

CHARACTER VALUES OF ‘CENING’ FOR EFL LEARNERS ON ENGLISH DRAMA SHOW: *SEKALA* AND *NISKALA*

Anak Agung Putu Arsana, Ni Putu Putri Cahayadewi, Ni Putu Erika Kencana Dewi

Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar-Indonesia

agungarsana@unmas.co.id

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the implementation of character education for EFL learners through the medium of an English drama performance. Centered on the character *Cening*, the study investigates how theatrical shows can serve as a vehicle for instilling core values such as courage, integrity, and solidarity. The research examines the vital role of character building within language instruction, specifically its impact on personal growth, communicative proficiency, and analytical reasoning. By utilizing drama-based strategies like storytelling and role-playing, the paper demonstrates how students can more deeply comprehend narrative themes and ethical lessons. Ultimately, the author argues that integrating drama into the curriculum effectively shapes the identities of EFL learners, preparing them to become successful and principled individuals.

Keywords: character education, English drama, EFL learners

INTRODUCTION

Drama has emerged as a widely acknowledged pedagogy in language education, valued for its ability to bolster linguistic proficiency alongside creativity, analytical skills, and cultural sensitivity. By immersing students in collaborative and interactive tasks, drama establishes authentic environments that facilitate natural language development. Furthermore, these theatrical methods cultivate an energetic and engaging classroom environment that stimulates student involvement. Research consistently supports the educational advantages of incorporating drama into language instruction. For example, studies indicate that role-playing exercises markedly enhance the speaking and listening abilities

of EFL students while simultaneously building their communicative confidence. Additionally, survey data suggests that educators often prefer drama-based approaches over conventional teaching styles, citing superior student motivation and improved educational results

In addition, Jati and Romadhan (2020) emphasized the cultural benefits of utilizing drama in language instruction. Their study showed that theatrical activities allow students to engage with diverse cultures, which builds empathy and broadens their grasp of various societal viewpoints. Nevertheless, even with the mounting evidence of drama's pedagogical value, there is still a call for more empirical data to assess its impact across different

educational settings and specific linguistic competencies. Moreover, subsequent research is required to establish concrete frameworks for creating and executing drama-based lessons that optimize student development.

To summarize, utilizing drama in language instruction facilitates more than just linguistic growth; it also nurtures students' imaginative capacities, analytical skills, and cultural sensitivity. The creation of a vibrant and interactive learning environment stimulates the motivation and active involvement necessary for effective language acquisition. Consequently, teachers are urged to integrate theatrical techniques into their teaching repertoires, while scholars should further investigate the varied roles and influences of drama in educational settings. The objective of this study is to examine how the ethical values represented by the main character “Cening” in the *Sekala and Niskala : Harmony between Two World English Drama Performance* can serve as a vehicle for advancing character education among EFL students.

The literature reviewed emphasizes the successful integration of literary works and theatrical activities into EFL curricula to advance character education. Research by Putri et al. (2021) indicates that pairing children's stories with techniques like

perspective-taking and value clarification nurtures essential traits such as respect, empathy, and responsibility. In a similar vein, Wahya et al. (2023) highlight that dramatic exercises, specifically role-playing, simultaneously improve language proficiency and encourage virtues like perseverance and teamwork. Furthermore, Pike et al. (2019) validate the use of moral narratives, such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, to instill courage and honesty through organized ethical discussions. Taken together, these studies confirm that dramatic and literary resources—exemplified by narratives like *Sekala and Niskala: Harmony between Two Worlds*—serve as potent instruments for teaching language while addressing moral development. The ethical challenges and cultural depth found in such stories offer EFL students significant opportunities to examine social and individual values, mirroring the core objectives of this research.

