

Integrating Local Folklore into Language Education: A Case Study of the Danau Toba Narrative in Indonesian Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This study examines the integration of local folklore into language education through the use of the Danau Toba narrative in Indonesian secondary schools. Motivated by the limited use of local folklore in classrooms despite its cultural richness, the research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Ronggurnihuta, Samosir Regency, North Sumatra, using a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and students in grades VIII–IX, and analysis of instructional documents. Thematic analysis identified patterns of pedagogical practice, student responses, and emerging challenges. Findings reveal that teachers employ the Danau Toba narrative to teach narrative structure, moral values, and linguistic features, while fostering connections between text and students' lived experiences. Students showed higher engagement and comprehension compared to national texts, supported by translanguaging practices combining Indonesian and Batak Toba languages. Challenges include the lack of official teaching resources, limited methodological guidance, and the constraints of the national curriculum. The study's novelty lies in situating folklore as a pedagogical resource rather than solely a literary object, highlighting its role in literacy development and identity-based learning. The findings contribute theoretically to discourse on local knowledge in pedagogy, empirically to evidence of folklore's educational impact, and practically to curriculum design supporting cultural relevance in language education.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is recognized as one of the countries with extraordinary cultural wealth, including oral traditions in the form of folktales spread across various regions. Folktales are not merely cultural heritage but also contain moral values, philosophies of life, and collective identities of communities transmitted across generations (Situmorang et al., 2023; Wedawati et al., 2022). Unfortunately, amid the currents of globalization and the modernization of education, the presence of folktales in secondary school learning practices is often marginalized. Modern texts, national literature, and standardized curriculum materials become the primary focus, while local narratives familiar to students' daily lives are rarely utilized as teaching resources (Inderawati et al., 2022; Utari et al., 2023). This phenomenon can be observed, for instance, in North Sumatra with the legendary tale of Lake Toba. Although this story is well known within the community, its use in Indonesian language

classrooms remains very limited. In fact, such folktales hold great potential for supporting literacy education while strengthening students' understanding of cultural identity. This constitutes the central issue underlying this research: the concern over how living community narratives are absent from the formal classroom.

The importance of this discussion lies not only in the fact that folktales are part of oral traditions that are on the verge of being forgotten, but also in their function as a medium for internalizing values. Through local texts, students do not merely learn language structures and narrative forms but also cultivate values of solidarity, responsibility, and human–nature relationships. The fact that many students feel distanced from national texts provided in textbooks reinforces the argument that innovations in learning material selection are needed. Integrating folktales into Indonesian language education is not simply about diversifying reading material; it is also a form of curriculum decolonization that gives greater space to local wisdom.

Previous studies have highlighted the significance of using local texts in language education. Research by Aprilliandari et al. (2024) and Siringo-ringo et al. (2022) shows that folklore serves both as a medium for strengthening cultural identity and as a tool for fostering critical literacy. Similarly, studies by Junaidi et al. (2022) and Safitri (2024) found that the use of folktales in teaching can increase students' motivation to read due to their proximity to everyday experiences. Meanwhile, Junaidi et al. (2023) and Novianti (2022) emphasized that local narratives contribute to contextual learning that is easier for students to grasp. These findings provide strong foundations suggesting that folklore integration is not only culturally relevant but also pedagogically effective.

Other literature also affirms the benefits of education based on local wisdom. According to Andriani et al. (2023) and Jayadiningrat & Widiani (2021), employing folktales in language learning can strengthen students' literacy skills while fostering pride in local identity. Similar findings were reported by Novita et al. (2024) and Puad & Ashton (2023), who observed that students respond more positively to texts reflecting their lives than to national texts perceived as distant. Even in the global context, research by Burgess et al. (2022) and Lowe et al. (2021) in Australia demonstrates that integrating indigenous narratives into the curriculum strengthens students' connection to ancestral culture while improving learning outcomes. Thus, this phenomenon should not be seen solely as a local Indonesian issue but as part of the broader discourse on global multicultural education.

In addition, literature on translanguaging, or the practice of blending languages, provides further insights. Putrawan (2022) and Sutrisno (2023) emphasize that translanguaging in classrooms enables students to mobilize their full linguistic repertoires to understand materials. In the context of Lake Toba, students frequently mix Indonesian with Batak Toba, and this has proven to be a natural strategy for deepening their comprehension. Studies by Azhary & Fatimah (2024) and Usman et al. (2022) in North Sumatra schools support this notion, showing that translanguaging enhances student engagement and makes learning more meaningful. Thus, the integration of local folklore cannot be separated from students' everyday linguistic practices.

