructional implementation strategies, strengths, and limitations of novels as character education media. Therefore, a comprehensive review that not only identifies character values in novels but also systematically details their relevance to classroom instruction in elementary education is highly essential.

This article presents clear novelty by providing a comprehensive literature review on novels as a character education medium in elementary schools. The study goes beyond cataloging embedded character values by thoroughly elaborating the role of novels in instruction, practical implementation strategies in elementary schools, advantages and constraints, and their strategic relevance in supporting students' character strengthening. This paper is expected to serve as a valuable reference for educators, curriculum developers, and researchers in designing literature-based learning oriented toward holistic student character formation.

## **Method**

This study employs a literature review method (library research) with a qualitative descriptive approach. This methodology was selected to examine, analyze, and interpret various scientific sources related to the utilization of novels as a character education tool for elementary school children. Research data were derived from secondary sources collected from books, national and international journal articles, conference proceedings, and official government policy documents addressing character education, literature instruction, reading literacy, and novels as instructional media. Primary priority was given to scholarly publications from the last five years, supplemented by foundational classic references that serve as theoretical baselines.

Data collection was conducted through systematic documentation procedures, involving searching, selecting, categorizing, and synthesizing relevant literature aligned with the research focus. Subsequently, data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis technique through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification stages. This analytical approach identified core concepts and character education values embedded in novels while assessing their instructional relevance in elementary classrooms, ultimately producing a holistic and rigorous synthesis of novel-based character education (Snyder, 2019; Zed, 2020).

## **Results and Discussion**

Novels represent literary works with immense potential as character education media because they present authentic life experiences through characters, plots, conflicts, and

resolutions that closely resonate with students' real-life contexts. Delivering character values through novels renders the learning process highly contextual, as students observe behavioral modeling indirectly through characters' journeys. Findings by Istiqomah and Marzuki (2024) demonstrate that Andrea Hirata's novel *Orang-Orang Biasa* contains five core character education values: religiosity, nationalism, mutual cooperation, independence, and integrity, making it an exceptional medium for character strengthening in educational environments (Istiqomah & Marzuki, 2024).

Utilizing novels as instructional media delivers a far more meaningful learning experience compared to theoretical value transmission. Students do not merely memorize concepts of honesty, responsibility, or social care; rather, they observe how these values are operationalized by characters confronting complex real-life dilemmas. Research by Kharani, Harahap, and Marsella (2024) indicates that children's novels contain rich character education values, including religiosity, discipline, responsibility, social awareness, hard work, and peace-loving attitudes, thereby serving as an effective medium for shaping student character through school literacy initiatives (Kharani et al., 2024).

Character education values embedded in novels can be seamlessly integrated into Indonesian Language instruction through diverse learning activities, such as intensive reading, group discussions, presentations, and character behavior reflections. These activities provide structured opportunities for students to connect narrative themes with their personal daily experiences. Fauziah and Hosna (2024) highlighted that Tere Liye's novel *Burlian* incorporates religiosity, honesty, discipline, hard work, independence, social care, and responsibility values that are highly relevant for classroom application in nurturing young learners' moral character from elementary age.

Teachers' pedagogical competence in selecting novels aligned with students' developmental characteristics represents a critical determinant of character education success through literature. Selected novels should feature accessible language, relatable narrative conflicts, and clear moral messages suitable for behavioral modeling. Adlan and Nirmawan's (2023) investigation demonstrated that novels serve not only as entertainment media but also as robust instruments for character formation by conveying religious values, responsibility, hard work, social care, and mutual respect, qualifying them as valuable learning resources in literature education.

Engaging in novel reading fosters students' reflective thinking capacity in understanding the causal relationship between characters' actions and their consequences. This cognitive process encourages students to critically evaluate positive and negative behaviors based on moral frameworks embedded within narratives. The ability to reflect upon character experiences constitutes a key mechanism in value internalization, as students comprehend the moral rationale behind behaviors rather than passively absorbing rules. Latifah et al. (2024) confirmed that integrating novels into language instruction significantly enhances literacy capabilities while deepening students' comprehension of character values through structured reading, discussion, and reflective writing activities (Latifah et al., 2024).

