

### WAYANG DI RUANG KELAS: FLIPBOOK PUNAKAWAN SEBAGAI MEDIA PENGUATAN BUDAYA DAN LITERASI

*Wayang in the Classroom: Punakawan Flipbook as a Media for Strengthening Culture and Literacy*

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#### **Abstract**

*This study aims to explore how four Punakawan characters; Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong can be utilized through digital Flipbook storytelling to enhance moral knowledge and storytelling skills among elementary school students in Central Java, Indonesia. The objectives are to (1) integrate local cultural values into digital learning media, (2) analyze students' perceptions of Puna-kawan-themed Flipbooks, and (3) evaluate their effectiveness in improving creativity, ethical understanding, and digital literacy. This study employed a qualitative descriptive method supported by quantitative data. Data were collected through students' created Flipbooks, reflective journals, observation notes, and teacher interviews. The data were analyzed using content analysis and simple descriptive statistics to identify dominant themes and participation levels. The results showed that students demonstrated higher creativity, stronger moral reasoning, and improved digital literacy. Semar and Petruk were the most preferred characters, while Bagong particularly attracted older students for his critical thinking values. These findings emphasize the pedagogical potential of integrating local wisdom with digital media for character education and 21st-century literacy development.*

**Keywords:** digital storytelling; moral education; Punakawan characters; Flipbook media; cultural literacy

#### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana empat tokoh Punakawan; Semar, Gareng, Petruk, dan Bagong, dapat dimanfaatkan melalui penceritaan Flipbook digital untuk meningkatkan pengetahuan moral dan keterampilan mendongeng di kalangan siswa sekolah dasar di Jawa Tengah, Indonesia. Tujuannya adalah untuk (1) mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai budaya lokal ke dalam media pembelajaran digital, (2) menganalisis persepsi siswa terhadap Flipbook bertema Puna-kawan, dan (3) mengevaluasi efektivitasnya dalam meningkatkan kreativitas, pemahaman etika, dan literasi digital. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif yang didukung oleh data kuantitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui flipbook yang dibuat siswa, jurnal reflektif, catatan observasi, dan wawancara guru. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis isi dan statistik deskriptif sederhana untuk mengidentifikasi tema dominan dan tingkat partisipasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa menunjukkan kreativitas yang lebih tinggi, penalaran moral yang lebih kuat, dan peningkatan literasi digital. Semar dan Petruk adalah tokoh yang paling disukai, sementara Bagong khususnya menarik

minat siswa yang lebih tua karena nilai-nilai berpikir kritisnya. Temuan ini menekankan potensi pedagogis dari integrasi kearifan lokal dengan media digital untuk pendidikan karakter dan pengembangan literasi abad ke-21.

**Kata-kata kunci:** penceritaan digital; pendidikan moral; karakter Punakawan; media Flipbook; literasi budaya

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## INTRODUCTION

In today’s rapidly changing world, the role of education extends beyond transferring knowledge, it shapes how younger generations adapt to social, cultural, and technological transformation. As societies transition from traditional to modern systems, education must evolve to foster innovation, creativity, and digital competence (Mazumdar, 2021). In Indonesia, the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 65 of 2013 highlights the importance of integrating information and communication technology in classroom learning to improve effectiveness and efficiency (Nunuk et al., 2020). This policy reflects the government’s commitment to preparing students for a globalized digital era in which technology-based learning is central to education.

However, challenges persist in classroom implementation. Many elementary schools continue to rely on conventional methods and outdated resources that limit student engagement and literacy development (Muawanah & Muhid, 2021; Sudarmo et al., 2021). Students often face difficulties in understanding language concepts when learning materials lack interactivity and visual appeal. According to Bušljeta (2013) and Kusumawati & Maruti (2019), effective use of teaching media plays a crucial role in enhancing learning outcomes, as it helps bridge the gap between abstract content and concrete understanding. In this regard, the use of digital visual flipbooks, interactive story-based media combining images and text, offers an engaging alternative. Supported by dual coding theory, which asserts that learning improves when verbal and visual information are presented together (Paivio, 2014), digital flipbooks can enhance students’ comprehension, memory retention, and motivation (Chambers, 2011; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001). This approach aligns with the concepts of dual coding theory, which emphasizes that information delivered through both verbal and visual channels leads to more effective learning outcomes (Paivio, 2014).

