



Building Character and Digital Literacy through Comics

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ABSTRACT

Comics can be categorized as literary works because they contain stories, ideas, and thoughts. Comics have at least two elements, such as images, and narration, which are interrelated. The pictures in comics are intended to stimulate interest in reading, develop imagination, and provide aesthetic elements. Therefore, comics can be used as a communication medium to convey stories and moral messages to readers and build character and digital literacy. This research aims to explain the role of comics as a medium for building character and digital literacy in the stories contained in the collection of children's comics published by Mizan and the Komik Next G series published by Muffin Graphics. Comic stories are written by writers for children aged 8-13 years and illustrated by professional comic artists. This research uses analytical descriptive methods. This research uses two kinds of data, namely primary and secondary sources. The data collection technique used in this research is the library technique. Based on the results of the analysis, it was found that the four stories used as research objects contained character education values, namely honesty and reminding each other in kindness, as well as being competitive and competing in a healthy manner; and the value of digital literacy, namely being wise in using devices, as well as using technology to develop talents, and the importance of supervision in using technology. The value of honesty and reminding each other in kindness are found in the story entitled *Jujur itu Penting*; the value being competitive in healthy manner is found in the story *Kunci Juara Kelas*. The value of digital literacy in the form of being wise and responsible in using devices is found in the story *Gara-Gara Wi-Fi*; The value of digital literacy in using technology for future development and the importance of supervision in using technology is found in the story of *Mangaka Cilik*.

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INTRODUCTION

This research discusses the use of comics as a medium for teaching character education and conveying digital literacy values. Comics are a type of children's literary work that is unique, in the form of word balloons, symbols and images. Word balloons in comics contain conversations and narration by comic characters to tell the story (Amelia, 2017). Another characteristic of comics is the presence of images and symbols that form the sequence of the story. The image and symbol aspects in this comic aim to provide messages. These three aspects not only make comics attract children's attention to reading but can also be an educational medium.

Faidah (2018) said that literature is a person's expression expressed in writing or a story that is packaged in an attractive way for the reader. Children's literature is a child's feelings expressed in written form and enjoyed by children. However, children's literature can also be written by adults, but the content is intended for children to read and enjoy. Thus, children's literature is the best literature that they read with characteristics of various varieties, themes, and formats (Sarumpaet, 2010).

Writing children's literature must be adapted to the level of development and needs of children. This means that children's literature must be written through the views and feelings of children. The words used in children's literature must be simple and avoid complicated stories,

because children have limited vocabulary and are not yet fully able to make sense of life. Children's literature contains at least two benefits, namely entertainment and education (Kurniawan, [2009](#)).

The beneficial aspects of entertainment in children's literature consist of: (1) providing fun, joy and enjoyment for children; (2) developing children's imagination and helping them consider and think about nature, life, experiences, or ideas in various ways; (3) developing children's insight into human life; (4) presenting and introducing children to universal experiences and cultural heritage. The benefits of education in children's literature are also related to developmental aspects, including (1) language development; (2) cognitive development; (3) personality development; and (4) social development (Faidah, [2018](#)).

According to Panglipur & Listiyaningsih ([2017](#)) character is an inner quality that influences all thoughts, minds, behavior, manners and character of humans or other living creatures. Instilling good thoughts, behavior, manners, and habits is not something that is easy to do, takes a long time, and must be done continuously. Apart from that, appropriate and effective media is needed in the character education process (Krissandi et al., [2018](#)). In this case, children's literature is trusted and is still used as a medium for character education. However, the existence of children's literature is often minimized, put aside, and considered as part of Indonesian language learning.

Recently, the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, Nadiem Makarim launched the "Sastra Masuk Kurikulum" program with the aim of increasing interest in reading and literacy skills at various school levels. The Minister of Education and Culture encouraged teachers in schools to use literary works as learning material. Teachers can help in reading activities so that students can explore the values contained in literary works. In this way, it is hoped that students can obtain the good things contained in literary works and internalize them into their daily lives.

Sardiman, in Nurgiyantoro ([2010](#)) argues, character education aims to instill noble values, manners, noble morals which are rooted in religious teachings, customs and Indonesian values in order to develop the personality of students so that they become human beings with dignity, citizens of the nation with character. in accordance with the noble values of the nation and religion. Noble values and manners can be obtained through children's literature because many children's stories are educational. Therefore, instilling noble values through the habit of reading literary works is one way to instill character education in schools by integrating it into all subjects (Krissandi et al., [2018](#)).

