



INTEGRATION OF FOLKLORE IN DIGITAL LEARNING: CHARACTER STRENGTHENING INNOVATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION ERA

Dewi Ariani¹, Dwi Sulistyorini^{2*}
Universitas Negeri Malang^{1,2}

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the integration of Indonesian folk tales into digital learning platforms as an innovative approach to strengthen character education in the 21st century. The study employs a qualitative descriptive method involving teachers and students in elementary schools who utilize interactive digital media based on local folklore. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of student learning outcomes. The findings indicate that digitalization of folk tales not only increases student engagement and motivation but also effectively internalizes moral values such as honesty, responsibility, and tolerance. Challenges encountered include limited digital literacy among teachers and students, as well as the need for culturally relevant content development. The article concludes that the integration of folk tales in digital learning environments offers significant potential for character building and cultural preservation, provided that adequate training and resources are made available for educators.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with a very rich cultural diversity, reflected in thousands of folklore spread across various regions. Folklore not only functions as entertainment, but also as a medium for transmitting noble values, social norms, and local wisdom that are inherited from generation to generation. Values such as honesty, cooperation, responsibility, and tolerance, are important foundations in the formation of the

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: dwi.sulistyorini.fs@um.ac.id (Dwi Sulistyorini)*.

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nation's character. In the context of education, folklore has great potential as a resource for character learning that is contextual and relevant to students' lives (Koentjaraningrat, 1987)(Yusuf, 2018).

As technology develops and the lifestyles of younger generations change, interest in traditional folklore tends to decline. Today's digital generation is more familiar with gadgets and social media than with stories passed down orally or written by parents and teachers (Setyawan, 2017). This phenomenon is a challenge for the world of education in an effort to preserve culture while instilling character values in students. Therefore, learning innovations are needed that are able to bridge local traditions with modern technology.

The integration of folklore into digital learning is one of the strategic solutions to overcome these challenges. Digital learning offers flexibility, accessibility, and interactivity that can increase students' interest in learning (Kurniati et al., 2022). Through digitization, folklore can be packaged in various forms of media, such as animated videos, interactive e-books, educational game applications, and podcasts, making it more accessible and attractive to the younger generation (Muliya et al., 2025). In addition, this approach allows teachers to relate folklore values to the context of students' daily lives more creatively and effectively.

Several studies have shown that the use of folklore-based digital media in learning not only increases students' understanding of the content of the story, but also strengthens the internalization of character values (Musaddad et al., 2025). For example, through interactive learning applications that contain folklore, students can learn to make decisions, understand the consequences of actions, and emulate the characters in the story. This is in line with the goal of national character education which emphasizes the importance of developing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects holistically (Kemendikbud, 2017).

However, the implementation of the integration of folklore in digital learning still faces various obstacles, such as the limitations of digital literacy of teachers and students, the lack of technological resources in some regions, and the need to develop content that is in accordance with the characteristics of local culture (Kurniati et al., 2022; Sitorus, 2019). Therefore, this study aims to describe an innovative model of folklore-based digital learning as an effort to strengthen students' character in the 21st century education era. This research is expected to

make a real contribution to the development of character education based on local wisdom that is adaptive to technological developments.

METHOD

This study uses the Descriptive Qualitative with the aim of describing the process of integrating folklore into digital learning as an effort to strengthen students' character. The qualitative approach was chosen because it was able to explore the meaning, experience, and deep perceptions of the research subjects related to the implementation of learning innovations based on local culture (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The research subjects consist of teachers and elementary school students in Malang City who have implemented folklore-based learning (Malin Kundang, Timun Mas, Sangkuriang) through digital media. The selection of subjects is carried out purposively, that is, choosing the informant who is considered to understand the most and be directly involved in the learning process. Data was collected through several techniques, namely: in-depth interviews with teachers and students to obtain information about experiences, perceptions, and challenges in the implementation of digital learning based on folklore; classroom observation to observe the learning process, interaction between teachers, and students' responses to the digital media used; Documentation study of teaching materials, digital applications, and student works related to folklore. Triangulation techniques are used to ensure the validity of the data, i.e. comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation (Sugiyono, 2019)(Moleong, 2017).

The research is carried out through several stages: first, the identification of local folklore that is relevant and has strong character values. Second, the development of digital media (e.g., interactive e-books, animated videos, or educational applications) that contain the folklore. Third, the implementation of digital media in the learning process in the classroom. Fourth, evaluation and reflection on changes in students' understanding and character attitudes after participating in learning. The collected data is analyzed interactively with the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The analysis was carried out to identify patterns of character strengthening, the effectiveness of digital media, as well as obstacles and solutions that arise during the learning process. This study pays attention to ethical principles by asking for consent from all participants,

maintaining data confidentiality, and using data only for research purposes (M. B. Miles; A. M. Huberman; J. Saldana, 2014).

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

This research shows that the integration of folklore into digital learning has a significant positive impact on strengthening students' character in elementary school. Implementation is carried out through the use of interactive applications and digital e-books that contain local folklore, such as "Malin Kundang", "Timun Mas", and "Sangkuriang". This digital media is developed with animated features, reflective quizzes, and virtual discussion forums that allow students to interact, discuss, and reflect on the moral values contained in the story.

Increased Student Interest and Participation

Classroom observation data showed that students' interest and participation increased significantly during the learning process. Students seem enthusiastic about following the stories presented visually and interactively, compared to the conventional method of using only textbooks. This is in line with the findings (Fardhany, 2016; Muliya et al., 2025) which states that digital media is able to increase student motivation and involvement in learning.

