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Folklore-Based Digital Character Comics (FBDCC): A Conceptual Framework for Integrating Character Education and Cultural Heritage

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Abstract:

Local cultural heritage embedded in folklore holds potential as a source for character education; however, it is increasingly overlooked by the younger generation due to the rise of digital technology and shifting learning preferences. Meanwhile, character education has become a priority in national educational development, aiming to cultivate a generation characterized by integrity and cultural awareness. This study aims to develop a conceptual framework for a digital character comic based on the "Kyai Konang" folktale, serving as a learning medium that integrates character education with cultural preservation. The study employs a conceptual framework development approach, utilizing Design and Development Research methods during the design phase. Data were gathered through a literature review and a content analysis of the Kyai Konang folktale from Bekonang Village, Sukoharjo Regency. The research yielded four key components: the Kyai Konang folklore content as a source of local cultural values, the integration of character values, a digital comic format featuring interactive visual narratives, and reflective activities for value internalization. This conceptual framework demonstrates that folklore-based digital comics have the potential to serve as both a medium for cultural literacy and a tool for character education that is contextual, relevant, and aligned with 21st-century learning needs.

Keywords: Digital Comics, Character Education, Cultural Heritage, Folklore, Local Wisdom

Introduction

The advancement of digital technology has brought about significant changes in how the younger generation acquires information and learns. Twenty-first-century learners tend to be more interested in visual, interactive, and technology-based media than in conventional learning media dominated by printed text (Mayer, 2021). These shifting learning characteristics necessitate innovations in learning media that can accommodate digital literacy needs while preserving local cultural values as part of the national identity. In the context of Indonesian education, this challenge is particularly critical because the currents of globalization and technological advancement threaten to weaken the younger generation's connection to local cultural heritage—traditionally passed down through oral traditions, including folklore (UNESCO, 2023).

Folklore is a form of intangible cultural heritage containing moral, social, religious, and cultural values that can serve as a resource for character education. Folklore functions not merely as entertainment but also as a medium for transmitting the values and social norms that evolve within a society (Danandjaja, 2017). Various studies indicate that integrating folklore into education can enhance cultural understanding and local identity awareness while strengthening students' character (Nurgiyantoro, 2023; Suyitno et al., 2022). However, the survival of folklore currently faces serious challenges due to the younger generation's waning interest in oral traditions and the rising dominance of digital popular culture, which is more easily accessible via various technological platforms.

Meanwhile, character education remains a strategic agenda in national educational development. Strengthening character is viewed as an effort to mold students who possess integrity, responsibility, and social concern, and who are capable of coexisting within a multicultural society (Lickona, 2019). The *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum) policy also prioritizes the development of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (Pancasila Student Profile) as a primary learning objective; this profile encompasses dimensions such as faith and devotion to God Almighty, global diversity, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), independence, critical reasoning, and creativity (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). Therefore, there is a need for learning media that are not merely oriented toward cognitive aspects but are also capable of instilling character values through meaningful learning experiences.

Although various character education programs have been developed, their implementation in schools still faces a number of obstacles. Instruction often treats character education as supplementary material delivered verbally through advice or lectures, thereby failing to provide students with contextual experiences (Berkowitz & Bier, 2021). Consequently, character values have not been fully internalized in students' daily behavior. This situation highlights the need for a learning approach that is more contextual, engaging, and relevant to students' lives, utilizing digital media that align with the characteristics of the current generation.

One promising alternative is the use of digital comics. Digital comics combine text, images, color, and visual narrative elements that can enhance students' attention, motivation, and comprehension of learning material (Mayer, 2021). Recent research

indicates that digital comics can boost learning engagement, reading literacy, and critical thinking skills, as well as improve understanding of social and cultural values (Aini & Nuroh, 2025; Rahmawati & Purwanti, 2025). Furthermore, presenting information in a visual-interactive format is considered more aligned with the learning preferences of the digital generation compared to conventional learning media.

In the context of cultural preservation, digital comics also offer an opportunity to transform folklore into more engaging and accessible learning media. The digitization of folklore allows local cultural values to remain relevant to the younger generation without losing their inherent cultural substance (Suyitno et al., 2022). Thus, developing folklore-based digital comics not only contributes to educational innovation but also supports the preservation of cultural heritage in the digital era.

One folktale with significant potential for development as a character education medium is the story of Kyai Konang from Bekonang Village, Sukoharjo Regency, Central Java. The character Kyai Konang is portrayed as a wise, religious, and hardworking individual who cares deeply about the community and possesses strong leadership qualities. The story embodies various character values, such as religiosity, responsibility, mutual cooperation, social concern, hard work, and the courage to uphold the truth. These values are highly relevant.

