



INTEGRATING FOLKLORE INTO LITERACY INSTRUCTION TO PROMOTE STUDENTS' CULTURAL AWARENESS IN INDONESIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Cultural awareness is an essential component of literacy education because students need to understand texts not only as linguistic products but also as cultural expressions that contain values, identities, beliefs, and social meanings. However, literacy instruction in many classrooms still emphasizes decoding, vocabulary, literal comprehension, and written exercises, while students' local cultural knowledge is rarely used as a meaningful resource for reading and interpretation. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of integrating folklore into literacy instruction to promote students' cultural awareness and to explore how students experience folklore-based literacy activities. The study employed a mixed-method design using a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group approach supported by classroom observations, student interviews, reflective journals, and document analysis. The participants were 84 Grade VIII students divided into an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group received folklore-based literacy instruction through reading, cultural inquiry, narrative analysis, value reflection, group discussion, and creative response tasks. The control group received conventional literacy instruction using general narrative texts. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, independent-sample t-tests, normalized gain

scores, and effect size analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings showed that folklore-based literacy instruction significantly improved students' cultural awareness. Students developed stronger cultural knowledge, appreciation of local values, perspective-taking, and identity reflection. The study concludes that folklore can become a powerful literacy resource when cultural meanings are explicitly connected to reading, discussion, reflection, and student response.

Keywords: folklore; literacy instruction; cultural awareness; narrative texts; local culture

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A. Introduction

Literacy education is not limited to the ability to read and write. It also involves interpreting texts, understanding context, and connecting reading to broader social and cultural meaning.

In many school contexts, literacy instruction still focuses heavily on reading accuracy, vocabulary comprehension, and main idea identification, with limited attention to cultural meaning embedded in texts.

Folklore offers a valuable resource for addressing this limitation. Folklore includes folktales, legends, myths, and oral traditions that carry community values, historical memory, and shared cultural identity.

Integrating folklore into literacy instruction is especially relevant in multilingual and multicultural societies. Students bring diverse cultural backgrounds, and folklore can serve as a bridge connecting personal identity with shared national and local heritage.

The use of folklore in literacy education is consistent with culturally responsive pedagogy. Gay (2002) argues that students learn more effectively when instructional content reflects their cultural frames of reference.

Folklore also supports multicultural and intercultural education. Banks (1993) explains that multicultural education helps students understand both their own culture and the perspectives of others through shared narrative traditions.

In literacy studies, culturally relevant texts have been shown to support engagement and comprehension. Guthrie et al. (2004) found that interest and relevance are strong predictors of reading engagement and comprehension outcomes.

Previous research has indicated the potential of folktales and local narratives in language and literacy learning. Safitri (2023) and Novianti (2022) found that Indonesian folk narratives support both language development and cultural identity formation.

However, integrating folklore into literacy instruction requires careful design. Folklore should not be used merely as a decorative or entertaining text but must be embedded in structured activities that promote genuine cultural reflection.

The problem addressed in this study is that students' cultural awareness is often underdeveloped in literacy classrooms that rely primarily on generic, culturally neutral texts. This study examines the effectiveness of folklore-based literacy instruction in promoting students' cultural awareness and explores how students experience this instructional approach.

B. Method

This study employed a mixed-method research design. The quantitative component used a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design to measure effects on cultural awareness, supplemented by observations, interviews, and document analysis.

The participants were 84 Grade VIII students from a secondary school. Two intact classes were selected: an experimental group (42 students) and a control group (42 students), with comparable prior literacy achievement.

The experimental group received folklore-based literacy instruction for eight meetings, using learning materials consisting of local folktales and legends selected for age-appropriateness and

clarity of cultural values, supported by structured discussion, value interpretation, and reflective writing activities.

The control group received conventional literacy instruction using general narrative texts from textbooks. Students read the texts, answered comprehension questions, and discussed the stories without explicit cultural analysis.

The main quantitative instrument was a Cultural Awareness in Literacy Scale consisting of 36 items measuring four dimensions: cultural knowledge, cultural appreciation, perspective-taking, and identity reflection (reliability 0.89).

Qualitative data were collected through eight classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with 16 students, student reflective journals, and learning documents from the experimental group.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, independent-sample t-tests, normalized gain scores, and Cohen's d; qualitative data were analyzed thematically and triangulated with the quantitative results.

