

Classic Mataraman Folktales for Improving *Qira'ah* among Arabic Language and Literature Students: A Local Cultural Approach

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Abstract

In *qira'ah* instruction, standardized Arabic texts often fail to engage students from culturally rich regions. This study examines how integrating classic Mataraman folktales can enhance *qira'ah* outcomes while strengthening cultural identity among Arabic Language and Literature students. The research responds to the need for culturally responsive pedagogy that bridges foreign language acquisition with the preservation of local culture in Indonesian Islamic higher education, where Arabic language mastery often feels detached from students' lived experiences. Using a qualitative case study approach at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah, Tulungagung, data were collected through participatory observation across 12 sessions, semi-structured interviews with 26 students and three lecturers, and analysis of instructional materials. Triangulation and member-checking techniques ensured data validity. Findings revealed that incorporating Mataraman folktales, specifically the tales of *Gunung Budeg*, *Lembu Peteng*, and *Putri Gayatri*, increased student motivation by 78%, text comprehension by 65%, and cultural identity by 83%. *Qira'ah* skills improved significantly across literal comprehension (18%), inferential comprehension (23%), critical comprehension (23%), and reading-writing integration

(17%), with statistical significance ($p < 0.05$). Thematic analysis further revealed greater emotional engagement, improved vocabulary retention, and a strengthened sense of learner identity. This study provides empirical support for culturally sustaining pedagogical practices and proposes a practical framework for integrating indigenous cultural resources into foreign language education.

Keywords: Classic Mataraman folktales, *qira'ah*, Arabic language learning, local culture, qualitative approach.

Introduction

Arabic has become one of the world's major languages, playing a strategic role in various aspects of life, particularly in Islamic education in Indonesia. As the country with the largest Muslim population, Indonesia has a strong need for Arabic language education, especially at the higher education level. Reading skills (*qira'ah*) are fundamental competencies that students must master, not only for understanding religious texts but also for supporting academic and professional development in Islamic studies.¹

Qira'ah is one of the four essential Arabic language skills, encompassing the ability to understand, analyze, and interpret written texts.² Teaching Qiroah is teaching the Arabic that focuses on aspects of students reading skills.³ According to Effendy, *qira'ah* is not merely the act of reading letters and words but involves grasping the meaning, context, and message of the text.⁴ Mastery of Arabic reading skills requires a deep understanding of its phonetic, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and rhetorical systems. These skills include recognizing letters, words, and sentences; comprehending explicit and implicit meanings; connecting ideas within texts; and critically analyzing and evaluating content. Such abilities demand a high level of linguistic and cultural competence.

Empirical evidence supports this multidimensional view of reading. Longitudinal studies in second language acquisition have shown that vocabulary knowledge accounts for only 30–40% of the variance in reading comprehension,

¹ Burhanuddin, "Pengembangan Materi Ajar Berbasis Komunikasi Dalam Pendidikan Bahasa Arab," *Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia* 4, no. 12 (2023): 1318–28, <https://doi.org/10.59141/japendi.v4i12.2583>.

² Ahmed Fouad Alyan, *Al-Maharat Al-Lughawiyah: Mâhiyatuhâ Wa Tharâiq Tadrîsîhâ* (Riyadh: Dar Al-Musallam, 2021), 156.

³ Ahmad Fikri, Noza Aflisia, and Harisah Harisah, "The Effectiveness Of Problem Based Learning In Improving Arabic Reading Skills," *Ijaz Arabi Journal of Arabic Learning* 6, no. 2 (July 25, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.18860/ijazarabi.v6i2.17392>.

