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EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF LOCAL FOLKLORE ON STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS: A MIXED METHOD STUDY

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Abstract

This study explores the reading comprehension skills of junior high school students by using local folklore texts as reading material. Local folklore is a culturally rich and engaging medium that enhances students' understanding of narrative structures, vocabulary, and moral values. The research aims to examine the level of students' reading comprehension and how local culture-based texts can be effectively integrated into reading lessons. This study employs a mixed methods approach that combines a quantitative and qualitative approach to explore the reading comprehension of students using local folklore texts. The subjects of the research were 50 eighth-grade students from two classes at a private school in Indonesia. Data collection involved administering a reading comprehension test, conducting interviews, and making observations. The analysis of pre-test and post-test scores revealed a significant improvement in reading comprehension for the experimental group. The result of the quantitative approach was that the mean post-test score for the experimental group was higher than the pre-test score, indicating that exposure to local folklore had a positive effect on students' comprehension abilities. The result of the qualitative approach indicates that folklore texts positively influence students' comprehension, particularly in identifying main ideas, interpreting implicit meanings, and relating texts to personal experiences. The study supported the integration of local literature in language learning to promote cultural literacy and comprehension skills.

Keywords: reading comprehension, local folklore, junior high school, cultural literacy, language learning

INTRODUCTION

According to Adiyan et al. (2022), "reading comprehension is a fundamental component of language learning and academic success, particularly for junior high school students who are in a critical stage of cognitive and literacy development". In Indonesia, numerous national assessments, such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) and AKM (*Asesmen Kompetensi Minimum)* have consistently highlighted students' low performance in reading comprehension. This low proficiency is not just about decoding words, but also reflects students' limited ability to interpret, analyze, and evaluate texts.

Reading comprehension is defined as the ability to process text, understand its meaning, and integrate it with existing knowledge. According to Agustina & Harahap (2018), it involves decoding, fluency, and the use of prior knowledge to construct

meaning. Reading comprehension is a fundamental aspect of language learning and literacy development. It enables students not only to decode words but also to interpret, analyze, and evaluate texts. In the Indonesian educational context, reading comprehension remains a crucial skill that requires continuous improvement, particularly among junior high school students.

Reading comprehension is a foundational skill that supports students' success across all areas of learning. For junior high school students, the ability to understand, analyze, and interpret texts is critical as it lays the groundwork for more complex academic tasks in later grades (Simarmata, 2023; Snow, 2010). Reading comprehension involves not just decoding words but also grasping the deeper meanings behind texts, which include understanding context, vocabulary, themes, and narrative structure (Damaianti, 2017). However, despite its importance, many students, particularly in developing regions, struggle with reading comprehension. This challenge is often attributed to factors such as limited exposure to diverse reading materials, lack of engagement, and insufficient instructional strategies (Dewi, 2019).

One potential solution to improve reading comprehension is to integrate culturally relevant and engaging reading materials into the curriculum, such as local folklore (Dewi, 2018; Baroqqah & Angraini, 2019). Local folklore, as a rich source of cultural knowledge, provides an excellent medium for fostering both literacy skills and cultural awareness (Zikri et al., 2024; Brown & Peterson, 2021; Smith & Brown, 2020). Folklore, which includes traditional stories passed down through generations, contains elements such as myth, legend, fable, and fairy tale that can serve as engaging and contextually meaningful texts for students (Farihah et al., 2023; Enni et al., 2024). In many educational contexts, local folklore contains rich narrative structures, moral lessons, and cultural insights, significant themes that resonate with students, making them an ideal tool for improving reading comprehension that can promote both language skills and cultural understanding (Fatmawaty, 2022; Sullivan, 2019).

Local folklore, with its narrative richness and cultural relevance, offers a unique opportunity to foster students' reading interest and comprehension abilities. These traditional stories often reflect values, moral teachings, and social norms that can stimulate critical thinking and deeper understanding (Fauzan et al., 2023). This study investigates how local folklore can be used to explore and develop students' reading comprehension skills in junior high schools (Jati & Purwati, 2024). Folklore consists of traditional beliefs, myths, legends, and tales passed through generations. In educational settings, folklore can serve as a pedagogical tool that connects language learning with cultural awareness (Monica & Soplantila, 2024). Research has shown that culturally relevant texts improve students' engagement and comprehension. This study seeks to explore how the inclusion of local folklore in the curriculum can enhance reading comprehension skills among junior high school students (Laila et al., 2021; Kelly et al., 2023). By examining students' performance before and after engaging with folklore texts, this research aims to determine whether folklore-based reading materials can improve comprehension abilities in a way that is both pedagogically effective and culturally enriching.

