



Research Article

German Children's Literature for Foreign Language Literacy and Character Education: A Case Study at SMA YARI Padang

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Abstract

Foreign languages in Indonesia are often taught as supporting subjects, with English being the most common. German has also been introduced in some schools, including SMA YARI Padang. However, German lessons at this school have been discontinued over the last two years due to a lack of teaching staff. This study examined the use of German children's literature to enhance foreign language literacy and character development. A case study approach involved storytelling, interactive quizzes, observation, and mentoring. The storybook *Ginting und Ganteng* was chosen as a learning material because it was enjoyable and engaging for students to read and learn from. The results showed that children's literature helped students remember basic German vocabulary, learn new words in context, and better understand the story that was read. Furthermore, the story encouraged students to reflect on positive values such as honesty, kindness, and respect. These findings suggest that children's literature can be an effective medium for learning German while supporting character education. This study demonstrates that literary texts can offer meaningful language learning experiences, even in schools with limited resources.

INTRODUCTION

Humans need communication to survive, and language is one way of doing so. Language can convey messages, thoughts, feelings, and goals as a means of communication. As Saragih (2022) explains, language is a meaningful sound or voice produced by the human vocal tract, functioning as a medium of communication between individuals or groups to express their thoughts and feelings. In this sense, language serves as a means of expressing emotions and a tool for achieving specific goals. Through language, humans can exchange ideas, express emotions, and disseminate information through oral or written media (Lareina et al., 2024).

In the Indonesian context, the position of language is formally regulated by the 1945 Constitution, which establishes Bahasa Indonesia as the nation's official language. Bahasa Indonesia also serves as the unifying language of the Indonesian people, helping to strengthen social cohesion across diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Saragih, 2022). In addition, Bahasa Indonesia is symbolic and practical, as it functions as the country's official language and is used daily in communication by its citizens (Lareina et al., 2024).

Besides English, another foreign language well-known in Indonesia is German. It is taught formally at the secondary level (SMA/SMK and MA), at the tertiary level in German Language and Literature programs, and in German language courses offered by other study programs (Purwono et al., [2021](#)). German is also taught informally through institutions such as the Goethe-Institut (Kudriyah, [2008](#)). This indicates that Indonesians are interested in learning German, particularly given the numerous opportunities for studying and working in Germany (Tomasouw et al., [2022](#)). Despite this, challenges persist, especially in schools where a shortage of qualified teachers and inadequate teaching resources hinder the continuity of German instruction. These issues underline the need for alternative pedagogical approaches—one of which is the use of German children's literature, which supports vocabulary learning and conveys cultural and character values.

Children's literature is an effective tool for language learning, demonstrating significant benefits in vocabulary acquisition and value education. Beniko Mason et al. ([2008](#)) found that students learning German acquired approximately six words per hour through story listening, compared to just 2.4 words per hour in traditional classes. Similarly, Belsky et al. ([2006](#)) confirmed that children's literature enhances language skills, promotes appreciation of reading, and stimulates advanced learning. Regarding values, Pulimeno et al. ([2020](#)) noted that tales convey fundamental values that are valid for children's lives, while Murwaningsih et al. ([2022](#)) emphasized that children's literature is a key medium for developing cultural and character values. The evidence suggests that children's literature is a powerful, multifaceted educational tool that simultaneously supports language acquisition and moral development.

One institution that has implemented German language instruction is SMA YARI Padang. German was also taught at the junior high (SMP YARI) and elementary (SD YARI) levels. In previous years, SMA YARI even sent students to Germany through exchange programs. However, German lessons at SMA and SMP YARI have been halted for about two years due to a shortage of teachers, leaving only SD YARI with an active program (Hawa, [2025](#)). This situation illustrates the concrete challenges of sustaining German language education in Indonesia, where institutional commitment exists but is hindered by the lack of teaching staff.

To find solutions to this situation, lecturers from the Faculty of Humanities at Universitas Andalas conducted a case study-based activity at SMA YARI Padang on 24 January 2025. Children's literature was chosen because it supports language skills and vocabulary acquisition (Nurgiyantoro, [2005](#)) while fostering cultural understanding and shaping character (Nurfadilla et al., [2020](#)). The selected work was *Ganteng und Ginting*, a German-language children's book that integrates linguistic and moral values.

Besides the shortage of teachers, another obstacle is the limited access to learning materials. Most textbooks are only available in cultural centers, such as the Goethe-Institut, in large cities like Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya. As a result, teachers at SMA YARI rely heavily on online sources. Furthermore, many teachers assigned to German are not graduates of German Education or Literature and have never received formal training, leading to limited language mastery acquired through self-study. These challenges further underscore the importance of exploring innovative resources, such as children's literature, to enhance foreign language literacy and character education.

METHOD

The research activity conducted at SMA YARI Padang employed three main approaches: storytelling, observation, and interactive quizzes. Storytelling was selected as the primary

medium because children's literature is not only engaging but also contributes significantly to the enhancement of language skills and vocabulary. Using the German story *Ginting und Ganteng* (Fey & Rappo, [2020](#)), students experienced a learning process that was both enjoyable and accessible. The storytelling method functioned not merely as entertainment but as a pedagogical tool designed to foster comprehension, encourage vocabulary recall, and simultaneously instill values such as empathy, environmental awareness, and responsibility. This demonstrates how literature can serve as both a linguistic and moral learning resource, aligning with the notion that literary works contribute to character formation (Nurfadilla et al., [2020](#)).

The observation method further revealed students' responses to the story and the extent of their vocabulary retention despite the absence of formal lessons over the past two years (Hawa, [2025](#)). Several students were able to recall simple German words and connect them to the storyline. The observation also captured students' engagement during discussions, where they not only attempted to comprehend the language but also reflected on the characters' actions and moral values. These findings underscore the potential of children's literature to bridge the gap between linguistic knowledge and ethical development, providing practical evidence of its dual function in foreign language education (Nurfadilla et al., [2020](#); Nurgiyantoro, [2005](#)).

Finally, the interactive quiz offered a more structured means of assessing students' understanding. Supported by slides and multimedia projection, the quiz encouraged active participation and immediate feedback, allowing for the evaluation of both vocabulary mastery and comprehension of the story's moral lessons. This approach confirmed that the use of children's literature in foreign language classrooms extends beyond passive reading activities; it can be transformed into interactive, student-centered learning experiences. By integrating cognitive, affective, and moral dimensions, the activity demonstrated that German children's literature holds substantial potential as a pedagogical tool to enhance both literacy and character education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This case study-based research was conducted at SMA YARI, located on Jalan Batang Kandis No. 3–5, Padang Baru Timur District, Padang City, Indonesia. The study was carried out in two stages. The first stage involved a preliminary visit and survey to map students' existing knowledge of the German language, which served as the foundation for planning subsequent activities. This stage revealed that SMA YARI students had not received formal German lessons for approximately two years. However, the survey results indicated that the students still possessed basic knowledge of German, including self-introductions, numbers, animal names, colors, and everyday greetings. This phase also helped identify relevant materials to be prepared for the research activities. Afterward, the resource persons collaborated with SMA YARI officials to finalize the schedule of activities.

The second stage involved implementing the case study-based research on Friday, 24 January 2025. The activity involved six lecturers from the Faculty of Cultural Sciences at Universitas Andalas. It aimed to utilize German children's literature as a medium for language learning, while enhancing vocabulary mastery and strengthening character education. The literary work used was *Ginting und Ganteng* (Frey & Rappo, [2020](#)), an illustrated fable chosen for its accessible language and moral content. The research subjects consisted of fifteen SMA YARI students from Grades 10 to 12.

The activity was conducted on Friday, 24 January 2025, after adjusting to the schedules of all team members. At precisely 9:00 a.m. (Western Indonesian Time), The research team

arrived at SMA YARI Padang. They were greeted by Miss Nisa, one of the school's teaching staff, and waited in the reception room while the students completed their first break.

At 9:30 a.m., the team was invited into a classroom where the participants—students from Grades 10 and 12—were already seated and prepared to join the session. While setting up their materials and equipment, the research team greeted the students, who responded enthusiastically.

The activity began with an icebreaking session designed to build rapport between the researchers and students. During this session, the facilitator introduced several simple German phrases, such as "*Guten Morgen*" (Good morning) and "*Wie geht's dir?*" (How are you?), and *Mein Name ist...* (My name is...). The facilitator also demonstrated how to write these expressions to help students understand and remember them. This opening activity aimed to activate prior knowledge, expand basic vocabulary, and create a friendly and relaxed learning atmosphere before moving on to the main session.

The icebreaking session revealed that some students—particularly those in Grade 12—still remembered simple German phrases from previous lessons, while the Grade 10 students were encountering the language for the first time. Nevertheless, both groups showed strong enthusiasm and curiosity throughout the session.

The next stage of the icebreaker introduced students to German animal names, including *der Tiger* (tiger), *der Löwe* (lion), *der Vogel* (bird), *die Kuh* (cow), *der Hund* (dog), *das Schwein* (pig), and *das Huhn* (chicken). This segment also served as an introduction to German noun classes and the article system—a key feature of German grammar. The facilitator explained that German articles indicate gender and number, with "*der*" used for masculine nouns, "*die*" for feminine nouns, and "*das*" for neuter nouns.

After the warm-up activities, the session continued to the main event, which focused on using German children's literature to enhance foreign language literacy and character education. The selected storybook, *Ginting und Ganteng* (Frey & Rappo, 2020), features simple vocabulary suitable for beginners while embedding strong moral lessons related to environmental awareness—the central theme of the story.

To support comprehension, the research team prepared a concise summary of the story, presented through slides using a projector. Each of the fifteen participants also received a printed copy of the storybook to follow along during the session. The storytelling method was applied as the core instructional approach, enabling students to engage actively with the text while connecting linguistic learning with moral reflection.

Synopsis of *Ginting und Ganteng*

Ginting und Ganteng tells the story of twin orangutans, Ginting and Ganteng, and their mother, Merah, who once lived peacefully in a tropical forest. One day, Merah heard unfamiliar noises—trees being felled by loggers. Terrified, she hid and watched as the forest was cleared until nothing was left. The destruction did not stop there: the forest, once home to deer, birds, tigers, and wild boar, was later burned by the same loggers. Merah narrowly escaped the inferno.

After wandering for days, Merah found herself in a vast palm oil plantation—land that had once been part of the tropical forest. The young palm fruits tasted unpleasant, so she continued her journey until she reached an orchard. Hungry and desperate, she picked a banana, but a farmer who saw her became angry and shot her with an air rifle.

Fortunately, a young man witnessed the incident and immediately reported it to a local orangutan rescue center. When rescuers arrived, Merah climbed a tree to escape, but a member

of the rescue team used a blowgun with a tranquilizer dart. After being safely caught in a net, she was taken to the rehabilitation center for treatment and recovery.

Three years later, Merah's twin sons, Ginting and Ganteng, had grown into healthy, playful orangutans. They lived at the care center, playing daily with other young orangutans—getting along, sometimes quarreling, like any siblings. Eventually, the long-awaited day came: Ginting and Ganteng were declared ready to return to the wild with their mother.

Their release took place in a designated conservation area, where rehabilitated orangutans undergo a final adaptation process before being fully reintroduced into their natural habitat. During this period, Merah, Ginting, and Ganteng adjusted well to their new surroundings. One day, while exploring the enclosure, they noticed the gate to the forest was open. Merah walked toward the wilderness, followed by Ganteng. Turning back, Ganteng reached out to his brother, Ginting, inviting him to join. Hand in hand, the three stepped into the forest—beginning a new life in the wilderness that would become their true home.

Character Education in *Ginting und Ganteng*

The research team ensured that character education values were effectively conveyed to students through this story, thereby strengthening both foreign language literacy and moral awareness. Through guided observation and discussion, students identified key values reflected in the narrative.

Several participants observed that the story emphasizes environmental awareness. *Ginting und Ganteng* vividly portrays the devastating effects of illegal logging and forest fires on wildlife, particularly orangutans. The narrative highlights the forest as a vital home for countless species whose survival depends on environmental preservation. This aligns with Nurgiyantoro's (2005) view that literature in language education not only develops vocabulary and comprehension but also cultivates moral reflection and ecological sensitivity.

Students also discussed the theme of wildlife protection. Merah's story illustrates how orangutans become victims of human greed and irresponsibility, reinforcing the importance of protecting endangered species and supporting conservation efforts. This interpretation resonates with Nurfadilla et al. (2020), who emphasize the role of literature in shaping empathy and moral reasoning. The findings suggest that incorporating children's literature into foreign language classes can simultaneously promote linguistic competence and ethical development.

The relationship among Merah, Ginting, and Ganteng further symbolizes familial affection and empathy. Their bond teaches the value of care, compassion, and emotional connection—qualities that are central to moral education. Such affective engagement, as highlighted by Nurfadilla et al. (2020), nurtures emotional intelligence and supports language retention and comprehension. Emotional resonance, as noted by Nurgiyantoro (2005), strengthens memory associations and enhances the learning experience in foreign language pedagogy.

The story also highlights the importance of coexistence and social responsibility. The young man who reported Merah to the rescue team and the veterinarians who treated her represent humanity's role as protectors and caretakers of nature. These figures embody values such as responsibility, cooperation, and the spirit of mutual assistance. This depiction supports the idea that literature provides learners with both authentic linguistic input and ethical reflection. In resource-limited contexts such as SMA YARI, this dual function becomes particularly meaningful, compensating for the absence of specialized teachers or textbooks by combining language and moral education in a single, engaging activity.

Finally, *Ginting und Ganteng* convey a profound message about harmony between humans and nature. Humans can act as agents of restoration for animals that have lost their habitats, emphasizing that every living being deserves to live freely in its natural environment. Acts of environmental destruction, therefore, violate the right of other creatures to coexist. The intertwined journeys of Merah, Ginting, and Ganteng reflect the values of togetherness, courage, and adaptation—showing that challenges can be overcome through unity and resilience.

In this sense, the story demonstrates how foreign language learning can transcend mere vocabulary acquisition to cultivate empathy, environmental responsibility, and perseverance—values that resonate with the broader goals of character education in contemporary pedagogy.

Using *Ginting und Ganteng* Storybook to Increase German Vocabulary

During the storytelling session, the research team ensured that participants remained attentive to the material. The reading activity employed an interactive approach, encouraging students to ask questions, repeat words, and engage in brief discussions. To enhance comprehension, the team introduced several German verbs such as *hören* (to listen), *rennen* (to run), and *laufen* (to walk). The facilitator explained that in German, verbs ending with *-en* represent the infinitive form, which is commonly found in dictionaries. However, to form complete sentences, verbs must be conjugated according to the subject (actor) and tense (present, past, or future).

To assess students' understanding, the teaching team applied the observation method by asking several participants to retell the story. The students responded enthusiastically, even volunteering to take part. Some successfully retold the story in both Indonesian and English, incorporating newly learned German vocabulary. This activity not only demonstrated comprehension but also revealed students' growing confidence in using the target language.

The final stage of the activity involved an evaluation phase conducted through an interactive quiz. The quiz, displayed via projector slides, consisted of multiple-choice questions related to the content of the storybook. Students responded by raising their hands to indicate their answers. The questions assessed vocabulary retention, understanding of moral values, and knowledge about orangutans' lives in the wild. Examples of quiz items included:

1. **“*Bis zu welchem Alter schläft der Orang-Utan im Nest seiner Mutter?*”**
(Until what age does an orangutan sleep in its mother's nest?)
→ Correct answer: **“*Bis er sieben Jahre alt ist.*”** (Until seven years old.)
2. **“*Wo leben die Orang-Utans?*”**
(Where do orangutans live?)
→ Correct answer: "The orangutans live in the forest."
3. **“*Wovon ernähren sich die Orang-Utans?*”**
(What do orangutans eat?)
→ Correct answer: "The orangutans eat leaves, insects, and fruit."

The quiz results indicated that students were able to comprehend the story's content and recall simple German vocabulary effectively. At the same time, they gained additional knowledge about the lives of wild animals, particularly orangutans. These outcomes confirm that integrating *Ginting und Ganteng* into the learning process successfully combined language development with value-based education, emphasizing environmental awareness, empathy, cooperation, and responsibility.

A deeper analysis reveals that the use of children's literature in this activity not only facilitated vocabulary acquisition but also created a meaningful and enjoyable learning environment. Students were able to connect emotionally with the story, which helped them retain new verbs and nouns associated with the plot. This supports existing research that suggests stories provide contextualized input, making vocabulary learning more effective and memorable (Nurgiyantoro, [2005](#); Nurfadilla et al., [2020](#)).

Moreover, children's stories also serve as valuable tools for moral education. Through *Ginting und Ganteng*, students learned to care for animals, show empathy, and take responsibility for the environment. This demonstrates that foreign language learning can complement character education, reinforcing values alongside linguistic competence.

Compared with traditional methods such as rote memorization or drilling, the storytelling approach proved more engaging and meaningful. Students' enthusiasm—evident in their eagerness to retell the story and participate actively in the quiz—illustrates the motivational power of interactive storytelling. In summary, this study highlights that children's literature serves as an effective pedagogical bridge, enabling students not only to expand their vocabulary but also to reflect on essential life values through an enjoyable and emotionally resonant learning experience.

CONCLUSION

A case study-based research activity conducted by a team of lecturers from the Faculty of Humanities at Universitas Andalas, in collaboration with SMA YARI Padang, went smoothly and achieved its goals. The activity was conducted in two stages: a survey and primary research. The survey stage helped the team assess the students' existing knowledge of German and design materials tailored to their needs. The results showed that students had very little knowledge of German because the subject had not been taught for about two years.

Students joined the activity with enthusiasm. They were eager to retell the story, discuss its character values, and answer the quiz questions correctly. This shows that the activity not only helped improve their knowledge of German vocabulary but also increased their awareness of environmental issues. In addition, the story encouraged values such as caring, empathy, courage, and cooperation, which the students could easily connect with.

In conclusion, this case study demonstrates that incorporating children's literature can enhance students' learning experiences. Literature can be an effective medium for improving foreign language literacy and, at the same time, delivering character education. The activity also highlighted how literary works can give students both language skills and meaningful values.

The research results further reveal that students in Padang are interested in learning German, but there are still challenges. The primary issues are the shortage of qualified teachers and limited access to learning resources, such as books and German literature. These issues slow down the progress of German language learning in the city. It is hoped that the results of this study will provide input to the local government and curriculum makers to offer training for German teachers and ensure schools have sufficient learning materials for both teachers and students.

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