

Developing Reading Materials Based on Mandailing Folktales to Increase Children's Interest in Literacy

Rahmi Wahyuni¹, Ardina Khoirun Nisa¹, Elismayanti Rambe¹

¹STAIN Mandailing Natal, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the development of reading materials based on Mandailing folktales as a strategy to increase children's interest in literacy. Folktales are an important part of local culture, containing educational and moral values. However, children in the Mandailing region still have low interest in reading, which can hinder their literacy development. Through this community service, we strive to create reading materials that are engaging and relevant to the local culture, thereby capturing children's attention. This activity includes collecting and adapting Mandailing folktales, developing engaging reading materials, and conducting literacy workshops for children. By involving the local community, we hope to raise awareness of the importance of literacy and local culture. Results from this activity indicate that children are more enthusiastic about reading when the reading materials presented relate to stories they know and love. Furthermore, this activity provides an opportunity for parents and educators to play an active role in supporting children's reading interests. Thus, the development of reading materials based on Mandailing folklore serves not only as a tool to increase literacy interest but also as an effort to preserve local culture. It is hoped that this initiative can serve as a model for other regions in developing children's literacy through an approach based on local wisdom.

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Corresponding Author:

Rahmi Wahyuni

STAIN Mandailing Natal, Indonesia; rahmist90@stain-madina.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

The ideal environment for the Mandailing Natal community is an environment rich in knowledge and culture. In this context, literacy is not limited to the ability to read and write, but also encompasses an understanding of the local culture that defines the community. (Sesmiarni, 2022) Good literacy will encourage people to be more active in participating in development, both socially, economically and culturally. (Klinik & Literasi, 2022)

However, the phenomenon in Mandailing Natal shows that local culture is increasingly being marginalized. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that literacy rates in Mandailing Natal remain relatively low, reaching 85% in 2023. (BPS Sumatera Utara, 2024) Furthermore, a survey

conducted by a local research institute showed that only 30% of the community is actively involved in local cultural activities. This indicates a gap between local cultural potential and the reality on the ground.(Bantulu & Mokodongan, n.d.)

Literacy Rate: According to BPS, the literacy rate in Mandailing Natal is still below the national average, which is 95%. **Cultural Participation:** Only 30% of the community is involved in local cultural activities, such as festivals, traditional arts, and the preservation of regional languages. **The Influence of Globalization:** Globalization and modernization have resulted in many young people being more interested in foreign cultures, which has the potential to erode local cultural values.(Tasya, Raihan, Luren, & Sapitri, 2023)

Previous research on local literacy and culture in Mandailing Natal is still limited. According to the study conducted(Hanifa, 2025)Folklore-based learning can also create a fun and meaningful learning environment. Literacy activities play a role in increasing students' interest in reading at MI Panyabungan.(Nasution, Islam, & Sunan, 2022)Most research focuses on formal education and under-emphasizes the role of local culture in improving literacy. Furthermore, many studies fail to consider the social and economic factors that influence community literacy levels. Therefore, there is a need to explore more deeply how revitalizing local culture can contribute to improved literacy.

This community service activity offers a new approach by integrating local culture as a medium to increase literacy. By involving the community in cultural activities, it is hoped that awareness of the importance of literacy and cultural preservation will be raised.(Lubis, 2018)This approach differs from previous research, which focused more on academic aspects without directly involving the community.

The urgency of this community service activity is very high. In the Mandailing Natal context, revitalizing local culture is not only crucial for preserving cultural identity but also for improving the community's quality of life. Good literacy will open access to information and knowledge, which in turn will increase community participation in development. Furthermore, this activity can strengthen social solidarity and foster a sense of belonging to local culture.(Nasution, A. S., & Siregar, 2021).

Thus, community service focused on revitalizing local culture as a means of increasing literacy in Mandailing Natal is essential. Through these activities, it is hoped that the community will appreciate and preserve local culture more, while simultaneously improving their literacy skills.

2. METHODS

Mandailing folklore is an important part of the rich cultural heritage.(Literasiologi & Indonesia, n.d.)However, children's interest in reading in the area remains low. Therefore, developing engaging and educational reading materials based on Mandailing folklore is crucial. This approach will involve various stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and the local community.

This community service activity was conducted at the Mandailing Natal Regency Library and Archives Service. Participants included elementary school teachers and literacy activists in the regency. The stages of the community service activity are as follows:

1. The community service team identified and collected folktales from various sources, such as community leaders, books, and archives. They also held meetings with the community to discuss and collect the stories. The output of this activity was a classification of folktales to be used as reading material.
2. Developing a Development Team by forming a team consisting of teachers, writers, and community members concerned with literacy. Output: A solid team is formed and ready to collaborate on developing reading materials.
3. Folktale Adaptation: Adapting folktales into engaging reading material for children. Using accessible language and engaging illustrations. Output: Reading material scripts tailored to children's ages and interests.
4. Reading Material Design and Production: Designing layouts and illustrations for reading materials. Mandailing folklore books ready for printing.
5. Training for Teachers and the Community: Conducting training for teachers and community

- literacy activists on how to use reading materials. This includes interactive seminars and workshops.
6. Implementation in Schools and Communities: Introducing reading materials to schools and communities. Holding book launches and group reading sessions.
 7. Evaluation and Feedback: Collecting feedback from children, teachers, and the community on reading materials. Output: Evaluation report that includes suggestions for improvement for further development.
 8. Distribution and Preservation: Distributing reading materials to more communities and schools. Using social media and digital platforms to reach a wider audience.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Finding

This activity was carried out for 1 day starting at 08.00 WIB until 16.00 WIB with a total of 30 training participants. After the implementation of the program, there was a significant increase in children's literacy interest in Mandailing Natal Regency. Through the introduction of reading materials based on Mandailing folklore, children showed greater enthusiasm for reading activities. In observations conducted, around 75% of children involved in this program admitted to being more interested in reading after being exposed to the folklore presented. This shows that introducing local culture can be an effective tool to attract children's attention.

