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Strengthening the Character of Middle School Students Through the Implementation of Role-Playing Methods in Fantasy Text Lessons

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe implementation of role-playing methods using fantasy texts to strengthen students' character and to identify the factors. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach and was conducted at SMP Negeri 3 Paguyangan with two seventh-grade teachers and 60 students as the subjects selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed using data triangulation. Triangulation of sources and techniques was performed to ensure the validity of the research data based on the sources obtained. The results of the study indicate that the fantasy-text-based role-playing method, which utilizes stories of local wisdom, is capable of increasing student engagement in learning and strengthening character traits such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and self-confidence. The effectiveness of the method is demonstrated by a learning implementation rate of 88%, student activity levels of 89%, and positive student responses of 68%. Supporting factors include the availability of local stories and high student interest, while inhibiting factors include the relatively long time required, the need for thorough preparation, space limitations, and students' shyness and lack of self-confidence. Role-playing methods based on local wisdom show potential as an alternative learning approach to strengthen the character of students.

1. Introduction

Character education plays a vital role in shaping high-quality human resources who serve as role models (Syam & Arafah, 2026). Character education has become one of the key priorities in Indonesia's current education agenda (Saudah et al., 2026). Character education can foster virtuous behavior rooted in noble moral values amid the rapid pace of modern development (Rasyid et al., 2024). Character education also helps shape the personalities of adolescents as they face various social

challenges during adolescence. Strengthening character during adolescence requires integration and collaboration among all stakeholders and the surrounding cultural context (Ayu et al., 2024). This is because, in today's world, shifts in character are increasingly prevalent in human society (Syahbrina & As'ad, 2026). Thus, during adolescence, students not only learn about cognitive skills and knowledge but also engage in character-building to shape their personalities (Tumangger, 2024).

In practice, the implementation of character education faces a wide range of problems and challenges. The integration of character education with local culture remains largely limited (Romli et al., 2026). The lack of student engagement in the implementation of character education is a significant issue that needs to be addressed (Rahmelia et al., 2025). Another obstacle is that the roles of families, schools, and the community in instilling character in students are not yet optimal (Faiz et al., 2021). A school environment that is not fully conducive to character development affects students' motivation to learn and develop their character (Rahmelia & Wijayanti, 2025). Students' inability to identify their own character traits, coupled with the lack of adequate resources, also contributes to the limited success of character education (Agustinova, 2015).

A similar phenomenon is observed at Paguyangan State Junior High School No. 3. Students' weak character is a concern for all teachers, and strengthening students' character is a top priority for them. In fact, teachers play the most crucial role in achieving educational goals (Khairina & Hafidz, 2026). Guidance counselors and homeroom teachers have noted that it is very easy for students to lie, such as skipping school under the pretext of being sick. Meanwhile, it is clear that they have left home and received an allowance from their parents. Additionally, students lack discipline regarding their attire and do not wear the full uniform as required by school regulations. They also do not yet fully possess a sense of responsibility toward the tasks assigned to them. For example, when assigned duties such as serving on the flag-raising team or leading the assembly, they tend to skip school rather than accept these responsibilities. This issue must certainly be resolved immediately using effective methods that align with students' learning activities.

Various previous studies have focused on the implementation of character education and methods for optimizing the strengthening of students' character. Research by Syahbudin et al. (2024) has revealed how character education is implemented and the obstacles encountered. Integration with local cultures, such as Bandung Mesagi, has also been implemented to ensure the success of character education among students (Hubi et al., 2024). Further research has also been conducted to identify character education needs and demonstrate that teachers' understanding of character education is quite high (Alam et al., 2025). Additionally, research was conducted to evaluate the implementation of character education using the CIPP model, finding that character development aligns with regulations, although there are still some limitations that need to be addressed (Arni et al., 2025).