While drama is a well-established catalyst for language acquisition, its specific utility in fostering character education within EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts remains significantly under-researched. Current literature predominantly focuses on linguistic outcomes—such as oral fluency and listening comprehension—or broad cultural

awareness, often neglecting the potential for moral and social-emotional growth. This oversight suggests a critical need for qualitative inquiry into how dramatic pedagogy can bridge the gap between language proficiency and ethical development.

Furthermore, existing studies frequently rely on Western-centric scripts, creating a void in research regarding localized drama materials. By utilizing "Sekala and Niskala: Harmony between Two Worlds," this study addresses the lack of culturally resonant content in the EFL classroom. This research is unique in its holistic approach, positioning drama not merely as a linguistic tool but as a medium for internalizing local values. Through qualitative analysis, this study seeks to uncover the nuanced ways students navigate the emotional and cognitive intersections of language learning and character building.

This study presents a distinctive integration of character building and English pedagogy by utilizing drama as a medium for nurturing moral and ethical growth. Unlike traditional drama-based

instruction that focuses primarily on linguistic fluency or cultural awareness, this research broadens the educational framework to prioritize the holistic development of the student. By analyzing the protagonist "Cening" in the production *Sekala and Niskala: Harmony between Two Worlds*, the work effectively bridges the gap between indigenous cultural heritage and international language acquisition, providing a meaningful context for value-based learning.

By adopting a qualitative methodological lens, the research captures a detailed exploration of how students interpret and adopt ethical virtues through theatrical performance. This approach facilitates a deeper grasp of the complex social, emotional, and cognitive transitions that occur during the learning process—nuances that are often missed by purely statistical analysis. Consequently, the study offers a rich, descriptive perspective on how dramatic engagement can serve as a powerful tool for internalizing character education within a language learning environment.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore how the values embodied by the main character in *Sekala and Niskala* : Harmony between two Worlds drama performance can be utilized as a medium to promote character education among EFL learners. A qualitative approach is deemed appropriate as it allows for an in-depth exploration of cultural, moral, and educational dimensions embedded within the drama, and how these can be interpreted and applied in the context of English language teaching (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data will be collected through a combination of semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and classroom observations, which are common methods for qualitative inquiry aimed at understanding participants' lived experiences and perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interviews will be conducted with EFL teachers and students to gather their perceptions of the main character's values and how these might support character education. Document analysis will focus on the "Cening" script and related instructional materials to identify core values, analyze video recording after the performance, which align with key components of character

education (Lickona, 1991). Classroom observations were also conducted to examine how students engage with the drama and how character values are received and discussed in EFL learning environments, as recommended by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) for triangulating qualitative data sources.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The drama performance titled "Sekala and Niskala: Harmony Between Two Worlds" was delivered by fourth-semester EFL students enrolled in the English Drama course under the English Language Education Study Program at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Mahasaraswati Denpasar University. The narrative primarily revolves around the character of Cening, who plays a central and pivotal role throughout the story.. Based on observations during the performance, the character Cening in this play is the perfect embodiment of the innocence of a Balinese village child full of curiosity, making her so relatable and endearing to the audience, especially children. As a little girl around 7-10 years old who is cheerful and obedient, Cening represents the pure sekala world—she is enthusiastic about playing hide-and-seek with her friends, politely asks permission from her parents, and naively trusts the

"kind old farmer woman" who is actually a deceptive spirit from the *niskala* world, showing her ignorance of mystical dangers without losing the charm of her kind heart. However, behind her simplicity, Cening also serves as a touching catalyst for conflict, as her naivety triggers village panic and a moral lesson about obedience, while her safe return with a weak smile emphasizes her unexpected resilience; overall, she is not just a cute main character, but also a symbol of Balinese cultural harmony that invites us to reflect on the balance between childhood joy and caution toward the unseen, making the performance feel warm and educational without being preachy.

This qualitative research investigates how the moral values embedded in the drama "*Sekala and Niskala: Harmony Between Two Worlds*" can be meaningfully woven into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning environments. By employing a mixed-methods approach—incorporating semi-structured interviews with educators, in-depth analysis of teaching materials and performance documentation, and direct classroom observations—the study seeks to uncover how the character's transformative journey resonates with both students and teachers.

