

Raja Mulawarman Folktale Wayang as a Local Culture-Based Counseling Medium with a Scaffolding Approach to Strengthen the Social-Emotional Development of Elementary School Children

Lupiana Tutut Pretiwi^{*1}, Theresia Y. Samangun Lain¹, Claudia Florenza Lola Ananta¹, Ahmed Kaid Thabet

Alshokhada² 

¹Universitas Sanata Dharma, Indonesia

²Thamar University, Yemen

*Corresponding Author: ltututp@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Rapid social transformation in the buffer zone of Indonesia's new capital city (IKN), particularly in KM 45 Bukit Merdeka, Balikpapan, has affected the social-emotional development of elementary school children. This study aims to describe and analyze the use of the Raja Mulawarman folktale wayang as a local culture-based counseling medium combined with a scaffolding approach. Using a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected from fifteen children aged 7–11 years through observation, interviews, and documentation across five mentoring sessions within a Community Service Program (KKN), then analyzed through data reduction, presentation, and verification with technical triangulation. The findings show that the wayang medium increased children's interest and participation, helped them express feelings, and fostered empathy, caring, and responsibility in daily interaction. The scaffolding approach enabled children to construct moral meaning gradually rather than receive it passively. The study's novelty lies in repositioning local folk puppetry from a classroom instructional tool to a contextual counseling instrument for children in a socially transitional region. The Raja Mulawarman folktale wayang can therefore serve as a creative, culturally grounded, and developmentally appropriate counseling medium that simultaneously strengthens character and reintroduces regional culture from an early age.

ARTICLE INFO:

Received
May 12, 2026

Revised
June 19, 2026

Accepted
July 22, 2026

KEYWORDS:

Child Counseling, Local Wisdom,
Folk Puppetry, Scaffolding, Social-
Emotional Development

How to cite	Tutut Pretiwi, L., Y. Samangun Lain, T., Florenza Lola Ananta, C., & Kaid Thabet Alshokhada, A. Raja Mulawarman Folktale Wayang as a Local Culture-Based Counseling Medium with a Scaffolding Approach to Strengthen the Social-Emotional Development of Elementary School Children. <i>Life Course Psychology</i> , 52–58. Retrieved from https://journal.scidacplus.com/index.php/lcp/article/view/871
Homepage	https://journal.scidacplus.com/index.php/lcp/index
Published by	ScidacPlus https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

INTRODUCTION

The social and emotional development of elementary school-aged children is a crucial part of character formation. At this stage, children begin to understand their own and others' feelings, build relationships with peers, and develop values such as caring, responsibility, and mutual respect. However, current social changes present unique challenges for children's development, particularly in the buffer zones of the Indonesian Capital City (IKN), such as KM 45 Bukit Merdeka, Balikpapan. Diverse social backgrounds, increased population mobility, and limited parental support time due to work demands mean that children require support that is more closely connected to their lives. Observations during child support activities at KM 45 Balikpapan revealed that children still experience difficulties expressing their feelings, understanding their peers' emotions, and building positive social interactions. This demonstrates that children require a support approach

that is not only educational but also nurtures emotional and social development in a fun and child-friendly way (Rahmawati & Hidayat, 2023).

One approach widely used in child support is story-based counseling, or *storytelling*. Stories are a medium close to children's lives because they convey messages in a simple, engaging, and easy-to-understand way. In counseling, stories serve not only as entertainment but as a means of reflection that helps children understand moral values, recognize feelings, and view life experiences from different perspectives. Research shows that using stories in child support develops empathy and communication skills and strengthens social character (Fitriani & Hasanah, 2021). The use of creative media also helps children express their thoughts and feelings without feeling judged or lectured (Susanto et al., 2024). A story-based counseling approach is therefore considered more effective for children because it suits their stage of thinking and emotional development.

In recent years, interest has grown in using local culture as a medium for educating and mentoring children. Folktales are seen as helping children understand moral values due to their close connection to the social and cultural environment in which they grow up (Rahman, 2024). One folktale with significant moral values is the story of Raja Mulawarman, a historical figure from East Kalimantan known for generosity, social awareness, and wise leadership—values relevant to children's character education.

Despite this growing interest, a clear research gap remains. Existing studies have concentrated on *storytelling* within formal classroom character education or on the general use of local culture in learning, treating folklore primarily as instructional content (Kurniawan & Lestari, 2023). Very few studies examine wayang (traditional puppetry) as a medium for child counseling rooted in local culture, and almost none situate such practice in the rapidly changing social context of the new capital city buffer zone. Furthermore, prior work rarely integrates a scaffolding approach to guide children's gradual interpretation of moral meaning within counseling rather than instruction.