Nevertheless, limitations remain in previous research. Most studies on folktales tend to focus on textual analysis or literary aspects alone, without connecting them to concrete pedagogical practices in classrooms. Other studies indeed discuss the benefits of folklore in education, but few specifically examine the implementation of particular folktales within secondary schools in culturally rich areas such as Batak Toba. Some research remains theoretical without direct empirical evidence from classroom settings. Yet understanding how teachers actually integrate folktales into teaching, how students respond, and what challenges they encounter is a crucial dimension to be addressed.

This study seeks to bridge that gap by directly examining the integration of the Lake Toba folktale into Indonesian language teaching at SMP Negeri 1 Ronggurnihuta, Samosir Regency. The focus is not merely on the text but also on classroom dynamics, teacher–student interactions, and learning experiences shaped through the use of local folklore. By placing field experiences at the center of inquiry, this research aims to demonstrate that folklore is not a static cultural artifact but a living, relevant pedagogical resource. This is the novelty offered here: repositioning folklore from the realm of cultural nostalgia into the arena of concrete educational practice.

Furthermore, this study highlights that local folktales can serve as a medium to strengthen students' identity while enhancing their critical literacy. Through the Lake Toba narrative, students not only learn to understand texts but also to interpret meaning, connect personal experiences with collective history, and recognize their position as members of a cultural community. Such perspectives are rarely emphasized in international scholarship, which tends to focus more on national literature or modern texts. Accordingly, this research contributes not only to the development of theories on local wisdom-based language education but also offers valuable empirical data for formulating more inclusive curriculum policies.

The main objective of this research is to describe the practice of integrating the Lake Toba folktale into Indonesian language learning in secondary schools, identify its benefits for literacy and cultural understanding, and uncover the challenges faced by teachers in its implementation. By formulating strategies and recommendations based on field findings, this study seeks to contribute to the development of social and political sciences, particularly within the framework of local wisdom-based education. Ultimately, it emphasizes that folktales are not merely heritage but also educational investments that can strengthen the identity of Indonesia's younger generation.

RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative approach was chosen because the focus of this study is to understand the practices, meanings, and pedagogical dynamics that unfold when the Lake Toba folktale is introduced into the classroom. This approach allows the researcher to explore teachers' and students' experiences in depth, capture cultural contextual nuances, and map learning processes that are contextual and meaningful (Lee et al., 2023; Natow, 2020; Ritter, 2022). A case study design is deemed appropriate, as the research centers on a concrete "case", SMP

Negeri 1 Ronggurnihuta, which represents Batak cultural contexts and is located at the heart of the Lake Toba region. This site was selected not only due to its proximity to the subject matter but also because it demonstrates relatively representative teaching practices for secondary schools in Samosir's cultural area and allows for direct observation of translanguaging and folklore use in classroom interactions (Gilad, 2021; Villamin et al., 2025).

Informants were selected purposively to ensure variation of perspectives and depth of data: two Indonesian language teachers actively integrating folktales (one classroom teacher as the main implementer and one supporting teacher providing collegial perspectives), as well as 18 students from grades VIII–IX selected based on gender variation, involvement in cultural extracurricular activities, and levels of literacy skills. This number was designed to balance depth (in-depth interviews with teachers) with representativeness of student experiences in the same class, allowing for comprehensive analysis of individual and collective response patterns (Cheron et al., 2022; Vindrola-Padros & Johnson, 2020).

Data collection was conducted through methodological triangulation: participatory classroom observations during the teaching of the Lake Toba text (3–5 sessions documented through field notes and audio recordings), in-depth semi-structured interviews with teachers (45–60 minutes), small group and individual interviews with students (20–40 minutes), and document analysis of lesson plans, syllabi, and textbooks used by the school. Observations captured actual practices, teaching strategies, translanguaging interactions, and student responses, since many aspects of learning are evident only in action; interviews were chosen to explore teachers' intentions, pedagogical reflections, and students' subjective experiences; and document analysis provided curriculum policy context and formal materials shaping classroom practice (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

