

## ENHANCING STUDENTS' LITERACY SKILLS THROUGH FOLKLORE-BASED LEARNING: A COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Sumiyani<sup>1\*</sup>, Intan Sari Ramdhani<sup>1</sup>, Nori Anggraini<sup>1</sup>, Ariyana<sup>1</sup>, Khairul Ikhwan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Indonesian Language and Literature Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang

Jln. Perintis Kemerdekaan I/33, Cikokol-Kota Tangerang, Prov. Banten-Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Adzkia, Sumatera Barat - Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author: [sumiyani.kinanti@gmail.com](mailto:sumiyani.kinanti@gmail.com)

---

### Article history:

Received: June 2026

Revised: June 2026

Accepted: June 2026

**ABSTRACT** Literacy skills remain a fundamental challenge among junior high school students, particularly in reading comprehension and narrative writing. This community engagement program aimed to enhance students' literacy skills through folklore-based Indonesian language learning by integrating local cultural content into classroom practices. The program was implemented using an action research approach combining quantitative (pre-test and post-test) and qualitative methods (observation, interviews, and documentation). A total of 80 seventh-grade students and two teachers participated in a six-month intervention consisting of reading, discussing, and rewriting local folklore into contemporary narratives. The results showed significant improvements in students' literacy outcomes. Reading scores increased from 65.3 to 78.4 ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.20$ ), while writing skills improved from 58.7 to 74.5 ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $d = 1.35$ ). Students' reading interest also rose from 2.8 to 3.4 on a Likert scale. Qualitative findings revealed increased student engagement, confidence, and creativity, as well as improved teacher effectiveness in delivering narrative-based instruction. The program also produced a student anthology titled "Cerita Rakyat Masa Kini" as a tangible output of literacy development. This study demonstrates that folklore-based learning is an effective community empowerment strategy that not only enhances literacy skills but also strengthens cultural awareness and active participation. It is recommended that schools integrate local cultural resources into literacy programs to create more meaningful, contextual, and sustainable learning experiences.

**KEYWORDS:** *Community Empowerment; Folklore-Based Learning; Indonesian Language Learning; Literacy Skills; Student Engagement.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Literacy skills, particularly reading and writing, are essential competencies for students in the 21st century, as they support critical thinking, communication, and lifelong learning. In the context of Indonesian junior high schools, literacy development has become a major concern, especially under the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered and meaningful learning. However, national and international assessments indicate that students' literacy levels in Indonesia remain relatively low, particularly in reading comprehension and written expression (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019).

One of the key challenges in literacy instruction lies in the dominance of conventional teaching methods that focus on product-oriented outcomes rather than the learning process. Such approaches often limit students' active participation, creativity, and engagement in reading and writing activities (Drajati, Hidayat, & Widiastuti, 2022). As a result, students tend to struggle with understanding narrative structures, generating ideas, and expressing them coherently in written form. This issue highlights the need for more contextual, engaging, and culturally relevant learning approaches that can foster both cognitive and affective aspects of literacy.

Integrating local cultural content, such as folklore, into language learning has been increasingly recognized as an effective strategy to enhance students' literacy skills. Folklore contains rich moral values, social norms, and cultural identities that are closely related to students' lived experiences, making learning more meaningful and relatable (Ferando, et al, 2023). Previous studies have shown that narrative-based learning, including storytelling and digital storytelling, can significantly improve students' motivation, creativity, and literacy performance (Hung, Hwang, & Chen, 2021). Furthermore, folklore-based learning not only develops linguistic competence but also strengthens students' cultural awareness and character education.

In addition, the implementation of the School Literacy Movement (Gerakan Literasi Sekolah/GLS) in Indonesia emphasizes the importance of creating a literacy-rich environment through reading, writing, and reflective thinking activities (Yu, W, Li & Zhang, 2025). However, in practice, many schools still face challenges in designing sustainable and engaging literacy programs that actively involve students and teachers (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2022). This gap suggests that there is a need for innovative literacy programs that integrate cultural relevance with participatory learning strategies. This view is in line with Bruner's theory of narrative meaning, which argues that stories play a central role in how individuals construct knowledge and interpret experience (Brunner, 1990).

Despite the growing body of research on literacy and storytelling, there is still limited evidence on how folklore-based learning can be implemented as a structured community engagement program that involves collaboration between teachers and students while producing measurable literacy outcomes. Most previous studies have focused on classroom-based experiments rather than long-term, participatory interventions that emphasize both learning processes and community empowerment. This approach is also supported by socio-cultural learning theory, which emphasizes that students learn more effectively through meaningful interaction with culturally relevant materials and social participation (Vygotsky, 1978).

