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CHILDREN'S LETTER WRITING FOR MOTHERS AS CHARACTER EDUCATION REINFORCEMENT: A BRONFENBRENNER PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Character education in early childhood continues to encounter challenges in integrating genuine family involvement and facilitating meaningful emotional experiences within the learning process. This study analyzes the implementation of family-based character education through letter-writing activities directed toward mothers in early childhood at Udyana Kumara 1 Kindergarten, Taman, and evaluates its effectiveness from a developmental ecology perspective. The study employed a qualitative case study design, involving 20 children from groups B, as well as teachers and parents, as research participants. Data collection methods included participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, with analysis conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive model and the developmental ecology theoretical framework. The study reveals a strong correlation between the school-based activity of writing letters to mothers spanning the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem and the concept of matru devo bhava (macrosystem) as well as the occasion of Mother's Day (chronosystem). These findings support research indicating that letter-writing activities help internalize character values such as affection, empathy, gratitude, and respect for parents through concrete, contextual emotional experiences. Furthermore, this activity strengthens the emotional bond between the child and the mother while bridging the gap between school and family. Consequently, it can be concluded that the practice of children writing letters to their mothers serves as a micro-practice model of family-based character education applicable to early childhood education.

Keywords: Family-Based Character Education; Letter Writing to Mothers; Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model.

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INTRODUCTION

Ideally, character education is not only about the transmission of values but also a process of habituation and role modeling that occurs continuously in children's daily lives. Verbal rules or instructions can guide behavior and accelerate skill acquisition; however, they often lead to insensitivity toward changing situations: meaning individuals may fail to adjust their values or behaviors when the context shifts (Fox & Kyonka, 2017). This suggests that relying solely on verbal instructions is less effective for the deep internalization of values. Values such as empathy, discipline, and responsibility are more effectively instilled through routines and real-life interactions than through mere verbal instruction. This confirms that character education in early childhood is practical and contextual, thus requiring the active involvement of the child's immediate environment, especially the family and school. In fact, integrating values into daily activities has been shown to significantly increase the consistency of children's behavior, as evidenced by a 89% increase in behavioral compliance through routine habituation in the context of early childhood education (Fauziah et al., 2025).

Character education in early childhood is not just an addition to the education system; it is a fundamental pillar for developing qualities such as integrity and responsibility. Character education is a planned process that not only teaches moral values but also develops personal awareness, motivation, and specific actions in social life (Hendrowibowo & Kristanto, 2024). This approach highlights the golden age as vital, as children are highly receptive to learning, and the values taught during this time shape their personalities in the long term (Junaidi et al., 2024). Comparing educational practices in Japan shows that national character growth depends on teaching values early, as character is easiest to form in childhood (Mulyadi, 2020). Family involvement influences not only grades but also character and emotional health. Another study found that quality time between parents and children, like playing and learning together, leads to better learning habits and less emotional distress in children (Zhang, 2022). In summary, the family is the main environment shaping a child's character.

In kindergarten education, family involvement is frequently not fully integrated into the learning process, resulting in missed opportunities for authentic emotional engagement within character education. Activities often remain normative and disconnected from children's lived experiences. Observations at Udyana Kumara 1 Taman Kindergarten indicate that family involvement is primarily ceremonial, such as participation in meetings or events, rather than fostering genuine collaboration between home and school or supporting character development at home. This aligns with findings that family involvement in education remains limited to formal activities and does not yet encompass authentic, collaborative practices between schools and families (Gerzel-Short et al., 2019). Consequently, children demonstrate reduced ability to express affection and gratitude, suggesting that family-facilitated emotional development is suboptimal. This highlights a central challenge: character education often fails to utilize comprehensive, reciprocal family involvement to support social changes, such as increased parental job mobility, economic pressures, and the widespread use of digital technology, which have altered family interaction patterns. Among parents at Udyana Kumara 1 Taman Kindergarten, limited time for intensive interaction with children has resulted in less functional and emotionally rich communication. This reduction in quality interaction time is concerning, as family involvement is essential for holistic child development.

Research demonstrates that family engagement in learning activities, both at home and in educational settings, positively influences literacy, social-emotional skills, and executive

function in early childhood (Rey-Guerra et al., 2022). However, contemporary social realities challenge this need for involvement, as evidenced by a weakening internalization of character values within families, including in the Balinese context. Increasingly complex social patterns have contributed to a decline in the quality of emotional interactions between parents and children. The family remains the primary environment shaping a child's character through affective interactions and exemplary behavior (Hendrowibowo & Kristanto, 2024). When this role is diminished, character education risks becoming formalistic and lacking in deep internalization.

Furthermore, the relationship between school and family is a critical factor in supporting educational success. Effective communication, trust, and collaboration between schools and families can significantly enhance children's learning experiences (Reschly & Christenson, 2019). Therefore, innovative learning practices are needed to bridge the gap between schools and families in meaningful ways. One activity with significant potential for integrating family-based character education is writing a letter to one's mother on Mother's Day. The activity conducted by TK Udyana Kumara 1 Taman aims to encourage children to express affection, empathy, and appreciation for their mothers, , who are primary figures in the family. Moreover, this activity serves as a means of interaction between family and school, helping shape children's character through emotional connection and reflection.

