

Folklore and Illustrated Children's Books: A Simple Indigenous Knowledge Preservation Form to Foster Culture and Literacy

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Abstract. The preservation of indigenous knowledge in Indonesia is often carried out through the conservation of oral culture, particularly folklore, which serves as an essential aspect of community identity. This study aims to examine the efforts to preserve indigenous folklore and its role in fostering cultural awareness and literacy skills among elementary school children in Parigi Moutong Regency, Central Sulawesi Province. Employing a qualitative approach, this research reveals three key findings: (1) students primarily learn about indigenous folklore through oral storytelling, while children's literature containing local folklore remains limited; (2) the preservation of indigenous folklore involves interviews with traditional leaders and elders, followed by the adaptation of folklore into illustrated children's books through collaboration between local writers and professional illustrators; and (3) the introduction of folklore through illustrated books, particularly via read-aloud activities, enhances students' comprehension of folklore and deepens their cultural understanding of Parigi Moutong Regency. This study highlights the importance of integrating folklore into literacy programs to sustain indigenous knowledge and strengthen cultural identity among young learners.

Keywords: knowledge preservation; folklore; indigenous knowledge; illustrated children's book.

1 Introduction

This study highlights the critical role of preserving indigenous knowledge in the form of folklore in increasing essential cultural and literacy skills that are more contextually relevant. Indonesia has the potential for traditional and indigenous knowledge in the current context. Therefore, it is necessary to extract more contextual indigenous knowledge of the community from various sources and document and transfer it, especially for indigenous knowledge, which is still in the form of tacit knowledge only known or owned by certain people or community groups. With the preservation activities, we can find out and map the variety of indigenous knowledge of the community and examine the values relevant to forming students' character and identity.

Several studies have emphasized the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge into educational practices, one of which is folklore owned by the community. Integrating indigenous knowledge can increase students' understanding of culture, history, and local wisdom, fostering values such as mutual respect, diversity, and environmental preservation. In particular, preserving indigenous knowledge of the folklore of the Parigi Moutong people, Central

Sulawesi Province, in the form of illustrated children's books, can be a link between community traditions in oral form and cultural and literacy skills in school.

The need to instill, familiarize, and improve basic literacy skills in the global era can start at the elementary school (SD) level. Elementary school age is a phase of forming the foundations that shape a child's character and identity, including cultural and basic literacy skills. One way is through children's literature, which has exciting and fun stories in illustrated books because pictures and colors can attract children's enthusiasm. Pictures that have color will improve memory and stimulate the working processes of the child's right brain [1].

Folklore-illustrated children's books are essential in cultivating, familiarizing, and improving cultural and literacy skills because folklore is a vital source for understanding the development of society because of its openness in reflecting the values, norms, and daily life of society at that time. Indirectly, folklore is part of efforts to preserve the culture passed down from ancestors to future generations, starting from elementary school-age children, so that the value of learning in stories can fostered from an early age.

2 Method

This research is research with a qualitative approach. The data collection process for this research was carried out in two different stages. First, folklore data from local communities were collected through literature reviews and unstructured interviews regarding the development of community folklore within predetermined regional and cultural boundaries. Then, field interviews were conducted with informants from traditional leaders and figures related to folklore in Parigi Moutong Regency, Central Sulawesi Province. In-depth interviews with the informants were conducted from September to November 2022, the primary data source for this research. The interview aims to confirm, explore, and document folklore as indigenous knowledge in the Parigi Moutong Regency community. Interview informants are selected based on their knowledge, ownership, expertise, and involvement in traditions and culture, especially local community folklore. The dataset examined in this research consists of interview results.

The results of the interviews were then turned into illustrated children's book manuscripts by a writer from Parigi Moutong Regency, who also understands the traditions and folklore of the local community, in collaboration with a professional illustrator.

Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with elementary school-age children and class teachers in Parigi Moutong Regency. Interviews were conducted to obtain data on related essential cultural and literacy skills of children who had read and read aloud four illustrated folklore book titles, which were folklore media products.

