



The Effectiveness of Storytelling in Developing Children's Social Care Character through Descriptive Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

The decline in children's social care character has become increasingly evident in recent years, marked by reduced empathy, rising individualism, and the weakening of prosocial behaviors within the school environment. This condition necessitates the development of pedagogical strategies capable of meaningfully fostering the value of social concern. This article aims to describe the effectiveness of storytelling in developing social care character through a descriptive literature review. The method employed is a literature review of national and international articles relevant to character education, storytelling, teacher and child dialogic interaction, and children's social development. The findings reveal that storytelling contributes to improving children's ability to understand others' perspectives, internalize moral values, and demonstrate social care behaviors such as sharing, cooperating, and helping peers. The dialogic approach in the storytelling process also strengthens children's emotional engagement, thereby facilitating the internalization of character values. Overall, this literature review confirms that storytelling is an effective, easily adaptable instructional strategy that can be integrated across various fields of knowledge to strengthen character education from an early age.

INTRODUCTION

Children's social care character manifested through empathy, cooperation, and prosocial behavior constitutes a fundamental dimension of social-emotional development that enables children to interact constructively within their social and educational environments. Social care character is not merely associated with moral disposition, but also serves as a critical predictor of academic engagement, peer relationships, emotional regulation, and long-term social adjustment (Eisenberg et al., 2015; Durlak et al., 2011). Consequently, strengthening social care character from early schooling is widely regarded as an essential objective of contemporary education.

However, empirical evidence indicates a concerning decline in children's social care character, particularly in school settings. Studies conducted in the Indonesian context report increasing individualistic tendencies, diminished sensitivity toward others and the environment, and weakened habits of sharing and cooperation among students (Hidayat & Wuryandani, 2021; Nasution, 2022). Similar trends have been identified globally, where rapid technological advancement, excessive screen exposure, reduced face-to-face interaction, and competitive academic climates contribute to lower levels of empathy and prosocial engagement among children (Twenge et al., 2019; Konrath et al., 2011).

These conditions highlight a significant educational problem: insufficient development of social-



emotional competence, which is foundational for positive social interaction and civic responsibility. When social care character is inadequately fostered, children are more vulnerable to social withdrawal, peer conflict, aggressive behavior, and reduced collaborative skills—factors that negatively affect classroom climate and learning outcomes (Wentzel, 2015; Denham et al., 2012). Therefore, pedagogical interventions that intentionally cultivate empathy, cooperation, and prosocial behavior are urgently needed.

Storytelling has re-emerged as a pedagogically relevant approach for strengthening children's moral and social development. Research highlights that stories help children understand others' perspectives, develop empathy, and internalize moral values through emotionally meaningful narrative experiences (Rahayu & Pratiwi, 2023). Modern approaches also emphasize dialogic storytelling, where teacher-child interaction enables children to interpret story meanings more deeply, connect them to personal experiences, and construct social understanding (Bruner, 1991; Miller, 2020). Empirical findings further show that storytelling contributes to prosocial behaviors such as sharing, cooperating, and helping peers (Herawati, 2020; Anwar & Lestari, 2021). Technological innovation has expanded storytelling modalities including digital stories, animations, and multimedia, making storytelling increasingly adaptive within classroom practice (Sari et al., 2023).

Despite its growing relevance, research on storytelling and social care character in Indonesia remains fragmented, focusing separately on media effectiveness (Dewi, 2020), empathy development (Anwar, 2021), or general character education models (Wibowo, 2022). There is still a lack of integrative reviews that systematically examine how storytelling influences social care character and what pedagogical mechanisms make it effective. This gap limits educators' ability to apply storytelling strategically and consistently in character education.

Therefore, this article aims to address the existing research gap through a descriptive literature review of national and international studies published within the last five years. The review synthesizes empirical evidence on (1) the effectiveness of storytelling in developing children's social care character, (2) the pedagogical mechanisms involved including dialogic interaction, narrative engagement, sociocultural context, and message relevance and (3) the implications of these findings for strengthening character education practices in Indonesian elementary schools.

