

The Value of Character Education in the *Empe Laho* Legend: A Study of Aceh Oral Literature

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Abstract. *This study aims to identify and describe character education values in the Empe Laho Legend as a form of Acehese oral literature and to explain its relevance for literature learning in schools. This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach with content analysis methods on the Empe Laho Legend text obtained through interviews with local informants and literature review. The analysis was carried out through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study show that the Empe Laho Legend contains a number of character education values, including moral, religious, social, and cultural values. These values are relevant to be integrated into learning because they align with the Character Education Strengthening program and are able to foster cultural awareness, social ethics, and positive behavior in students. This research affirms that Acehese oral literature plays an important role as a source of character education and should be optimized in the context of modern education.*

Keywords: *values; character education; oral literature*

1. Introduction

Oral literature is one of the cultural treasures of the Nusantara, functioning as a medium for preserving the noble values of a society. Aceh is a region in Indonesia located at the far end of the Nusantara. The people of Aceh are a community that has folktales in the form of legends. These legends continue to live on in the lives of the Acehese people, especially in the past. In Acehese literature, the term legend is known as one of the forms of *haba jameun* that is highly favored (Asriani, 2021).

In the Acehese tradition, oral literature not only serves as entertainment but also becomes a medium for conveying moral, social, cultural messages, and life teachings passed down through generations via folk tales. One of the legends that is still remembered by the community today is the Legend of *Empe Laho*. This story not only contains interesting narrative aesthetic elements but is also rich in meaning relevant to shaping the character of the younger generation. However, the potential of folk tales as a source of character education has not been fully utilized in the context of formal education, especially in literary learning in schools (Prawiyogi et al., 2025). Learning is still often oriented only toward the cognitive aspect, while the moral values contained in the stories receive little deep attention. This condition results in a gap between students' knowledge of folklore and their understanding of the values of character that should be derived from the story.

Character education must be instilled from an early age starting from home, community, and school. With early implementation, it is hoped that character education will enhance students' abilities, morals, and open-mindedness. If all parties cooperate effectively, all these goals will surely be achieved. In addition to having strong intellectual intelligence, students are also required to possess moral quality. Good character education must be integrated with strong intellectual intelligence. Thus, character education will produce students who are moral and intelligent.

Character Education is a deliberate effort to develop good character based on core virtues that are objectively beneficial for both individuals and society (Halfian, 2019). According to Wibowo and Muhammad (2023), the values of character education include: religious, honest, tolerant, disciplined, hardworking, creative, independent, democratic, curious, patriotic, love for the homeland, appreciating achievements, friendly, peace-loving, fond of reading, caring for the environment, socially responsible, and responsible.

According to Rusyana, folklore is a national cultural heritage and still possesses values that should be developed and utilized for the life of today and the future, particularly in relation to fostering literary appreciation. Folklore has also long served as a medium for understanding ideas and passing on values that grow within society. In fact, folklore has for centuries played a role as a basis of communication between the creator and the community, in the sense that oral-based forms are easier to engage with due to familiar elements within the society (Halfian, 2019).

Lickona stated that there are ten indications of poor moral behavior in children that need to be corrected and given more attention in order to improve (Youpika & Darmiati, 2016). These ten indications are violence and anarchic behavior, theft, cheating, disregard for applicable rules, student brawls, use of inappropriate language, premature sexual maturity and its deviations, and self-destructive behavior. Furthermore, Ki Hajar Dewantara, as the father of education in Indonesia, also emphasized that spiritual/inner strength or character is just as important as intellectual needs and a person's health. The sufficiency of character strength, intellectual capacity, and physical health can then serve as a foundation for someone to achieve a perfect life. Regarding the implementation of character education, it can fundamentally be carried out in many ways and through various intermediary media. One of them is through literary works. Every literary work contains embedded messages. These messages can include cultural content, social life, education, politics, religion, the environment, and other aspects of life (Setyawan, et al. 2017).

This is in line with Alfien et al. (2025), who stated that folklore contains character education values in the form of: moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral action. Moral awareness (moral knowledge), the ability to make wise decisions, understanding moral values, taking perspectives; compassion (moral feelings), competence and willingness to solve moral problems (moral action). In contrast, Erianty et al. (2025) examined character values through a sociological literature approach, showing that folklore can be an effective medium for strengthening character while preserving culture. Furthermore, Rasyid et al. (2024) stated that character education plays a role in shaping students' personalities, preventing adolescent social problems, preparing a responsible generation, providing life skills for society, and supporting students' academic achievement.

