STUDENT RESEARCH PROJECT

Banggai Folktales as Reading Materials for Developing Student's Critical Literacy

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Judul Penelitan : Banggai Folktales as Reading Materials for Developing Students' Critical Literacy:A Qualitative Content Analysis

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Banggai Folktales as Reading Materials for Developing Students' Critical Literacy: A Qualitative Content Analysis

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Abstract

Folktale has considerable potential as English reading material, not only for fostering students' cultural awareness but also for developing their critical literacy. In the current digital era, students are exposed to massive amounts of information that cannot be fully controlled, making critical literacy an essential skill. A critical lens enables students to analyze texts and information thoughtfully before forming judgments or taking action. This study, then, intended to analyze the potential Banggai folktales as English reading materials for developing students' critical literacy. It applied a qualitative content analysis. The source of the data was Banggai folktales texts written in English. The researchers play vital roles as the main instrument for collecting and analyzing the data. The four dimensions of critical literacy—disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action and promoting social justice— were used as the analytical framework. Peer debriefing was conducted to maintain the trustworthiness of the study. The results indicate that three Banggai folktales can effectively engage students across all four dimensions of critical literacy. To sum up, Banggai folktales have strong potential as alternative English reading materials to develop students' critical literacy and encourage them to critically engage with complex and problematic social issues.

Keywords: *Banggai Folktales, Critical Literacy, Reading Materials*

INTRODUCTION

Folklore offers strong potential as a culturally grounded resource in English language learning. Folklore refers to a body of stories, beliefs, and traditions transmitted collectively across generations within a community. One of its central forms is folktales, narrative texts that reflect social experiences, values, and worldviews. This review focuses on Banggai folktales as narrative reading texts that can be utilized in EFL contexts. Therefore, in this study the terms folklore and folktale are used interchangeably. Beyond functioning as cultural content, folklore may serve as alternative reading materials that promote not only cultural awareness but also students' critical literacy.

Previous studies indicate that folklore-based texts can enhance intercultural awareness by encouraging learners to compare values, symbols, and social norms across cultures (Hidayah & Ali, 2023). In addition, the use of folklore has been shown to support cultural authenticity and the appropriate

use of local terminology in narrative texts (Gurning & Tarigan, 2025). More importantly, folklore facilitates cultural reflection and moral awareness by engaging students in evaluating embedded cultural messages and ethical perspectives (Istiqomah, Oktarini, & Laeli, 2025). Such learning outcomes resonate with the objectives of Indonesia's 2003 Education Act, which emphasizes the development of students' intellectual capacities and personal character through the internalization of cultural values.

A key cultural value represented in Banggai folktales is gotong royong (mutual cooperation). This value functions not merely as collective labor but as a social norm that structures community relationships and regulates social life (Rawis, 2011). In everyday practices, gotong royong is manifested through traditions such as monsu'u (mutual assistance in house construction), mosaut (cooperation in agriculture), and memboka (cooperative fishing activities). These practices reflect the maritime-oriented lifestyle of Banggai society, which is strongly rooted in solidarity and shared responsibility.

The principle of cooperation is also embedded in ceremonial traditions such as Montulungi or Montolutusan, which emphasize voluntarism, togetherness, and social cohesion (Nurvitasari, 2021). Comparable traditions exist in neighboring communities, such as the Poo Tulungi tradition in the Balantak community, which reinforces collective resilience through cooperation in farming, housing, and communal celebrations (Mua, 2025). Despite the challenges posed by modernization, these cultural practices continue to preserve the communal ethos of coastal societies.

However, previous research suggests that the integration of local culture into formal English learning materials remains limited. Ulfa and Astuti (2022) found that local cultural representations in the junior high school textbook When English Rings a Bell were largely superficial, addressing only cultural products and perspectives while neglecting deeper dimensions such as people and social practices. Similarly, Salingkat et al. (2023) reported that although local content in elementary schools in Banggai Regency includes regional languages, arts, and traditional activities, it has not been specifically developed for English language learning contexts. These findings indicate a gap between the potential of local cultural resources and their systematic use as EFL reading materials, particularly for developing students' critical literacy skills.

To develop students' critical awareness, teachers can apply the four dimensions of critical literacy proposed by Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) to help them in organizing the learning process. The dimensions are disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focuses on sociopolitical issues, and taking action and promoting social justice.

The first dimension is disrupting the commonplace. In this stage, students are engaged in reading texts not only to understand but also to problematize and interrogate texts that are normally considered unproblematic. Teachers can ask the students questions such as "How is this text trying to position a woman in society?" or "What are valued, excluded, and included in our society through the texts?" It is to invite students to problematize, interrogate, and examine how texts might construct identity, culture, and world in powerful and

ideological ways (Gee, 2008; Luke, 2000; Vasquez, 2000). Thus, students might see that what is usually perceived as normal is actually problematic.

