Pop A Tale: Popularizing Indigenous Folktales in Digital Media

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Abstract: One of the issues pertaining to the construction of stories for 21st century young ESL learners is the accelerating concerns with its content. As children's stories are globally accessible through multi-media today, they are also vulnerable to criticism by diverse groups of people holding on to different political and cultural values. Some children's stories are rendered as racist, colonialist, satirical, speciesism, sexist or encourage homosexuality POP A TALE: POPULARIZING INDIGENOUS TALES is a product designed to tailor to the needs of 21st-century learners. For decades Malaysian young learners have been fed with western story like Cinderella and local folktale like Si Tanggang have become cliche. Sadly, initiative to popularize indigenous tales have not been addressed. Indigenous folktale is a precious heritage that must be safeguarded to avoid complete disappearance consumed by globalization and profit-making entertainment. Popularizing the indigenous tales through innovations via digital media is desirable because such practices ensure the sustainability of these folktales, as well as help, engage students' interest and motivation in the language classroom. The team has taken the initiative to collect the Semai indigenous people's original stories and has obtained five stories from a Semai storyteller. The aim is to popularize the tales of indigenous people in Malaysia to young ESL learners. The project required the students to retell the story read from a book entitled The Myths of Semai in the form of digital stories. The storyboards helped to dramatize the tales and then video editing apps were used to compile the storyboards into videos of the chosen folktales. The product was five digital videos of indigenous folktales to be showcased in all English language learning classrooms. The videos uploaded to YouTube for other ESL educators and learners to use. Based on students' feedback on their experience with the indigenous tales, they had an amazing experience working on a noble project to help popularize and preserve the indigenous tales.

Keywords: indigenous folktale, digital media, preservation.

1. INTRODUCTION

A folktale is a traditional story that has been passed on by words of mouth before writing systems were developed. The Orang Asli Semai owns many myths of origins, folktales and animal fables which were transmitted through the oral tradition. The Semai oral traditions have its own moral and transitions into which symbolized them with the significant elements in the embodiment of their cultural and spiritual lifestyle. The oral tradition has served as an important teaching tool for the younger generations. In addition, the Semai folktales reflect the traditional practices, unique cultures, and heritage, the social and lifestyles of the Semai's tribe in the ancient time and place. It also mirrors

the people's culture, personal and world view. In Semai community, folktales which was told orally was a dominant medium used in educating and entertaining the tribes of the concerned culture. The Semai children are educated by their parents, who model cultural practices which they inherited from their ancestors. Values and good deeds learned from their ancestors are instilled in the Semai folktales.

Since the late 20th century, anthropologists, and researchers, such as Skeat and Blagden (1906) and Schesbesta (1928) have documented some of the myths of origins and folktales of various Orang Asli subgroups. Karim (1981), Nowak (1987) and Chan (2010) documented changing versions of the Mah Meri's myth of origins. Edo (1990) published a monograph on the oral traditions of the Semai community. Due to awareness on preservation effort of the folktales, a team of linguists from Universiti Teknologi Mara Kedah has produced a collection of Semai folktales which they later documented the tales in multiple languages in a book entitled The Myths of Semai the Untold Stories. (Sharina Saad et.al 2016). The collected tales have unleashed the culture and lifestyle of the Semai indigenous people in Malaysia. In addition, representation in folklore and folktales reveal much about the particulars of a certain people. The magical realism, as well as the fantastical nature of much of folklore, calls for the audience to allow for a suspension of their sense of reality. Despite this, folktales and folklore often convey a thematic element (a moral, a lesson, etc.) that many concede as being universally accepted human truths. Given this characteristic, these tales have the potential to be understood to a wide degree across cultures; that is to say, folktales convey a cross-cultural, yet often familiar and mutual "language."

However, in the field of language teaching, the richness and potential of folktales seems to have been under-utilized in today's language classes (Bean, 1999; Taylor, 2000). Despite, a study by (Sharina Saad, 2019) revealed the suitability of two Semai folktales to be used in ESL classrooms as teaching materials. The study also revealed all 100% of the students prefer to watch the animated movie version of the folktales rather than to read from handouts. In another research, Sharina Saad et. al (2022) utilized Semai folktales in ESL classrooms. Prior to the research in the case of the Semai, 0rang Asli community, their folklore has become the subject of an English class. The research finding is in agreement with a study by Mc Kay (2001) on how literary texts can be incorporated in English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) classes. In addition, McKay (2001) argues that there are three major benefits in using literature as content in Second Language (L2) classrooms – (i) demonstrating for learners the importance of language form to accomplish specific communicative purposes, (ii) providing an ideal basis for integrating different language skills, and (iii) raising students' and teachers' cross-cultural awareness.

