



The Development of Illustrated Storybook Media Based on Balantak Local Wisdom to Enhance Early Childhood Character

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood is a critical period for shaping character through appropriate educational media. This study aims to develop and determine the feasibility of an illustrated storybook based on Balantak local wisdom to enhance the character of children aged 5–6 years. The research was conducted at TK Sejahtera Bonebak, involving all Group B children as participants. The method used was Research and Development (R&D) with the ADDIE model, consisting of Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation stages. The study specifically aimed to produce a culturally relevant storybook and assess its suitability in supporting children's character development. Feasibility was assessed by a language expert and a media expert, resulting in scores of 95.4% and 94.4%, both classified as highly valid. The storybook was tested on children focusing on four character traits: courage, discipline, tolerance, and social care. The results showed that the media was highly feasible and effectively supported the development of these character traits. In conclusion, illustrated storybooks incorporating local wisdom can serve as effective tools for character education in early childhood settings.

Keywords: Illustrated Storybook, Local Wisdom, Balantak Culture, Character Education, Early Childhood

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INTRODUCTION

Education is inseparable from human life, serving as a vital pillar for national development. According to Indonesia's Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System (Sisdiknas), education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning environment and learning process through which learners actively develop their potential in spiritual, personal, intellectual, and social dimensions (Dodi, 2019; Noor, 2018). As such, education must be inclusive and value-oriented from an early age to prepare individuals to contribute meaningfully to society (Aulia & Amra, 2021; Desmita et al., 2023; Warmansyah et al., 2024). When this foundation is neglected, there is a risk of moral and intellectual decline among future generations.

Ki Hajar Dewantara, the Father of National Education in Indonesia, emphasized education as guidance for children to develop their innate potential and achieve both personal well-being and social responsibility. His philosophy "Tut Wuri Handayani," "Ing Madya

Mangun Karsa," and "Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha" continues to shape pedagogical approaches in Indonesia (Lestarineringrum, 2022; Sugiarta et al., 2019). These three roles of educators emphasize motivation, innovation, and exemplary behavior, which are especially critical in early childhood settings where foundational habits and values are formed (Noventari, 2020; Rusdiana, 2020). Therefore, the educator's role is not limited to instruction but extends to modeling and nurturing character.

Education, therefore, is not merely the transmission of knowledge but also the transformation of attitudes and behaviors (Febriyani & Warmansyah, 2021; Siahaan & Hidayat, 2019; Suri & Chandra, 2021). Early childhood is a crucial period where the seeds of moral character are sown (La Hadisi, 2015; Tanu, 2019; Wahidah & Latipah, 2021). Introducing education at this stage enhances children's ability to internalize good behavior and become well-adjusted individuals (Dhiu & Fono, 2022; Widiastuti et al., 2019). This reinforces the urgency of embedding strong value systems early in life, particularly through accessible and engaging educational methods.

The legal foundation for early childhood education in Indonesia is stated in Law No. 20 of 2003, Chapter 1, Article 1, Paragraph 14, which defines early childhood education as the guidance offered from birth to six years of age to help develop children's physical and spiritual readiness for further learning (Yufiarti, 2020). This phase, often referred to as the golden age, is marked by rapid cognitive and emotional development (Sholichah, 2020; Syahrial et al., 2022). During this window, children are most receptive to learning, and missed opportunities are difficult to recover later. Thus, early education must be prioritized as an investment in the nation's future. The golden age represents a rare developmental phase in which the introduction of values and behavior patterns has a lasting impact (Fitria, 2014; Shofiyati et al., 2022). If this period is ignored or left unguided, it can lead to developmental deficits and behavioral issues. Hence, educators and parents must be intentional in choosing educational content that fosters character and reflects the cultural identity of the nation (Khodarasih et al., 2025; Rusady et al., 2025; Syaharra et al., 2025; Warmansyah & Marwan, 2025). This strategy can serve as a preventive measure against moral decline and the erosion of national values.

