

Maluku folktales: Character education values, opportunities, and challenges in Indonesian language learning

Aria Bayu Setiaji*, Nanik Handayani, Tuti Alwiyah,
Ilham Syahputra Hitjah

Abstract: As a cultural product, Maluku folktales emerge from traditions, origins, and customary rituals that contain moral messages, harmony, tolerance, and life wisdom. In the context of education, it is important to teach folktales as a means of cultural preservation and character building. The purpose of this study is to describe the value of maluku folklore, opportunities, and challenges in Indonesian Language learning. This study uses a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach. The primary data consist of interviews with teachers, students, and literature experts, while the secondary data include documents and folktale publications from The Maluku Language Office and the Department of Education and Culture. The findings reveal that Maluku folktales have significant potential as Indonesian language teaching materials that incorporate character education. From the twenty folktales analyzed, legends dominate because they contain concrete moral values and simple narrative structures that are easily understood by students. Their intrinsic elements present themes, protagonists embodying leadership and courage, and natural settings that foster ecological awareness. The moral messages emphasize honesty, togetherness, hard work, patriotism, and environmental care, which are aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile. Maluku folktales are therefore relevant for strengthening literacy, character education, and cultural preservation. Nevertheless, their utilization still faces challenges, particularly the limited availability of teaching resources and the lack of technology-based innovation. Therefore, integrating folktales into Indonesian language learning through digital media, P5 projects, and teacher training becomes a strategic step to support the Merdeka Curriculum while strengthening the cultural identity of the younger generation.

Keywords: *character education, Indonesian language learning, Maluku folktales, teaching materials*



AFFILIATION

Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Abdul Muthalib Sangadji Ambon, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author:

✉ ariabayu@uinambon.ac.id

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INTRODUCTION

Maluku, as an archipelagic region, possesses a highly diverse cultural heritage, one of which is reflected in its folktale traditions that are rich in local wisdom, moral values, and the social identity of the community (Kaliky, 2022; Wakano, 2019). However, amid the development of 21st-century education, the use of folktales as a resource in Indonesian language learning has not yet been optimal, both in terms of the availability of contextual teaching materials and the innovation of engaging learning media. In fact, folktales have significant potential to develop literacy skills while simultaneously instilling character education values that are relevant to students' lives example of a story *Buaya Tembaga* (Masniati, 2023; Syifa et al., 2023).

Folktales not only function as entertainment but also contain life values that are relevant for every generation (Shokoufeh, 2016; Solissa, 2022). In the context of education, folktales are important to be taught from elementary to secondary levels as a means of instilling character education while preserving cultural heritage (Abdulah, 2021; Dikul & Kiting, 2019). Character values in folktales are reflected through characters, settings, behaviors, and moral messages conveyed either explicitly or implicitly (Adwiah et al., 2023; Baan, 2021).

As part of the literary heritage of the Maluku community, folktales need to be explored within the context of Indonesian language learning. Their use as learning resources in schools can serve as an effective means of instilling character education values as a foundation for shaping students' personal development (Liando, et al., 2021). With the advancement of technology, folktales are now easily accessible in digital forms, including e-books, allowing them to be widely utilized (Hakamies et al., 2019).

Therefore, the inventory of Maluku folktales constitutes an important step in preserving and utilizing valuable oral cultural heritage through processes of collection, documentation, and description of folktales that have developed across various regions. The inventory of Maluku folktales is presented in Table 1.

The Maluku Language Office is one of the institutional units that plays an important role in the preservation and inventory of Maluku folktales through research activities, documentation, and the publication of folktale anthologies from various regions. These efforts not only ensure the sustainability of oral cultural heritage so that it is not lost over time, but also provide valid reference sources for educators, students, and researchers in developing Indonesian language learning based on character education values.

Maluku folktales used as learning resources at the elementary and secondary education levels need to emphasize the cultivation of moral values, such as harmony, tolerance, and character formation (Kartikasari & Tryanasari, 2020 ; Yuki & Chaeruman, 2021). Each plot and character within folktales contains positive messages that can serve as moral guidance for contemporary generations. In line with Kusumastuti & Khoiron (2019), folktales that are rich in character values need to be examined more deeply so that they can be effectively implemented in classroom learning.

Based on the above explanation, an in-depth examination of character education values in Maluku folktales becomes important. The findings of this study have the potential to be utilized as Indonesian language teaching materials at both elementary and secondary levels. The urgency of this research is also based on the limited availability of teaching materials that are relevant, contextual, and rich in the local cultural values of Maluku. In addition, it is important to examine the characteristics, opportunities, and challenges in the use of these folktales so that their application in learning can become more effective, adaptive, and sustainable.

Table 1. Inventory of Maluku Folktales

Title	Story Series	Author	Publisher
Ambon Island and the Lease Island	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Asal Usul Nama Desa Waiheru</i> (The Origin of the Name of Waiheru Village) • <i>Sejarah Desa Nania</i> (The History of Nania Village) • <i>Perang Kapahaha</i> (The Kapahaha War) • <i>Legenda Batu Layar di Negeri Larike</i> (The Legend of Batu Layar in Larike Village) • <i>Burung Gagak yang Sombong</i> (The Arrogant Crow) • <i>Batu Gila</i> (The Crazy Rock) • <i>Dua Pulau Ade-Kaka di Timur Indonesia</i> (Two Islands Ade-Kaka in Eastern Indonesia) • <i>Pela Antara Negeri Latuhalat dan Negeri Alang</i> (Pela Between Latuhalat and Alang Villages) 	Anna P. Soplanit – Aprilia Beatrix Mainake et al (Maluku Language Office)	The Maluku Language Office
Maluku Regional Folklore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Asal Mulanya Danau Tapala</i> (The Origin of Tapala Lake) • <i>Keganasan Burung Garuda & Pulau Buru</i> (The Ferocity of the Garuda Bird & Buru Island) • <i>Batu Kapal dan Burung Kakak Tua</i> (The Batu Kapal and the Cockatoo) • <i>Ikan Bibi</i> (Bibi Fish) • <i>Kisah Tenggelamnya Pulau Metsyaha</i> (The Sinking of Metsyaha Island) 	Bambang Suwondo, Ahmad Yunbus, Singgih Wibisono, Sri Mutosih.	Department of Education & Culture
Pakuela, the Ruler of Baguala	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Buaya Tembaga dari Teluk Baguala</i> (The Copper Crocodile of Baguala Bay) • <i>Kedatangan Pakuela ke Pulau Buru</i> (Pakuela's Arrival at Buru Island) • <i>Kebahagiaan Masyarakat Pulau Buru</i> (The Happiness of Buru Island Community) 	E Hadi G.	The Maluku Language Office
Princess Tuju	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Laweri Hulan dan Kayangan</i> (Laweri Hulan and the Heavenly Realm) • <i>Tujuh Mata Air</i> (The Seven Springs) • <i>Sayembara Sang Putri</i> (The Princess's Contest) • <i>Sayap Putri Bungso</i> (The Wings of Putri Bungso) 	Adi Syaiful Mukhtar	The Maluku Language Office