At its core, the narrative centers on Cening, a young girl whose innocent curiosity leads her into a spiritual encounter between the visible world (*sekala*) and the invisible realm (*niskala*). Her journey reflects an authentic inner struggle—balancing childish wonder with growing awareness of danger, obedience with autonomy, and individual choice with communal responsibility. This emotional and ethical arc serves as a powerful pedagogical tool when explored through critical and reflective classroom discussions.

The study aims to demonstrate how such culturally rich, story-driven content can go beyond language acquisition, fostering the development of essential character virtues such as empathy, moral responsibility, respect for tradition and elders, and civic-mindedness. Rather than treating the drama as mere entertainment, the research emphasizes its potential to create moments of deep learning—where students don't just learn English, but also reflect on who they want to become. The findings will contribute to innovative, values-based EFL pedagogy that nurtures both linguistic competence and ethical intelligence in an increasingly interconnected world.

By centering on the transformative journey of Cening's character, this study

underscores the powerful role that local cultural narratives can play in teaching universally relevant values. When carefully analyzed and discussed in the EFL classroom, these values—rooted in Balinese tradition—can spark meaningful self-reflection among students, encouraging them to examine their own thoughts, actions, and relationships. This process fosters the growth of emotional intelligence, empathy, and interpersonal sensitivity, helping learners become more thoughtful and responsible individuals.

In particular, the story of Cening embodies key character traits such as innocence, curiosity, adventurous spirit, playfulness, joy, obedience, and love—all of which are central to nurturing well-rounded, ethically aware individuals. These qualities are not only deeply human but also align with the goals of character education, which seeks to cultivate emotional and moral maturity alongside academic skill. By integrating *Sekala and Niskala* into EFL instruction, educators can go beyond grammar and vocabulary, transforming language learning into a holistic experience that nurtures both linguistic confidence and moral development.

This approach demonstrates how language education can become a vehicle for cultural preservation and ethical formation. Instead of viewing native stories

as mere "background" content, the study advocates for their intentional inclusion in curricula to create a more meaningful, engaging, and morally grounded learning environment. Ultimately, the integration of such narratives supports the vision of holistic education—one where students do not only learn English, but also grow in wisdom, compassion, and identity. In this way, the classroom becomes not just a space for language acquisition, but a stage for personal and cultural transformation.

This performance is an English-language drama infused with Balinese cultural elements. The play is titled *Sekala and Niskala: Harmony Between Two Worlds*, and it tells the story of a young girl named I Cening who goes missing after playing in the rice fields during the afternoon (*tengai lepet*). The narrative explores the theme of harmony between the visible world (*sekala*) and the invisible realm (*niskala*). The drama structure includes an introduction, a cast list, and several key scenes: Scene 1: The Nyamprut Family Home; Scene 2: Playing in the Rice Fields; Scene 3: Cening Goes Missing; and the Closing Scene. The main characters include I Cening, her parents (Men Nyamprut and Pan Nyamprut), her friends (such as Wayan, Made, and Nengah), and village figures like Bu Gek, the Kelian Banjar, and a spirit disguised as an old

farmer woman. The central theme emphasizes the importance of listening to parental advice and respecting the boundaries between the visible and invisible worlds. The moral message for children is clear: avoid playing outside during midday or twilight hours.

Cening is the main protagonist in this drama, a Balinese village girl around 7-10 years old (referred to as the "beloved child" and described as cheerful like the morning sun). She is portrayed as the central character who bridges the *sekala* world (the real world, such as playing with friends) and the *niskala* world (the spiritual realm, through her encounter with a spirit). Below is an explanation of her key traits based on the dialogue, actions, and script descriptions:

- 1) Innocent and Naive: Cening is depicted as a village child who is naive about spiritual dangers. She easily trusts the "old farmer woman" (a deceptive spirit) and hides in the bamboo without suspicion, as seen in the dialogue "Wow, thanks Odah! You're so kind!" This reflects a child's lack of understanding of parental warnings about midday hours (*tengai lepet*), which becomes the catalyst for her disappearance and the central conflict.