In today's globalized era, local cultural values are increasingly vulnerable to being overshadowed by foreign influences (Kusni et al., 2021). This cultural erosion can weaken children's sense of identity and result in behavioral deviations. Alarming data from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) revealed 11,492 cases involving children in conflict with the law (Hapsari et al., 2019). Such figures underscore the need for educational interventions rooted in indigenous values, which serve as anchors for children's moral compass. Among Indonesia's most potent cultural assets is local wisdom, which shapes community life and reinforces ethical conduct (Rafita & Puspa Juwita, 2025; Riadi et al., 2023). Preserving this wisdom in education not only wisdom into educational content is a strategic move to cultivate character while safeguarding cultural heritage (Puspitasari & Ni'mah, 2024).

As Chintia, (2019) state, education based on local wisdom is a conscious effort to utilize indigenous knowledge and values to enhance learning relevance and student engagement. Iqbal et al., (2024) further highlights its pedagogical potential to regulate social

behavior and instill ethical attitudes, knowledge, and spirituality. When integrated into the curriculum, local wisdom enables learners to appreciate their cultural roots and actively contribute to community development (Salmiah et al., 2025). Such integration is especially impactful during early childhood, when identities are still being shaped.

Character education in Indonesia is of paramount importance and deserves to be amplified across educational settings (Astutik, 2017; I. Lestari & Aryanti, 2024; Qistina & Khadijah, 2025). The development of moral character in early childhood requires consistent reinforcement through both instruction and practice (Aini & Fitria, 2021; Aisyah et al., 2021). As Iswantiningtyas & Wulansari, (2018) argue, educators play a pivotal role in building positive habits by embedding character values into daily routines and interactions. When practiced consistently, these values become internalized and contribute to lifelong behavioral patterns.

Initial observations at TK Sejahtera Bonebobakal in Central Sulawesi revealed that while educators apply character-based approaches, they lack specialized media particularly locally-themed picture books to enhance value transmission. The absence of Balantak-themed picture books limits opportunities for contextual learning. As a result, children are not only distanced from their cultural identity but also deprived of engaging, value-laden content suitable for their age and environment.

Picture storybooks based on Balantak local wisdom can function as culturally relevant media to support character education. Such books allow children to explore the traditions, norms, and identity of the Balantak ethnic group while simultaneously instilling core values. This dual function cultural preservation and moral development makes picture books a strategic medium in early childhood settings. A picture storybook is a narrative format that combines text and visuals to communicate a storyline (Ratnasari & Zubaidah, 2019). For early learners, engaging illustrations are essential to stimulate interest and comprehension (Wulandari et al., 2025). When combined with age-appropriate language and moral messaging, picture books become powerful tools for behavioral modeling and value internalization.

While previous research has acknowledged the importance of local wisdom in education (Amelia et al., 2017; Andriana et al., 2017; Basri et al., 2022; Bulkani et al., 2022; Wulansari, 2017), there remains a significant gap in the development of visual media specifically tailored to the Balantak cultural context. Most existing studies focus broadly on local content integration without addressing its application in picture-based storytelling for early learners. This study fills that gap by designing and developing a picture storybook grounded in Balantak local wisdom, aimed at enhancing the character of children aged 5–6 years. The novelty lies in creating a culturally embedded medium that merges traditional values with visual engagement, offering a replicable model for other indigenous communities seeking to revitalize local identity through early education.