The novelty of this study lies in three combined elements that have not previously been brought together: (1) repositioning local folk puppetry from a classroom instructional tool to a counseling instrument that supports emotional expression and social adjustment; (2) embedding a scaffolding approach so that children actively construct moral meaning rather than passively receive it; and (3) situating the intervention in the IKN buffer zone of KM 45 Bukit Merdeka, Balikpapan, a region undergoing intense social transition. As one of the buffer areas directly affected by the relocation of the national capital, KM 45 experiences an influx of migrant families, shifting economic patterns, and the loosening of traditional community ties. From a sociological-psychological perspective, these conditions reduce family supervision and expose children to diverse, sometimes conflicting, social values, heightening the risk of emotional insecurity and social-adjustment difficulty. This makes the location a strategic and urgent setting for culturally grounded counseling that can anchor children's identity amid change.

Based on these conditions, research on the use of Raja Mulawarman folktale wayang as a local culture-based counseling medium is important to conduct at KM 45 Balikpapan. This study not only describes the use of wayang as a counseling medium but also demonstrates that local culture can function as a means of contextual social and emotional support. Through stories, reflective dialogue, and developmentally appropriate scaffolding, the counseling process is expected to be more communicative, enjoyable, and meaningful, contributing to the development of local culture-based child counseling while supporting folklore preservation as part of character education.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to understand the use of the Raja Mulawarman folktale wayang as a local culture-based counseling medium at KM 45 Bukit Merdeka, Balikpapan. The qualitative approach was chosen because the research focuses on the mentoring

process, children's experiences, and the values that emerge during counseling activities, allowing an in-depth picture of children's interactions with the wayang medium and their reflective involvement (Creswell & Cheryl, 2020).

The research subjects were elementary school-aged children participating in mentoring activities within the Community Service Program (KKN) at KM 45 Balikpapan. A total of fifteen children aged 7 to 11 years (grades 1 to 5) were involved across five consecutive meetings. Subject selection was purposive, considering the children's active involvement in storytelling and counseling activities and their regular attendance. Data were collected through observation, simple interviews, and documentation. Observations assessed children's responses, interactions, and involvement; interviews were conducted in a relaxed manner adapted to the children's developmental stage; and documentation in the form of activity photos, field notes, and children's work served as supporting data (Moleong, 2021).

The activity strategy used *storytelling* with puppets depicting the folktale of Raja Mulawarman, combined with reflective dialogue and scaffolding. Children listened to the story, became acquainted with the characters, identified the values contained within, and reflected through simple questions and interaction with the facilitator. This approach suits the developmental stage of elementary school children, who more easily understand learning through visual media, stories, and concrete experiences (Kurniawan & Lestari, 2023).

The data were analyzed through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and focusing on data relevant to the research objectives; the selected data were presented in narrative form for easier analysis; and conclusions were drawn based on emerging patterns and findings. To maintain validity, the researcher conducted technical triangulation by comparing the results of observation, interviews, and documentation (Moleong, 2021).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Local culture-based counseling at KM 45 Bukit Merdeka, Balikpapan, was conducted using the Raja Mulawarman folktale wayang as the primary medium. The activity proceeded through several stages: listening to stories, role-playing with puppets, group dialogue, and simple reflection on daily experiences. Throughout, children participated enthusiastically because the method differed from conventional school learning; they did not merely sit and listen but were directly involved in the storytelling and discussion.

Discussion

The Role of Folktale Wayang Media in Attracting Children's Interest

In the initial stages, most children appeared shy and reluctant to speak, often remaining silent and observing the storyteller. Once the puppets were introduced, however, the atmosphere became more active, and children grew interested in observing the characters they could see directly. This indicates that visual media help children focus and understand the story more easily than verbal explanation alone. The finding aligns with Utami and Raharjo, who found that elementary school-aged children more readily understand learning that uses concrete and visual media (Utami and S. Raharjo, 2021).

The story of Raja Mulawarman was chosen because it embodies values close to children's lives: helpfulness, care for others, respect, and responsibility. After the story, the facilitator engaged the children in dialogue about the characters' actions through simple questions such as, "Why did Raja Mulawarman help his people?" or "What should you do if you see a friend in trouble?" These questions helped children connect the story to their own experiences. A field note recorded a Grade 3 boy responding:

“...If a friend falls down, I help them so they won't be sad...”

Showing how the narrative prompted children to relate moral content to concrete situations and to apply good behaviors at home and school.

The Development of Children's Communication and Social Behavior

Children's communication skills also developed during the activity. At first, only a few dared to answer questions or express opinions; after several meetings, more children spoke actively and shared personal experiences, recounting how they had helped friends, shared food, or apologized after arguments. During one reflection session, a Grade 2 girl told the group:

“...Yesterday I shared my lunch with a friend who forgot to bring food...”