The various studies described earlier have diverse focuses and findings. This indicates that research on character education remains a focus for many researchers

today. However, there are still few studies focused on strengthening students' character through integration with the learning process. One method that can be used is role-playing. This method encourages students to embody a role, experience conflict, and find solutions to a problem. Role-playing can strengthen students' character because it provides a learning experience integrated with the character values conveyed by the story. Role-playing was used with fictional texts because they were aligned with the research topic. Based on this background description, this study will focus on describing the learning process using the role-playing method with fantasy texts to strengthen students' character. This study also describes the factors that support and hinder the application of the role-playing method to fantasy texts. It will provide a systematic explanation based on the perceptions of teachers and students within a single classroom learning framework. It is hoped that this study can make a tangible contribution to efforts to strengthen students' character amid rapid societal development and cultural change.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach using descriptive qualitative methods. Descriptive qualitative research deals with data in the form of words and images and does not focus on or emphasize numbers, although some data may need to include numerical values. The researcher chose this method because the study aims to explain how role-playing is implemented as a means of strengthening students' character. Qualitative research is a research method used to study subjects in their natural settings, in which the researcher serves as the key instrument (Sugiyono, 2021). In qualitative research, the researcher plays a key role in every stage and process of the research.

This study was conducted during the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year at Paguyangan 3 Public Junior High School in Paguyangan Subdistrict, Brebes Regency. The location was selected based on the readiness of the school and teachers to implement innovative teaching methods. This school is also closely tied to the local folklore and mystical traditions that form the local wisdom of Cigobang-Kedungoleng Village. The author selected several stories reflecting local wisdom and adapted them into fantasy stories, which were then used as a medium in role-playing activities to enhance students' character development. The stories were chosen based on their historical relevance to the students, so that they could understand the plot and easily embody positive character traits in their daily lives.

The research subjects were teachers and seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Paguyangan. A total of two teachers and 60 students participated in this research. The sample was selected using purposive sampling. The selection criteria focused on the students' regions of origin and their proximity to the source of the story. The research instruments included an interview guide, an observation questionnaire, and documentation. The interview guide was used to elicit information on how learning through role-playing took place and what factors influenced it. The observation questionnaire was used to assess the implementation of the learning process based on the activities of teachers and students. Documentation served as supporting data,

consisting of photographs and records taken during the learning activities. The three types of data were triangulated to ensure the validity and credibility of the findings.

This research procedure began with planning a role-playing activity based on fantasy texts. The teacher formed small groups in the classroom, and each group performed a role in a fantasy story based on diverse local wisdom. Students actively discuss and practice playing their roles according to their respective characters. At the end of the discussion, the groups take turns performing their roles in class and analyzing the values embodied by the characters. Data collection is conducted using a research instrument after students complete the fantasy text learning activity through role-playing. The instrument is distributed to students, and the research data is subsequently analyzed to derive insights and conclusions from the study.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative methods to explain how the implementation of role-playing in fantasy text lessons strengthens the character of middle school students. The researcher described the data obtained using qualitative descriptive analysis to understand the findings of the study. The presentation of the analysis results was categorized into several themes, such as learning through the role-playing method in fantasy text materials to strengthen students' character. Additionally, the data analysis identified supporting and hindering factors in the application of the role-playing method to fantasy text materials. Qualitative data was also transformed and presented using diagrams or graphs to help the researcher identify the meanings and conclusions of the study. Percentage graphs were derived from the number of student responses in each category. The total percentage for each diagram does not exceed 100%. Triangulation of sources and techniques was also conducted to ensure the validity of the research data based on the sources used.