This study aims to develop a culturally relevant picture storybook based on Balantak local wisdom to improve the character of children aged 5–6 years at TK Sejahtera Bonebobakal. The research is grounded in the belief that media rooted in local culture can effectively bridge moral instruction and identity formation. By contextualizing character education through familiar cultural narratives, the book is expected to enhance children's understanding of core values such as respect, honesty, and communal harmony (Junaidi,

2019). This initiative is particularly significant in light of the limited availability of early childhood educational media that reflect Balantak identity. The outcome of this study not only contributes to the pedagogical toolkit for educators in remote areas but also supports the national agenda of cultural preservation through education. Ultimately, this research offers a replicable framework for integrating indigenous wisdom into modern educational practices for early learners.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a research and development (R&D) design to produce a culturally relevant picture storybook based on Balantak local wisdom. The objective was not only to create a tangible educational product but also to evaluate its feasibility and effectiveness in character education for early childhood learners. The research followed a modified Borg and Gall model, emphasizing need analysis, design development, expert validation, revision, and implementation. This approach allows for iterative improvement based on formative feedback, making the development process adaptive and responsive to the educational setting.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at TK Sejahtera Bonebobakal, located in Bonebobakal District, Banggai Regency, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. The school was selected due to its strong cultural roots in the Balantak ethnic group and its lack of culturally specific educational materials. Participants included one class of children aged 5–6 years, consisting of 20 students, as well as three classroom teachers. The involvement of local educators was essential for ensuring cultural and pedagogical alignment in the storybook development and classroom implementation phases.

Data Collection Techniques

Several qualitative data collection methods were utilized. Observation was carried out to document classroom dynamics and student engagement before and after the introduction of the picture book. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers to explore their perceptions regarding the relevance, clarity, and cultural resonance of the book. Additionally, expert validation was obtained from two early childhood education specialists and one local culture expert to ensure both educational value and cultural authenticity were preserved in the final product.

Instrument Development

Instruments included observation sheets, interview guides, and validation rubrics. The observation sheet was designed to capture changes in student behavior, particularly in the domains of honesty, cooperation, respect, and responsibility. The interview guide focused on the functionality, appeal, and instructional value of the storybook. Validation rubrics contained criteria to assess content accuracy, language appropriateness, illustration effectiveness, and cultural relevance.

Data Analysis Procedure

Qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns. Observational data were tabulated and interpreted descriptively to compare children's behavioral indicators before and after the storybook intervention. Interview responses were coded and categorized to assess recurring opinions and emerging suggestions. Meanwhile, expert validation scores were compiled to determine the overall feasibility and quality of the developed product. Revisions were made based on both qualitative feedback and expert input.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures were carried out with respect for ethical principles in educational research. Informed consent was obtained from teachers and parents of participating children. Anonymity was maintained in reporting individual responses, and the picture book content was carefully curated to avoid cultural misrepresentation or bias. Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the institutional research ethics committee before implementation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis Phase

The initial phase of this study involved a comprehensive needs analysis conducted at TK Sejahtera Bonebobakal, Kecamatan Lamala, Kabupaten Banggai, Sulawesi Tengah. Observations and interviews were used to gather data on the availability and use of locally rooted media in early childhood education. The analysis revealed a significant gap: there were no illustrated storybooks based on Balantak local wisdom available in the school or in surrounding institutions. This lack of cultural representation in educational materials is concerning, particularly in the era of globalization, where many aspects of local heritage are at risk of being forgotten. Balantak cultural values are essential to be preserved, and one of the most effective strategies to transmit them is through early childhood education. This context justifies the urgency of developing culturally grounded learning media to reinforce character development from an early age.

Design Phase

In the design phase, the concept of the picture storybook was developed based on fictional narratives infused with Balantak local wisdom. The stories were specifically structured to instill values such as courage, discipline, tolerance, and social care. The book was designed in A4 landscape format, consisting of 34 pages, including a cover, foreword, table of contents, main stories, and author biography. The stories were planned using narrative frameworks that detailed the storyline, character development, and perspective. Visual elements were created using the Ibis Paint application, with bright and attractive colors chosen to engage children aged 5–6 years. The language used was adjusted to suit the developmental level of early childhood learners. In addition, the book included dialogues and scenes that were interactive and stimulating, aiming to foster critical thinking and moral imagination in young readers.

