

Innovation of Story-Based Moral Learning Modules in Strengthening Student Character

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to develop and test the effectiveness of a story-based moral learning module as an innovation in strengthening students' character. The background of this study is based on the weak implementation of character education which tends to be normative and non-contextual. The story-based module is designed to touch the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of students through narratives that are relevant to their lives. The research method used is the Research and Development (R&D) model of Borg & Gall, with stages of needs analysis, planning, development, expert validation, revision, limited trials, and evaluation of effectiveness through a quasi-experimental approach. The results of the study showed that the use of story-based modules significantly improved students' understanding and internalization of moral values, such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy. This module is also able to build students' emotional involvement and create a fun and meaningful learning atmosphere. These findings strengthen the theory that the narrative approach can be an effective strategy in character learning. Thus, this module has great potential to be widely replicated in the context of character education at various school levels.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Character education is the main foundation in forming a young generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also strong in morality and ethics (Susanto, 2024). In the midst of the challenging digital era, the role of education in shaping students' characters is becoming increasingly complex and crucial. General facts show that character education has become an integral part of the curriculum at various levels of education, as stated in the policy of the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology through the Character

Education Strengthening program (PPK) (Herdiyanti, Janah, & Susanto, 2025). This program emphasizes the importance of religious values, nationalism, independence, mutual cooperation, and integrity that are internalized in students. However, the implementation of character education often does not run optimally because the learning approach is less contextual and boring for students (Susanto, Rohmah, Hidayanti, & Sugiyar, 2023).

Socially, Indonesian society is currently facing various moral and ethical challenges among the younger generation. Phenomena such as increasing cases of bullying, academic dishonesty, lack of empathy, and declining manners are a reflection of the weakening character of the student generation (Helandri & Supriadi, 2024). On the other hand, the culture of literacy and the nation's noble values which were previously introduced through folk tales or moral stories are starting to be marginalized by the consumption of digital media, not all of which contain educational value (Puji, Hani, & Kumalasari, 2025). This is a common concern because the weak character of the younger generation can threaten the future of the nation. Therefore, an innovative learning approach that touches the emotional and moral side of students is an urgent need in the world of education (Kartiwan, Alkarimah, & Ulfah, 2023).

The main problem faced in character education today is the lack of learning media that are fun, meaningful, and relevant to students' lives. Rigid and cognitive learning modules are often unable to deeply touch the affective aspects of students. As a result, the character building process is not optimal and is only normative or symbolic. Moral learning is often delivered verbally without a real-life context, making it difficult for students to internalize these values in their daily behavior. In addition, most teachers have difficulty in delivering character education materials that touch students' hearts due to the limited availability of effective and fun teaching media.

As a solution to these problems, innovation in story-based learning modules can be a relevant and effective approach. Stories as a teaching medium have the power to convey moral messages subtly, touch the affective side of students, and facilitate the process of internalizing values. Stories allow students to reflect on the actions of characters in the narrative, understand the moral consequences of an action, and relate them to their own life experiences. This approach is also more interesting and enjoyable because it combines elements of imagination, emotion, and indirect value learning. Thus, the development of story-based moral learning modules is expected to be able to strengthen students' characters more effectively than conventional approaches.

Previous research studies show that story-based learning methods have been widely used in the context of moral and character education. For example, research by Barida and Prasetiawan (**Barida & Prasetiawan, 2018**) shows that narratives can increase students' moral awareness and empathy. Other research by Kosasih (**Kosasih, 2013**) emphasizes the importance of integrating moral values in daily learning through contextual methods and touching the affective side of students. In addition, the results of Wening's research (**Wening, 2012**) in Indonesia, it has been proven that the use of stories in learning can improve students' understanding of the values of honesty and responsibility. However, innovations in modules that systematically integrate local and modern stories in the form of moral education narratives are still very limited, especially those specifically designed to support a comprehensive character education curriculum.