Technological advances bring changes in various aspects of life, including education. Technological progress is in line with the ability to use devices and access and consume information. The ability to manage and access information is also based on the ability to read various media, such as books, newspapers, magazines, comics, blogs (Ilham & Marlina, [2019](#)). The ability to obtain and process information using technology is referred to as digital literacy.

In the world of education, digital literacy needs to be instilled in students, especially in the internet era where the spread and exchange of information takes place quickly and massively. Excessive use of devices if not accompanied by teacher and parent supervision, as well as a lack of digital literacy can cause students to consume news whose credibility cannot be justified. This happens because children do not have the ability to choose and sort out which information is appropriate for consumption. In the long term, this can damage the child's mentality.

Instilling digital literacy in students can be done using literary media. In the literary context, digital literacy includes the activity of reading literary works using technology or digitalization of literature. Literature as a richness of cultural expression can be accessed and studied through various digital platforms such as e-books, audiobooks, or literary social media (Kami & Artika, [2024](#)). The existence of technology certainly makes it easy for students to access and utilize digital literary works as learning material. However, according to Kami & Artika ([2024](#)) another thing that also deserves attention is the use of technology that supports understanding of literary works, facilitates discussions, and provides creative space for students to express themselves through digital media.

These two aspects of digital literacy can be obtained through the Komik Kecil-Kecil Punya Karya (KKKPK) program initiated by Mizan Publishers and Komik Next G by Muffin Graphics. The KKKPK and Muffin Graphics programs facilitate young writers aged 6-12 years to develop their thoughts, ideas and creativity through writing children's stories which will then be illustrated by professional illustrators into the form of comic. The various stories contained in KKKPK and Komik Next G provide a refresher on children's stories that are often overlooked in children's literature written by adults.

The stories in the KKKPK Program and Komik Next G talk about children's lives, so they can have relevance to the problems children face in everyday life. The themes presented by these two children's story writing programs are varied, from food, friendship, family, to fantasy. Apart from being published in physical comic form, the stories contained in the KKKPK Program and Komik Next G can also be enjoyed via the application. Therefore, this program is a positive thing because it adapts to children's development in the digital era.

The stories in KKKPK and Komik Next G display aspects of character education and digital literacy which are the focus of this research. The character education aspect is demonstrated through instilling good values such as honesty, independence, responsibility, and so on. The discussion of digital literacy aspects in this research focuses more on depicting characters who could use devices to find solutions to problems, the importance of supervision in using the gadgets, and the use of devices to develop talents.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a literature review method with descriptive analysis techniques. This research uses literature review techniques to collect various data and materials sourced from journal articles and books on children's literature theory. The main objects of this research are two comic stories entitled *Honesty is Important* and *Mangaka Cilik* which are contained in a collection of comic stories entitled *Mangaka Cilik* from the KKKPK program, as well as two comic stories entitled *Kunci Juara Kelas* and *Gara-Gara Wi-Fi* which are contained in a collection of comic stories entitled *Gara-Gara Wi-Fi*, which is published by Komik Next G.

Systematic research was carried out by selecting four comic stories and then identifying character education values in the form of honesty, having a competitive nature, and competing healthily and digital literacy values in the form of being wise in using technology and the need for supervision in using devices through dialogue spoken by the characters. After that, conclusions are drawn.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Comics as Literary Works

By genre, literary works are divided into three: poetry, drama, and prose. If we look at the form and the way the story is told, comics can be classified as pictorial prose. Comics consist of an arrangement of images and words which aim to provide the information that they author wants to convey to the reader (Soedarso, [2015](#)).

The emergence of comics was previously considered something that was not educational, because the images only provided entertainment and fun to children without having to read. This criticism was aimed at the graphic elements contained in the comic. The images presented in it contain many harsh, violent, and brutal actions carried out by the characters in the comic in telling the story Muktiono in (Soedarso, [2015](#)).

Hurlock in (Soedarso, [2015](#)) believes that the image elements in comics can help the development of children's imagination. Comics can provide models that can be used to develop

children's personalities. This statement is in line with what Seto Mulyadi said, that reading comics can help visualize the imagination of children who cannot yet read. However, he also added that children still need to be introduced to storytelling books when they are already fluent in reading.