Development Phase

This stage involved the creation of the full storybook prototype, including manuscript writing, illustration, text formatting, and expert validation. The product underwent validation by two expert validators one in language and one in media. The language validation was conducted by a university lecturer in Indonesian language and literature, who assessed six aspects: clarity, communicativeness, interactivity, alignment with early childhood development, adherence to linguistic conventions, and proper symbol usage. The media validator, a lecturer in early childhood education, evaluated instructional design and visual display quality. The validators provided both quantitative ratings and qualitative feedback.

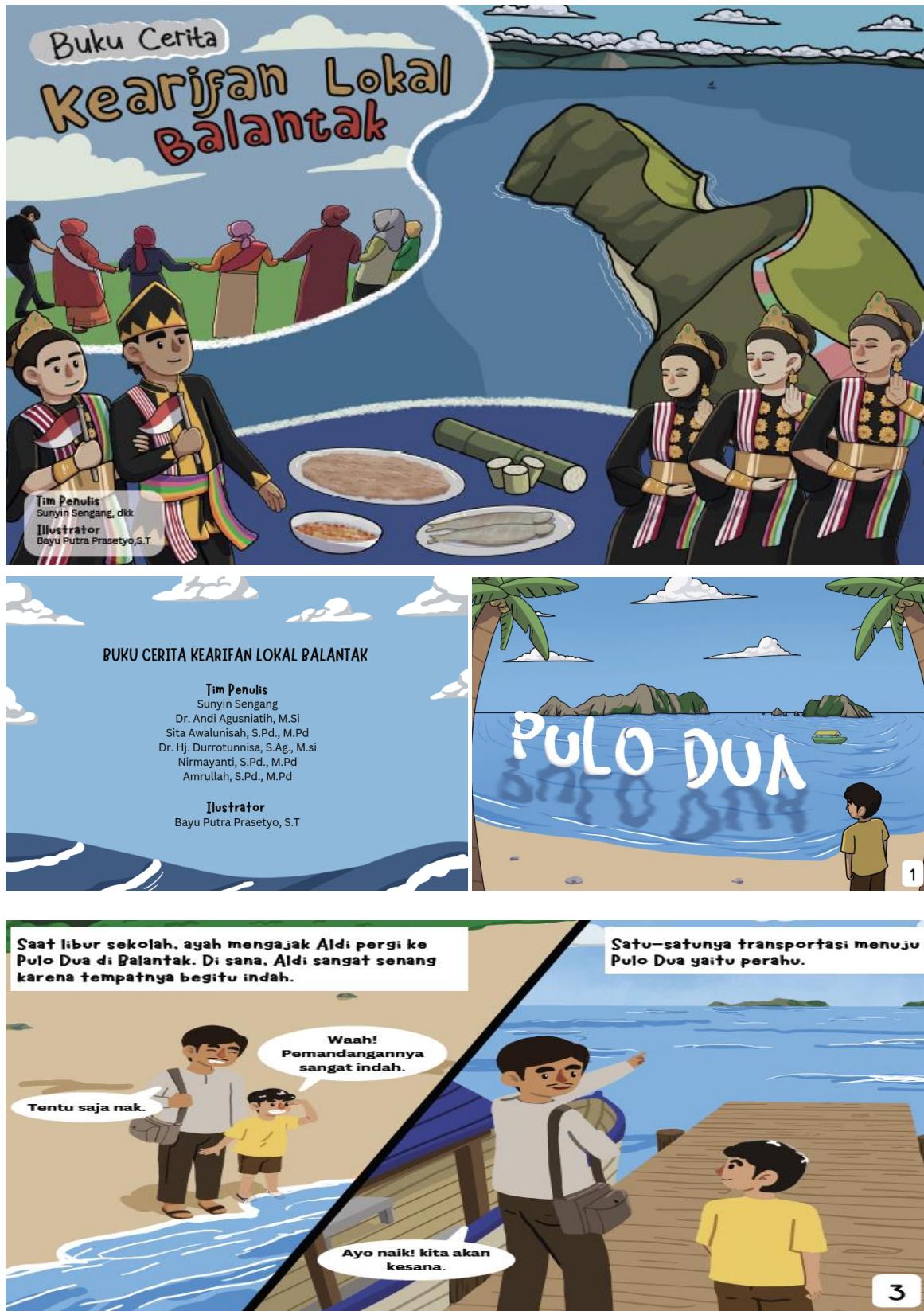
The language expert validation produced a total score of 42 out of 44, yielding a validity percentage of 95.4%, indicating the book is highly valid and requires no revision. The media expert gave a total score of 34 out of 36, resulting in a validity percentage of 94.4%, also falling into the highly valid category. Both evaluations concluded that the book was appropriate for use without revision. Tables 1 and 2 below summarize the results:

Table 1. Validation Result by Language Expert

Aspect	Indicators Evaluated	Score	Validity Percentage	Category
Clarity	Sentence structure and effectiveness	7	87.5%	Valid
Communicativeness	Use of terms and child-appropriate vocabulary	8	100%	Very Valid
Dialogic and Interactive	Motivational and critical-thinking prompts	8	100%	Very Valid
Child Development Appropriateness	Intellectual and character alignment	8	100%	Very Valid
Language Rules Compliance	Grammar and PUEBI adherence	7	87.5%	Valid
Symbol Use	Punctuation and clarity	4	100%	Very Valid
Total		42	95.4%	Very Valid

Table 2. Validation Result by Media Expert

Aspect	Indicators Evaluated	Score	Validity Percentage	Category
Instructional Design	Attractiveness, color usage, iconic illustrations	10	83.3%	Valid
Visual Display	Font size, image quality, layout, and design	24	100%	Very Valid
Total		34	94.4%	Very Valid



Gambar 1. Illustrated Storybook Media Based on Balantak Local Wisdom to Enhance Early Childhood Character

Implementation Phase

After validation, the storybook was implemented in Group B of TK Sejahtera Bonebobakal. The trial was conducted with 17 children (9 boys and 8 girls) over four sessions between February 6 and 18, 2025. Each session lasted 30 minutes and involved reading and interactive discussion guided by the classroom teacher. Before the intervention, observational assessments of the children's character development were conducted based on four key traits: courage, discipline, tolerance, and social care.

The pre-intervention assessment showed that 11 children demonstrated courage, 12 showed discipline, 12 showed tolerance, and 13 demonstrated social care. After the storybook intervention, improvements were noted across all four traits: 15 children displayed courage, 16 demonstrated discipline, 15 showed tolerance, and 15 showed social care. This improvement highlights the positive impact of the storybook as a character education tool rooted in local culture.

Evaluation Phase

The final stage of the ADDIE model focused on evaluating the overall quality and effectiveness of the developed product. This evaluation incorporated both expert validations and classroom implementation outcomes. Based on combined expert scores, the average validation result reached 94.9%, confirming the product's high validity. Furthermore, the observed increase in children's character indicators after the use of the book demonstrates its pedagogical value. The picture storybook based on Balantak local wisdom is not only educationally sound and visually engaging but also culturally enriching. It fosters a deeper connection between the children and their heritage while nurturing core values essential to personal and social development.

Discussion

This development research adopted the ADDIE model Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation. In the initial analysis phase, the researcher conducted classroom observations and interviews with Group B teachers at TK Sejahtera Bonebobakal. The goal was to identify the need for illustrated storybooks that enhance children's character development while also introducing Balantak local wisdom.

The study produced a culturally rooted picture storybook specifically designed for children aged 5–6 years. This book was intended to assist both teachers and children in cultivating positive traits such as bravery, discipline, tolerance, and social awareness. Since children in this age group are highly responsive to visual stimuli, the book incorporates vibrant illustrations to maintain engagement and facilitate comprehension.