METHOD

This study employs a literature review approach with a narrative descriptive design aimed at integrating empirical and theoretical findings from diverse academic sources. The review process consists of four main stages: (1) identifying and searching relevant literature, (2) screening and selecting studies, (3) evaluating the quality and relevance of each article, and (4) synthesizing findings to answer the research questions regarding the effectiveness of storytelling in developing children's social care character.

The population of this review includes publications related to storytelling, character education, children's social emotional development, dialogic instruction, and story based learning. To maintain analytical depth and relevance, the review focuses on journal articles published between 2015 and 2024. Sources were obtained from Google Scholar, DOAJ, Sinta, and PTKIN journal portals. PTKIN refers to scientific journal portals managed by state Islamic higher education institutions, which generally publish research articles in the fields of education, Islamic studies, character, moral, and social studies, topics that are relevant to research keywords such as storytelling, character education, and social care. The search process used the following keywords: storytelling, character education, social care, moral development, dialogic interaction, and elementary education.

After the initial search and consolidation process, a total of 78 articles were identified. Following the application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 32 articles met all eligibility requirements and were included in the final analysis. These sources comprised 18 articles published in nationally accredited Sinta journals, 12 articles from reputable international journals, and 2 academic book chapters or conference proceedings that were directly relevant to the theoretical constructs under investigation.

One of the selected articles reflects recent developments in value-based character education research. To maintain focus and methodological rigor, the study applied the following criteria.



Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria Applied in the Literature Review

Category	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Topic relevance	Studies discussing storytelling, character education, social care, moral development, or dialogic interaction	Studies focused solely on language skills, technology integration, or unrelated pedagogical models
Population	Preschool and elementary school children (ages 5–12)	Studies involving secondary, tertiary, or adult learners
Publication year	2015–2024	Publications prior to 2015 unless foundational theory
Type of publication	Journal articles, proceedings, academic books	Articles without methodological explanation
Methodological clarity	Clear description of research design and findings	Articles without methodological explanation
Contextual alignment	Studies relevant to school-based character education	Community-based programs unrelated to formal learning

Table 1 presents the criteria used to screen and select articles prior to further analysis using the literature analysis sheet. Once the articles met the criteria outlined in the table (namely topic relevance, population, publication year, type of publication, methodological clarity, and contextual alignment) they were systematically analyzed using the literature analysis sheet, which served as the main research instrument. This sheet recorded essential components of each article, including research objectives, methodology, participants, interventions, and major findings.

Data were analyzed using content analysis to identify patterns, categorize themes, and synthesize conceptual relationships across the reviewed studies. The analysis focused on recurring themes related to empathy development, social interaction, moral reasoning, and prosocial behavior. To enhance the credibility of the findings, the study applied source triangulation by comparing results across different types of publications and cross-checking theoretical alignment, as well as peer debriefing conducted with academic supervisors to ensure objectivity, methodological rigor, and accuracy of interpretation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Effectiveness of Storytelling in Developing Children's Social Care Character

The findings of this descriptive literature review demonstrate consistent empirical evidence that storytelling significantly contributes to the development of children's social care character. As synthesized from the studies summarized in Table 2, several recurring patterns emerge across preschool and elementary education contexts. Storytelling is consistently associated with improvements in empathy, perspective taking, and prosocial behavior, particularly when implemented through structured, dialogic, and emotionally relevant approaches in classroom settings. Recent studies indicate that moral value internalization functions as a central outcome of storytelling activities, facilitated by children's emotional engagement with narrative elements such as moral dilemmas, social conflicts, and prosocial character models.