Several previous studies serve as references and form an important basis for this research. Among them, the study conducted by Merdiyatna (2022), using Herder's romantic nationalism approach and Alan Dundes' (1965) folklore study method, emphasizes the important role of folklore in the formation of national identity. The movement to collect folktales from 34 provinces is viewed not only as supporting literacy and character education but also as a national political strategy to strengthen national integrity, reinforce the principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), and instill national values in adolescent learners. These findings indicate that folktales function strategically as a medium for cultural transmission and

as an instrument for shaping national character.

Subsequently, the study by Hakamies et al., (2019), entitled *The Reinforcement of Character Education through the Values of Local Wisdom in Folktales*, emphasizes that the local wisdom contained in folklore contributes significantly to strengthening character education. The study further identifies four main values that can be transmitted to students, namely honesty, positive thinking, religiosity, and politeness in social interaction. These findings indicate that folktales function not only as cultural heritage but also as an effective instrument for instilling character values among students.

Another related study was conducted by Ferando et al., (2025), entitled *Fantastical Characters in Folk Tales and Their Educational Function*. The research findings show that fantastical characters in folktales, including mythological creatures such as dragons, demons, fairies, witches, and heroes, play a significant role in children's moral education. These symbolic elements not only help children understand the distinction between good and evil but also contribute to the development of positive character traits, such as courage, honesty, and patience. From a linguistic and cultural perspective, this study highlights the pedagogical potential of folktales as a medium for character education while also preserving cultural values.

The findings of Ferando et al., (2025) indicate that the use of folktales as learning media plays a strategic role in strengthening Indonesian language literacy, particularly through the enhancement of reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills integrated with local cultural contexts. Folktales are considered capable of increasing students' interest in learning because they present materials that are closely related to their daily lives while also containing character values. In line with this, Dikul & Kiting (2019) emphasize that folklore can function as a form of educational entertainment, serving as a learning medium that not only educates but also entertains, thereby creating a meaningful and enjoyable learning experience. Both studies highlight that folktales have great potential as effective learning media, both in strengthening literacy and in creating engaging, culturally grounded learning experiences.

The five previous studies highlight the important role of folklore in the formation of national identity (Hakamies et al., 2019), the strengthening of character education through local wisdom (Andriani & Aulia, 2023), and the pedagogical function of fantastical characters in fostering children's moral development (Dikul & Kiting, 2019; Ferando et al., 2025). However, these studies have not specifically examined the character values contained in folktales nor the opportunities and challenges related to their implementation in Indonesian language learning. Therefore, this study offers a new contribution by positioning Maluku folktales as the object of analysis, while also exploring the potential and challenges of utilizing them as contextual learning resources rich in local cultural values.

Based on this background, this research examines Maluku folktales in terms of their characteristics, opportunities, and challenges as teaching materials for Indonesian language learning that incorporate character education. The findings of this study are expected to be recommended as learning resources for both schools and universities, particularly in the Province of Maluku.

This study is important to conduct due to the gap between the significant potential of Maluku folktales as a source of learning based on local wisdom and their limited utilization in educational practice. Although Maluku possesses a rich body of folklore containing strong character values, the availability of contextual, systematic, and curriculum-relevant teaching materials aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum remains very limited. This condition affects the low integration of local cultural values into Indonesian language learning, resulting in less optimal character formation among students. In fact, various studies have shown that folktales play a strategic role in shaping students' identity, morality, and literacy (Andriani & Aulia, 2023; Dikul & Kiting, 2019; Ferando et al., 2025; Hakamies et al., 2019).

METHOD

This study aims to describe the characteristics, challenges, and opportunities in the use of Maluku folktales as Indonesian language teaching materials containing character education values by employing a descriptive-analytical qualitative approach (Andriani & Aulia, 2023) The data were collected from two sources: (1) primary data, in the form of interviews with Indonesian language teachers, students, and literature experts regarding the use of Maluku folktales in Indonesian language learning (Abdussamad & Sik, 2021); and (2) secondary data, in the form of documents and folktale publications issued by The Maluku Language Office, including anthologies and previous studies related to character education values (Kusumastuti & Khoiron, 2019).

The data analyzed in this study were derived from four main works of Maluku folktales. First, *Antologi Cerita Rakyat Pulau Ambon dan Pulau-Pulau Lease* by Anna P. Soplanit and Aprilia B. Mainake et al. (The Maluku Language Office), which contains eight stories. Second, *Cerita Rakyat Daerah Maluku* by the Regional Writing Team, which consists of five stories. Third, *Pakuella Sang Penguasa Baguala* by E. Hadi G. (The Maluku Language Office), which includes three stories. Fourth, *Putri Tuju* by Adi Syaiful Mukhtar (The Maluku Language Office), which consists of four stories. This sample of folklore was selected because it was given by Maluku Language Office as a learning material at school.