⁴ Ahmad Fuad Effendy, *Metodologi Pengajaran Bahasa Arab* (Malang: Misykat, 2017), 45.

while cultural schema and background knowledge significantly contribute to the remaining outcomes.⁵

Arabic language learning in Indonesia faces complex challenges, particularly in *qira'ah*. Students often struggle to understand Arabic texts due to limited vocabulary, differing grammatical structures, and a lack of cultural context relevant to their own experiences. Research by Dewi et al. (2022) revealed that authentic texts reflecting real Arabic cultural contexts could enhance students' understanding of sentence structures and textual meaning.⁶

However, the study focused exclusively on Arab cultural contexts and did not explore the potential of learners' own cultural backgrounds as mediating tools for comprehension. Most current textbooks remain dominated by Middle Eastern-oriented materials, creating knowledge and cultural gaps for Indonesian learners. These gaps often lead to comprehension difficulties that negatively affect motivation and overall learning effectiveness. Additional challenges include a limited understanding of vocabulary and linguistic structures differing from Indonesian, a lack of exposure to diverse Arabic texts, and low student motivation due to the difficulty and cultural irrelevance of the materials.

Observations and studies conducted among students in Arabic Language and Literature programs show that many still struggle with reading Arabic texts effectively. The main problems they encounter are low motivation, monotonous learning methods, and a lack of engaging instructional media.⁷

In foreign language learning, including Arabic, integrating local cultural elements into learning materials positively affects the learning process and its outcomes. This approach not only facilitates deeper understanding but also supports the preservation of local culture. Folktales, as an element of local cultural heritage, holds great potential for developing Arabic learning materials.⁸

Indonesia has a rich collection of folk narratives, such as fairy tales like *Kancil and Buaya*, legends like *Tangkuban Perahu*, myths like *Nyi Roro Kidul*, and folktales like *Malin Kundang*. Unfortunately, these stories are rarely told today due to declining student interest, as many prefer engaging with rapidly developing technologies.

⁵ Henriette Raudszus, Eliane Segers, and Ludo Verhoeven, "Patterns and Predictors of Reading Comprehension Growth in First and Second Language Readers," *Journal of Research in Reading* 44, no. 2 (2021): 400–417, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12347>.

⁶ Intan Sari Dewi, Faisal Mahmoud Adam Ibrahim, and Syuhadak, "Ta'Līmu Mahārah Al-Qirā'ah Ittiṣāliyyan Bi-Istikhdām an-Nuṣūṣ Al-'Arabiyyah Al-Aṣliyyah Wa Ta'Thīrihā Fī Tanmiyah Wa Taḥfīz Al-Qirā'ah Ladā Aṭ-Ṭullāb," *Arabiyatuna Jurnal Bahasa Arab* 6, no. 2 (2022): 527–54, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v6i2.4710>.

⁷ Researcher observations of students in the Arabic Language and Literature Program at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah over one semester (February 15–July 30, 2025)

⁸ Mohamad Zaka Al Farisi and Hikmah Maulani, "Investigating Arabic Language Teaching Materials Based on Indonesian Folklore: An Ethnographic Study on the Folktale of 'Bandung,'" *Asian Education and Development Studies* 13, no. 2 (2024): 134–49, <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-07-2023-0082>.

Folktale is appealing because it is enjoyable, easy to understand, and closely related to everyday life. It represents a cultural treasure filled with moral, historical, and social values. In education, folktales can increase students' interest and help them better understand specific cultural contexts. It also stimulates character and intellectual development, while moral messages conveyed through entertaining narratives are more easily internalized.⁹

Mataraman folktale refers to the oral traditions of the Mataram Kingdom communities in East Java, including the former Madiun and Kediri Residencies. This region is characterized by a strong Javanese cultural identity distinct from that of Central Java and Yogyakarta. Mataraman *Kulon* includes the districts of Pacitan, Ngawi, Magetan, and Ponorogo, while Mataraman *Wetan* comprises Nganjuk, Trenggalek, Tulungagung, Kediri, Blitar, and Madiun. Koentjaraningrat defines folktales as cultural expressions that live and develop within communities, passed down through generations.¹⁰

Tulungagung, as the cultural center of Mataraman *Wetan*, possesses a wealth of Mataraman folktales with strong potential to serve as a bridge for Arabic language learning. These stories, ranging from legends and folktales to long-standing traditions, have been deeply rooted for centuries. The Mataraman region's folktales embody moral, social, and local wisdom values that have become integral to the community's cultural identity, offering educational elements relevant to modern learning contexts.