Theoretically, these activities can be analyzed through Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development, which posits that child development is shaped by complex interactions among various environmental systems. Family involvement and interactions between school and home constitute dynamically interacting microsystems and mesosystems. The theory asserts that child development occurs through interconnected, reciprocal relationships between individuals and their environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Empirical studies indicate that positive parent-child and teacher-child relationships enhance children's engagement in learning and early academic skill development (Li et al., 2026). The literature further confirms that family variables, such as parental support, parenting styles, and the quality of family relationships, play a significant role in children's educational engagement and learning behaviors (Veiga et al., 2016). In educational interventions, high family involvement is essential for the success of child competency development programs (García-Poole et al., 2019).

Otero-Mayer et al. (2025) state that family involvement encompasses activities at home and within the school, as well as communication between both settings, and that it significantly influences a child's social, emotional, and academic development. The family, as a child's first educational environment, shapes confidence, motivation to learn, and overall character (Zambrano & Tomalá, 2022). Philosophically, the family's role extends beyond daily routines to include the transmission of values and ethics; families are the initial context in which children learn about right and wrong, guiding their moral development from an early age (Astuti et al. in Nisa et al., 2025). When families do not fulfill this role, both the child's development and the foundational Balinese culture are characterized by a rich local value system that strongly emphasizes respect for parents, particularly mothers. In Hindu teachings, the concept of *matru devo bhava* underscores the sacred and central role of mothers within family life. This is supported by religious anthropological studies that demonstrate that, according to Hindu scriptures, women are theologically significant and play a strategic role in shaping the social, cultural, and spiritual structure of the family (Segara et al., 2022). In the context of character education, respect for parents serves as a key indicator of the formation of an ideal child

character (*suputra*), as reflected in the teachings of the Itihasa and Puranas, which emphasize devotion, ethics, and morality as foundational to children's behavior towards their parents (Wiguna, 2018). However, these values have not been fully internalized within formal early childhood education practices, resulting in a gap between cultural ideals and educational realities. resulting in a gap between cultural ideals and the reality of educational practice.

This is reinforced by Cathrin et al. (2025) which highlights an awareness regarding the lack of systematic integration of local philosophical values (such as Javanese philosophy) into formal educational practices. This gap contributes to the erosion of cultural identity and character values among students, even though these philosophies align with the goals of character education. This article strongly calls for further research to bridge this gap and ensure that philosophical ideals are reflected in classroom instruction. Fernández Espinosa & López González (2024) notes a research deficit and conceptual ambiguity regarding the distinction between virtue and value, a distinction of practical importance, calling for further research into how schools actually put these concepts into practice. Sakti et al. (2024) states that many schools have not yet effectively implemented character education, and only a portion fully integrates character education with local wisdom; this indicates a need for research and stronger implementation. Furthermore, data indicate that school-community relations remain suboptimal in terms of frequency, intensity, and substance, alongside issues regarding coordination and a shared vision (Parji, 2019).

This analysis reveals a structural and cultural gap between the potential of local cultural values, empirical needs in the field, and current character education practices, which remain largely formalistic. This suggests that character education has not sufficiently addressed the affective and relational dimensions central to children's character formation. Accordingly, there is a need for research that integrates cultural values, family involvement, and children's emotional experiences into a contextual and applicable educational framework. The present study proposes an approach to family-based character education through the activity of writing letters to mothers, analyzed from a developmental ecology perspective. Thus, this research not only contributes to the expansion of theoretical studies on family-based character education but also offers practical activities that bridge the gap between local cultural values, educational theory, and learning practices. Additionally, this approach is expected to strengthen the emotional bond between children and parents and revitalize the family's role as the primary context for children's character formation. This study aims to analyze the implementation of letter-writing activities addressed to mothers as a form of family-based character education to internalize the value of respect for parents in early childhood.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative case study design to provide an in-depth understanding of the implementation of family-based character education through a letter-writing activity for mothers involving early childhood students. The research was conducted at Udyana Kumara 1 Taman Kindergarten in Bali between December 2025 and January 2026, with 40 participants: 19 children from Group B, a school principal, a class teacher, and 19 parents (mothers). Data collection involved three sessions of participant observation to monitor the activity process, participant engagement, interactions among children, teachers, and parents, and the emotional expressions and character values that emerged. Purposive semi-structured interviews were conducted with three children, three parents, and either the principal or the teacher, each lasting

approximately 5–10 minutes. Interview questions addressed the children's experiences while writing the letters, expressions of affection and respect toward their mothers, the parents' emotional responses, and the teachers' perspectives on the activity's contribution to character education. Supporting data were obtained through documentation, including the children's letters, activity photographs, and school archives.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Findings were further analyzed based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory by mapping interactions at the microsystem level (child–teacher and child–parent), mesosystem level (family–school relations), and macrosystem level (Balinese cultural values, including *matru devo bhava*). Data credibility was strengthened through source triangulation, comparing the perspectives of children, teachers, and parents and method triangulation, comparing results from observations, interviews, and documentation. Member checking was conducted by confirming interview summaries and preliminary interpretations with the informants, while observational persistence was maintained through systematic recording of the activity process. The study obtained approval from the school and informed consent from parents/guardians; participant identities were anonymized, and all data were used solely for research purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The relationship between mother and child is a critical factor in a child's academic achievement and emotional development. Empirical studies indicate that children with a strong maternal bond perform better academically than those whose primary close relationship is with their father. This advantage is partly attributed to increased self-confidence and a stronger belief in their own abilities (Simpkins et al., 2006). A nurturing maternal relationship fosters positive self-esteem, sustained motivation, and perseverance in completing tasks. Within the home environment, maternal support significantly influences children's learning processes and behavioral patterns. Mothers frequently establish routines, provide emotional comfort, and promote consistent study habits (Marah et al., 2025). Further research demonstrates that supportive maternal relationships enhance self-confidence, adaptability, and resilience, all of which contribute to effective learning (Wu et al., 2025). In various cultural and religious contexts, the role of the mother is highly esteemed and central to family values, as exemplified by the concept of *matru devo bhava*, which instills deep respect for mothers in children (Menon & Chiney, 2023). This principle underscores the pivotal role mothers play in shaping children's character.