- 2) Curious and Adventurous: Cening is enthusiastic about joining a game of hide-and-seek despite her mother's concerns, evident from dialogues like "Ok enough, let's play!" and her casual complaint "OMG, it's so hot." She enjoys exploration, such as going to the banjar and rice fields, but her curiosity leads her into danger, emphasizing the theme of harmony with nature and spirits.
- 3) Playful and Joyful : The introductory description compares her smile to the "morning sun," and her dialogue is full of laughter and light promises like "Yes, Emek, I promise!" She is portrayed as a sociable child loved by her friends and parents, with actions like running to join her friends, showcasing positive energy that makes her relatable as a symbol of Balinese childhood.
- 4) Obedient and Loving: Despite her boldness in playing, Cening always asks for permission ("Wait, I need to ask permission first.") and promises to obey, and at the end of the story, she shares her experience with gratitude. This demonstrates her strong emotional bond with her family, reinforced by the village's

rescue efforts, and the moral message that children like Cening need to be protected by the community.

Overall, Cening is not a heroic figure but a representation of an ordinary child who learns from her mistakes, enriching the drama's theme of balance between *sekala* and *niskala*. Her character is simple yet profound, ideal for educational performances for children in Bali, with potential for expression through simple costumes (traditional Balinese village attire) and cheerful movements on stage. Through the performance of the drama *Sekala and Niskala: Harmony Between Two Worlds*, EFL learners can gain dual benefits—improving their English language skills while developing important character values. In terms of language, students enjoy authentic, engaging exposure to spoken English within a vivid, emotional narrative context. Natural dialogues, expressions of feelings, social interactions, and scene descriptions help expand vocabulary and strengthen listening and speaking comprehension. In terms of values, Cening's character serves as a role model, teaching students the importance of heeding parental advice, respecting boundaries between the visible and invisible worlds, and maintaining balance in life. The theme of harmony between

sekala and *niskala* promotes mindfulness, cultural respect, and personal responsibility—universal values relevant to children worldwide. Thus, this drama is not just a language learning tool, but a powerful medium for holistic education, seamlessly blending language, culture, and character development into a meaningful and enjoyable experience.

CONCLUSION

The story *Sekala and Niskala: Harmony Between Two Worlds* offers a universal message about the importance of maintaining balance between the real world (*sekala*) and the spiritual world (*niskala*), especially in the lives of growing children. Through the journey of the character Cening—a naive, curious, and spirited child—the story illustrates how natural curiosity can lead to risks if not guided by parental advice and respect for cultural boundaries. Values such as obedience, respect for traditions, awareness of the boundaries between the physical and spiritual realms, and collective responsibility in protecting children serve as the core seeds planted in this narrative. By combining English as a communication tool and Balinese cultural values as the backdrop, this drama is not merely an artistic performance but a profound cultural and character education play, capable of

transforming the theater experience into unforgettable life lessons for audiences, particularly children and language learners.

For lecturers of English drama courses, the analysis of Cening's character values demonstrates that dramas like *Sekala* and *Niskala* can serve as a powerful teaching medium—not only for mastering language structures but also for shaping cultural awareness and ethics. Lecturers are encouraged to design integrative curricula, where drama is not merely an object of study but a space for exploring morals and cultural identity. For English Language Education students, this study provides a concrete example of how drama can be utilized as a learning tool that simultaneously addresses affective and cognitive aspects. They are urged not only to comprehend the script linguistically but also to delve deeply into the narrative meaning, characters, and cultural background values, such as the *sekala-niskala* concept in Balinese societal life. For future researchers, these findings open the door to ongoing research on intercultural drama pedagogy, particularly within the EFL context in countries rich in local cultural heritage like Indonesia. There is a need for more qualitative and quantitative studies examining the impact of dramas that integrate foreign languages and local cultural values on language competence

development, positive attitudes toward other cultures, and the formation of children's character.

