
Employing Traditional Stories to Enhance Critical Thinking Skills of Junior High School Students

Nur Fauzia¹⁾, Rahayu Kuswardani²⁾, Abdur Rosyid³⁾, Fithriyah Inda Nur Abida⁴⁾, Diana Budi Darma⁵⁾

¹Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia
nurfauzia@unesa.ac.id

²Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia
rahayukuswardani@unesa.ac.id

³Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia
abdurrosyid@unesa.ac.id

⁴Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia
fithriyahabida@unesa.ac.id

⁵Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia
dianabudi@unesa.ac.id

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Email Correspondence: nurfauzia@unesa.ac.id

Abstract

In contemporary education, there is a growing interest in exploring alternative methods to cultivate critical thinking skills among junior high school students. Traditional stories, with their cultural richness and narrative depth, present an intriguing opportunity as a potential learning tool to foster such skills. This research aims to investigate the efficacy of utilizing traditional stories as a pedagogical instrument to enhance critical thinking abilities among junior high school students. By employing a qualitative research design, the study seeks to delve into the impact of traditional stories on students' critical thinking development. Adopting a qualitative research design, this study takes on a single case study approach, focusing on thirty eighth-grade students from SMPN 14. The participants were selected through a purposive sampling method. The research spans a duration of six weeks, during which carefully selected traditional stories were utilized as a medium for nurturing critical thinking experiences. Research instruments encompassed observation, interviews, and the implementation of specifically designed critical thinking worksheets. Data analysis was conducted using categorization and thematic processes to discern the patterns of change in the students' critical thinking capacities throughout the intervention. The findings of the research indicate that the incorporation of traditional stories effectively enhances the critical thinking skills of junior high school students. Throughout the learning process, students exhibited advancements in various facets of critical thinking, including problem identification, critical analysis, argument assessment, and reflective thinking. The critical thinking experiences derived from the utilization of traditional stories were instrumental in fostering deeper and contextually relevant thinking skills. As a result, the study recommends that educators consider integrating traditional stories into their teaching practices to facilitate the development of critical thinking abilities across different educational levels.

Keywords: Critical Thinking Skills, Learning Method, Traditional Stories

1. INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking ability is a cognitive skill that underlies many aspects of life. In the current era of information and technology, challenges faced by society have become more complex and rapidly changing. Globalization and the fourth industrial revolution have transformed the economic, social, and political landscape, creating diverse challenges in daily life (Castells, 2010). Therefore, junior high school students are required to have strong critical thinking skills to effectively confront these challenges (O'Brien, 2018), (Meyliana & Rokhayati, 2020), (Tan & Teo, 2021). The advancements in information and communication technology have significantly impacted the widespread and rapid dissemination of information and knowledge. Junior high school students are exposed to information from various sources, including social media, the internet, and other media platforms. However, much of this information is unverified, inaccurate, or even misleading (Rifkin, 2014), (Vosoughi, 2018), (Pennycook, 2020). Critical thinking skills are crucial in identifying valid information, analyzing it objectively, and making decisions based on strong evidence (Kivunja, 2015), (Hadi & Pahlevi, 2018), (Liem, 2019). Additionally, globalization has connected people from diverse cultures and backgrounds. Junior high school students are now exposed to various perspectives and viewpoints. Critical thinking enables students to understand and appreciate diversity while objectively analyzing different viewpoints (Paul & Elder, 2006), (Kwak & Kim, 2017), (Davies & Brown, 2017). In an increasingly interconnected and multicultural environment, critical thinking has become even more crucial in developing positive and productive intercultural relationships.

The fourth industrial revolution has brought significant changes in the job and industrial sectors. Many tasks previously performed by humans can now be automated by technology (Parsaorantua et al., 2017). Therefore, junior high school students are required to develop critical and creative thinking skills to compete in an increasingly competitive job market (Yusnan et al., 2022). Critical thinking skills enable students to find innovative solutions, adapt to technological changes, and develop competitive advantages based on analytical and reflective thinking. Everyday situations and problems have also become more complex and multidimensional (Ennis, 2011), (Paul & Elder, 2013), (Facione, 2015). Junior high school students often face various social, environmental, and political issues that require critical thinking to find sustainable and impactful solutions. Critical thinking allows students to identify the root of problems, analyze various factors involved, and develop effective action plans. In this context, education must adapt to the changing times and prepare students to face complex challenges in the future. Critical thinking skills should be an integral part of the junior high school curriculum (Brookfield, 2012), (Henderson,

2013). Teachers and educators play a vital role in guiding students to develop critical thinking skills through various innovative and problem-solving-oriented teaching methods.