3. Results and Discussion

Learning through role-playing with fantasy texts to strengthen students' character

Interviews were conducted with teachers and students as informants. Data were collected using structured interviews, so that the teachers' and students' responses were aligned with the predefined answer options provided in the interview questions. The results of the teacher interviews revealed that the role-playing learning method had been implemented and applied in fantasy text lessons to strengthen students' character. Teachers began the lesson by providing an initial overview and dividing the class into small groups. Each group consisted of 5–6 students. Each group was given a fantasy story text developed based on stories prevalent in the local community. Students in each group then discussed the text and acted out the roles from the given fantasy story. The fantasy texts featured diverse and varied characters. According to the teachers, implementing this method had a fairly effective impact on strengthening students' character. Students were able to delve into the characters and strive to embody the traits and personalities of each character in the story. The initial stages of the lesson as presented by the teachers are shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The teacher provides an introductory explanation and divides the class into groups

The interview results also indicate that the role-playing method in teaching fantasy texts to strengthen students' character is highly effective. Students' character can be effectively developed when they are exposed to folktales that convey character values relevant to their social lives. Additionally, students argued that the use of the storytelling method is highly effective. These results are further supported by the percentage of responses provided by students. This argument was expressed by the majority of students, accounting for 68%. This indicates that the effectiveness of the storytelling method is evident to all students during the learning process. A summary of the students' responses and arguments is presented in Figure 2.

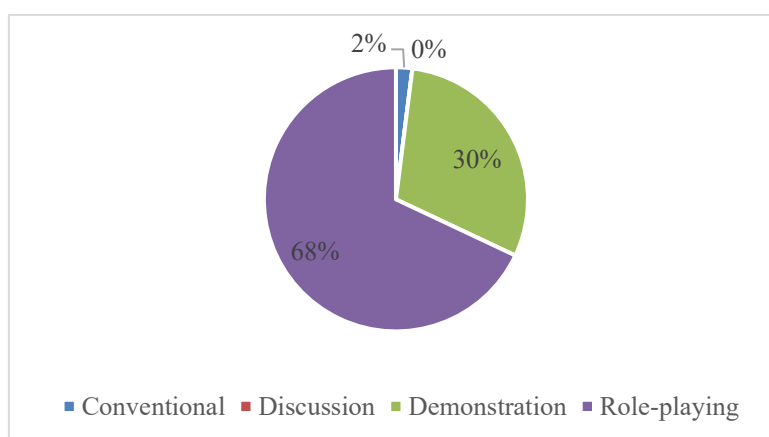


Figure 2. The Effectiveness of the Story Text Learning Method from the Students' Perspective

Throughout the learning process, the students demonstrated high levels of enthusiasm. This was evident in their enthusiasm and keen interest in the learning process. All students in the small groups had different responsibilities and roles, allowing them to focus on their assigned tasks. Students within the groups were also very active in discussing and collaborating with their peers. This fosters the development of positive communication patterns that help build character values. Thus, the learning objectives of the role-playing method are successfully achieved. Through this method, it is hoped that students will internalize positive lessons and

character values and avoid emulating negative character traits. Documentation of the students' role-playing activities is presented in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Students engaging in role-playing

Observations conducted on role-playing instruction also yielded results consistent with the interviews and documentation. Role-playing instruction achieved an implementation rate of 88%. The success and implementation of this instruction were reflected in the teachers' activities during the teaching-learning process. Teachers reported conducting lessons by first presenting the objectives, learning steps, and procedures, and then effectively dividing students into groups. Teachers also presented story scenarios and actively guided and motivated students to maintain high enthusiasm and interest in learning. Teachers also provided evaluations and reinforcement to students regarding the character values that could be learned at the end of the lesson.

Student engagement during the learning process also yielded fairly good and satisfactory results based on observations. Student engagement in this learning activity reached a rate of 89%. This indicates that student engagement produced positive results and that students were highly active in their learning process. Students demonstrated a sense of responsibility, self-confidence, and cooperation in completing each learning task using the role-playing method. Students also actively participated in discussions and showed a participatory attitude during group discussion activities. Thus, the use of the role-playing method was effective in enhancing student learning activities, allowing the characters in the fantasy story to be well-internalized by the students.