Integrating Mataraman folktales into Arabic language instruction can bridge the gap between learning materials and students' socio-cultural backgrounds. However, Arabic folktales books are still rare, necessitating innovative efforts to boost reading interest through culturally relevant stories. The culturally responsive teaching approach emphasizes incorporating students' cultural experiences into the learning process. Gay (2010) explains that this approach enhances motivation, relevance, and overall learning effectiveness.¹¹

Various studies have explored the development of learning media based on cultural heritage and local wisdom in Arabic language education. For instance, Yusuf, Eljdi, and Bando (2023)¹² examined the use of Saudi cultural heritage translated into English, finding that it improved reading and speaking skills among students learning English as a foreign language. However, the study focused on

⁹ Nada Sawita, Nazurty, and Urip Sulistiyo, "A Systematic Review of Cultural Values in Indonesian Folklore: Preserving Local Wisdom through Educational Integration," *PPSDP International Journal of Education* 3, no. 2 (2024): 279–294, <https://doi.org/10.59175/pijed.v3i2.318>.

¹⁰ Koentjaraningrat, *Pengantar Ilmu Antropologi* (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 2015), 187.

¹¹ Geneva Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice* (Teachers College Press, 2010), 112.

¹² Abubaker Yousif, Rajkumar Eligedi, and Sasidhar Bandu, "Use of Translated Saudi Folk Narratives to Improve Reading and Speaking Skills of Saudi EFL Learners," *World Journal of English Language* 13, no. 6 (2023): 524–36, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v13n6p524>.

the target language's culture rather than the learners' local culture, representing a fundamentally different pedagogical orientation.

Farisi et al. (2024)¹³ explored the potential of integrating Indonesian folktales, such as the origin story of Bandung, into Arabic learning materials. While promising, this study remained at a conceptual level without empirical testing or measurable outcomes and did not specify which folktales or regional contexts were most effective.

Irawan (2023)¹⁴ developed local culture-based Arabic teaching materials that were shown to enhance students' self-regulation, concentration, and understanding. However, this research employed a quasi-experimental design without a control group and focused primarily on self-regulation rather than direct *qirā'ah* performance outcomes.

Sultun and Kabir (2025)¹⁵ suggested that incorporating Arabic folktales and proverbs improves language fluency and cultural understanding among non-Arabic students by 35% compared to traditional methods. Nevertheless, their research utilized Arab folktales translated for non-Arab learners rather than the learners' own local folktales, thus failing to activate the cultural schema mechanism central to this study's theoretical framework.

Aflisia, Rini, and Fikri (2019)¹⁶ emphasized the importance of integrating vocabulary related to local culture in Arabic language learning. However, their study focused mainly on vocabulary acquisition in isolation rather than on integrated reading comprehension skills within authentic narrative contexts.

Karimi and Bourier (2023)¹⁷ demonstrated that collaborative learning through Arabic literature enhanced reciprocal cultural competence and strengthened students' critical thinking skills. While valuable, this study examined Arabic literature within its original cultural context rather than localized adaptations, and it employed collaborative learning methods rather than culturally responsive content design.

¹³ Farisi and Maulani, "Investigating Arabic Language Teaching Materials Based on Indonesian Folklore: An Ethnographic Study on the Folktale of 'Bandung'", 134-139.

¹⁴ Bambang Irawan, "Developing Arabic Teaching Materials Based on Local Culture to Enhance Reading Skills And Its Implications on Self-Regulated Learning," *IJIE: International Journal of Islamic Education* 2, no. 2 (2023): 57-72, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.35719/ijie.v2i2.1895>.

¹⁵ Achmad Sultun and Saleh Muhammad Kabir, "Integrating Arab Cultural Elements in Arabic Language Education," *Lahjatuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 4, no. 2 (2025): 133-45, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.38073/lahjatuna.v4i2.2597>.

¹⁶ Noza Aflisia, Rini, and Ahmad Fikri, "Integration of Local Wisdom in Arabic Learning," *Jurnal Al Bayan: Jurnal Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 11, no. 2 (2019): 356-73, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24042/albayan.v11i2.4719>.

¹⁷ Asim Karimi and Sébastien Farhan Poirier, "Exploring Arabic Culture through Literature: Collaborative Learning and Intercultural Competence in the LearnCuID Initiative," *Saudi Journal of Language Studies*, June 5, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1108/SJLS-02-2025-0011>.

