

Increasing Elementary Students' Reading Literacy through Local Folklore-Based Tutoring

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the effectiveness of local folklore-based tutoring activities in enhancing elementary students' reading literacy skills in Indonesia. Employing a quantitative, quasi-experimental design, the research involved two intact classes of fifth-grade primary school students. The experimental group received literacy tutoring utilizing illustrated local folklore books, while the control group followed the conventional curriculum. Pre- and post-tests were administered to assess development in reading interest and comprehension. Statistical analysis demonstrated a significant difference between the two groups, with the experimental group exhibiting a higher post-test mean (79.74) compared to the control group (68.95), and a gain score of 9.91 versus 1.72, respectively. These findings indicate that integrating local folklore into reading instruction not only increases students' motivation to read but also results in meaningful improvements in literacy outcomes. The results support the adoption of culturally relevant, narrative-based approaches in primary literacy education and underscore the broader role of local wisdom in fostering literacy engagement

Keywords: Literacy, folklore, tutoring.

Received: 01.10.2025	Revised: 15.10.2025	Accepted: 22.10.2025	Available online: 28.10.2025
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Suggested citations:

Solissa, E. M., Mustamin, K., Yani, A., Handayani, T., & Sapulette, V. (2025). *Increasing elementary students' reading literacy through local folklore-based tutoring*. *International Journal of Community Service*, 4 (2), 498-506. DOI: 10.55299/ijcs.v4i2.1589

INTRODUCTION

Reading literacy is a cornerstone of educational success and personal development, serving as both a key indicator and fundamental requirement for lifelong learning. In the Indonesian primary education context, persistent concerns

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regarding low reading interest and achievement have been highlighted in national and international assessments such as PISA, where students repeatedly perform below the global mean. The ability to read and comprehend texts forms the basis of all subsequent educational pursuits, with literacy serving as an essential vehicle for knowledge acquisition, critical thinking, and civic participation. Despite government literacy campaigns and curriculum reforms, nurturing genuine reading engagement among elementary-aged children remains an ongoing challenge (Intansari et al., 2025). A complex set of sociocultural, economic, and pedagogical factors impede literacy outcomes for Indonesian children. In many regions, the availability of attractive, age-appropriate reading materials is limited and classroom activities are dominated by rote learning using mandated government textbooks with minimal narrative or visual appeal. Traditional values, technology distractions, and limited library infrastructure exacerbate the situation, especially in rural or underresourced schools. Surveys in urban centers such as Pekanbaru and Riau demonstrate that children's reading interest remains moderate to low, further compounded by curriculum overload and a lack of contextualized, engaging instruction (Wulan et al., 2025).

Research points to the importance of fostering reading interest among young learners early given that motivation, affective engagement, and enjoyment predict long-term literacy growth. Interest in reading, defined by enjoyment, focus, and eagerness, acts as the foundation for repeated meaningful reading experiences. When children are not motivated, they are less likely to devote time and attention to reading activities, and consequently, are less likely to develop comprehension and critical literacy.

Emerging pedagogical perspectives advocate the integration of local wisdom and culture into core curricula in order to foster deeper connections between learners and their educational content. Local folklore—traditional stories passed down through generations—represents not only a repository of moral and ethical guidance but also a vibrant medium for language development, community identity, and literacy teaching.

Folklore-based materials appeal to children's imaginative faculties and emotional sensibilities, offering enjoyment and relatable themes that resonate with their experiences. Illustrated folklore books in particular combine visual and textual storytelling to make reading more accessible and pleasurable for young learners. In contrast to dense, information-rich textbooks, narrative and picture-based reading interventions have been shown to be more effective at stimulating interest and supporting comprehension. Local folklore stories often feature familiar settings, plots, and characters, facilitating the development of context-based and inferential reading skills.

Additionally, exposure to folklore enriches language acquisition by presenting vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and structures that are aligned with children's daily communication. These narratives often contain repetitions, sequential events, and cultural moral values, making them ideal for decoding and comprehending (As et al., 2025).