Furthermore, incorporating culturally relevant content into learning materials can strengthen students’ identity and character development. In Indonesia, folklore, fairy tales, and especially wayang stories serve as rich sources of cultural and moral education (Octaberlina, 2023). Among these, the Punakawan characters: Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong, symbolize wisdom, humility, humor, and social critique. As noted by Noorzeha, Sutono, and Suryosumunar (2022), the lakon Punakawan functions as a form of cultural and religious transformation within Javanese society, conveying moral and philosophical messages in relatable ways. The expressive visuals and emotional resonance of such narratives, as discussed by Smith (2022), can deeply engage learners, enabling them to connect emotionally with characters and stories, thereby enhancing empathy and understanding.

Despite their richness, many students today are unfamiliar with Punakawan and traditional wayang literature due to a lack of modern, accessible learning media that present these stories in appealing digital formats. Prior research has begun to address this issue. For instance, Pratiwi et al. (2022) implemented Wayang Punokawan as a supplementary sourcebook to enhance elementary students' writing skills, while Rosarineysa et al. (2023) and Zuhriah et al. (2024) showed that wayang-based learning media can positively influence students' character formation. Similarly, studies on illustrated storybooks and digital media integrating local wisdom have demonstrated their effectiveness in promoting social responsibility and moral education (Murniayudi & Sujarwo, 2021; Sari & Wardani, 2021). Other research has focused on the presence of local wisdom in reading books issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture, revealing five key elements: culture, norms, ethics, beliefs, and customs (Fadhilah & Rahmawati, 2020). In addition, Santoso, Apriliya, and Kosasih (2017) designed children's storybooks based on the Tasikmalaya embroidery tradition, illustrating how integrating local crafts and narratives into educational materials can reinforce regional identity and creativity.

Although these studies highlight the importance of embedding local wisdom in education, there remains a research gap regarding the development and use of Wayang Punakawan-themed digital flipbooks as a learning medium for Indonesian language instruction. Most prior works have focused on printed materials or other media forms, leaving limited exploration of digital formats that merge traditional stories with modern interactive technology. The development of such media is particularly relevant given the need to revitalize local cultural knowledge among younger generations in a digital learning context.

The present study is motivated by the researcher's concern and interest in connecting digital literacy with local wisdom. As an educator observing the decline in students' familiarity with traditional stories, the researcher aims to develop innovative learning media that engage learners cognitively and emotionally while promoting Indonesia's cultural heritage. Prasetyo (2020) emphasizes that developing learning media should not only facilitate knowledge transfer but also enhance students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities. Accordingly, by using Wayang Punakawan as digital flipbook content, students can learn linguistic concepts while internalizing moral and cultural values embedded in Javanese philosophy.

Therefore, this study aims to (1) analyze the integration of local wisdom values within Wayang Punakawan-themed digital flipbooks; (2) evaluate students' perceptions of the use of these flipbooks in Indonesian language learning; and (3) examine the effectiveness of digital flipbooks in improving students' motivation, comprehension, and appreciation of local wisdom. From these objectives, the research problem can be formulated as follows: How can Wayang Punakawan-themed digital flipbooks be effectively used to enhance Indonesian language learning and promote local wisdom values among elementary school students?

In essence, this paper argues that the integration of digital media and cultural storytelling can create a powerful pedagogical approach that revitalizes traditional knowledge through modern technology. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for teachers, curriculum developers, authors, and policymakers in designing culturally grounded and technologically adaptive learning materials that foster literacy, character education, and cultural appreciation among Indonesian elementary students.

## **METHODS**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design with supporting quantitative elements. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allowed an in-depth exploration of students' interpretations of moral and cultural values represented by the

Punakawan characters through digital flipbook storytelling. This design aligned with the research objectives, which sought to understand how students construct moral narratives and how their engagement patterns reflect these values. Quantitative data, such as the frequency of character selections and levels of participation, complemented the qualitative findings by providing measurable trends that strengthened the analysis.

The study was conducted at a public elementary school in Central Java, Indonesia, selected purposively for its integration of local cultural content and students' familiarity with digital learning tools. Participants consisted of 50 students, 24 from Grade 5 and 26 from Grade 6, who had prior exposure to Indonesian folklore and basic ICT literacy. The three-week implementation was structured to ensure replicability. In the first week, students were introduced to the Punakawan figures: Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong, and the moral values they embody, including wisdom, honesty, humor, and critical thinking. They also received short training on using digital flipbook software. In the second week, students developed short digital flipbooks that combined text and visuals to illustrate selected moral themes. The teacher and researcher observed engagement and creativity using structured notes, while students recorded their character preferences and explained their choices. In the final week, students submitted their flipbooks and reflective journals discussing the moral intentions behind their stories, and teachers provided feedback through brief interviews.