The graphic elements in comics can be an attraction that can stimulate children's interest in reading. Comics can now be an effective and enjoyable learning and communication medium for conveying educational values (Pandanwangi & Nuryantiningsih, [2018](#)). Comics in Indonesia have long appeared in printed form. Due to the advance development in technology, the form of comics is becoming more modern through its emergence in digital form. Although initially comics were only considered as a means of entertainment, along with the development of society, various new categories of comics have emerged which contain educational elements such as education, information facts, and so on (Gunawan & Sujarwo, [2022](#)).

FINDINGS

Honesty and reminding each other in kindness

Jujur itu Penting is one of the stories in the Mangaka Cilik edition of KKKPK. This story was written by 15-year-old author Virginia Haqq Alqy. *Jujur itu Penting* talks about the main character of Putri, who is afraid of being scolded by her teacher, Miss Laura, because she didn't bring a worksheet book (LKS) for the Citizenship Education subject. Putri, who panicked, told her problem to her classmate, Risa. When Putri intended to go home on the grounds that she had sickness, Risa advised her that lying was a bad thing. She then suggested that Putri tell Miss Laura the truth about the situation, that she had indeed forgotten to bring the LKS book.

The lesson begins. Putri went to Miss Laura's table, nervously telling her situation to her teacher. Miss Laura continued to stare at her, and Putri became increasingly nervous. As if she could read Putri's thoughts, Miss Laura praised Putri's honesty rather than telling lies just because she was afraid of being punished. Putri felt relieved and thanked Risa for reminding her. "Hopefully we can both stay away from lying behavior, Put!" (Haqq, [2020](#)). Honesty is an attitude that must be cultivated from an early age, even though sometimes it can create uncomfortable situations for those who say it and hear it. Putri is lucky to have a friend like Risa who continues to remind her of goodness. In the end, honesty will bring relief and people will appreciate it if we tell the truth.

Having a competitive and supportive spirit

The value of competitive and supportive character education is found in the story entitled *Kunci Juara Kelas*. This story is written by a young author named Afifah Khairunnisa and published in one of the Komik Next G series with the same title. The story opens with an announcement about the character Shofi who is the regular class champion at her school. This then gives rise to Aurel's competitive spirit and enthusiasm to become a class champion like Shofi. Shofi is described as having a shy nature. Her shy nature makes her feel awkward hanging out with her friends even though they recognize Shofi's intelligence. This then causes Aurel to feel dissatisfied.

Aurel shows her displeasure towards Shofi, and this makes Shofi feels uncomfortable. Aurel then studies hard so that her grades could surpass Shofi's. She studies all night. However, the next day, she could not do the exam questions well. When the exam results were distributed, Aurel is disappointed because her score have dropped, and Shofi gets the best score. Aurel realizes that her competitive nature has gone too far. She finally acknowledged Shofi's intelligence and stops feeling jealous. Aurel asks Shofi about learning tricks. "Please teach me how to be top of the class!" (Khairunnisa & Mustika, [2023](#)). Shofi has a good heart, she does not feel resentment towards Aurel and helps her study.

Aurel's words above shows that a person has the capacity to change for the better if she has an open mind and heart. Aurel changes her behavior towards Shofi and decides to compete in a healthy

manner. Through this *Kunci Juara Kelas* story, the author wants to convey that a competitive nature can encourage someone to continue to be enthusiastic in improving their competence. The depiction of Shofi and Aurel characters in this story also show that having supportive friends who support and encourage each other is more enjoyable than harboring feelings of jealousy which prevents someone from moving forward.

Be wise and responsible in using electronic devices

Gara-Gara Wi-Fi is included in the *Kunci Juara Kelas* series by Comic Next G. This story is written by 15-year-old Rachelyta Zahra Bintang C. and illustrated by Satrio. *Gara-Gara Wi-Fi* tells the story of a girl who is taken by her mother to watch a film at the cinema while her mother shops at the supermarket. The child was given pocket money to buy cinema tickets and popcorn. Her mother told the child to always let her know if something happened. "Mama will pick you up here, okay, don't go anywhere" (Calysta & Satrio, 2023). Character education is seen from the upbringing of the mother who trains children to have independence and have an attitude of responsibility. Children are not just let go but are given the trust to manage their pocket money and are provided with devices so that the mother can monitor the child's whereabouts.