An accompanying field note observed that children who had been silent in the first session began raising their hands without prompting by the fourth. These changes indicate that conducting counseling through stories and play made children feel comfortable speaking up as though playing while listening rather than being advised.

These findings align with Utami, Nurhadi, and Prasetyo, who explain that creative media in childcare help children express thoughts and feelings more openly (Utami et al., 2022). This study, however, found that folk puppetry has a broader impact than ordinary creative media: wayang helps children not only speak more openly but also build an emotional connection to the story because the characters come from a culture close to their own. The counseling process thus fosters both communicative development and a sense of closeness to the social values embedded in the narrative.

Developments were also evident in social behavior. Children showed greater concern for peers, some helping friends tidy play equipment without being asked, listening more attentively, and interrupting less. While modest, these changes demonstrate that stories told through wayang helped children grasp the importance of caring and mutual respect. This supports Pratiwi and Kurniawan, who state that a reflective storytelling approach helps children understand character values more deeply because they not only hear the story but also think about and feel its contents (Pratiwi & Kurniawan, 2023). Children began to understand not only the rules of good behavior but also its impact on others.

The Application of the Scaffolding Approach in the Counseling Process

The scaffolding approach was used to help children gradually understand the story's content. The facilitator did not immediately explain the entire moral but supported children through simple questions and relevant examples; as understanding grew, children were invited to re-explain the story in their own words. This helped them think in stages appropriate to their developmental level.

These findings align with Rahman and Suyanto, who explain that a scaffolding approach helps children better understand moral values because learning proceeds in stages suited to their abilities (Rahman & Suyanto, 2021). Kurniawan and Lestari similarly showed that a narrative scaffolding approach effectively develops empathy and reflection skills (Kurniawan & Lestari, 2023). This study extends both by showing that scaffolding combined with puppetry and folklore yields a more contextual learning experience, where children understand values not only through explanation but through seeing, listening to, and reflecting on stories close to their lives.

The folktale of Raja Mulawarman also demonstrates that local culture can be an effective counseling medium. Children showed more interest in stories from their own region because they felt closer to their lives, which eased their grasp of the messages conveyed. Rahman, Setiawan, and

Lestari explain that local culture-based character education helps children understand moral values more easily because it relates directly to the life and culture in which they grew up (Rahman et al., 2024). Beyond supporting social-emotional development, the activity also helped children rediscover their regional culture; some had been unfamiliar with the Raja Mulawarman story and came to see that regional folktales offer not only entertainment but lessons for daily life.

Novelty and Theoretical Contribution

The principal novelty of this study emerges clearly in the discussion. Whereas earlier research treated folklore and storytelling as instruments of classroom instruction, the present findings show that folk puppetry can be repositioned as a counseling medium that supports emotional expression and social adjustment among children in a transitional environment. Local culture functioned not merely as the setting of the story but as the central factor building children's emotional engagement: children interpreted values more naturally when the characters and messages were tied to their own social environment, internalizing character values more strongly because these connected to their cultural identity and daily experience (Rahman et al., 2024).

The integration of the scaffolding approach constitutes a further contribution. By guiding children through questions and collaborative dialogue rather than direct moral instruction, scaffolding transformed the child from a passive recipient into an active interpreter of cultural meaning, strengthening reflective capacity and cultural identity simultaneously. The combination of wayang, local folklore, and scaffolding within a counseling—rather than instructional—frame therefore offers a new contribution to creative, local culture-based counseling for elementary school children, particularly in the fields of child psychology and character education.

Implication

The implication of this research is the importance of using media relevant to children's lives in counseling and mentoring. Wayang folklore can serve as an engaging, accessible counseling medium that also helps children recognize and appreciate their regional culture, providing a reference for teachers, counselors, community service students, and child advocates in designing creative counseling activities.

Limitation

The study has limitations: it was conducted over a relatively short period, so long-term behavioral change could not be observed; the number of children was limited to one neighborhood, limiting representativeness; and it focused on the process of using wayang rather than measuring specific psychological constructs. Further research over longer periods, with larger samples and more in-depth measurement, is recommended to establish more fully the effectiveness of local culture in child counseling.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Raja Mulawarman folktale wayang functions effectively as a local culture-based counseling medium capable of strengthening the social-emotional development of elementary school children in the IKN buffer zone of KM 45 Bukit Merdeka, Balikpapan. The central finding is that integrating three elements folk puppetry, local folklore, and the scaffolding approach, produces a counseling experience that is contextual, participatory, and developmentally appropriate, enabling children to internalize empathy, care, responsibility, and mutual respect more naturally than conventional verbal guidance allows.