Data were collected through four techniques: 1) Literature Review: examining various references related to Maluku folktales and character education; 2) Document Analysis: analyzing Maluku folktale texts to identify the character education values contained within them; 3) In-depth Inter-

views: conducted with teachers, students, and literature experts to obtain information regarding the use of folktales as teaching materials; and 4) Observation: observing the implementation of folktale-based learning in school environments.

Data analysis was carried out in four stages (Abdussamad & Sik, 2021). 1) Data Reduction: selecting, simplifying, and organizing the collected data to focus on the research objectives; 2) Categorization and Coding: classifying the data based on folktale themes, characteristics of Maluku folktales, character education values, and their relevance in Indonesian language learning; 3) Data Interpretation: systematically organizing the findings to obtain an in-depth understanding of the role of Maluku folktales; and 4) Data Presentation: the analyzed data are presented in the form of narrative descriptions to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The research findings show that among the twenty Maluku folktales analyzed, the majority are legends, which narrate the origins of particular places, objects, and figures as representations of local wisdom. These legends not only function as entertainment but also serve as a medium for cultural transmission, the cultivation of moral values, and the strengthening of social solidarity within the community. The results of the data analysis are presented in the following diagram.

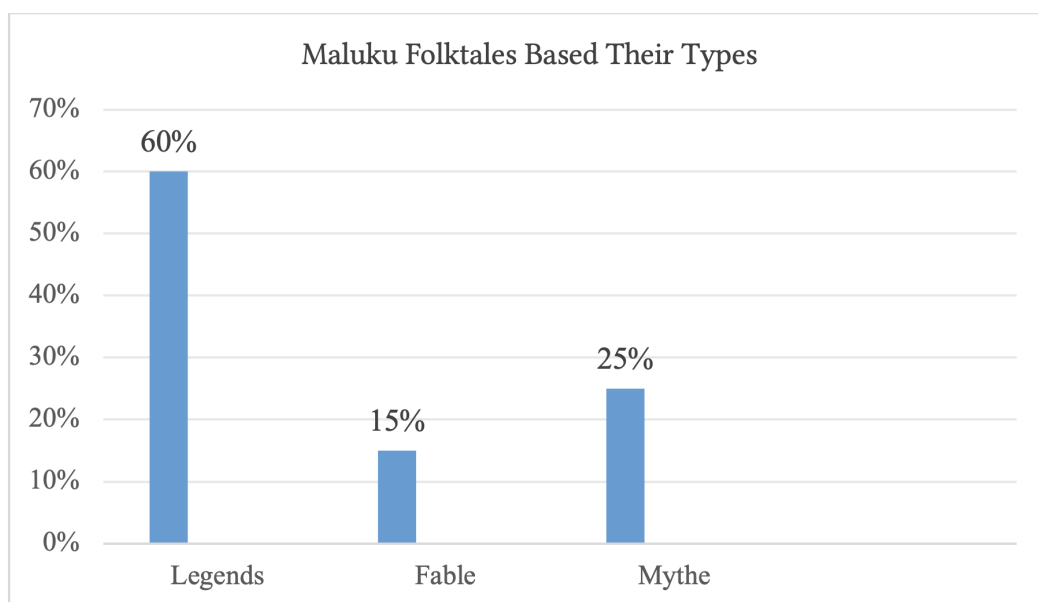


Figure 1. Maluku Folktales Based on Their Types

Maluku legends are relevant to Indonesian language learning because they can be integrated into the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, while simultaneously instilling character values in accordance with the national curriculum. With a simple and coherent nar-

rative structure, legends are easily understood by junior high school students, making them effective as reading materials, discussion topics, and inspiration for creative works (Yusuf et al., 2024).

Most Maluku folktales center on themes such as the struggle between good and evil, loyalty and gratitude, as well as the origins of places or natural phenomena. Examples include *The Origin of Lake Tapala*, *The Origin of the Name Waiheru Village*, and *The History of Nania Village*, which highlight local history and geographical origins. These recurring themes reflect the worldview of the Maluku community, which highly values solidarity, simplicity, and adherence to customary norms. The distribution of these themes is illustrated in the following chart.

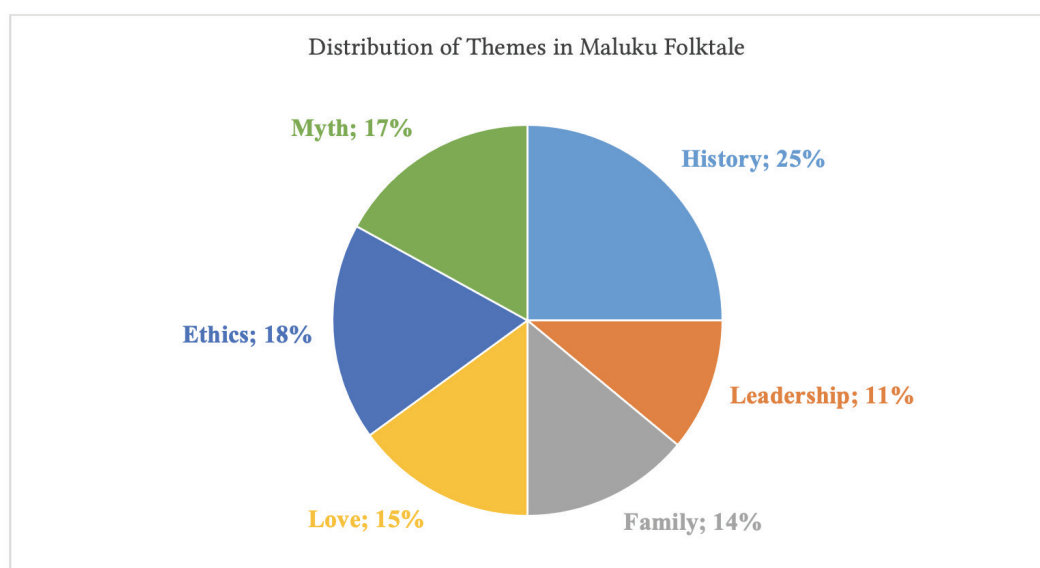


Figure 2. Distribution of Themes in Maluku Folktales

The emergence of these themes can be explained through theory of the functions of folklore, which states that folklore serves as a means of projection, validation of social norms, child education, and social control (Krisandi, 2021). The dominance of themes such as goodness, loyalty, and the origins of places reflects the efforts of the Maluku community to reinforce moral norms, communal identity, and spiritual relationships with nature. At the same time, these themes align with the cognitive development needs of adolescents to understand moral values through stories that are closely related to their life experiences (Nelson & Sturm, 2025).