Factors Supporting and Hindering the Implementation of the Role-Playing Method in Fantasy Text Materials

Various factors influence the success of implementing the role-playing method in strengthening students' character. Teachers stated in interviews that a supporting factor observed in the implementation of the role-playing method is the availability of a variety of local stories that can be used as scenarios. These local stories have historical ties to the local community and are usually related to the origins of a particular place or event. Each story carries diverse historical values and characters,

so the values that students can learn from them are also very diverse. Thus, local stories that have developed in the surrounding community can be used as a means and medium to shape character in accordance with the local culture and wisdom. Teachers added in their arguments that students responded very positively when the role-playing method was implemented in accordance with the stories selected by each group.

Students also offered different perspectives on the factors supporting the implementation of role-playing in fantasy texts. They stated that using local stories helps foster interest in the roles they play. Students are quite familiar with each character in these stories. The names of the characters they already knew made it easier for students to immerse themselves in their roles, learn about, and embody each character. This interest and enthusiasm undoubtedly had a significant impact on their drive and motivation to fulfill their assigned roles. In addition to these supporting factors, the teacher also noted that the role-playing method implemented in the classroom still faces challenges or obstacles. The first challenge is that students often feel shy about the roles and characters they portray. As a result, the scenes they perform lack naturalness, and the characters are not portrayed authentically. This also prevents the character values embedded in the story from being effectively conveyed. This problem can be addressed by maximizing the roles of teachers and peers in providing motivation and encouragement to these students. This process will foster active discussion and mutual support among group members as they plan and carry out their roles. As a result, a sense of togetherness and collaborative learning is fostered throughout every process they go through.

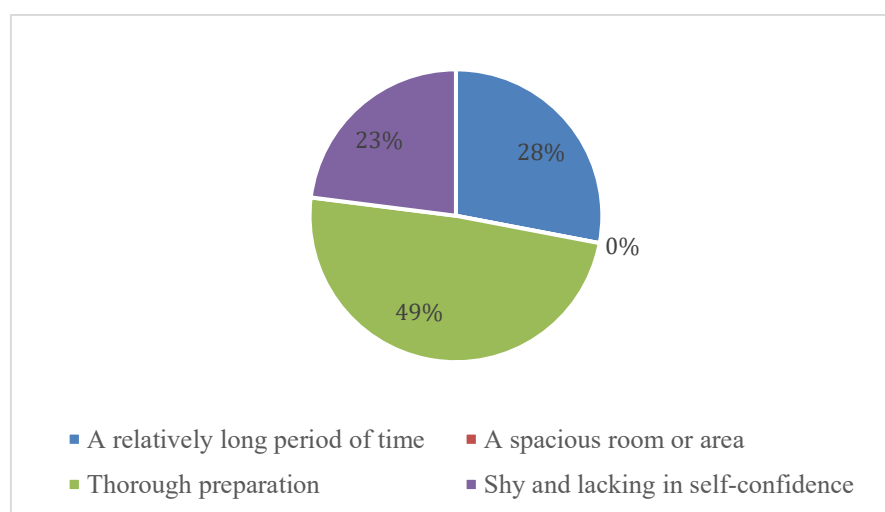


Figure 4. Barriers to the role-playing method

The students' perspectives, as reflected in their interview responses, also indicate that using the role-playing method requires a significant time commitment and careful planning. The lengthy process of dividing students into groups, rehearsing, and performing the roles makes it difficult to implement this learning method. Students also need to exert greater effort in terms of energy, thought, and time to carry out this learning activity so that the role-play performance conveys appropriate character values. These obstacles are certainly quite complex and

require discussion within each group to manage the necessary time and preparation. Special attention is needed as a solution and to anticipate these obstacles in order to maximize the effectiveness of the learning process. A summary of the student interview results is presented in Figure 4.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the teaching of fantasy texts at the junior high school level particularly at Paguyangan Public Junior High School No. 3 is conducted using the role-playing method. The use of the role-playing method provides students with contextual experiences and encourages active participation in learning, enabling them to understand the meaning and content of the stories while internalizing and reinforcing the character values within them. The role-playing method gives students the opportunity to collaborate, discuss, and communicate effectively. Observational findings indicate that student engagement in the learning process is very high, as evidenced by various attitudes displayed during the process. Attitudes such as responsibility, cooperation, and self-confidence are particularly evident during the learning process using the role-playing method.