Previous studies have explored the use of cultural heritage in foreign or second language learning, yet few have specifically incorporated local cultural heritage. Most focused on Islamic or general Arabic narratives, with limited experimental research and a primary emphasis on elementary to high school learners.

The present study investigated the integration of classical Mataraman folktales into *qira'ah* learning to examine student responses and assess its effectiveness in enhancing *qira'ah* skills. Employing a qualitative case study approach, it aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of how Mataraman folktales could be utilized in *qira'ah* instruction.

Conducted in the Arabic Language and Literature Study Program at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung during the 2024 even semester, the study involved 26 second-semester *Qira'ah* students and three lecturers. Data were collected through participatory observation over eight sessions, semi-structured interviews, document analysis of syllabi and teaching materials, and focus group discussions. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's thematic analysis framework.

The analysis was grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Carrell and Eisterhold's Schema Theory, emphasizing the roles of cultural tools and prior knowledge in language acquisition. Thematic analysis was iterative, with data coded and organized to reveal patterns related to folktales integration, student engagement, and comprehension outcomes. This qualitative case study design enabled naturalistic observation and a nuanced understanding of culturally responsive teaching within Arabic language learning environments.

Findings and Discussion

Implementation of Classic Mataraman Folktales in *Qira'ah* Learning

This study identified three models for implementing classic Mataraman folktales in Arabic-as-a-foreign-language learning, demonstrating significant effectiveness. The findings indicate that a local wisdom-based approach contributes substantially to improving the quality of Arabic language learning among students in Arabic language and literature programs. Integrating cultural elements from the classic Mataraman tradition establishes a pedagogical framework that bridges familiar cultural contexts with target language acquisition, thereby enhancing linguistic competence and cross-cultural understanding.¹⁸

First, Story Adaptation Model

The story adaptation model represents a systematic pedagogical approach that integrates local Mataraman folktales into Arabic learning materials. This model shows considerable potential in creating meaningful connections between

¹⁸ Rongmei Yu, "Culture in Second or Foreign Language Acquisition," *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 11, no. 6 (2020): 943–47, <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1106.10>.

students' cultural backgrounds and the acquisition of the target language.¹⁹ In its implementation, lecturers systematically adapted various legends and traditional folktales, including *The Legend of Mount Budeg*, *The Story of Lembu Peteng*, *The Tale of Princess Gayatri*, and *The Legend of Telaga Buret*.²⁰

The adaptation process involved translating these stories into Arabic while maintaining their narrative structure and cultural values. A careful balance between linguistic transformation and cultural preservation ensures that the authentic essence of the folktales is retained while serving as an effective medium for language learning.²¹

This transformation involved several methodological stages, including an in-depth analysis of the original narrative structure, identification of essential cultural elements, and reconstruction in Arabic with consideration of students' linguistic proficiency. For instance, in adapting *The Legend of Mount Budeg*, lecturers did not merely translate the text literally but made creative adaptations to preserve the spiritual symbolism of the mountain as a representation of steadfastness and strength, while integrating Arabic vocabulary relevant to geography and character traits.

A successful example of implementation was the adaptation of the story *Joko Bodo (Joko Budeg)*, which was modified according to the students' linguistic levels. In this process, lecturers developed a gradation of linguistic complexity, from simple sentence structures to more advanced constructions, while maintaining a storyline familiar to the students.

This scaffolding strategy employed selective glossing techniques, where key vocabulary was explained in the text margins, the use of a color-coded system to categorize vocabulary difficulty levels, and the inclusion of Arabic audio narration to reinforce phonetic aspects of learning. Students were gradually encouraged to participate actively in the adaptation process, from identifying cultural elements that should be preserved to contributing ideas for the most appropriate Arabic expressions to describe local concepts.

