



INDONESIAN TEENAGERS' PERCEPTIONS OF BENGKULU FOLKTALES

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ABSTRACT

The declining interest of young generations in Indonesian folktales has emerged as a concerning cultural issue. This is particularly unfortunate, as folktales represent an intangible cultural heritage embedded with moral values, local wisdom, and cultural identity. This study aims to examine the perceptions of Indonesian adolescents toward Bengkulu folktales, with a particular focus on their understanding of the intrinsic elements that structure the stories, such as characters, setting (place and time), atmosphere, and plot. A descriptive quantitative approach was employed, with data collected through an online questionnaire. Respondents were adolescents aged 11 to 21, selected using convenience and snowball sampling techniques. The findings reveal that adolescents' comprehension of the intrinsic elements in the folktales Batu Belarik, Batu Dewa, Batu Panco, and Bukit Pabes remains relatively low. The majority of respondents reported lacking an understanding of the key elements in all four folktales. These results indicate that Bengkulu folktales are not widely known among teenagers and have not become part of their daily cultural experience. Based on these findings, more innovative strategies for cultural preservation are needed, such as reimagining folktales in digital and interactive formats, and integrating them into character education curricula. This study is expected to serve as a foundation for designing more effective and relevant cultural preservation programs tailored to younger generations.

Keywords: adolescent perception, folktales, Bengkulu, intrinsic elements, cultural preservation

INTRODUCTION

Interest in Indonesian folktales has substantially declined in recent years. This diminishing engagement has become a serious cultural concern, particularly because younger generations who are the custodians of cultural heritage appear increasingly reluctant to recognize, read, or transmit traditional stories that are rich in moral values and local wisdom (Ferando et al., 2025). This shift in interest is inextricably linked to the dominance of global popular culture, which offers instant and visually appealing entertainment through digital media.

The waning interest in folktales is not merely a matter of entertainment preference but rather a pressing cultural issue. If left unaddressed, this situation could lead to the gradual erosion of oral traditions and local identities, which for generations have been preserved and transmitted through folktales (Kuswara & Sumayana, 2020).

Folktales play a pivotal role in the lives of communities as a form of cultural heritage that reflects a community's values, norms, and identity. Through folktales, older generations transmit local wisdom, worldviews, and moral teachings to the younger

generation. These stories function not only as entertainment but also as a vehicle for character education and as a medium that strengthens social bonds through oral traditions conveyed across generations. Therefore, preserving folktales is essential for safeguarding cultural roots and maintaining the continuity of timeless values that shape the identity of Indonesian society (Simatupangani, 2024).

In understanding folktales, it is essential to grasp the intrinsic elements embedded within them, as these elements form the fundamental structure of a narrative. Intrinsic elements are internal components that constitute the story, such as characters and characterization, plot, setting (place, time, and atmosphere), theme, language style, and point of view. According to Nurgiyantoro, intrinsic elements are components that directly shape literary works and can only be identified by analyzing the textual content of the story itself (Nurgiyantoro, 2018).

In the face of modernization, efforts to preserve folktales cannot be implemented effectively without first understanding the perceptions of younger generations especially adolescents regarding the folktales themselves. Various preservation strategies will be ineffective without a foundational understanding of how youth, particularly teenagers, perceive and relate to folktales (Maula & Mukhlis, 2025).

Perception refers to an individual's ability to process, interpret, and assign meaning to an object. According to Gibson, perception involves recognizing and understanding something based on information acquired through the senses, which is then processed through personal experience and knowledge (Gibson, 1979). Adolescents are at a developmental stage characterized by identity formation and the assimilation of personal values (Nurhayati et al., 2015). Consequently, what adolescents perceive as relevant and valuable plays a crucial role in determining the viability of cultural traditions.

Folktales are a form of cultural heritage that originated and evolved in specific regions through oral transmission across generations. They are also often employed as a medium to convey particular messages or purposes (Hady Hartanto et al., 2022). A study conducted by Afriza in 2022 examined high school students' perceptions of folktales, aiming to assess their knowledge and evaluate the folktales contained in the anthology *Patahnya Gunung Daik* (Afriza & Zulfadhli, 2022).