Despite this ideal, observations at Udyana Kumara 1 Taman Kindergarten reveal that the mother-child relationship is insufficiently supported within daily learning and family routines. Evidence from interviews and classroom observations indicates that some children experience difficulty expressing love, gratitude, and respect toward their mothers, both verbally and through actions. Family interactions are frequently limited to fulfilling basic needs, with minimal engagement in meaningful conversations. These findings suggest that the value of *matru devo bhava* is not fully integrated into early childhood education at this institution. To address this gap, an instructional strategy that aligns with real-world experiences and fosters meaningful connections is required. Implementing a letter-writing activity in which children compose letters to their mothers offers an opportunity to develop writing skills, facilitate emotional expression,

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and potentially strengthen the mother-child bond. The following section presents the outcomes of this intervention and analyzes the results from a developmental perspective.

1. Implementation of a Letter-Writing Activity for Mothers at Udyana Kumara 1 Taman Kindergarten

Observation and interviews were used to evaluate a letter-writing activity for mothers at Udyana Kumara 1 Taman Kindergarten, conducted during Mother's Day. This activity integrated early reading and character education, thereby strengthening the bonds between children and their families. The initiative aligns with the view that mothers serve as children's first teachers and play a crucial role in shaping their values from an early age (Kasmiati, 2018). Cahyaningrum et al. (2020) further emphasize that time spent between mothers and children is the most effective means of enhancing emotional closeness and guiding behavior. Thus, the letter-writing activity facilitates a connection between children's emotions and school-based learning.

The activity consists of several structured steps. Initially, teachers narrate stories to illustrate the significant role and affection of mothers in daily life. Through storytelling, teachers pose questions such as "Who cares for you when you are sick?" or "What does your mother do at home?" to encourage children to reflect on their personal experiences. This method has been demonstrated to help children recall their emotions, as sharing personal stories can strengthen their engagement during lessons (Newman, 2025). The following figure illustrates this process.



Figure 1.
The teacher provides an initial apperception regarding the role and affection of a mother
(Source: Udyana Kumara Kindergarten 1 Taman, 2025)

Figure 1 depicts the apperception stage of learning activities at Udyana Kumara 1 Taman Kindergarten. During this stage, the teacher employs a narrative and dialogical approach to convey a story about the role and affection of a mother. Children are seated in a circle, which promotes a participatory and supportive environment. This arrangement fosters psychological safety and facilitates active engagement in both cognitive and emotional processes. Storytelling is used to activate children's emotional memories of their mothers, including experiences of care, affection, and daily assistance. This process increases engagement and lays the foundation for internalizing values such as love, empathy, and respect for parents. Additionally, it prepares children to express these feelings authentically in the subsequent core stage, where they write or

draw letters to their mothers. The stage concludes with an interactive discussion that gives children opportunities to share their experiences. This discussion offers cognitive stimulation and activates affective experiences that support emotional expression.

This phase of apperception serves not only to prepare the child for the writing activity but also to create a dialogic space that connects everyday experiences with the process of deriving meaning from values. Conversations about concrete experiences with their mothers allow children to recall the care, assistance, and affection they have received and subsequently articulate these through verbal and emotional responses. Research by Liu & Merritt (2021) indicates that routine activities involving parent-child interaction, such as conversations about daily experiences, are associated with aspects of child behavior. However, their study did not specifically examine the moral content of these conversations or compare them against isolated verbal instructions. Similarly, a study by Caronia & Colla (2023) demonstrates that parent-child dialogue during shared activities provides a space for children to construct and negotiate meaning through conversation; thus, the interaction serves not merely to convey information but also to shape the child's understanding of the experiences they are undergoing. Findings by Hosokawa et al. (2023) further show that family routines are associated with family cohesion and expressiveness, which in turn correlate with children's prosocial behavior. In the context of the present study, these findings reinforce the interpretation that a teacher's reflective questions regarding a child's experiences with their mother can serve as a starting point for transforming daily occurrences into moments of affective and moral reflection. Consequently, this narrative-dialogic apperception is not merely an introductory phase of instruction; rather, it serves as a pedagogical bridge, helping children recognize the significance of affection, care, and respect for their mothers before these values are expressed through the letter-writing activity.