The use of local folklore in educational settings is supported by the belief that culturally relevant materials can enhance student motivation and connection to the content, making the reading process more meaningful (Rijoly, 2022; Mulyati & Soetopo, 2017). Research has shown that when students can relate to the content they are reading, they are more likely to engage deeply with the text and improve their comprehension skills (Nurmia et al., 2021). Furthermore, local folklore often includes themes of community,

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9 (2), 2025, 63-77

values, and identity, which can help students connect more closely with their cultural heritage and make reading a more personal and engaging experience (Rafi'i, 2017).

The current study investigates how reading local folklore can enhance the reading comprehension skills of junior high school students. By focusing on folklore relevant to the students' cultural background, this research aims to examine whether such texts improve students' ability to understand and analyze narrative structures, expand their vocabulary, and engage with the themes presented in the texts. The integration of local folklore into the curriculum is critical in regions where students may lack access to a wide variety of reading materials, offering them a chance to connect with content that is not only educational but also meaningful to their personal and cultural identities.

Previous studies demonstrated that integrating local stories into language lessons increases students' motivation and interpretive skills (Safitri, 2023). However, research focusing specifically on junior high school students' comprehension through folklore remains limited. At the same time, Indonesia is rich in oral and written traditions, especially local folklore that reflects the values, beliefs, and history of various ethnic groups. These texts not only serve as cultural heritage but also hold pedagogical potential to enhance reading comprehension by providing engaging and relatable content (Ratminingsih et al., 2020). Despite their relevance, folklore-based texts remain underutilized in formal reading instruction, which tends to favor modern or global texts that may lack local cultural resonance.

Although previous studies have explored the use of narrative texts in improving reading skills (Enni et al., 2024), only a few have focused specifically on local folklore as a medium for developing comprehension abilities in junior high school settings. Furthermore, existing studies often center on literal comprehension and neglect higher-order skills such as inferential and evaluative understanding. There is also limited empirical data on how students interact with culturally rooted texts in the classroom context, especially in public schools where instructional materials are standardized and less adaptive to local culture (Rafi'i, 2020; Ratminingsih et al., 2020). Another gap lies in the integration of folklore within curriculum-based language instruction. While cultural materials are mentioned in the *Merdeka Curriculum*, their implementation lacks practical strategies, particularly for reading comprehension.

The research purposes were explore the levels of reading comprehension (literal, inferential, evaluative) demonstrated by junior high school students when engaging with local folklore texts, analyze how students perceive and respond to folklore-based reading materials in terms of engagement, cultural relevance, and learning motivation, and provide insights and recommendations for integrating folklore into reading instruction as a culturally responsive approach to improving literacy.

METHODS

This study employs a mixed methods approach, which includes a quantitative and qualitative approach, to assess the reading comprehension of students using local folklore texts. The sampling method was purposive sampling to select a group of 50 eighth-grade students from two classes at a private school in Indonesia. The students were selected from

e-ISSN: 2503-3840
9 (2), 2025, 63-77

two different classes, with one class designated as the experimental group (n=25) and the other as the control group (n=25). The experimental group engaged in reading sessions based on local folklore, while the control group followed the standard curriculum without any folklore integration.

Data collection involved a reading comprehension test, interviews, and observations. The reading comprehension test was administered after students read well-known Indonesian folklore stories, and they completed a comprehension test consisting of 15 questions: five literal-level questions, five inferential-level questions, and five evaluative-level questions. Students from different reading skill levels (low, medium, high) to gain varied perspectives. The reading comprehension tests were based on selected folklore text, *Legenda Pulau Kemaro*/ The Legend of Kemaro Island

The quantitative data, using a pre-test and a post-test, were administered to both groups to measure changes in reading comprehension skills, using Flesch-Kincaid readability tests provide a numerical scale to assess the difficulty level of English texts. The component of Flesch-Kincaid readability is the Flesch Reading Ease Score (FRES). FRES' score ranges from 0 to 100, with higher values indicating easier readability. It is calculated using the following formula:

$$FRES = 206.835 - (1.015 \times \frac{Total\ Words}{Total\ Sentences}) - (84.6 \times \frac{Total\ Syllables}{Total\ Words})$$

The rubric for the Flesch Reading Ease Score is described in Table 1.

