



MALIN KUNDANG FOLKTALE AS A MEDIUM FOR CHARACTER BUILDING AND CONTEXTUAL LEARNING IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Folktales represent a vital part of local cultural heritage, rich in moral messages and character-building values. In educational contexts, they serve as engaging yet meaningful learning tools. However, research on how primary school students comprehend and interpret such narratives remains limited. This study explores how the Malin Kundang folktale can be employed to foster character development and support contextual learning in accordance with the Indonesian Merdeka Curriculum. Conducted as a qualitative case study at SD Negeri Babakan Sukamanah, the research involved 20 sixth-grade students, a classroom teacher, and the school principal. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct classroom observations, and document analysis. Findings reveal that students most easily grasp narrative elements such as plot, whereas their understanding of character roles, setting, and moral messages remains underdeveloped. While students could internalize moral values such as respect for parents and humility, cultural values like awareness of heritage were less comprehended. Both the teacher and school principal emphasized the relevance of this folktale for thematic and contextual instruction. With appropriate instructional strategies, folktales like Malin Kundang hold strong potential to serve as effective pedagogical resources for character formation and cultural identity reinforcement in primary education.

Keywords: folktale, contextual learning, character education, cultural identity, primary school students

INTRODUCTION

Folktales represent a form of intangible cultural heritage that has been passed down through generations via oral and written traditions. In educational contexts, folktales serve a vital role as a learning tool imbued with moral, social, and cultural values. According to Permatahati et al. (2022), folktales encompass cultural elements, social norms, and ethical values that contribute to the character development of young people. However, in today's digital age, there has been a notable decline in students' interest in folktales (Safitri, 2021). This decline is attributed to children's preference for various digital forms of entertainment, such as social media, online games, and interactive visual content, over traditional narrative forms.

This trend poses a unique challenge in education, particularly regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes experiential learning, real-world contexts, and the reinforcement of local values. Hidayati (2022) argues that integrating local cultural elements into education not only strengthens students' cultural identities but also plays a role in character formation. One folktale that is rich in moral lessons and cultural significance is the legend of Malin Kundang from West Sumatra.

This story conveys important moral teachings, such as the significance of respecting parents, the value of humility, and the dangers of arrogance (Bahri & Fikri, 2023).

Previous research has shown that folktales like Malin Kundang are crucial for character development among elementary school students. Hidayat (2020) indicates that folktales are effective teaching materials for instilling moral values such as honesty, responsibility, and social awareness. However, other studies (Nugroho, 2019; Suprani & Hendracipta, 2018) reveal a gap between students' literal understanding of folktales and a deeper, contextual comprehension of moral values. This underscores the necessity for further research to explore how students interpret folktales and the relevance of these stories in the learning process.

Within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, folktales are viewed not merely as entertainment but as contextual learning tools that can be integrated across various subjects (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Research is particularly significant as it focuses on the understanding of sixth-grade students at Babakan Sukamanah Elementary School regarding the folktale of Malin Kundang as a learning resource. The research site was selected based on the diversity of student characteristics and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the school.

The findings of this study indicate that among the 20 sixth-grade students surveyed, most understood the plot of Malin Kundang (8 students), while their comprehension of the characters, moral messages, and story background was still limited. The moral value most recognized was the importance of filial piety (8 students) and the dangers of arrogance (8 students). From the perspectives of teachers and the school principal, the folktale of Malin Kundang is considered highly relevant as a learning medium, particularly in fostering students' character and reinforcing local cultural values in alignment with the Pancasila Student Profile. This story is also viewed as suitable for integration into learning based on the Merdeka Curriculum.

This research supports Endraswara's (2013) assertion that folktales possess significant emotional and educational appeal, as they can evoke psychological experiences in students and convey moral values through simple yet meaningful narratives. Additionally, the use of folktales in education aligns with the constructivist theory proposed by Piaget (1952), which emphasizes that learners construct knowledge through real, contextual experiences relevant to their lives.