For analysis, data were recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed following Wiesner's (2022) steps: familiarization, initial coding, theme search, theme review, theme naming, and analytic narrative writing. To ensure credibility, triangulation was carried out by combining data sources (observation, interviews, documents), techniques (field notes, recordings, transcripts), and validation through member checking with selected informants and peer debriefing with fellow researchers, along with researcher reflexivity regarding their positionality in the field (Muurlink & Thomsen, 2024). Ethical procedures such as informed consent, data anonymization, and secure handling of recordings were also applied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Integration of Local Folklore in Pedagogical Practice

The integration of the Lake Toba folktale into Indonesian language learning at SMP Negeri 1 Ronggurnihuta demonstrates that local folklore is not merely presented as supplementary reading material but is employed as a primary source for explaining narrative structure, moral values, and linguistic elements. Teachers begin lessons by reading the Lake Toba story aloud at a measured pace, emphasizing parts that illustrate setting, plot, and character development. During observation, it was evident that the teacher outlined the story's structure on the board and then invited students to recall the sequence of events. This

activity extended beyond mastering story structure, guiding students to extract moral lessons such as responsibility, honesty, and the consequences of breaking promises. The classroom atmosphere became lively, as students felt a strong sense of familiarity with a story they had heard since childhood.

In interviews conducted after the lesson, one teacher, referred to as Ms. N, explained that using the Lake Toba folktale enabled students to grasp the concept of narrative texts more easily. In her view, when examples are drawn from stories already familiar to students, they do not need to expend effort adapting to an unfamiliar text. This aligns with the arguments of Chang and Viesca (2022) and Hidayati and Santiana (2020), who emphasize the importance of teaching materials that reflect students' cultural backgrounds to ensure learning is relevant, meaningful, and accessible. In this context, folklore is not treated merely as traditional literature but rather as a pedagogical bridge connecting formal learning with students' cultural realities.

Students also displayed considerable enthusiasm. A ninth-grade student, anonymized as S, stated that he was pleased when the teacher discussed the Lake Toba story because, in his words, "that story is part of us." Though expressed simply, this reflects how folklore-based teaching materials foster a sense of ownership and cultural pride. Field observations confirmed this, as some students eagerly contributed details of the story they had heard from parents or grandparents. When asked about the moral lessons, several students related the story to their own lives, such as the importance of keeping promises to friends or valuing family. Such connections reveal that learning extended beyond text comprehension to engage affective dimensions supportive of character formation.

This practice also affirms the inseparability of language and culture in learning. Caingcoy (2023) and Souisa et al. (2020) explain that culturally responsive pedagogy involves not only selecting local texts but also employing teaching strategies that acknowledge, value, and build upon students' cultural strengths. In this case, the teacher did not merely borrow folklore as an illustration but used it as the primary medium to teach linguistic concepts such as adjectives, compound sentences, and narrative structure. For example, in explaining conflict in the story, the teacher asked students to write sentences describing the tension between the father and child. Students composed sentences in their own words, and the teacher provided feedback on grammatical correctness. This illustrates how folklore functions as a "living text" that can be leveraged to develop writing, reading, and critical thinking skills.

The use of folklore also fostered a more collaborative classroom atmosphere. Observations revealed that students frequently shared knowledge about different versions of the story. One student added that the mother figure played a crucial role, while another emphasized the moral of keeping family secrets. Rather than creating confusion, these variations enriched classroom discussion. The teacher facilitated by highlighting that such differences were part of the richness of oral culture. This situation reinforces the findings of Caingcoy (2023) and Chang and Viesca (2022) that integrating local culture into learning broadens student participation and nurtures skills in appreciating diverse perspectives.

Furthermore, the integration of folklore shows that learning encompasses not only cognitive but also affective and social dimensions. When students feel that the texts studied reflect their own world, the internalization of values becomes more profound. Souisa et al. (2020) and Suyatno et al. (2022) emphasize that education must not only be culturally responsive but should also strive to sustain and develop students' culture. In this classroom, the teacher not only used the Lake Toba story as a temporary teaching tool but also encouraged students to retell it in their own style, whether in Indonesian or interspersed with Batak Toba. This process both preserved local culture and enriched students' literacy experiences.

Classroom observations also revealed that folklore integration lowered barriers to learning. At the beginning of lessons, students tended to be passive when national textbook texts were used. However, when the Lake Toba story was read aloud, students immediately demonstrated more active involvement. They raised their hands to share knowledge, some even adding Batak expressions to clarify meaning. The teacher acknowledged these contributions and connected them to the linguistic content under discussion. The class became more lively, interactive, and infused with humor, creating a relaxed learning atmosphere. These observations indicate that folklore has the potential to create a more humanistic and dialogical learning environment.