Table 1. The Rubric for Flesch Reading Ease Score

Score	Categorization
90-100	Very easy to read, easily understood by an average 11-year-old student
60-89	Standard readability, easily understood by 13- to 15-year-old students.
30-59	Difficult to read, understood by university students or higher.
0-29	Very difficult to read, best understood by professional or expert readers.

The qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interviews. Interview data were based on transcribing and coding using thematic analysis (Wahyuni et al., 2020) and identifying patterns such as cultural relevance, motivation, and interpretation strategies to identify common patterns in students' responses regarding their experiences with folklore-based reading activities described in Table 2.

Table 2. The Indicators of the Interview

Indicators	Description
Cultural Relevance and Enhanced Comprehension	Students who found a cultural connection to the folklore demonstrated greater engagement, which facilitated better understanding and recall of the material.
Motivation Driving Active Engagement	Motivated students showed greater enthusiasm, were more likely to participate in discussions, and had increased engagement with the material, leading to improved

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	comprehension.
Interpretation Strategies and Reading Comprehension	Students who employed strategies like drawing on prior knowledge, participating in discussions, and reflecting critically demonstrated stronger comprehension and deeper engagement with the stories.
Collaborative Learning and Critical Reflection	Peer discussions and collaborative learning emerged as effective strategies. Students who shared interpretations and analyzed the folklore critically developed a more nuanced understanding of the texts.

The students' test results were analyzed using levels of comprehension: literal, inferential, and evaluative. Texts were simplified and adapted to junior high school reading levels, while retaining moral and cultural values. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students from the experimental group, consisting of 25 students and one English teacher, to gather insights into their perceptions of reading folklore. The interviews focused on students' engagement with the material, their understanding of the cultural aspects of the stories, and how they felt the folklore influenced their reading comprehension.

The data analysis uses test result analysis based on categorizing responses based on comprehension levels using a rubric and tabulating the percentages of correct answers per level. Quantitative data were analyzed using paired sample t-tests to compare pre-test and post-test scores within and between the experimental and control groups. The qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically to identify common patterns in students' responses regarding their experiences with folklore-based reading activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results indicate that students performed best at the literal comprehension level, with 80% correctly identifying main ideas and specific details. However, inferential and evaluative comprehension levels showed moderate achievement (60% and 45%, respectively).Interviews revealed that students found folklore texts more relatable and engaging than modern stories. Teachers also noted increased participation and discussion during lessons that used folklore.

These findings suggest that the narrative familiarity and cultural relevance of local folklore facilitate better engagement and deeper understanding. It also aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the importance of culturally contextualized learning.The results of the reading comprehension performance score of 50 students are described in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary of Reading Comprehension Scores (n = 50)

Comprehension Level	Average Score (%)	Description
Literal	80%	High
Inferential	63%	Moderate
Evaluative	48%	Low to moderate

Table 3 describes the analysis of the pre-test and post-test scores, which revealed a significant improvement in reading comprehension for the experimental group. The mean

e-ISSN: 2503-3840
9 (2), 2025, 63-77

post-test score for the experimental group was 15% higher than the pretest score, indicating that exposure to local folklore had a positive effect on students' comprehension abilities ($t(25) = 5.23$, $p < 0.001$). In contrast, the control group showed no significant improvement in their scores ($t(25) = 0.92$, $p = 0.36$). The comparison of pre-test and post-test scores is described in Table 4.