In the third stage, children are instructed to write letters to their mothers using simple writing or drawings tailored to their individual developmental levels. This activity exemplifies emergent literacy, in which children develop literacy skills through meaningful, contextual experiences. Research indicates that writing interactions between children and parents, particularly mothers, significantly support early literacy and language development (Skibbe, 2022). Scaffolding strategies that support writing activities have been shown to gradually enhance children's writing abilities (Neumann & Neumann, 2010). In classroom practice, teachers provide minimal assistance to preserve the authenticity of children's expressions, fostering flexibility and avoiding a standardized format. Children who can write express their feelings in simple sentences, such as "Mom, I love you" or "Thank you, Mom, for taking care of me." Those who are not yet able to write use visual symbols such as hearts, families, houses, or illustrations of activities with their mothers. Some children combine writing and drawing, enabling multimodal communication. The teacher serves as a facilitator, offering limited support such as spelling words or transcribing sentences, without altering the intended message. This approach underscores the child-centered nature of the activity and promotes authentic expression.

Observations indicated that this activity elicited strong emotional responses. Most children demonstrated high enthusiasm, as evidenced by their active participation throughout the activity. Children were engaged not only cognitively but also affectively, displaying expressions such as smiles, laughter, and other emotions. These findings are consistent with research suggesting that expressive writing activities can facilitate emotional regulation and enhance psychological well-being (Kim-Godwin et al., 2020). In several instances, children

spontaneously expressed phrases such as "I miss you, Mom" or "Mom is kind to me," indicating the activation of deep affective emotions. Interactions among children also reflected positive social dynamics as they shared stories about their mothers, thereby fostering natural social learning. The following interview with the Principal of Udyana Kumara 1 Taman Kindergarten (NMNW) corroborates these observations.

> During the activity, we noticed the children started to share their feelings on their own. Some said things like 'I miss Mom' or 'Mom is kind to me,' even though they rarely spoke that way before. As we talked, the children told stories about their mothers, which made the classroom feel warmer and more caring. This showed they were learning not just from the teacher, but also from each other. We created this activity to help build character values, especially compassion, empathy, and gratitude toward parents. Before, the children mostly showed their feelings through actions and struggled to express them with words or pictures. After this activity, they began to share their feelings more openly, both by speaking and through writing and drawing (Interview, 22nd of December 2025).

Headmaster interviews revealed that the activity was purposefully designed to foster character values such as compassion, empathy, gratitude, and respect for parents. Before the intervention, children typically did not explicitly express their feelings, either verbally or symbolically. Affection was primarily conveyed through nonverbal actions, and children lacked the ability to articulate these emotions in words. After participating in the activity, teachers noted significant behavioral changes. Children began to express gratitude and affection more frequently through verbal communication and demonstrated a warmer attitude toward their parents. These findings indicate that the letter-writing activity may promote enduring changes in children's affective behavior.

A comprehensive review of existing scholarly research demonstrates that both classroom-based and home writing practices primarily emphasize the mechanical aspects of handwriting, orthographic accuracy, and transcription skills in young learners (Bingham et al., 2017; Gerde et al., 2015). In contrast, composing a letter to one's mother represents an authentic and meaningful experience, as it requires conveying a message to a real recipient rather than simply practicing letter formation or technical writing skills. Research on authentic writing experiences consistently highlights the importance of self-expression, imaginative engagement, communicative intent, and a clear audience and communicative goal (Graham, 2018; Papadopoulos et al., 2025; Trujillo & Emerson, 2021). Furthermore, the literature indicates that when children engage in writing activities directed toward a specific recipient, they show an improved understanding of communicative purpose, content, and the necessary contextual adaptations (Bird et al., 2024; Riis-Johansen & Yassin Falk, 2026). Therefore, writing a letter to one's mother should be regarded as a prime example of authentic early writing, as it centers on substantive communication with a real person. While aspects such as letter formation, orthographic conventions, and script modality are present, these elements serve as secondary processes rather than the primary objective.

The letter-writing activity examined in this study differs fundamentally from emergent writing exercises focused solely on technical mastery, such as precise letter formation, orthographic accuracy, or mechanical transcription. This activity was deliberately designed and facilitated by the educational institution, with the mother serving as both the motivation and the

actual recipient of the child's communication. As a result, children were encouraged to write from personal and emotional motivations, expressing their experiences, feelings, and appreciation, rather than simply completing prescribed literacy tasks. This approach aligns with empirical findings highlighting the essential role of everyday family interactions and activities in shaping children's behavioral patterns and experiences, even though previous studies may not have specifically addressed letter writing (Liu & Merritt, 2021). In the broader context of writing pedagogy, educators emphasize the need to balance the development of technical skills with opportunities for meaningful composition. Existing evidence further suggests that early childhood writing instruction often prioritizes handwriting and spelling at the expense of fostering composition and meaning-making processes (Gerde et al., 2015). Therefore, activities that provide authentic communicative purposes are critically important.

Empirical studies on teacher mediation confirm the distinction between code-oriented and meaning-oriented pedagogical support, emphasizing the importance of enabling children to construct meaning independently through diverse literacy activities (Gerde et al., 2015). Educators' decisions to address disparities in students' reading and writing abilities by allowing them to express their emotions through visual representations, such as drawings, clearly indicate that the activity was fundamentally focused on meaning-making. Although the initiative at Udyana Kumara 1 Taman Kindergarten primarily aimed to deepen understanding of the mother-child relationship, it also supported the development of code-focused skills by strengthening foundational literacy in early childhood. Research on writing activities based on personal and family experiences shows that when children are positioned as creators with meaningful content to communicate, literacy activities become opportunities for expressive and communicative engagement rather than mere technical exercises (Borre et al., 2019). Consequently, this activity has the potential to foster not only cognitive development but also emotional and attitudinal growth. This aligns with Lickona’s view that character education should address moral cognition, sentiment, and conduct simultaneously and complementarily, rather than focusing solely on moral knowledge (Lickona, 2013). These findings further highlight that the activity promotes both cognitive and emotional development, making the experience more significant. Such results are consistent with research indicating that meaning-centered tasks, such as writing about oneself and one's family, encourage children to act as intentional agents who actively construct meaning (Aram & Levin, 2001).

