

OPTIMISING LITERARY ACTIVITIES FOR CHARACTER BUILDING AT MUSAMUS UNIVERSITY, SOUTH PAPUA

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Abstract: Literature is a powerful tool for individuals' character building, an essential aspect of education. In the context of education in Papua, studies indicate the potential for character development through literary exploration. Therefore, by conducting a systematic review of the relevant sources, this study highlights the importance of literature, the challenges and how the optimization of literary activities plays a vital role in forming students' character. This study's participants were the students of the English Language Education Study Programme and English Letters, Musamus University Merauke. In addition, it involved the data from the interview with three high-school teachers. All the participants represented different ethnic backgrounds and cultural experiences to ensure comprehensive insights. This study also employed the library study and observation in gaining the data. This study used some credible journal articles from national and international sources as secondary data and analysed the points through a fishbone diagram and USG method. The findings show the challenges in optimizing the literary activities and their impacts on the students, especially their character-building. Accordingly, some highlights are provided as solutions to the challenges which require more significant support and collaboration between educational institutions, local authorities, and the community. This research provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and literary facilitators to design and implement impactful literary initiatives that shape the youth character-building in Merauke, South Papua.

Keywords: literature, character building, character education

INTRODUCTION

Merauke, a region nestled amidst the lush landscapes of South Papua, is where cultural diversity thrives, and indigenous traditions hold deep-rooted significance. With a rich oral storytelling heritage and an evolving literary landscape, Merauke presents a suitable platform for character-building through literary activities. On the aspect of cultural heritage, each diverse indigenous community boasts a unique narrative that goes through generations. In its tradition, storytelling has been the conduit for transmitting knowledge, values, and ethics within these communities. Tales of heroism, morality, and cultural practices have been shared through oral tradition, shaping the character of individuals and reinforcing the bonds of their society.

The emergence of written literature has recently presented new avenues for character-building. Literature, in its varied forms, encompasses a treasury of human experiences, emotions, and wisdom, fostering empathy and emotional intelligence. Through the lens of literature, individuals can vicariously explore diverse perspectives, allowing them to develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others. This literary culture will later determine one's societal success (Anas, 2021). Therefore, literacy

has become an essential global educational issue (Kemendikbud, 2016). Yet to comprehend the current state of literary activities at Musamus University Merauke, data was collected through a comprehensive survey and interviews with community members. According to the study, Merauke exhibits a literacy rate of 72%, showcasing a significant portion of the population with the foundational skills necessary for engaging with literature (Smith, 2022). This promising figure indicates the potential for character development through literary exploration. However, the survey also revealed that only 30% of the population can access community libraries or bookstores (Kemendikbud, 2023). The survey shows that it is still considered a small number and not even half of the Merauke population. This limited accessibility poses a challenge in optimizing literary activities for character building. A thriving reading culture, bolstered by accessible literary resources, is essential for empowering individuals to delve into the transformative world of literature.

Literature can serve as a valuable tool for character building. A character is described as having a dependable inner nature in responding to situations in a morally good way (Lickona, 1991). In addition, good morality can be seen from three interrelated aspects: moral knowing, feeling and moral behaviour. Therefore, schools, adults, and teachers around children are influential in building the characters (Permana, 2018; Aghi, 2020). Literature, as a cultural product, imitates reality which may result in a reflection of life, and it will later affect the readers as the audiences in the sense of humanity, human values, emotions and actions (Bressler, 2011; Meyer, 2018; Blessingsa, 2021). Therefore, education and character-building can be reflected and achieved through literature (Novianti, 2017; Istiharoh & Indartono, 2019; Rahmawati & Liliani, 2019; Amarudin, 2020; Agustin, 2020, Aghni, 2020).

According to those points, literary events and workshops serve as invaluable platforms for character-building within the community. These events, often attended by the youth, provide opportunities to nurture creativity, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence. Engaging with literature through interactive workshops and discussions fosters empathy, enabling individuals to relate to diverse experiences and perspectives. The data collected during interviews highlighted that 45% of the youth actively participate in literary events (Kemendikbud, 2023; Merauke Community Library Survey, 2020). This enthusiastic engagement signifies the potential of literary activities to form the character of the younger generation positively. Through literary events, the youth can cultivate open-mindedness, resilience, and compassion, essential qualities that contribute to their personal growth and social interactions. Literature, exceptionally when crafted in exciting forms, becomes a powerful tool for preserving cultural identity. Indigenous authors, writers, ordinary people, the government, and the authorities in Merauke play a pivotal role in capturing the essence of their communities, customs, and language.