One interesting teaching method in education is the use of traditional stories as a learning tool. Traditional stories are part of the cultural heritage passed down from generation to generation. These stories are not merely entertainment or fairy tales; they carry profound values in shaping the moral, norms, and culture of a society (Nuthall, 2005), (Short, 2007), (Woods, 2015). Traditional stories also offer a unique appeal as they contain elements that arouse students' curiosity and imagination. Often, these stories feature intriguing and emotionally-rich characters, captivating and engaging students in the learning process. By emotionally connecting with the stories, students find it easier to relate to the lessons and develop a high interest in understanding the content more deeply. Traditional stories often present complex conflicts and situations that require analytical and critical thinking to comprehend the story comprehensively. In following the storyline, students have to identify and analyze various factors, understand the characters' motivations, and evaluate the actions taken by the story's characters. This process allows students to hone their critical thinking skills in exploring multiple perspectives and understanding the implications of the decisions made (Shofiyah, 2017), (Subagyo & Hidayat, 2022). Through experiencing traditional stories, students can gain a better understanding of life values and develop critical, reflective, and analytical thinking abilities.

This learning approach offers an intriguing alternative to enhance the effectiveness of education and positively impact overall student development (Sofie et al., 2022). Using traditional stories as a teaching method not only provides students with a unique learning experience but also has positive effects on various aspects of their development (Kusuma, 2019), (Yusuf & Isyuniarti, 2021), (Wulandari, 2020). Encompassing elements of engagement, cultural understanding, emotions, critical thinking, and moral values, traditional stories become an effective learning tool in motivating students, enhancing comprehension, and shaping positive character traits. Therefore, implementing this learning approach becomes essential in creating a more meaningful and relevant educational process for students. While there have been some studies on using storytelling as an educational tool, the focus on traditional stories specifically to enhance critical thinking skills in secondary school students is still limited. Previous research may have explored the general impact of storytelling on cognitive development but might not have delved deep into the specific aspects of traditional stories and their effects on critical thinking abilities in the context of secondary education. Hence, this research aims to fill this knowledge gap by delving deeper into the potential use of traditional stories as a learning tool to enhance critical thinking skills among junior high school students. The results of this study are expected to provide a more

comprehensive understanding of the potential of traditional stories as an innovative teaching approach to improve students' critical thinking abilities. Moreover, this research is also anticipated to offer recommendations to educators and educational stakeholders in developing more effective learning strategies to enhance critical thinking skills at the junior high school level

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopted a qualitative research design with a single case study approach. Adopting a qualitative research design with a single case study approach implies that the research methodology is focused on exploring a single case or entity in great depth. This approach allowed the researcher to delve deeply into the phenomenon and understand the process holistically within the context of high school education (Creswell, 2017); (Creswell, 2016), (Yin, 2018), (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, 2013). the particular context of interest, namely, junior high school students, can be examined in greater detail, encompassing the distinctive cultural, societal, and environmental elements that might impact the subject of the study. The participants in this study were junior high school students in 8th grade at SMPN 14 Surabaya. The participant selection process used purposive sampling to ensure that participants had experience with traditional stories in their educational context. Data Collection was conducted through several techniques:

- a. Observation: The researcher observed the learning process in classrooms that involved the use of traditional stories. This observation provided insights into how traditional stories were introduced, explained, and integrated into the learning process.
- b. Interviews: Interviews were conducted with teachers who used traditional stories in their teaching to understand the purpose of their use, challenges faced, and strategies employed in teaching students about the moral values and critical aspects of the stories.
- c. Focus Group Discussions: Focus group discussions involved students who had experienced learning with traditional stories. These discussions focused on students' understanding of the stories, their critical thinking about various aspects of the stories, and their experiences in using critical thinking skills to address conflicts within the stories.
- d. Written Documents: Written documents such as lesson notes, student assignments, and reflective responses were collected to complement data from observations and interviews.

The collected data were analyzed qualitatively. The analysis process involved categorization, thematic grouping, and pattern formation to identify themes and patterns that emerged from the data (Creswell, 2016); (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, 2013). The researcher identified the

specific aspects of traditional stories that most influenced the development of students' critical thinking abilities. Themes related to moral values and ethical dilemmas present in the traditional stories can be categorized to understand their influence on students' moral reasoning and ethical decision-making skills. Concepts related to character development, plot structure, and narrative elements in the traditional stories can be organized to evaluate their impact on students' analytical and interpretative skills. Ideas associated with the cultural contexts and societal norms depicted in the traditional stories can be grouped to assess their influence on students' understanding of diverse perspectives and critical reflection on societal issues. Through the analysis, the researcher specifically focused on identifying the specific aspects of traditional stories that played a significant role in influencing the development of students' critical thinking abilities.

