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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Penthul Tembem art: Study and its application in elementary school Indonesian language learning as a storytelling medium for strengthening cultural character

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ABSTRACT

Penthul Tembem, a traditional oral art from Madiun City, has been studied from the perspective of history and cultural values, but has not been studied as a storytelling material in classroom learning. This study aims to describe the cultural values of Penthul Tembem Art and analyze its application as a storytelling medium in Indonesian language learning to strengthen the cultural character of 4th grade students. This descriptive qualitative study was conducted at Banjarejo Elementary School, Madiun City, with 24 students and a teacher as subjects. Data were collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and storytelling performance tests on a scale of 1–4, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model and verified through triangulation of sources and techniques. The Penthul Tembem story was compiled in a condensed version for 4th grade and presented in the form of a digital flipbook. The results of the study showed that students' understanding of the historical and philosophical values of art was at an average of 3.6 (very good), while their storytelling skills were categorized as very good with an average fluency of 3.54, expression of 3.0, and understanding of the story content of 3.3. Character strengthening was seen in the enthusiasm, courage to perform, and cooperation of students when telling stories in groups. This study contributes conceptually through the transfer of performing arts media into learning stories, methodologically through integrated indicators of storytelling skills and cultural characters, and practically for elementary school teachers through alternative Indonesian language learning based on Madiun local wisdom.

Keywords: penthul chubby art; Indonesian language learning; media; story telling; characters

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INTRODUCTION

Basic education is the foundation for national character formation, and Indonesian language learning plays a strategic role not only as a means of communication but also as a vehicle for instilling values, attitudes, and cultural identity in students (Albaburrahim, 2021). Therefore, Indonesian language learning in elementary schools (SD) ideally should not stop at mastering listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, but also serve as a space for internalizing character values and local wisdom that develop within the student's environment. This demand aligns with the placement of cultural and civic literacy as one of the basic literacy indicators in the profile indicators of educational units in Indonesia, which is seen as anticipating the negative impacts of globalization (Cahyanti & Nuroh, 2023). Character education in schools also needs to be designed based on practical principles supported by research evidence (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004).

In practice, these demands have not been met. Globalization and digitalization have made children more familiar with popular culture on social media than with their local culture (Syakhsiyyah et al., 2025), and more interested in entertainment deemed appealing, such as dance, bands, and Western music (Aisah et al., 2025). This trend aligns with studies of the psychology of globalization, which show that globalization influences how young people form cultural identities, including how they balance local and global cultures (Arnett, 2002). This situation risks weakening pride in local cultural identities and the positive character traits that can be fostered through early introduction to regional arts. From a learning perspective, teacher barriers to teaching Indonesian in elementary schools have been studied, but most of them are general in nature and do not specifically address institutional and cultural contexts (Parino et al., 2026). Learning also tends to be textual and oriented toward linguistic achievement, while local culture in student textbooks is predominantly derived from other regions. As a result, the local arts of students' homes have not been systematically integrated into Indonesian language learning. The gap between the culture experienced by students in their environment and the learning practices in schools has also been reported in a number of low and middle income countries, so the integration of local cultural activities into the curriculum is beginning to be considered as a bridge between schools and communities (Wiysahnyuy & Valentine, 2023). Conceptually, this effort aligns with culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) pedagogy that seeks to maintain cultural diversity (Paris, 2012), and the concept of funds of knowledge, which views knowledge developed within students' cultures and communities as a source of learning in the classroom (Moll & Amanti, 1995).