Based on the urgency and relevance, this study aims to develop and test the effectiveness of a story-based moral learning module in strengthening students' characters. This module is designed not only to convey moral values, but also to facilitate discussion, reflection, and application of values in real life. The main objective of this study is to create a learning innovation that is humanistic, fun, and has an impact on the development of students' characters in elementary and secondary schools. With a story-based approach, students are expected to not only understand moral values, but also be motivated to practice them in their daily lives.

The urgency of this research lies in the need for a learning approach that is able to bridge the gap between theory and practice of character education. In today's world of education, there is a tendency for students to understand moral concepts cognitively, but fail to apply them in behavior. This shows that a learning method is needed that integrates cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in a single learning process. Story-based modules provide a great opportunity to achieve this integration because they allow students to be emotionally and cognitively involved in understanding and reflecting on moral values.

The method used in this research is Research and Development (R&D) with the Borg & Gall approach (**Borg & Gall, 1983**). The research stages include needs analysis, module design planning, prototype development, expert validation, module revision, limited trials, and effectiveness evaluation through a quasi-experimental approach (**Sugiyono, 2016**). Data were collected through observation, interviews, questionnaires, and student character tests before and after the intervention. The validity of the module content will be tested by character education experts and language experts, while the effectiveness of the

module is analyzed through a comparison of the character values of students who participate in learning using the story module and those who do not use the module.

The novelty of this research lies in the development of a moral learning module that not only presents inspiring stories, but is also systematically designed to support value reflection activities, moral discussions, and application exercises in students' lives. This module will integrate local and global stories that are relevant to students' current lives, thus forming a bridge between traditional values and contemporary moral challenges. In addition, this module is also designed with a thematic, interactive, and multimodal approach (combining text, images, and audio) so that it can attract the attention of students with various learning styles. Another uniqueness of this module is the presence of a personal reflection and student commitment section at the end of each story, which allows students to evaluate themselves and design concrete actions as an implementation of moral values.

Thus, the development of Story-Based Moral Learning Modules is expected to be a real contribution in supporting efforts to strengthen students' character through an approach that touches the heart, inspires the mind, and triggers real moral action. This innovation not only provides a solution to the weakness of character education in schools, but also becomes a learning model that can be widely replicated in various educational institutions. As a form of development of educational science and practice, the results of this study can be a reference for teachers, curriculum developers, and educational institutions in designing more effective, contextual, and meaningful character learning.

2. METHODS

This research method uses a Research and Development (R&D) approach which refers to the Borg and Gall model (**Borg & Gall, 1983**). This approach was chosen because it is suitable for designing, developing, and testing the effectiveness of a learning product, in this case a story-based moral learning module. The R&D model aims to produce products that are not only conceptually innovative, but also empirically proven to be feasible and effective (**Sugiyono, 2016**). This research was conducted through seven main stages, namely needs analysis, design planning, prototype development, expert validation, module revision, limited trials, and effectiveness evaluation. The first stage, needs analysis, was conducted by collecting data through observation, interviews, and questionnaires to teachers and students to determine the

obstacles faced in character learning and the extent of the need for contextual and enjoyable teaching media.

Based on the results of the analysis, the second stage is module design planning (**Borg & Gall, 1983**) is done by compiling a module structure that integrates moral stories, discussion activities, value reflection space, and character strengthening exercises. This module is designed thematically, according to the context of students' lives and combines local and global elements. In the third stage, a module prototype is developed by including value-laden stories presented through narrative text, images, and interactive activities. The fourth stage is module validation by experts, namely character education experts and language experts, who assess the appropriateness of the content, language, integration of presentation, and suitability of the module to learning objectives. After validation, the module is revised based on suggestions and input to improve its content and presentation. Then, a limited trial is conducted on a group of elementary and middle school students to determine their response to the module and how the module affects their understanding and attitudes towards moral values.