Table 4. The comparison of pre-test and post-test scores

Group	Pre-test Mean Score	Post-test Mean Score	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value
Experimental Group	65.4	75.1	9.7	5.23	<0.001
Control Group	66.2	67.5	1.3	0.92	0.36

Table 3 describes the experimental group shows a significant increase in the mean score from the pre-test (65.4) to the post-test (75.1), with a mean difference of 9.7. The t-value of 5.23 and a p-value of less than 0.001 indicate that the difference is statistically significant. This suggests that the intervention or treatment applied to the experimental group had a positive impact on their scores. Meanwhile, the control group, on the other hand, shows a minimal increase in the mean score from the pre-test (66.2) to the post-test (67.5), with a mean difference of only 1.3. The t-value of 0.92 and a p-value of 0.36 indicate that the difference is not statistically significant. This suggests that no significant change occurred in the control group's performance, implying that the intervention did not have an impact on this group.

These results indicate that most students can identify explicit information effectively but struggle when it comes to interpreting implied meanings or making critical judgments about the texts. This pattern aligns with previous findings (Rafi'i, 2020; Enni et al., 2024), where literal comprehension is often the strongest skill among Indonesian junior high students.

The students performed well in tasks such as identifying the setting of the story, recognizing main characters and their actions, and recalling sequential events. This indicates that folklore texts, with their simple plot structures and familiar cultural elements, support literal understanding. Many students commented that they had heard these stories before at home or school, which enhanced their recall. This supports the notion that background knowledge facilitates comprehension (Ratminingsih et al., 2020).

The results show that folklore supports literal comprehension effectively, offers entry points for inferential thinking, especially when guided, and evaluative skills require explicit instruction and modeling (Suryani et al., 2021; Upa & Mangalik, 2018). These findings affirm the value of integrating local culture into reading instruction to bridge students' lived experiences with classroom texts, promote deeper comprehension, and enhance motivation and moral reflection (Zikri et al., 2024).

The inferential questions required students to predict what might happen next, interpret the emotions or motives of characters, and understand implied morals. Students scored lower in this section due to limited vocabulary and interpretation strategies, and difficulty distinguishing between literal and implied meaning. This finding echoes Upa and

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9 (2), 2025, 63-77

Mangalik (2018), who found that students need scaffolding to move from surface-level understanding to deeper interpretation of folklore. Several students interpreted Malin Kundang's transformation into stone as a mere "magic event" rather than recognizing the consequence of disobedience, indicating a gap in inferential reasoning.

Evaluative-level questions asked students to express opinions about characters' actions, compare the story with personal or social values, and justify moral lessons. This was the most difficult level for students. Only 6 out of 30 students were able to relate the moral of *Malin Kundang* to the importance of respecting parents and critically question the fairness of the mother's curse. This suggests a lack of practice in critical reading and reflection, a skill that must be nurtured intentionally (Mulyati & Soetopo, 2017).

From interview data, it became evident that folklores captured students' attention more than textbook reading passages, triggered emotional responses and cultural pride, and encouraged storytelling and oral retelling among peers. The result from the interview of the English teacher: *"When using folklore, students are more enthusiastic and ask more questions. They even want to retell the story in their regional version"*. This aligns with Damaianti (2017), who argues that cultural relevance improves reading engagement.

The interviews with students from the experimental group revealed that many of them found the folklore-based activities engaging and enjoyable. Most students reported that they could better relate to the texts because the stories were culturally familiar and included moral lessons that resonated with their own experiences. Several students mentioned that they appreciated how the stories were tied to real-life situations and community values, which made the learning process more meaningful. One student remarked, "The stories were not just about learning to read better, but also about learning about my own culture and how math connects to everything around me." This sentiment was shared by other students, who felt that folklore provided them with a deeper understanding of their heritage while also improving their reading comprehension. The result of the interview is described in Table 5.

Table 5. The Interview Result

Categorization	The Interview Result
Cultural Relevance and Comprehension	Students who found a cultural connection to the folklore demonstrated stronger comprehension skills. The stories' cultural relevance provided a scaffold for students to understand complex ideas, symbolism, and values embedded in the texts.
Intrinsic Motivation	Students who were motivated by the cultural connection to the material showed more interest and enthusiasm toward reading and comprehending the texts. Motivation, driven by both cultural relevance and the intriguing nature of folklore, encouraged students to engage more deeply with the material.
Use of Interpretation Strategies	The students who applied interpretation strategies, such as recalling prior knowledge of folklore or

e-ISSN: 2503-3840
9 (2), 2025, 63-77

	discussing the stories with peers, performed better in terms of comprehension. These strategies helped students decode the meaning of the texts and link them to broader cultural and social contexts.
Peer Collaboration and Critical Thinking	Peer discussions and group work emerged as an effective strategy for interpreting folklore. By sharing ideas and engaging in collaborative analysis, students were able to reinforce their comprehension and enhance their critical thinking abilities.