Cahyati and Zainal (2021), who conducted research on the legend of Buka Luwur: The Origin of Dukuh Pantaran as a Character Education Medium, concluded that the legend of Buka Luwur: The Origin of Dukuh Pantaran falls under the category of folk legends, because it tells the origin of the name Dukuh Pantaran, and (2) the legend of Buka Luwur: The Origin of Dukuh Pantaran contains fourteen character education values, namely: religious, honest, tolerant, disciplined, hardworking, creative, independent, curious, appreciative of achievement, friendly/communicative, peace-loving, environmentally conscious, socially caring, and responsible. With these fourteen values, the legend of Buka Luwur: The Origin of Dukuh Pantaran has the potential to be a character education medium that should be instilled in students.

Through this folklore, we can introduce various character values that can later be adopted or emulated by the children. Character education is carried out through the teaching of values or policies that form the basic values of the nation's character (Halfian, 2019). This is in line with Akbar et al. (2025) who stated that the story of Princess Cooked Areca Nut contains five main character education values, namely love for the homeland and national spirit, loyalty and devotion to parents, courage, wisdom, and responsibility. The values in folklore reflect the social structure and norms of the society that created them.

The main problem addressed in this study is the lack of a thorough and systematic exploration of character education values in the *Empe Laho* Legend, resulting in their suboptimal use in learning, particularly in the context of character education. This issue is further compounded by the limited academic studies that specifically examine the values of character education in Acehese folklore, especially legends originating from inland areas. Therefore, this research is important to conduct in order to fill the gap in studies and provide a comprehensive understanding of the potential of legends as a source of character education.

In the context of culture, the role of folklore as a vehicle for character development has long been recognized. Values such as honesty, courage, responsibility, empathy, hard work, and wisdom in living life are core teachings that can be found in many Nusantara legends, including the Legend of *Empe Laho*. However, without systematic analysis, these values are not explicitly visible and are difficult to use as references in educational development. Therefore, this study aims to examine the character education values contained in the legend through an oral literature approach, so that the results can be used as a basis for strengthening students' character in schools.

The purpose of this research is to identify and describe the character education values contained in the *Empe Laho* Legend and to explain their relevance to literature learning in schools. Thus, the research results can provide practical benefits for teachers, students, as well as academics who study oral literature and character education.

The urgency of this research becomes even more apparent when linked to the current educational reality. Amid the challenges of modernity, which bring changes in lifestyle and mindset, local values are often marginalized (Arifin & Kristanti, 2020). The younger generation now interacts more with popular culture, which does not always align with the moral values in their communities. Therefore, reviving local wisdom such as the *Empe Laho* Legend is a strategic step to build the character resilience of young generations through culture-based learning. By utilizing folklore that is close to students' social environment, character education can be carried out in a more contextual, enjoyable, and meaningful way.

Thus, it can be formulated that this study focuses on the character education values contained in the *Empe Laho* Legend and their relevance to literature learning in schools. This issue serves as the basis for the analysis and discussion conducted. This research not only aims to uncover the educational values contained in the legend, but also to bridge their use in the field of education.

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a content analysis approach to explore and understand the values of character education in the Legend of *Empe Laho* as part of Acehese oral literature. A qualitative approach was chosen because it can provide an in-depth depiction of the moral messages implied in folklore. The research

data consists of two types, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through direct storytelling by informants who know and still preserve the *Empe Laho* story. Informants were selected purposively based on certain criteria, namely being over 50 years old, recognized by the community as storytellers, and considered to have sufficient ability and knowledge about oral traditions. The data collection process was carried out through interviews, recording of legend narratives, and transcribing the recordings into written text. In addition, this study also used secondary data in the form of written documents such as Acehese folk tale books, scientific articles, and previous relevant research results as comparative material to strengthen the accuracy of the analysis.

Data analysis was carried out in stages following the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selects and simplifies important parts of the legend text that are directly related to character education values. These parts consist of the characters' behaviors, dialogues, conflicts, and significant events that reflect certain moral values. Next, the reduced data is presented in the form of structured descriptions that categorize character values such as religiosity, morality, culture, and social aspects. Data presentation is done systematically to facilitate the interpretation process. The final stage is drawing conclusions.