1.1 Problem Statement

As folktales is facing extinction, the need therefore arises for an interface between the folktale genre and the media where the latter intervenes in the promotion of the genre for its sustenance in society. The safeguarding of folklore consists of six stages: identification, conservation, preservation, dissemination, protection, and international collaboration. The initial stage involves a few suggestions, and one of the prominent ones is creation of medium which the folktales can be disseminated among the young learners as preservation awareness the current study achieved through a collaborative movie project in ESL classroom. The digital form of folktale is an avenue to identify and populate folktales methodically, and it is parallel to UNESCO's recommendation in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2003). With the immense popularity of social networking and technology, it is high time to develop a high-tech edutainment product for the young learners to attain the benefits.

1.2 Aims and Purpose of the Study

The present study involved 30 ESL Diploma students in a class project called WWW Semai Folktales Movie Project folktales to engage them on a structural analysis of the folktales and to discover

certain major benefits in using folktales for teaching and learning English as a second language (ESL). In particular, the researchers discussed the ways in which folktales could be useful for facilitating ESL learners in their understanding of the importance of language form to achieve specific communicative purposes, and also for enhancing their cross-cultural awareness. It is then aligned with the 21st century teaching and learning a language as it can be used in the classroom as technology-based language enrichment activities.

Thus, the study aims to promote the Semai folktales using education medium specifically in the teaching and learning of English language in fun, interactive and technology integrated way. The study analyses the emerging themes in each folktales the students studied such as moral values which were passed down from generation to generation through Semai folktales. The study hoped to answer three research questions which are:

1. What are the moral lessons portrayed in Semai Indigenous stories?

2. What benefits have you gained from doing Indigenous project work?

3. Do you think Orang Asli folktales are interesting and are suitable to be used in English classrooms?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Semai People

Orang Asli is a collective term for the 18 indigenous ethnic tribes in Peninsular Malaysia who are generally classified under Negrito, Senoi and Proto Malay (JAKOA, 2021). Each tribe has its own unique culture but unfortunately, they are not reflected in the current education system (Rosnon & Talib, 2019). This causes Orang Asli to face difficulties in relating themselves to the learning contents and feel marginalised (Kamarulzaman & Osman, 2008; Nicholas, 2006). One of the Orang Asli sub group, the orang Semai known as the largest indigenous people in Malaysia make up a total of 51,437 out of 178,179 Orang Asli in peninsular Malaysia (Edo and Fadzil, 2016, p. 251) and speak the Senoi language classified under the Mon Khmer languages grouped under the Austroasiatic family of languages. The Semai are a group of Orang Asli who live in south-eastern Perak and north-western Pahang states of West Malaysia. Some Semai villages are located in more isolated forest fringes while others are close to main towns. The ancestors of the Semai were semi-nomadic groups that practiced swidden agriculture. Today, the Semai engage in permanent agriculture and participate in the wage-earning sector (Nicholas, 2000, p. 4). In Perak, the Semai community is divided by anthropologists into two groups, referred to as the highland and lowland Semai. The highland Semai is more adapted to activities based on exploiting the forests resources such as hunting, fishing, gathering and engaging in farming. The lowland Semai traditionally adopted a peasant way of life, being involved in the labour force and seeking employment in small-scale trading of jungle produce and today are more exposed to the modern economy (Juli Edo, 1998). They practice swidden horticulture in the state's rain forests. The Semai do not possess handi-crafting skills but are good in agriculture and hunting and are experts in making blowpipes. The Semai are better known as the non-violent people and the people who practise total sharing (Juli Edo, 1998).

2.2 The Semai Folktales and Preservation Effort

Folktales is defined as the traditional art, literature, knowledge, and practice that is disseminated largely through oral communication and behavioral examples. Holden (2008) highlighted the various forms of folklore expressions such as oral, as in folktales, musical, as in songs, actions, as in folk dances, plays or rituals. These folklore expressions are considered as "traditional knowledge" and passed down from generation to generation. (Samsiah, Sharina, Nurazila & Azlan 2013) revealed that

the Semai have portrayed some uniqueness with a vast collection of their ancestral folklore. Through telling and showing one another how to do things, they pass down the skills for survival such as hunting, building houses, making clothes, tools, medicine, and religious practice. Through singing, telling stories, and plays, they nurture their strong beliefs in spirits and supernatural beings which dominate Semai's daily lives from generation to generation.