Perception is closely correlated with knowledge and comprehension. In the context of folktales, understanding a story requires familiarity with its intrinsic elements. According to Febriani's 2025 study on the intrinsic elements of Minangkabau folktales, these components serve as the structural framework that allows a folktale to form a coherent narrative, contributing to the preservation of local cultural heritage (Febriani & Ws, 2025).

Bengkulu folktales represent one of Indonesia's underrecognized cultural heritages among teenagers, both locally and nationally. Understanding how Indonesian adolescents perceive Bengkulu folktales is an important first step in evaluating their awareness of this cultural legacy. This research is crucial in providing a comprehensive picture of the status that folktales occupy in the perspectives of today's younger generation.

This study focuses on Bengkulu folktales, particularly stories such as Batu Belarik, Batu Dewa, Batu Panco, and Bukit Pabes. It contributes novel insights into how regional folktales influence youth perception and serves as a foundation for developing more effective, engaging, and contemporary cultural preservation strategies. Thus, this research not only supports the preservation of Bengkulu's folktales but also contributes

to the broader effort to sustain Indonesia's cultural identity amid the escalating forces of modernization.

METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive quantitative approach, utilizing questionnaires as the primary data collection instrument. The target population encompassed all Indonesian adolescents aged 11 to 21 years. The sample was selected using a convenience sampling technique through a Google Form, complemented by snowball sampling to broaden the scope of respondents. The collected data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel to facilitate more accurate interpretations. The folktales examined in this study include Batu Belarik, Batu Dewa, Batu Panco, and Bukit Pabes. These four stories, which originate from Bengkulu Province, are classified as etiological folktales that narrate the mythical origins of certain places or phenomena.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion examines the extent of adolescents' comprehension and knowledge of the intrinsic elements found in four Bengkulu folktales: Batu Belarik, Batu Dewa, Batu Panco, and Bukit Pabes. Each story is analyzed based on responses to five key intrinsic elements: character, setting (place), setting (time), atmosphere, and plot. Based on the quantitative data collected and presented through bar charts, there is a discernible trend indicating a limited level of understanding among adolescents regarding these elements. This section further analyzes the data by contextualizing it within perception theory and literary theory, particularly concerning the role and significance of intrinsic elements in the interpretation of folktales. The following is an analysis of each of the four folktales:

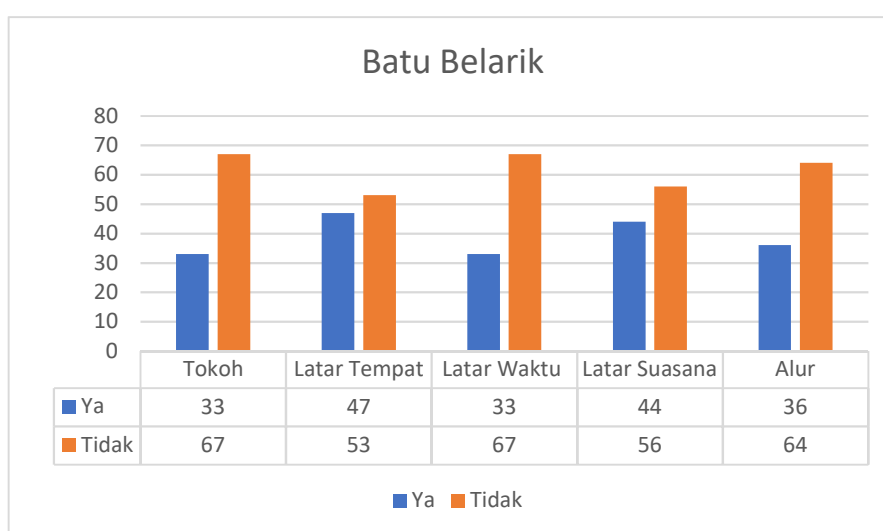


Figure 1.1. Indonesian Teenagers' Perceptions of the Folktale Batu Belarik

Figure 1.1 demonstrates that more than 50% of Indonesian adolescent respondents exhibit a relatively low level of understanding of the intrinsic elements in the Batu Belarik folktale. This is evident from the results showing that the percentage of respondents who answered "No" to understanding the intrinsic elements of the story is considerably higher than those who answered "Yes." Specifically, elements such as character and time setting