3 Findings and Discussion

Parigi Moutong Regency, Central Sulawesi, is a region in Indonesia that has its characteristics and customs. The relationship between custom and ethnicity reveals that each cultural group in Parigi Moutong Regency has different traditions and values, one of which is the community's folklore. Folklore, as a product of society's oral culture, will always change according to the dynamics of the community that owns it. Unfortunately, folklore in Indonesia has not been well documented, even though it is a cultural wealth of indigenous knowledge and values and is the result of the creativity of the people who own it. Changing or losing folklore

as an oral cultural product also means losing indigenous knowledge and cultural treasures [2]). This also refers to the loss of identity of the community that owns it. Therefore, activities that preserve and introduce folklore from an early age need to be carried out in a more organized and sustainable way. In this research, the author focuses research on the process of documenting the folklore of the indigenous people of Parigi Moutong Regency, the process of preserving folklore as indigenous knowledge into illustrated children's books, and the practice of implementing children's books in fostering children's cultural and literacy skills.

3.1 Folklore as Indigenous Knowledge and its Existence in Parigi Moutong Regency

Folklore is generally associated with stories of animals, superheroes, toponymy of a region, and supernatural things. Folklore is essential in studying repetitive practices considered conventional in introducing culture, especially to children, because folklore includes ideas used to create a culture at various levels, from people to nations [3]. Folklore is a product of everyday life and traditions in which children grow up. It is considered capable of reflecting and describing the appropriate social environment so that children can learn the social behavior patterns of their community through this folklore. Culture stimulates the mind,

Research finds that folklore is a culture quickly becoming extinct and readily subject to story distortion. This is not only due to the transfer process being carried out orally but also the lack of preserving and media transfer processes that are easily accessible to the public. It is easier for people, especially children, to find and read folklore from areas outside the island of Sulawesi, for example, Malin Kundang, Roro Jongrang, Tangkuban Perahu, or Batu Menangis. Preserving activities or media transfer as part of folklore preservation in Parigi Moutong is also still limited. In schools, folklore is found in anthology books or collections with text, no illustrations, and not in color. This reduces children's interest in reading and knowing the indigenous people's folklore.

Apart from the minimal documentation process and the conversion of folklore media into a form attractive to children, distortion of stories also often occurs. This is not only because folklore was born according to the needs of the people. It differs from one region to another, but the use of regional languages in everyday life also influences the existence and development of folklore. The massive use of Indonesian, especially in the formal education system, has caused several regional terms that have no equivalent in Indonesian to be lost. This also occurs when transferring indigenous knowledge in the form of folklore.

Children's perception that indigenous people's folklore is a product of the past and is less popular than popular cultural products such as superheroes means that folklore is no longer an essential cultural product and needs to be preserved, especially among children. The most critical problem in the existence of the original folklore of the Parigi Moutong Regency community is the increasing age of traditional leaders who understand folklore well. It is feared that this will eliminate the existence of the folklore of the original Parigi Moutong community.

3.2 Preserving Folklore as Indigenous Knowledge into Illustrated Children's Books

In storing and documenting indigenous knowledge, knowledge preservation is used to preserve and maintain cultural practices and heritage as an identity for future generations. So, preserving indigenous knowledge not only helps preserve culture but also forms part of forming the identity and character of the generations. Knowledge preservation activities can be carried

out using various methods and practices, including exchanging original knowledge from the knowledge owner to other people or groups. This exchange activity can occur informally and unstructured, such as in storytelling activities. This activity is commonly found in society, forming a shared collective memory.

However, preserving indigenous knowledge can also be done in a structured manner by documenting and transferring media. This indigenous knowledge preservation activity aims to ensure that the memory or knowledge of indigenous people or groups is preserved to maintain their practical capacity. Knowledge preservation includes two main activities: capturing and storing knowledge in a knowledge reservoir. Mazour argues, "Knowledge conservation is a process of maintaining knowledge that is important for an organization's mission, which stores knowledge or information over time and provides the possibility of being recalled in the future" [4].

This research determines four folklores of the people of Parigi Moutong Regency, which will be preserved from tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge. The four folklores are determined based on the urgency of introducing folklore to children, the existence of folklore among communities, children's interests and preferences for topics, and folklore stories. The folklore selected for preservation are (1) Randa Ntovea, (2) Legend of Tasi Kodi, (3) Vatu Nipada, and (4) Volo Mbulava and Irantea. The four folklores include toponymic folklore, which tells the story of the origins of naming in Parigi Moutong Regency.

Knowledge gathering was conducted using interview techniques with one of the traditional leaders in Parigi Moutung Regency, who comes from the Kaili Tribe. Data collection through interviews aims to confirm and rewrite the folklore of key research informants. Researchers collaborated with two local writers to document and rewrite four folk tales, then drafted them into children's book manuscripts. Writing adjustments were made by considering the target readers, namely lower-grade elementary school-age children in Parigi Moutung Regency.