Furthermore, from the perspective of characters and characterization, the research findings indicate that characters in Maluku folktales reflect the values of local community life. The main characters are generally portrayed as wise leaders, brave individuals, hardworking figures, and caring family members, while also being closely connected to the local island traditions, such as working as fishermen, gathering sago, or going to the forest or river. Collective characters highlight cooperation, solidarity, deliberation, and adherence to customary norms, whereas antagonistic characters are depict-

ed as cunning, greedy, arrogant, or cruel, either in the form of humans or as symbolic representations of nature. The characterization in Maluku folktales is presented in the following table.

Table 2. Characters and Characterization in Maluku Folktales

Title	Main Character	Main Character Traits	Values
<i>Asal Usul Nama Desa Waiheru</i> (The Origin of the Name of Waiheru Village)	Mr. Alberth	Wise	Deliberation
<i>Sejarah Desa Nania</i> (The History of Nania Village)	Eruwakan	Kind and Firm	Leadership
<i>Perang Kapahaha</i> (The Kapahaha War)	Kapitan Telukabessy	Brave	Heroism
<i>Legenda Batu Layar di Negeri Larike</i> (The Legend of Batu Layar in the Larike Village)	Amar	Calm and Wise	Wisdom
<i>Burung Gagak yang Sombong</i> (The Arrogant Crow)	The Crow	Arrogant	Humility and Self-Reflection
<i>Batu Gila</i> (The Crazy Rock)	Community Figure	Cautious	Caring
<i>Dua Pulau Ade-Kaka di Timur Indonesia</i> (The Two Ade-Kaka Island in Eastern Indonesia)	Ade and Kaka	Loving Each Other	Unity
<i>Pela Antara Negeri Latuhalat dan negeri Alang</i> (Pela Between Latuhalat and Alang Villages)	Pela Leaders	Upholding Tradition	Mutual Cooperation & Solidarity
<i>Asal Mulanya Danau Tapala</i> (The Origin of Tapala Lake)	Community Figure	Opposing Figure	Morality & Obedience
<i>Keganasan Burung Garuda & Pulau Buru</i> (The Ferocity of the Garuda Bird & Buru Island)	The Garuda Bird	Protector	Courage & Justice
<i>Batu Kapal dan Burung Kakak Tua</i> (The Batu Kapal and Cockatoo)	Family Figure	Loving	Responsibility
<i>Ikan Bibi</i> (Bibi Fish)	Bibi Fish	Loyalty	Affection
<i>Kisah Tenggelamnya Pulau Metsyaha</i> (The Sinking of Metsyaha Island)	Village Figure	Accepting Fate	Religious & Patience
<i>Buaya Tembaga dan Teluk Baguala</i> (The Copper Crocodile of Baguala Bay)	Pakuella	Powerful	Wisdom
<i>Kedatangan Pakuella ke Pulau Buru</i> (Pakuella's Arrival at Buru Island)	Pakuella	Powerful	Leadership
<i>Kebahagiaan Masyarakat Pulau Buru</i> (The Happiness of Buru Island Community)	Pakuella	Wise	Justice
<i>Laweri Hulan dan Kayangan</i> (Laweri Hulan and the Heavenly Realm)	Laweri Hulan	Devout	Obedience & Loyalty
<i>Tujuh Mata Air</i> (Seven Springs)	Laweri Hulan	Patient	Honesty
<i>Sayembara Sang Putri</i> (The Princess's Contest)	Princess Bungso	Brave	Courage & Loyalty
<i>Sayap Putri Bungso</i> (The Wings of Princess Bungso)	Princess Bungso	Self-Sacrificing	Sacrifice & Affection

Characterization in Maluku folktales emphasizes local life values through main characters portrayed as wise leaders, brave, hardworking, and devoted to their families, as well as collective characters that represent cooperation, solidarity, deliberation, and adherence to customary norms. In contrast, antagonistic characters are often depicted as cunning, greedy, or cruel, either as human figures or as symbolic representations of natural forces. This pattern of characterization is both contrasting and symbolic, emphasizing that goodness ultimately brings blessings, whereas wrongdoing leads to punishment.

Based on the elements of characters and characterization, Maluku folktales serve a dual function: as a medium of traditional entertainment and as a learning resource for instilling character education values such as religiosity, cooperation, integrity, nationalism, and independence in accordance with the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum. Furthermore, in terms of plot structure, Maluku folktales generally follow a simple, linear, and easy-to-follow storyline, but they often conclude with extraordinary events that convey moral lessons. This narrative pattern not only supports the oral storytelling tradition but is also relevant as teaching material in schools because it effectively introduces local culture while instilling values such as leadership, honesty, cooperation, mutual assistance, and respect for nature. Visually, the plot structure in Maluku folktales can be seen in the following figure.