Through literary works, preserving the cultural heritage and wisdom of the ancestors and reinforcing a sense of pride and belonging among the locals cannot only occur but also enrich Merauke's literary landscape and foster inclusivity and respect for diverse linguistic identities. Embracing literary diversity enhances character building by encouraging individuals to recognize the value of cultural heritage and nurture intercultural understanding. This essay deals with the causes of the low rate of literary activity in Merauke. It delves into the solutions and profound impact of optimizing literary pursuits in Merauke as a catalyst for shaping human character and fostering holistic development within the community.

METHOD

To investigate the optimization of literary activities in Merauke, South Papua, as a formation of human character building, a mixed-methods research approach of library study and observation was employed. The observation involves the students in the *Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris* (English Language Education Study Programme) and *Sastra Inggris* (English Letters) study programme at Universitas Musamus Merauke, as well as interviews with three teachers – one from *Sekolah Lanjutan Tingkat Pertama/ Junior High School (SLTP)* and two teachers from *Sekolah Lanjutan Tingkat Atas/ Senior High School (SLTA)* for three months. A diverse group of students and teachers representing different ethnic backgrounds and cultural experiences was chosen to ensure comprehensive insights. Meanwhile, the observation process was conducted over three months, involving regular classroom visits and

extracurricular literary activities. During the observation, the researcher actively engaged with students, educators, and literary facilitators to understand their experiences and perceptions related to literary activities. The data was collected through field notes, audio recordings, and photographs, documenting the students' active participation in literary events, class-teaching activities, and discussions. The researcher also recorded observations of students' reactions, emotions, and interactions during those activities. The researchers used the fishbone diagram presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The description of 5M-concepts

No	Category	Description
1	Man/ Human resources	People involved in the process
2	Methods/ Process	Things should be noticed before the process and how things are going during the process.
3	Machine/ Tools	Tools needed for getting the process done.
4	Material	Things used for the final product.
5	Measurement	The data collected from the process is used to evaluate the quality of the product.

In addition, Linkert Scale in USG (Urgency, Seriousness and Growth) method is used to complete the diagram to determine the causes of the low rate of literary activities in Merauke. The description is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. The indicator of USG method

No	Indicator	Description
1	Urgency	How urgent the factors that cause the problem to be resolved are related to the time dimension and how difficult it is to find a solution to the problem
2	Seriousness	How serious the factors that cause the problem need to be discussed concerning the consequences that arise if the solution is postponed. Will it cause new problems if this issue is not resolved immediately?
3	Growth	How quickly the probable cause of the problem is developing or getting worse if it remains unsolved

The Linkert Scale is used within the USG method. The point of each category is described in Table 3.

Table 3. Description of USG point

Point	Urgency	Seriousness	Growth
1	The causal factors take time to be resolved.	The causal factors are less serious about being discussed because they will not impact other aspects.	Factors causing slow development.
2	The causal factors are less urgent to be resolved immediately.	The causal factors are less serious to be discussed immediately. They have less impact on other aspects.	Factors causing less rapid development
3	The causal factors are urgent enough to be resolved immediately.	The causal factor is serious enough to be discussed immediately because it will impact other aspects.	Factors that cause problems quickly develop and immediately prevented
4	Urgent causal factors are to be resolved immediately.	Serious causal factors are to be discussed immediately because they will have an impact on other aspects.	Factors that cause problems quickly develop to be prevented immediately
5	The causal factors are very urgent to be resolved immediately	The causal factor is very serious to be discussed immediately because it will have an impact on other aspects	Factors that cause problems are very fast developing to be addressed immediately

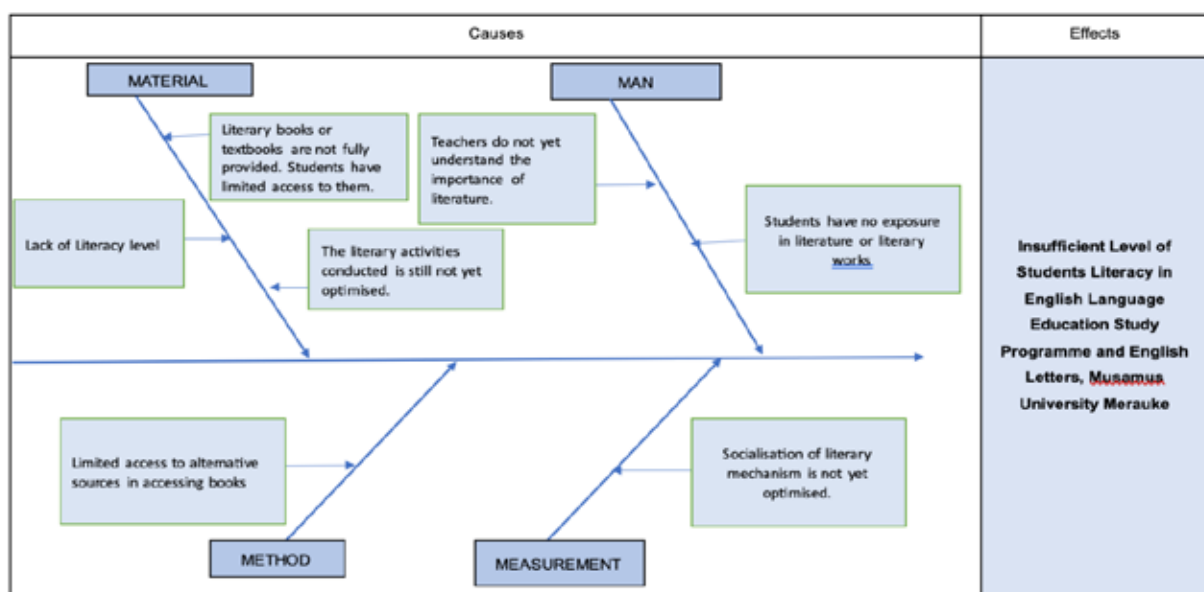
The mixed-methods approach, combining observation of students and interviews with teachers, provided valuable insights into optimizing literary activities in Merauke as a formation of human character building. By closely engaging with students and educators, this method allowed the researcher to comprehend the impact of literary events, workshops, and discussions on character development.