Madiun City has a traditional art form that has the potential to address these issues: the Penthul Tembem art form. This art form is a masked dance that tells the story of the journey of Raden Ngabehi Ranggawarsita (Bagus Burhan) using two distinctive masks: a white mask named Penthul and a black mask named Tembem. Historical and cultural studies indicate that this art form arose from local folklore and encompasses moral, leadership, religious, aesthetic, and entertainment values applicable to community life. However, its development is considered inadequate due to minimal government and community attention (Yulianti & Habsari, 2021). Initial fieldwork reinforces these concerns. Fourth-grade elementary school students in Madiun City, who are cognitively capable of understanding simple storylines and are beginning to develop moral reasoning, are still unfamiliar with Penthul Tembem as part of their city's cultural identity, and teachers have not yet utilized it as Indonesian language teaching material. This known from results observation early in students grade 4.

On the other hand, storytelling has long been viewed as a pedagogical approach that integrates cognitive, affective, social, and oral literacy aspects (Jurahman, 2022). International evidence shows that both oral storytelling and reading stories improve early childhood oral language skills, and children who hear stories told appear to understand them better when retelling them (Isbell et al., 2004). At the elementary school level, its application has been reported to improve speaking and listening skills while also being a means of instilling nationalistic, religious, and socially conscious characters (Lestari et al., 2025; Rusiyono & Apriani, 2020). However, moral messages are not automatically absorbed simply by hearing or reading a story; understanding the moral theme depends on the child's understanding of the text and their stage of moral development (Narvaez, 2002), so stories need to be accompanied by discussion and reflection. Recent studies have focused on digital storytelling, which has been reported to impact learning, particularly in aiding comprehension (Ginting et al., 2024; Rahiem, 2021; Shahid & Khan, 2022). Including improving elementary school students' speaking skills (Cahyanti & Nuroh, 2023). Internationally, digital storytelling has been linked to more engaging and constructivist learning environments in schools (Smeda et al., 2014) and improved academic achievement, critical thinking, and learning motivation (Yang & Wu, 2012). (Robin (2008) emphasized that its use needs to be based on a clear pedagogical framework, not simply the use of technology. In early childhood, digital storytelling models have been reported to help develop communication, collaboration, and early literacy skills (O'Byrne et al., 2018). In language learning, systematic reviews demonstrate the benefits of digital storytelling for language

skills (Lim et al., 2022; Moradi & Chen, 2019), particularly speaking skills from elementary school through college (Nair & Yunus, 2021) as well as for motivation and learning satisfaction (Hava, 2021). In the realm of cultural heritage, information technology is seen as having the potential to enrich cultural heritage education (Ott & Pozzi, 2011), and interactive digital storytelling and virtual reality have been utilized to present and expand access to cultural heritage preservation (Rizvic et al., 2024; Selmanović et al., 2020). When combined with local wisdom, storytelling acquires a cultural dimension. Stories serve as text Authentic storytelling containing moral, educational, and cultural values, and the effectiveness of digital storytelling based on oral tradition on students' fluency and speaking confidence has been tested (Muliadi, 2025). story in learning language has also been shown to facilitate vocabulary, increase self-confidence, and encourage active student participation (Aisah et al., 2025), while the integration of local wisdom in elementary school learning can strengthen character students (Jubaedah et al., 2025).

Language learning views storytelling as more than just a storytelling activity, but rather an integrative platform for honing students' language skills. When listening to a story, students are trained to capture information, recognize characters, events, and causal relationships within the narrative. Furthermore, the retelling process trains them in organizing ideas, selecting vocabulary, constructing sentences, and applying appropriate intonation and expression. Therefore, utilizing traditional arts-based stories makes the language experience more contextual because it is sourced directly from students' social and cultural realities. In this regard, Penthul Tembem art serves not only as a means of cultural preservation but also as an effective, authentic material for practicing speaking skills through the comprehension and reconstruction of oral stories. However, the author's review of the literature reveals three limitations. First, the outcomes studied generally involve writing skills, such as in digital storybooks featuring Punokawan characters Pratiwi et al. (2026) and digital storytelling based on local wisdom, which teachers consider essential for improving writing skills (Munajah et al., 2022), or cultural literacy, as measured by cognitive tests (Cahyanti & Nuroh, 2023). Students' oral storytelling performance, namely fluency, expression, and comprehension of story content, assessed alongside cultural character indicators within a single framework, has not been widely studied. Furthermore, most international studies on digital storytelling have been conducted in the context of English language learning (Hava, 2021; Nair & Yunus, 2021), not in the context of traditional English language learning. Indonesian with material stories from the students' own local arts. Second, studies of local cultural integration in elementary schools tend to highlight other