The entire research process was carried out through several stages, starting from the preparation stage which included identifying the problem, collecting references, and determining informants, to the data collection stage through interviews and recordings, followed by the analysis of legend texts to identify character values, and concluded with the research findings.

3. Results and Discussions

Based on the research findings, the educational values contained in the *Eumpee Laho* legend are moral values, religious values, social values, and cultural values.

1) Moral Values

Parents should love their children in both happiness and sorrow. This is because children are a trust from the Almighty. Parents should not treat their children unwisely as follows.

Oh ka abeh atra han ek le geubre bu, geu gom diyub beulangong buso teuk aneuek nyan. Geugom cawan pingan, geugop peu-peu mantong yang kebutuhan aneuknya. (Over time, the wealth owned by the parents ran out. Eventually, the parents could no longer afford to feed their child, so the child was placed under an iron pot. Besides the child, a plate of rice and all the child's necessities were also placed there).

2) Religious Value

It is only natural for a servant of Allah to pray and ask only of Him. Just like what *Eumpee Laho's* parents did below.

Bak jameuen dilee na sidroe ureung kaya geumahajat bak Allah beuk na aneuk. So nyang peuhabeu atra. Oh lheueh nyan geubre aneuk oleh Allah Swt.

(A long time ago, there was a very wealthy person who prayed to Allah to have offspring. He wanted someone to inherit his wealth. After that, Allah granted him a child.)

3) Social Values

Humans should help each other even in times of scarcity. However, it is not

appropriate to disappoint those who have helped and to break their trust, as found in the text below.

Cawan pingan nyang geu gom dimiyup beulangong buso geujak lakee geujak sipreuek breueh padee. watee malam geusipreueh breueh padee, watee beungoh kajipeutubiet cawan pingannya. Oh lheueh nyan ureung geutuka-tuka dum han teuk dibre le.

(The plate of rice placed under the iron wok was eventually requested by people nearby by sprinkling rice mixed with paddy. At night, the rice was spread out, and in the morning, the plate of rice would be retrieved. However, this practice did not last long because many people exchanged the plate of rice, and eventually, it was no longer given).

4) Cultural Value

Language is also a product of culture, where each region uses a different language from one region to another. This can be seen in the excerpt of the text below.

Geumeucap watee na aneuek keu bu geubre saboh mu pisang. Watee geubre bu sigunca breueh watee geutagun. Geuboh nan aneuek nyan Eumpee Laho.

(His parents vowed that when they had offspring, they would give one bunch of bananas at a time for each meal. They would give five sacks of rice at once when cooking rice. The child was named *Eumpee Laho*).

The legend of *Eumpee Laho* is one of the folk tales of Aceh that is rich in moral messages and educational values relevant to the life of the community. Through the storyline, characters, and events depicted, this legend contains various noble teachings that can serve as guidelines for shaping the character of the younger generation. Based on the analyzed data, there are four main values contained in this legend, namely moral values, religious values, social values, and cultural values. Each of these values appears clearly in important events in the story that illustrate the relationship of humans with themselves, with God, and with society as well as their environment.

The first value is moral value, which is reflected in the way parents treat their children. In the quote “*Oh ka abeh atra han ek le geubre bu, geu gom diyub beulangong buso teuk aneuek nyan...*”, it is depicted that the parents do not show wisdom in raising and nurturing their child. Parents should love and protect their children under any circumstances, as children are a trust from the Almighty. However, in this story, the parents' inability to manage their emotions and patience causes them to treat the child inappropriately, even putting the child under an iron pot to meet their living needs. This attitude demonstrates a moral deviation that the folktale seeks to critique, so through this legend, society is taught to recognize the importance of love, responsibility, and wisdom in parent-child relationships. The story also illustrates that neglecting this trust can have detrimental consequences for family life.

The second value is the religious value, which is seen from the character's awareness to depend on Allah in every situation. In the excerpt “*Bak jameuen dilee na sidroe ureung kaya geumahajat bak Allah beuk na aneuk...*” it appears that a wealthy person prays to Allah to be given offspring. This action reflects the belief that everything comes from God's will and humans must pray with humility. This religious value emphasizes the importance of prayer, submission, and the conviction that children are a blessing, not merely a biological factor. It also conveys the message that sustenance, children, and life's trials are part of divine decree that should be appreciated and safeguarded. Thus, this legend teaches that the relationship between humans and God is

the fundamental foundation in life, and every life event should be faced with faith and trust in God.

The third value that appears in the legend of *Eumpee Laho* is the social value, which is shown through the interactions of the community in fulfilling the child's needs. In the excerpt “*Cawan pingan nyang geu gom dimiyup beulangong buso geujak lakee geujak sipreuek breueh padee...*” it is illustrated that *Empe Laho* initially helped the surrounding community by providing assistance on the condition of scattering rice mixed with paddy at night. The next day, plates and other necessary supplies for the community would appear. This reflects a culture of mutual help, solidarity, and social care, which are important parts of Acehnese community life. However, this story also shows another side, namely when the aid is misused by some people who dishonestly exchange the plates, resulting in the aid no longer being given. Through this conflict, the legend teaches two social lessons: first, that humans must help each other, especially those who are experiencing difficulties; second, that trust is something valuable and must be maintained, because the misuse of trust can damage social relationships. This lesson is very relevant for shaping honest, trustworthy, and responsible character in society.

The fourth value is cultural value, which is evident from the use of the Acehnese language in the narrative as well as the tradition of making vows (*kaoy*). The quote “*Geumeucap watee na aneuek keu bu geubre saboh mu pisang...*” shows that *Eumpee Laho*'s parents made certain vows as a form of gratitude if they were blessed with offspring. Traditions like this are part of Aceh's cultural values, rich with symbols and spiritual meanings. Furthermore, the use of the Acehnese language in the story demonstrates that this legend serves as a cultural heritage that preserves the linguistic identity of the community. Language, as a cultural product, is not only a means of communication but also a medium for conveying local wisdom values. The cultural values in this legend also emphasize the importance of maintaining traditions, language, and customs as an integral part of the identity of the Acehnese people.

Thus, the discussion of the *Eumpee Laho* legend shows that folklore not only serves as entertainment but also as an educational medium filled with noble values. The four main values moral, religious, social, and cultural reflect life lessons that are relevant to shaping the character of today's generation. Folklore like this is very important to revive in the educational context, especially as teaching materials that can strengthen character values based on local wisdom. Through learning legends, students not only become familiar with regional culture but also gain moral and ethical examples that can be applied in daily life.

Various values of character education in the legend of *Eumpee Laho* are very relevant for literary learning in schools, especially in efforts to instill moral, religious, social, and cultural values in students. Through the analysis of literary texts such as this legend, students can be trained to understand moral messages deeply, connect them with daily life, and develop critical thinking and empathy skills. Literary learning that utilizes local legends can also strengthen students' understanding of the importance of love within the family, responsibility, helping each other, and obedience to God. This aligns with the goals of character education, which emphasize the development of individuals who are virtuous, cultured, and have a good personality.

In addition, the legend of *Eumpee Laho* also supports literature learning based on local wisdom, which is currently one of the important approaches in the education curriculum. Through Acehnese folklore, students can recognize and appreciate their own regional cultural identity, whether through language, traditions, or religious values that

are living in the community. Teachers can use this legend as teaching material for activities such as reading, discussing, creative writing, and value reflection. In this way, literature learning not only focuses on aesthetic aspects and plot, but also serves as a means of internalizing positive character and preserving culture, thereby creating a young generation that is strong in character and rooted in local culture.

4. Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the *Eumpee Laho* legend, it can be concluded that this Acehnese folktale contains various character education values that are relevant for shaping the personality of the younger generation. Moral values are reflected in the depiction of the relationship between parents and children, teaching the importance of love, responsibility, and wisdom in upbringing. Religious values are evident in the character's reliance on Allah, showing that every prayer, hope, and blessing in life comes from God's will. Meanwhile, social values are demonstrated through the community's attitude of mutual help and the important message about maintaining trust and responsibility. These values clearly indicate that this legend is not only an entertaining narrative but also an educational medium that conveys moral and spiritual teachings.

In addition, the legend of *Eumpee Laho* contains cultural values that demonstrate the Acehnese people's closeness to traditions, language, and religious practices such as vows (*kaoy*) as a form of gratitude. The use of the Acehnese language in the text reinforces the role of folklore as a medium for passing down culture and local identity. Thus, it can be concluded that this legend plays an important role in preserving moral, religious, social, and cultural values that can serve as material for learning based on local wisdom. This story can be utilized in education as a source of character values that are relevant and contextual, thereby strengthening the development of positive character in students.

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