The final stage is the evaluation of the effectiveness of the module which is carried out using a quasi-experimental approach using a pre-test and post-test design (**Mulyadi, 2011**). The evaluation instruments included student character questionnaires, value understanding tests, observations, and interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and difference tests, such as paired t-tests, to see the increase in character values before and after the intervention. Meanwhile, qualitative data were analyzed through a process of reduction, categorization, and in-depth interpretation of student and teacher responses during the use of the module. With this systematic and comprehensive method approach, it is hoped that the story-based moral learning module can provide a real contribution to strengthening student character through learning that touches on the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in an integrated manner.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Integration of Moral Values in Story Modules: A Strategy for Building Student Character Holistically

Character education is not just about conveying moral values, but is a long process that demands a pedagogical approach that touches on all dimensions of student development, both cognitive, affective, and psychomotor (**Cindy &**

Fariyatul, 2019). In this context, story modules as a learning medium become very relevant. Stories have the natural power to convey moral messages indirectly but deeply, allowing students to understand and absorb values through the experiences of the characters in the narrative. Story modules not only present stories, but also become a place for integrating moral values in a fun and meaningful learning process. The strategy for integrating moral values in story modules begins with selecting story content that is appropriate to the context of students' lives (**Firoza, Barlenty, & Mokhamad, 2025**). The stories used are not only fictional or fairy tales, but also contain social realities and life values that are close to students' daily experiences. For example, stories about honesty in the school environment, the courage to face the truth, or the attitude of responsibility in the family. This kind of story allows students to reflect on themselves and build emotional connections with the values conveyed. The integration of values is not done verbally and dogmatically, but through a touching narrative flow, which enables students to see the moral consequences of every choice made by the story characters (**Agustina et al., 2022**).

In addition to relevant story content, the module structure is designed to lead students to a deeper understanding of moral values. Each story in the module is equipped with a reflection sheet containing critical questions, such as: "How do you feel after reading this story?", "What is the main value of this story?", "If you were in the character's position, what would you do?" These questions not only facilitate cognitive understanding, but also invite students to reflect on attitudes and moral choices in real life. The module is also equipped with group discussion activities, where students exchange views and learn from the perspectives of their friends. These discussions foster empathy, respect for differences of opinion, and strengthen collective values such as mutual cooperation and tolerance. The integration of moral values in the story module is also reinforced with psychomotor exercises, namely concrete activities that invite students to practice these values. For example, after reading a story about helping each other, students are asked to make a simple social action plan, such as helping a friend who has difficulty learning or keeping the school environment clean. This approach means that character learning does not stop at the cognitive realm, but is translated into real actions that strengthen the internalization of values in a sustainable manner. In this way, students not only know what moral values are, but also experience and practice them in everyday life (**Syafi'i, Marfiyanto, & Rodiyah, 2018**).

The module is also designed to accommodate various learning styles of students. For visual learners, the story is presented with interesting illustrations depicting important scenes. For auditory learners, an audio version of the story is provided that can be listened to independently or together in class. Meanwhile, for kinesthetic learners, there is a role play activity to reconstruct the story in the form of a simple drama. This multimodal approach aims to ensure that moral values can be conveyed optimally according to the learning characteristics of each student. From a pedagogical aspect, the story module adopts a student-centered learning approach that provides space for students to actively construct meaning. The teacher is no longer the only source of values, but rather a facilitator who guides the process of discussion, reflection, and moral evaluation. The role of the teacher in this strategy is very important, especially in providing constructive feedback and directing students to a deeper understanding of values (**Widodo, Susanto, & Deden, 2023**). Teachers are also provided with flexible module usage guidelines, so they can adjust the learning flow to class dynamics and student needs.