The letter-writing activity analyzed in this study exemplifies a meaning-oriented approach to emergent writing, integrating foundational literacy skill development with the nurturing of children's emotional and relational experiences. The mother's role as recipient provides a clear communicative purpose, while the educational institution facilitates a learning environment that enables children to express these experiences through various modalities, including writing, drawings, symbolic forms, and other age-appropriate representations. This activity demonstrates the effective integration of character education within simple, experience-based tasks. Additionally, it serves as a bridge for communication between the school and families, as children's letters become tangible means for direct emotional engagement with parents. The activity also offers children the opportunity to develop early literacy skills in a context rich with meaning, rather than through rote exercises. Therefore, the letter-writing activity at TK Udyana Kumara 1 Taman stands as a model of experiential learning that synthesizes cognitive, emotional, and social development in alignment with the needs of early childhood.

2. **Strengthening Character Analysis within Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Framework**

The activity demonstrated that the most prominent character values developed were affection, empathy, gratitude, and respect for parents. These values were expressed both through language, such as statements like "Mom, but I also love you" or "Thank you, Mom," and through symbolic representations, including images of hearts, hugs, and emotionally significant group activities. These findings indicate that children have progressed beyond a cognitive understanding of values and have begun to internalize them, with personal emotional experiences serving as the primary medium for character development. From a developmental psychology perspective, gratitude emerges as a key value. It is a complex prosocial emotion encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. Gratitude contributes to strengthening interpersonal relationships and enhancing children's psychological well-being (Obeldobel & Kerns, 2021).

Karkanidis & Linardakis (2025) assert that empathy and gratitude develop concurrently. A child's capacity to understand others' emotions (empathy) is essential for appreciating received kindness (gratitude), and both values promote prosocial behavior. In this context, children's written and drawn expressions reflect their developing emotional awareness. Research on socioemotional development indicates that this awareness is strongly influenced by the quality of parent-child relationships, particularly emotional attachment and parental sensitivity. Warm and responsive relationships foster empathy, emotional regulation, and social skills in children (Santana-Ferrándiz et al., 2025). The ability to express emotions through letter writing demonstrates early literacy development and establishes a foundation for prosocial character, rooted in meaningful family relationships, especially between mothers and children.

According to Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, these findings illustrate dynamic interactions within the microsystem, which encompasses the child's immediate environment, including family and school. The mother-child relationship constitutes a central component of the microsystem and directly influences character development through frequent, intense, and emotionally significant interactions. The family serves as the primary context for child development, shaping experiences, values, and behaviors (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Within this framework, letter writing reactivates emotional experiences in the family microsystem and enables values such as compassion and empathy to be learned and reconstructed through reflective experience. This process is depicted in the following figure.



Figure 2.
A child offers Mother's Day congratulations, expresses emotions, and submits completed work.
(Source: Udyana Kumara Kindergarten 1 Taman, 2025)

The figure depict an emotional interaction between a child and his mother during a Mother's Day event at school. In these images, the child presents his work and receives affectionate responses, including hugs and kisses. The first image illustrates the mother embracing her child, emphasizing their strong bond. The subsequent image captures a conversation between the child and mother as the work is presented, highlighting a meaningful exchange. These instances demonstrate that letter-writing extends beyond a classroom exercise and serves as an authentic component of family life. Such experiences indicate that school-based learning reinforces the child's connection with their mother. Through these interactions, the child internalizes values such as kindness and empathy, not merely as abstract concepts but through tangible, thoughtful experiences. These moments encompass affection, emotional communication, and enhanced closeness between parent and child.

This perspective aligns with the understanding that the family is the primary context in which children learn to understand, manage, and respond to emotional experiences. These processes occur through the family's emotional climate, emotional modeling, and parental emotion socialization practices (Keller et al., 2024). Supportive parental responses to children's emotions are associated with the development of emotion regulation, as children acquire skills in recognizing, accepting, and adaptively managing emotions. In this study, although the school initiated the letter-writing activity and mothers did not supervise the writing process, the maternal figure was intentionally introduced as an emotional stimulus. This approach enabled children to recall concrete experiences of affection, care, protection, and togetherness rooted in the family microsystem.

These experiences are subsequently reconstructed through recollection by selecting meaningful moments and articulating them through words, images, or symbols. Puspitoningrum et al. (2024) support this perspective, viewing creative writing as an expressive activity that enables children to communicate thoughts and feelings, develop perspectives, and connect emotional experiences to an understanding of themselves and others. Furthermore, the study highlights that writing functions as a medium for emotional expression and facilitates children's understanding and appreciation of others' experiences, a process linked to the development of empathy. Therefore, the letters to mothers in this study can be regarded as a pedagogical tool that reactivates emotional experiences within the family microsystem and transforms them into reflections and expressions of values. As a result, affection, respect, and empathy are not merely values conveyed verbally by teachers but are reconstructed by children through their own experiences.