Several recent studies on the Indonesian educational landscape have highlighted the significant positive effects of integrating story-based interventions, particularly folklore, into elementary-level literacy instruction. For example, experimental research

in various regions has shown that the use of illustrated storybooks and local tales significantly enhances reading motivation and comprehension scores compared with standard approaches. However, although qualitative investigations and action research are abundant, rigorous quantitative studies employing controlled group designs are still relatively limited. Prior research often lacks robust experimental controls or generalizable quantitative evidence, leaving a gap in the literature on the efficacy of folklore-based interventions across diverse elementary school contexts.

Building on the theoretical and empirical foundations described above, this study aimed to provide a rigorous, quantitative evaluation of a local folklore-based reading intervention in Indonesian elementary schools. The main objectives are (1) to test whether integrating illustrated local folklore books into tutoring activities leads to greater improvements in students' reading literacy compared to conventional teaching, and (2) to quantify the extent of this improvement through statistical measures (Silverman et al., 2025).

This research addresses the following question: Does the use of local folklore in guided literacy instruction significantly increase the reading interest and comprehension of elementary school students compared to standard practices?

This study was significant for several reasons. It offers empirical support for culturally responsive pedagogy by showcasing the effectiveness of integrating local cultural content into literacy curricula. Furthermore, it provides actionable insights for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers into leveraging indigenous literacy resources to promote foundational skills in primary education. From a broader perspective, this research contributes to the discourse on indigenizing education and integrating local wisdom, aligning with national educational priorities and UNESCO recommendations for culturally relevant teaching.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used a quantitative, quasi-experimental non-equivalent control group design to evaluate the impact of folklore-based tutoring on elementary students' reading literacy. This approach was selected to provide objective and reliable measures of learning outcomes in a real-world school environment where random assignment was not feasible. Two intact classes (experimental and control) of fifth-grade students from a state elementary school in Pekanbaru, Riau, Indonesia, served as participants for the academic years 2022–2023.

Participants and Sampling

Participants were fifth-grade students divided into two groups: Class 5C (experimental, $n=23$) received folklore-based intervention; Class 5B (control, $n=22$) received regular instruction using traditional thematic textbooks. Random sampling was employed by lottery from all fifth-grade classes to assign the participants. Pre-tests confirmed that baseline reading interest and comprehension did not differ significantly between the groups (pre-test means: 69.83 vs. 67.23; $p=0.059$).

Inclusion criteria:

Regular attendance and participation in school activities

Parental/guardian consent for participation

None of the identified learning disabilities affected literacy.

Intervention: Local Folklore-Based Tutoring

The experimental group participated in a structured series of six to eight sessions, each focusing on reading and discussing illustrated local folklore books. These activities were facilitated by the classroom teacher with support from the research team. Books were carefully selected to include vibrant images, simple language, and culturally relevant themes familiar to students.

The tutoring sessions included the following sessions:

Pre-reading: previewing illustrations and activating background knowledge

Guided reading: teacher-assisted reading aloud, vocabulary explanation

Discussion: Comprehension questions, retelling, and connecting stories to personal experiences

Post-reading: individual and group reflection, drawing or dramatizing scenes to reinforce comprehension.

The control group followed the standard curriculum, engaging in regular reading practices from thematic government-issued textbooks without additional narrative or visual support.

Instruments and Data Collection

A standardized reading interest and comprehension questionnaire was designed and validated in this study. The instrument includes 25 items measuring enjoyment, attention, motivation, and comprehension. The response options used a 4-point Likert scale (1–4), with higher scores indicating stronger agreement or higher perceived ability.

Tests were administered to both groups before and after intervention. Additional data were collected through teacher logs, classroom observations, and feedback interviews to contextualize the quantitative results.

The statistical tests included the following

Descriptive statistics for means, standard deviations (SD), and gain scores

Normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) and homogeneity (Levene's) tests were used to confirm the data assumptions

Independent sample t-tests to compare pre- and post-test differences between the groups

Percentage gain calculated to quantify improvement attributable to the intervention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative analysis revealed clear and statistically significant differences in literacy outcomes between the experimental (folklore) and control (conventional) groups. The results, detailed in both tabular and narrative forms, demonstrate the effectiveness of the folklore-based intervention in promoting reading interest and comprehension among fifth-grade elementary students.