cultural objects or local cultural values in general, such as traditional games (Susanti et al., 2022) and the integration of local cultural values across learning (Sumarni et al., 2024), and focus more on cultural materials than on how to contextualize them within a learning syntax that suits the characteristics of today's children. International studies on folklore as a pedagogical tool, for example, have only explored the views of teachers and parents (Wiysahnyuy & Valentine, 2023) and have not yet tested classroom storytelling learning designs. Third, studies on Penthul Tembem itself have only focused on history and cultural values (Yulianti & Habsari, 2021), while studies of Penthul arts in Melikan Hamlet have focused on children's character education through involvement in mask-making, practice, and performances (Wijayanti, 2024), rather than on the use of the stories as storytelling material in Indonesian language learning in the classroom. Based on the author's research, no studies have been found that explain the oral tradition of Penthul Tembem into a story text that is adapted to student grade 4 and test its use in formal Indonesian language learning.

Based on this gap, the novelty of this research lies not merely in the change of object and location, but in four contributions. Conceptually, this research proposes a transformation of the mask performance art medium into a concise story in the form of a digital flipbook that suits the characteristics of the mask student grade 4, then narrated repeated orally by students, so that local arts function as texts and storytelling media, not just objects of cultural introduction. Theoretically, this study expands the study *of* storytelling and local wisdom by linking artistic cultural values, storytelling skills, and strengthening cultural character within a single indicator framework. Methodologically, this study combines storytelling performance rubrics (fluency, expression, and understanding of content). Empirically, this study presents initial evidence of learning in grade 4 of Banjarejo Elementary School, Madiun City, about arts that have never been taught to students.

This research aims to (1) describe the cultural values contained in Penthul Tembem Art, (2) analyze its application as a storytelling medium in students' Indonesian language learning . class 4, and (3) describes the strengthening of cultural character that emerges in students. The results are expected give contribution theoretical in the form of enrichment a study of the use of local arts in language learning, as well as a practical contribution in the form of alternative Indonesian language learning based on local wisdom for elementary school teachers in Madiun City, while also preserving the Penthul Tembem arts as a regional cultural heritage.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative research type, which aims to describe, interpret, and analyze in depth a socio-cultural phenomenon as it is, without manipulation of variables (Sugiyono, 2013) . The subjects of the study were fourth-grade students and class teachers at Banjarejo Elementary School, Madiun city. Prior to the study, preparations were made such as taking care of administration, permits, and approval from students and teachers. The study was conducted in January 2026 as an initial stage at Banjarejo Elementary School, Madiun city. The subjects in the study were fourth-grade students of Banjarejo Elementary School, Madiun city who had obtained permission to participate in the study. The selection of fourth-grade students was based on the consideration that at this stage of development, students have the ability to understand simple narrative texts, identify characters and events, and re-communicate information obtained through spoken language. These characteristics are relevant to the research objectives that place storytelling as a primary activity in Indonesian language learning. Class teachers were involved as informants to obtain information about Indonesian language learning experiences, students' introduction to local arts, and responses to the use of the Penthul Tembem story in learning.