This study is of great importance in providing a comprehensive overview of the potential of folktales as effective, relevant, and contextually appropriate learning media at the elementary school level. The findings are expected to serve as a reference for developing local culture-based teaching methods that adhere to the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study methodology. This approach was selected for its ability to explore students' understanding in depth based on their experiences and reflections during learning sessions that incorporate folktales. The research was conducted at Babakan Sukamanah Elementary School, located in Kampung Rawaseel, RT 02/RW 08, Tanjungsari Village, Jampang Tengah District, Sukabumi Regency, West Java. This school implements the Merdeka Curriculum and has a total of 185 students, with 20 sixth-grade students participating as research subjects. In this study, data were collected from two primary categories: primary and secondary data. Primary data were gathered directly through the researcher's interactions with respondents in the



field. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 sixth-grade students at Babakan Sukamanah Elementary School, as well as involving the class teacher and the school principal as additional informants. The purpose of these interviews was to gain insights into students' perspectives on the folktale of Malin Kundang, particularly regarding their understanding of the story's elements, moral messages, and their connection to learning experiences at school.

The researcher also conducted direct observations of learning activities that integrated folktales as teaching media. These observations provided concrete insights into student interactions, teaching methods, and how the story was utilized in the learning process. All observations were recorded in field notes for further analysis. Additionally, the researcher collected documentation from various school sources, activity documentation, student data, and other administrative information relevant to the learning context and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the school. Secondary data were sourced from various literature references, including academic books, scientific journals, previous research, and educational policy documents. These references were used to strengthen the theoretical foundation, support the findings, and provide comparative benchmarks. Important literature referenced includes works by Endraswara (2013), Hidayat (2020), Hidayati (2022), and official documents from Kemendikbudristek regarding the Merdeka Curriculum (2022). These sources contribute to understanding the role of folktales as character education media and as part of a contextual approach based on local wisdom. The combination of primary and secondary data in this study provides a comprehensive depth of analysis and strengthens the validity of the research findings, allowing for a thorough response to the research focus and contributing to the development of local culture-based learning models at the elementary education level.

Data collection in this study was conducted through various complementary techniques to obtain comprehensive information. One of the main techniques used was semi-structured interviews, conducted with sixth-grade students, the class teacher, and the school principal. These interviews aimed to explore their views on the utilization of the folktale Malin Kundang in the learning process. In addition, the researcher also carried out direct observations during learning activities involving folktales. The purpose of these observations was to examine student interactions in the classroom and assess their level of understanding of the material presented. Documentation was also used to complement field data by collecting various physical evidence such as school documents, photos of learning activities, and field notes. Additionally, a literature review was conducted to strengthen the theoretical foundation of the research and provide a comparison to the findings, as explained by Helmanto (2024).

Data analysis in this study was conducted in a phased and structured manner. The first step involved recognizing and comprehensively understanding the data through repeated readings. This process aimed to allow the researcher to capture the context and meaning contained within the data as a whole.

The initial coding process involved labeling important parts of the data, such as story elements, moral values contained within, and the relationship between folktales and the learning context. After coding was completed, the researcher grouped these codes into main themes, such as Moral Values, Story Plot, and Learning Relevance.

The process of reviewing the obtained themes was conducted to ensure that the themes accurately reflect the data and are relevant to the research focus. In the final stage,

the findings were organized into a systematically structured narrative, following the procedures outlined by Helmanto (2024).

In this qualitative study, several measures were taken to ensure the validity of the collected data. One of the techniques employed is triangulation, which encompasses both source triangulation and method triangulation. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from three groups of informants: sixth-grade students, the class teacher, and the school principal. This method enables the researcher to gain a more thorough and balanced understanding of the use of the folktale Malin Kundang as a learning resource.

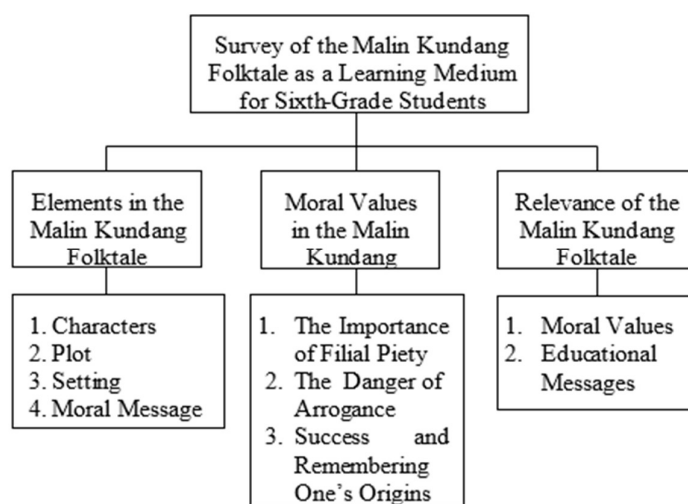
The researcher also utilized method triangulation by combining findings from interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted to explore the informants' perspectives and experiences in greater depth, while observations aimed to directly assess the interactions and activities of students and teachers during the learning process. Documentation, including photographs of activities, field notes, and relevant educational materials, provided supporting data that strengthened the findings from the other two methods.