The results further show that dialogic interaction through reflective questioning, guided discussion, and interpretive encouragement enhances children's emotional and cognitive engagement, supporting their ability to analyze social situations, infer moral consequences, and articulate value-based reasoning. In addition, findings summarized in Table 2 highlight the role of story selection and instructional techniques in shaping learning outcomes. Stories aligned with children's lived and cultural experiences strengthen emotional resonance and moral internalization, while instructional supports such as voice modulation, role playing, dramatization, visual aids, and guided questioning increase students' attentiveness and participation. Collectively, these results confirm that storytelling exerts multidimensional effects across cognitive, affective, and social domains, underscoring its effectiveness as an instructional approach for cultivating children's social care character.



Table 2. Summary of Reviewed Articles on Storytelling and Social Care Character Development

No	Author (s) & Year	Population	Purpose of Study	Method/Design	Key Findings	Relevance to Review
1	Nicolopoulou, A (2018)	Preschool-Elementary	To examine storytelling/story-acting for socio-emotional development	Experimental classroom study Storytelling	Storytelling improves empathy, cooperation, and social understanding	Strong alignment with storytelling for social care character
2	Soleimani, H., & Akbari, M (2020)	Elementary students	To analyze dialogic storytelling for moral development	Qualitative classroom intervention	Dialogic interaction strengthens moral reflection and value internalization	Fits criteria: storytelling + dialogic pedagogy
3	Isbell et al. (2004)	Preschool-Elementary	To assess teacher-led storytelling for emotional and social growth	Mixed-method	Storytelling enhances engagement, empathy, and prosocial readiness	Included as foundational evidence (meets exception rule)
4	Tsai & Tu (2021)	Elementary students	To evaluate digital storytelling for character education	Quasi-experimental	Digital storytelling increases moral sensitivity and responsibility	Relevant to modern storytelling in schools
5	Haven, K. (2015)	Elementary	To explore cognitive-emotional effects of stories on moral understanding	Conceptual + empirical synthesis	Story immersion boosts empathy and moral reasoning	Fits conceptual support (published ≥2015)
6	Kim, M. (2020)	Elementary	To study culturally relevant stories in shaping prosocial behavior	Qualitative case study	Cultural narratives enhance social responsibility and peer empathy	Strong contextual alignment
7	Lwin, S. (2016)	Elementary	To examine storytelling as a pedagogical tool for character education	Classroom-based study	Storytelling promotes moral reasoning and reflective thinking	Meets topic and population criteria
8	Digital Storytelling Research Group (2019)	Elementary	To investigate how multimodal storytelling develops prosocial skills	Mixed-method	Multimodal stories strengthen cooperation and emotional expression	Relevant: tech-supported storytelling connected to character formation
9	Mages, W. (2016)	Elementary	To evaluate narrative-based moral instruction	Experimental	Narrative engagement increases children's ability to judge right-wrong and act prosocially	Directly aligned with moral development
10	Bruner, J. (1991)	Theory, foundational	To explain narrative as a means of constructing social meaning	Theoretical	Children construct moral meaning through narrative interpretation	Included as foundational theory (meets exception rule)

Empathy, Prosocial Behavior, and Moral Understanding

Across the reviewed studies, several recurring patterns emerged. Storytelling has been shown to enhance children's empathy, perspective taking, and prosocial behavior, particularly when structured, dialogic, and emotionally relevant approaches are employed in school contexts. Studies published within the last five years indicate that the internalization of moral values serves as the primary mechanism underlying this development, as children emotionally connect with narrative elements involving moral



dilemmas, social conflicts, or characters who model prosocial behavior. This emotional engagement enables children to understand and subsequently exhibit values such as kindness, care, and social responsibility. Furthermore, the effectiveness of storytelling increases significantly when dialogic interaction is incorporated. Research highlights that the use of reflective questioning, interpretive encouragement, and facilitated discussions enhances children's emotional and cognitive engagement, thereby supporting their ability to analyze social conflicts, infer moral consequences, and articulate value based reasoning. In addition, story selection and instructional techniques play a crucial role in shaping learning outcomes. Stories that align with children's lived experiences foster stronger emotional resonance and facilitate moral internalization, while instructional strategies such as voice modulation, role playing, dramatic gestures, visual aids, and guided questioning improve students' attentiveness and participation. Collectively, these findings confirm the multidimensional impacts of storytelling in the cognitive, affective, and social domains, positioning it as a powerful medium for cultivating social care character during the elementary school years.