In Semai community, folktales which was told orally was a dominant medium used in educating and entertaining the tribes of the concerned culture. Some of the stories were story told and disseminated from mouth to mouth, since at that time, the stories were not written or documented. Moreover, the stories were disseminated from generation to generation for the purpose of preserving the values in the stories (Mohd Taib Osman, 1988; Normaliza Abd Rahim & Siti Nur Aliaa, 2012). Although the stories were told verbally and changed from time to time, but the basic or purpose of the stories were similar and thus, the moral values of positive values were well explained and understood

Despite its simple appearance, folktales address themes and issues that are profound for all humanity. It touches on psychologically significant themes of honesty, kindness, generosity, jealousy, arrogance, greed, and so forth. The themes and issues raised in oral tales can be significant for all ages past and present and all humanity, making them suitable for language learners of all age groups (Talyor,2000). Such heritages persist through time for many generations carrying values and messages weaved with cultural identities, and they work as platforms that permit communications between generations (Penjore, 2005). Hence, a folktale is a precious heritage that must be safeguarded to avoid complete disappearance consumed by globalization and profit-making entertainment (Dorji, 2009)

2.3 Revitalizing Semai Folktales in ESL Classrooms

Villasante (1989) states that an aesthetic education using folklore enhances sensitivity. Often folk tales showcasing fantasy beings, such as wizards, elves, fairies, and talking animals. Similarly, Semai indigenous folktales consist of all the fascinating elements which depict in other popular tales around the world. Tales in the language classroom take advantage of students' natural wonder, curiosity, and enthusiasm whereas common course books may not. Furthermore, in the ESL classroom, teachers guide students on the specific literature piece based on their proficiency level, lexical and discourse knowledge (Lazar, 1993). These creative activities will also allow teachers to adapt the activities in accordance with the text used in the classroom and also based on students' proficiency levels. Another activity which is retelling of a story is said to have benefits such as helping learners become confident language users (Grugeon & Gardner, 2000). Based on this, the researcher had prepared a movie project based on Semai folktales where students are required to retell the story in a digital medium.

3. METHOD & MATERIAL

3.1 Participants

The present study was conducted at a local university in the Northern state Malaysia. The university offers basic Integrated Language courses for first, second and third semester Diploma students. The participants are 30 second semester students studying English proficiency course. The age of the participants is 18 to 19. A collaborative movie project work was given to 30 Diploma students who are studying literature texts for English for Academic Purpose course. Each group was given a manuscript of a story which was taken from a book The Myth of Semai (Sharina et al 2016). Students need to analyse the chosen story according to the literature elements such as, plot, setting, characterization, themes, and moral values learned. Students should discuss among themselves to produce a creative video presentation on the given story. Students were told to be as creative as possible in their video production. Students were encouraged to do internet search about the origin of the Semai people, their culture and lifestyle. Students were encouraged to invent the story by adding dialogues

and characters to make their video presentation more interesting. However, they were not allowed to change the original plot of the story. From the story, the students were asked to identify the moral values they have learned. Students also uploaded their videos to You tube to disseminate the folktales to other learners. The duration of the project was a month. The students were asked to write a reflection journal about their experience doing the project work. The reflections are student's responses based on their experiences working with the folktales of the Semai.

3.2 Instruments

The Semai folktales were chosen according to the current estimated level of the students. The students were given the freedom to choose any stories they prefer from The Myths of Semai the Untold Stories a collection of Semai folktales by Sharina Saad (et. al, 2016). The underlying reasons for the preference of these folktales were:

1. These are neither short nor long for in-class/ outside class time activities.

2. The topics were interesting for the university-level ESL students.

3. The quality of the written narration was exceptionally good.

4. The folktales portray universal moral lessons which are suitable for the current level of the participants.

Another instrument is student's reflective journals posted in google classroom at the end of the class project. The data collection procedure was explained in a chart below.
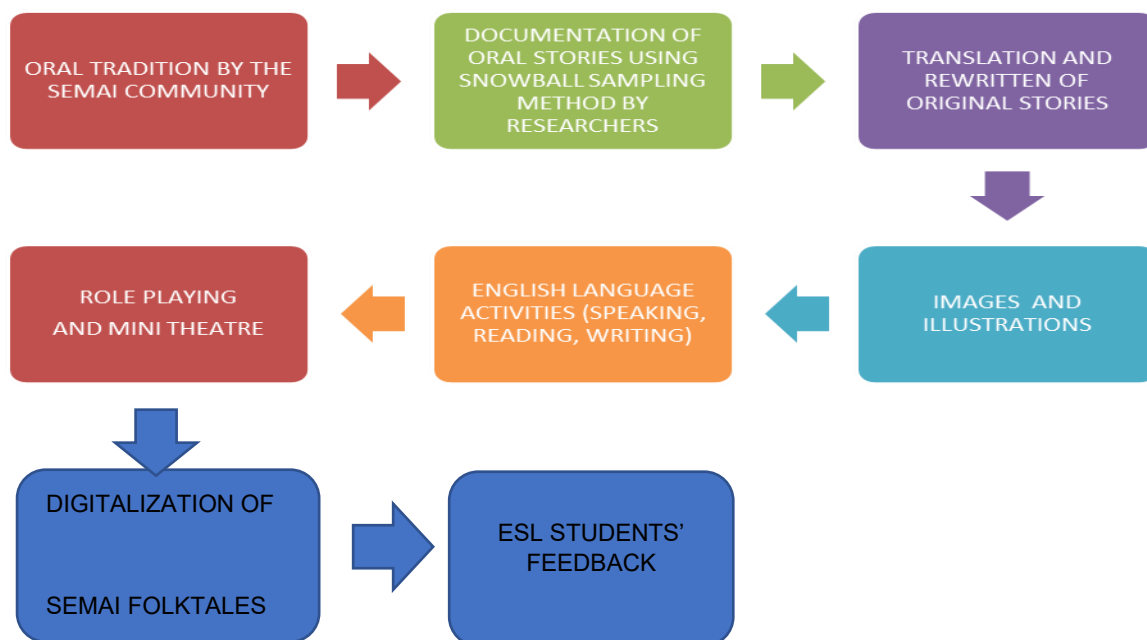

Figure 3: Data Collection Procedure

3.3 Data Analysis

The Reflective journals by students were analysed using Thematic Analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) argued that thematic analysis should be a foundational method for qualitative analysis, as it provides core skills for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis. After four weeks of involvement in the Semai movie project, the students were asked to write a reflective journal on their experience. The data was analysed using thematic analysis. Each of the data set were classified into several themes that reflect its meaning.

4. FINDINGS

The main objectives of this research are to find out:

RQ 1- What are the moral lessons portrayed in Semai Indigenous stories

RQ2 -   What are the benefits from doing Indigenous project work?

RQ 3 - Do you think Orang Asli folktales are interesting and are suitable to be used in English classrooms?

R1 - What are the moral lessons portrayed in Semai Indigenous stories

These are some of the students' responses which similar to the moral values derived from the short stories.

Table 1: Students' responses on Moral values of the Semai Folktales.

No.	Students' Response	Moral values
S1	*..the forbidden when entering the jungle*	Everyone should behave and be respectful whenever they are in the jungle.
S2	*. It was an interesting story because its about the young boy doesn't listen to the forbidden that given from their mother*	
S1	*the unique of their knowledge about culture*	Be respectful of a traditional taboo.
S2	*we can get to know their traditions by using their equipment or their religion*	
S3	*because young people now want to know the history of the native people when it comes to their way of life, food, housing*	
S3	*Although Bah Luit's life is difficult, he is still grateful for what he has obtained.*	Modernization should not harm the Aboriginal's heritage.

Table 2: Moral Lessons Learned from the Semai Folktales.

TITLE FOLKTALE	MORAL LESSONS	EVIDENCE
The Ghost of Ludat https://youtu.be/-glxIgxknY4	*Everyone should behave and be respectful whenever they are in the jungle.*	Edric did not behave while in the jungle, he broke the rule by urinating in the jungle.
	There are consequences of our actions.	Eric was punished by the Ludat ghost because he disrespected the jungle rules while Kai was spared due to his kind deeds.