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Finding

Students' Cultural Awareness before and after the Intervention

The pretest results showed that the experimental and control groups had comparable initial cultural awareness, with no significant difference, confirming baseline equivalence before the intervention.

After eight meetings, the posttest results showed a clear difference between the groups, with the experimental group obtaining a notably higher mean cultural awareness score than the control group.

Table 1. Cultural Awareness Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Test	N	Mean	SD	Interpretation
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Experimental	Pretest	42	3.04	0.41	Moderate
Experimental	Posttest	42	4.16	0.38	High
Control	Pretest	42	3.02	0.43	Moderate
Control	Posttest	42	3.45	0.46	Moderate to high

Source: Processed from Cultural Awareness in Literacy Scale data.

The paired-sample t-test showed that the experimental group improved significantly from pretest to posttest, $t(41) = 16.24$, $p < .001$, with a larger gain than the control group's improvement.

Table 2. Gain Scores and Statistical Comparison

Indicator	Experimental Group	Control Group	Statistical Result
Mean gain	1.12	0.43	Experimental group higher
Normalized gain	0.57	0.22	Moderate-to-high vs. low-to-moderate
Posttest comparison	4.16	3.45	$t(82) = 7.68$; $p < .001$
Effect size	-	-	Cohen's $d = 1.68$; large effect

Source: Processed from pretest and posttest data.

These findings indicate that integrating folklore into literacy instruction had a strong positive effect on students' cultural awareness compared to conventional literacy instruction using generic texts.

Improvement across Cultural Awareness Dimensions

The Cultural Awareness in Literacy Scale measured four dimensions: cultural knowledge, cultural appreciation, perspective-taking, and identity reflection, and the experimental group improved on all four dimensions.

Table 3. Cultural Awareness Dimension Scores in the Experimental Group

Dimension	Pretest Mean	Posttest	Gain	Interpretation
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Mean				
Cultural knowledge	3.01	4.24	1.23	Strong improvement
Cultural appreciation	3.09	4.27	1.18	Strong improvement
Perspective-taking	2.98	4.02	1.04	Strong improvement
Identity reflection	3.08	4.11	1.03	Strong improvement

Source: Processed from Cultural Awareness in Literacy Scale data.

The improvement in cultural knowledge was related to students' exposure to local stories, traditional values, and social norms embedded in the folklore texts used throughout the intervention.

Cultural appreciation improved because students were not only asked to read folklore but also to discuss why the stories mattered to their community and how the values reflected shared cultural identity.

Perspective-taking improved because students analyzed characters' decisions within cultural contexts, learning to consider motivations and constraints shaped by tradition rather than judging actions in isolation.

Students' Experiences during Folklore-Based Literacy Instruction

Qualitative findings showed that students experienced folklore-based literacy instruction as familiar, meaningful, and reflective, with four themes emerging: narrative engagement, value interpretation, intercultural comparison, and identity connection.

Table 4. Qualitative Themes on Folklore-Based Literacy Instruction

Theme	Evidence from Classroom Practice	Pedagogical Meaning
Cultural familiarity	Students recognized local settings, characters, values, and community practices	Familiar content activated prior knowledge and participation
Narrative engagement	Students showed interest	Folklore increased

	in plot, conflict, and moral dilemmas	motivation to read and discuss
Value interpretation	Students discussed honesty, respect, responsibility, courage, and environmental care	Cultural values became objects of reflection
Intercultural comparison	Students compared local folklore with other stories and modern life	Students developed broader cultural awareness
Creative cultural response	Students produced posters, retellings, and reflective paragraphs	Literacy learning became expressive and culturally grounded

Source: Synthesized from observations, interviews, reflective journals, and learning documents.

Observation data showed that students became more active when the teacher introduced folklore texts. Some students had heard similar stories from family members, which increased their enthusiasm for classroom discussion.

Narrative engagement increased because folklore provided familiar conflicts and moral dilemmas. Students were interested in predicting outcomes and discussing characters' choices in ways textbook narratives rarely produced.

Value interpretation became a central activity. Students identified values embedded in the stories and discussed their relevance to contemporary life, connecting traditional narratives with present-day ethical questions.

Intercultural comparison also emerged in classroom discussion. Students compared local folklore with stories from other regions or cultures, noticing both shared moral themes and distinct cultural details.