Overall, Cening's character is not just a fictional figure but a symbol of educational transformation: from learning language to understanding the world, from listening to drama to experiencing life's values. This is an important legacy that must be preserved and developed in the realm of 21st-century language education.

REFERENCES

- Afandi, L. (2018). An Analysis of Moral Values of the *Rainbow Troops* Novel by Andrea Hirata. *Journey: Journal of English Language and Pedagogy*, 1(1), 36-47.
- Banks, J. A. (2015). *Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching* (6th ed.). Routledge.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Ghani, M., & Muhammad, A. (2019). The impact of role-playing techniques on communication skills of EFL learners. *Journal of Language Teaching Research*.
- Herskovitz, S., & Crystal, S. (2010). The role of legacy in family identity development. *Journal of Family Issues*, 31(12), 1646–1667. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X10381452>
- Johardianto, Yohanes. 2018. *An Analysis of Moral Values In 47 Ronin*. Malang: Universitas Kanjuruhan Malang.

- Kao, S. M., & O'Neill, C. (1998). *Words into worlds: Learning a second language through process drama*. Ablex Publishing.
- Lamb, T., & Reinders, H. (2012). *Learner and teacher autonomy: Concepts, realities, and responses*. John Benjamins Publishing.
- Lee, J. F. (2014). Culture and language education. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (Vol. 2, pp. 45–59). Routledge.
- Lickona, T. (1991). *Educating for character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility*. Bantam Books.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Muhammad, S., & Shah, R. (2018). Teachers' perceptions of traditional vs. drama-based instruction in EFL classrooms. *International Journal of Education*.
- Narvaez, D., & Lapsley, D. K. (2009). Moral identity, moral functioning, and the development of moral character. In D. Narvaez & D. K. Lapsley (Eds.), *Personality, identity, and character: Explorations in moral psychology* (pp. 140–165). Cambridge University Press.
- Nasir Chairina, Iskandar Abdul Samad, Tria Maisal Jannah & Eda Suhana Sharudin. 2019. *An Analysis of Moral Values In The Movie "Coco"*. Proceedings of the 2nd English Education International Conference (EEIC) with the 9th Annual International Conference (AIC) Banda Aceh : Universitas Syiah Kuala
- Nucci, L. (2001). *Education in the moral domain* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Pike, M. A., Lickona, T., Nesfield, V., & Clark, P. (2019). Teaching virtues through literature: Learning from the 'Narnian Virtues' character education research. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 40(4), 456–472. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2019.1689544>
- Putri, M. A., Harto, S., & Moecharam, N. Y. (2021). Promoting character education in EFL classroom: Using children's literature as teaching material. *Journal of English and Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia*. <https://vm36.upi.edu/index.php/LE/article/view/9946>
- Subrata, I. W. R. F., Piscayanti, K. S., & Suprianti. (2018). *An Analysis of Moral Values Found in Robert.X*
- Utami, D. B., & Arini, R. (2017). An Analysis Of Moral Values In Burnett's Little Lord Fauntleroy Novel. *JELE (Journal of English Language and Education)*, 3(1), 29. <https://doi.org/10.26486/jele.v3i1.26>
- Wahya, T. N. I., Amrullah, M. I., & Rohmana, W. I. M. (2023). Drama as the way to integrate literature in English language teaching. *International Journal of English Learning and Applied Linguistics (IJELAL)*. <https://ejournal.unida.gontor.ac.id/index.php/IJELAL/article/view/9057>
- Wessels, C. (2014). *Drama, creativity and learning: Developing higher order skills through drama in education*. Routledge.