The synthesis of the reviewed articles, as presented in Table 2, reveals a consistent pattern indicating the positive role of storytelling in fostering children's social care character across early childhood and elementary education contexts. The selected studies encompass diverse research designs, including experimental, quasi experimental, qualitative, mixed method, and theoretical approaches, demonstrating the robustness and breadth of empirical evidence supporting storytelling as an effective pedagogical strategy in character education.

Across the empirical studies, storytelling was found to significantly enhance key socio emotional dimensions such as empathy, cooperation, social understanding, and prosocial readiness. Experimental and classroom-based studies consistently reported that children exposed to structured storytelling activities showed greater emotional engagement and improved ability to understand social situations and moral consequences compared to those in conventional learning settings. These findings suggest that storytelling facilitates moral internalization by allowing children to emotionally connect with narrative characters and social dilemmas.

Furthermore, several studies emphasized the importance of dialogic and interactive storytelling practices. Qualitative and classroom intervention studies demonstrated that dialogic interaction during storytelling, including reflective questioning and guided discussion, strengthened children's moral reflection and value internalization. Such interactions encouraged children to articulate their perspectives, reason about right and wrong, and develop a deeper understanding of social responsibility.

In addition, the findings highlight the influence of instructional strategies and media formats on learning outcomes. Studies focusing on digital and multimodal storytelling reported increased moral sensitivity, emotional expression, and cooperation among students, indicating that technology supported storytelling can enhance engagement when aligned with character education objectives. Similarly, the use of expressive instructional techniques such as story immersion, voice modulation, and narrative enactment was shown to support empathy development and moral reasoning. Cultural relevance also emerged as a significant factor. Studies examining culturally grounded narratives revealed that stories reflecting children's lived experiences and social contexts were more effective in promoting social responsibility and peer empathy. This finding underscores the importance of contextual alignment in storytelling based character education.

Finally, foundational theoretical works included in the review provide conceptual support for the empirical findings. Narrative based theories explain how children construct moral meaning through interpretation and emotional engagement with stories, reinforcing the role of storytelling as a cognitive and social tool for character formation. Collectively, these results confirm that storytelling exerts multidimensional effects encompassing cognitive, emotional, and social domains, thereby positioning it as a powerful and adaptable approach for cultivating social care character in school settings.

The discussion of these findings reinforces the idea that storytelling functions as a strategic pedagogical approach for cultivating social care character in elementary school children. This interpretation is theoretically grounded in narrative constructivist perspectives, which emphasize that learners actively construct meaning through narrative structures rather than passively receiving information (Bruner, 1990; Bruner, 1996). Drawing from the patterns identified in the results, several interrelated interpretive insights can be articulated to explain how and why storytelling contributes



meaningfully to character development. First, the reviewed studies strongly align with narrative constructivist theory, which emphasizes that children actively construct moral understanding through symbolic narrative experiences (Egan, 1986; Nicolopoulou, 1997). As children follow a character's journey, encounter moral conflicts, and observe the consequences of actions within a story, they do not merely receive moral messages passively but instead develop personal moral frameworks through interpretation, reflection, and meaning making (Bruner, 1990). This process positions storytelling as an experiential learning medium consistent with constructivist learning principles (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984) that support moral reasoning and value formation (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009).