Aligning novel selection with students' cognitive and psychological development stages is an essential prerequisite for optimizing character education outcomes. Novels utilizing clear language, addressing relatable child-centered issues, and depicting positive role models are significantly easier for elementary students to comprehend and internalize. Teachers must also ensure alignment between story themes and targeted learning achievements so that novels function effectively as instructional tools supporting comprehensive competence attainment. Suriaman et al. (2024) emphasized that successful character education reinforcement relies heavily on selecting relevant instructional media tailored to student needs and systematically embedding character values across continuous learning activities (Suriaman et al., 2024).

The implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum) provides expanded flexibility for educators to leverage novels as learning media, given its orientation toward authentic experiential learning and strengthening the Profil Pelajar Pancasila (Pancasila Student Profile). Key dimensions such as religiosity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, creativity, and global diversity can be cultivated through character analysis and narrative conflict resolution within novels. This integration illustrates that literary works possess

far broader educational functions beyond basic literacy development by supporting holistic student character growth. Sugiyanto et al. (2023) affirmed that character education must be implemented in an integrated fashion across diverse learning activities to transform moral values into consistent daily habits (Sugiyanto et al., 2023).

The teacher's instructional role remains the central pillar in successfully utilizing novels for character education in elementary schools. Teachers are responsible not only for selecting age-appropriate novels but also for designing engaging learning activities that deeply explore character values. Instructional strategies such as group discussions, character analysis presentations, reflective journal writing, and role-playing assist students in connecting narrative themes to real-world contexts. Nurhayati and Sulastrri (2023) demonstrated that character education success is strongly influenced by teachers' capability to embed character values into meaningful instructional experiences rather than abstract theoretical lectures (Nurhayati & Sulastrri, 2023).

Students' interpretive capacity also directly impacts the efficacy of character formation through literature. Students who actively analyze character motives, identify narrative conflicts, and extract moral lessons internalize character values far more effectively than passive readers. This underscores that novel reading must be accompanied by structured reflection to enable students to relate character experiences to their own life situations. Wulandari and Rahmawati (2023) highlighted that reflection-based literature instruction enhances critical thinking while strengthening empathy, responsibility, and social concern by guiding students to understand characters' lived experiences (Wulandari & Rahmawati, 2023).

Furthermore, adopting novels as character education media contributes significantly to strengthening school literacy culture. Sustained reading habits established through literature instruction elevate student reading interest while broadening perspectives on multifaceted life issues. Novels featuring social conflicts, cultural values, and characters' perseverance through challenges serve as valuable platforms for students to practice moral decision-making. Rahmawati et al. (2024) concluded that integrating the School Literacy Movement (*Gerakan Literasi Sekolah*) with literature instruction generates a profound positive impact on character development, as reading activities foster reflective thinking habits and personal responsibility (Rahmawati et al., 2024).

Despite its substantial benefits, novel-based instruction encounters operational challenges that require teacher attention. Disparities in student reading abilities, instructional time constraints, and low baseline reading interest can hinder the value internalization process through novels. These conditions necessitate innovative instructional approaches, such as incorporating digital media, interactive discussions, and literacy-based project learning to maintain active student engagement throughout the learning process. Nurgiansah (2022) asserted that character education requires continuous instructional innovation connecting curricular content with students' authentic experiences to ensure sustainable character growth in daily life (Nurgiansah, 2022).

## **Conclusion**

Novels constitute an effective instructional medium for supporting character education implementation in elementary schools due to their capacity to integrate cognitive, affective, and social development through contextual and meaningful reading experiences. Findings from this literature review demonstrate that various novels embody essential character values including religiosity, honesty, discipline, responsibility, hard work, independence, social care, tolerance, mutual cooperation, and integrity which can be effectively internalized through reading, group discussions, reflection, presentations, and role-playing activities. Utilizing novels contributes not only to character building but also to improving reading literacy, critical thinking, empathy, and moral decision-making capabilities. Successful implementation relies heavily on teachers' competence in selecting developmentally appropriate reading materials, designing interactive learning strategies, and bridging narrative content with real-life contexts. Consequently, novels serve as a highly relevant learning medium supporting the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, fostering elementary students who are not only literately competent but also ethically grounded and capable of applying positive character values in society.

## Acknowledgments

The authors express praise and gratitude to Almighty God for the successful completion of this article. Sincere gratitude is extended to the supervising lecturer for guidance, constructive feedback, and direction throughout the writing process, as well as to colleagues and supporters who provided motivation and valuable literature references. The authors hope this article provides meaningful insights and serves as a useful reference for advancing literature instruction and novel-based character education in elementary schools.

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