Illustrated children's books are an essential medium that helps the learning process and children's cognitive and emotional development [5]; [6]; [7]. Apart from that, illustrated children's books also greatly influence children's language development. For this reason, illustrated children's books that are specially prepared to highlight the quality and sensitivity of the artist are needed so that children acquire the habit and pleasure of reading. Apart from that, by reading quality illustrated books with parents, children will have a pleasant and meaningful reading experience. Research shows that children's interactions with illustrated books from the start can help their growth, development, and intellectual and artistic awareness [8]).

Some folklore, such as the Legend of Tasi Kodi and Volo Mbulava and Irantea, contain old traditions of the Parigi people, which today conflict with the community's religious and cultural values. The tradition of offerings to the rulers of the earth and cockfighting becomes a problem when you want to put it into children's stories. However, removing this part will change the entire content of folklore. Writing a children's book manuscript also considers sentence structure, clarity of message, and storyline.

A professional illustrator then illustrates the manuscript. The process of making illustrations requires discussion with traditional leaders and writers because it concerns the traditions and life of the people in Parigi Moutung in ancient times. Details of the landscape, clothing, knick-knacks, and even the clothing used are interesting. Folklore is a medium for studying culture and traditions, so ornamental details are an essential concern so that the transfer of values is not distorted. Collecting data, documenting, writing the script, and converting the media into a children's book took 11 months.

Before the book is printed and distributed, field testing is held. Field testing was conducted online by inviting several children as representatives of elementary school students in Parigi

Moutung Regency. Children were asked to assess books regarding clarity of message, plot, story, illustrations, choice of letters, color, and book size. Field testing results are used as final evaluation and revision material before printing and distributing the book.

3.3 Implementation of Illustrated Children's Books to Foster Culture and Literacy Skills

Distribution and socialization activities are part of accessing the practice of preserving original knowledge. The basic process of preservation of knowledge according to selecting, collecting, storing, actualizing, protecting, and accessing [9]. The use of folklore in the form of illustrated books in class and at home is carried out through narrative activities.

Narrative activities are commonly used in early years education as a valuable tool for developing oral language and literacy. In its development, it became known as read-aloud. Narrative activities through read-aloud support literacy development because they help children learn ideas about how to use language and encourage oral skills [10]. Read-aloud activities can encourage writing skills by inspiring children to create their own stories, change stories they have read, and even write plays based on popular stories [10]; [11]. It is often considered beneficial due to its support for many aspects of children's growth, including cognitive, physical, emotional, and spiritual. It can strengthen cognitive engagement, critical thinking, and story sequencing [12].

Folklore is also a suitable medium for motivating children to be interested in reading, especially using the form of illustrated children's books. This media can also train children's vocabulary and grammar development and skills. And most importantly, introducing folklore through illustrated children's books helps strengthen children's cultural understanding. Folklore in illustrated children's book packaging is motivating and fun for children, teachers, and parents. Additionally, involving children in reading activities using folklore gives them an impressive and meaningful experience. Children experience moments of closeness and emotional bonding with teachers and parents when doing read-aloud, building children's self-confidence because they are given space to express opinions and convey ideas.

The read-aloud activity of illustrated folklore books can attract students to complete the reading in one session. This is caused by several factors, including attractive illustrations with striking colors matching the story and simple sentence structures adapted to the target reader. So, the process of reading this illustrated folklore book will strengthen children's understanding of the text and the analysis and inferences of children's stories, especially when done with parental assistance.

4 Conclusions

This research examines the role of folklore in the form of illustrated children's books as part of preserving the original knowledge of local communities and its use to foster basic and cultural literacy in children. The activity of externalizing folklore from tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge was carried out through interviews with traditional leaders and tribal leaders, which was then converted into an illustrated children's book manuscript. This research selected four manuscripts, which will then be translated into media. Local writers carry out the media transfer process in collaboration with professional illustrators. Converting media into illustrated children's books prioritizes the characteristics of children as the target readers.

Implementing folklore media products is done through read-aloud school activities for lower-grade students. Apart from that, read-aloud activities are also carried out at home with parents. This activity aims to build children's essential literacy competencies and knowledge about local folklore and culture and their critical powers.

Therefore, this research not only underlines the importance of folklore that is more contextual and comes from the local community in educational practice but also recommends that activities to preserve original knowledge in the form of folklore be transferred to the form of illustrated children's books or other formats that further encourage the development of literacy competence—basic and cultural literacy of children in Indonesia.

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