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## MALGUDI DAYS IN THE INDONESIAN CLASSROOM: FOSTERING LITERACY, CRITICAL THINKING, AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP FOR A COMPETITIVE WORKFORCE (ALIGNED WITH SDG 4)

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### Abstract

In today's interconnected world, fostering a well-rounded workforce equipped with literacy, critical thinking skills, and a sense of global citizenship is paramount. This research explores the potential of R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi Days* to achieve this objective within Indonesian classrooms, aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of ensuring quality education. *Malgudi Days*, set in the fictional Indian town of Malgudi, offers relatable characters and themes that transcend geographical boundaries. This study examines how these stories can enhance Indonesian students' literacy skills through engaging narratives and diverse writing styles. Beyond language mechanics, analysing characters' struggles and societal issues encourages critical thinking about universal human experiences and ethical dilemmas, fostering intercultural understanding and empathy. Additionally, the research highlights how *Malgudi Days* can cultivate a sense of global citizenship. By exploring lives in a different cultural context, students develop a broader worldview, learning to identify commonalities and celebrate differences, thus preparing them for effective communication and collaboration in a globalised workforce. This study contributes to improving educational outcomes in Indonesia by demonstrating the power of literature to nurture well-rounded individuals. By integrating *Malgudi Days* into the curriculum, Indonesian classrooms can empower students with the critical thinking, literacy, and global citizenship skills necessary to thrive in the 21st century.

**Keywords:** *Malgudi Days*, Literacy, Critical Thinking, Global Citizenship, SDG 4, Indonesian Education

### INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected world, fostering literacy, critical thinking, and global citizenship is essential for a competitive workforce, and literature, described by E.B. White as "the only university you can carry in your pocket" (Elledge 2006), plays a crucial role in achieving these goals. Engaging with diverse narratives, "the highest function of literature is to expose man's mind to the widest range of experience" (Emerson 2004). Literature not only

cultivates a love for language, for “any book that encourages a child to cultivate a habit of reading, making it a fundamental and enduring necessity, benefits them exceedingly” (Angelou 1969), but also enhances literacy through improved reading and writing skills, supported by research from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Journal of Research in Reading (Harrison 2004). Additionally, Phillips underscores literature’s role in enhancing comprehension across literal, inferential, and critical levels (Phillips 2021), complemented by Y.S. Kim’s findings linking literature engagement to enhanced vocabulary development (Kim 2004).

Integrating literature into education aligns with SDG 4, fostering inclusive, equitable quality education and lifelong learning through diverse perspectives. It promotes literacy, critical thinking, and cultural empathy, essential for global citizenship and societal equity (United Nations). Global citizenship, as highlighted by the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, emphasises our interconnectedness and responsibility for global well-being. In this context, through diverse narratives, literature fosters empathy and cultural understanding, exemplified by Indian epics like the Ramayana and Panchatantra fables, which offer universal themes and life lessons transcending borders (Bose 2004; Buck 1996). Accessible through translation, Indian literature enriches appreciation for cultural diversity globally. As Salman Rushdie observes: “Indian stories are capable of travelling the world” (Rushdie 2002), equipping readers with empathy and a shared sense of humanity essential for global citizenship.

### **R.K. Narayan’s “Malgudi Days” (1943)**

R.K. Narayan’s “Malgudi Days” is a collection of thirty-two short stories published in 1943. Set in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi, the book portrays the everyday lives of its residents with humour, empathy, and keen observation. Malgudi embodies the essence of traditional and modern Indian life, with bustling markets, quaint homes, temples, and schools, serving as a relatable microcosm of Indian society. The stories explore themes of human nature, the tension between tradition and modernity, the richness of daily experiences, and moral dilemmas. Notable stories include “An Astrologer’s Day,” where an astrologer encounters a man from his past, highlighting fate and redemption; “The Missing Mail,” where a postman delays delivering a letter to prevent disrupting a wedding, balancing duty and personal ethics; “The Doctor’s Word,” where a doctor struggles with professional detachment and personal involvement when a friend falls ill; “Iswaran,” where a student’s repeated exam failures lead to a tragic yet touching end; and “The Gateman’s Gift,” where an old gateman’s devoted service and unexpected validation of his clay art by General Manager, prompts him to reluctantly give up his hobby.

Narayan’s writing is marked by simplicity, humour, and realistic optimism, described by William Walsh as “a refreshing picture of Indian life” (Walsh 1982). M. K. Naik praises Narayan for presenting “ordinary life with unpretentious directness and simplicity” (Naik, 1984), emphasising the stories’ relatability. “Malgudi Days” has significantly influenced Indian literature and media adaptations, offering insights into societal norms and human nature, as noted by Ranga Rao’s observation that Narayan’s works present a “realistic and truthful picture of Indian society” (Rao 1968). Pico Iyer reflects on Narayan’s stories as touching “the heart and illuminating the soul with humour, pathos, and quiet profundity” (Iyer 2020), highlighting their emotional impact and universal themes. Thus, Narayan’s “Malgudi Days” provides valuable insights into human nature and societal dynamics, making it a helpful tool for education and fostering literacy, critical thinking, and global citizenship.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework of this study delves into narrative engagement theory, critical literacy theory, and global citizenship education models, each contributing unique perspectives on the role of literature in education.

### **1. Narrative Engagement Theory**

Rooted in reader-response theory from the 1960s and 70s, Narrative Engagement Theory emphasises how readers actively construct meaning from narratives, as “The reader’s transaction with the text creates meaning through a fusion of the reader’s experiences and the text’s portrayal” (Rosenblatt 1978). Transportation theory, as defined by Green and Brock, describes “the mental state of being deeply absorbed in a story” (Green and Brock 2000), while Mar elaborates on cognitive processes involved in entering story worlds (Mar 2004). Contemporary researchers McLaren emphasises that critical literacy encourages readers to “deconstruct texts to reveal underlying ideologies and challenge dominant narratives” (McLaren 1994), further developing these concepts and providing insights into how narratives captivate and enrich learning experiences (Busselle and Cutietta 2011).

### **2. Critical Literacy Theory**

Critical Literacy Theory, as defined by Irvine and Anderson (1994), emphasises learning “as part of the process of becoming aware of one’s experience that is shaped historically within the specific power relations” (Anderson 1994). This theory encourages readers to analyse texts beyond their surface meaning, questioning the author’s perspective and how language choices might reflect or perpetuate social inequalities. According to Vasquez, critical literacy involves creatively rethinking and redesigning texts to communicate alternative messages that promote social justice and equity (Vasquez 2017). Critical literacy empowers individuals to actively participate in meaning-making, challenging dominant narratives and working towards a more just society.

### **3. Global Citizenship Education Models**

These models advocate for integrating literature to promote cultural awareness, empathy, and a sense of interconnectedness. UNESCO defines global citizenship education as “equipping learners with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to contribute responsibly to a more just, peaceful, inclusive, and sustainable world” (UNESCO). Literature-based learning aligns with these objectives by exposing students to diverse narratives and perspectives, fostering empathy and understanding of global issues. Thus, this framework integrates narrative engagement theory to explore how literature captivates and educates readers, critical literacy theory to analyse ethical dilemmas and societal themes within texts, and global citizenship education models to promote inclusive and interconnected learning experiences through literature, emphasising its transformative potential in enhancing learning outcomes and preparing students as informed global citizens.

## **INTENDED OUTCOME OF “MALGUDI DAYS” IN INDONESIAN CLASSROOMS**

### **1. Using Narrative Engagement Theory**

Using narrative engagement theory, “Malgudi Days” can enhance literacy and learning for Indonesian students by immersing them in compelling stories that foster deep emotional and cognitive engagement. According to Rosenblatt, readers create meaning through a transaction between their experiences and the text’s portrayal (Rosenblatt 1978). The

intended outcomes include enhanced ethical understanding through stories like “An Astrologer’s Day” and “The Missing Mail” and emotional and psychological engagement from “The Doctor’s Word” and “Gateman’s Gift.” Students will reflect on human values with “Such Perfection” and “The Blind Dog” and gain social awareness from “Fellow Feeling” and “Iswaran.” Personal and social responsibility themes are explored in “Father’s Help,” “Forty-Five a Month,” and “Out of Business,” while critical thinking and reflection are prompted by “The Snake Song” and “Engine Trouble.”

## **2. Using Critical Literacy Theory**

Critical literacy theory encourages students to analyse texts for power dynamics, social injustices, and ethical dilemmas. “Malgudi Days” provides rich material for this, fostering critical engagement and reflection on societal issues. Intended outcomes include understanding power dynamics in “An Astrologer’s Day” and “Fellow Feeling,” ethical reflection in “The Missing Mail” and “The Doctor’s Word,” and insights into social and personal identity in “Gateman’s Gift” and “Such Perfection.” Students develop empathy and social justice awareness through “The Blind Dog” and “Iswaran” and consider honesty and responsibility in “Father’s Help.” Additionally, “The Snake Song” and “Engine Trouble” prompt critical reflection on human behaviour, while “Forty-Five a Month” and “Out of Business” address emotional and economic struggles.

## **3. Using Global Citizenship Education Models**

“Malgudi Days” fosters global citizenship by sparking curiosity, empathy, and critical thinking, aligning with SDG 4’s objectives for quality education. The intended outcomes include promoting empathy and understanding diverse perspectives through stories like “An Astrologer’s Day” and “The Missing Mail.” “The Doctor’s Word” and “Gateman’s Gift” encourage discussions on social responsibility and cultural awareness, highlighting professional ethics and personal identity. “Fellow Feeling” and “The Blind Dog” address social justice and community, while “Iswaran” and “Such Perfection” foster discussions on perseverance, humility, and human achievement. “Father’s Help,” “The Snake Song,” and “Engine Trouble” promote cultural awareness and critical reflection on personal values, and “Forty-Five a Month” and “Out of Business” enhance empathy and understanding of social dynamics and economic struggles.

# **IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

## **1. Challenges in Integrating “Malgudi Days” into the Indonesian Curriculum**

Integrating “Malgudi Days” into the Indonesian curriculum presents challenges such as cultural and contextual differences, potential logistical and bureaucratic hurdles, and language barriers. The specific settings and social norms in the stories may not directly align with Indonesian students’ experiences, potentially limiting engagement. Additionally, obtaining approval from educational authorities, aligning the material with existing standards, and ensuring high-quality translations into Bahasa Indonesia are significant challenges.

## **2. Opportunities for Leveraging Literature to Achieve Educational Objectives**

Despite these challenges, “Malgudi Days” offers valuable opportunities to enhance educational outcomes. The universal themes and relatable characters can improve literacy skills, including reading comprehension, vocabulary, and critical thinking. The stories’ ethical dilemmas and societal issues support critical literacy education, encouraging students

to analyse characters' actions and reflect on broader themes such as honesty, duty, and social justice. Moreover, exposure to a different cultural context fosters empathy, cultural awareness, and global citizenship, aligning with UNESCO's objectives.

### 3. Comparative Analysis with Global Practices in Literature-Based Education

Globally, integrating diverse literature enriches the learning experience. In Singapore, literature from various cultures, including Indian and Chinese texts, is incorporated to promote multicultural understanding and global awareness. Similarly, Australia's curriculum includes works by Aboriginal authors and international literature to enhance cultural empathy and critical thinking. These instances underscore the potential advantages of integrating "Malgudi Days" into the Indonesian curriculum, offering students a broader perspective and aligning with global educational trends, emphasising cultural diversity and global citizenship.

## CONCLUSION

Integrating "Malgudi Days" into Indonesian classrooms through narrative engagement, critical literacy, and global citizenship models aims to significantly enhance educational outcomes. The intended outcomes include promoting literacy, critical thinking, and cultural empathy through stories like "An Astrologer's Day," "The Missing Mail," "The Doctor's Word," and others. These narratives align with SDG 4 by fostering inclusive, quality education and equipping learners with essential skills and perspectives for academic and personal growth. Engaging with these stories will deepen students' understanding of human experiences, societal dynamics, and ethical dilemmas, nurturing empathetic and knowledgeable global citizens. Despite challenges like cultural disparities and language differences, the stories' universal themes and rich narratives can improve literacy levels, stimulate critical thought, and cultivate a sense of global citizenship that prepares students to contribute meaningfully to a diverse, interconnected world.

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