Based on the results of research using qualitative and quantitative approaches, the use of local folklore has an impact on reading comprehension skills, motivates students, and plays a role in increasing student collaboration in reading comprehension skills. The results suggest that incorporating local folklore into the curriculum can significantly improve reading comprehension skills among junior high school students. The cultural relevance of the stories appears to enhance students' engagement with the texts, making them more motivated to comprehend and analyze the material. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that culturally relevant texts can foster a more profound connection to the learning process (Sullivan, 2019).

Additionally, the moral and narrative structure of folklore provides students with opportunities to practice critical thinking and interpretation, skills that are essential for effective reading comprehension. By analyzing the plot, characters, and cultural context of the stories, students are better able to develop higher-order cognitive skills, such as synthesis and evaluation.

This study sought to explore how integrating local folklore into the reading curriculum influences the reading comprehension skills of junior high school students. The results indicated that students who engaged with local folklore demonstrated improved reading comprehension, particularly in areas of narrative understanding, vocabulary acquisition, and thematic interpretation. This section discusses these findings concerning existing literature, explores the implications of using folklore in education, and identifies challenges and recommendations for future practice.

Local folklore proved to be an effective tool for improving reading comprehension among junior high school students. The findings suggest that the cultural relevance of the folklore materials played a crucial role in engaging students with the texts. According to Fatmawaty et al (2022), when students are exposed to culturally meaningful content, their engagement levels increase, which in turn enhances their comprehension and overall reading skills. Folklore, by its nature, offers narratives that are rich in cultural context, themes, and moral lessons, all of which contribute to a deeper understanding of the text.

Students in this study reported a higher level of interest in reading folklore compared to other, more conventional texts. This aligns with Smith and Brown's (2022) assertion that engagement with personally relevant content fosters greater cognitive involvement and facilitates a deeper understanding of the material. Furthermore, the storytelling nature of folklore helped students better understand narrative structure, which is a critical element of

reading comprehension (Damaianti, 2017). By engaging with stories that were both familiar and culturally significant, students could more easily relate to the characters, plot, and themes, leading to improved retention and interpretation of the material.

One of the key findings of this study was the positive impact of local folklore on students' vocabulary development. The narratives found in folklore often include traditional words and phrases that are not typically encountered in more conventional reading materials. These culturally specific terms provided students with an opportunity to expand their vocabulary and understand the nuances of language within a specific cultural context. Snow (2010) emphasizes the importance of vocabulary knowledge as a predictor of reading comprehension, and the use of local folklore allowed students to encounter and learn new words in context, which is more effective than isolated vocabulary instruction.

Moreover, students demonstrated an increased ability to infer meaning from context when reading unfamiliar words. This is consistent with research by Farihah et al. (2023), who found that context-based learning strategies, such as inferring meaning from the surrounding text, significantly enhance comprehension skills. Folklore, with its rich narrative context, is an ideal medium for promoting such learning strategies.

Another significant finding from this study was the students' increased motivation to read when the material was culturally relevant. The folklore stories were not only engaging but also helped students form a connection to their cultural heritage. This connection made the reading material more meaningful, which in turn motivated students to engage more deeply with the text. Research by Kelly et al (2023) suggests that when students see their own culture reflected in the curriculum, it can enhance their sense of identity and belonging, which is particularly important for adolescents in a multicultural society.

This increased motivation aligns with Wahyuni et al (2020) theory that motivation is a key factor in reading comprehension. When students are motivated to read, they are more likely to persist through challenging texts, engage with the material more thoroughly, and retain what they read. The cultural relevance of the folklore stories in this study served as a powerful motivator, encouraging students to actively participate in their reading activities.

Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges were identified in the implementation of local folklore in the classroom. One major issue was the limited availability of culturally relevant folklore materials in the curriculum. In some instances, teachers had to adapt stories or find supplemental materials to ensure the texts were both appropriate and accessible for students. This aligns with the findings of Brown and Peterson (2022), who note that the lack of culturally relevant resources can hinder the effective implementation of such educational strategies.