Furthermore, the researcher implemented member checking to verify the accuracy of the data. During this process, the outcomes of the interviews and the researcher's interpretations were confirmed with the informants to ensure that the collected data accurately represented their intended meanings and experiences. This approach enhanced the credibility of the gathered data and established a robust basis for drawing conclusions from the research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data for this study were analyzed using ATLAS.ti software version 9.1.3.0, which involved processing the results from interviews and documentation through coding and the visualization of excerpts. The findings were subsequently re-evaluated to ensure consistency between the analysis results, the context of student learning, and the main objectives of the research.

Below are the comprehensive findings of the researcher:



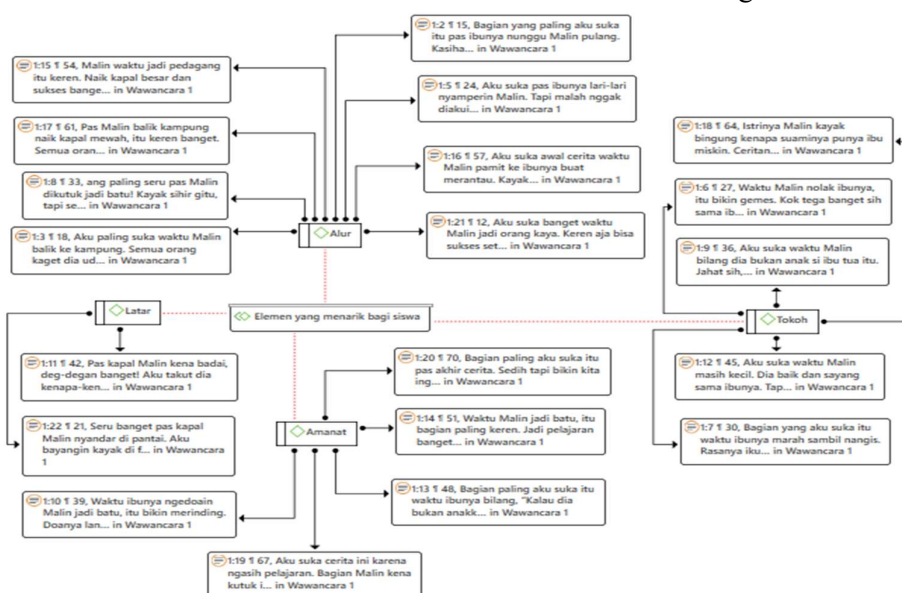
The research conducted at Babakan Sukamanah Elementary School regarding the utilization of folktales as a learning medium for sixth-grade students yielded several

important findings that reflect both the potential and challenges of integrating folktales into elementary school learning. Three main focuses identified from this research include students' understanding of the elements in the folktale Malin Kundang, students' appreciation of the moral values contained within, and the extent to which the story is relevant to students' daily lives and learning experiences. These findings were obtained through intensive interactions with three groups of research subjects: sixth-grade students, the class teacher, and the school principal, all of whom provided a comprehensive perspective on the role of folktales in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum.

1. Students' Understanding of the Elements in the Folktale Malin Kundang

Figure 2

Elements of the Folktale Malin Kundang



From the data shown in the figures regarding the elements of the Malin Kundang story, it is evident that the plot is the most prominent aspect in students' memories. Students relatively find it easier to remember significant events, especially the climax of the story, which is tragic, such as the curse that turns Malin into stone. This indicates that the dramatic aspects of folktales have a strong emotional appeal, making them easier for children to remember. This view aligns with Endraswara's assertion that folktales possess emotional power because they can touch the psychological and social aspects of their audience. Elements in folktales that evoke emotions, such as inner conflict, punishment, or tragedy, are often more easily internalized by students as they respond emotionally to the storyline.