Data were collected from multiple sources: student-created digital flipbooks, reflective journals, teacher observation notes, character preference logs, and informal teacher interviews. This triangulation strengthened the validity and richness of the data. The digital flipbooks and journals served as primary materials for understanding students' moral reasoning and storytelling skills, while the quantitative logs and observation data revealed participation patterns and value alignment. Data analysis followed a combined qualitative and descriptive quantitative procedure. All student artifacts were compiled and anonymized, and qualitative content analysis was used to identify recurring themes, visual symbols, and moral representations. Open coding produced categories such as wisdom, honesty, humor, and cooperation, which were then interpreted to reveal how students conveyed moral lessons through narrative and imagery. Quantitative data were summarized using simple descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages, to illustrate dominant character choices and engagement levels. Triangulation, member checking with teachers, and peer review of coding categories ensured the trustworthiness of the analysis.

Ethical procedures were followed throughout the research. Informed consent was obtained from participants and guardians, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and student works were used solely for academic purposes. Overall, this methodological approach provided a comprehensive yet replicable framework for examining how culturally embedded figures, when integrated into interactive digital media, can enhance moral understanding, creativity, and engagement among elementary school students.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Storytelling using Punakawan figures from Javanese wayang (Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong) is an effective way to combine students' cultural heritage with literacy and moral education media. Each puppet represents a specific virtue; for example, Semar usually represents humility and honesty, whilst Petruk's humor and generosity represent concern for others, making them excellent role models in classroom scenarios (Yunita, 2020). Based on this study, stories that incorporate these well-known cultural symbols draw children's attention and make literacy tasks more motivating. Teachers have used Punakawan stories to create engaging, values-infused reading and writing activities in Indonesian language. This method corresponds to the educational goals of incorporating character education into literacy

learning: culturally-based storytelling not only teaches moral ideals but also improves students' motivation and writing abilities. The table 1 below summarizes Grade 5 and 6 students' reactions to each Punakawan character, highlighting the features and moral teachings they identified, as well as the engagement which they inspired in storytelling lessons.

**Table 1.** Students' reactions to each Punakawan characters

<i>Punakawan Character</i>	<i>Character Trait</i>	<i>Aligned Moral Value</i>	<i>Storytelling Focus</i>	<i>Grade 5 Students Engaged</i>	<i>Grade 6 Students Engaged</i>	<i>Total Students</i>
<i>Semar</i>	Wise, humble, fatherly	Wisdom, humility	Narration clarity, moral conclusion	20	24	44
<i>Gareng</i>	Honest, loyal, simple	Honesty, integrity	Building trust in narrative voice	17	22	39
<i>Petruk</i>	Creative, humorous, clever	Creativity, resilience	Character dialogue, humor use	21	25	46
<i>Bagong</i>	Bold, critical, straightforward	Courage, critical thinking	Plot development, conflict resolution	18	23	41

The data demonstrate that elementary students from grades 5 and 6 have a strong affinity for Punakawan figures, notably Semar and Petruk, implying that character-driven moral instruction, when based on local culture, is both successful and interesting. This is in line with Suriansyah and Amelia (Suriansyah & Amelia, 2021) and Gularso et al. (2023), who discovered that using local wisdom characters in language acquisition improves both value absorption and expressive language use. They contend that characters like Semar have symbolic moral power that young learners intuitively perceive, making them excellent agents for internalizing abstract values such as humility or fairness. Our data validates this, as 44 of 50 students actively associated with Semar, associating him with narrative conclusion and moral closure, which are essential elements for successful storytelling.

Petruk, known for his knowledge and wit, had the greatest engagement rate (46/50). His traits are congruent with Kasilingam and Ajitha's (Kasilingam & Ajitha, 2022) findings, which imply that humor improves deeper emotional memory, hence improving value retention and storytelling fluency (Taylor, 2020). Based on our observations, students found Petruk to be a springboard for creativity and language experimentation, particularly when composing dialogues, humor, and problem-solving scenarios. This strategy is consistent with constructivist pedagogies, in which students co-create knowledge in an engaging way rather than passively receiving it.