	We should listen to the elderly.	Eric ignored his mother's warning about the jungle spirit.
The Rules of The Jungle The Ghost of Terloche https://youtu.be/LlJCufHmrco 	*The young generation must respect the restrictions while hunting.* *While in the jungle, we need to be humble and safeguard our speeches.*	Semai people who went to the jungle should not eat the tiger's leftovers such as pig or goat, not allowed to step on or kick tiger's droppings. The Semai also believes that there are some jungle spirits that would always watch and observe their doings.
The Legend of Cen Cemana https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tj5ZPDbZ-SQ 	*We must be careful of strangers.* *Be obedient to your parents.*	Semai elderly teaches the children to be careful of strangers so that they won't be in trouble. Putih trusted a stranger but ended up being brutally kidnapped and killed.
Bah Bertai the Tiger of Serenglog https://youtu.be/sHSXp4p5YfM 	*The importance of serenglog (keeping promises)* *Be respectful of a traditional taboo.*	Wak Tina did not keep her promise to her grandmother not to eat bamboo shoots during menstruation. A taboo may be absurd to young Wak Tina but the consequences had caused her life.
Bah Luit's Jungle Treasure https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cKwq_FzwlU 	*Respect the leader* *Modernization should not harm the Aboriginal's heritage.*	Bah Luit and his friends consulted Tok Batin about the incident in the jungle The Semai community feel that their peaceful land and society have been disturbed.

The results in Table 2 proved the values from these folktales are universal values and are relevant until the present day. Some of the moral values retrieved from these short stories are *"Everyone should behave and be respectful whenever they are in the jungle"*, *"Be respectful of a traditional taboo"*, and *"Modernization should not harm the Aboriginal's heritage"*.

RQ2 - What have you gained from doing Indigenous movie class project?

Table 3 : Students Feedback on the Benefits from Indigenous Folktales Class Project.

STUDENTS	BENEFITS	THEMES
S1	*I learned the restrictions of the native people's life when they went into the forest.*	Semai traditions and lifestyle.
S2	*Knowledge about Semai traditions and lifestyles.*	Semai traditions and lifestyle.
S3	*we learned indigenous people lifestyles, the unique of their knowledge about culture, society, life and taboos.*	Semai tradition and lifestyles
S4	*I learned about the unique lifestyle of the Semai*	Semai traditions and lifestyle.
S5	*learned new thing in editing because this project work should be created with the animation presentation*	New knowledge
S6	*learn to be creative*	Creativity
S7	*learned that we must believe and listen to elderly people advice.*	Semai traditions and lifestyle.
S8	*Learn to work in a team*	Teamwork
S9	*Being patient while completing a task or a project work*	Teamwork
S10	*This project also helps me to be an independent learner*	Independent Learner
S11	*teaches us to be responsible students*	Responsbile
S12	*This project also helps me to solve a problem*	Solving Problem

Based on Table 3 which analyse this question "What have you gained from doing Indigenous movie class project?", the result shows there are a few themes derived from the responses. Some of the themes are Semai traditions and lifestyles, New knowledge, Creativity, Teamwork, Independent, Responsible and Solving problem.

RQ 3 – Do you think Orang Asli folktales are interesting and are suitable to be used in English classrooms?

Table 4 : Students Feedback from Indigenous Folktales Class Project.

STUDENTS	OPINION ABOUT FOLKTALE IN ELT	THEMES
S1	*Students can example the good values and learn a lot of new interesting words.*	Good Values, Interesting Words
S2	*Yes, because young people now want to know the history of the native people*	History of the Native people
S3	*Interesting to the young generation because of the moral lessons and survival skills in the jungle.*	Good Values

S4	*Learning about the community is necessary to respect their culture and beliefs.*	History of the Native people
S5	*learn more new words found in the story*	Interesting Words
S6	*The story is really interesting, very creepy yet full of lessons to be learned*	Good Values, Interesting Short stories
S7	*The story is about the rules that should be followed by everyone when they are in the jungle*	Good Values
S8	*Interesting. we must respect and listen or do things that has been told by elderly*	Good Values, Interesting Short stories
S9	*The story is interesting, very creepy yet full of lessons*	Good Values, Interesting Short stories
S10	*we must respect the ethics or culture created by a race*	Good Values, Interesting Short stories
S11	*we must respect the ethics or culture created by a race*	Good Values, Interesting Short stories
S12	*remarkably interesting as it teaches many interesting lessons.*	Good Values, Interesting Short stories

Referring to Table 4, we found a few themes which are Good values, Interesting Words, History of the Native People and Interesting short Stories.