Although students' understanding of the plot is quite good, the research findings indicate that their understanding of the characters, moral messages, and story background is still limited. Generally, students can recognize the main characters, such as Malin and his mother, and grasp the moral message of the story, such as the importance of respecting parents. However, their level of understanding remains at a literal or surface level. They have not fully interpreted the symbolic or reflective meanings of the characters in the

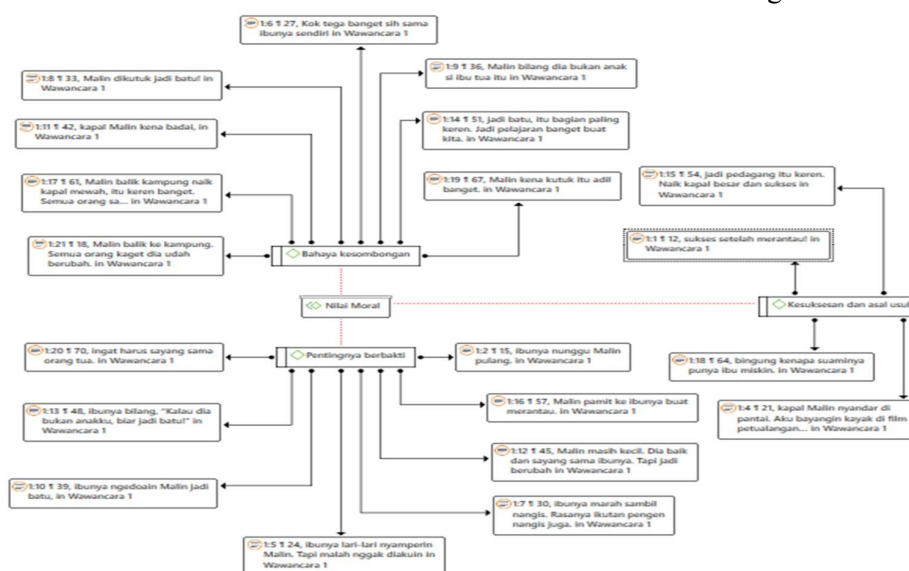
story. This is supported by Endraswara's theory, which states that characters in folktales often possess archetypal qualities, representing universal human types such as the disobedient child, the loving mother, or the wise leader. In the context of learning, teachers play a strategic role in guiding students to understand the deeper meanings behind each character, rather than merely recognizing names or roles superficially.

One interesting finding is the minimal understanding of students regarding the story's background, with only two students able to accurately mention the setting. This indicates a gap between students' daily experiences and the cultural and geographical context presented in the folktale. Endraswara explains that the setting in folktales is not merely a depiction of place, time, or atmosphere but is also rich with the social and cultural values of the local community. The low understanding of the setting among students highlights the need for a more contextual pedagogical approach, such as cultural studies, richer visual illustrations, or even virtual visits to West Sumatra, the origin of the Malin Kundang story. Such approaches are believed to bridge the gap in students' understanding of the cultural context in folktales.

2. Students' Understanding of the Moral Values in the Folktale Malin Kundang

Figure 3

Moral Values of the Folktale Malin Kundang



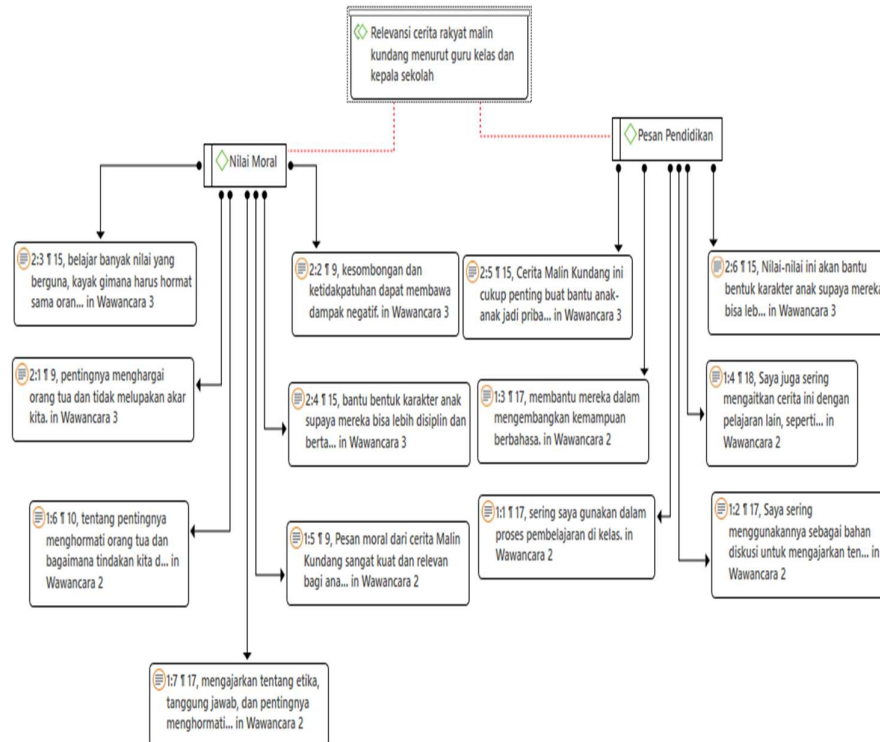
The data displayed regarding the moral values in the Malin Kundang story show a strong correlation between students' statements and two main moral values: the obligation to be filial to parents and the dangers of arrogance. The tragic story of Malin Kundang, who turns to stone due to his disobedience to his mother, successfully evokes deep sympathy and empathy among students. This supports Endraswara's explanation that the values in folktales are not conveyed dogmatically but through the life experiences of the characters that invite emotional involvement from the audience.