The problem arose after the film finished; the child waited for her mother to pick her up at the cinema after her mother had gone shopping. The daughter realized that she couldn't call her mother because she was used to using Wi-Fi at home, so she forgot to top up her data package. She took the initiative to look for the nearest area that has hotspot but remembered her mother's message not to go anywhere. The daughter decided to leave the cinema until she finally found a hotspot and immediately notified her mother. The mother realized that it was 14:00, so she should have picked up the child. Seeing the busy cashier queue, she immediately notified the child and panicked when she saw that her message still had one tick. She then called her daughter. The daughter picked up, but her voice was broken. The mother and child around to find each other.

Both realized that the habit of using Wi-Fi at home caused communication to be a bit hampered outside the house. Through the story *Gara-Gara Wi-Fi*, it is shown that children also have the capability to be wise when using devices. Therefore, the message that this story also wants to convey is that parents can also cultivate responsible characters from childhood. Apart from the educational value of independent character and responsibility, this story also depicts the figure of a child who has digital literacy. Digital literacy is not only described by a person's ability to use devices, but also the use of digital to search for information and find solutions. "That's why I looked for hotspots earlier" (Calysta & Satrio, 2023). The child's words show that the child character is depicted as not only being able to surrender to waiting for her mother at the cinema, but the child also taking the initiative to look for Wi-Fi and inform her mother.

Using of technology to develop talent and importance of supervision in using technology

In the story *Mangaka Cilik* written by Adnin Zaqiyah Salma Azzahra Zia, there are two aspects of digital literacy, namely skill in using gadgets and the use of gadgets to develop talents. The main character in the Little Mangaka story is Karin who is depicted using a gadget for positive things such as finding out about Japanese culture which she loves, as well as using a smartphone to channel her talent in drawing manga (comics). "Karin is a fan of manga and Japanese culture. Apart from reading, she also blogs about manga and draws manga" (Zaqiyah, 2020).

Karin's passion and knowledge of Japanese culture encouraged her to develop her other talent, namely writing. Karin writes her first article and publishes it on her blog. Karin's writing receives a good response from her followers. Thanks to the motivation given by her sister, Karin, who initially has no confidence and doubts, became even more enthusiastic to continue writing. She also sent her writing to a publisher and his writing is successfully published. In the *Mangaka Cilik* story, the two aspects of digital literacy possessed by the character Karin are also supported by her sister's supervision and guidance. The *Mangaka Cilik* story shows that using gadgets positively can increase

a person's creativity and produce something that can be useful for other people. Apart from that, it can also be concluded that electronic devices can also be used as a medium for appreciating literary works.

CONCLUSION

The four stories published in the comic compilation series *Mangaka Cilik* by KKKPK and *Kunci Juara Kelas* by Komik Next G can be used as a medium for character education and development of children's digital literacy. The character education values of honesty and reminding each other of kindness are found in the story entitled *Jujur itu Penting*, the values of competitive and supportive nature are found in the story called *Kunci Juara Kelas*. The value of digital literacy is shown through a girl character who is wise in using a device to find solutions to problems in the story called *Gara-Gara Wi-Fi*. In the story called *Mangaka Cilik*, aspects of digital literacy in the form of skills in using devices and the use of technology to develop talents are shown by the main character, Karin. Apart from that, Karin's digital skills are also supported by her sister's supervision and guidance in using Karin's gadget.

This research hopefully can contribute to children's literature research, especially research on comics. Apart from that, the stories contained in KKKPK and Komik Next G can be used as learning material, especially at the elementary level. Through the supervision of teachers at school, it is hoped that children can reap the benefits in the form of character education values contained in comics. Through the stories in KKKPK Comics and Next G Comics, it is also found that gadgets and technology can have positive value if children are supervised in their use and used for useful things such as learning and honing their talents.

The story writing program held by Penerbit Mizan and Muffin Graphics is a positive thing because it facilitates young writers in developing their ideas and imagination. Apart from that, the stories in KKKPK and Komik Next G are conveyed from the perspective of young writers so that they are more relevant in conveying the problems they face in everyday life. Apart from that, it is also hoped that teachers can provide positive encouragement and motivation to improve students' literacy skills in appreciating literary works through reading and writing activities.

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