In addition, emotional engagement emerged as a central mechanism in moral internalization. The findings indicate that storytelling is most effective when children experience emotional resonance with the storyline, characters, and conflicts presented. This observation is supported by research in educational neuroscience demonstrating that emotion plays a fundamental role in learning, meaning construction, and decision making processes (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). Emotional engagement fosters moral identification, whereby children empathize with characters and internalize the values embedded within narratives (Hoffman, 2000). Through this affective pathway, values such as empathy, care, and social responsibility are internalized at both cognitive and emotional levels, increasing the likelihood of sustained behavioral change rather than short-term moral compliance (Decety & Cowell, 2014). Narrative transportation theory further explains this mechanism by suggesting that deep engagement with stories enhances attitudinal and value-based influence (Green & Brock, 2000).

Furthermore, the role of dialogic interaction was found to be critical in enhancing critical thinking and social awareness. This finding is consistent with sociocultural learning theory, which posits that cognitive development is fundamentally shaped by social interaction and mediated dialogue (Vygotsky, 1978). Meaningful teacher–student dialogue during storytelling sessions encourages learners to articulate interpretations, explore multiple moral perspectives, and connect narrative events to real-life social situations (Mercer & Littleton, 2007). Such dialogic processes promote reflective thinking and collaborative meaning-making (Wells, 1999), enabling children to negotiate interpretations, evaluate moral consequences, and deepen their understanding of social relationships (Alexander, 2008). Consequently, storytelling becomes not only a narrative activity but also a socially mediated cognitive space for value-based reasoning.

The findings also highlight that effective storytelling requires contextual relevance and the use of varied instructional techniques. Stories that reflect children's cultural backgrounds and lived experiences generate stronger emotional and cognitive resonance, an idea aligned with culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally responsive teaching frameworks (Gay, 2018). From a developmental perspective, learning is inseparable from cultural and social context (Rogoff, 2003), suggesting that culturally grounded narratives enhance meaning construction and value internalization. At the same time, instructional strategies such as role play, visual representation, dramatic expression, and digital storytelling platforms expand engagement opportunities and accommodate diverse learning preferences, reinforcing experiential and multimodal learning principles (Kolb, 1984).

The novelty of this article lies in its integrative perspective on storytelling in character education. Unlike prior studies that often examine cognitive, emotional, or dialogic dimensions separately, this review synthesizes these elements into a unified explanatory framework (Nucci, Narvaez, & Krettenauer, 2014). The findings highlight the dynamic interplay between emotional engagement and dialogic interaction as dual drivers of moral internalization, extending narrative-centered approaches (Bruner, 1990) by incorporating sociocultural mechanisms of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Additionally, this study provides a structured mapping of recent storytelling practices within contemporary educational contexts, contributing to the broader discourse on effective character education strategies (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Lickona, 1991). Finally, the discussion proposes a practical instructional pathway for integrating storytelling into character education curricula, positioning storytelling as a flexible, context-sensitive, and pedagogically robust approach for fostering social care character in elementary education.



CONCLUSION

This descriptive literature review concludes that storytelling consistently and significantly contributes to the development of children's social care character. When implemented in a structured, dialogic, and emotionally engaging manner, storytelling enhances empathy, perspective-taking, and prosocial behaviors such as sharing, cooperation, and helping peers. Its effectiveness is rooted in the integration of meaningful narratives, teacher–student dialogue, and engaging storytelling techniques that support value internalization. Storytelling also provides multidimensional benefits by simultaneously fostering children's social-emotional, cognitive, and moral development. Therefore, storytelling should be positioned as a strategic pedagogical approach and systematically integrated into character education in elementary schools. Teachers are encouraged to select stories that align with students' developmental levels and lived experiences, facilitate reflective dialogue, and employ varied delivery techniques, including role-play and visual or digital media, to strengthen emotional engagement and moral understanding. Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to examine the long-term impact of storytelling on social care character. Comparative studies across storytelling modalities and cultural contexts are also recommended to strengthen empirical evidence and instructional practice.

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