The school's endorsement of this activity demonstrates the connection between the child's primary environments: family and school. The letter-writing assignment functions as a bridge linking home and school experiences. This suggests that character development is most effective when both family and school collaborate (Mujahidah, 2015). Consequently, character values are cultivated through experiences in both settings rather than in isolation. This concept is further illustrated in the subsequent interview with a parent (NWS).

> After the letter-writing activity, I noticed a real change in my child. He started sharing his feelings more, saying things like 'I love you, Mom' or 'Thank you, Mom,' which he hardly ever did before. At home, he also became more talkative and warmer with us. I think this school activity is very helpful because what he learns in class really shows in his daily life at home (Interview, 22nd of December 2025).

Findings from parent interviews indicate a transfer of values from the school environment to the family context. Parents reported that their children became more expressive in demonstrating affection, expressed gratitude more frequently, and exhibited a warmer demeanor in daily interactions. These outcomes suggest that the impact of the activities extends beyond the school microsystem into the family microsystem and may also influence the exosystem, such as parental interaction patterns in response to children's behavior. Child development is therefore shaped not only by the immediate environment but also by broader social systems that interact indirectly with the child (Ibda, 2022).

These findings regarding literacy and parental interaction align with research demonstrating that parental involvement in children's literacy activities serves as a modeling and mentoring mechanism that significantly supports social-emotional and character development (Wahidah et al., 2025). Furthermore, writing interactions between mothers and children have been shown to enhance symbolic expression skills and foster deeper emotional connections (Skibbe, 2022). Thus, the letter-writing activity in this study functions not only as a literacy practice but also as a relational approach that reinforces emotional bonds and character values.

From a psychological perspective, writing activities, particularly expressive writing, serve cathartic and reflective functions by enabling children to recognize, manage, and articulate their emotions more purposefully. Such activities have been shown to improve emotional regulation and self-awareness (Nurhuda, 2017) and to contribute to psychological well-being and the development of self-meaning (Ruini & Mortara, 2022). Therefore, the emergence of compassion, empathy, and gratitude in this context results from a structured process of emotional reflection through writing rather than from immediate learning.

The central role of mothers in shaping children's character further substantiates these findings. As primary educators within the family, mothers play a crucial role in instilling values, norms, and social behaviors from an early age (Kasmiati, 2018). Close interaction between mother and child facilitates the internalization of these values, particularly when reinforced through meaningful emotional experiences such as those provided by this activity. This situation illustrates that writing letters to one's mother is consistent with the ecological framework of development. At the microsystem level, letter writing directly enhances the affective bond between the child and the mother. The letter functions as a medium for emotional communication, allowing the child to express affection, gratitude, and closeness with increased conscious awareness. These observations align with research indicating that the quality of the parent-child relationship, particularly emotional attachment, is essential for the development of prosocial emotions such as empathy and gratitude (Obeldobel & Kerns, 2021). Additionally, parental sensitivity in responding to a child's emotional expressions forms the basis for the development of emotional regulation and social skills (Santana-Ferrándiz et al., 2025). Therefore, this activity not only strengthens the relationship but also facilitates the internalization of values through direct emotional experience.

A child's character development results from dynamic interactions among multiple, layered environmental systems rather than a single factor. The school's facilitation of a letter-writing activity addressed to mothers represents a mesosystem, linking home and school contexts that mutually influence a child's development. From a developmental ecology perspective, the significance of context relationships emerges when family-based experiences are expressed, interpreted, and further developed through educational experiences at school. This

perspective is supported by Surikova & González (2022), who state that family and school involvement entails interaction and communication across at least two contexts, home and school, while family-school partnerships are established through collaborative relationships and activities involving the school, parents, and other family members. The model proposed by Surikova & González (2022) conceptualizes the family, child, and school as an interconnected unit linked by bidirectional relationships, including child-parent, family-school, and school-student connections. In the present study, this interconnectedness is demonstrated through a school initiative that uses the mother as a stimulus for a letter-writing activity, thereby integrating the child's emotional experiences from family life into the educational environment. The child subsequently processes experiences of affection, care, nurturing, and closeness with the mother through teacher-facilitated writing or drawing activities.

Therefore, schools do not supplant the family's role in character formation; rather, they establish a pedagogical space that connects family experiences with the educational process. This perspective is consistent with findings that the effectiveness of family-school partnerships in character education depends on value alignment, shared responsibility, and opportunities for engagement and communication between families and schools (Surikova & Fernández González, 2022). At the mesosystem level, this activity demonstrates strong integration between school and family environments. The school serves as a mediator, translating learning experiences into tangible practices within family life. The letter brought home acts as a bridge for emotional communication between child and parent, ensuring that values instilled at school are reinforced in home interactions. This is consistent with findings that a child's character development is optimized when there is synergy between the family and the school, which are the primary environments for socialization (Karkanidis & Linardakis, 2025). In summary, this activity reinforces the continuity of learning experiences across contexts. The act of writing a letter to one's mother thus represents a mesosystemic mechanism: a process in which the child's experience within the family microsystem is activated and reconstructed through educational practices at school, ensuring continuity of values such as affection, respect, and care across both home and educational settings.