The effectiveness of this model is reflected in student testimonials, indicating increased Arabic comprehension through familiar cognitive schemas: *"When I read the story of Putri Gayatri in Arabic, I found it easier to understand because I had known the story since childhood. This helped me guess the meaning of words I didn't know."*

¹⁹ Sulfany Tineh, Olga A. Rorintulus, and Ceisy N. Wuntu, "Integrated Skill in English Language Learning: Examining Folklore-Implemented Teaching Toward EFL Students' English Skill," *Edumaspul: Jurnal Pendidikan* 7, no. 2 (2023): 3982–94, <https://doi.org/10.33487/edumaspul.v7i2.7054>.

²⁰ Santi Sidhartani, Muhammad Iqbal Qeis, and Dendi Pratama, "The Art of Adaptation: From Folk Literature to the Age-Appropriate Visual Media," *Cultural Syndrome* 1, no. 1 (2019): 53–60, <https://doi.org/10.330998/CS.V1I1.22>.

²¹ Shaden Al Kanhal, "Translation Commentary: 'The Tale of the Three Brothers' by J. K. Rowling from English to Arabic," *International Journal of Language and Linguistics* 13, no. 2 (2025): 76–81, <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijll.20251302.12>.

This statement suggests that prior knowledge of local folktales serves as cognitive scaffolding that facilitates Arabic language acquisition.

This finding aligns with schema theory in second language learning, which emphasizes the importance of background knowledge in understanding new texts. The phenomenon also produced several positive psychological effects, as observed in the study. *First*, students showed significantly reduced language anxiety because they operated within a culturally familiar context. *Second*, there was an increase in confidence when applying meaning-inference strategies, as students were more willing to use the context of familiar stories to understand new linguistic structures. *Third*, this model generated sustained motivational momentum, as students experienced a sense of accomplishment when they successfully comprehended familiar stories in the target language.

The implementation of the story adaptation model demonstrates the application of andragogical principles relevant to adult learners.²² Using local folktales as learning media creates a cognitive comfort zone that enables students to access new knowledge through familiar cultural frameworks.²³

From a psycholinguistic perspective, this approach draws upon transfer from the first language and culture (L1/C1) to the target language and culture (L2/C2).²⁴ In this regard, students utilized linguistic and cultural structures they had already mastered to comprehend new Arabic content. The most prominent andragogical principle reflected in this implementation was self-directed learning, whereby students were encouraged to become active explorers of their own cultural heritage.

Students were responsible for discovering folktales within their communities, identifying adaptable elements, and contributing to the translation process. This approach acknowledges that learners bring valuable life experiences into the classroom, namely the experiences that serve as powerful learning assets.

Consistent with the findings of Ubay, Syaifullah, and Murtadho (2023), Kolb's experiential learning model has proven effective in enhancing students' reading skills because it emphasizes direct experience, reflection, and real-world application of concepts. This process parallels the adaptation of Mataraman

²² Zamzami Zainuddin, Samuel Kai Wah Chu, and Juliana Othman, "The Evaluation of Gamification Implementation for Adult Learners: A Scale Development Study Based on Andragogical Principles," *Education and Information Technologies* 29 (2024): 18591–18620, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-024-12561-x>.

²³ Suherli Kusmana et al., "Development of Folklore Teaching Materials Based on Local Wisdom as Character Education," *International Journal of Secondary Education* 8, no. 3 (2020): 103–9, <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijssedu.20200803.14>.

²⁴ Keiko Koda, "Cognitive Process in Second Language Reading: Transfer of L1 Reading Skills and Strategies," *Second Language Research* 4, no. 2 (1998): 133–55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026765838800400203>.

folktales, which actively engages students in reading, listening, and interpreting texts.²⁵

Overall, the findings of this study have important implications for developing a local wisdom-based Arabic language learning curriculum. The story adaptation model has proven effective in enhancing students' intrinsic motivation through emotional engagement with the material, facilitating knowledge transfer from familiar to new domains, and strengthening cultural identity while improving Arabic language competence.²⁶

Second, Comparative Cultural Model

This approach compared the classical Mataraman tradition found in the legends of *Mount Budeg*, *Lembu Peteng*, *Telaga Buret*, and *Sendang Penampian* with Arab traditions such as classical Arabic tales, stories from *Alf Layla wa Layla* (*One Thousand and One Nights*), and pre-Islamic Arabic poetry (*Syi'ir Jahiliyyah*).²⁷

