

Reviving Oral Traditions: Digital Preservation of Asian Indigenous Folktales Through the *Nusantara* E-Book

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the *Hidden Tales of Nusantara* e-book as a digital tool for preserving Indigenous folktales and promoting cultural education amid the decline of oral traditions in Southeast Asia. Using a quantitative design with online questionnaires, data was collected from parents, educators, and students to assess the e-book's usability, cultural relevance, and engagement potential. Findings reveal that the e-book is effective in teaching moral values, user-friendly, and well-suited for children, with most participants recognising its value in making cultural stories accessible to younger audiences. Despite its strengths, issues of digital accessibility in rural areas remain a concern. The study concludes that digital platforms like this e-book offer promising solutions for cultural preservation and education, recommending future efforts to improve interactivity and expand access in underserved regions.

Keywords: Cultural heritage, digital preservation, digital storytelling, indigenous folktales, Southeast Asia

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INTRODUCTION

Oral traditions have long been central to preserving cultural heritage, but globalisation and digital media have contributed to their decline, especially in Asia's diverse Indigenous communities (Wong & Naqvi, 2023). Digital technology offers new opportunities to safeguard these narratives, with e-books like the *Hidden*

Tales of Nusantara using interactive storytelling to engage younger audiences and bridge tradition with modern formats (Bauman & Briggs, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). In Malaysia, government-led digitisation efforts reflect this shift, making digital storytelling a key tool in cultural preservation (MCMC, 2022). However, concerns over authenticity and access remain, emphasising the need for collaboration with local communities (Smith & Watson, 2021). This study aims to examine how the *Hidden Tales of Nusantara* e-book supports Indigenous folktale preservation, boosts engagement among parents, educators, and students, and contributes to cultural education and awareness for future generations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Oral tradition—the transmission of knowledge, history, and cultural values through storytelling and performance—has long been central to preserving Indigenous identity, especially in the Asian societies. In Malaysia, communities like the Orang Asli and Iban rely on folktales to convey moral values and collective wisdom (Bauman & Briggs, 2020). With globalisation threatening these traditions, digital technologies such as e-books and multimedia archives offer new opportunities to document and share oral narratives across generations and audiences (Smith & Watson, 2021). The *Hidden Tales of Nusantara* e-book exemplifies this potential by using visuals, interactive quizzes, and multimedia elements to make Indigenous stories engaging and accessible. Theoretical frameworks like the Bourdieu’s Cultural Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986) and Rogers’ Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 2003) help explain the importance and adoption of such digital tools. However, while Malaysia has made strides in digitising cultural assets, research on the long-term effectiveness of digital storytelling in preserving intangible heritage and maintaining youth engagement remains limited. The table summarises past studies related to the digital preservation of Asian Indigenous folktales through digital platform strategies (Table 1):

Table 1
Past studies related to the preservation of Asian indigenous folktales

Authors	Year	Method	Main Findings
Wong & Naqvi	2023	Case Study Analysis	Indigenous folktales enhance cultural relevance in ESL learning, increasing student engagement.
Smith & Watson	2021	Conceptual Framework	Folktales bridge cultural gaps in language learning by embedding cultural identity into lessons.
Bauman & Briggs	2020	Thematic Review	Storytelling fosters empathy and deeper cultural understanding in language learners.
Sa’ad et al.	2023	Mixed-methods Approach	Indigenous folktales offer a creative avenue for ESL learning, improving comprehension and engagement.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research design to explore how digital platforms can be used to preserve Asian Indigenous folktales, focussing on the perceptions of parents, educators, and students. The population comprises individuals who actively engage with digital tools for cultural and educational purposes. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 30 participants, equally divided among parents, educators, and students, to provide balanced perspectives. Data was collected through an online questionnaire focussed on usability, engagement, and the effectiveness of digital platforms in fostering cultural awareness, with responses collected over one month. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and all responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. To ensure reliability, the Cronbach's alpha was calculated, with a value of 0.70 or higher was considered acceptable (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Results and Findings section examines the students' attitudes towards the usability of the e-book and their involvement in enjoyable English language activities.

Usability of the e-Book

The findings provide valuable insights into the participants' perceptions of the e-book's effectiveness, language suitability, usage frequency, preference for digital storytelling, and the importance of preserving folktales. The e-book was perceived as highly effective in teaching moral values, with a mean score of 4.5. The language and structure were well-received, with a mean score of 4.6 and low variation, suggesting alignment with the children's reading levels. However, its frequency of use varies, with a mean score of 2.9, showing that some participants intend to use it frequently, while others plan occasional use. Preferences for digital storytelling are mixed, reflected in the neutral mean score of 3.3. There is a strong consensus on the importance of preserving folktales, with a high mean score of 4.8. These findings highlight both the strengths of the ebook and areas for further exploration.

Perceptions Towards the e-Book

The descriptive analysis shows that students responded positively to the use of fun English activities in the e-book. The highest-rated item was "I think the fun activities help make learning English more interesting" (Mean = 4.286), followed by "I feel excited about participating in English language fun activities" and "I am motivated to improve my English skills through these activities" (Mean = 4.234). These results suggest that the interactive features of the e-book effectively support emotional engagement and motivation in learning English.

Students also expressed strong support for collaboration and autonomy in their learning. “I enjoy working with other students during the English activities” (Mean = 4.208) and “Participating in these activities helps me feel more independent in my English learning” (Mean = 4.13) indicate that the e-book promotes both peer interaction and self-directed learning. Meanwhile, statements like “I feel more confident speaking English” (Mean = 3.896) and “These activities give me a chance to take charge of my own learning” (Mean = 3.935) show that while confidence and autonomy were slightly lower, they remain important outcomes to be further enhanced.

The Pearson correlation analysis reveals strong positive relationships between the students’ enjoyment of fun English activities and their learning outcomes. High correlations were observed for emotional engagement, such as “The activities that we do make me want to participate more in English class” ($r = .667$), and motivation, including “I feel that the fun activities will help me achieve my personal English learning goals” ($r = .649$). Notably, the strongest correlation was found in autonomy, with “These activities give me a chance to take charge of my own learning” ($r = .693$), indicating that enjoyable, student-centred tasks effectively enhance engagement, motivation, confidence, and independent learning.

The results underline the e-book’s efficiency, adequacy of language, and cultural relevance while indicating differences between its use and common use of digital storytelling. Fun activities are positively correlated with student engagement, motivation, confidence, collaboration, and autonomy.

CONCLUSION

This study evaluated the *Hidden Tales of Nusantara* e-book as a tool for preserving Indigenous folktales and promoting cultural education. It was found effective in teaching moral values and engaging young readers, with a strong support for its suitability and accessibility. While digital platforms were widely accepted, some still preferred traditional formats, highlighting the need to balance both. Building on previous studies, this research adds insights into user experience and digital access challenges, especially in underserved areas. Grounded in the Cultural Capital and Diffusion of Innovations theories, the study affirms the e-book’s value for cultural transmission and calls for further research into long-term impact and interactive features.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study highlights the *Hidden Tales of Nusantara* e-book’s potential as an effective digital platform in preserving Indigenous folktales and enhancing cultural education. It supports previous findings that culturally relevant digital tools can engage youth and transmit traditional values. High usability and engagement affirm its alignment with the Cultural Capital and Diffusion of Innovations theories. While the e-book bridges heritage

and technology, challenges remain in rural access and balancing digital with traditional storytelling. The study calls for inclusive infrastructure and future use of AI or VR, offering practical value for educators aiming to integrate cultural content into modern learning.

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