Methods

This study employs the Conceptual Framework Development (CFD) approach within the Design and Development Research (DDR) methodology—specifically during the design phase—to develop a conceptual framework for folklore-based learning media that integrates character education with local cultural preservation. The CFD approach was selected for its focus on identifying, integrating, and synthesizing key concepts to produce a conceptual model explaining the interrelationships between components in learning media design (Jabareen, 2009), while DDR was chosen for its suitability in creating educational product designs grounded in both theory and user needs (Richey & Klein, 2007). Research data were gathered through a literature review covering character education, folklore, digital comics, digital literacy, and 21st-century learning, alongside a content analysis of the *Kyai Konang* folktale to identify cultural and character values suitable for transformation into digital media (Krippendorff, 2019). The research procedure involved identifying key concepts, synthesizing literature, analyzing character values within the *Kyai Konang* folktale, and constructing a conceptual framework comprising folklore content, character value integration, digital visual narratives, and reflective learning activities. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively by synthesizing various concepts and interpreting emerging themes to generate a coherent, practical model (Miles et al., 2020). The resulting conceptual framework was evaluated based on pedagogical relevance, cultural appropriateness, and potential for implementation in Indonesian language instruction, thereby serving as a foundation for developing folklore-based digital comics that support character education and the preservation of local cultural heritage in the digital era.

Results and Discussion

Findings

This research has produced a conceptual framework for a digital character-based comic centered on the Kyai Konang folktale, designed to integrate character education, cultural literacy, and digital technology-based learning into a unified instructional system. The framework was constructed through a synthesis of literature, an analysis of cultural values within the Kyai Konang folklore, and theoretical reviews of character education, cultural literacy, constructivism, and multimedia learning theory. Its development adapted the "Conceptual Framework Development" approach, which involves organizing interrelated concepts to comprehensively explain a phenomenon and serve as a theoretical foundation for developing educational models or products (Jabareen, 2009).

From the perspective of instructional media development, the conceptual framework serves as a map of the relationships between educational objectives, learning content, presentation strategies, and expected learning outcomes. Consequently, the resulting framework not only outlines the structure of the digital comic product but also illustrates the mechanism by which local cultural values can be transformed into learning experiences capable of shaping learners' character. The synthesis indicates that the developed model comprises four key components: (1) the Kyai Konang folktale content as a source of local cultural values; (2) the integration of character education values; (3) the presentation of the digital comic through interactive visual narratives; and (4) reflective activities for the internalization of character values. Together, these four components form an integrated learning system that supports the achievement of character education goals while simultaneously fostering the preservation of local culture.

Analysis

1. The Kyai Konang Folklore Content as a Source of Local Cultural Values

The first component in the conceptual framework is Kyai Konang's folklore content which functions as the main source of local cultural values. Theoretically, folklore is a form of cultural expression of society that contains collective knowledge, value systems, social norms, and views of life that are passed down from generation to generation (Danandjaja, 2017). Folklore not only functions as entertainment, but also as an instrument of social education that helps people understand cultural identity and values that are considered important in living together.

The Kyai Konang folklore which developed in Bekonang Village, Sukoharjo Regency, was chosen because it contains strong cultural values and is still relevant to the challenges of modern society. The figure of Kyai Konang is described as a community leader who dedicates himself to the welfare of the people through the development of agriculture, trade and social life. This narrative shows that folklore does not just store local historical facts, but also represents a value system that can be used as a source of character learning.

In the context of 21st century education, the use of folklore as a learning resource is becoming increasingly important because it is able to bridge the need for cultural

preservation with the demands of contextual learning. UNESCO (2023) emphasizes that education has an important role in transmitting cultural heritage to the younger generation as part of efforts to maintain cultural identity amidst globalization and digitalization. Thus, the integration of the Kyai Konang folklore into digital learning media allows students to gain a learning experience that is not only oriented towards mastering the material, but also towards strengthening cultural identity and local cultural literacy.

2. Integration of Character Education Values

The second component involves integrating the character education values found in the Kyai Konang folktale. Character education is a systematic process designed to help learners understand, embrace, and practice moral values in their daily lives (Lickona, 2019). According to Lickona, good character encompasses not only moral knowledge but also moral feeling and moral action.