The findings from the observation and interviews shed light on the significance of literary activities in fostering empathy, critical thinking, and cultural awareness among students. Moreover, the research highlights teachers' challenges in organizing such activities and the importance of collaboration between educational institutions and the community to maximize their impact.

By employing those aspects, this research offers a comprehensive understanding of the potential of literary activities as a powerful tool for character-building in Merauke. As literary activities will give such impact if it is introduced and deliver at the early stage of education, the insights gained from this method can guide educators, literary facilitators, and policymakers in optimizing literary initiatives to shape a generation of ethically responsible, culturally aware, and empathetic individuals, contributing positively to the development of the students of Musamus University, the young learners in Merauke high school, and Merauke's community and beyond.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research was conducted through the observation of students in the *Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris* and *Sastra Inggris* programs at Universitas Musamus Merauke and interviews with three teachers (one from Sekolah Lanjutan Tingkat Pertama and two from *Sekolah Lanjutan Tingkat Atas*) provided valuable insights into the optimization of literary activities in Merauke as a formation of human character building. Through observations, it was evident that literary activities played a crucial role in fostering student empathy. Meanwhile, the findings revealed the significance of literary initiatives in fostering



empathy, critical thinking, and cultural awareness among students while highlighting the challenges educators face in organizing such activities, as seen in the fishbone of Figure 1.

Figure 1. Analysis of 5M concept

According to Figure 1, in the aspect of Man/Human Resources, one can see that both students and teachers have less exposure to literature or literary works. In addition, teachers' knowledge regarding to the character building still needs to be improved. Moreover, the limited access to alternative sources that provide books and allow the students to access books or literary works has become the cause in the method aspect. In addition, from the Measurement point of view, the socialization of literary mechanisms still needs to be optimized. However, one should notice the material aspects in which there is still less book procurement, literary activities, and the need for literary level among the students.

To specify the issues, the analysis in the USG method is conducted. The result is as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Analysis of USG criteria

No	Issues	Criteria			Score	Rank
		U	S	G		
1.	Students who have not received exposure to literature	4	4	2	11	4
2.	Teaching staff who do not fully understand the importance of literacy	4	4	3	12	3
3.	Literacy socialization mechanisms that are not yet optimal	3	3	3	9	6
4.	Access to sources for books that are not widely known/socialized	3	3	2	8	7
5.	Lack of literacy activities	4	4	5	13	2
6.	Low literacy level	5	5	4	14	1
7.	Literature books or textbooks that are not widely available	3	3	4	10	5

From the result in Table 4, the issue that needs to be highlighted is the low literacy level experienced among the students. This issue will also significantly impact some other aspects of teaching and learning, especially related to student behaviour. First, the students will lose interest in learning or studying literature because they quickly get bored with the learning process. As the students will get bored with the learning process, they will not feel the urge to study and will likely not participate in the learning process. As a result, it will impact graduates from Musamus Merauke University as they may graduate with lack of knowledge and without any characters. An example given is if those graduates cannot meet the labour market criteria, there will later be no companies that will employ these graduates. One can draw from that lamentable fact that literature can be used as a tool for the students' character building. It is simply because the students can learn positive values such as social values, moral values, and the importance of education. Therefore, a solution is needed that can directly overcome the low literacy level and play a role in forming their character as capable and literate individuals. Thus, some possible solutions can be done to overcome the issue. The study offers the following four solutions.