The data collection technique was carried out through participatory observation, namely the researcher was directly involved in observing the Indonesian language learning process using the Penthul Tembem art story telling media, in-depth interviews, documentation, and performance tests, namely direct assessment of storytelling activities. In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the main instrument assisted by instruments in the form of observation guidelines used to observe the activities, responses, participation, and attitudes of students during the Indonesian language learning process based on Penthul Tembem art storytelling, semi-structured interview guidelines, used to collect data from class teachers, students' learning experiences, story telling performance assessment rubrics, used to assess students' storytelling skills (fluency, intonation/pronunciation, expression, and understanding of the story's content), cultural character strengthening sheets/rubrics, used to describe and assess the emergence of cultural character indicators in students during and after learning, documentation, in the form of a list of collected documents (photos, videos of activities, student work, lesson plans/teaching modules, field notes) as supporting data.

Research is structured based on indicators in two main aspects, namely the aspect of storytelling-based Indonesian language learning and the aspect of strengthening cultural

character. The score range uses a scale of 1-4 with assessment weights of very good (4), good (3), sufficient (2) and less (1), then presented and explained qualitatively to conclude the meaning of the results, as presented in the following table.

Aspect	Indicator	Sub-Indicators / Descriptors
A study of the cultural Values of Penthul Tembem art	Understanding the historical and philosophical value of art	Students are able to explain the origins and characters in the story Penthul Tembem
	Introduction to noble values	Students are able to mention moral, religious, leadership and aesthetic values in this art.
Storytelling skills	Fluency and clarity of storytelling	Students tell stories fluently, with clear pronunciation and intonation.
	Expression and appreciation	Students use facial expressions, gestures, and intonation that are appropriate to the content of the story.
	Understanding the content of the story	Students are able to answer questions/retell the main points of the story correctly.
Strengthening cultural character	Love the homeland and be proud of local culture	Students show enthusiasm and pride in their own regional arts.
	Religious and respect moral values	Students are able to relate the moral/religious message of the story to everyday attitudes.
	Confidence and cooperation	Students are brave enough to appear and tell stories in front of the class and are active in group activities.
	Respecting cultural diversity	Students show respect and interest in learning traditional arts.

Table 1. Indicators of storytelling and cultural strengthening

Data analysis was carried out using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model, as also used in previous studies of the history and cultural values of Penthul Tembem Art (Yulianti & Habsari, 2021) , which includes three continuous activity flows, namely (1) data reduction namely the process of selecting, simplifying, and focusing data from observations, interviews, and documentation on things that are relevant to research indicators, (2) data presentation, namely organizing data that has been reduced into descriptive narrative form, tables, or matrices so that patterns and relationships between data are easy to understand, and (3) drawing conclusions and verification, namely drawing meaning from the data that has been presented, then verified through triangulation of sources (teachers, students) and triangulation of techniques (observation, interviews, documentation) to guarantee the validity and credibility of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to explore the meaning, process, and cultural values of the Penthul Tembem art form and to understand contextually how this art form can be applied as a storytelling medium in Indonesian language learning in elementary schools. It also aims to observe the process of strengthening cultural character that emerges in students. The results of this study can be explained as follows.

Study and history of Penthul Tembem

The Penthul Tembem art form is the only oral tradition native to Madiun. It was composed and preserved by the Wisma Melati Studio, owned by Grandmother Dra. Ny. R. Ngt. Sri Wijati Rahardjo. To this day, Penthul Tembem remains a source of pride for the people of Madiun. The history of the penthul tembem is inseparable from the Madiun region. The story of the penthul tembem begins with a student named Bagus Burhan who studied at the Tegalsari Islamic Boarding School in Ponorogo. Due to his misbehavior, he was expelled by his teacher, Kyai Kasan Besari. Bagus Burhan went to Madiun accompanied by his loyal servant, Onggoleya. At the Madiun Market, he met Raden Ajeng Gombak, the daughter of the Regent of Madiun, and gave her his ring for free. From the ring, the Regent learned that Bagus Burhan was actually his own nephew. Meanwhile, Tegalsari Village fell into chaos after Bagus Burhan's death. Kyai Kasan Besari regretted his actions and sent his servant, Kromoleya, to search for his student.