One of the outstanding aspects in the integration of moral values through this story module is the emotional involvement of students. Emotions play an important role in the process of internalizing values because they help bind moral information in long-term memory. Stories that contain moral conflicts, dilemmas, or certain emotional shocks can arouse students' ethical awareness and increase their moral sensitivity. For example, a story about a child who must choose between telling the truth or protecting a friend can arouse feelings of confusion, guilt, or empathy, which then become an entry point for teachers to discuss the value of honesty in more depth. This module also pays attention to the cultural context and local values that are relevant to students. Many stories are taken from local wisdom such as folk tales, regional legends, or stories of inspirational figures from the surrounding environment. This aims to strengthen students' cultural identity while instilling moral values that have long lived in society. The integration of local culture in character learning emphasizes that education cannot be separated from social roots and noble values that have been inherited by previous generations (**Yahuda & Susanto, 2022**).

In addition, this module supports the principle of sustainability in character education. This means that learning is not only completed in one session, but is designed as a continuous process. Each story in the module is equipped with a "personal commitment" section that encourages students to write down the values they want to practice and how they do it within a certain period of time.

This commitment can then be evaluated periodically through students' personal journals or teacher observations, so that a reflective and progressive learning cycle occurs. Overall, the strategy of integrating moral values in this story module provides a holistic approach to character education. This approach not only equips students with knowledge of values, but also develops reflective moral attitudes and behaviors that are in accordance with these values. The learning process becomes more enjoyable, meaningful, and impactful because students are involved cognitively, emotionally, and in real action. This module is an important means of responding to the challenges of character education in the modern era which tends to be individualistic and full of digital influences.

With a humanistic narrative approach and participatory learning, the integration of moral values through story modules can be a powerful strategy in building students' character as a whole. Values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, cooperation, and tolerance are no longer just memorization, but become part of students' identities. This is the essence of true character education—education that changes from within, touches the heart, and guides action.

Effectiveness of Story-Based Moral Learning Modules: Findings and Implications in the Context of Character Education

Effective character education does not only depend on the delivery of material, but also on the media and learning methods used. In this context, the story-based moral learning module is a significant innovation because it offers an approach that touches on the affective aspects of students and encourages their active involvement in the process of internalizing values (**Siswanto & Soeharno, 2024**). The use of stories as an instrument for moral learning is not new, but its effectiveness in the context of a systematic and contextual character education curriculum still requires strong empirical evidence. Therefore, testing the effectiveness of this module is important to determine how much impact it has on strengthening students' characters. Based on the results of limited trials conducted in this study, the effectiveness of the story-based moral learning module showed very encouraging results. Initial findings showed that students who took part in learning using this module showed a significant increase in their understanding of moral values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, and cooperation (**Herdiyanti et al., 2025**). This can be seen from the pre-test and post-test scores which showed statistically significant differences. In addition, students also showed more positive behavioral changes in the school

environment, such as increased concern for friends, courage to admit mistakes, and politeness in interacting with teachers and peers.

Observation data during the learning process also showed that students became more active and enthusiastic when participating in learning sessions with story modules. They appeared to be involved in discussions, provided critical responses to the storyline, and were able to relate the stories they read to their personal experiences. This involvement is very important because it is an indicator that learning not only touches the cognitive domain, but also activates the affective and socio-emotional dimensions of students. Stories are able to trigger empathy and moral awareness because students indirectly learn through the characters in the narrative and the conflicts they face. An important implication of this finding is that story-based modules are effective in bridging the gap between moral knowledge and moral behavior. One of the main weaknesses in character education is the fact that students often know what is good and right, but have difficulty applying it in real life (**Susanto, Ali, & Hidayat, 2024**). This module helps students build a bridge between what they learn and what they do, through a structured process of reflection and discussion. Reflection after reading a story is a critical moment where students not only understand values, but also weigh moral choices, contemplate consequences, and design personal commitments to those values.