First, the book procurement at Musamus University of Merauke. Literary books or textbook procurement will optimize the function of the Musamus University library and allow the students. The students will learn about various literary genres and prominent writers who have played a significant role in Indonesian or world literature, such as Umar Khayaam, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, William Shakespeare, and T.S Eliott. This new exposure will make it easier for lecturers to work, especially those who teach in the Indonesian Language and Literature Study Program, English Literature Study Program and English Education Study Program. This is because lecturers can later emphasize or introduce literary works to students. They can later also spend extra time while focusing on teaching more essential elements, such as analyzing literature using social theories. This course will be helpful to train students in critical thinking.

Second, conducting literary activities within the university and working with parties outside the university. Literacy activities should support book procurement activities. These activities can be conducted within universities and with other parties like literary communities or other (teaching) institutions. One of the activities that can be carried out is the book club, where students or anyone can gather while sharing their recommendations on books and discussing any literary works. Regarding outside parties, the university can collaborate with book publishers or other literacy activist organizations such as the Makassar International Writers Festival, Ubud Writers Festival, and others. This will also give new nuances to students and their exposure to the outside world by interacting through literacy activities. It will later provoke students' interest in literature gradually.

Third, socializing the alternative sources where students can access books easily. Due to the limited space and sources, the library at Musamus University certainly cannot accommodate the reading materials for its students and the commoners. Therefore, an alternative source for students to access the reading materials is needed. In this case, it can be exemplified by providing socialization to students about the existence of *iPerpusnas*, in which the students can help themselves to access the reading materials for free. By doing so, the students are expected to gain more exposure and liking towards literature.

Fourth, identifying the applicable RPP (lesson plan) following the curriculum set as a learning guide. Curriculum changes that occur may cause changes to the material and focus of student teaching. Students' introduction to literature should start in the golden age when they can absorb knowledge quickly. However, in practice, with a constantly changing curriculum, there are still many teachers who still need to be able to introduce literacy and its exposure to students at the lower level of education which are junior and senior high school levels. This results in students not knowing what literature is but also not knowing great writers from the Indonesian literary period, such as the *Angkatan Balai Pustaka*, *Pujangga Lama*, *Pujangga Baru*, and the Indonesian modern literature. This is such a lamentable and huge loss because Indonesian literature needs to be preserved, and to do so, it should be, at least, exposed in the teaching materials. Therefore, one may need a revised lesson plan which carries the literary aspects in it. By doing so, the students will not only be exposed to types of literature but also appreciate beauty and the aesthetic values of a literary work.

Apart from the points offered as a solution, the most essential thing that should be highlighted is that literature can be used as an educational tool to boost literacy skills and character building. The students will learn to engage with diverse narratives and fictional characters through all the activities and solutions offered, allowing them to step into different perspectives and experiences. It will later develop their emotional aspects. As students encountered characters facing various challenges and triumphs, they demonstrated an enhanced ability to empathize with others within their immediate community and beyond. Through these emotional journeys portrayed in literary works, students were encouraged to reflect on their feelings and emotions, leading to increased self-awareness and improved interpersonal skills.

The interaction through literary events and workshops will also help the students to develop their creativity and encourage critical thinking. Engaging in discussions and debates about literary works pushed them to analyse characters' motivations, plot developments, and underlying themes. This analytical approach also nurtured their critical thinking abilities, enabling them to question, evaluate, and articulate their ideas effectively. Encouraging students to write and share their stories, poems, and reflections can also foster a sense of creative expression and boost their confidence in articulating their thoughts. This creative freedom also encouraged them to explore innovative solutions to real-life problems, promoting resourcefulness and adaptability. The synergy between the students and those involved in the literary events can also help the students learn the value of tolerance and respect towards others' opinions and backgrounds.

In addition to those points, literary activities were instrumental in promoting cultural awareness and inclusivity among students. Engaging with literature from various cultural backgrounds exposed them to diverse perspectives, values, and traditions. This exposure helped students appreciate the beauty of cultural diversity and embrace a more inclusive worldview. By celebrating linguistic diversity, literary activities encouraged students to value their cultural heritage, leading to a greater sense of pride and identity. Therefore, according to those points above, one can see the importance of literature and how optimising literary activities plays a vital role in forming students' character building.

CONCLUSION

The essay's findings underscore the profound impact of optimizing literary activities in Merauke as a formation of human character building. Literature is a powerful tool for fostering student empathy, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. Through literary events, discussions, and creative writing, students developed emotional intelligence, analytical skills, and a greater appreciation for cultural diversity.

The researcher highlights the challenges faced in holding the literary activities. However, the researcher also points out the importance of literature, highlighting challenges in organizing such activities, including limited resources and time constraints within the academic curriculum. To overcome these challenges, there is a need for more significant support and collaboration between educational institutions, local authorities, and the community.

By maximizing the potential of literary activities and fostering a reading culture, Musamus University Merauke can nurture a generation of ethically responsible, culturally aware, and empathetic

individuals who actively contribute to the development of their community and beyond. This research provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and literary facilitators to design and implement impactful literary initiatives that shape the youth character-building in Merauke, South Papua.

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