were each understood by only 33% of respondents, while 67% stated they did not understand them. Similarly, the plot (36% "Yes", 64% "No") and atmosphere (44% "Yes", 56% "No") demonstrated the same pattern. Only the element of place setting showed a relatively superior level of comprehension, with 47% of respondents indicating "Yes." These findings indicate that despite the cultural and moral values embedded in folktales, which are deeply rooted in local traditions, today's adolescents do not fully grasp the content**, ** particularly in the case of Batu Belarik, a folktale from Bengkulu. Therefore, more proactive preservation and educational efforts are needed through media that resonate with adolescents in order to prevent this cultural heritage from disappearing entirely. The following section presents an overview of adolescents' perceptions of the Batu Dewa folktale:

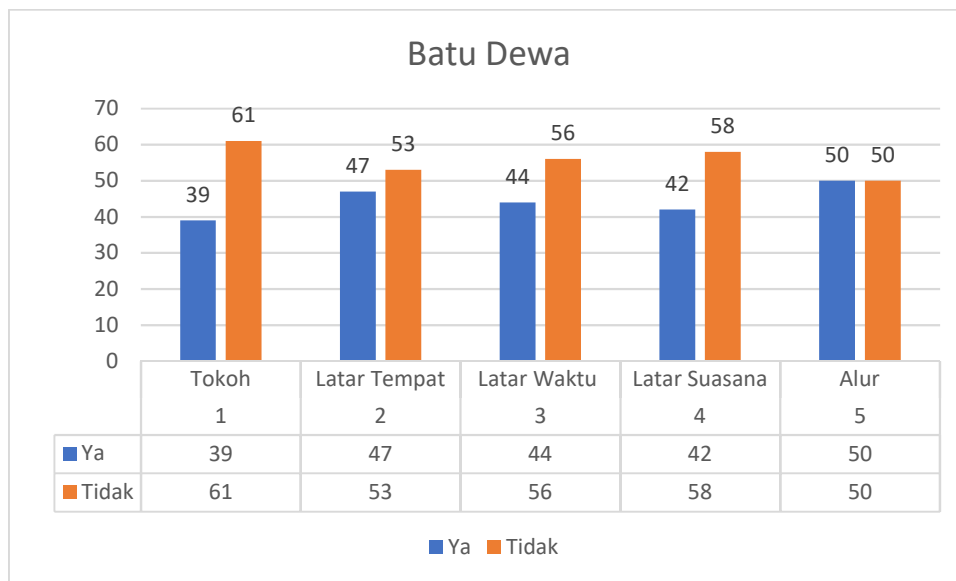


Figure 1.2. Indonesian Teenagers' Perceptions of the Folktale Batu Dewa

Figure 1.2 depicts Indonesian adolescents' understanding of the intrinsic elements in the Batu Dewa folktale, revealing that their knowledge and comprehension remain inadequate. As shown in the bar chart, for most of the intrinsic elements assessed, a greater proportion of respondents answered "No" to understanding them compared to those who answered "Yes." Specifically, for the character element, only 39% of respondents indicated that they knew or understood the characters in Batu Dewa, while 61% stated they did not. This suggests that the majority of adolescents are unfamiliar with the main characters in the story, even though characters are one of the fundamental components in understanding a folktale's plot and moral message.

The element of setting (place) received a "Yes" response from 47% of respondents. While this is the highest among the elements, it still remains below the ideal benchmark. Meanwhile, 53% reported not knowing the story's setting, indicating that many were unable to accurately identify the location in which Batu Dewa takes place. For the setting of time, 44% responded "Yes" and 56% "No," reflecting that most respondents did not fully grasp when the events of the story occurred. Similarly, understanding of the atmosphere remains low. Only 42% of respondents recognized the emotional tone or mood conveyed in the story, while 58% did not. This underscores a

lack of appreciation for the story's emotional context, which is essential in deepening narrative engagement and meaning.