A comparison between Grade 5 and Grade 6 students demonstrates significant developmental trends: Grade 5 relied largely on characters such as Semar and Petruk to provide clarity and engagement. This complements Piagetian developmental theory, which states that younger learners (who are still in the concrete operational stage) require clear, moral-centered storylines and emotionally appealing information. Grade 6 students, closer to the formal operational level, were more responsive to critical and abstract dimensions, as seen by their more substantial attachment to Bagong (23/26 students). Bagong's role in stimulating critical thinking and confronting moral quandaries aligns with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, in which guided exposure to complexity helps scaffold learning. This is consistent with the findings of Walton and Davidson (Walton, 1996), who observed that older

primary kids began to absorb sarcasm, satire, and moral ambiguity, helping them to negotiate more complex story structures.

The final educational objective was to enhance students' storytelling abilities, especially in: Moral clarity narrative structure, that students using Semar could articulate clear moral resolutions. Those aligned with Petruk used richer dialogues and humor. Bagong prompted more complex plots involving conflict and critical analysis. This triangulates with OECD's framework on creative thinking in education (Kusumoto, 2018), which identifies storytelling as a vehicle for values education, empathy building, and communication competence, all demonstrated in our study.

### ***The Integration of Punakawan Characters and Student Response***

The integration of Punakawan characters into storytelling lessons revealed distinct patterns of engagement and learning outcomes among students in Grades 5 and 6. Each character, Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong, was intentionally associated with specific moral values, allowing students to explore ethical dimensions while developing narrative skills. The classroom data indicates that these characters were not only effective in embodying core values but also served as accessible entry points into various storytelling techniques.

Semar, the most widely recognized and respected Punakawan figure, was associated with wisdom and humility. His fatherly presence and role as a moral anchor made him a popular figure, especially in narratives that required clear moral conclusions or conflict resolution. A significant majority of students 20 in Grade 5 and 24 in Grade 6 gravitated toward Semar when crafting stories that needed emotional depth and ethical reflection. Teachers observed that students who chose Semar often demonstrated improved narrative coherence and a stronger ability to tie character actions to clear moral lessons, showcasing enhanced skills in delivering purposeful stories.

Gareng, with his traits of honesty, loyalty, and simplicity, became a vehicle for students to explore themes of sincerity and trust. Although slightly less popular than Semar or Petruk, Gareng still engaged 17 Grade 5 students and 22 Grade 6 students. Students using Gareng in their stories tended to write from a first-person perspective, emphasizing internal emotions and trustworthiness. The character encouraged reflective storytelling, where students learned to position their narrators as credible and emotionally honest. This demonstrated growth in their ability to develop tone and narrative perspective, critical components of storytelling voice.

Petruk, known for his cleverness and humor, proved to be the most engaging character overall. With 21 students in Grade 5 and 25 in Grade 6 choosing him, Petruk offered a bridge between moral instruction and creative expression. Students frequently employed dialogue, exaggeration, and problem-solving scenarios when writing about Petruk, which enhanced their narrative flair. Teachers noted that students felt more confident experimenting with plot twists and comedic timing, leading to livelier and more dynamic stories. This suggests that Petruk played a crucial role in encouraging linguistic creativity and audience engagement through humor.

Bagong, while less prominent than Petruk and Semar, nonetheless attracted substantial interest, 18 students in Grade 5 and 23 in Grade 6. His bold, critical, and straightforward nature resonated particularly with older students who were beginning to engage with more complex narrative structures. In stories featuring Bagong, students were more likely to introduce conflict and moral ambiguity, challenging their readers to think critically. This reflects an emerging ability among Grade 6 students to navigate complex ideas and apply

them creatively in storytelling, aligning with cognitive growth expectations for their age group.

Overall, the use of Punakawan characters in the classroom gave useful insights into how students connect with moral archetypes and apply those links to storytelling practice. The findings demonstrate that culturally integrated characters not only improve moral awareness, but also provide as developmentally appropriate scaffolding for storytelling skill development. Teachers were able to steer students to desired learning outcomes in an engaging and pedagogically successful manner by linking each character with unique moral principles and storytelling roles.

### ***Purposeful Alignment: Punakawan Characters and Flipbook Storytelling***

The use of Punakawan characters in Flipbook storytelling reveals integration of cultural storytelling with digital teaching, as indicated by strong levels of engagement and moral internalization among Grades 5 and 6. Flipbooks transform traditional storytelling into a multimodal, interactive format, allowing students to animate their grasp of values through layered storytelling that combines visuals and texts. This digital medium encourages students to actively reconstruct folktales, positioning characters such as Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong inside individualized moral situations. Students are not only absorbing ethical lessons; they are living and expressing them within their own narratives, demonstrating deeper comprehension and personal connection to the principles being studied.