5. DISCUSSION

This study has successfully promoted the idea of innovation as the effective ways to preserve these folktales from diminishing by introducing Semai folktales in ESL classrooms. Based on the findings of research question 1, each of the short stories entails many moral values which are relevant to the students. These moral values are indirectly depicted in the short stories but the students managed to identify these moral stories in which reflect their awareness of the similarities of their culture with The Semai. This is in line with Taylor (2000) mentioned that the themes and issues raised in oral tales can be significant for all ages past and present. In addition the result of the study showed that the students enjoyed ESL lessons using folktales and preferred the movie as the medium which are more relevant to the 21st century learners.

Likewise, the research question 2 portrays another significant result on the benefits of using Indigenous Folktales in ESL classroom. The themes are Semai traditions and lifestyles, New knowledge, Creativity, Teamwork, Independent, Responsible and Solving problem. Indirectly, Indigenous Folktales introduces the students the culture, traditions and the lifestyle. Students responded "I learned the restrictions of the native people's life when they went into the forest." and "I learned about the unique lifestyle of the Semai" in which depicted the reality of the students while they preparing for their animated movie for the short stories. Undeniably, a positive significant is seen as obvious result from incorporating Indigenous Folktale in ESL classroom. Other than that, another worth highlighted attributes obtained from these themes are New knowledge, Creativity, Teamwork, Independent, Responsible and Solving problem. These themes reflects on students' autonomous learner ability as they are able to "learned new thing in editing because this project work should be created with the video presentation". These responses show that through this task, they are able to force themselves to be an independent learner. Another attribute which significant in learning is teamwork where the students recognised the needs to collaborate and cooperate with another to fulfil their task. Students responded "Learn to work in a team" and "Being patient while completing a task or a project work". Thus, through this project, students will be able to improve their autonomy learner ability and also collaborate with others.

According to the results of research question 3, positive feedbacks show that students agreed that learning about indigenous short story is necessary because "The short story depicts moral values", "The short story teaches the students regarding indigenous culture, tradition and mythical stories", "The short story enriches the students with new knowledge", "The short story is enjoyable due to its storyline", and "The short story improves the students' language learning". Since we live in a multicultural diversity country, thus learning other cultures and races is seen as a necessity in building up the understanding between one to another. Students have gained benefits from the tasks given such as independency, creativity and problem solving and they also found that the folktales are unique and interesting and teaches them about a cultural beliefs and way of life of the Semai people. Hence, the overall result of the study shows that the students enjoyed ESL lessons using folktales and preferred the digital the medium which are more relevant to the 21st century learners .

The study is significant because besides introducing the Semai unique culture to the young generation, it also teaches them significant values in life. Semai movies project is also in line with Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013) to develop values driven Malaysian because the Semai folklores featured in the digital medium instils such important values. Thus, teaching of values need to be integrated in ESL teaching and learning.

As the ways to disseminate knowledge are vast, this edutainment project is significant to promote the stories of the indigenous Semai in a way that can attract the young learners to learn the invaluable cultures and values of their tribe in one hand and learn the English language on the other by doing the interactive activities prepared in the application related to the animated movies they have watched. With the immense popularity of social networking and technology its high time to develop a high-tech edutainment product for the English language classes as teaching materials. Thus, it can also be used in the classroom as technology-based language enrichment activities.

6. CONCLUSION

The study also has an impact towards society and humanity such as to eradicate misunderstanding among the society at large on Semai's way of life as they now exposed to technology and social media and deserve a proper education. It also helps boost social skills, and English proficiency. Most folktales embody the hopes and aspirations of the majority of the people in the society and are used to transmit and preserve the cultural values of the group. Moreover, using folktales in the language teaching will make the students be more motivated in the learning process because they know and like the materials, and they can also learn the good moral values, which fits the character-based curriculum.

Therefore, the researcher concludes two main insights from the study; that using folktales in the teaching and learning process which is integrated to the new curriculum will gain the students' interest in learning English and the initiative to preserve these folktales through class projects with students will create awareness on the Orang Asli traditions and the importance to safe guard the intangible heritage of the community. Future project could be creating a database to systematically document each innovative works on Semai folktales for future references.

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