Upon arriving in Madiun, Kromoleya busked and danced in the town square wearing a black mask called Tembem. Coincidentally, Onggoleya was passing by. He joined in the dance wearing a white mask called Penthul. To their surprise, they discovered they knew each other. This encounter between the two masks led to their union. Afterward, Bagus Burhan returned to Tegalsari to atone for his sins by fasting forty days. He eventually married Raden Ajeng Gombak and became a renowned court poet under the name Raden Ngabehi Ranggawarsita.

The story of the penthul tembem is made in a more concise version according to the characteristics of 4th grade students, so it is easy to read and interesting. The story of the penthul tembem is presented in an online book that can be accessed through https://online.fliphtml5.com/apvrjy/Judul-Buku-Ceritamu/. The art of Penthul tembem is not just a funny and interesting art. Behind the story of the penthul tembem there is a moral message that can be learned, namely that every mistake needs to be acknowledged and

corrected as done by Bagus Burhan, a kyai dared to admit his negligence by expelling his students so that he sent his servants to look for Bagus Burhan. The story of the penthul tembem contains a message about how friends are always loyal to accompany like onggoleyo and kromoleya and most importantly there is a moral message where the habit of helping and keeping the message of parents will bring goodness. The value of admitting mistakes and honesty carried out by Bagus Burhan when asked about his origins is in line with the universal character pillars of honesty put forward (Samani, 2011)

Implementation Procedures for Storytelling Learning Based on Penthul Tembem Arts

The Penthul Tembem art-based storytelling learning process is carried out through several stages. The first stage is an introduction to local culture, where the teacher introduces the Penthul Tembem art through a video performance and a brief explanation of the origins and characters in the story. The second stage is story exploration, where students listen to the Penthul Tembem story that has been simplified and presented through a digital flipbook. At this stage, students are directed to identify the characters, setting, sequence of events, and moral message of the story. The third stage is understanding and interpretation, where students discuss the content of the story and identify the cultural values contained within. The fourth stage is storytelling practice, where students are divided into groups and take turns retelling parts of the story using their own language, paying attention to fluency, intonation, expression, and understanding of the content. The final stage is reflection, where students and the teacher identify moral messages and cultural values that can be applied in everyday life.

Storytelling results and strengthening student character

Banjarejo Elementary School students' understanding of the historical and philosophical values of art averaged 3.6, categorized as very good. These results were obtained from an oral test given by the teacher to understand the origins of the Penthul Tembem art. The teacher asked questions using the 5W+1H formula after playing the Penthul Tembem story, as shown in the following image.



Figure 1. The teacher displays the story of penthul chubby

The results of understanding moral, religious, leadership and aesthetic values in art the story "Penthul Tembem" was categorized as very good because students were able to articulate the moral values contained in the story. Learning activities began with explaining and presenting the story in a flipbook. Students noted important points and retold them in their own words. The story was presented both orally and in writing, resulting in a score for understanding the story's content. This was evident in the students' enthusiasm as they explained each story's story, as shown below.

No	Student Name	Story telling skills assessment score											
		Fluency and clarity of storytelling				Expression and appreciation				Understanding the content of the story			
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1	S1				✓			✓				✓	
2	S2				✓			✓				✓	
3	S3				✓			✓				✓	
4	S4				✓			✓				✓	
5	S5				✓			✓				✓	
6	S6				✓				✓			✓	
7	S7				✓				✓			✓	
8	S8				✓				✓			✓	
9	S9				✓				✓			✓	
10	S10				✓			✓				✓	
11	S11			✓				✓					✓
12	S12			✓				✓					✓
13	S13			✓				✓					✓
14	S14			✓				✓					✓
15	S15			✓				✓				✓	
16	S16			✓					✓			✓	
17	S17			✓					✓			✓	
18	S18			✓					✓			✓	
19	S19				✓				✓				✓
20	S20				✓			✓					✓
21	S21				✓			✓					✓
22	S22			✓				✓					✓
23	S23			✓				✓				✓	
24	S24			✓				✓				✓	
	Average			3.54				3				3.3	

