

## Multiliteracy Approaches to Teaching Social Empathy and Justice through A.A. Navis's Literary Works in Elementary Education

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**Abstract.** This study explores how multiliteracy pedagogy using A.A. Navis's literary works fosters social empathy, promotes gender equality, and enhances moral awareness among elementary students in Bandung, Indonesia. Objective: To examine the role of local literature in enhancing students' emotional and social literacy through empirical classroom-based learning. Method: A qualitative descriptive design was applied, including classroom observations, student reflection journals, and teacher interviews involving 34 fifth-grade students and 2 teachers. Findings: The results indicate that multiliteracy-based learning improved students' emotional expression, cooperation, and moral reasoning. Students related characters such as "Mother" and "Sutan Duano" to acts of empathy and fairness, while teachers observed increased collaboration and reduced classroom conflict. Conclusion: Integrating multiliteracy pedagogy with Indonesian local literature serves as an effective model to cultivate empathy, inclusivity, and character-based education aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 and 5.

**Keywords:** multiliteracy, empathy, elementary education, A.A. Navis, developmental psychology.

### INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, multiliteracy refers to the ability to construct meaning across linguistic, visual, cultural, and digital modes (The New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Within Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka, this concept aligns with the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, emphasizing character formation, collaboration, and social justice. A.A. Navis's literary works, deeply rooted in Minangkabau culture, offer rich narratives that depict empathy, fairness, and moral resilience—values that are essential for developing emotional intelligence and civic awareness in elementary education.

From the perspective of developmental psychology, children aged 6–12 are in the industry versus inferiority stage (Erikson, 1950; Santrock, 2018), where competence and self-efficacy emerge through meaningful social participation, acknowledgment, and guided tasks. At this stage, learning experiences that combine moral reflection with creative expression strengthen both cognitive and socio-emotional development. Integrating local literature within multiliteracy pedagogy allows students to explore moral dilemmas, practice empathy, and engage with social values in culturally familiar contexts.

Moreover, such an approach contributes to the realization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 and 5, which advocate for inclusive, equitable, and quality education as well as

gender equality. By incorporating local wisdom into literacy practices, teachers can cultivate classroom environments that value diversity, dialogue, and shared responsibility. Literature-based multiliteracy not only reinforces comprehension and critical thinking but also supports emotional literacy and moral agency—qualities crucial for young learners growing within a diverse and globalized world. Consequently, this study explores how A.A. Navis’s literary works can be used as a foundation for multiliteracy learning to promote empathy, inclusivity, and justice among elementary school students in Bandung, Indonesia.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to capture the dynamics of multiliteracy learning in the classroom. Data were collected through direct classroom observations, student reflection journals, and teacher interviews conducted between March and May 2025 at an elementary school in Bandung, Indonesia. The participants comprised 34 fifth-grade students and two teachers. Observations focused on students’ emotional expression, collaboration, and moral reasoning during multiliteracy-based learning using A.A. Navis’s stories *Ibu* and *Kemarau*.

The thematic analysis followed the six-phase procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which includes familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. During the familiarization stage, the researchers repeatedly read student reflection journals and teacher interview transcripts to obtain an in-depth understanding of the data. A total of 132 inductively derived initial codes were generated and subsequently clustered into broader thematic categories.

To strengthen the credibility and confirmability of the findings, direct quotations from students and teachers were incorporated to demonstrate the alignment between raw data and thematic interpretations. For example, one student expressed: *“If my friend feels sad, I want to comfort them like the mother in the story”* (Student 12), while a teacher noted: *“Students collaborate more effectively now, and minor conflicts are resolved much faster after the multiliteracy sessions”* (Teacher A). These excerpts illustrate how participants internalized emotional and social concepts, thereby validating the thematic structure derived from the analysis. The collected data were analyzed thematically using NVivo software, identifying three major categories: (1) forms of support systems, (2) multiliteracy practices, and (3) psychological outcomes. Ethical approval and parental consent were obtained prior to data collection to ensure adherence to research ethics.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis revealed three overarching categories—support systems, multiliteracy practices, and psychological outcomes—which illustrate how multiliteracy pedagogy grounded in A.A. Navis’s literary works shaped students’ social-emotional development. These findings align with recent multiliteracy scholarship emphasizing multimodal meaning-making, learner identity, and social justice-oriented pedagogy (García & O’Donnell, 2021; Rowsell & Wohlwend, 2020; Abednia & Izadinia, 2023).