Interviews revealed a lack of culturally contextualized reading materials at the school. Teachers expressed a strong need for storybooks that not only teach character values but also reflect local traditions. The book developed by the researcher, titled Picture Storybook Based on Balantak Local Wisdom, addressed this gap by presenting narratives inspired by real cultural practices and environments familiar to the children.

The book features four distinct stories, each linked to a core value. The first story, about a child named Aldi exploring the beauty of Pulo Dua, emphasizes bravery. The second features three girls training for a traditional dance competition, underscoring the importance of discipline. The third story narrates a celebration of Pengucapan Syukur, promoting tolerance across faiths. Lastly, the fourth story shows two children making traditional clothing, highlighting social empathy.

Validation from a media expert yielded a score of 95.4%, and a language expert gave a 94.4% score. Both evaluations categorized the book as "highly valid" and suitable for use without revision. Implementation in Group B of TK Sejahtera Bonebobakal showed high engagement levels. Children were drawn to the book's bright colors, culturally relevant stories, and child-friendly language, which helped improve their grasp of moral lessons.

Before the intervention, observation data showed 11 of 17 children displayed bravery, 11 showed discipline, 12 demonstrated tolerance, and 13 showed social care. After reading the book, the numbers improved to 15 in bravery, 16 in discipline, 15 in tolerance, and 15 in social care, indicating the book's effectiveness in stimulating character growth.

Bravery

Over the three-week implementation period, children gradually exhibited increased bravery expressing opinions, asking and answering questions, and sharing experiences. Initially, six children were hesitant, which can be linked to low self-confidence and lack of motivation. As Indrayanti et al., (2024) asserts, self-confidence is a precursor to bravery. After the storytelling sessions, only two children remained hesitant. This outcome aligns with Lubis (2018), who found that storytelling helps children verbalize emotions and encourages public speaking in a joyful setting.

Discipline

The character of discipline was measured by a child's ability to follow rules, organize belongings, and queue. Before the intervention, six children struggled with discipline, often bringing toys from home despite school rules. According to Purnama, (2016) , inconsistency in teacher enforcement can normalize disobedience. After using the storybook, only one child remained inconsistent. The second story's narrative, which focused on disciplined dance training leading to success, proved especially influential. Sukma et al.,(2022) confirm that discussion-based storytelling prompts imitation of positive behavior.

Tolerance

Tolerance was defined as the ability to befriend anyone and respect differing opinions. Before reading sessions, five children showed deficits in this area. This may be linked to emotional-social development and parenting styles that emphasize comparison or negative reinforcement (Hasdin et al., 2024). After the intervention, only two children remained with low tolerance levels. According to Lestari et al.,(2023), picture books captivate children through colors and relatable content, increasing understanding and engagement.

Social Awareness

This character was measured through indicators like helping peers, sharing, and expressing gratitude. Initially, four children lacked these traits. Nurbaiti et al.,(2022) attribute such deficits to egocentrism and lack of empathy. After reading the book, only two children still needed improvement. Hapsari et al.,(2019) emphasize that social awareness reflects the essence of humans as social beings, and storytelling is an effective method for fostering such values. The fourth story, Atu and Ido, featuring children assisting an elderly woman, was particularly impactful. As Metafisika et al.,(2022) state, narrative content aligned with daily life and child development can reinforce emotional learning.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the development of a culturally relevant picture storybook based on Balantak local wisdom is both feasible and effective for fostering character education in early childhood. Using the ADDIE model—comprising analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation the book was carefully crafted to integrate local values into age-appropriate narratives aimed at children aged 5–6 at TK Sejahtera Bonebobakal. Expert validation confirmed the book's high quality in both language and visual design, and its implementation demonstrated positive impacts on children's character traits, particularly in courage, discipline, tolerance, and social awareness. These findings affirm the potential of culturally embedded media as meaningful tools for character development in early education.

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