The second dimension is interrogating multiple viewpoints. In this dimension, students are engaged in exploring experiences and texts from their viewpoints and others, including contradictory perspectives (Lewison et al., 2002). It is very crucial for students to consider various perspectives to help them to do reflections by questioning texts to find the silenced voices. Here, students are going to be engaged in the activities to interrogate the missing and heard voices (Harste et al., 2000). Interrogating a text from various perspectives might help students to be aware that a tidy conclusion to a text is not enough or even unfair.

Next, the third dimension focuses on sociopolitical issues. Here, students are going to see language as never neutral. In other words, the use of language is always involved in power relations as well as the sociopolitical system (Lewison et al., 2002). Therefore, students will see a text through a broader lens. They will relate the issue (text) they read not only with their personal lives, but also with sociopolitical issues around the issue. It is by questioning the status quo, the relationships between the use of language and power (Comber 2001).

Last, the fourth dimension is taking action and promoting social justice. In this dimension, students are invited to see their ability to reflect and act as a means for transformation towards unbalanced power that causes injustice in society (Lewison et al., 2002).

Critical literacy has gained its popularity not only in English-speaking countries but also in non-English-speaking countries as an alternative approach to teaching English. Especially in EFL settings, many scholars have found that critical literacy contributes positively to developing students' critical awareness when implemented in the classroom. Some positive impacts include enhancing students' critical thinking skills and critical stance, vocalizing their own thoughts, acknowledging multiple perspectives, and reconsidering what is perceived as normal or neutral in their daily routines (Shin & Cookes, 2005; Izadinia & Abdenia, 2010; Park, 2011; Kuo, 2014; Suarcaya & Prasasti, 2017). This means that critical literacy can be an effective tool for developing students' critical awareness.

Then, this study aims to qualitatively analyze the potential of Banggai folktales as EFL reading materials for developing students' critical literacy. Specifically, it examines how cultural values, social practices, and moral messages embedded in Banggai folktales can support students in interpreting texts critically, reflecting on cultural meanings, and engaging with broader social and ethical issues in English language learning.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applied a qualitative content analysis research design. This study was intended to explore the potential of Banggai folktales as reading materials for junior high school students. The study used the critical literacy framework proposed by Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys (2002) as the analytical tools as well as the guidance to develop the rubric of the analytical construct. It was

because the four dimensions of critical literacy were carefully and comprehensively formulated for applying the critical literacy concepts into the classroom.

The main data source of this study was Banggai folktale texts written in English. First, the texts were taken from Cerita Rakyat Sulawesi Tengah that was a story written by T. David Andersen in collaboration and published by Masyarakat Linguistik Indonesia and Summer Institute of Linguistics in 1999. Second, the texts were taken from a book entitled Tales from the Edge of Sulawesi: Bilingual Folklore and Legends of Banggai, Balantak, and Saluan, a compiled volume authored by 23 students from the English Language and Culture Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Tompotika Luwuk, and published by Binar Media in 2025.

This study used three instruments for data collection: the researchers, an analytical rubric, and datasheets. The researchers acted as the main instruments in collecting and analyzing the data. The analytical rubric was used to identify relevant parts of the texts related to the research questions. Datasheets were used to record the findings based on specific indicators. Data were collected through a note-taking technique and recorded in the datasheets.

The collected data were analyzed qualitatively using Creswell's (2007) data analysis spiral. The analysis involved three stages: describing and classifying the data, interpreting the findings, and presenting the results. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, intercoder agreement was applied following Mayring (2014). This technique involved the use of a second coder to check the consistency and validity of the data. The coders consisted of a university lecturer and a senior high school English teacher in Banggai.

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

FINDING

The findings indicate that Banggai folktales have the potential to enhance students' critical awareness. Based on this consideration, three folktales were selected for in-depth and critical analysis: *The Old Horse of the King* by T. David Andersen, *The Legend of Lemelu Lake*, and *The Legend of Lake Tendetung*. These texts were chosen because they are appropriate for junior high school students. Before discussing the results related to the texts' potential in developing students' critical awareness, this section first presents the four dimensions of critical aspects identified in the analyzed texts, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Analysis of the four dimensions of critical aspects

Text	Disrupting the commonplace	Interrogating multiple viewpoints	Focusing on sociopolitical issues	Taking action and promoting social justice
1	☐	☐	☐	
2	☐	☐		☐
9	☐	☐	☐	☐

Based on the findings, it is evident that all four dimensions of critical literacy proposed by Lewison et al. are present across the analyzed Banggai folktales. This indicates that the texts have strong potential to be used as reading inputs to engage students in critical literacy practices. Although each text demonstrates different emphases, collectively they provide opportunities for students to experience all dimensions of critical literacy. Some texts emphasize certain dimensions more strongly than others; however, when used thoughtfully in classroom instruction, all texts can contribute to the development of students' critical awareness.