Students' connection with local texts underscores the importance of folklore integration as a means of building learning rooted in cultural identity. Through the Lake Toba story, students not only learned abstract concepts such as plot or character but also experienced the relevance of moral values to real life. This supports Costansa and Sarbunan's (2021) argument that culturally based teaching materials can enhance the relevance of learning, strengthen motivation, and foster a sense of belonging. Thus, integrating local folklore in pedagogical practice is not merely an alternative material choice but a strategy for unifying cognitive, affective, and social dimensions in language education.

Student Responses and Learning Engagement

Students' responses to the use of the Lake Toba folktale in Indonesian language learning revealed dynamic and meaningful patterns. Compared to the use of more generic national texts, students appeared more engaged when interacting with local texts that held emotional and cultural resonance. Field findings indicated that many students found it easier to understand narrative structures, plotlines, and moral lessons in folklore than in universal texts. In interviews, an eighth-grade student remarked that reading the Lake Toba story felt like learning something familiar, as they had often heard it since childhood. This statement illustrates how connections to everyday lived experience significantly enhance classroom engagement.

Active student participation was also evident during classroom observations. In lessons where students were typically passive when the teacher read national texts, the atmosphere shifted to one of lively interaction with the Lake Toba folktale. Students repeatedly asked questions about story details, and some contributed additional information about versions they had heard from their families. For example, when the teacher explained

narrative structure, students debated how the transformation of the father figure in the story influenced the plot's outcome. This active discussion revealed that students were not merely listening but actively co-constructing meaning.

Flint et al. (2021) and Lewier and Nendissa (2020) stress that student engagement increases when learning materials reflect their identities, languages, and lived experiences. By using the Lake Toba text, the teacher implicitly validated students' cultural experiences and demonstrated that their local culture holds a legitimate place in the academic space. This validation boosted students' intrinsic motivation, as they felt they were learning not merely to meet curricular demands but to connect learning with their everyday realities.

In classroom discussions, some students even compared the moral lessons of the Lake Toba story with values practiced at home. One student shared that his parents had always taught him to keep promises, a message that aligns with the central conflict of the folktale. Such statements highlight the strong affective ties between the text and students' social realities. This integration revived the notion that learning is not only cognitive but also engages emotional and ethical dimensions.

From classroom observations, the learning environment appeared noticeably different. Students who usually sat quietly with neutral expressions began leaning forward, whispering to peers about interesting parts of the story, and even typically reserved students raised their hands to speak. Teachers found it easier to foster interaction because student responses were quicker and more spontaneous. The classroom thus became a collaborative space where Indonesian was not only studied as a set of formal rules but also functioned as a medium to revitalize local knowledge.

This phenomenon illustrates how local texts serve as a bridge between national curricula and students' social experiences. Through the Lake Toba story, students learned how narrative texts are structured while simultaneously engaging with values of identity and togetherness embedded in the folktale. This aligns with Paris (2021) and Wenno et al. (2021), who argue that the success of culturally sustaining pedagogy lies in its ability to create safe spaces where students' identities are acknowledged and affirmed.

Interview data with one teacher, anonymized as B, reinforced this observation. The teacher noted that when using national texts, it was often difficult to spark student enthusiasm. However, when materials were replaced with the Lake Toba story, students responded more quickly and related the content to their family experiences. For the teacher, this was tangible evidence that local materials were more effective in fostering student participation.

Further analysis revealed that engagement was not only individual but also collective. Students built social relationships through discussion, exchanged perspectives, and corrected each other when misremembering story details. In this way, local texts enhanced cognitive engagement while simultaneously strengthening classroom social cohesion. The learning environment became more participatory and democratic, consistent with principles of culturally sustaining pedagogy that emphasize sustaining students' collective identities in academic contexts (Litualy & Serpara, 2021; Lumaela & Que, 2021; Park & Paulick, 2021).

These findings provide an important reflection: Indonesian language learning can be enriched through folklore-based materials because local texts possess emotional appeal that motivates student engagement. Moreover, this engagement suggests the emergence of sustainable intrinsic motivation, in contrast to the temporary engagement observed with less relevant texts. Thus, learning becomes more meaningful, culturally grounded, and impactful for shaping the identity of Indonesia's younger generation.

Translanguaging as a Learning Strategy

In Indonesian language learning practices at SMP Negeri 1 Ronggurnihuta, translanguaging emerged as a highly natural strategy when teachers and students engaged with the Lake Toba folktale. Rather than restricting communication to formal Indonesian, teachers encouraged students to draw on Batak Toba in explaining meanings, interpreting plotlines, and deepening their understanding of cultural values. This was evident in moments when students struggled to find equivalent words or articulate expressions in Indonesian; teachers allowed them to first explain in Batak Toba before switching back to Indonesian. This strategy not only facilitated comprehension but also legitimized students' linguistic identities as bilinguals in their everyday lives.

In interviews, one student (pseudonym T) expressed feeling more confident when allowed to use Batak Toba in class. According to him, certain cultural terms in the Lake Toba story were easier to understand and carried richer meanings in the local language than in Indonesian, whose translations often felt flat. This echoes Carroll (2022), Prilutskaya (2021), and Yilmaz (2021), who argue that translanguaging is not simply code-switching but a cognitive and identity-based strategy enabling students to negotiate knowledge in more meaningful ways. In this sense, translanguaging served as an epistemological bridge between students' cultural world and the academic world represented by the national curriculum.

Field observations reinforced this finding. In one lesson, the teacher read a part of the story describing the relationship between father and child. Some students struggled to grasp particular phrases in formal Indonesian. The teacher then asked them to discuss the meaning in Batak Toba, leading to a more fluid conversation. Students exchanged views, using local terms imbued with emotional nuance. Afterwards, the teacher summarized the discussion in Indonesian, enabling students to learn how local concepts could be translated into academic discourse. A classroom that initially seemed hesitant transformed into one full of conversation, laughter, and collaborative meaning-making.

This phenomenon shows that translanguaging not only reduces linguistic barriers but also creates space for students to mobilize their entire linguistic repertoires. Bonacina-Pugh et al. (2021) argue that translanguaging constitutes a form of languaging, a social practice through which individuals express identities, build meaning, and connect different knowledge systems. In this classroom, translanguaging fostered an authentic learning experience, as students were not forced to suppress their home language but were instead empowered to integrate it into formal learning.

Moreover, an interview with teacher B revealed that translanguaging encouraged more active participation from typically passive students. According to her, when students

were required to answer only in Indonesian, many hesitated or remained silent. However, when given the option to respond in Batak Toba, they eagerly shared their ideas, enriching the discussion with real-life examples. She observed that the use of both languages cultivated students' sense of ownership over the learning process, as their language was recognized as a legitimate source of knowledge.

From an analytical standpoint, translanguaging in this context extended beyond simplifying communication to function as a critical literacy strategy. By connecting local and national languages, students learned that meaning is never singular but is produced through interaction between languages and cultures. For instance, when discussing the concept of promises in the Lake Toba story, students used local terms carrying stronger moral connotations than their Indonesian equivalents. This opened a space for discussion on how moral values are expressed across languages, teaching students to view language as a medium of critical reflection rather than merely a communication tool.

Translanguaging also deepened comprehension, as students could access meaning through two linguistic sources. When limited by Indonesian vocabulary, they relied on Batak Toba, and vice versa. This process reduced language barriers while training students to perform conceptual translation between the two languages, thereby enhancing their metalinguistic skills. In other words, translanguaging encouraged students not only to understand the content but also to reflect on the linguistic processes shaping that understanding.

Theoretically, translanguaging supports the view that language learning cannot be separated from students' social and cultural identities. Galante (2024) emphasizes that translanguaging creates a "third space," where languages are no longer rigidly separated but are flexibly drawn upon as part of a unified repertoire. This third space was clearly visible in the Samosir classroom, where students felt comfortable moving between Indonesian and Batak Toba without fear of error. Through this blending, they constructed richer understandings while simultaneously internalizing the cultural values embedded in folklore.

Challenges in Implementing Folklore in the Classroom

The implementation of the Lake Toba folktale in Indonesian language learning at SMP Negeri 1 Ronggurnihuta revealed a number of complex challenges. One of the most apparent is the absence of official teaching materials that teachers can use as references. Teachers must exert significant effort to transcribe, restructure, and even adapt the folktale texts themselves to fit classroom needs. In an interview, one teacher, referred to as B, stated that she often relied on oral versions of the story she had heard since childhood, rewriting them in simpler language to be used in class. However, she also emphasized that this limitation makes lesson preparation more time-consuming compared to using national textbooks, which are already fully available. This highlights how the lack of institutional support can become a burden for teachers seeking to enrich learning with local wisdom.