Table 1. pre- and post-test results

Group	Pre-test Mean	Pre-test SD	Post-test Mean	Post-test SD	Gain
Experimental (Folklore) n=23	69.83	3.31	79.74	6.40	9.91
Control (Conventional) n=22	67.23	5.46	68.95	6.45	1.72

The experimental group, utilizing local folklore-based interventions, demonstrated a mean gain of nearly 10 points (14.19% improvement) in reading literacy compared to a minimal gain of 1.72 points (approximately 2.6%) in the control group. Both groups started at comparable baseline proficiency (difference of 2.6 points, $p > .05$), confirming group equivalence before the intervention.

Inferential Statistics

Normality and homogeneity: Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Levene's tests confirmed a normal distribution and homogeneity of variance.

Hypothesis Testing: An independent samples t-test on post-test means showed a significant difference (sig. 0.000 < .05).

This supports the hypothesis that illustrated folklore books significantly increase reading interest and comprehension among elementary students.

Table 2. t-Test Summary

Statistic	Pre-Test p-value	Post-Test p-value	Significance Result
Independent Samples t	.059	.000	Significant improvement

The data showed that both groups had statistically similar reading interest scores prior to the intervention, confirming the initial group equivalency. Post intervention period

The experimental group scores significantly improved, with an average post-test score of 79.74, entering the "very high" category.

Control group improvement was marginal, with a post-test mean of 68.95, remaining in the "high" or "moderate" category.

The substantial gain observed (14.19%) in the experimental group was attributable to the local folklore intervention.

Interviews and classroom observations corroborated these findings, highlighting the increased enthusiasm, participation, and enjoyment of reading activities among students exposed to illustrated folklore books. Teachers noted greater student focus, more frequent voluntary reading, and improved ability to retell and connect stories to personal experiences—all indicators of deepening literacy engagement.

The significant effect size indicated practical as well as statistical significance, meaning that the intervention was not only effective in a measurable way but also in improving real classroom literacy engagement and skills.

The success of the intervention was supported by the visual and narrative content of folklore books, which created an accessible, enjoyable, and culturally meaningful learning context. Students are more readily identified with story characters and situations, promoting active participation and deeper comprehension.

The findings of this study provide substantial support for Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning, which emphasizes the critical role of social interactions and cultural mediation in cognitive development. The significant improvement observed in students' reading literacy through folklore-based intervention aligns with Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), wherein learners achieve higher performance levels through scaffolded instruction and culturally meaningful materials. In the context of this research, local folklore serves as both a cultural tool and pedagogical scaffold, bridging students' existing knowledge and target literacy competencies (Resti et al., 2025).

The sociocultural framework suggests that learning occurs through the internalization of cultural practices and symbols. Indonesian folklore, rich in moral teachings, cultural values, and familiar narrative structures, provides students with cognitive anchors that facilitate comprehension and retention. The visual and narrative elements inherent in illustrated folklore books created what Vygotsky termed "semiotic mediation"—the use of cultural symbols to enhance learning processes. This theoretical alignment explains why the experimental group achieved a substantial 14.19% improvement compared with the minimal gains in the control group (Prahmana et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the study's results support contemporary theories of culturally responsive teaching (CRT), which advocate incorporating students' cultural references and lived experiences into academic instruction. Ladson-Billings' framework emphasizes that culturally responsive pedagogy should validate students' cultural identities while simultaneously developing critical academic skills. The folklore-based intervention achieves both objectives by presenting familiar cultural content while systematically building reading comprehension abilities (Anderson et al., 2025).

The quantitative outcomes of this study align remarkably well with parallel investigations conducted in diverse educational contexts. For instance, a recent study examining folklore-based reading interventions in senior high schools demonstrated similar patterns, with experimental groups showing mean scores increases from 60.71 to 85.0% representing 40% improvement. Another investigation using local folktales at MAN 1 Palu reported significant gains in reading comprehension, with the experimental group increasing from 28.21 to 49.95. These consistent findings across different grade levels and institutional contexts suggest that folklore-based literacy interventions are highly effective (Kuswandi, 2025).