Therefore, this study aims to implement and evaluate a folklore-based Indonesian language learning program as a form of community empowerment to enhance students' literacy skills in a junior high school setting. The program involves collaborative activities such as reading, interpreting, and rewriting folklore into contemporary narratives, as well as presenting and performing students' work. By integrating local cultural resources into literacy instruction, this study is expected to provide a practical and sustainable model for improving literacy skills while fostering student engagement and cultural identity.

## **2. METHOD**

This study employed a community engagement approach using action research to improve students' literacy skills through folklore-based learning. The approach was selected to allow iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection involving researchers, teachers, and students collaboratively (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2014). The program was designed not only to enhance literacy outcomes but also to strengthen student participation and cultural awareness through meaningful learning activities.

The program was conducted at a public junior high school in Tangerang, Indonesia, over a six-month period from January to August 2025. The beneficiaries of this program were approximately 80 seventh-grade students, supported by two Indonesian language teachers who acted as collaborators in implementing and evaluating the intervention. The school was selected purposively based on its readiness to implement literacy programs and its openness to culturally responsive teaching approaches.

Prior to the intervention, an initial assessment was conducted to identify students' baseline literacy levels and classroom learning conditions. The findings indicated that students had moderate to low reading comprehension, limited ability in narrative writing, and low interest in literacy

activities. These conditions served as the basis for designing a contextual and participatory literacy program.

The intervention consisted of three main stages. First, the preparation stage included program socialization, teacher training on folklore-based learning strategies, development of teaching materials, and administration of pre-tests on reading and writing skills. Second, the implementation stage involved 8–12 classroom sessions where students engaged in structured activities, including reading local folklore, discussing narrative structures and moral values, rewriting stories into contemporary versions, and presenting their work through storytelling or performances. These activities emphasized active participation, collaboration, and creative expression. Third, the evaluation stage included post-tests, distribution of reading interest questionnaires, and reflective interviews with teachers and students to assess the outcomes and impacts of the program.

Data were collected using multiple instruments, including reading comprehension tests, writing performance assessments based on analytic rubrics (content, organization, vocabulary, coherence, and mechanics), and a Likert-scale questionnaire to measure students' reading interest. In addition, classroom observations, interviews, and documentation (photos, field notes, and student work) were used to capture the learning process and community participation.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Normality tests were conducted prior to analysis; paired sample t-tests were used for normally distributed data, while Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were applied for non-normal data. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's *d* to determine the magnitude of improvement. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to student engagement, learning experiences, and teacher reflections. This mixed-method approach provided a comprehensive understanding of both the outcomes and processes of the community-based literacy program.

### **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The implementation of the folklore-based literacy program resulted in significant improvements in students' reading skills, writing skills, and reading interest. A comparison of pre-test and post-test scores is presented in Table 1.

**Table 3. 1** Students' Literacy Scores Before and After the Program

Variable	N	Pre-test Mean	SD	Post-test Mean	SD	p-value	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Reading Skills	80	65.3	10.2	78.4	9.5	< 0.001	1.20 (Large)
Writing Skills	80	58.7	11.0	74.5	10.3	< 0.001	1.35 (Large)
Reading Interest	80	2.8	0.5	3.4	0.4	< 0.001	1.20 (Large)

The results indicate statistically significant improvements across all measured aspects ( $p < 0.001$ ). The large effect sizes (Cohen's  $d > 1.0$ ) suggest that the intervention had a strong impact on students' literacy development. Reading comprehension improved substantially, indicating that students were better able to understand narrative structures and extract meaning from texts. Similarly, writing performance showed marked improvement, reflecting enhanced ability to organize ideas, develop narratives, and use appropriate language features. In addition, the increase in reading interest suggests that students developed a more positive attitude toward literacy activities.

Qualitative findings from observations, interviews, and documentation further support the effectiveness of the program.

### **Student participation and engagement.**

Students demonstrated increased enthusiasm during learning activities, particularly in storytelling and rewriting tasks. They actively participated in discussions, collaborated with peers, and confidently presented their work. Many students expressed enjoyment in modifying story endings and creating their own versions of folklore.

### **Teacher perspectives.**

Teachers reported that folklore-based learning made it easier to explain narrative structures, intrinsic elements, and contextual vocabulary. They also observed that students became more responsive and motivated compared to conventional teaching methods. However, teachers noted the need for additional preparation time in selecting appropriate folklore materials and designing instructional activities.

### **Learning outcomes and products.**

One of the tangible outcomes of the program was the production of a student anthology titled "*Cerita Rakyat Masa Kini*", which compiled students' rewritten stories. This product reflects not only improved writing skills but also students' creativity and ownership of learning.

These qualitative findings indicate that the program not only improved literacy skills but also fostered active participation, creativity, and confidence among students as part of a community-based learning process.