Content analysis reveals that the Kyai Konang folktale embodies six key character values: religiosity, hard work, responsibility, leadership, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), and social concern. These six values are highly relevant to current character education needs in Indonesia. The value of religiosity is reflected in Kyai Konang's way of life, characterized by his dedication to the community. The value of hard work is evident in his efforts to improve community welfare through the development of agriculture and trade. The values of responsibility and leadership are demonstrated by his role in maintaining security and guiding the community. Meanwhile, the values of mutual cooperation and social concern are shown through his involvement in helping the community address various social issues.

These values align with the dimensions of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (Pancasila Student Profile), which emphasizes fostering students who possess faith and devotion to God Almighty, a spirit of mutual cooperation, independence, critical thinking skills, creativity, and a global perspective. Therefore, the Kyai Konang folktale holds great potential as a medium for integrating character education into literature instruction in a more contextual and meaningful way.

3. Digital Comics as a Medium for Interactive Visual Narrative

The third component is the core innovation of the conceptual framework developed, namely the transformation of folklore into the form of digital comics based on interactive visual narratives. The selection of digital comics is based on the characteristics of digital generation students who are more responsive to visual, multimodal and interactive information than conventional texts.

According to Mayer (2021), the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning theory explains that students learn more effectively when information is presented through a combination of words and images rather than just through text. Verbal and visual information is processed through two different cognitive channels, resulting in deeper understanding and lasting longer in memory.

In the context of literature learning, digital comics have the ability to concretely visualize characters, settings, conflicts and storylines, thereby helping students understand the content of the story more easily. Wardani's research (2024) shows that digital comics are able to increase students' learning engagement because they present

material in an interesting, interactive form and in accordance with the characteristics of the digital generation. Wardani found that digital comic media based on local wisdom had a positive effect on students because it provided a contextual and enjoyable learning experience.

Apart from that, research by Aini and Nuroh (2022) shows that the use of digital comics can improve students' writing skills through visual presentation which makes it easier to develop ideas and imagination. These findings strengthen the argument that digital comics are not only a medium for conveying information, but also a medium that is able to facilitate creative thinking processes and meaning construction by students.

Within this conceptual framework, the digital comic Kyai Konang is designed by combining visual illustrations of Javanese culture, communicative dialogue, systematic storylines, and interactive elements that allow students to be actively involved in the learning process. In this way, digital comics function as a bridge that connects local cultural heritage with the learning needs of the digital generation.

4. Reflective Activity as a Mechanism for Value Internalization

The fourth component consists of reflective activities designed to ensure that the character values embedded in the folklore do not remain merely at the level of cognitive understanding. From the constructivist perspectives of Piaget and Vygotsky, meaningful learning occurs when learners actively construct knowledge through experience and reflection.

Reflective activities within the digital comic are implemented through guiding questions, reflective journals, group discussions, case studies, and application-based tasks that connect the experiences of the character Kyai Konang with the learners' daily lives. This strategy enables learners to internalize values through critical thinking, self-evaluation, and moral decision-making.

According to Dewey (1933), reflection is an intellectual process that allows an individual to connect experiences with broader meanings, thereby fostering more permanent behavioral changes. Consequently, reflective activities serve as a crucial component of character education, as they assist learners in translating the values they have learned into tangible actions in their daily lives.

Research findings indicate that these four components form a cohesive conceptual framework in which each element complements and supports the others. The Kyai Konang folklore serves as the source of local cultural values; character education provides the values to be taught; the digital comic functions as an engaging and interactive learning medium; and reflective activities help students comprehend and apply these values in their everyday lives. Integrating these four components yields a learning model that not only helps preserve local culture but also instills character values through learning activities that are meaningful, relevant to students' lives, and aligned with 21st-century learner needs. These findings expand the discourse on the relationship between folklore, character education, and digital media, while providing a robust conceptual foundation for the development of folklore-based learning media in future research stages.

Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion, this study successfully developed a conceptual framework for a digital character-education comic based on the Kyai Konang folktale, integrating character education, cultural literacy, and digital technology into a cohesive learning system. The framework comprises four key components: the Kyai Konang folktale content as a source of local cultural values; the integration of character education values—specifically religiosity, hard work, responsibility, leadership, mutual cooperation (gotong royong), and social concern; the presentation of the digital comic through interactive visual narratives; and reflective activities serving as a mechanism for internalizing character values. The findings indicate that the Kyai Konang folktale holds significant potential as both a resource for character education and a means of preserving local culture, while digital comics serve as an effective medium for transforming these values into a learning experience that is engaging, contextual, and aligned with the characteristics of 21st-century learners. The integration of these four components yields a conceptual model that not only supports the strengthening of learners' character and cultural literacy but also expands the scope of research on utilizing folklore in digital learning media, while providing a theoretical and practical foundation for the future development of folktale-based learning media.

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