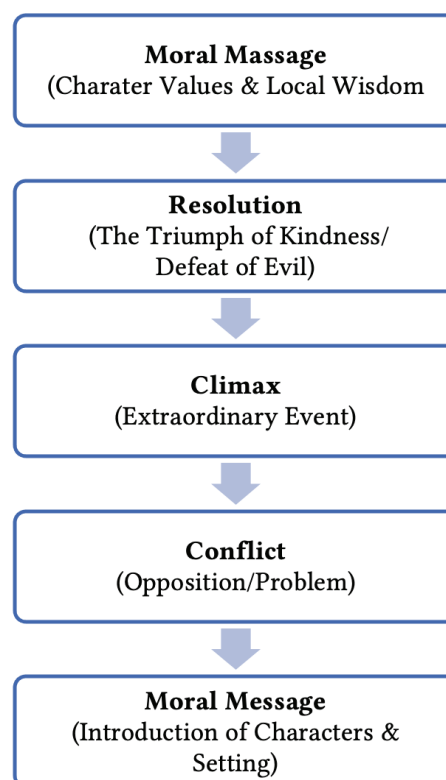


Figure 3. Plot Structure of Maluku Folktales

Most Maluku folktales employ a simple progressive plot, beginning with the introduction of characters and regional settings such as islands, seas, and forests. The storyline then develops into conflicts either between humans or between humans and supernatural or natural forces. Examples include the stories of Garuda in Buru Island, The Copper Crocodile, and The Grandmother's Curse in Metsyaha, which ultimately conclude with resolutions involving punishment or miracles, such as islands sinking, humans turning into stone, dead birds transforming into islands, or tribes receiving blessings or curses. This narrative pattern is repeated with climaxes involving major events such as fights, oaths, disasters, or battles. As a result, the storyline becomes easy to understand, effective for oral transmission, and rich in moral messages.

In terms of setting, Maluku folktales are generally closely related to natural environments such as the sea, rivers, forests, and islands, reflecting the life of an archipelagic society while also carrying symbolic meanings. The sea often symbolizes sacrifice, rivers represent purity, and islands signify brotherhood or punishment. Historical settings, such as the Kapahaha War, evoke the collective memory of the people's struggle, while mystical settings such as heavenly realms or sacred stones reinforce the community's sacred beliefs. The atmosphere of the stories, whether peaceful, heroic, tragic, or joyful, consistently supports moral messages about honesty, courage, loyalty, and brotherhood. Therefore, the setting not only supports the plot but also reflects the cultural identity, history, and spirituality of the Maluku community. The following table presents a summary of the setting elements in Maluku folktales along with their symbolic functions.

Table 3. Setting Elements and Their Symbolic Functions

Setting Element	Symbolic Function
Sea	Sacrifice, unity, source of life and a space for testing courage
River	Purity, the flow of life, and connector between regions
Forest	Source of food and medicine, a space for encounters with the supernatural
Island	Brotherhood, communal identity, as well as divine punishment or blessing
Rock	Sacred symbol, reminder of oaths or violations of tradition
Heavenly Realm	Representation of spirituality and local beliefs in higher powers
Historical Sites	Collective memory of struggle, patriotism, and cultural identity reinforcement

The settings in Maluku folktales are relevant as Indonesian language learning materials because they contain rich character values. The sea, rivers, and forests instill environmental awareness; village deliberation fosters

democratic values and cooperation; while warfare or struggles cultivate courage, leadership, and love for the homeland (Kurniawan & Asman, 2019). Through the analysis of settings, students not only develop their language skills but also internalize values such as honesty, loyalty, responsibility, and gratitude. Thus, learning based on Maluku folktales integrates language mastery with character formation.

The moral messages conveyed in Maluku folktales are rich in life values, emphasizing togetherness, brotherhood, honesty, loyalty, and keeping promises as guiding principles in life. The characters serve as examples of hard work, courage, and sacrifice, while also warning against arrogance and greed. Values such as compassion, sincerity, the importance of family, care for nature, and gratitude to God are also highlighted. Therefore, Maluku folktales function not only as entertainment or as legends explaining origins, but also as a medium for moral education that remains relevant across generations.

Table 4. Moral Messages and Values in Maluku Folktales

Title	Moral Message
<i>Asal Usul Nama Desa Waiheru</i> (The Origin of the Name of Waiheru Village)	The harmonious relationship between human and nature
<i>Sejarah Desa Nania</i> (The History of Nania Village)	The importance of unity, cooperation, and mutual assistance
<i>Perang Kapahaha</i> (The Kapahaha War)	Freedom can only be achieved through unity
<i>Legenda Batu Layar di Negeri Larike</i> (The Legend of Batu Layar in Larike Village)	Patience and cooperation will bring safety
<i>Burung Gagak yang Sombong</i> (The Arrogant Crow)	Arrogance will only harm oneself
<i>Batu Gila</i> (The Crazy Rock)	The importance of parental and community care
<i>Dua Pulau Ade-Kaka di Timur Indonesia</i> (Two Ade-Kaka Islands in Eastern Indonesia)	The importance of preserving love and brotherhood
<i>Pela Antara Negeri Latuhalat dan negeri Alang</i> (Pela Between Latuhalat and Alang Villages)	The importance of brotherhood, honesty, and loyalty
<i>Asal Mulanya Danau Tapala</i> (The Origin of Tapala Lake)	The importance of kindness, generosity, and compassion
<i>Keganasan Burung Garuda & Pulau Buru</i> (The Ferocity of the Garuda Bird & Buru Island)	Greed will always end in destruction
<i>Batu Kapal dan Burung Kakak Tua</i> (The Batu Kapal and Cockatoo)	Life must be lived with resilience
<i>Ikan Bibi</i> (Bibi Fish)	The importance of protecting family honor

Title	Moral Message
<i>Kisah Tenggelamnya Pulau Metsyaha</i> (The Sinking of Metsyaha Island)	Baseless slander can bring disaster
<i>Buaya Tembaga dan Teluk Baguala</i> (The Copper Crocodile of Baguala Bay)	The importance of maintaining good relations with others
<i>Kebahagiaan Masyarakat Pulau Buru</i> (The Happiness of the Buru Island Community)	Goodness will always be remembered and honored
<i>Laweri Hulan dan Kayangan</i> (Laweri Hulan and the Heavenly Realm)	Humans must always be grateful for God's blessings
<i>Tujuh Mata Air</i> (The Seven Springs)	Humans must obey the rules
<i>Sayembara Sang Putri</i> (The Princess's Contest)	Humans must be brave and loyal
<i>Sayap Putri Bungson</i> (The Wings of Princess Bungso)	Love must be accompanied by honesty

The moral messages contained in Maluku folktales are highly relevant for Indonesian language learning at the junior high school level because, in addition to developing language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), they also promote character education. Through the appreciation and analysis of these stories, students learn values such as honesty, discipline, cooperation, and responsibility. Thus, learning based on folktales not only enriches students' understanding of local cultural heritage but also helps shape individuals with strong character in accordance with the goals of national education.