### Support Systems in the Learning Process

As indicated in Table 1, emotional support was the most prominent theme (46 instances), demonstrated through students' empathetic reflections on the story *Ibu*. Acts of social justice inspired by *Sutan Duano* appeared 32 times, suggesting strong moral engagement with fairness and communal responsibility. Teacher feedback further confirmed improvements in cooperation and reductions in conflict, functioning as a secondary support system reinforcing positive behavioral outcomes.

**Table 1.** Themes of Support Systems in Student Learning

Dimension	Frequency	Example from Data
Emotional support	46	"Mother" comforting her children inspired empathy reflection in 25 students.
Social justice acts	32	"Sutan Duano" mobilizing villagers promoted fairness awareness.
Student reflection	27	79% of students linked "helping friends" with "being like Sutan Duano".
Teacher feedback	5	Teachers observed reduced conflicts and greater cooperation following multiliteracy activities.

These findings reflect Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1996), wherein teacher guidance and peer interaction constitute essential microsystem components that nurture socio-emotional maturity. More recent multiliteracy literature similarly asserts that supportive learning environments enable identity formation, agency, and ethical reasoning through multimodal engagement (Abednia & Izadinia, 2023; García & O'Donnell, 2021). Thus, support systems in this study function as emotional scaffolds that help students internalize empathy and fairness within a culturally grounded context.

### Multiliteracy Practices and Cognitive Engagement

Students demonstrated strong cognitive and emotional engagement through reading, visualization, dramatization, and dialogic interpretation of Navis's stories. These multimodal practices supported meaning-making beyond linguistic decoding, enabling students to reconstruct social meanings through narrative, visual, gestural, and interpersonal modalities. This is consistent with Cope and Kalantzis's (2009) multiliteracies framework and supported by more recent research emphasizing multimodal representation as a catalyst for deeper literacy learning (Mills & Unsworth, 2018; Rowsell & Wohlwend, 2020).

The students' ability to combine textual interpretation with visual and performative expression shows the pedagogical power of multimodality in fostering critical thinking, empathy, and cultural awareness. Kim and Slapac's (2022) work on multimodal storytelling supports this

finding, highlighting how embodied and multimodal expression enhances learners' emotional and moral imagination.

Through these multiliteracy activities, cultural narratives became pedagogical tools that connected students' personal experiences with broader social values, enabling transformative learning aligned with 21st-century competencies.

### Psychological Outcomes: Empathy, Collaboration, and Moral Reasoning

Student journals and classroom observations highlighted meaningful psychological outcomes. Many students linked behaviors such as "helping friends" with "being like Sutan Duano," illustrating internalized moral reasoning and embodied empathy. Emotional literacy also improved, as students articulated feelings more explicitly and responded more thoughtfully to peers' emotions.

These outcomes align with Erikson's (1950) industry versus inferiority stage, where competence develops through social participation and meaningful contribution. The findings also correspond with contemporary multiliteracy scholarship emphasizing that multimodal learning environments support emotional development, identity construction, and moral agency (García & O'Donnell, 2021; Kim & Slapac, 2022; Abednia & Izadinia, 2023).

Teachers' observations of increased cooperation and reduced conflict provide additional confirmation. Such cognitive–affective integration aligns with Santrock (2018), but is further supported by recent studies showing that multiliteracy practices foster collaborative classroom cultures grounded in equity and respect (Rowell & Wohlwend, 2020). Together, these results illustrate that multiliteracy pedagogy rooted in local literature can simultaneously cultivate empathy, collaboration, and moral reasoning—psychological competencies essential for preparing students to navigate diverse and globalized societies.

Table 2 provides compelling qualitative evidence illustrating how learners internalized key socio-emotional themes emerging from the multiliteracy activities. Students demonstrated the ability to relate narrative content to personal actions, indicating affective transfer and reflective engagement—central qualities of moral imagination (Kim & Slapac, 2022).

**Table 2.** Direct Quotations from Students and Teachers by Theme

Theme	Source	Direct Quotation
Empathy	Student	"I want to comfort my friend just like the mother in the story comforted her child."
Collaboration	Teacher	"Students are now more willing to express their opinions and listen to one another."
Fairness	Student	"We should share things fairly, just like Sutan Duano shared with the villagers."
Emotional Regulation	Teacher	"Several students have begun verbalizing their emotions, saying things like 'I feel disappointed' or 'I want to be heard,' which is new progress."

Statements such as “*I want to comfort my friend like the mother in the story*” show that empathy was not merely cognitively understood but also personally adopted as a behavioral intention. These responses reflect the socio-emotional affordances of multimodal literacy experiences described in recent scholarship (Rowell & Wohlwend, 2020).

Teacher quotations further validate these patterns, emphasizing improved student collaboration, communicative confidence, and emotional articulation. These observations align with García and O’Donnell’s (2021) argument that multiliteracies pedagogy cultivates inclusive, dialogic classroom spaces where students negotiate meaning and practice social responsibility. As such, Table 2 enriches the thematic analysis by providing direct evidence of how students and teachers co-constructed social and emotional meaning through literature-based multimodal learning.

Table 3 synthesizes the multiliteracy activities and illustrates their differentiated impacts across cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal domains. Reading activities strengthened students’ moral comprehension and narrative understanding, while visual modes facilitated emotional expression and perspective-taking, consistent with findings by Mills and Unsworth (2018).

**Table 3.** Multiliteracy Activities and Their Impact on Students

Multiliteracy Activity	Mode of Literacy	Observed Impact on Students
Reading the stories <i>Ibu and Kemarau</i>	Linguistic	Strengthened moral comprehension and character interpretation
Drawing important scenes	Visual	Enhanced emotional expression and perspective-taking
Role-playing dramatic scenes	Gestural & Auditory	Improved embodied empathy, emotional regulation, and confidence in communication
Group discussions	Interpersonal	Increased cooperation, respectful dialogue, and negotiation skills
Reflective journaling	Intrapersonal	Improved self-awareness, moral reasoning, and personal meaning-making

Role-playing activities had the strongest effect on embodied empathy and emotional regulation—findings supported by Kim and Slapac (2022), who argue that multimodal storytelling activates both affective and cognitive pathways. Interpersonal modes, such as group discussions, fostered cooperation and respectful dialogue, supporting García and O’Donnell’s (2021) concept of multiliteracies as socially situated practices.

Reflective journaling, functioning as an intrapersonal mode, enhanced self-awareness and moral reasoning, resonating with Abednia and Izadinia’s (2023) argument that multiliteracies support identity development and agency. Taken together, Table 3 shows that multimodal learning environments engage students holistically—emotionally, intellectually, socially, and morally—thus reflecting the multiliteracies framework’s full pedagogical potential.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that multiliteracy-based learning using A.A. Navis's literary works effectively integrates cognitive, emotional, and cultural dimensions of elementary education. Through multimodal engagement—including reading, visualization, dramatization, collaborative dialogue, and reflective writing—students developed enhanced empathy, fairness reasoning, and cooperative skills. These findings align not only with classical developmental theories (Erikson, 1950; Vygotsky, 1978) but also with contemporary multiliteracy research emphasizing identity, agency, and social justice (García & O'Donnell, 2021; Rowsell & Wohlwend, 2020; Abednia & Izadinia, 2023).

Multiliteracy pedagogy based on local literature offers culturally resonant pathways for strengthening students' moral imagination and socio-emotional competence, supporting the goals of SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). This approach encourages inclusive, values-based learning while fostering critical and compassionate young citizens. Future research may incorporate digital multiliteracy tools or cross-cultural comparative designs to further explore how diverse multimodal environments shape children's ethical development and social participation.

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