This research also found that students' understanding of deeper aspects, such as cultural origins and social identity reflected in the story, remains relatively low. In the Malin Kundang story, Malin's rejection of his mother actually carries a broader symbolic meaning, representing a rejection of cultural roots, social identity, and collective values of society. Endraswara emphasizes that folktales are not just about individuals but also reflect the collective values that form the local identity of the community. In this context,

teachers have a significant responsibility to help students see the actions of characters in the story not merely as personal behavior but as symbols of the conflict between tradition and modernity, or between cultural identity and personal ambition. This interpretive process is crucial for students to not only understand the story literally but also to grasp the deeper cultural and moral messages.

3. Relevance of the Folktale Malin Kundang to the Lives and Learning of Sixth-Grade Students

Figure 4
 Relevance of the Folktale Malin Kundang



The research findings regarding the relevance of the folktale Malin Kundang indicate that the codes "moral values" and "educational messages" frequently appear in quotes from teachers and the school principal. This reinforces the belief that folktales serve not only as entertainment but also as effective educational instruments. Teachers view this folktale as highly suitable for integration into thematic learning, while the school principal emphasizes the importance of folktales in character formation, aligning with the goals of strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile.

In the Merdeka Curriculum, folktales like Malin Kundang are considered to have great potential as cross-subject teaching materials. For instance, in Indonesian language learning, folktales can be used to train narrative text comprehension skills. In civic education (PPKn), folktales can serve as discussion material on national values, social norms, and ethics in community life. Meanwhile, in religious education, this story can be used to reinforce students' understanding of the importance of filial piety as part of moral and religious teachings. Endraswara underscores that folktales function as an effective cultural bridge to convey noble values subtly but with a strong memorability in students' minds.

The story of Malin Kundang has high relevance in students' lives as it contains moral values close to their daily experiences, presents a dramatic and easily followed plot, and has a cultural context that can strengthen students' identities as part of the Indonesian nation. These findings align with Endraswara's idea that folklore-based learning serves not only as entertainment but also as a foundation for character and cultural education.

This research reveals that sixth-grade students find it easier to understand the plot of Malin Kundang compared to other elements such as characters, messages, or story backgrounds. Students tend to interpret the plot as a series of connected events, while their understanding of character and moral values remains at a basic level. Values such as filial piety and the dangers of arrogance are the most easily understood messages, while aspects regarding cultural origins and character identities are still less comprehended by students. These findings highlight the importance of innovation in folk tale-based learning methods so that students not only understand the story superficially but also connect it with cultural values and their social lives.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that the folktale Malin Kundang has significant potential as a contextually appropriate learning medium, relevant, and rich in character values at the elementary school level. Based on interviews and observations of 20 sixth-grade students at Babakan Sukamanah Elementary School, it was revealed that most students could understand the story's plot quite well. However, their understanding of the elements of characters, settings, and moral messages still requires further reinforcement. Moral values such as the importance of respecting parents and the negative impact of arrogance are the messages that students find easiest to accept and remember.

From the educators' perspective, both the class teacher and the school principal consider the story of Malin Kundang highly suitable for supporting learning based on the Merdeka Curriculum, especially in character development and strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile. If delivered with the right methods and creative approaches, folktales can serve not only as engaging reading materials but also as effective means of instilling valuable life lessons in students.

Overall, this research emphasizes that folktales have great opportunities to be revitalized in learning activities as a medium for cultural education and character formation. Therefore, there is a need for innovative local wisdom-based learning so that the younger generation excels not only in academic achievements but also possesses a strong identity grounded in the noble values of the nation's culture.

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