Beyond confirming the value of storytelling in character formation, the study contributes theoretically by demonstrating that local cultural media can be repositioned from a tool of classroom instruction to an instrument of child counseling that supports emotional expression and

social adjustment in communities undergoing rapid social transition. The scaffolding approach is essential to this shift, transforming the child from a passive recipient of moral messages into an active interpreter of cultural meaning and thereby strengthening reflective capacity and cultural identity at once.

It is therefore recommended that local cultural media be developed more widely in both school and community counseling contexts, and that future research extend the scale and duration of intervention while incorporating measurable psychological indicators, to establish more fully the effectiveness of culturally grounded counseling for children growing up in transitional environments.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to Universitas Sanata Dharma for its academic support throughout this research. The authors also extend their gratitude to the elementary school children who participated in this study, the Community Service Program (KKN) team at KM 45 Bukit Merdeka, Balikpapan, and all individuals who provided technical and administrative assistance during the implementation of the research.

Authors' Contribution

Lupiana Tutut Pretiwi conceptualized and designed the study, conducted the investigation, collected and analyzed the data, and prepared the original manuscript. Theresia Y. Samangun Lain contributed to the research methodology, supervised the research process, reviewed and revised the manuscript, and validated the findings. Claudia Florenza Lola Ananta assisted in data collection, documentation, and manuscript editing. Ahmed Kaid Thabet Alshokhada contributed to the interpretation of the findings, critically reviewed the manuscript, and provided academic revisions. All authors read, approved, and agreed to be accountable for the final version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

REFERENCES

- Aprilia, Wahyu, and Bambang Setiawan. "Wayang as a Medium of Moral Education in the Digital Era." *Journal of Culture and Education* 7, no. 2 (2022): 110–123. [Google Scholar](#)
- Bruner, Jerome S. *The Process of Education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977. [Google Scholar](#)
- Creswell, John W., and Cheryl N. Poth. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. 4th ed. California: Sage Publications, 2020. [Google Scholar](#)
- Fitriani, N., and U. Hasanah. "Stories as a Medium for Character Education for Elementary School Children." *Journal of Child Education* 10, no. 2 (2021): 85–95. [Google Scholar](#)
- Kurniawan, D., and S. Lestari. "Narrative-Based Scaffolding in Children's Moral Values Learning." *Journal of Elementary Education* 14, no. 1 (2023): 22–32. [Google Scholar](#)
- Lickona, Thomas. *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*. New York: Bantam Books, 2009. [Google Scholar](#)
- Miles, Matthew B., A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. 4th ed. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2020. [Google Scholar](#)

- Moleong, Lexy J. *Qualitative Research Methodology*. Revised edition. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya, 2021. [Google Scholar](#)
- Nuraeni, Siti, and Ahmad Fauzi. "Local Folklore as a Source of Character Values in Primary Education." *Indonesian Journal of Basic Education* 6, no. 1 (2022): 45–58. [Google Scholar](#)
- Pratiwi, R., and D. Kurniawan. "Reflective Guidance in Understanding Children's Character Values." *Journal of Education and Culture* 8, no. 2 (2023): 97–108. [Google Scholar](#)
- Rahman, A., D. Setiawan, and S. Lestari. "Local Wisdom-Based Character Education for Elementary School Children." *Journal of Character Education* 14, no. 1 (2024): 1–12. [Google Scholar](#)
- Rahman, A., and S. Suyanto. "Application of Scaffolding in Elementary School Children's Learning." *Journal of Elementary Education* 13, no. 1 (2021): 1–12. [Google Scholar](#)
- Rahmawati, D., and N. Hidayat. "Local Wisdom-Based Character Education as a Strengthening of Students' Moral Values." *Journal of Educational Sciences* 29, no. 1 (2023): 33–44. [Google Scholar](#)
- Santrock, John W. *Child Development*. 14th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, (2019). [Google Scholar](#)
- Susanto, H., R. Pratiwi, and D. Kurniawan. "Story-Based Reflective Learning to Strengthen Children's Character Education." *Journal of Education and Culture* 9, no. 1 (2024): 1–12. [Google Scholar](#)
- Utami, D., and S. Raharjo. "Contextual Learning for Elementary School-Aged Children." *Journal of Elementary Education* 12, no. 2 (2021): 78–89. [Google Scholar](#)
- Utami, D., N. Nurhadi, and A. Prasetyo. "Scaffolding in the Social-Emotional Development of Elementary School Children." *Journal of Child Education* 11, no. 1 (2022): 34–45. [Google Scholar](#)
- Vygotsky, Lev S. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978. [Google Scholar](#)

Copyright Holder: © Authors. (2026)

First Publication Right: © Life Course Psychology

This article is under:

