



Sociocultural Values in Madogiwa no Totto-chan: A Narrative-Based Pedagogical Framework for Language Education

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 21 August 2026	Learners require the capacity to engage empathically with cultural difference, construct meaningful social identities through the target language, and internalise the moral and civic values that underpin responsible participation in multilingual communities. In this context, literary narratives are re-emerging as mediators in language education. This study examines the sociocultural values embedded in Kuroyanagi (1981) and develops a narrative-based pedagogical framework for language education grounded in those values. Employing a qualitative research integrating literary content analysis (Mayring, 2015) and document analysis (Bowen, 2009) within an interpretivist paradigm. The study systematically analysed all forty-three narrative chapters using a theoretically grounded coding matrix. The findings identified eight interconnected sociocultural value domains including individual dignity, empathy and interpersonal trust, learner agency, and moral character co-present across the majority of narrative episodes, reflecting the Sociocultural Theory (SCT) principle that values are transmitted as integrated dimensions of culturally situated practice. Character analysis revealed developmental trajectories for the three principal dynamic characters structurally consistent with Vygotsky's account of internalisation, and identified a narrative ZPD enacted across seventeen episodes in the Kobayashi Totto-chan dyad. These findings were synthesised into a four-component pedagogical framework value identification, narrative analysis, character-based reflection, and language production whose sequential structure mirrors the SCT internalisation logic from social encounter to individual production. The study contributes the first systematic operationalisation of SCT constructs at the level of literary narrative analysis and provides language educators, particularly in Southeast Asian contexts, with a theoretically principled and practically implementable model for integrating sociocultural values into character-based language education.
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1. Introduction

Contemporary language education increasingly acknowledges that linguistic competence alone is insufficient to prepare learners for the communicative demands of a culturally diverse world (Corbett, 2022). Learners also require the capacity to engage empathically with cultural difference, construct meaningful social identities through the target language, and internalise the moral and civic values that underpin responsible participation in multilingual communities (Avila-López & Vaquero-Ibarra, 2025), capacities that are consistent with Vygotsky and Cole's (1978) foundational argument that higher mental functions are socially and culturally constituted before becoming individual capacities. Within this context, literary narrative has attracted renewed attention as a promising mediational resource for language education. Unlike decontextualised grammatical exercises, literary narratives embed language within complex social situations and emotionally resonant human relationships that can activate empathic and perspective-taking capacities implicated in real-world communicative competence (Keen, 2006). Accordingly, literary texts, when approached through theoretically principled frameworks, can function simultaneously as sites of linguistic development, intercultural reflection, and moral formation (Hall, 2005). Despite this recognition, the systematic translation of sociocultural values embedded in literary narratives into structured and classroom-applicable pedagogical frameworks remains underexplored.

Among literary works with particular potential for this purpose is *Madogiwa no Totto-chan*, the autobiographical narrative by Kuroyanagi (1981), which recounts the author's childhood experiences at Tomoe Gakuen under the educator Sosaku Kobayashi. The work has sold more than ten million copies in Japan and has been translated into more than thirty-six languages, underscoring its broad cultural circulation and educational significance. Previous scholarship has confirmed its progressive-humanistic educational philosophy (Lau, 2012) and its embodiment of values including self-determination, equity, and empathy (Brusnahan et al., 2023). However, despite this established educational and sociocultural significance, the narrative has not been systematically reconceptualised as a sociocultural mediational resource for language education. This gap provides the point of departure for the present study, which examines *Madogiwa no Totto-chan* through Sociocultural Theory (SCT).

SCT, developed by Vygotsky and Cole (1978) and elaborated by Lantolf (2000) and Wertsch (1991), posits that cognitive and affective development occurs through socially mediated interaction, with higher psychological functions emerging first on the interpsychological plane and subsequently being internalised as individual capacities. Within this framework, literary narrative can function as a cultural artifact that mediates the reorganisation of mental processes and introduces sociocultural meanings and moral values into the learning process (Kozulin, 2003). Three SCT constructs are particularly relevant to the present study. First, semiotic mediation refers to the role of literary texts as symbolic artefacts through which learners access sociocultural knowledge, alongside mediation provided by teachers and peers (Alkhudiry, 2022). Second, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) provides a basis for understanding how guided engagement with narrative can enable learners to appropriate cultural meanings beyond what they could achieve independently (Lantolf et al., 2018). Third, internalisation concerns the transformation of values encountered through narrative and classroom dialogue into internal communicative and moral resources (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Taken together, these constructs provide a theoretical basis for examining literary narrative not merely as a source of linguistic input, but as a mediational resource through which sociocultural meanings can be encountered, negotiated, and potentially internalised.

Empirical research further supports the pedagogical potential of narrative for sociocultural and moral learning. Gasser et al. (2022) demonstrated that educators select narrative fiction to support sociomoral development, while Rogoski and Pfeiffer-Flores (2025) found that dialogic reading significantly enhanced interpersonal and literary empathy. Bohlin (2005) similarly argued that character-based literary pedagogy should position teachers as mediators of ethical reflection, an orientation that is compatible with the humanistic and dialogic principles of SCT. Prior scholarship on *Madogiwa no Totto-chan* has also confirmed its sociocultural and pedagogical value (Fowler, 1992). Nevertheless, existing studies have primarily approached the work through literary, thematic, or educational analysis rather than examining how its sociocultural meanings can be systematically reconceptualised as a structured mediational resource for language education.

Against this background, three interrelated gaps remain in the literature. First, although SCT has been extensively applied to classroom interaction and language-learning processes, its systematic application to literary texts as mediational resources for the explicit development of language-pedagogical frameworks remains underdeveloped (Poehner & Lantolf, 2013). Second, research on literary texts in language education has focused disproportionately on simplified readers and Western canonical texts, leaving comparatively limited attention to non-Western canonical narratives that carry significant intercultural and sociocultural meanings (Mufti, 2016). Third, character education in second-language learning has often been treated as a curricular component separate from language instruction rather than as an integrated process; consequently, the role of literary narrative in mediating the internalisation of sociocultural values within language education remains insufficiently examined (Donato & McCormick, 1994). These gaps indicate the need for an integrated approach that connects sociocultural value analysis, literary narrative, SCT, and language pedagogy.

To address this need, the present study reconceptualises *Madogiwa no Totto-chan* as a sociocultural pedagogical resource for character-based language education, drawing on SCT, narrative-based pedagogy (Houston et al., 2011), and intercultural communicative competence theory (Byram et al., 2013). The study therefore moves beyond identifying values in a literary text by examining how those values are represented through narrative and character development, how they can be interpreted through SCT constructs, and how they can ultimately be transformed into a theoretically grounded and classroom-applicable pedagogical framework. Guided by these objectives, the study addresses three research questions: (1) What sociocultural value domains are embedded in the narrative episodes, character system, and authorial worldview of *Madogiwa no Totto-chan*, and through what narrative mechanisms are they expressed? (2) How do the character development trajectories in the narrative instantiate the SCT constructs of semiotic mediation, ZPD-consistent interaction, and internalisation as analytically documentable patterns? (3) How can the sociocultural values identified through systematic literary analysis be operationalised into a theoretically grounded and classroom-applicable pedagogical framework for language education?

By addressing these questions, the study makes two principal contributions. Theoretically, it advances the application of SCT to literary narrative as a structured mediational resource, extending its explanatory reach beyond conventional applications such as dynamic assessment to encompass the reader–narrative relationship as a productive site of sociocultural learning (Lantolf et al., 2018). Pedagogically, it provides language educators with a concrete, values-centred framework for transforming a canonical literary text into an

active resource for character-based language instruction. In doing so, the study reconceives the literary classroom as a dialogically constituted space for sociocultural value internalisation, intercultural reflection, and learner identity development, thereby demonstrating the potential of *Madogiwa no Totto-chan* as an underutilised resource for inclusive, values-centred, and humanistically grounded language education.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Sociocultural Theory And Language Learning

Sociocultural Theory (SCT), originally articulated by Vygotsky and Cole (1978), provides the foundational framework for the present study's understanding of how language learning emerges through socially mediated activity. SCT posits that higher mental functions — including language acquisition — develop not through individual cognitive effort alone but through sustained engagement with others and with culturally meaningful tools, signs, and artifacts (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Language thus functions as the primary semiotic tool through which learners co-regulate mental processes, negotiate meaning, and internalise the values of their cultural communities (Lantolf, 2000; Wertsch, 1991). Central to SCT is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) defined by Vygotsky and Cole (1978) as the gap between independent and mediated performance operationalised in language education through scaffolding (Wood et al., 1976), dialogic interaction (Ohta, 2001), and guided participation, enabling the progressive appropriation of linguistic and cultural resources initially distributed across the social environment (Lantolf et al., 2018). Building on this foundation, SCT scholars have expanded its application to cultural artifacts including literary narratives as mediational resources in language education (Smagorinsky, 2011): literary texts carry complex systems of social values and historically situated meaning, and when learners engage with them they participate in what (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) describe as “culturally situated meaning-making practices” that simultaneously support linguistic competence, pragmatic awareness, and intercultural understanding. Within this perspective, reading literature constitutes a dialogic activity (Kramsch, 2013) that extends language development beyond grammatical accuracy to encompass the pragmatic and intercultural dimensions increasingly foregrounded in contemporary language education frameworks (Byram, 1997).

2.2 Narrative-Based Pedagogy In Language Education

Narrative-based pedagogy has emerged as a theoretically grounded approach in language education, drawing on cognitive psychology, narrative inquiry, and sociocultural theory (Kim, 2019). Scholars argue that narrative constitutes the fundamental structure through which humans organise experience, construct identity, and interpret social reality (Bruner, 1991), and that in educational contexts stories function as epistemological frameworks that simultaneously activate linguistic, cognitive, and affective dimensions of development (Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005). Unlike decontextualised language exercises, narratives embed language within authentic social situations, exposing learners to real discourse structures, pragmatic strategies, and culturally situated communicative patterns while drawing them into interpretive processes inferring motivations, reconstructing relationships, evaluating social actions that activate higher-order cognitive functions and deepen language processing. Empirically, sustained engagement with literary narratives has been shown to enhance discourse competence, lexical development, pragmatic awareness, and intercultural sensitivity, while generating the affective engagement and intrinsic motivation that identifies as critical to long-term language learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009).

A further dimension of narrative pedagogy is its transmission of cultural schemas the shared knowledge structures encompassing social norms, moral values, and implicit communicative expectations (Kramsch, 2013) that enable learners to read language within culturally appropriate frameworks (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Walqui, 2008), thereby simultaneously advancing both linguistic development and intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997).

2.3 Sociocultural Values In Madogiwa No Totto-Chan

The autobiographical narrative *Madogiwa no Totto-chan* (Kuroyanagi, 1981) constitutes a particularly rich site for examining the intersection of narrative, sociocultural values, and educational philosophy. Recounting Kuroyanagi's childhood at Tomoe Gakuen an unconventional primary school in prewar Tokyo directed by Sosaku Kobayashi the text has sold over ten million copies in Japan and been translated into thirty-six languages, confirming the cross-cultural resonance of its educational values (Tsuneyoshi, 2004). The narrative consistently foregrounds respect for individual dignity, experiential learning, community solidarity, and empathy across social and physical difference values transmitted not through abstract exposition but through affectively resonant narrative episodes consistent with SCT's understanding of values as socially mediated and narratively constituted (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978; Wertsch, 1991). From a sociocultural perspective, Kobayashi embodies the Vygotskian ideal of the responsive mediating adult (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014), while learning at Tomoe unfolds through collaborative activity, embodied exploration, and dialogic interaction conditions that correspond closely to SCT's conceptualisation of learning as inherently social, culturally embedded, and tool-mediated. The text thus functions simultaneously as a literary representation of childhood development and as a culturally embedded model of learning in which values and communicative practices are not merely described but performed a distinction (Kramsch, 2013) identifies as fundamental to genuine intercultural understanding.

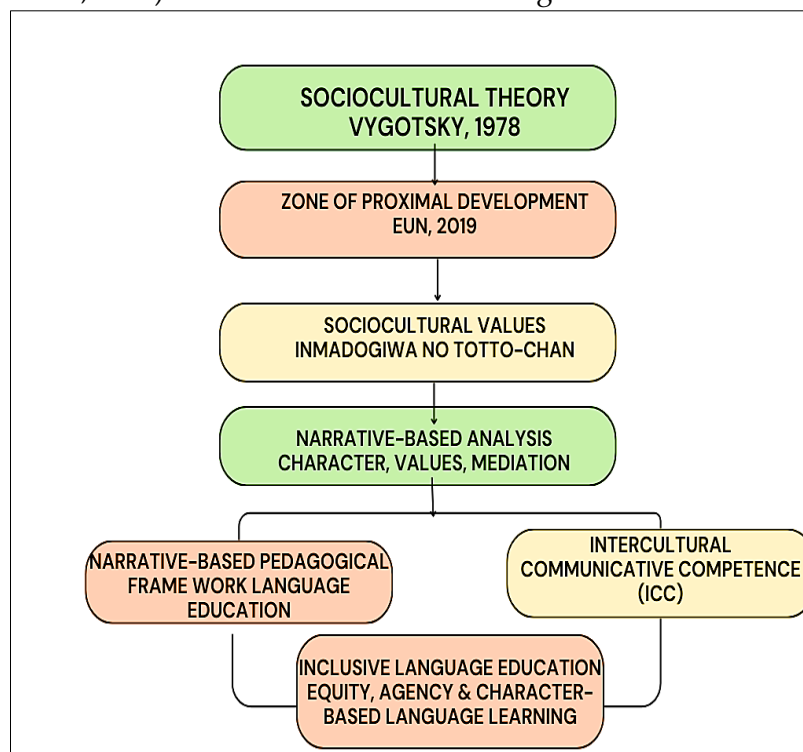


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework of Sociocultural Values in Madogiwa no Totto-chan and for Language Education

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in literary content analysis and narrative inquiry, positioned within an interpretivist paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The qualitative approach was selected because the research objectives centred on the systematic identification, critical interpretation, and theoretically coherent categorisation of sociocultural values embedded in *Madogiwa no Totto-chan*, and on the development of a narrative-based pedagogical framework aims that foreground depth of interpretive engagement over statistical generalisation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This interpretivist orientation is consistent with the study's theoretical foundation in SCT, which emphasises the constitutive role of cultural mediation and historical context in shaping meaning (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The design integrated two complementary methodological approaches: qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2015; Schreier, 2024), applied to the narrative structure, character interactions, and value systems within the primary text; and document analysis (Bowen, 2009), used to examine relevant theoretical and empirical scholarship in sociocultural theory, narrative pedagogy, and language education. This combination enabled iterative movement between textual evidence and theoretical interpretation, ensuring that the resulting framework was simultaneously grounded in literary data and coherent with established scholarly frameworks.

3.2 Data Source And Corpus

The primary data source was the complete literary text of *Madogiwa no Totto-chan* (Kuroyanagi, 1981), analysed in both the original Japanese edition and the authorised English translation (Kuroyanagi, 1996). The Japanese text enabled close attention to culturally embedded linguistic choices and discourse structures whose sociocultural significance is most fully legible in their original context (Gottlieb, 2011), while the English translation afforded broader analytical accessibility. The primary text was complemented by a corpus of secondary scholarly sources across four domains: sociocultural theory and SLA (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978; Lantolf et al., 2018); narrative pedagogy and literary education (Bruner, 1991; Mar et al., 2009); intercultural communicative competence (Byram et al., 2013; Kramsch, 2013); and language education in Japanese and Southeast Asian contexts (Tsuneyoshi, 2004). These secondary sources served as the theoretical framework through which identified values were analysed and translated into pedagogical principles, rather than as data in themselves. The forty-three episodic chapters of the text were treated as the principal unit of analysis, with individual narrative episodes functioning as analytical sub-units a holistic treatment consistent with the principle that contextually valid coding requires sustained engagement with the text as an integrated whole (Neuendorf, 2019).

3.3 Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was a self-developed analytical framework constructed through an iterative review of the theoretical literature prior to formal analysis. Drawing on (Byram, 1997) intercultural communicative competence model, (Kramsch, 2013) theorisation of language and cultural identity, and (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) elaboration of SCT as a cultural-historical analytical framework, the researchers developed a coding matrix comprising five initial sociocultural value domains:

1. Individual dignity and respect for difference

2. Experiential and inquiry-based learning
3. Empathy, care, and interpersonal trust
4. Community solidarity and collaborative participation
5. The relationship between freedom, learner agency, and educational responsibility

Each domain was operationalised through observable narrative indicators character actions, dialogue patterns, narrative descriptions, and interpersonal interactions designed to keep coding firmly anchored to textual evidence (Mayring, 2015; Schreier, 2024). The instrument was piloted on five purposively selected episodes representing the text's thematic diversity. The pilot resulted in the refinement of two existing indicators and the addition of one emergent sub-category *aesthetic and embodied learning experience* reflecting the prominent role of sensory, creative, and physically situated activities in the narrative that had not been fully anticipated in the initial framework. This iterative refinement reflects standard practice in qualitative instrument development (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2018).

3.4 Procedure

The study was conducted in three sequential phases. In the *first phase* (textual immersion), the researchers engaged in repeated close readings of the complete text, generating preliminary analytical notes and observations, while concurrently reviewing existing scholarship on *Madogiwa no Totto-chan* in Japanese educational philosophy, comparative education, and applied linguistics (Gottlieb, 2011; Tsuneyoshi, 2004). In the *second phase* (systematic coding), each of the forty-three episodes was coded using the analytical framework, encompassing both manifest content explicitly stated values, direct speech, and narrative commentary and latent content implicit meanings conveyed through narrative structure, character behaviour, and symbolic detail in accordance with the dual-level approach elaborated by (Mayring, 2015) and (Schreier, 2024). Coding was conducted independently by the two researchers; discrepancies were resolved through collaborative discussion and renewed close reading. In the *third phase* (framework construction), coded values were synthesised through analytical abstraction (Miles et al., 2018) and mapped onto narrative pedagogy principles (Bruner, 1991) and intercultural communicative competence dimensions (Byram, 1997), producing a four-component pedagogical framework value identification, narrative analysis, character-based reflection, and language production subsequently reviewed for theoretical coherence and pedagogical applicability.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the six-phase thematic analysis procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006), adapted for literary content analysis within a sociocultural framework: (1) familiarisation through repeated readings and reflective note generation; (2) systematic initial code generation across the full dataset; (3) organisation of codes into preliminary thematic clusters; (4) review and refinement of thematic categories for internal coherence and differentiation; (5) conceptual definition and theoretically informed naming of themes drawing on SCT and ICC frameworks; and (6) integration of themes into the final analytical interpretation. Trustworthiness was ensured through researcher triangulation (independent dual coding), theoretical triangulation (simultaneous application of SCT, narrative pedagogy, and ICC theory), and peer review by two independent academic reviewers specialising in Japanese literary studies and applied linguistics respectively (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability was supported through a comprehensive audit trail comprising original coding matrices, analytical memos, inter-researcher discussion records, and successive draft

iterations of the pedagogical framework.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of the study are presented in four interrelated sections that correspond to the analytical structure outlined in the method. The first section presents the sociocultural value domains identified through the systematic content analysis of *Madogiwa no Totto-chan*. The second section examines the narrative and character-based dimensions through which these values are transmitted within the text. The third section analyses the relationship between the identified values and the sociocultural context of the novel's production. The fourth section presents the narrative-based pedagogical framework derived from the synthesis of the preceding analytical findings. Taken together, these findings address the central research question of how the sociocultural values embedded in *Madogiwa no Totto-chan* can be systematically translated into a pedagogically coherent framework for language education.

The qualitative content analysis of the forty-three narrative episodes yielded a total of eight major sociocultural value domains, each comprising multiple observable sub-values expressed through specific character actions, patterns of dialogue, and narrative description. These domains, together with their constituent sub-values and representative narrative evidence, are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Sociocultural Value Domains Identified in *Madogiwa no Totto-chan*

No	Value Domain	Sub-values Identified	Narrative Evidence
1	Individual dignity and respect for difference	Acceptance of physical and cognitive difference; inclusive education; non-judgmental pedagogy; affirmation of individual identity	Kobayashi's inclusion of physically disabled pupils (Yasuaki-chan, Takahashi-kun) within the mainstream school community
2	Experiential and inquiry-based learning	Learner autonomy in curriculum selection; nature-integrated learning; learning through direct experience; student-centred methodology	Pupils choosing their own daily subject order; outdoor walks as structured learning activities
3	Empathy, care, and interpersonal trust	Unconditional positive regard for learners; emotional responsiveness; affective scaffolding; building trust as a pedagogical foundation	Kobayashi listening to Totto-chan for four uninterrupted hours on her first day; repeated affirmation "You are truly a good child"
4	Community solidarity and collaborative participation	Collective responsibility; cooperative classroom routines; peer interdependence; social learning through group activity	Pupils collectively cleaning classrooms; communal lunchtime rhetoric practice; group outdoor expeditions
5	Freedom, agency, and educational responsibility	Child-initiated learning; freedom within purposeful structure; responsibility as an outcome of trust; self-regulation	Pupils selecting from all subjects at the start of each day; Totto-chan fulfilling her promise to Kobayashi after the toilet episode
6	Moral character and ethical development	Self-reliance; courage; honesty; humility; perseverance;	Totto-chan retrieving her purse from the toilet pit without complaint;

		kindness; responsibility; defending physically weaker peers empathic action against bullying
7	Aesthetic and embodied learning experience	Integration of music, nature, and physical activity into the curriculum; learning through sensory engagement; creativity as a developmental dimension Eurhythmics instruction by Kobayashi; nature walks as sensory-exploratory learning; cooking activities as embodied curriculum
8	Social harmony and cultural belonging	National and community identity; civic responsibility; cross-generational solidarity; cultural continuity through narrative Totto-chan singing for soldiers; the collective memory of Tomoe Gakuen as a community-forming narrative among alumni

As Table 1 demonstrates, the sociocultural values embedded in the narrative are both diverse and structurally interconnected. The analysis revealed that no single episode in the text expressed a single value in isolation; rather, narrative episodes consistently embodied multiple, mutually reinforcing values simultaneously. This finding is consistent with the SCT premise that sociocultural values are not transmitted as discrete propositions but as integrated dimensions of culturally situated practice (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Wertsch, 1991). The value domain of empathy, care, and interpersonal trust, for instance, is inseparable from the domain of individual dignity and respect for difference in the majority of the episodes in which both are expressed, suggesting that the text constructs these values as structurally co-dependent rather than independently attained.

The analysis of the narrative's character system revealed that the two primary characters Totto-chan as protagonist and Kobayashi as the mediating educator function as the principal vehicles through which the text's sociocultural values are expressed, developed, and pedagogically modelled. Table 2 presents a systematic summary of the value profiles associated with each major character in the narrative.

Table 2. Character Profiles and Sociocultural Value Functions

Character	Primary Embodied Values	Language Education Implication	Pedagogical Function
Totto-chan (Tetsuko Kuroyanagi)	Learner agency; curiosity; empathy; courage; perseverance; relational generosity	Learners identify with Totto-chan's developmental arc; promotes positive L2 learner identity formation	Models the developing learner who flourishes under responsive mediation; embodies the learner identity
Sosaku Kobayashi (Headmaster)	Unconditional positive regard; empathic listening; trust-based pedagogy; inclusive vision; developmental patience	Provides a culturally embedded model of scaffolded, trust-based instruction for language educators	Embodies the Vygotskian mediating adult; models humanistic educational philosophy in action
Akira Takahashi (Takahashi-kun)	Development of self-confidence; resilience; overcoming social stigma associated with physical difference	Supports discussion of inclusive education values; models perseverance as a learnable character	Illustrates transformation through inclusive education and consistent affirmative mediation by the educator

		trait		
Yasuaki Yamamoto (Yasuaki-chan)	Dignity in difference; acceptance; friendship across physical ability boundaries	Promotes reflection on empathy, inclusion, and the social dimensions of learning environments	Embodies inclusive community values; catalyses Totto-chan's empathic development through friendship	
Kunio Oe (Oe-kun)	Social responsibility; transformation through peer relationship and consistent moral guidance	Enables discussion of social behaviour change and the role of community in moral development	Demonstrates social and moral developmental potential of character-based narrative learning	
Totto-chan's Mother (Mama)	Parental wisdom; non-judgmental support; advocacy for the child's developmental needs	Invites reflection on family-school relationships and non-punitive approaches to learner support	Models the responsive adult role outside the school; reinforces trust and unconditional acceptance	

A key finding of the character analysis was the structural centrality of the Kobayashi–Totto-chan dyad as the text's primary pedagogical relationship. The analysis identified seventeen distinct narrative episodes in which this dyad enacts observable ZPD-consistent interactions (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978; Lantolf & Poehner, 2014): Kobayashi consistently identifies Totto-chan's developmental potential, provides targeted and affective mediation, and progressively withdraws directive guidance as her autonomy and self-regulation develop. This pattern of interaction constitutes what the present study terms a *narrative ZPD* a fictionally constructed but sociocultural theoretically legible model of responsive mediation that can serve as a concrete illustration of SCT principles for language learners and educators alike.

The analysis further revealed that character transformation observable across *Totto-chan*, *Takahashi-kun*, and *Oe-kun* follows a consistent developmental arc in the narrative: initial social marginalisation or personal limitation, followed by exposure to the value-rich environment of Tomoe Gakuen, leading to progressive appropriation of sociocultural values and emergent self-regulation. This arc aligns structurally with the SCT account of internalisation (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), in which capacities first distributed across the social environment are progressively taken up as individual competencies. Table 3 presents a comparative summary of the character development trajectories identified in the narrative.

Table 3. Character Development Trajectories and Sociocultural Value Internalisation

Character	Initial Characterisation	Developmental Turning Point	Final Characterisation	Representative Quote (Turning Point)
Totto-chan	Expelled from conventional school; labelled disruptive; socially marginalised	Kobayashi's four-hour listening session on her first day at Tomoe Gakuen	Self-reliant, empathic, courageous, morally responsible; confident communicator	"By the time the lunchbell rang, Totto-chan had told him everything. Kobayashi had listened for four hours." (Ch. 2)
Takahashi-kun	Physically disabled; low self-	Kobayashi's redesigned	Self-confident; socially engaged;	"After that day, he no longer felt embarrassed

	confidence; social anxiety; avoidance of peer interaction	Sports activities allowed Takahashi-kun to win events	Day that	later university education and professional success	achieves standing in front of others.” (Ch. 38)
Oe-kun	Socially aggressive; physically imposing; inconsiderate of peers, especially female classmates	Sustained exposure to Kobayashi’s modelling of respectful social norms; collaborative peer activities		Socially responsible; capable of respectful peer relationships; later becomes a respected specialist	“Totto-chan took Oe-kun’s hand and they ran together towards the teacher’s kitchen.” (Ch. 24)

The analysis of the text in relation to its sociocultural and historical context the prewar and wartime Japanese social environment in which the Tomoe Gakuen episodes are set revealed a consistent authorial worldview centred on the primacy of humanistic education and the social value of individual dignity. This worldview is expressed not through explicit didactic commentary but through the cumulative narrative effect of Kuroyanagi’s episodic portrayals of Kobayashi’s educational practice. The analysis identified the following principal dimensions of the authorial sociocultural perspective.

Table 4. Dimensions of Authorial Sociocultural Worldview

Dimension of Authorial Worldview	Narrative Expression	Sociocultural Significance	Representative Textual Quote
Critique of institutional conformity in education	Totto-chan’s expulsion from a conventional school for curiosity-driven behaviour the system could not accommodate	Challenges authoritarian educational norms prevalent in prewar Japan; valorises individual difference over institutional compliance	“Your daughter causes too much disruption. Please take her to another school.” — Totto-chan’s first teacher (Ch. 1)
Affirmation of progressive, child-centred pedagogy	Tomoe Gakuen’s learner-directed curriculum, sensory learning environment, and complete absence of punitive discipline	Reflects Kobayashi’s engagement with European progressive education; anticipates contemporary learner-centred language pedagogy	“Now, start from whichever subject you like.” — Kobayashi to students (Ch. 4)
Inclusive social vision across difference	Integration of physically disabled children within the mainstream school community; celebration of each child’s unique gifts	Represents a socially progressive counter-narrative to the militaristic and socially conformist ideologies of wartime Japan	“Among Tomoe’s students were children with polio, children who were very small — children with handicaps.” (Ch. 14)
Human resilience and	Kobayashi’s response	Transmits the	“What kind of school

dignity in historical trauma	to the destruction of Tomoe Gakuen by wartime bombing; forward-looking optimism and commitment to rebuilding	cultural value of perseverance and constructive orientation in the face of loss and historical disruption	shall we build next?" — Kobayashi as Tomoe burns (Ch. 43)
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The analysis of the sociocultural context of the novel's production confirmed that the values expressed in the narrative are not merely idiosyncratic personal preferences of the author but reflect and engage with broader currents in Japanese educational philosophy, progressive international pedagogy, and universal humanistic values. This finding supports the claim that *Madogiwa no Totto-chan* functions as a culturally significant artifact in the Vygotskian sense a text that carries, transmits, and mediates sociocultural knowledge across generations and cultural boundaries (Smagorinsky, 2011; Wertsch, 1991). Its global readership of over ten million copies further attests to the cross-cultural resonance of the sociocultural values it encodes.

The synthesis of the three preceding analytical findings the sociocultural value domains, the character-based value transmission mechanisms, and the authorial sociocultural worldview produced the narrative-based pedagogical framework presented in this section. The framework is organised around four sequential and interrelated pedagogical components, each designed to operationalise a specific cluster of the identified sociocultural values as structured language learning activities. The structure and content of the framework are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Narrative-Based Pedagogical Framework: Components, Objectives, and Extended Specifications

Component	Pedagogical Objective	Values Targeted	Representative Activities	Language Skills
Value Identification	Enable learners to recognise and name sociocultural values as expressed within narrative episodes	Individual dignity; empathy; community solidarity; moral character	Close reading of selected episodes; guided value-mapping using a structured analytical matrix	Reading comprehension; vocabulary enrichment; analytical writing
Narrative Analysis	Develop learners' capacity to interpret how narrative structure communicates sociocultural values implicitly and explicitly	Experiential learning; cultural belonging; aesthetic experience; authorial worldview	Comparative episode analysis; theme identification; discussion of manifest vs. latent content	Critical reading; academic discussion; oral and written argumentation
Character-Based Reflection	Support learners in perspective-taking, empathic reasoning, and	Empathy; trust; agency; transformation through social	Character development mapping; role-play and	Spoken interaction; pragmatic competence; sociopragmatic

	sociocultural comparison through character analysis	interaction; consistent mediation	ZPD-	dramatic reconstruction; intercultural comparison tasks	awareness; intercultural reflection
Language Production	Engage learners in producing target-language output that authentically integrates identified sociocultural values	All domains; integration of individual, social, and cultural values in communicative practice	eight	Reflective writing tasks; creative episode rewriting; oral presentation; values-based debate	Productive skills (writing, speaking); discourse competence; intercultural communicative competence

The four components of the framework are designed to be implemented sequentially within an integrated instructional unit, though individual components can also be used as standalone activities depending on the instructional context and the proficiency level of the learners. The sequential structure reflects the theoretical logic of the framework: learners must first be able to identify values before they can analyse them narratively, engage with them through character reflection, or produce original language that authentically incorporates them. This sequencing aligns with the SCT principle of internalisation, according to which cultural knowledge is first encountered in the social environment (Components 1 and 2), then rehearsed through mediated interaction (Component 3), before being appropriated as individual productive competence (Component 4) (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

The distribution of the eight sociocultural value domains across the four framework components is presented in Figure 2, which illustrates the relative emphasis of each domain at each stage of the pedagogical sequence. The figure demonstrates that while all eight domains are addressed across the complete framework, Components 1 and 3 carry the greatest concentration of value-focused activity, while Components 2 and 4 place greater emphasis on the linguistic and discursive dimensions of engagement with the narrative.

Table 6. Distribution of Sociocultural Value Domains Across Pedagogical Framework

Sociocultural Value Domain	Comp 1	Comp 2	Comp 3	Comp 4	Appearance Frequency	Representative Textual Quote	Language Education Implication
Individual dignity and respect for difference	●●●	●●	●●●	●●	Very High (Ch. 1, 3, 14, 28, 38)	"Among Tomoe's students were children with polio..." (Ch. 14)	Promotes inclusive classroom culture; models respectful intercultural interaction
Experiential and inquiry-based learning	●●	●●●	●●	●●	High (Ch. 4, 7, 15, 20, 22)	"Why does this flower bloom? Do you know?" teacher on nature walk (Ch. 7)	Supports task-based and content-integrated language learning;

Empathy, care, and interpersonal trust	●●●	●●	●●●	●●●	Very High (Ch. 2, 3, 24, 28, 38 recurring motif)	“You are truly a good child, you know that.” Kobayashi (repeated, Ch. 3–43)	learner-directed activity design Activates empathic reasoning; develops affective dimensions of communicative competence Models cooperative learning; supports design of collaborative L2 speaking and project tasks Supports learner autonomy development; applicable to self-directed and autonomous L2 learning frameworks
Community solidarity and collaborative participation	●●	●●	●●●	●●●	Moderate–High (Ch. 10, 17, 24, 33)	“First erase the blackboard. Then all together, mop the floor until it’s clean.” (Ch. 33)	Enables character-based language activities; develops values-centred discourse competence Supports multimodal and arts-integrated language learning approaches;
Freedom, agency, and educational responsibility	●●	●●●	●●	●●	High (Ch. 4, 9, 12, 23)	“Now, start from whichever subject you like.” Kobayashi (Ch. 4)	
Moral character and ethical development	●●●	●	●●●	●●●	High (Ch. 9, 11, 18, 27, 35)	“Totto-chan fulfilled her promise to the headmaster, returning everything to its place.” (Ch. 9)	
Aesthetic and embodied learning experience	●	●●●	●●	●●	Moderate (Ch. 6, 7, 19, 30)	“The butterfly also helps the flowers bloom.” — teacher, on eurhythmics walk (Ch. 7)	

Social harmony and cultural belonging	••	•••	••	•••	Moderate (Ch. 31, 39, 42–43)	“What kind of school shall we build next?” — Kobayashi as Tomoe burns (Ch. 43)	develops creative writing Promotes cultural identity reflection; applicable to heritage language and intercultural communication courses
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Components: Extended Version (● = primary emphasis; •• = secondary; ••• = central focus)

The framework is intended to be applicable across a range of language education contexts, including Japanese as a foreign language, English as a foreign language with a comparative cultural dimension, and broader language and literature courses at secondary and tertiary levels. Its design reflects the principle, central to both narrative-based pedagogy and intercultural communicative competence theory, that effective language education must address not only the structural and functional dimensions of the target language but also the cultural, social, and ethical dimensions of communicative practice (Byram et al., 2013; Kramsch, 2013). The sociocultural richness of *Madogiwa no Totto-chan* as a literary source text positions it as an especially productive resource for achieving this integrative pedagogical aim.

The results of the study confirm that *Madogiwa no Totto-chan* constitutes a sociocultural artifact of exceptional richness and pedagogical utility. The analysis identified eight interconnected sociocultural value domains, expressed through a narratively coherent and theoretically legible system of character development, educational philosophy, and authorial worldview. The translation of these findings into a four-component pedagogical framework provides a structured and theoretically principled pathway for integrating the text's sociocultural dimensions into language education practice. The following section discusses these findings in relation to the existing literature and elaborates on the theoretical and pedagogical implications of the proposed framework.

5. Discussion

The analysis confirms that *Madogiwa no Totto-chan* functions as a high-density sociocultural artifact, with eight interconnected value domains distributed across all forty-three narrative episodes and consistently co-occurring within individual units. This structural pattern supports (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) and (Smagorinsky, 2011) argument that literary narratives serve as culturally saturated mediational tools. The co-occurrence of multiple value domains within single episodes is pedagogically significant: it enables a single narrative unit to anchor multiple learning objectives simultaneously, facilitating more holistic instruction than decontextualised exercises permit (Vold, 2022). Mar et al. (2009) claimed that literary fiction simulates social experience, showing that such simulation is organised around a coherent Vygotskian educational philosophy.

A key theoretical contribution is the identification of the narrative ZPD the fictionally constructed yet theoretically legible model of Vygotskian mediation enacted across seventeen

episodes in the *Kobayashi–Totto-chan dyad*. This extends ZPD scholarship in applied linguistics (Ohta, 2001; Poehner & Lantolf, 2013) by demonstrating that the construct can be analytically documented within literary narrative, rendering SCT principles experientially accessible to learners. The narrative ZPD exhibits three dynamic assessment properties (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014): identification of developmental potential, responsive graduated mediation, and progressive withdrawal of guidance as autonomy develops. This internalisation arc from limited social agency through mediational engagement to communicative and moral appropriation is replicated in the trajectories of Totto-chan, Takahashi-kun, and Oe-kun, consistent with the SCT account of development as the appropriation of socially distributed capacities (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

The four-component pedagogical framework advances the field in three respects. First, it provides a systematic pathway for translating sociocultural literary analysis into structured teaching practice a connection underspecified in the literature (Smagorinsky, 2011). Second, its sequential structure intentionally mirrors the SCT internalisation logic (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978; Lantolf et al., 2018): Components 1–2 correspond to the social plane; Component 3 to the interpsychological plane of mediated dialogue; and Component 4 to the intrapsychological plane of productive language output mirroring L2 classroom developmental sequences (Lantolf et al., 2018; Poehner & Lantolf, 2013; Swain & Lapkin, 2013). Third, the framework constitutes a generalisable template applicable to any literary narrative of sufficient sociocultural density, offering educators a principled criterion for selecting narrative resources across instructional contexts.

Several limitations warrant acknowledgement. As a qualitative documentary study, the research provides no empirical evidence of the framework’s classroom efficacy; its effectiveness for measurable gains in linguistic competence, intercultural awareness, or learner motivation requires classroom-based validation. The focus on a single literary text also limits the generalisability of the sociocultural density concept and the four-component framework pending comparative studies. Future research should pilot the framework across diverse institutional and cultural contexts using mixed-methods designs; examine its applicability to a broader range of literary narratives from diverse traditions; and investigate how learner variables proficiency, cultural background, and value orientations mediate framework effectiveness, contributing to understanding of L2 identity development (Norton, 2013) and ICC formation (Byram et al., 2013).

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *Madogiwa no Totto-chan* constitutes a rich sociocultural artifact whose narrative values can be systematically translated into a theoretically grounded framework for language education. The qualitative content analysis of all forty-three chapters identified eight interconnected sociocultural value domains, including individual dignity, empathy, interpersonal trust, learner agency, and moral character, reflecting the Sociocultural Theory (SCT) principle that values are transmitted through culturally situated practices (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Character analysis further revealed that the developmental trajectories of Totto-chan, Takahashi-kun, and Oe-kun align with Vygotskian internalisation, progressing through social interaction and mediation toward greater self-regulation, social competence, and moral agency. These findings establish the narrative as both a cultural repository of sociocultural values and a model of humanistic education encompassing linguistic, pragmatic, intercultural, and ethical development.

The study makes theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it operationalises SCT constructs of semiotic mediation, the ZPD, and internalisation in literary narrative, introducing the concept of the *narrative ZPD* to describe responsive mediation in the Kobayashi–Totto-chan relationship across seventeen episodes and supporting the concept of the collective ZPD (Poehner & Lantolf, 2013) within the narrative community. Practically, the proposed four-component framework—value identification, narrative analysis, character-based reflection, and language production—positions literary analysis as a developmental tool for integrating linguistic competence, intercultural awareness, empathic reasoning, and values-oriented communicative agency, consistent with the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020).

Despite these contributions, the study relies exclusively on documentary data, and the framework requires classroom validation to establish its effectiveness for specific learning outcomes. Future research should implement the framework across diverse institutional and cultural contexts, particularly in Indonesian and Southeast Asian language education, using pre- and post-measures of intercultural communicative competence, learner response data, and longitudinal assessments of values-based discourse development. Further studies should examine learner variables, including L2 proficiency, prior cultural knowledge, and personal value orientations, while exploring digital annotation and AI-assisted reflective writing to assess scalability in hybrid learning environments.

In conclusion, *Madogiwa no Totto-chan* extends beyond conventional cultural supplementary material to provide a theoretically coherent and pedagogically meaningful foundation for integrating linguistic competence, intercultural awareness, and moral agency. By reconceptualising literary narrative as a structured pedagogical instrument, the proposed framework advances a humanistic and inclusive approach to language education that recognises every learner's potential for growth and every classroom's capacity for shared meaning and transformative learning.

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Conflict of Interest

The conflict of interest in this research.

Authors' Contribution

Helena Maria Lidwina Pandi: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Statement of the Use of AI

The author declares that during the process of writing this paper, they used generative AI to refine the grammar, readability, and language; however, all research outputs and content were reviewed and verified by the author.

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