Notably, the responses to the plot element were evenly split, with 50% answering "Yes" and 50% "No." This balance suggests that while some adolescents were able to follow the storyline, the other half struggled to comprehend the narrative structure. This may indicate that the way the story is presented is either not sufficiently engaging or alien to today's youth. Overall, Indonesian teenagers' perceptions of the Batu Dewa folktale remain limited. This lack of understanding may contribute to a declining interest in folktales as an essential part of local cultural heritage. The following section discusses adolescents' perceptions of the Batu Panco folktale:

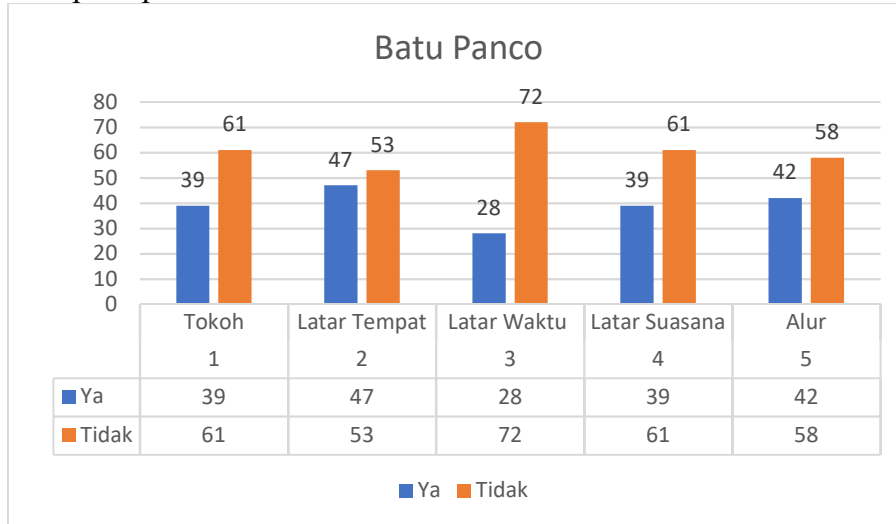


Figure 1.3. Indonesian Teenagers' Perceptions of the Folktale Batu Panco

Based on Figure 1.3, which depicts Indonesian adolescents' understanding of the Batu Panco folktale, it was found that, in general, their level of comprehension regarding the story's intrinsic elements remains relatively low. This is reflected in the bar chart, where for each intrinsic element, the majority of respondents selected "No" rather than "Yes." Specifically, the character element was understood by only 39% of respondents, while 61% indicated they did not understand it. A similar pattern emerges in the setting of place, with 47% answering "Yes" and 53% "No." The most significant disparity appears in the setting of time, where only 28% of respondents reported understanding it, compared to 72% who did not**, ** indicating a poor recognition of the temporal context in the story.

The atmosphere element also reveals an imbalance, with 39% indicating understanding and 61% not understanding. For the plot, 42% answered "Yes" and 58% "No." The overall low level of adolescent perception regarding the intrinsic elements of Batu Panco suggests that the story is not part of their familiar or readily accessible knowledge. As a form of oral literature, folktales possess distinct structural characteristics. When the majority of adolescents are unable to identify these elements within Batu Panco, it indicates that folktales are beginning to lose their function as a medium for transmitting cultural values and identity. This underscores a growing disconnect between local cultural heritage and the interests and comprehension of the younger generation. The following section presents an overview of adolescents' perceptions of the Bukit Pabes folktale:

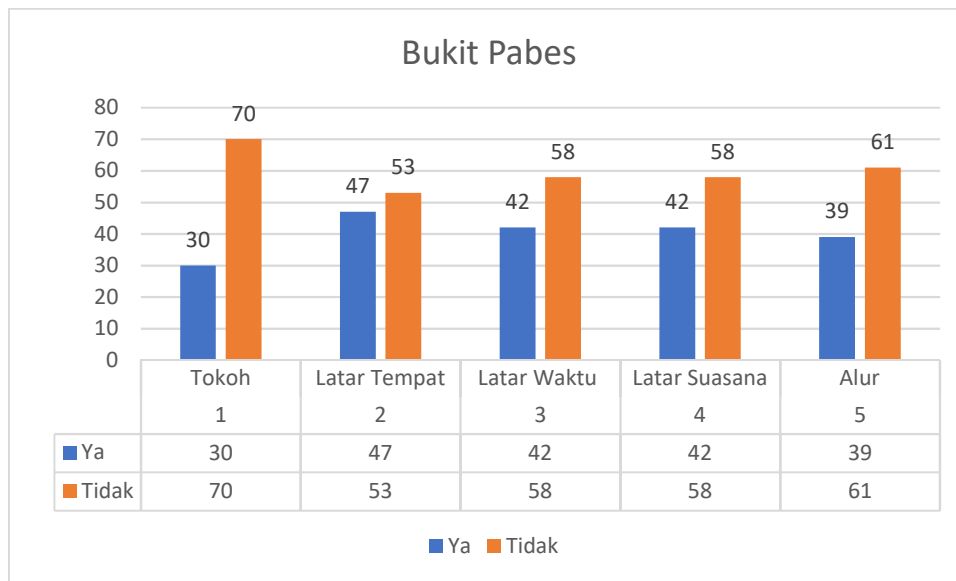


Figure 1.4. Indonesian Teenagers' Perceptions of the Folktale Bukit Pabes

Figure 1.4, which illustrates Indonesian adolescents' understanding of the Bukit Pabes folktale, reveals that their knowledge and perception of the story's intrinsic elements remain relatively low. This is evident from the chart, which shows a predominance of "No" responses across nearly all of the intrinsic elements assessed. For the character element, only 30% of respondents reported knowing the characters in the story, while the remaining 70% indicated they did not. A similar result is seen in the setting of place, where 53% of respondents did not know the story's location, compared to 47% who did. Disparities are also evident in the setting of time and atmosphere, with "Yes" responses at 42% and "No" at 58% for both elements. Even more notably, only 39% of respondents were able to follow the plot, while 61% could not comprehend the narrative structure of the Bukit Pabes folktale. These results indicate that adolescents' perception of Bukit Pabes is still underdeveloped. One's understanding of an object is heavily influenced by experience, knowledge, and exposure. The lack of awareness among adolescents regarding these elements suggests a disconnection between the younger generation and their regional cultural heritage.

Based on the overall discussion of Indonesian adolescents' perceptions of Bengkulu folktales, it can be concluded that their level of understanding and knowledge regarding the intrinsic elements in the four folktales Batu Belarik, Batu Dewa, Batu Panco, and Bukit Pabes remains relatively low. The analysis of the five main intrinsic elements character, setting of place, setting of time, atmosphere, and plot shows that in each folktale, the majority of respondents answered "No" more frequently than "Yes," indicating a general lack of comprehension across all stories.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study on Indonesian adolescents' perspectives toward Bengkulu folktales, it can be concluded that their overall understanding of the stories' intrinsic elements remains low. This is evident from the questionnaire data, which show that the majority of respondents answered "No" more frequently than "Yes" when asked about elements such as characters, setting of place, setting of time, atmosphere, and



plot. This trend was consistently observed across all four folktales *examined Batu Belarik, Batu Dewa, Batu Panco, and Bukit Pabes*. The lack of comprehension suggests that Bengkulu folktales are not yet widely recognized among adolescents and have not become part of their everyday cultural experience. Therefore, more creative and youth-oriented preservation strategies are needed, such as the use of digital media and the adaptation of folktales into visual or interactive formats. This study highlights that preserving folktales cannot rely solely on textual conservation; it must also ensure that younger generations genuinely know, understand, and internalize the stories and the cultural values they carry through approaches that are relevant, engaging, and accessible.

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