Table 2. Student storytelling results

Table 2 shows that the average score for fluency and clarity in storytelling for students was 3.54, categorized as very good. Furthermore, expression and appreciation were also categorized as good. The average score for understanding the story content was 3.3,

categorized as good. The activity of understanding the story content was carried out by rewriting the story that had been shown. A total of 16 students understood the story well. This is supported by interview results which stated that students had only just learned the text of the Penthul Tembem story, because the teacher had never taught it. The results of the storytelling performed by students were categorized as good in line with research by Cahyani and Nuroh which proved that digital storytelling can improve the speaking skills of elementary school students (Cahyanti & Nuroh, 2023). Although it had never been taught before, the research findings showed that students were actively following the Penthul Tembem story presented by the researcher. This differs from Wijayanti's (2024) research which involved children in the process of making masks, practicing, and performing because the focus of the research was introducing the Penthul Tembem story as a storytelling activity.

Character building is demonstrated through an enthusiastic attitude toward the art of Penthul Tembem. Before telling stories, students form groups. The storytelling activity is carried out in front of the class in turns. Although it is done with limited time, students in groups tell stories, each student in a group taking turns telling one paragraph, so that the stories are connected. Learning activities are also filled with showing examples of Penthul Tembem art taken from YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fS7jMjWrnc). This is relevant to the government's efforts to strengthen character education through a local culture-based approach (Wijayanti, 2024)

CONCLUSION

Based on the established indicators, this research is expected to produce the following descriptions of achievements: (1) obtaining a description of the cultural values in the Penthul Tembem Art that can be understood and explained again by students; (2) identifying improvements in the storytelling skills of fourth grade students, which are evident from the fluency, intonation, expression, and understanding of the story content that is getting better during the learning process; and (3) observing the emergence and strengthening of indicators of students' cultural character, such as love of the homeland, religious attitudes, self-confidence, cooperation, and appreciation for cultural diversity, which are recorded through observations, interviews, and storytelling performance results. These three achievements together prove that the Penthul Tembem Art is worthy and effective as a storytelling medium in elementary school Indonesian language learning to strengthen students' cultural character. The research only focuses on storytelling at Banjarejo Elementary School in Madiun City, so it is limited to one school. Further research can be

conducted focusing on the mask-making process, design and performance carried out by students.

The repurposing of Penthul Tembem as a *storytelling medium* demonstrates that local cultural values can be integrated into language learning without compromising the essence of the original story. The simplification process maintains the integrity of the narrative structure, such as characterization, plot, conflict, resolution, and moral. The use of digital *flipbooks* enriches the delivery of the material through a combination of visuals and accessible text. As a result, the use of Penthul Tembem goes beyond simply introducing tradition to the audience, transforming it into a literacy tool that connects cultural understanding with strengthening language skills.

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DECLARATIONS

Ethical considerations

This study involved 24 fourth-grade students and a fourth-grade teacher at Banjarejo Elementary School in Madiun City. This study obtained written permission and approval from the school and the parent-teacher association. Students were given explanations in language appropriate to their characteristics. Participation was voluntary as it was still within the scope of Indonesian language lessons. The storytelling activity was part of Indonesian language learning in class and therefore did not pose any risks beyond daily learning activities. Personal protection was implemented by replacing student names with codes (S1-S24). Data was used solely for research purposes without involving differences in ethnicity, race, or class. Interaction through digital platforms was limited to broadcasting the story of the pentul tembem. Students did not create accounts, upload content, and interact on the platform.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

The authors declare that the generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool [Gramarly and Paraphrase] was used exclusively for language editing and/or grammatical improvement. The use of AI did not influence the scientific content, study design, data analysis, data interpretation, results, or conclusions of the manuscript. Full responsibility for the content remains with the authors.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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