Moreover, Flipbooks provide a dynamic platform for differentiating moral character traits through creative representation, allowing each Punakawan figure to serve as a unique narrative device. Students naturally gravitated toward roles and story arcs that resonated with the personalities of each character using Semar as a wise narrator to provide resolution, emphasizing Gareng's sincerity through emotive visuals and tone, or deploying Petruk's comedic potential with animated exaggerations that heightened narrative energy. Bagong's association with boldness and critical thinking often inspired students to experiment with moral dilemmas and plot twists, showcasing their evolving capacity for higher-order narrative construction. This synergy between character-driven storytelling and Flipbook features fostered a student-centered learning environment where cultural identity, ethical reasoning, and digital literacy intersected meaningfully, underscoring the pedagogical value of blending local wisdom with innovative media.



**Figure 1.** Wayang Punakawan Characters



**Figure 2.** Wayang Punakawan Flipbook

The findings from our classroom implementation of Flipbooks integrated with Javanese wayang characters demonstrate a strong convergence with recent scholarly research on digital storytelling, moral education, and the incorporation of local wisdom. The outcomes not only validate the pedagogical potential of Flipbooks but also underscore their effectiveness as multimodal tools for cultivating ethical reasoning, narrative development, and cultural appreciation among elementary students.

First, our observations closely align with Unayah et al. (2024), who found that digital flipbooks embedded with culturally rich and character-driven narratives significantly enhanced students' comprehension, moral sensitivity, and engagement. Their emphasis on the synergistic effect of visual and auditory elements mirrors our own findings, particularly in the way students emotionally and ethically connected with figures such as Semar and Bagong. These characters served as conduits for moral reflection, allowing students to navigate complex values like honesty, humility, and responsibility within a familiar cultural framework.

Similarly, our data resonate with Swanson (2016), who demonstrated that storytelling enhances narrative coherence, especially when students engage with internal character conflicts and ethical dilemmas. In our classroom, the integration of Bagong and Gareng not only enriched plot construction but also encouraged students to script reflective dialogues that illustrated the tension between right and wrong. This indicates that Flipbooks serve not merely as presentation tools but as scaffolds for deeper narrative thinking and character development.

Moreover, our findings affirm Arifin and Karen's (Arifin & Karen, 2024), which highlighted the ability of interactive media incorporating wayang characters to encourage cultural awareness and enhance value transmission. We discovered that students did not simply recite classic stories; rather, they reinvented Semar and Petruk in current circumstances, dramatizing moral dilemmas with a personal voice. This type of creative appropriation demonstrates a transition in the learner's position, from passive cultural recipients to active cultural agents. Flipbooks enabled students to engage in a dynamic process of cultural reinterpretation, where tradition met innovation in ethically laden narratives.

Finally, our results find broader theoretical support in OECD (Lucas, 2022), which argues for the integration of creative and ethical thinking through digital means. Flipbooks demonstrate this pedagogical objective by allowing students to create narratives that are both inventive and morally based. The enthusiastic and insightful responses to moral characters in

our classroom reinforce the significance of digital storytelling technologies in accomplishing these 21st-century learning goals. Thus, our findings confirm a growing agreement in educational research that Flipbooks, when developed with cultural and moral intentionality, are effective vehicles for ethical engagement, narrative sophistication, and cultural rootedness in the digital era. These findings imply that the convergence of technology, storytelling, and local wisdom can be more than a pedagogical trend, but an innovative framework for holistic education.

## CONCLUSION

Integrating Punakawan characters into Flipbook-based storytelling is a culturally grounded and pedagogically effective way to improve students' moral reasoning, narrative abilities, and engagement in literacy acquisition. This technique, which combines ancient Javanese wisdom with modern digital tools, enables students to actively construct meaning, internalize ethical ideals, and express their creativity through character-driven storylines. The continuous alignment of students' answers to the attributes of Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong highlights the potential of adopting culturally relevant characters as moral scaffolds across developmental stages. These findings underscore the importance of storytelling as a medium for value transmission and cognitive development, particularly when embedded in interactive formats such as Flipbooks. As a recommendation, future implementations should study expanding this approach to cross-disciplinary contexts, such as civic education or social studies and investigating its longterm impacts on students' ethical growth and cultural identity formation.

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