This process involved a deep exploration of how elements such as narrative structure, character development, moral dilemmas, or cultural contexts within the traditional stories impacted the students' cognitive growth and critical thinking skills. For example, certain narratives may consistently stimulate deeper analytical thinking, while others may predominantly encourage empathetic understanding or ethical reasoning. By carefully examining the categorized data, the researchers identify recurring trends or patterns that shed light on the impact of traditional stories on students' critical thinking skills. To ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings, the researcher employed triangulation techniques. Triangulation involved comparing and contrasting data from multiple sources, such as observations, interviews, focus group discussions, and written documents. By cross-validating the information obtained from these diverse sources, the researcher could strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings and ensure that the interpretations were grounded in robust evidence.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings identified several specific aspects of traditional stories that have a significant impact on developing students' critical thinking abilities. First, the complex conflicts in traditional stories challenge students to think critically about various possible solutions that characters in the stories could take. They need to consider multiple aspects, consequences, and implications of each action that could be taken. Students are not only asked to find a single correct answer but to explore and analyze various options that characters might choose and how each choice can affect the overall plot of the story. Additionally, complex conflicts also encourage students to think critically about the values and morals involved in the story. Faced with moral dilemmas, students need to consider various ethical perspectives that may exist. They have to identify conflicts between different values and try to figure out how

characters decide to act based on their values. This process encourages students to think critically about ethics and morality in everyday life and how they can make decisions based on these values.

When presented with complex challenges and moral dilemmas, students are prompted to contemplate the extensive effects of each choice made by the characters in the story. They must contemplate the consequences of each decision and how it can affect the development of the story and the fate of the characters. This process teaches students about the importance of considering the long-term impact of their actions and thinking about the consequences of each choice made in real life. Overall, complex conflicts in traditional stories prompt students to think critically about various possible solutions and consequences of each action. This process involves in-depth analysis, moral reflection, and consideration of the long-term implications of the decisions made. Thus, traditional stories become an effective tool in honing students' critical thinking abilities and helping them face complex challenges in life with more mature and reflective thinking. Furthermore, multidimensional characters in traditional stories refer to characters that are complex and have many dimensions. This means that these characters cannot be simply defined by one trait or quality, but have a combination of diverse traits, feelings, and motivations that shape their personalities. This allows students to identify and understand characters in a deeper and more comprehensive way.

Multidimensional characters provide opportunities for students to analyze the motivations behind their actions. In traditional stories, characters often face challenges or conflicts that force them to make important decisions. The emergence of various traits and emotions in characters allows students to see that someone's motivation can come from various factors, including background, past experiences, and adopted values. By identifying and understanding character motivations, students can sharpen their critical thinking skills in understanding human complexity and how a person's decisions are influenced by various factors. Furthermore, multidimensional characters also undergo changes when facing challenges or conflicts in the story. They can experience emotional, psychological, and moral changes along with the development of the storyline. This provides an opportunity for students to contemplate how experiences and conflicts can shape characters and how they can evolve as they go through different events.

As a result of this process, students are driven to acquire a deeper comprehension of character development and improve their critical thinking skills when examining character transformations. With the presence of multidimensional characters, students can also identify complexity and imperfections in these characters. This helps them avoid seeing the world in black and white or based on stereotypes. Instead, students are encouraged to view characters as complex individuals with strengths and weaknesses, and how these aspects can influence their decisions and actions in the story.

Multidimensional characters in traditional stories provide valuable opportunities for students to hone their critical thinking skills. Through identifying character motivations and changes, students learn to better understand the complexity of human nature, view challenges from various perspectives, and analyze the moral and ethical implications of character actions. Thus, traditional stories help students develop deeper and more comprehensive critical thinking abilities when facing life's complexities and various situations in real life.

The cultural context in traditional stories also plays a crucial role in enriching students' learning experiences. Traditional stories often reflect the values, norms, beliefs, and traditions of a particular culture. Involving students in stories with cultural contexts opens opportunities to understand and appreciate cultural diversity in the world, as well as stimulates reflection on the ethical values within their own culture. Traditional stories from various cultures can provide profound insights into the diversity of cultures worldwide. When students engage in stories originating from different cultural backgrounds, they learn about the differences and similarities in the values and norms cherished by specific societies. This can broaden students' perspectives on human diversity, strengthen tolerance, and foster mutual respect for various cultures. Students are exposed to narratives and the lives of characters that may significantly differ from their own cultural environment.