In addition to the limitation of teaching materials, methodological issues also emerged as another challenge. There is no official guideline on how local folklore can be integrated into the language curriculum. Teachers are left to improvise in designing learning activities,

such as using the folktale as material for rewriting narrative texts or discussing its embedded moral values. In practice, such improvisation sometimes works well, but often lacks a solid pedagogical framework. A student, referred to as T, explained that classroom discussions sometimes felt confusing because the teacher was not systematic in connecting the local text with the basic competencies mandated by the curriculum. This demonstrates that without clear methodological guidance, folklore integration risks becoming a supplementary activity rather than an integral component of Indonesian language instruction.

Classroom observations reinforce this picture. When the teacher introduced the Lake Toba story as learning material, students appeared enthusiastic while listening. However, when the teacher attempted to link the story to narrative text structure, the class became noisy due to unclear instructions. The teacher eventually reverted to using the national textbook to explain the concept of structure, relegating the folktale to a mere supplementary example. This situation illustrates the tension between teacher initiative and the limitations of available methodological frameworks. The classroom atmosphere, initially full of enthusiasm, shifted to a more formal and rigid tone, indicating that such pedagogical challenges are real and directly affect instructional effectiveness.

Another equally significant challenge lies in the highly centralized and uniform nature of the national curriculum. The curriculum tends to prescribe certain literary texts that must be used across all schools, leaving little room for local texts. A teacher, referred to as L, admitted that she often felt hesitant about incorporating folktales into lesson plans due to concerns about misalignment with centrally determined assessment standards. She noted that although the Lake Toba story is highly relevant for students in Samosir, national assessments continue to evaluate students on texts drawn from national or modern literature. This statement underscores the misalignment between local needs and the prevailing national education policy.

From an educational policy perspective, this condition can be understood as a consequence of the standardization paradigm that dominates Indonesia's education system. The curriculum is designed to ensure uniformity of teaching materials nationwide, under the assumption that uniform standards guarantee equal educational quality. However, as Dutton and Rushton (2020) point out, standardization often suppresses teacher creativity and neglects the local context that is essential for ensuring relevance in learning. The case at SMP Negeri 1 Ronggurnihuta exemplifies how uniform policies can hinder the integration of local culture into classrooms, even though that culture is a vital part of students' daily lives.

Analytically, these three challenges, the absence of official teaching materials, the lack of methodological guidance, and the dominance of the national curriculum, underscore the need for greater flexibility in education policy. If the national curriculum provided more space for teachers to adapt materials to local wisdom, then the use of folklore would no longer be seen as a matter of individual improvisation but rather as a legitimate part of the learning process. This aligns with Ortiz and Davis (2020), who emphasize the importance of culturally relevant pedagogy in ensuring education is rooted in students' social realities. Thus, the challenges faced by teachers are not merely technical but reflect a policy structure that

remains too rigid and insufficiently supportive of cultural diversity.

Despite these constraints, teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Ronggurnihuta continue striving to integrate the Lake Toba folktale into classroom learning. This effort demonstrates a strong grassroots drive to make education more contextual and meaningful. However, for such practices to be sustainable, broader systemic support is required, including the development of locally based teaching materials, the provision of methodological guidelines, and curriculum reform that allows room for diversity. The challenges encountered should not be viewed as evidence that folklore is unfit for the classroom but rather as highlighting the urgency of restructuring the educational framework to be more responsive to students' needs and local cultures.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that integrating the Lake Toba folktale into Indonesian language learning in secondary schools not only enables students to more easily understand narrative texts, story structures, and moral values, but also creates space for learning rooted in their cultural identities. Through translanguaging practices that combine Indonesian and Batak Toba, students do not merely master content cognitively but also build affective connections with texts closely tied to their daily lives. These findings demonstrate that folklore can function as a legitimate pedagogical resource rather than merely a literary artifact isolated from the classroom, while simultaneously strengthening critical literacy and student engagement. The challenges posed by limited teaching materials, the absence of methodological guidelines, and the dominance of the national curriculum highlight the need for more flexible policies that provide room for local cultural diversity.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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