The success of this study was supported by the use of fantasy stories based on local folklore that have been passed down through generations in the community. Students were already familiar with the characters and traits of each shop featured in the stories. Nevertheless, the implementation of role-playing methods in teaching fantasy texts encountered obstacles and challenges. The fact that many students still appear shy and lack self-confidence, the relatively long time required, and the need for thorough preparation and the availability of a learning space are obstacles that must be addressed. Practical solutions need to be designed and implemented to create an active and collaborative learning environment.

The role-playing method can encourage students to actively participate in discussions. This is supported by previous research showing that the role-playing method helps increase student interaction and focuses on improving communication skills (Annajih & Bakhtiar, 2024). Research by Aflah & Rahmani (2022) also explains that the role-playing method can enhance students' active participation, higher-order thinking skills, and motivation to learn. Character development among students can also be enhanced through the use of the role-playing method in this learning process. The role-playing method fosters character development through the exemplary values embedded in the stories (Maileni et al., 2024; Rahayu, 2024). Thus, the implementation of the role-playing method in this study provides answers to the research questions and offers supporting evidence consistent with previous research.

A supporting factor is the diversity of local stories that have developed within the community, which allows for a wider variety of stories featuring diverse characters. The use of local wisdom can shape students' character and foster an attitude toward preserving traditions (Masrukhi et al., 2024). In local stories rooted in local wisdom, there is typically an emphasis on the values of faith and devotion in community life

(Suwandi et al., 2025). Other traits, such as tolerance, discipline, responsibility, and independence, can also be developed through stories based on local wisdom (Astuti & Apriliani, 2025). This demonstrates consistency between previous research and the findings of this study.

The use of role-playing can foster the development of virtuous character traits such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and hard work. These traits are shaped by the personalities of the characters in local folktales. This is possible because fantasy texts rooted in local wisdom contain values of etiquette and morality that served as a medium for contextual learning in the past. The use of role-playing will help students become directly involved in portraying characters that embody these positive values. Consequently, admirable character traits and morals aligned with the culture and traditions of the surrounding community are fostered. This will also have a direct and significant impact on the success of the educational program.

The implications of the findings in this study suggest that character building among students can be effectively achieved by integrating this method into the active learning process. In other words, learning must provide students with direct and tangible experiences so that they can construct concepts based on their own experiences. Teachers must also be able to utilize more contextual learning methods or models that emphasize collaboration among students and between students and teachers. Teachers can use fantasy stories that have developed within the local community. The use of stories rooted in local wisdom can strengthen students' love for their region and reinforce character values. The professional development of teachers must also be a top priority in improving the quality of learning in schools through the use of innovative methods tailored to students' needs. Nevertheless, this study has limitations for which solutions need to be identified promptly. This study is limited to a single research site. As a result, the conclusions drawn from the research findings cannot be fully generalized to a broader school context or applied universally. A solution to this limitation could be to conduct similar research at several different school locations. This would also improve the quality of the data collected and the conclusions drawn from the study. Additionally, a quantitative research approach may be necessary to obtain more objective and measurable data, so that the explanations and conclusions can be supported by quantifiable figures.

4. Conclusion

The results and findings of this study lead to the conclusion that the use of role-playing in teaching fantasy texts at Paguyangan Public Junior High School No. 3 promotes active and participatory learning. The fantasy stories draw on narratives rooted in local wisdom. The character traits developed include honesty, discipline, responsibility, and hard work. Supporting factors that influenced the results were the availability of texts based on local wisdom and students' interest in learning. Obstacles encountered included the time-consuming nature of the method and the need for thorough preparation. This study can serve as new information regarding

the use of innovative learning methods to strengthen student character at the junior high school level.

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