Challenges in the Use of Maluku Folktales as Indonesian Language Learning Materials Incorporating Character Education Values

Based on interviews with Indonesian language teachers at SMP Cendikia Ambon, SMP Al-Hijrah Ambon, and MTs Al-Mukhlisin Ambon, it was found that the use of Maluku folktales containing character values still faces several challenges, particularly the limited availability of teaching materials. Many folktales have not yet been documented in the form of books, modules, or official media, causing teachers to rely on collections of stories that were not originally designed for Indonesian language instruction.

Another challenge concerns students' responses to folktale-based learning, which remain relatively low. This is mainly because the presentation of the material tends to be conventional and monotonous, often limited to reading texts, resulting in less optimal student interest and engagement, even though the stories are closely related to their local culture.

Teachers also face challenges related to the limited use of technology and learning media in teaching Maluku folktales. Most folktales are still available only in simple printed text, while digital formats such as animations, e-modules, or interactive comics are not yet widely available. As a result, the presentation tends to be monotonous and less appealing to today's gen-

eration. Teachers believe that the digitalization of folktales through visual and audiovisual media is highly important and requires collaboration among schools, local governments, and other stakeholders to preserve cultural heritage while improving learning effectiveness.

Based on interviews with Indonesian language teachers in Maluku, the main challenge is the lack of socialization, research, and training related to the use of folktales in education. The character values contained in these stories have not been systematically explored, making it difficult to connect them with core competencies and learning outcomes. The limited support in the form of workshops, modules, and standardized teaching materials has also hindered optimal implementation, even though such support is crucial to better prepare teachers and ensure the sustainability of folktale-based learning. The challenges of using Maluku folktales as learning materials are presented in the following table.

Table 5. Challenges of Maluku Folktales as Learning Materials

Challenge Aspect	Findings	Learning Implication
Limited official textbooks or modules	No official modules/books exist that integrate Maluku folklore text	Learning is less effective and character values are not optimally explored
Low student enthusiasm	Students show little interest because story presentation is still conventional	Innovation is needed in learning, such as drama and visual media
Limited time allocation	Folklore texts have not yet become the core of the lesson	Direct integration into core learning competencies is needed
Lack of technology and media support	Folklore has not yet been packaged as learning media such as videos or animations	Digitalization and educational facility support are needed
Lack of socialization, research, and teacher training	Minimal research, socialization, and teacher training	Workshops, textbooks, and training for teachers in Maluku are needed

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that Maluku folktales have significant potential as character-based Indonesian language learning media. However, their implementation still requires comprehensive support, including the development of standardized teaching materials, innovation in teaching methods, the use of technology, and continuous teacher training. If these challenges can be addressed, folktales will not only contribute to the preservation of local culture but will also become a strategic medium for shaping the character of today's students in Maluku through Indonesian language learning.

Opportunities for the Use of Maluku Folktales as Indonesian Language Learning Materials Incorporating Character Education Values

Despite facing several challenges, Maluku folktales have significant potential to be integrated into Indonesian language learning that incorporates character education values. As cultural heritage that records history, myths,

and local wisdom, folktales contain rich moral messages such as honesty, courage, cooperation, social awareness, and love for the environment, which are aligned with the objectives of national character education. The analysis shows that almost every story contains values of local wisdom, such as maintaining harmony with nature, respecting others, and upholding justice, all of which are relevant for strengthening students' character. Interviews with teachers in Ambon also confirm that students show greater enthusiasm when learning activities are connected with local folktales due to their emotional and cultural proximity. At the same time, this approach supports the development of literacy skills, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking, through creative activities such as storytelling performances, discussions of moral values, and the digitalization of folktales. The opportunities for the use of Maluku folktales are presented in the following table.

Table 6. Opportunities of Maluku Folktales as Learning Materials

Potential Aspect	Findings	Educational Implications
Preservation of Local Culture	Folklore serves as a medium for cultural transmission and Maluku identity.	Fosters students' sense of pride and love for their region.
Relevance to Students' Lives	Stories are close to students' social, cultural, and geographic environment.	Makes learning contextual, easy to understand, and meaningful.
Integration of Character Values	Almost all stories are rich in moral messages: unity, cooperation, honesty, humility, and environmental care.	An effective medium for strengthening character education in schools.
Strengthening Literacy & Merdeka Curriculum	Supports language literacy skills while strengthening character in line with the Merdeka Curriculum.	Creates integrated learning: literacy, character, and culture.

Discussion

Characteristics of Maluku Folktales as Indonesian Language Learning Materials Incorporating Character Education

Inventory and Classification

This study finds that the inventory of Maluku folktales is a strategic step for cultural preservation as well as for their utilization in education. The classification of twenty Maluku folktales shows that legends dominate compared to myths and fables. Legends stand out because they contain concrete moral values, such as cooperation and honesty, and are easily understood and applied in learning contexts.

The dominance of legends in Maluku folktales provides pedagogical advantages because their narrative structure is simple and coherent, making them easy for junior high school students to understand. In line with Sitepu et al., (2019), legends are effective in developing listening, reading, writing,

and speaking skills, ranging from use as reading comprehension materials and classroom discussion topics to inspiration for creative writing. Therefore, the use of legends not only strengthens literacy but also reinforces cultural identity and fosters reflective attitudes toward life values. Interview results with students revealed that they found it easier to understand the content of the stories and were more interested in participating in discussions because the stories were derived from their local culture. In addition, students stated that the moral values embedded in the legends helped them reflect on their attitudes and behavior in everyday life.

