

## Educating for Change through Children's Literature: Developing Intercultural Awareness among German Level A1 Learners in Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

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Reflecting the vision of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) to promote inclusive and equitable quality education, this study explores the potential of children's literature as a medium for developing intercultural awareness among beginner learners of German (A1 level) in Indonesia. Learning German cannot be separated from the development of linguistic competence, intercultural understanding, but it is also regarded as an integral part of education for sustainable development. Drawing on Target 4.7 of SDG 4 and the concept of intercultural communicative competence, this paper argues that language learning should not only build linguistic skills but also nurture empathy, tolerance, and global citizenship. Through the integration of selected German children's stories, students engage in linguistic practice, cultural comparison, and reflective learning that connect language and culture meaningfully. The article addresses two questions: How can children's literature foster intercultural awareness among German A1 learners in Indonesia? and what teaching strategies can effectively integrate children's literature to enhance intercultural learning in the German A1 classroom? Finally, it can be said that children literature serves as an effective medium to link language learning with cultural understanding in the German A1 classroom. Using children literature and cultural reflection, learners build linguistic competence, develop empathy and intercultural awareness in line with the vision of SDG 4.

### INTRODUCTION

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) emphasizes the need for inclusive and equitable quality education that promotes lifelong learning and transformative change. In this global era, language education plays an important role in shaping learners who are linguistically competent, culturally aware, and empathetic toward diversity (Byram, 1997; Kramersch, 1993). In the teaching of the German language, linguistic competence and cultural awareness are also taught to learners in Indonesia. However, in the Indonesian context, foreign language instruction, particularly German, has predominantly emphasized grammatical accuracy, vocabulary mastery, and the introduction of cultural aspects (Setiawan, 2020). Nevertheless, cultural awareness and the enhancement of cultural competence can still be effectively achieved by integrating elements of Indonesian culture, thereby fostering a more balanced and reciprocal intercultural perspective. Such integration has the potential to strengthen language education by cultivating deeper intercultural understanding, empathy, and social sensitivity among learners.

To address this gap, there is a growing need to reimagine language classrooms as spaces for humanistic and intercultural growth (Kramersch, 2021). Using children's literature, as a medium in teaching offers meaningful opportunities for learners to engage emotionally, linguistically, and culturally with authentic narratives. Through its imaginative and emotional dimensions, literature encourage intercultural understanding. Integrating children's literature into German level A1 instruction in Indonesia thus aligns with the vision of *educating for change*, an approach that unites language, art, and culture to

promote transformative and inclusive education in accordance with SDG 4 (UNESCO, 2020; Shaules,2019).

## RESEARCH METHOD

Using a literature-based qualitative method, this study reviews and synthesizes key theories and research findings related to children's literature, intercultural competence, and sustainable education. The aim is to identify pedagogical strategies that connect language learning with intercultural understanding, consistent with the transformative vision of SDG 4 in the context of teaching German to beginner learners in Indonesia

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) represents an educational paradigm that transcends traditional notions of schooling by integrating equity, inclusion, and sustainability as foundational principles of human development. It means that education is not merely a cognitive process of knowledge acquisition but a transformative force that fosters critical thinking, social responsibility, intercultural understanding, and global citizenship. In this sense, SDG 4 aligns with the concept of *education for sustainable development (ESD)*, which aims to cultivate learners' competencies to engage with complex social, cultural, and environmental challenge

### Developing Intercultural Awareness Among German A1 Learners in Indonesia

Culture is increasingly viewed as an integral component rather than a supplementary aspect in foreign language education (Sarr 2023, Chicwangura,2018). Developing intercultural awareness among German A1 learners in Indonesia is a crucial step toward fostering holistic language competence that integrates both linguistic and cultural dimensions. At the beginner level A1, learners often focus primarily on vocabulary and grammar; however, understanding how language reflects social norms, values, and cultural perspectives is equally essential. By engaging students with children literature can help learners recognize cultural between Indonesian and German. This early exposure to cultural contrasts promotes curiosity, tolerance, and the ability to interpret meaning beyond literal words.

