



The Role of Elementary School Teachers in Cultivating Students' Empathetic Character Through Indonesian Folktales

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Abstract

This article aims to examine the role of elementary school teachers in shaping students' empathetic character through the use of Indonesian folktales, particularly those originating from West Nusa Tenggara (NTB). West Nusa Tenggara folktales contain diverse moral values that can teach students empathy the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. Using a content analysis approach, this study explores how folktales from Sasak communities in Lombok and Sumbawa can serve as tools for instilling empathy in classroom learning. The findings indicate that folktales enable students to recognize and apply the concept of empathy in their daily lives. Furthermore, the article illustrates how teachers can act as effective facilitators by employing folktales as meaningful and contextually relevant learning media.

INTRODUCTION

Character education at the elementary school level plays a vital role in shaping individuals who are not only academically competent but also socially compassionate (Muliadi & Asyari, 2024; Rohyana & Siddiq, 2024; Saputri et al., 2025). One of the most crucial character values to be developed is empathy the ability to feel and understand the emotions of others. Indonesian folktales, rich in moral messages and local cultural wisdom, serve as an effective medium for fostering empathy among students (Hatima et al., 2025; Putri et al., 2025). As facilitators, teachers play a key role in guiding students to recognize the empathetic values embedded in these folktales and relate them to their everyday experiences. Through this approach, students gain a deeper understanding of the importance of human relationships and learn to respect and care for others (Rahayu, 2024; Renaldo et al., 2024).

As part of character education in elementary schools, developing empathy in students is essential for shaping individuals with strong social skills (Hartati, 2023; Kamaruddin et al., 2023; Wangi et al., 2022). One effective way to instill empathy is through Indonesian folktales, which are rich in moral messages. These stories not only convey life wisdom but also offer students opportunities to empathize with the characters (Amalia et al., 2024; Baiti & Putera, 2025). Elementary school teachers play a central role in facilitating this process by guiding students to explore the narratives, engage in discussions, and reflect on the values embedded within them. This approach allows students' empathetic character to grow naturally (Musa, 2025).

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The development of students' empathetic character is one of the primary goals of elementary education. Empathy, which forms the foundation of healthy interpersonal relationships, can be cultivated through various approaches one of which is the use of Indonesian folktales (Aulia et al., 2024; Komang, 2024). These traditional stories, passed down through generations, contain moral values closely related to empathy, such as helping others, understanding others' feelings, and maintaining social harmony (Turyani et al., 2024). In this context, teachers play a crucial role in guiding students to explore and internalize the empathetic values embedded in folktales. With the right pedagogical approach, teachers can create a learning environment that supports the natural development of students' empathy (Fatimah et al., 2023; Zahro et al., 2024).

As educators in elementary schools, teachers play a strategic role in instilling character values in students, one of which is empathy. Well-developed empathy supports students in building healthy social interactions, both with classmates and within their broader environment. One effective method for fostering empathy is through the use of Indonesian folktales as a learning medium. Folktales that contain moral messages can evoke students' emotions and help them understand the feelings of others. Teachers are responsible for selecting appropriate stories, facilitating discussions, and guiding students to reflect on the values embedded in these narratives (Safutri & Faizah, 2025).

Character education in elementary schools goes beyond academic instruction, emphasizing the development of essential social values one of which is empathy. Empathy, the ability to feel and understand others' emotions, serves as a foundation for harmonious relationships within society. One effective way to cultivate empathy in students is through Indonesian folktales, which are rich in moral values relevant to everyday life. Teachers act as facilitators, guiding students to comprehend and internalize empathetic values through these stories in an engaging and meaningful way (Hidayat et al., 2023).

In today's rapidly advancing global era, the ability to empathize has become increasingly important, especially for younger generations. At the elementary school level, teachers play a vital role in cultivating empathetic character in students, which serves as the foundation for healthy social interactions and mutual respect. Indonesian folktales, rich in wisdom, morality, and humanity, offer a meaningful method for teaching empathy to students. Through these stories, students are encouraged not only to follow the narrative but also to reflect on the emotions and actions of the characters. Teachers act as facilitators, helping students uncover the deeper meanings within folktales and guiding them to apply these values in their everyday lives (Ferando et al., 2025; Nur'aini et al., 2024).

Teachers play a significant role in shaping students' character, particularly in developing empathy. One effective way to foster empathy is through the use of Indonesian folktales, which are rich in moral values such as mutual assistance, respect, and emotional understanding. Folktales help students connect more easily with the empathetic values being taught. Teachers are not only responsible for narrating these stories but also for facilitating discussions, uncovering moral messages, and encouraging students to reflect on how these values can be applied in their daily lives. With the right pedagogical approach, students' empathetic character can develop meaningfully (Manurung et al., 2025).

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using content analysis of selected folktales from West Nusa Tenggara (Engkizar et al., 2022). The folktales analyzed in this research originate from the Sasak community in Lombok and the Sumbawa community. These stories were chosen based on their popularity among local

communities in West Nusa Tenggara and their relevance in conveying empathetic values.

This study employed a qualitative approach using content analysis of selected folktales from West Nusa Tenggara, specifically those originating from the Sasak community in Lombok and the Sumbawa community. These stories were chosen based on their popularity among local communities and their relevance in conveying empathetic values. The research steps included collecting widely recognized folktales commonly used in educational settings, analyzing their content to identify moral messages related to empathy such as character interactions, emotional conflicts, and resolutions emphasizing social care (Engkizar et al., 2023). In addition, interviews were conducted with elementary school teachers in West Nusa Tenggara to explore how they integrate folktales into character education and how these narratives support the development of empathy in students. Classroom observations were also carried out to examine teaching practices that utilize folktales as a medium for fostering empathetic character (Amnda et al., 2020; Elkhaira et al., 2020; Engkizar et al., 2023; 2025; Murniyetti et al., 2016; Oktavia et al., 2023).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

West Nusa Tenggara Folktales and Empathetic Values

West Nusa Tenggara folktales contain numerous elements that can be used to cultivate empathy among students. A recurring theme in these stories is the protagonist's struggle to understand and empathize with others, even in challenging circumstances. Through these characters, students learn the importance of sharing, mutual understanding, and showing care for others.

For example, in Sasak folktales from Lombok, there is a story that portrays a character who must make personal sacrifices for others, even while facing hardship. The protagonist learns to prioritize others' feelings above their own a powerful expression of empathy. In an educational context, teachers can use this story to help students understand how to recognize others' struggles and why empathetic actions are essential for building healthy, supportive relationships.

Moreover, in folktales from the Sumbawa community, we can observe how the main character confronts conflicts involving the emotions of others and resolves these challenges by considering the needs and well-being of those around them. Such stories teach students not to focus solely on their own interests, but to understand others' situations and take action to support them. Teachers can encourage students to reflect on these empathetic values and facilitate discussions on how they can apply empathy in their daily lives, both at school and at home.

Folktales from West Nusa Tenggara often reflect strong social values such as togetherness, unity, and mutual respect. These values contribute significantly to the development of empathetic character, enabling students to care not only for themselves but also for those around them. Therefore, West Nusa Tenggara folktales are highly relevant in shaping empathy among elementary school students. Folktales taught in classrooms such as legends, fables, and regional narratives are rich in moral values related to empathy, including the ability to understand others' emotions, helping one another, and maintaining harmonious relationships. Teachers utilize these stories to encourage students to engage in discussions and reflect on the emotions of the characters, connecting them to their own daily experiences. Through dialogue and inquiry-based activities, students are guided to explore and internalize empathetic values in their personal lives (Afifah et al., 2024; Salama, 2025).

Moreover, teachers also implement active learning methods such as role-playing activities, which aim to enhance students' ability to understand and feel the emotions of others. This approach has proven effective in increasing students'

emotional engagement and strengthening their capacity to respond to others with attentiveness and compassion.

The Role of Teachers in Using West Nusa Tenggara Folktales to Foster Empathetic Character

Teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' empathetic character, as they interact directly with learners and influence how they perceive the world and others around them. In this context, folktales from West Nusa Tenggara can serve as a highly effective tool for teaching empathy. These stories offer an engaging and interactive medium through which teachers can guide students in exploring moral values. One practical approach involves reading folktales aloud and inviting students to discuss the values embedded in the narratives, encouraging reflection on empathy and its relevance to their everyday lives.

This discussion can be guided by questions that encourage students to think critically about how characters in the story experience and respond to the emotions of others. For instance, teachers might ask, "How did the main character feel when they had to sacrifice something for someone else? Have you ever felt the same way?" Such reflective questions help students connect emotionally with the narrative and deepen their understanding of empathy. Following the discussion, teachers can facilitate activities that allow students to apply empathetic values in their daily lives. One effective method is assigning group projects that illustrate acts of empathy. In these projects, students may be asked to share personal experiences of showing empathy toward friends, family, or their community. Teachers can also provide concrete examples of empathetic behavior, such as helping a struggling classmate, listening to a friend's problems, or sharing with someone in need, to reinforce the practical relevance of empathy in everyday situations.

In addition, teachers can incorporate role-playing activities in which students act as characters from West Nusa Tenggara folktales. These activities place students in situations that require them to demonstrate empathy toward others. For example, in the story [name of story 3], students might portray a character who must help someone else despite facing personal hardship. Through role-playing, students learn how others' emotions can influence their own actions and how empathetic behavior can make a meaningful difference in someone's life. Teachers can also engage parents and the broader community to support empathy education. For instance, parents may be invited to share their experiences of practicing empathy at home, or schools may organize community-based activities that offer real-life examples of caring for and helping others.

Through these approaches, teachers can help students not only understand the concept of empathy but also apply it in their daily lives. Teachers serve not merely as instructors, but as facilitators who guide students in developing empathetic character through West Nusa Tenggara folktales, which are rich in moral values.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that folktales from West Nusa Tenggara hold significant potential in shaping empathetic character among elementary school students. These stories, rich in moral and social values as seen in narratives from the Sasak community in Lombok and the Sumbawa community teach students to understand and feel the emotions of others, while also providing concrete examples of how empathetic actions can be applied in everyday life. The values embedded in these folktales, such as sharing, respecting others' feelings, and helping one another, are highly relevant to the development of empathy in young learners. The role of teachers in integrating West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) folktales into classroom instruction is crucial. As facilitators, teachers are not merely storytellers

they guide students in understanding the moral meanings embedded in these narratives and encourage them to apply empathetic values in their social interactions. By employing interactive learning methods such as discussions, group projects, and role-playing, teachers can create deep and meaningful learning experiences that foster empathy.

Furthermore, teachers should involve parents and the wider community to reinforce character education beyond the school environment. Using NTB folktales in character development not only helps students grasp the importance of empathy but also introduces them to the richness of local culture, thereby enhancing their educational experience. Overall, NTB folktales serve as an effective and contextually relevant medium for teaching empathy in elementary schools. Therefore, teachers must optimize the use of these stories as educational tools that convey moral values and shape students into socially responsible individuals. In doing so, students can grow into individuals who are not only academically competent but also caring and empathetic toward others.

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