Text 1

Among the analyzed folktales, text 1 demonstrates clear potential to engage students in the first three dimensions of critical literacy, namely disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, and focusing on sociopolitical issues. In the first dimension, the text allows students to disrupt the commonplace by examining how characters are positioned within the story. Although the characters are portrayed as animals, they symbolically represent human roles and social conditions. Through guided discussion, students can be encouraged to question how the text reflects societal attitudes toward certain groups, particularly those who are considered weak or no longer productive. This makes the text suitable for introducing students to critical questioning about how individuals or groups are represented in narratives. Look at the story snippet below:

> *There was an old horse of the king who was taken to the middle of the forest because he couldn't work any more. In that forest was a very bad animal that frequently ate other animals.*
> [1/T1/P1/S1-2]

Even though here the characters are animals, we can ask students to think of the issue in our society. The characters in the story can represent human characters in real life. The old horse represents old people who cannot work anymore. The bad animal that frequently eats animals can represent the problems/dangers that the old people might face, such as stress, sadness, loneliness, or any feeling or thought that might affect their health, or even be life-threatening. Some questions can be raised to stimulate students' critical stances, such as "According to the text, how does the writer try to position the old horse?" The teacher can use the question to bridge students to further

analysis of the cultural discourse about how society positions old people.

Secondly, the text can be used to engage students to interrogate multiple viewpoints. Look at the story snippet below:

One day Mouse Deer went and met the king' s horse that had been taken to that forest. When they met, Mouse Deer said, "Tiger over there is exceedingly bad. Let's trick him and kill him." Mouse Deer and Horse worked together. Mouse Deer said, "Horse, you go and lie down, and pretend you're dead, but not now, after a bit when the tiger is about to arrive. go over there to him and trick him. I'll tell him that a horse died here so that he'll come over here.

[2/T1/P1/S3-9]

The story portrays a Mouse Deer and the king's horse who cooperate to defeat and kill a tiger that is described as dangerous. This episode provides an opportunity for students to analyze the event from multiple perspectives, including those of the Mouse Deer, the king's horse, and the tiger, each of whom acts based on different interests and motivations. From the Mouse Deer's perspective, the action may be seen as a strategic effort to eliminate a threat. From the king's horse's perspective, cooperation becomes a means of survival after being abandoned. Meanwhile, from the tiger's perspective, the act can be interpreted as a form of deception and injustice.

This interaction reflects a key cultural value in Banggai coastal society, namely togetherness or collective action. However, the text also presents a critical tension, as cooperation in this case is used to carry out harmful actions rather than morally positive ones. This contradiction allows students to critically reflect on the idea that collective action is not always ethically justified and that cultural values can be applied in both constructive and problematic ways. Through this analysis, students are encouraged to question moral assumptions, examine the consequences of collective decisions, and evaluate how cultural values are represented and challenged within the narrative.

Thirdly, the text can be used to engage students to focus on sociopolitical issues. Look at the story snippet below:

The king was very amazed to see a dead tiger brought by the horse that he had taken away. That horse was reinstated by the king and cared for once again.

[3/T1/P5/S1-2]

Students can analyze the king's decision to take care of the old horse after he sent the horse to the middle of the forest because it couldn't work anymore. Students can analyze it as a political action, and also consider the social effects.

Text 2

Text 2 can be used to engage students in the first, second, and fourth dimensions. Firstly, the text can be used to engage students to analyze how text constructs people and disrupts the status quo. Look at the story snippet below:

The king lived happily with his family, especially with the presence of a beautiful, gentle, and graceful princess named Princess Lemelu.

[4/T2/P1/S2]

Students can use the text to analyze how happy a family is defined. Here, a happy family is a family that has a beautiful, gentle, and graceful girl. It is to make the students see how the writer's definition in the story insists the writer's perspective of what a happy family is. This is a good text to direct students to think again that the writer's perspective is not the only concept of a happy family because it does not cover all families with their diversity.