Incorporating intercultural learning at the A1 stage also aligns with the goals of *education for sustainable development (SDG 4)*, which emphasizes inclusive, empathetic, and globally minded education. Through guided reflection and discussion, learners begin to view language as a bridge between cultures rather than a mere linguistic system. Such an approach nurtures *intercultural communicative competence* (Byram, 1997) and prepares Indonesian learners not only to speak German accurately but also to engage respectfully and effectively in multicultural environments.

### Children's Literature in German

Children's literature has significant pedagogical potential in the teaching of German as a foreign language, particularly at the beginner level. Having rich in cultural context, it provides learners with exposure to natural language use, emotional narratives, and moral values that resonate across cultures. Through literature, students encounter vocabulary

and grammatical structures embedded in meaningful situations, which supports both linguistic acquisition and cognitive engagement. From an intercultural perspective, German children's literature serves as cultural windows, allowing learners to explore social norms, traditions, and worldviews within German-speaking contexts. Integrating children's literature into language instruction aligns with the goals of educational linguistics and intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997), as it enables learners not only to acquire language skills but also to develop empathy, cultural awareness, and reflective thinking, essential components of global citizenship in the 21st century.

### Recommended German Children's Literature for A1 Learners

Several accessible children literature can effectively support A1 learners in developing both linguistic competence and intercultural awareness. As Bland (2013) emphasizes, children's literature enables learners to experience language as "living culture," not merely a system of grammar and vocabulary. Hier are several examples;

Children's Literature for Developing Intercultural Awareness in German A1 Learning

**Table 1:** Literature Can Effectively Support A1

Title	Author	Cultural Values	Potential for Intercultural Awareness	Didactic Notes
Hans im Glück (Hans in Luck)	Brothers Grimm	Simplicity, gratitude, inner happiness	Compare with the Indonesian proverb 'gratitude brings happiness'	Basic vocabulary of objects and occupations
Die Bremer Stadtmusikanten (The Bremen Town Musicians)	Brothers Grimm	Cooperation, solidarity	Compare with the Indonesian concept of 'gotong royong' (mutual cooperation)	Vocabulary of animals and professions
Rotkäppchen (Little Red Riding Hood)	Brothers Grimm	Obedience, caution	Compare with moral warnings in Indonesian folktales	Repetitive and easily memorable structure
Der Froschkönig (The Frog Prince)	Brothers Grimm	Promise, honesty, transformation	Discussion on trust and	Simple dialogues for

Schneewittchen (Snow White)	Brothers Grimm	Kindness, envy, honesty	personal change Discussion on gender roles and the concept of beauty	speaking practice Useful for introducing adjectives
Aschenputtel (Cinderella)	Brothers Grimm	Patience, justice	Comparison with similar Indonesian folktales	Practice with family and clothing vocabulary
Der gestiefelte Kater (Puss in Boots)	Ludwig Tieck / Brothers Grimm	Cleverness, courage	Discussion on the value of wit in both cultures	Rich in basic action verbs

### How Can Children's Literature Foster Intercultural Awareness Among German Level A1 Learners in Indonesia?

Children's literature can serve as a powerful pedagogical tool for fostering intercultural awareness among German A1 learners in Indonesia by presenting language and culture in an integrated, emotionally engaging form. Unlike conventional textbooks that often isolate grammar and vocabulary, children's literature immerses learners in culturally meaningful contexts where values, behaviors, and worldviews are implicitly communicated. This exposure encourages learners to compare these representations with their own cultural experiences, stimulating reflection, empathy, and critical understanding, key components of *intercultural communicative competence* (Byram, 1997). Moreover, the simplicity of language in children's literature makes it particularly suitable for A1 learners, who can focus on interpreting meaning rather than decoding complex linguistic forms. Guiding discussions in classroom and reflective activities based on the stories allow students to articulate cultural similarities and differences, fostering an awareness that communication is shaped by cultural context. In this way, children's literature not only supports linguistic development but also transforms language learning into an intercultural experience, aligning with the principles of *education for sustainable development* by nurturing openness, respect, and global-mindedness from the earliest stages of foreign language acquisition.