The findings of this study demonstrate that folklore-based learning is an effective strategy for improving students' literacy skills within a community engagement framework. The significant improvements in reading and writing skills are consistent with previous studies highlighting the effectiveness of narrative-based learning in enhancing literacy outcomes (Drajati et al., 2022; Hung et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2025). The use of culturally relevant materials, such as local folklore, provides meaningful learning experiences that connect students' prior knowledge with new information, thereby facilitating deeper comprehension and expression.

From a community empowerment perspective, this program successfully involved both teachers and students as active participants in the learning process. Teachers were not only facilitators but also collaborators in designing and implementing the intervention, while students actively engaged as readers, writers, and performers. This participatory approach aligns with the principles of student-centered learning and supports the development of a collaborative learning environment.

The improvement in students' reading interest also indicates that integrating local culture into literacy instruction can enhance motivation and engagement. This finding supports the implementation of the School Literacy Movement (GLS), which emphasizes the importance of creating a literacy-rich and culturally responsive learning environment (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). By embedding folklore into classroom activities, the program contributes to sustaining literacy practices beyond formal instruction. This finding also supports Krashen's perspective that meaningful and engaging reading materials significantly contribute to literacy development and language acquisition (Krashen, 2004).

Furthermore, the production of a student anthology represents an example of innovation adoption within the school context. Students were able to transform traditional stories into contemporary narratives, demonstrating not only literacy development but also creative and critical thinking skills. This outcome reflects the broader impact of the program in fostering a sense of ownership and cultural identity among students.

Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges were identified. Teachers required additional time and resources to prepare instructional materials, and some students initially showed limited interest in traditional stories compared to modern narratives. To address these challenges, future programs should incorporate digital storytelling tools and collaborate with local cultural institutions to enrich learning resources.

Overall, this study highlights that folklore-based literacy programs can serve as a sustainable model for community-based education. By integrating cultural content, participatory learning, and creative production, such programs can enhance literacy skills while simultaneously strengthening cultural awareness and student engagement.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This community engagement program demonstrates that folklore-based learning is an effective approach to improving students' literacy skills, particularly in reading comprehension, writing ability, and reading interest. The significant increase in students' scores, supported by large effect sizes, indicates that integrating local cultural content into literacy instruction can produce meaningful academic outcomes.

Beyond cognitive improvement, the program also fostered positive changes in students' engagement, confidence, and creativity. Students actively participated as readers, writers, and performers, while teachers played a crucial role as facilitators and collaborators in implementing the learning activities. The production of a student anthology further reflects the tangible impact of the program on literacy development and creative expression.

In terms of community empowerment, this program highlights the importance of participatory and culturally responsive learning practices that involve both teachers and students. The integration of folklore not only enhances literacy but also strengthens cultural awareness and identity among students.

It is recommended that schools adopt folklore-based literacy programs as part of sustainable literacy initiatives, particularly within the framework of the School Literacy Movement. Future programs may incorporate digital storytelling and collaboration with cultural institutions to expand learning resources and increase student engagement. Such efforts are expected to support the development of contextual, meaningful, and sustainable literacy practices in educational settings.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the principal, teachers, and students of SMPN 7 Kota Tangerang for their active participation and support throughout the implementation of this community engagement program. Appreciation is also extended to the Indonesian Language teachers who collaborated in designing and conducting the learning activities. The authors also thank Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang for its institutional support in

facilitating this program. This study did not receive specific funding from any public, commercial, or non-profit funding agencies.

## **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors have no financial, professional, or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this study.

## **REFERENCES**

- [Hung, C.-M., Hwang, G.-J., & Chen, S.-H. (2021). Digital storytelling-based learning model to improve student engagement and creativity. *Computers & Education*, 167, 104170. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2021.104170>
- [Yu, W., Li, X., & Zhang, Y. (2025). The impact of digital storytelling on language learning motivation and literacy skills: A meta-analysis. *Language Learning & Technology*, 29(1), 22–40.
- Bruner, J. S. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Harvard University Press.
- Drajati, N. A., Hidayat, R., & Widiastuti, A. (2022). Digital storytelling to enhance narrative writing and semiotic awareness among students. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 12(3), 456–472. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v12i3.41278>
- Ferando, A., et al. (2023). Folklore-based learning as a strategy for strengthening literacy in secondary education. *Journal of Language and Education*, 9(2), 120–135.
- Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi. (2022). *Panduan Gerakan Literasi Sekolah (GLS) dalam Kurikulum Merdeka*. Jakarta: Kemendikbudristek.
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (2014). *The action research planner: Doing critical participatory action research*. Springer.
- Krashen, S. D. (2004). *The power of reading: Insights from the research* (2nd ed.). Libraries Unlimited.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2019). *PISA 2018 results (Volume I): What students know and can do*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/5f07c754-en>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.