The intrinsic elements of Maluku folktales further strengthen their relevance in learning. The dominant themes include the struggle between good and evil, loyalty, and origins, which function as a medium for moral and social education. For example, the *Nenek Luhu* folktale from Seram conveys a strong moral message about the consequences of greed and dishonesty, where the narrative structure and the consequences experienced by the main character affirm that virtue ultimately prevails over evil, thereby functioning as a medium for moral education among students. Meanwhile, origin legends such as *Asal-Usul Pulau Seram* and other mythological narratives provide insights into cultural identity and the relationship between humans and their environment. These narratives not only enrich students' cultural understanding but also serve as a medium for social and cultural education, fostering awareness of local values. These findings are consistent with Melinda & Muzaki (2023), who state that folktales not only serve as entertainment but also act as a means of internalizing noble cultural values that can shape students' character.

Maluku folktales generally employ a coherent linear plot that progresses from introduction to resolution, with conflicts often revolving around greed, arrogance, supernatural forces, or colonization. The resolution typically involves miracles or symbolic punishment, such as islands sinking or humans turning into stone. This plot pattern, as emphasized by Naili, (2020), is not only effective for preserving oral traditions but also relevant in educational contexts because it helps students understand narrative structures while internalizing moral values.

Protagonist characters in Maluku folktales, such as Kapitan Telukabessy, often demonstrate leadership and courage, while collective characters reflect solidarity and cooperation. The commonly used linear plot structure helps students easily understand narrative structures, while the settings closely associated with the sea, forests, and islands teach values of environmental awareness and cultural identity. The moral messages in Maluku folktales emphasize values such as togetherness, honesty, hard work, patriotism, humility, and care for nature. These values are aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile in the Merdeka Curriculum. Research by Rizkylillah et al., (2024), states that moral understanding, as reflected through characters and characterization, embodies character values. By integrating activities such

as appreciation, discussion, and analysis of folktale texts, students not only expand their understanding of local culture but also develop noble character in accordance with the goals of national education (Hanipah et al., 2021).

Overall, the characteristics of Maluku folktales demonstrate significant potential as Indonesian language teaching materials. Their intrinsic elements provide contextual materials for developing literacy skills, enriching vocabulary, and instilling character education based on local cultural values (Fahri & Zainuri, 2019). The integration of folktales into learning is also in line with the Merdeka Curriculum, which aims to develop students who are literate, possess strong character, and remain rooted in their cultural identity (Yulianti et al., 2024).

Opportunities and Challenges of Maluku Folktales as Indonesian Language Learning Materials Incorporating Character Values *Challenges*

The results of this study on the use of Maluku folktales in Indonesian language learning incorporating character education reveal a dynamic interplay between challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, limitations in teaching resources, time, technological support, and the relatively low enthusiasm of some students pose obstacles to implementation. In line with the studies of Melinda & Muzaki, (2023) and Khasanah et al., (2022), the use of folktales in character education requires the support of practical and applicable teaching materials. On the other hand, folktales possess significant potential as contextual learning media that align with the Merdeka Learning Curriculum and the strengthening of students' character development (Devonasista et al., 2025; Ferando et al., 2025; Simorangkir et al., 2024).

A fundamental challenge faced by teachers is the limited availability of textbooks and official modules that integrate folktales, requiring them to adapt or rewrite story texts according to instructional needs. This condition highlights the importance of documenting and transforming oral traditions into systematic formal teaching materials. Achmad et al., (2025) and Rahman et al., (2022) emphasize in their research the importance of preserving cultural heritage and strengthening national identity through the teaching of language and literature.

In addition, the low level of student enthusiasm often arises from the conventional presentation of folktales, such as reading texts without media support, which does not align well with the needs of the digital generation (Musaddad et al., 2025). Therefore, the study by Al Farisi et al., (2024), suggests that teachers and parents should revive the storytelling tradition through digital media so that it is not displaced by foreign cultural influences (Barrett, 2019). This is further emphasized by Kasmi et al., (2024) who highlight the importance of teacher training in producing short storytelling videos to increase students' interest in learning.

The limited instructional time allocated to Indonesian language subjects

also restricts opportunities to explore character values contained in folktales. As a result, integrative planning is required by linking the material with core language skills. Another obstacle is the lack of technological support and school facilities, while most folktales are still available only in printed form. Consequently, the character values embedded in these stories are not conveyed optimally.

Another challenge is the limited socialization and training provided to teachers. Many teachers have not received sufficient guidance in integrating folktales into classroom instruction, making systemic support from the government, academics, and schools essential. These findings emphasize that media innovation, digitalization, and teacher capacity building are crucial aspects for enabling Maluku folktales to function effectively as a means of cultural preservation as well as character education.

Opportunities

The opportunities for utilizing Maluku folktales in Indonesian language learning are considerable, particularly due to their dual function as both a means of cultural preservation and a medium for education. Stories about the origins of villages, islands, or community figures not only record local history but also instill cultural identity and a sense of pride among students toward their region. The dominance of legends within the oral tradition demonstrates the important role of folktales as a medium for transmitting cultural and moral values.

Furthermore, the relevance of folktales to students' everyday lives strengthens their potential as teaching materials. Settings such as beaches, forests, or rivers, along with legendary local characters, create emotional and cultural proximity (Ayu et al., 2019; Gultekin, 2025). This proximity enables moral values such as honesty, hard work, unity, social awareness, and environmental care to be more easily understood and internalized by students. These values align with the dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile within the Merdeka Curriculum, making folktales strategically important for character education.

Another aspect is that folktales also contribute to strengthening literacy (Gaurifa 2024; Musaddad et al., 2025). Through activities such as reading, rewriting stories, listening, discussing, and performing dramas, students can develop integrated language skills within the context of local culture (Amalia et al., 2019). This potential becomes even greater with the implementation of the Merdeka Learning Curriculum, which provides space for local content and project-based learning. Within the framework of P5 (*Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila*), folktales can serve as the basis for cultural exploration activities, documentation of oral traditions, as well as the cultivation of moral and character values (Santika, 2023).