This experience will open new and fascinating perspectives about the world, making students more open and flexible in understanding cultural differences. Traditional stories with cultural contexts also help create space for reflection on their own cultural values and ethics. Students can compare and contrast the values presented in the stories with the values existing within their own culture. This will encourage students to think critically about the truth and relevance of cultural values in modern life, as well as how these values shape their perspectives and attitudes towards life. Stories with cultural contexts also aid students in developing empathy towards the characters and societies within the stories. They can feel and understand the emotions, difficulties, and challenges faced by characters in different cultures. The ability to empathize is an essential social skill for building understanding and better relationships with people from various cultural backgrounds. Through stories with cultural contexts, students can learn to appreciate and respect the values of other cultures without judging from an ethnocentric or culturally superior standpoint. They will realize that cultural values and norms are the outcomes of the experiences and history of specific societies, and that each culture contributes uniquely to the diversity of the world. By involving students in stories that reflect various cultures, this learning approach not only aids in the development of critical thinking but also encourages a more comprehensive and valuable learning experience in facing an increasingly interconnected and culturally diverse world.

Approaching the aspects of conflict (plot), characters, and cultural context in traditional stories significantly enhances student engagement in the learning process and develops students' critical thinking abilities. Based on observation results, students showed higher enthusiasm when traditional stories were used as a learning tool compared to conventional teaching methods. They actively engaged in understanding the stories, asked questions, and participated in classroom discussions related to the conflicts and moral values presented in the stories. The more enjoyable and captivating learning experience through traditional stories helps create a positive learning environment and stimulates students' interest in the subject matter. Students are also able to see various perspectives, analyze complex situations, and draw conclusions from different characters' arguments in the stories. The students' work results also demonstrated their ability to recognize the implications of characters' actions and critically respond to the conflicts faced by the story's characters.

The findings of this research underscore the importance of using traditional stories as an effective learning approach to enhance student engagement, develop understanding of conflicts and moral values, and create a positive learning environment. Implementing traditional stories in the learning process provides benefits beyond information delivery, but also encourages deeper and more meaningful critical thinking and reflection by students. This research makes a valuable contribution to the development of critical thinking learning through traditional stories by identifying specific aspects in traditional stories that influence students' critical thinking abilities. By exploring these aspects, this research provides practical guidance for teachers and educational institutions to design more effective learning strategies for developing students' critical thinking skills. Furthermore, this research also provides a deeper understanding of how the use of traditional stories can motivate students, increase their engagement in learning, and create a positive learning environment. These implications can have a positive impact on increasing students' interest in learning and strengthening their active participation in the teaching and learning process. Finally, this research also contributes to understanding the role of moral values in developing students' critical thinking. Presenting ethical values in traditional stories helps students better understand the moral implications of actions and decisions and teaches them about ethics and morality in everyday life contexts.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, the use of traditional stories effectively enhances student engagement in the learning process and develops their critical thinking abilities. Through the three specific aspects in traditional stories: characters, plot, and cultural context, students practice

understanding human characters, cultural backgrounds, and complex situations that refer to the story's plot. By comprehending these aspects, students can see various perspectives, analyze complex situations, and reflect on the moral implications of characters' actions in the story. The complex conflicts presented in traditional stories encourage students to think critically about various possible solutions and consequences of each action. Furthermore, the multidimensional characters in traditional stories allow students to identify character motivations and changes in facing challenges, thereby helping them develop a deeper understanding of human complexity. The use of traditional stories as a learning tool has proven to enhance students' critical thinking skills through the story's plot, characters, and cultural context. Throughout the learning process, students exhibited advancements in various facets of critical thinking, including problem identification, critical analysis, argument assessment, and reflective thinking. The critical thinking experiences derived from the utilization of traditional stories help students develop analytical and reflective abilities, as well as contextually relevant thinking skills.

The results of this research provide valuable contributions to the development of innovative and impactful learning approaches to sharpen students' critical thinking skills in junior high schools. Therefore, further research can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how traditional stories varies across different cultural contexts. This could include exploring whether certain cultural narratives have a more pronounced impact on critical thinking skills. A comparative analysis can provide a clearer understanding of the unique contributions of traditional storytelling to cognitive development. The next suggestion is to conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of incorporating traditional stories into the curriculum. Exploring the long-term impact of integrating traditional stories by conducting longitudinal studies can provides a comprehensive understanding of the enduring effects on critical thinking skills, developmental trajectories, and potential challenges.

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