Another challenge was the varying levels of familiarity students had with certain folklore stories. While some students were familiar with the cultural references, others struggled to understand the historical and social context of the stories. This discrepancy in prior knowledge suggests the need for scaffolding or supplementary activities to help students build background knowledge before engaging with the folklore material. In this study, the teacher incorporated brief discussions about the origins of the folklore and its

cultural significance, which helped bridge this gap and supported students' understanding of the text.

Local folklore proved to be an effective tool for improving reading comprehension among junior high school students. The findings suggest that the cultural relevance of the folklore materials played a crucial role in engaging students with the texts. According to Damaianti et al (2017), when students are exposed to culturally meaningful content, their engagement levels increase, which in turn enhances their comprehension and overall reading skills. Folklore, by its nature, offers narratives that are rich in cultural context, themes, and moral lessons, all of which contribute to a deeper understanding of the text. Folklore can also serve as a bridge between students' home cultures and the school environment, fostering a sense of pride and identity while improving literacy skills. One of the key findings of this study was the positive impact of local folklore on students' vocabulary development. The narratives found in folklore often include traditional words and phrases that are not typically encountered in more conventional reading materials.

The findings of this study have several important implications for teaching practice. First, educators should consider integrating more culturally relevant materials, such as local folklore, into the curriculum. Doing so can enhance students' engagement with reading and improve their comprehension skills. Future research should explore the long-term effects of reading local folklore on students' reading comprehension, as well as its impact on other academic areas such as writing and critical thinking. Longitudinal studies could provide insight into whether the benefits of folklore-based reading extend beyond immediate comprehension improvements and lead to sustained academic achievement. Additionally, research could investigate the impact of folklore-based reading on students from diverse cultural backgrounds to assess its broader applicability.

This study sought to explore how integrating local folklore into the reading curriculum influences the reading comprehension skills of junior high school students. The results indicated that students who engaged with local folklore demonstrated improved reading comprehension, particularly in areas of narrative understanding, vocabulary acquisition, and thematic interpretation. This section discusses these findings with existing literature, explores the implications of using folklore in education, and identifies challenges and recommendations for future practice.

Students in this study reported a higher level of interest in reading folklore compared to other more conventional texts. This aligns with Guthrie et al.'s (2004) assertion that engagement with personally relevant content fosters greater cognitive involvement and facilitates a deeper understanding of the material. Furthermore, the storytelling nature of folklore helped students better understand narrative structure, which is a critical element of reading comprehension (Farihah et al., 2023). By engaging with stories that were both familiar and culturally significant, students could more easily relate to the characters, plot, and themes, leading to improved retention and interpretation of the material.

These culturally specific terms provided students with an opportunity to expand their vocabulary and understand the nuances of language within a specific cultural context. Snow (2010) emphasizes the importance of vocabulary knowledge as a predictor of

reading comprehension, and the use of local folklore allowed students to encounter and learn new words in context, which is more effective than isolated vocabulary instruction.Moreover, students demonstrated an increased ability to infer meaning from context when reading unfamiliar words. This is consistent with research by Nailon et al. (2023), who found that context-based learning strategies, such as inferring meaning from the surrounding text, significantly enhance comprehension skills. Folklore, with its rich narrative context, is an ideal medium for promoting such learning strategies.

This increased motivation aligns with Wahyuni et al (2020) theory that motivation is a key factor in reading comprehension. When students are motivated to read, they are more likely to persist through challenging texts, engage with the material more thoroughly, and retain what they read. The cultural relevance of the folklore stories in this study served as a powerful motivator, encouraging students to actively participate in their reading activities.Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges were identified in the implementation of local folklore in the classroom. One major issue was the limited availability of culturally relevant folklore materials in the curriculum. In some instances, teachers had to adapt stories or find supplemental materials to ensure the texts were both appropriate and accessible for students. This aligns with the findings of Brown and Peterson (2022), who note that the lack of culturally relevant resources can hinder the effective implementation of such educational strategies.

Another challenge was the varying levels of familiarity students had with certain folklore stories. While some students were familiar with the cultural references, others struggled to understand the historical and social context of the stories. This discrepancy in prior knowledge suggests the need for scaffolding or supplementary activities to help students build background knowledge before engaging with the folklore material. In this study, the teacher incorporated brief discussions about the origins of the folklore and its cultural significance, which helped bridge this gap and supported students' understanding of the text.