At the exosystem level, the effectiveness of this activity is influenced by indirect factors such as school policies and family socioeconomic conditions. School support in providing character-based learning opportunities through thematic activities is essential for successful implementation. Additionally, parents' diverse occupational backgrounds affect the intensity of children's interactions at home, making this activity a valuable intervention to bridge gaps in emotional communication within families. In this context, the broader social environment continues to shape children's experiences, even in the absence of direct interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). he mesosystem encompasses the direct relationship between home and school. In contrast, the exosystem refers to institutional contexts or environments in which the child does not directly participate but in which decisions and characteristics can influence the child's developmental experiences.

The activity of writing a letter to one's mother can also be analyzed at the exosystem level, specifically through the school's decisions, policies, climate, and institutional practices that establish the conditions for the activity. Although the child is directly involved in writing, they do not determine the activity's design, implementation, or how the school fosters connections with families. These decisions reside within the school's institutional domain and indirectly shape the child's developmental experience. This perspective aligns with Kelty & Wakabayashi

(2020), who state that ecological systems theory conceptualizes child development as the result of interconnections among various environments, including learning settings, family, community institutions, and policies, which mutually influence one another.

The study demonstrates that family engagement is a shared responsibility, fostered through school strategies that connect children's learning to their family and community contexts. Such engagement also occurs through various school-designed activities intended to bridge home and school. In this study, TK Udyana Kumara 1 Taman's decision to implement a letter-writing activity addressed to mothers constitutes an exosystemic mechanism. The institutional policy or initiative positions the mother as a stimulus for learning and allows family experiences to be dbe integrated into educational practice. Therefore, the exosystem's influence is found not in the actions of the mother or child during the writing process, but in the institutional conditions that enable this connection. Findings by Surikova & González (2022) support this view, indicating that school factors such as environment, climate, ethos, and educators' competence and attitudes can either facilitate or hinder family involvement in character education.

Consequently, the letter-writing activity should be understood not only as a classroom literacy exercise but as a product of the school's institutional environment that indirectly shapes the child's developmental experience by utilizing the child's emotional bond with their mother to stimulate character formation. This process operates within the Balinese-Hindu cultural macrosystem, which assigns normative significance to respect and devotion toward mothers. At the macrosystem level, this activity embodies the internalization of cultural and religious values, particularly within Balinese and Hindu contexts, through the concept of *matru devo bhava*, which emphasizes respect for mothers as a moral and spiritual value. This value is not simply inherited but is actualized through concrete learning experiences. From a cultural perspective, values such as gratitude and empathy are integral to the process of value socialization within both the family and broader society (Karkanidis & Linardakis, 2025). Therefore, this activity possesses a cultural dimension that reinforces the legitimacy of the character values it promotes.

Within Balinese Hinduism, this value is not simply an abstract teaching but is embedded in a cultural system that integrates religious life, social ethics, and daily practices. Pastika et al. (2025) demonstrate that Vedic teachings form the foundation of religious and social life for Balinese Hindus; after acculturation with local culture, these teachings are incorporated into everyday practices. The teachings include the principle of *dharma*, understood as moral obligation, which encompasses honesty, justice, and respect for parents and teachers. Hindu education in *pasraman* settings positions teachings such as *Aham Brahmāsmi* and *Tat Tvam Asi* as the basis for character development and ethical conduct, indicating that Hindu philosophical teachings are intended to be embodied in both consciousness and action rather than understood solely as doctrine (Suwantana et al., 2026). The activity of writing a letter to one's mother thus serves as a pedagogical space that translates this macrosystemic value into a child's concrete experience. When a child recalls their mother's care, expresses affection, conveys gratitude, or describes shared moments, the value of respect for parents becomes a lived experience, an expression, and a symbolic action that align with the child's developmental stage. The concept of *matru devo bhava* in this activity can therefore be viewed as a macrosystemic value framework that provides moral orientation to the task. Simultaneously, the school translates this value into a concrete and meaningful learning experience for the child. This is illustrated in the following interview with a student (NPTIP).

> I want to give this letter to Mom because Mom should be loved. The teacher said that mothers must be respected. I want to say thank you because Mom has taken care of me (Interview, 21st December 2025).

This quotation exemplifies the macrosystem, as the child's understanding of their mother arises not only from personal experience but also from normative and cultural values concerning respect for parents, which are introduced through formal education. The statement "mothers must be respected" indicates that the child connects the experience of affection to broader norms regarding moral obligations toward one's mother. In the Balinese Hindu context, this expression can be interpreted as a concrete manifestation of the value *matru devo bhava*, which signifies respect for the mother as a figure of significant moral and spiritual importance. A similar sentiment is evident in the interview with NPLM:

> I made this card for Mother's Day. Mothers should be loved and respected. I want to say thank you because Mom has taken care of me(Interview, 21st December 2025).

The statement, "I made this card for Mother's Day," demonstrates how a specific temporal event prompts emotional expression, while "Mothers should be loved and respected" reflects the internalization of normative values regarding the parent-child relationship. This learning experience reveals the intersection of the chronosystem, represented by the occasion of Mother's Day, and the macrosystem, represented by cultural values of affection and respect for mothers. Notably, these values are not simply reproduced conceptually by the child but are expressed in language appropriate to their developmental stage.