Children's literature offers a rich and culturally embedded medium for developing intercultural awareness among German A1 learners in Indonesia. Classic and contemporary German children's stories, such as *Die kleine Raupe Nimmersatt* (*The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle), *Max und Moritz* by Wilhelm Busch, *oh, wie schön ist Panama* by Janosch, and *Der Regenbogenfisch* (*The Rainbow Fish* by Marcus Pfister), provide learners with simple, authentic language embedded in culturally meaningful contexts. These introduce themes of curiosity, friendship, diversity, honesty, and empathy, allowing students to explore both linguistic patterns and underlying moral or cultural messages.

## What teaching strategies can effectively integrate children's literature to enhance intercultural learning in the German A1 classroom?

In classroom practice, teachers can design tasks that encourage reflection and comparison, such as discussing how the values portrayed in *Der Regenbogenfisch* relate to Indonesian cultural ideas of sharing, or how *Max und Moritz* reflects humor and discipline in 19th-century German society. Similarly, *oh, wie schön ist Panama* can prompt dialogue about migration, belonging, and the search for happiness, universal human experiences seen through a German cultural lens. By engaging with these texts, level A1 learners not only build vocabulary and sentence structure in authentic contexts but also develop intercultural awareness through emotional engagement and moral reflection. Thus, children's literature becomes both a linguistic and intercultural bridge, cultivating empathy, curiosity, and global citizenship in the early stages of language learning. Effective integration of children's literature into the German A1 classroom requires teachers to adopt strategically scaffolded, culturally responsive, and reflective pedagogy. First, teachers should implement pre-reading cultural scaffolding, introducing key vocabulary and cultural background through visual aids, short videos, or realia (e.g., German food, festivals, or family structures) to activate learners' prior knowledge and prepare them for intercultural interpretation. This aligns with the *schema activation theory* (Anderson, 1984), helping students connect linguistic input with cultural meaning before engaging with the text.

During the reading stage, teachers can apply interactive storytelling techniques, such as *shared reading*, *dramatization*, or *dialogic reading*, encouraging learners to embody characters' emotions and observe social norms reflected in dialogue. Through guided questions (e.g., "How would this situation be handled in Indonesia?"), teachers facilitate cross-cultural comparison and foster *empathy-building*. Visual story mapping and character analysis also help students identify differences in values, politeness strategies, and communication patterns between German and Indonesian contexts.

In post-reading activities, teachers should emphasize critical reflection and creative reconstruction. For example, students can discuss the story from a different cultural perspective, compare morals between German and Indonesian cultures, or create digital storyboards that reinterpret the plot using bilingual narration. Reflection journals and group discussions further consolidate intercultural understanding by encouraging learners to articulate how the story changed their perception of "the other."

Finally, teachers should apply assessment for learning (AfL) by integrating intercultural awareness rubrics that evaluate not only language accuracy but also learners' ability to interpret, relate, and reflect on cultural differences (Byram, 1997; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). This holistic strategy transforms *children's literature* from a linguistic exercise into a culturally dialogic space, where learners develop both communicative competence and intercultural sensitivity, core elements of *education for sustainable development* (SDG 4).

## CONCLUSION

Children's literature offers a meaningful way to integrate linguistic and cultural learning in the German A1 classroom. By engaging with children literature, Indonesian learners can develop not only vocabulary and grammar but also intercultural sensitivity

and empathy. Through guided storytelling, discussions, and reflective comparison between German and Indonesian cultural values, students begin to see language as a bridge to understanding diverse perspectives and ways of life.

Teachers play a key role as intercultural facilitators who design learning experiences that go beyond linguistic accuracy. Using strategies such as cultural scaffolding, interactive reading, and creative response activities, they help students connect language with real-world cultural meanings. In this way, children's literature supports both communicative competence and intercultural awareness, aligning with the goals of inclusive and quality education as envisioned in SDG 4.

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