In addition to its effectiveness on students, the findings also show that teachers feel helped by this module. In interviews conducted, teachers revealed that the module provides clear guidance in conveying moral values in a more contextual and interesting way. The module not only presents stories, but also includes worksheets, discussion guides, and reflective activity instructions that make it easier for teachers to manage classes and evaluate students' character development. This answers the challenges that have been felt by many teachers, namely the difficulty of finding effective teaching media for character education, which is not only normative but also applicable (**Wahyudi, Nuriana, & Irfan, 2025**). From the sustainability aspect, this module also has a positive impact because it encourages sustainable moral practices through student commitment. Each end of the story in the module provides space for students to write personal reflections and make moral promises to themselves, such as "I will tell the truth every day" or "I will help friends who are in trouble." This commitment is part of the formative evaluation that is continuously monitored by the teacher, so that the character learning process is not interrupted, but becomes a continuous process that forms good habits.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of this module can also be seen from the students' acceptance of the learning media. In the questionnaire distributed after the learning, most students stated that they preferred moral learning using stories compared to lectures or ordinary reading. They found it easier to understand moral values and did not feel bored while learning. This shows that stories have great potential in creating a fun and meaningful learning experience. In addition, students also feel more confident in expressing their opinions in discussions because stories open up a wide and non-judgmental interpretation space. However, the effectiveness of this module cannot be separated from several supporting factors that must be considered. First, the teacher's ability to facilitate discussion and moral reflection greatly determines the learning outcomes. Teachers need to understand the narrative approach and be able to explore the values of the story in depth. Second, the context of the story must be adjusted to the social environment and age of the students. Stories that are too complicated or irrelevant to students' lives will reduce the absorption of the moral values contained in them. Third, parental involvement is also an important factor in strengthening the impact of learning. Parental support in strengthening the values learned at school through practice at home will expand the reach of the impact of this module.

The implications of these findings for the world of education are quite broad. First, story-based learning modules can be used as a model in developing character education materials at various levels. The Ministry of Education or regional curriculum developers can adopt this approach as part of a national strategy in strengthening character education. Second, teacher education institutions (LPTK) can include training in the use of this story module in their curriculum to equip prospective teachers with a humanistic and applicable learning approach. Third, this research can be a basis for the development of more specific advanced modules, such as story modules for inclusive education, anti-bullying education, or digital literacy education that contains character.

Theoretically, the success of this module strengthens the view that the narrative approach has an important role in moral education. This is in accordance with the theory of character education which emphasizes the importance of emotional involvement and reflective experience in the formation of values. This study also supports the results of previous studies as stated by Mujahid (**Mujahid, 2021**) and Kokasih (**Kosasih, 2013**) that stories are able to increase moral awareness and form good habits through modeling and reflection mechanisms. In the Indonesian context, where the tradition of storytelling has

become part of the local culture, this approach has a strong socio-cultural foundation and is very potential to be further developed. Thus, the effectiveness of story-based moral learning modules is not only empirically proven in improving students' moral understanding and behavior, but also has broad implications for improving character learning strategies in schools. This module is an example that character learning can be done in a fun, meaningful, and impactful way if developed with the right and contextual approach. Therefore, there needs to be support from various parties—educators, policy makers, and parents—to continue to develop, disseminate, and implement similar modules in order to build a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent, but also strong in morality.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the development and implementation of a story-based moral learning module has proven effective in strengthening students' characters holistically. This module not only conveys moral messages through relevant stories, but also facilitates reflection, discussion, and application of values in students' real lives. The narrative approach used is able to arouse the affective side and form students' emotional attachment to the values taught, so that internalization of values occurs more deeply. The evaluation results showed a significant increase in students' understanding and moral behavior after using this module, which also received a positive response from teachers as a contextual, interactive, and fun teaching medium. This module also successfully integrates local and global stories and supports various student learning styles. Therefore, the story-based learning module can be used as an alternative solution to overcome the weakness of character learning in schools and can be further developed as part of the national character education curriculum. The author is further advised to conduct trials on a wider scale, covering different levels of education (eg PAUD, SMP, or SMA) as well as diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds so that the validity of the module's generalization can be expanded.

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