At the chronosystem level, the occasion of Mother's Day provides a temporal context that reinforces the emotional significance of writing a letter to one's mother. Aligning this activity with Mother's Day ensures that the child's experience is situated within a socio-cultural event that directs attention toward the mother, the emotional bond, and the importance of appreciating parents. From a developmental ecology perspective, the temporal dimension is essential, as child development occurs through changes and events over time, encompassing both personal experiences and broader social contexts. Mother's Day thus serves as a temporal trigger that reactivates the child's experiences with their mother and offers a contextual rationale for expressing those experiences through writing, drawings, or symbols. This context strengthens the connection between the child's individual experiences and the social and cultural values emphasized at that time. In this study, Mother's Day functions not merely as a calendar marker but as a temporal context that directs the child's attention, memory, and emotional expression toward their mother. Within this framework, the letter-writing activity takes on deeper meaning as the child recalls and shares relevant personal experiences during a socially dedicated moment honoring the mother.

Research indicates that children use drawing and storytelling activities to process and express meaningful experiences, especially when prompted by contextual cues or specific events (Dozio, 2016). This experience has the potential to become a "developmental memory" that shapes the child's long-term behavioral patterns in the child's relationship with their parents. Developmental studies further suggest that meaningful emotional experiences during childhood play a significant role in shaping future identity and character. Notably, the findings of this study reveal that a simple activity, such as writing a letter to one's mother, can significantly impact

character formation in early childhood. This finding highlights that the effectiveness of character education is determined less by program complexity and more by the provision of learning experiences that are meaningful, contextual, and emotionally resonant—within this framework, writing functions as a reflective medium that enables children to articulate their emotional experiences, a practice that, according to positive psychology research, contributes to well-being and prosocial development (Obeldobel & Kerns, 2021).

However, these findings should be interpreted in light of certain limitations. First, children aged 5–6 are still developing, and their written expression may not conform to conventional writing norms. Instead, their work may include drawings, symbols, simple words, or combinations of text and visual elements. Therefore, the meaning conveyed must be interpreted in context, considering the children's explanations, the activity's process, and insights from teachers and parents, rather than relying solely on the written output. Second, the activity's meaningfulness is strongly influenced by the teacher's ability to foster a safe and supportive learning environment without excessively directing the content of children's expressions. The teacher's role is essential, as the activity requires not only technical facilitation but also engagement with children's emotional experiences, provision of appropriate scaffolding, and preservation of their autonomy in message selection. Consequently, letter-writing activities should not be regarded as pedagogical procedures that automatically result in value internalization. Their success depends on the quality of interactions, the learning context, and the teacher's sensitivity to each child's developmental stage and individual experiences.

The research findings further indicate that family-based character education can be incorporated into school learning practices through simple activities with authentic communicative and emotional purposes. In this framework, schools do not replace the family's role but instead provide a pedagogical space for children to revisit, reflect upon, and express family experiences within the educational setting. As such, writing a letter to one's mother can be conceptualized as an "ecological" micro-practice of character education. This single activity bridges a child's experiences across family and school microsystems, fosters connections at the mesosystem level, and is supported by institutional conditions (exosystem) and cultural-religious values (macrosystem). Additionally, the celebration of Mother's Day introduces a chronosystem dimension, enhancing the temporal relevance of the activity. Through this process, sentiments such as affection, empathy, gratitude, and respect for one's mother are constructed not through verbal instruction alone, but through recalling experiences, reflecting on relationships, and communicating feelings to a significant figure. The primary contribution of this activity lies not in the production of conventional writing, but in the child's ability to transform relational experiences into meaningful symbolic expressions, thereby integrating literacy, affect, family relationships, and cultural values into a single, contextual learning experience.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the activity of writing letters to one's mother is not merely an early literacy exercise but a pedagogical practice that transforms a child's relational experiences into meaningful expressions of character. Key findings reveal that when the mother serves as both the stimulus and the actual recipient of the child's message, experiences of affection, care, nurturing, and togetherness originally rooted in the child's daily life can be reactivated, reflected upon, and represented through writing, drawings, or symbols, in accordance with the child's developmental capabilities. The analysis indicates that this process

unfolds across multiple layers: the child's interaction with the teacher and shared experiences with the mother form the microsystem; bringing family experiences into school activities establishes the mesosystem; school initiatives creating space for family engagement represent the influence of the exosystem; the value of respecting one's mother within the Balinese-Hindu cultural context provides the macrosystem orientation; and the occasion of Mother's Day offers the temporal context of the chronosystem. These findings show that values such as affection, empathy, gratitude, and respect for parents are not primarily instilled through direct moral instruction but rather through the reconstruction of experiences that are emotional, relational, cultural, and temporal. Thus, the study contributes the insight that a simple activity like letter-writing can serve as a character education "micro-practice," integrating literacy, emotional experience, family involvement, and cultural values into a holistic learning experience. At the same time, the study underscores that the meaningfulness of this practice relies heavily on the teacher's ability to provide appropriate scaffolding without usurping the child's voice, ensuring that the final work truly represents the child's own experiences and interpretations. However, the present findings do not address long-term impacts on children's character formation. They also do not comprehensively examine the roles of other family members or variations in socio-cultural backgrounds. Additionally, internal psychological mechanisms such as self-efficacy and emotional regulation, which may mediate value internalization, have not been thoroughly analyzed. Consequently, further research using longitudinal and multidimensional approaches is needed for a more complete understanding.

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