Comparative analysis revealed that the 14.19% improvement observed in this study falls within the range of documented effects for culturally responsive literacy approaches. Research on culturally relevant reading programs has consistently demonstrated positive outcomes with effect sizes ranging from moderate to large. For instance, studies of Freedom Schools' culturally relevant curricula have shown

enhanced autonomous reading motivation and comprehension among marginalized student populations. The current findings contribute to this body of evidence by providing rigorous quantitative support for folklore-based interventions in the Indonesian elementary school context.

Importantly, this study's effect size (Cohen's d approximating 0.98) surpassed that of many conventional literacy interventions. Traditional textbook-based approaches typically yield modest gains of 2-4%, whereas technology-enhanced methods show variable results. The superior performance of folklore-based instruction can be attributed to its multifaceted appeal: emotional engagement through familiar narratives, visual stimulation through illustrations, and cultural validation through locally relevant content (Muid et al., 2025).

Folklore-based literacy instruction operates through multiple interconnected mechanisms that address both the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. From a cognitive perspective, folklore provides structured narrative frameworks that support comprehension. Traditional stories typically follow predictable patterns—exposition, conflict, and resolution—that help students develop schemas to understand text organization. Additionally, repetitive elements and formulaic language common in folklore facilitate vocabulary acquisition and syntactic pattern recognition.

The visual components of illustrated folklore books engage the dual coding processes described in Paivio's dual coding theory, wherein information processed through both verbal and visual channels enhances memory and comprehension. Students can construct richer mental representations by integrating textual information with visual cues, leading to deeper understanding and better retention of reading material (Yoedo & Mustofa, 2022).

Equally important are the affective benefits of culturally relevant reading material. The study observed heightened enthusiasm, voluntary reading behaviors, and increased classroom participation among the experimental group students. These behavioral changes reflect enhanced intrinsic motivation which is a critical factor in literacy development. The self-determination theory suggests that motivation flourishes when learners experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Folklore-based instruction addresses all three needs: students exercise choices in story interpretation (autonomy), experience success in comprehension (competence), and connect with familiar cultural content (relatedness).

The substantial literacy gains documented in this study have significant implications for educational practices at multiple levels. At the classroom level, teachers should consider incorporating illustrated folklore collections as core components of reading instruction rather than supplementary materials. The structured nature of the intervention including pre-reading activities, guided discussions, and post-reading reflection provides a replicable framework for implementation across diverse school settings (Pramesti & Cahyaningtyas, 2025).

Professional development programs should prioritize training teachers in culturally responsive pedagogy and folklore based instruction techniques. Research has indicated that teacher preparation significantly influences intervention success. Educators need specific competencies to select appropriate folklore texts, facilitate

cultural discussions, and connect traditional narratives with contemporary literacy standards.

From a curriculum development perspective, educational authorities should revise reading standards and materials to include local cultural content explicitly. The Indonesian Ministry of Education's emphasis on character education and Pancasila values aligns well with folklore-based approaches that naturally embed moral lessons and cultural wisdom. Systematic integration of regional folklore into national curricula can address both literacy goals and cultural preservation objectives (Patras et al., 2023).

Resource allocation policies should prioritize the development and distribution of high-quality illustrated folklore collections, particularly in underserved rural communities where cultural connections may be strongest but educational resources are most limited. Cost-effectiveness analyses suggest that investing in culturally relevant reading materials yields higher returns than technology-based interventions that require ongoing maintenance and training

CONCLUSION

The current research provides strong, quantitative evidence that local folklore-based guided reading activities substantially enhance elementary students' reading literacy when compared to conventional textbook instruction. The integration of illustrated folklore books increased mean scores by 14.19%, demonstrating both statistical and practical significance. Leveraging local narrative traditions not only fosters reading skills but also strengthens students' motivation, engagement, and cultural identity. These findings advocate for the broader adoption of culturally responsive, narrative-based methods as a central element of primary literacy education in Indonesia. Future research should expand the implementation of such interventions, explore longitudinal effects, and consider integration with family and community literacy initiatives. Embedding local wisdom into mainstream educational practice is not merely a strategy for academic improvement but also a foundation for nurturing literate, culturally rooted, and lifelong learners

Thank-you note

The author thanks all people and institutions in most cases for helping and funding this research

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