The findings of this study indicate that Maluku folktales are predominantly composed of legends that narrate the origins of places, figures, and

natural phenomena as manifestations of local wisdom. These legends function not only as entertainment but also as a medium for cultural transmission, the cultivation of moral values, and the strengthening of social solidarity. The dominant themes include the struggle between good and evil, loyalty, and the origins of regions, reflecting values such as togetherness, simplicity, and adherence to customary norms. These stories generally follow a simple linear plot, making them easy to understand and relevant as Indonesian language learning materials at the junior high school level. Furthermore, the characters and characterization reflect positive values such as leadership, courage, hard work, and care, with a clear contrast between protagonists and antagonists that reinforces moral messages. The settings, which are predominantly natural environments such as the sea, rivers, forests, and islands, also carry symbolic meanings that strengthen aspects of life, spirituality, and the cultural identity of the Maluku community.

Furthermore, the findings of this study emphasize that Maluku folktales have significant potential as Indonesian language learning media integrated with character education. Values such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, environmental awareness, and religiosity are strongly embedded in each story, thereby supporting the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile within the Merdeka Curriculum. However, their utilization still faces several challenges, including the limited availability of teaching materials, low student interest due to conventional teaching methods, and the lack of technological support and teacher training. Therefore, innovation in the development of digital-based learning media, as well as efforts to enhance teacher capacity, are necessary so that Maluku folktales can be optimally utilized as contextual and meaningful learning resources (Nuryanto et al., 2025; Salsabila & Wardono, 2025).

The main findings of this study indicate that Maluku folktales are predominantly composed of legends with simple narrative structures, rich in character values, and strongly connected to the ecological and cultural context of archipelagic communities. These findings reinforce previous studies which state that folktales contain character education values such as religiosity, honesty, hard work, and social awareness (Al Farisi et al., 2024; Eryandi, 2023). Other studies also show that folktales function as a medium for moral and social education that is closely related to community life (Duong et al., 2025; Suoth & Sabarua, 2026; Utami et al., 2021). Furthermore, studies on literature-based teaching materials derived from folktales emphasize that local wisdom values can serve as a foundation for developing students' character (Birhan et al., 2021; Hassan et al., 2026; Touwe, 2023). Therefore, in general, the findings of this study are consistent with previous research, confirming that folktales possess strong educational and cultural functions.

However, this study demonstrates significant differences compared to previous research. Most prior studies tend to focus on the textual analysis of character values, emphasizing the identification of moral values. In con-

trast, this study offers a more comprehensive approach by examining twenty Maluku folktales in an integrated manner, covering aspects such as types of stories, themes, plot structures, characters, settings, and their relevance to Indonesian language learning within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum. These differences may be attributed to variations in methodological approaches, a broader data scope, as well as the geographical context of Maluku as an archipelagic region with distinct cultural and ecological characteristics. In addition, this study highlights the integration of folktales with the four language skills, which has not been widely discussed in previous research.

The main novelty of this study lies in three aspects. First, this research not only identifies character values but also integrates structural literary analysis with the pedagogical needs of Indonesian language learning. Second, it positions Maluku folktales as the basis for developing contextual teaching materials grounded in local wisdom, aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum and the Pancasila Student Profile. Third, this study reveals the interconnection between intrinsic elements of folktales (themes, characters, and settings) and the simultaneous strengthening of students' literacy and character, thereby offering a new conceptual contribution to the development of literature learning based on local cultural contexts.

The implications of this study encompass practical, academic, and policy aspects. Practically, the findings can serve as a basis for teachers in developing innovative teaching materials based on Maluku folktales, whether in the form of modules, digital media, or project-based learning. Academically, this study enriches the field of educational literature by offering an integrative approach that combines folklore, literacy, and character education. From a policy perspective, these findings support the importance of strengthening local content in the curriculum, as well as the need for the digitalization and documentation of folktales as cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

The characteristics of Maluku folktales demonstrate significant potential as Indonesian language teaching materials that incorporate character values. The dominance of legends with simple linear plots, protagonist characters representing leadership and solidarity, and settings closely related to the lives of coastal communities make them relevant and easily understood by junior high school students. Intrinsic elements such as themes of good versus evil and moral messages emphasizing hard work, honesty, patriotism, and environmental awareness further strengthen their function as a medium for character education. The integration of folktales into Indonesian language learning not only supports literacy skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking) but also reinforces cultural identity and instills noble values aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile in the Merdeka Curriculum. Thus, Maluku folktales can serve a dual function as both a medium for

cultural preservation and an instrument for shaping students' character in accordance with the goals of national education.

The use of Maluku folktales in Indonesian language learning that incorporates character education values reflects a dynamic interplay between challenges and opportunities. The main challenges include the limited availability of textbooks, minimal technological support, low student enthusiasm, limited instructional time, and the lack of teacher training, all of which hinder the optimal use of folktales as learning media. Nevertheless, the opportunities for integration remain substantial, as folktales not only function as a means of preserving local culture and strengthening cultural identity but also align with the objectives of the Merdeka Learning Curriculum, particularly in supporting literacy, character education, and the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5). Therefore, revitalizing oral traditions through digitalization, innovation in learning media, and improving teacher capacity are strategic steps that should be optimized so that Maluku folktales can effectively function as sustainable instruments for language education, character formation, and cultural preservation.

The utilization of Maluku folktales as teaching materials requires tangible support from various stakeholders. Teachers need to innovate in presenting folktales, for example through digital media such as videos, podcasts, or animations, so that they are more aligned with the characteristics of the digital generation and can increase students' learning interest. Schools can integrate folktales into P5 projects within the Merdeka Curriculum, making learning more contextual, interactive, and capable of fostering students' appreciation of local culture. At the same time, the government and academic institutions need to provide modules, textbooks, and systematic teacher training so that oral traditions can be well documented and utilized as formal learning resources. Through these efforts, Maluku folktales can function not only as literacy materials but also as effective instruments for cultural preservation and the development of students' character.

As a follow-up, future research is recommended to develop digital-based learning models or teaching materials (such as e-modules, animated videos, or interactive comics) based on Maluku folktales and to test their effectiveness in improving students' literacy skills and character development. In addition, experimental or research and development (R&D) studies are needed to examine their direct implementation in classroom settings and to expand the scope of research across different levels of education.

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