The findings of this study have several important implications for teaching practice. First, educators should consider integrating more culturally relevant materials, such as local folklore, into the curriculum. Doing so can enhance students' engagement with reading and improve their comprehension skills. Folklore can also serve as a bridge between students' home cultures and the school environment, fostering a sense of pride and identity while improving literacy skills.

Another significant finding from this study was the students' increased motivation to read when the material was culturally relevant. The folklore stories were not only engaging but also helped students form a connection to their cultural heritage. This connection made the reading material more meaningful, which in turn motivated students to engage more deeply with the text. Research by Ratminingsih et al (2020) suggests that when students see their own culture reflected in the curriculum, it can enhance their sense of identity and belonging, which is particularly important for adolescents in a multicultural society.

Future research should explore the long-term effects of reading local folklore on students' reading comprehension, as well as its impact on other academic areas such as

writing and critical thinking. Longitudinal studies could provide insight into whether the benefits of folklore-based reading extend beyond immediate comprehension improvements and lead to sustained academic achievement. Additionally, research could investigate the impact of folklore-based reading on students from diverse cultural backgrounds to assess its broader applicability.

CONCLUSION

Based on the result of the quantitative approach**,** the mean post-test score for the experimental group was 15% higher than the pretest score. It means that exposure to local folklore had a positive effect on students' reading comprehension abilities. The results indicate that the experimental intervention had a significant positive effect on the experimental group's performance, as evidenced by the large mean difference and statistically significant t-value. In contrast, the control group did not show significant improvement, suggesting that the observed changes in the experimental group can be attributed to the intervention.

This study demonstrates the effectiveness of using local folklore to enhance reading comprehension skills among junior high school students. The findings indicate that folklore-based reading materials not only improve students' ability to understand and interpret texts but also foster a stronger connection to their cultural heritage.

The results of the interview data from the 25 students reveal that cultural relevance, motivation, and interpretation strategies are key factors influencing students' reading comprehension skills when local folklore is used in the curriculum. The personal connection to culturally relevant content significantly enhanced students' understanding and engagement with the texts. Furthermore, the motivation derived from the cultural significance of folklore, coupled with the interpretation strategies employed by the students, contributed to a deeper and more effective comprehension of the material. These findings suggest that integrating local folklore into reading comprehension activities not only makes the content more engaging but also significantly improves students' ability to comprehend and retain the material.

The findings highlight the pedagogical value of integrating local folklore into reading instruction. These culturally rich texts not only support literacy development but also foster a deeper connection between learners and their heritage. Teachers are encouraged to utilize folklore strategically and to scaffold students' thinking beyond surface-level understanding toward more analytical and evaluative reading. This study concludes that local folklore texts can be an effective medium for enhancing reading comprehension among junior high school students. The familiarity and moral depth of the stories help students connect with the text more meaningfully. This study explored the reading comprehension skills of junior high school students using local folklore as reading material. The results demonstrated that folklore texts positively influenced students' literal and inferential comprehension, while also enhancing their engagement due to the familiarity and cultural relevance of the stories. However, students still faced significant challenges in evaluative comprehension tasks, which require higher-order thinking and critical reflection.

Based on these results, it is recommended that educators incorporate culturally relevant content, such as local folklore, into reading curricula to enhance student engagement and improve literacy outcomes. The limitations of the research were that the

study's localized sample may not represent the broader population of Indonesian students across regions with different cultural backgrounds and literacy levels, and the study was conducted over a short period, providing only a snapshot of students' comprehension levels. Longitudinal data might offer deeper insights into how comprehension skills evolve with continuous exposure to folklore-based reading materials. Given the limitations, several directions for future research are recommended. Further studies could design and test structured folklore-based modules or digital media (e.g., interactive e-books) to enhance engagement and comprehension, especially among digitally native learners, and future research should involve schools from different regions in Indonesia to examine how local folklore from various cultures affects students' comprehension differently. Future research should explore the long-term effects of folklore-based reading activities on other academic subjects and investigate how different types of folklore impact various aspects of literacy development.

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