Next, the text can be used to engage students to interrogate multiple viewpoints and the action to promote social justice. Look at the story snippet below:

But time passed, and the King forgot his promise. Without remembering the vow, he accepted the proposal of another, richer and more respected young man.
Langgabule was heartbroken. He demanded a promise, only to be rewarded with silence and betrayal. Princess Lemelu's wedding was still held.
Langgabule did not remain silent. He descended into the ocean, summoning sea creatures and land animals, uniting the forces of nature to avenge his heartache.

[6/T2/P5-7/S1-6]

Students can use the text to analyze the issue of injustice from various viewpoints. Students might interrogate the issue from the king's side as the parent who determines his daughter's future life by choosing a husband for her and at the same time breaks his promise, from princess Lemelu's side as the daughter whose life is determined by the parent, from Langgabule's side as the young man who does not get what is promised to him that makes him angry.

Furthermore, students can also be invited to think of Langgabule's action as an effort to get justice for himself by asking for the sea creatures and land animals to unite to avenge his heartache. Here, students can reflect on the ways of promoting social justice.

Text 3

Text 3 can be used to engage students in all four dimensions. Firstly, the text can be used to engage students to analyze how text positions people and disrupts the status quo. Look at the story snippet below:

"I will not let you marry that man! I've told you—our customs are different. What will become of you if you marry someone with no clear lineage?" Kokiap's father was furious, more than ever before.

[7/T9/P2/S1-3]

This part of the text allows students to analyze how cultural customs and lineage are used to position someone as suitable or unsuitable for marriage. The story presents these factors as fixed standards, which encourages students to question whether such norms are fair or should remain unquestioned. By discussing this issue, students can reflect on how texts represent people and maintain the status quo, as well as consider alternative ways of viewing marriage and personal choice.

Secondly, the text can be used to engage students to analyze how text constructs people and interrogate multiple viewpoints. Look at the story snippet

below:

But it wasn't only their parents who condemned what they had done. God and nature themselves seemed enraged. Storms rose. Trees fell, blocking their path. They had to change direction again and again, searching for a way out. Obstacle after obstacle stood in their way. And when the boat had twisted and turned through what seemed like a hundred bends, at the hundredth bend, a gaping hole suddenly appeared ahead, a hole wide enough to swallow the world.

That hole consumed the floodwaters, the boat, and the two lovers within. No one ever knew what became of Sundano and Kokiap. One thing was certain: their dreams and hopes of a life together were lost forever.

Roughly three months after the tragedy, two clear springs emerged at the site. They were about 300 meters apart. From each spring flowed a river, winding through the land. Locals believe the two springs are the spirits of the star-crossed lovers.

[10/T9/P10-12/S1-13]

Here, the students can analyze how the writer constructs the lovers as the spirits of the star-crossed lovers because parents, God, and nature are believed to condemn what they have done. Students can analyze the issue from the lovers' perspectives. Students can also create different endings for this story by changing the perspective. In other words, students can analyze the problem from multiple viewpoints.

Finally, the text can be used to engage students to focus on sociopolitical issues. Look at the story snippet below:

Then came a plan to stop the wedding at all costs. Sundano gathered sea creatures and placed them into bamboo tubes. According to legend, if these creatures were released at the site of a wedding, they would trigger a great curse known as Tobibil, a violent flood rising from the depths of the earth to drown everything in its path.

[9/T9/P6/S1-3]

This part of the story allows students to examine revenge not only as a personal response to injustice but also as a form of action that carries wider social and political consequences. The lovers' decision to seek revenge affects many people beyond those directly involved, showing how individual actions can influence the safety and well-being of the broader community. Through this discussion, students can reflect on power, responsibility, and the impact of personal decisions on society. At the same time, students can be encouraged to consider whether the lovers' actions represent a pursuit of justice or create further injustice, thereby connecting the narrative to broader sociopolitical issues related to conflict, authority, and collective responsibility.

DISCUSSIONS

This study aimed to examine the potential of Banggai folktales to engage students in the four dimensions of critical literacy proposed by Lewison et al., namely disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action and promoting social justice. The findings indicate that, compared to textbooks analyzed in previous studies, the folktales used in the current study provide stronger and more natural opportunities to develop students' critical literacy.

Regarding the first dimension, disrupting the commonplace, previous

studies such as Gustine (2014) found that students were able to question dominant assumptions only when teachers provided explicit guiding questions. In contrast, the findings of the present study show that Banggai folktales inherently encourage students to question taken-for-granted ideas. For example, text 1 allows students to reconsider how old people are positioned in society through symbolic animal characters, while text 2 challenges the dominant idea of a "happy family" by linking happiness to physical beauty and gendered traits. Text 3 further disrupts cultural norms related to marriage and lineage. These findings suggest that local folktales can naturally stimulate students to question dominant social beliefs without relying solely on external instructional prompts.

In terms of interrogating multiple viewpoints, previous research has shown that textbooks often limit students to understanding content or collecting opinions rather than critically examining different perspectives (Yoon, 2016). The present study, however, demonstrates that the analyzed folktales strongly support this dimension. Students can analyze events from the perspectives of various characters who hold different interests and positions of power. For instance, Text 1 allows students to examine cooperation and morality from the viewpoints of the Mouse Deer, the old horse, and the tiger. Similarly, Text 2 invites students to explore injustice from the perspectives of the king, Princess Lemelu, and Langgabule, while Text 3 encourages students to consider conflicts from the perspectives of lovers, parents, and cultural authorities. This indicates that Banggai folktales offer richer opportunities for perspective-taking than the textbook materials discussed in earlier studies.

Concerning the third dimension, focusing on sociopolitical issues, earlier studies reported that textbooks tend to avoid sociopolitical discussions due to government regulations and sensitivity toward controversial topics (Al Jumiah, 2016; McKinney, 2005). As a result, students are rarely encouraged to connect texts to broader issues of power and social consequences. In contrast, the findings of this study show that Banggai folktales contain narrative events that can be interpreted as sociopolitical actions. In Text 1, the king's decision to abandon and later reinstate the old horse can be analyzed as a political action related to social responsibility and authority. In Text 3, actions such as revenge and curses can be discussed in relation to power, collective punishment, and social impact. Although Text 2 presents fewer explicit sociopolitical elements, it still reflects power relations within family structures. These findings suggest that folktales can serve as an effective medium for discussing sociopolitical issues in a culturally appropriate way.

Finally, with regard to taking action and promoting social justice, previous studies have identified this dimension as the weakest in textbook-based instruction, as activities often stop at reflection without encouraging ethical action or social commitment (Gustine, 2014; Yoon, 2016). The current study shows that Text 2 and Text 3 offer clearer opportunities for engaging students in this dimension. Text 2 encourages students to reflect on injustice and evaluate revenge as a response to broken promises, while Text 3 allows students to consider the consequences of actions taken in the name of justice and to imagine alternative, more just solutions. Compared to the textbooks examined

in earlier research, the folktales in this study provide greater potential for fostering students' awareness of justice and ethical responsibility, particularly when supported by appropriate classroom discussion.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that Banggai folktales have strong potential as critical literacy resources. Unlike many textbooks discussed in previous studies, these texts allow students to engage with all four dimensions of critical literacy. Therefore, integrating local folktales into English language teaching may contribute to the development of students' critical awareness and better prepare them to participate as thoughtful and responsible members of a democratic society.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

CONCLUSION

Banggai folktales show strong potential as instructional media that go beyond transmitting cultural beliefs and social norms. The findings of this study indicate that these texts can also function as meaningful reading materials to support the development of students' critical awareness. Through their narrative structures, character interactions, and moral conflicts, Banggai folktales provide rich opportunities to engage students in all four dimensions of critical literacy. The stories allow students to question taken-for-granted ideas, examine events from multiple perspectives, relate narrative conflicts to broader sociopolitical issues, and reflect on actions related to justice and responsibility. Moreover, the texts encourage students to pose deeper and more complex questions about the problematic issues presented in the stories, particularly those embedded in characters' perspectives, decisions, and belief systems. By connecting these elements to local cultural values, students are guided not only to understand the stories but also to critically evaluate cultural meanings and social practices reflectively and analytically.

SUGGESTION

Since this study focused on textual analysis and did not involve classroom implementation, future research is recommended to extend the findings by applying Banggai folktales in actual English language teaching contexts, particularly at the junior high school level. Further studies may explore how these texts can be adapted into teaching materials and learning activities that align with students' linguistic and cognitive development. In addition, future research should examine linguistic aspects such as vocabulary load, grammatical complexity, and text readability to ensure that the folktales are appropriate for students' proficiency levels. Analyzing these aspects would help teachers select or modify the texts so that they are both pedagogically accessible and effective in supporting students' reading comprehension and critical literacy development.

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No: 206-B/T.10/PN-0002/2025

Ketua LP2M Universitas Tompotika Luwuk, dengan ini memberikan tugas kepada :

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Untuk melaksanakan penelitian dengan judul, ***"Banggai Folktales as Reading Materials for Developing Students' Critical Literacy : A Qualitative Content Analysis"*** pada tanggal 9-11 Mei 2025

Demikian surat tugas ini dibuat untuk dilaksanakan dengan sebaik-baiknya.

Luwuk, 06 Mei 2025
Ketua LP2M UNTIKA Luwuk

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