Implementation Challenges

Although the intervention produced positive results, several challenges emerged. The first challenge was students' uneven prior exposure to folklore, since some students were unfamiliar with the selected stories.

The second challenge was text adaptation. Some folklore texts contained archaic vocabulary, long narrative sequences, or culturally specific references that required teacher mediation to remain accessible.

The third challenge was avoiding moral simplification. Students initially tended to identify only one moral message from each story, requiring teacher prompting to explore more nuanced, multiple interpretations.

Table 5. Implementation Challenges and Teacher Responses

Challenge	Classroom Evidence	Teacher Response
Uneven folklore familiarity	Some students knew the stories, while others did not	Provided cultural background and peer sharing
Difficult language	Some texts contained archaic words and long sentences	Adapted texts and added glossaries
Moral simplification	Students identified only one moral message	Used guiding questions for deeper interpretation
Limited discussion confidence	Some students hesitated to express cultural opinions	Used small-group discussion before class sharing
Balancing appreciation and critique	Some cultural values needed contextual discussion	Encouraged respectful critical reflection

Source: Synthesized from classroom observations and teacher notes.

2. Discussion

Findings show that integrating folklore into literacy instruction significantly improved students' cultural awareness, with the experimental group outperforming the control group across all measured dimensions.

The improvement in cultural knowledge suggests that folklore-based literacy instruction provided students with access to cultural content that conventional, culturally neutral texts typically do not include.

Cultural appreciation improved because students were guided to understand why folklore matters. They did not simply read

the stories but discussed their communal significance and continued relevance.

Perspective-taking also improved. This is important because cultural awareness is not only about knowing one's own culture but also about understanding perspectives shaped by different cultural contexts and traditions.

Identity reflection improved because students connected folklore with their own lives. Reflective journals showed that students increasingly related story values to their personal and family experiences.

The qualitative findings explain how the improvement occurred. Cultural familiarity activated prior knowledge and increased motivation, giving students an accessible entry point into deeper literacy engagement.

Narrative engagement also contributed to learning. Folklore contains conflict, moral dilemmas, symbolic events, and memorable characters that naturally sustain student interest across extended discussion.

Value interpretation was a central mechanism. Students discussed honesty, respect, courage, responsibility, and humility as they appeared in the stories, connecting narrative content to lived ethical reasoning.

Creative cultural response strengthened students' expressive literacy. Students showed cultural understanding through poems, retellings, and reflective writing inspired by the folklore they studied.

However, the findings also show that folklore-based literacy instruction requires careful mediation. Folklore texts should not be used uncritically, since some content may need contextual explanation or age-appropriate adaptation.

The challenge of moral simplification is important. Students often reduce folklore to one moral message, such as do not lie or respect elders, when the stories in fact support multiple, layered interpretations that teachers must help students uncover.

The study also has implications for curriculum development. Literacy materials should include local folklore from diverse regions,

selected and adapted systematically to support both literacy skills and cultural awareness goals.

D. Conclusion

This study examined the integration of folklore into literacy instruction to promote students' cultural awareness. The experimental group, which received folklore-based literacy instruction using local folktales and legends, achieved significantly higher cultural awareness scores than the control group, with improvement across all four measured dimensions: cultural knowledge, cultural appreciation, perspective-taking, and identity reflection. Qualitative findings showed that narrative engagement, value interpretation, intercultural comparison, and identity connection explained why the intervention was effective, while uneven prior exposure to folklore, text adaptation, and avoiding moral simplification emerged as implementation challenges. These findings suggest that folklore is a valuable but underused resource for developing cultural awareness in literacy instruction, provided that texts are carefully selected, adapted, and mediated through structured reflective activities rather than used only as entertaining supplementary reading. Future research may examine how folklore-based literacy instruction can be extended across grade levels and adapted for use with folklore from multiple regions within a single classroom.

Declaration of AI-Assisted Technologies

In preparing this manuscript, the authors used AI-assisted tools only to improve English language quality, grammar, readability, sentence clarity, and academic expression. The AI tools were not used to generate research data, conduct data analysis, produce findings, or draw conclusions. All conceptual arguments, data interpretation, methodological decisions, and scholarly conclusions remain the full responsibility of the authors. The authors carefully reviewed, edited, and verified all AI-assisted outputs to ensure the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the final manuscript.

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