Elementary school teachers also demonstrated increased engagement in literacy activities. Eighty percent of teachers who participated in the training felt more confident in teaching literacy to their students. They began integrating Mandailing folktales into their curriculum, which not only increased children's interest in reading but also enriched their cultural knowledge. Group discussions during the training also provided a space for teachers to share experiences and strategies in teaching literacy.

The community literacy activists involved in this program also demonstrated a strong commitment. They actively supported reading activities in their neighborhoods, such as holding reading groups and establishing reading corners in public places. These activities not only increased children's access to reading materials but also created a conducive learning environment. Community participation in this activity is crucial, as they act as agents of change in improving literacy culture in the area.



Documentation with activity participants



Documentation of the implementation of the development of reading materials based on Mandailing folk tales to increase children's interest in literacy in students. The book on the Development of Reading Materials Based on Mandailing Folk Tales has been printed and has an ISBN



Kearifan Lokal Mandailing Natal: Tradisi, Adat dan Nilai-Nilai Kehidupan

Rita Asmarida
Resdilla Pratiwi
Aisyah Mutiara Sani
Asla Alayya
Rona Adani Ulayya
Laila Safidri

Nur Indah Ramadhani Nasution
Nur Hasanah
Salsabila Lubis
Sri Wardani
Ummu Azizah
Widya Suci Ramadhani

While the results are quite positive, several challenges remain. One is the lack of quality and diverse reading materials. Communities and teachers need to work together to develop more engaging and age-appropriate reading materials. Furthermore, local government support is needed to provide adequate facilities and resources to support literacy activities.

Mandailing folktales possess rich moral and cultural values, which can be used as a tool for teaching literacy. By using folktales as reading material, children not only learn to read but also to understand and appreciate their own culture. This aligns with educational theory, which states that learning relevant to local culture can increase student motivation and understanding.

To ensure the sustainability of this program, it is recommended that literacy activities not be limited to a single implementation. This program should be made a regular event in schools and communities. Developing networks between schools, communities, and local governments is also crucial to creating a sustainable literacy ecosystem. Furthermore, regular training for teachers and community literacy activists is necessary to increase their capacity to teach and promote literacy.

Discussion

Developing reading materials featuring Mandailing folklore is a creative solution to address children's low interest in reading through an approach that is familiar to their environment. By transforming oral narratives, such as stories, into picture books or digital formats, children not only learn to spell words but also develop a sense of identity. Folktales have a strong emotional appeal, making reading less of an academic burden and more of a fun, imaginative adventure. (Pulungan, 2019)

Educationally, Mandailing folktales are rich in moral values and local wisdom relevant for early character development. The integration of values such as respect for parents and hard work into the texts helps children understand social norms in a non-patronizing manner. Through diction tailored to the child's cognitive developmental level, these reading materials serve a dual purpose: as a means of enhancing linguistic skills and as a medium for cultivating character based on the local wisdom of North Sumatra. (Sari, D. K., & Harahap, 2022).

The methodology for developing this reading material must prioritize visual aspects and interactivity to capture the attention of Generation Alpha. The use of illustrations depicting traditional clothing, architecture, and the natural beauty of Mandailing Natal can help children visualize the story more concretely. Furthermore, the insertion of simple Mandailing vocabulary into Indonesian texts can be an effort to preserve the fading regional language, while simultaneously enriching children's vocabulary bilingually. (UNESCO., 2017).

The involvement of the community, teachers, and parents is key to the successful implementation of these reading materials. The developed teaching materials need to be piloted on a small scale, for example in school reading corners or village libraries, to gauge children's responses and understanding of the storyline. Feedback from children will serve as the basis for refining the readability aspect, ensuring the moral message of the folktale is effectively conveyed without losing the entertainment element that is its primary appeal.

In conclusion, utilizing Mandailing folklore in literacy is not merely a nostalgic endeavor, but rather a long-term investment in building an intelligent and cultured society. When children feel proud of the stories of their homeland, their intrinsic motivation to read will naturally grow. The synergy between quality local content and modern packaging is expected to produce a literate generation with a global perspective while remaining firmly grounded in the noble values of Mandailing.

4. CONCLUSION

In developing reading materials, the author emphasized that folktales have a strong appeal for children. These stories, rich in moral and cultural values, can be an effective tool for fostering reading interest. Furthermore, the use of simple language and engaging illustrations are also important factors in capturing children's attention. The results of this community service show that using folktale-based reading materials makes children more enthusiastic about reading. They not only learn about their own culture but also develop literacy skills that are crucial for their future. Overall, developing reading materials based on Mandailing folktales is a strategic step in increasing children's interest in literacy. It also demonstrates that preserving local culture can go hand in hand with efforts to improve education. Thus, it is hoped that this initiative will continue and inspire more similar programs in other regions

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