Internalization of Character Values

Through in-depth interviews, teachers and students revealed that digital folklore-based learning facilitates understanding of character values such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance. For example, in the story "Timun Mas", students are invited to discuss the meaning of courage and ingenuity, as well as reflect on their application in daily life. Teachers also make use of the reflective quiz feature to gauge students' understanding and attitudes after reading the story. The results of the evaluation showed an increase in the average score of students' character attitudes before and after the intervention, especially in the aspects of honesty and responsibility.

Strengthening Local Wisdom and Cultural Identity

The integration of folklore in digital learning also contributes to the preservation of local wisdom and the strengthening of students' cultural identity. Students become more

familiar with a variety of folklore from their own region and other regions in Indonesia. This is important in building a sense of pride and love for the homeland, as expressed and (Koentjaraningrat, 1987)(Dewi & Nurzaman, 2024) that folklore is an effective medium in instilling cultural values and national identity.

The results of this study confirm that the integration of folklore into digital learning makes a significant contribution to strengthening students' character in the modern education era. These findings are in line with a range of literature highlighting the importance of preserving local cultural values through educational innovation. (Koentjaraningrat, 1987)

The Relevance of Folklore in Character Education

Indonesian folklore is rich in moral messages, ethics, and local wisdom that have been proven to be able to shape the character of the younger generation since ancient times. Values such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance contained in folklore, if internalized appropriately, can be a strong foundation in building students' character (Musaddad et al., 2025). The integration of folklore in digital learning allows these values to be packaged in an interesting and contextual way, making it easier for students living in the digital era to understand and appreciate them.

Story	Main Character Values	Cultural Values/Local Wisdom	Brief Description
Malin Kundang	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsibility Respect for parents Honesty Humility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Obedience to parents The law of karma (retribution for deeds) Family values 	Malin Kundang teaches the importance of respecting and serving parents and the bad consequences of disobedience.
Timun Mas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Courage Perseverance Ingenuity Never give up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gotong royong Belief in the forces of nature and lucky objects Human-nature relationship 	Timun Mas highlights courage and ingenuity in facing dangers and the importance of help from others and nature.
Sangkuriang	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honesty Responsibility Patience Self-control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prohibition of inbreeding Respect for parents Local Wisdom on the Origins of Nature 	Sangkuriang contains a message about the importance of honesty, self-control, and the prohibition of violating cultural norms.

Table of Character and Cultural Values in the Story of Malin Kundang, Timun Mas, and Sangkuriang

Digitalization as a Learning Innovation

Transforming folklore into digital formats—such as interactive e-books, animated videos, and educational apps—has proven to be effective in increasing student interest and participation. Digital media offers a more visual, interactive, and flexible learning experience, so that it can reach a wide range of students' learning styles (Ariani et al., 2023; Kurniati et al., 2022; Tanjung et al., 2024). Features such as reflective quizzes, discussion forums, and role simulations in digital learning apps facilitate students to not only understand the storyline, but also reflect and discuss the moral values contained in it.

The increase in interest in learning found in this study is also supported by the literature that states that technology-based learning can increase student motivation, creativity, and engagement (Saputra et al., 2022; Tanjung et al., 2024). Thus, the digitization of folklore is not only a means of cultural preservation, but also a pedagogical innovation that is relevant to the needs of the digital generation.

Strengthening Cultural Identity and Local Wisdom

One of the important impacts of integrating folklore in digital learning is the strengthening of students' cultural identities. Through the introduction of folklore from various regions, students not only understand the diversity of Indonesian culture, but also build a sense of pride and love for the homeland. This is especially important in the context of globalization, where the flow of foreign cultures is very strong and has the potential to erode local identity. Thus, digital folklore-based education can be a fortress of cultural defense as well as a medium for strengthening the nation's character. (Koentjaraningrat, 1987)

Implementation Challenges

While there are many benefits, the study also identifies a number of challenges that need to be addressed. First, the limitation of digital literacy among teachers and students is still the main obstacle. Not all teachers have the ability and confidence to integrate technology in learning, so continuous training and mentoring are needed (Tanjung et al., 2024). Second, the uneven availability of technological devices, especially in remote areas, can limit students' access to digital learning media. In addition, the development of digital content based on folklore must pay attention to the relevance of local culture and diversity. The content developed needs to involve the local community, cultural experts, and parents

so that the values raised are truly in accordance with the needs and characteristics of students in each region (Musaddad et al., 2025; Yusi Kamhar & Lestari, 2019).

Implications and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research, the integration of folklore in digital learning can be recommended as an innovative model of character education in Indonesia. To optimize implementation, several strategic steps that can be taken include: providing intensive training to teachers in developing and utilizing digital media based on folklore; involve local communities and cultural experts in the process of digitizing folklore so that the content produced is in accordance with local wisdom values; building cooperation between schools, governments, educational application developers, and the community to expand access and quality of digital learning; conduct periodic evaluations of the effectiveness of digital media in strengthening students' character and make continuous improvements.

Contribution to the Development of Educational Science and Practice

This research makes a real contribution to the development of character education based on local wisdom through technological innovation. The model of integrating folklore in digital learning can be a reference for the development of curriculum and learning strategies at various levels of education. In addition, the results of this study also open up opportunities for further research related to the effectiveness of similar models in different cultural and technological contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

This research confirms that the integration of folklore into digital learning is an effective innovation in strengthening students' character education in the digital era. Through the digitization of folklore in the form of interactive e-books, animated videos, and educational apps, students not only gain knowledge of local moral values and culture, but also experience a more interesting, interactive, and relevant learning process to their daily lives. The results of the study showed an increase in interest in learning, active participation, as well as understanding and internalizing character values such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance. In addition, digital folklore-based learning also plays an important role in preserving local wisdom and strengthening students' cultural identity. However, challenges in

the form of limited digital literacy of teachers and students, as well as uneven access to technology, still need serious attention so that the implementation of this innovation can run optimally.

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