This comparative model enabled students to identify similarities and differences in narrative structures, universal themes, such as heroism, love, and sacrifice, and the moral values embedded in both traditions. Students examined Arabic texts from both traditions using a contrastive approach promoting cross-cultural understanding. The methodology employed in this model adopted a layered analytical framework encompassing structural, thematic, linguistic, and philosophical dimensions.²⁸

In the structural dimension, students analyzed narrative patterns such as conflict initiation, character development, climax, and resolution in both traditions. For example, the heroic journey in the story of *Lembu Peteng* could be compared to a similar pattern in the tale of *Antar ibn Shaddad*, where both protagonists face formidable challenges to prove their worth and identity.

In the thematic dimension, the analysis focused on exploring universal themes present in both traditions, such as the concepts of honor and justice in Javanese culture, which parallel the concept of *murū'ah* in Arab tradition. Students were encouraged to explore how these values were expressed in different cultural contexts while sharing comparable philosophical foundations.

The implementation of this model involved a comparative analysis of literary elements such as characterization, geographical and temporal settings, and the moral messages conveyed. For instance, the figure of *Prince Lembu Peteng* could be compared to heroic characters in Arabic tales such as *Antar ibn Shaddad* or *Abu*

²⁵ Ubay et al., "Fa'aliyyah Mawad Ta'lim Maharah Al-Qira'ah Li Tarqiyah Maharah Al-Qira'ah Al-Thullabah," *Arabiyatuna Jurnal Bahasa Arab* 7, no. 1 (2023): 15–32, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v7i1.5558>.

²⁶ Farisi and Maulani, "Investigating Arabic Language Teaching Materials Based on Indonesian Folklore: An Ethnographic Study on the Folktale of 'Bandung'," 134-139.

²⁷ Cindy Pradina Putri and Dwi Sulistyorini, "Struktur Arketipe Dalam Legenda Telaga Buret Desa Sawo Kecamatan Campurdarat Kabupaten Tulungagung," *Jurnal Pembelajaran Sastra* 4, no. 1 (2033): 33–44, <https://doi.org/10.51543/hiskimalang.v4i01.61>.

²⁸ Umar Farooque, "Comparative Analysis Of Epics," *International Education and Research Journal (IERJ)* 10, no. 6 (2024): 26–33, <https://doi.org/10.21276/IERJ24640375651733>.

Zayd al-Hilali, enabling students to grasp the notion of heroism within two distinct cultural frameworks.²⁹

This dialogic learning process was facilitated through comparative reading techniques. Students read parallel Arabic texts that recounted both local Javanese legends and Arabic tales. This activity was complemented by structured discussion sessions, where students worked in small groups to share findings, exchange interpretations, and build a collective understanding of the universality of narrative themes.

A key pedagogical innovation in this model is the role-reversal analysis, in which students were asked to imagine how characters from one tradition would behave if placed within the context of another. For example, *how might Antar ibn Shaddad respond to the challenges faced by Lembu Peteng, and vice versa?*

Research conducted by Youpika et al. (2024) also indicates that Central Malay folktales contain aesthetic (beauty), humanistic (humanity), ethical (morality), and religious values. These values can be internalized through literary study, enriching students' learning experiences and contributing to their character formation.³⁰

This mental exercise deepens students' understanding of characters while sharpening their critical thinking and cultural empathy skills. The comparative model systematically cultivates intercultural competence by exposing students to diverse yet complementary worldviews.

Through this process, students learn to appreciate unity in diversity, recognizing that while cultural expressions may differ, fundamental human values are often universal. Faruq (2023) demonstrates that the use of authentic Arabic-based texts enables non-Arabic students to better grasp cultural contexts and complex sentence structures. This finding aligns with the Mataraman–Arabic cultural comparison model employed in this study, as both approaches emphasize the importance of understanding the cultural values embedded within texts.³¹

The implementation of this model also included developing a comparative glossary, in which students compiled vocabulary and concepts from both traditions that shared equivalent or contrasting meanings. For instance, the concept of “wisdom” in the Javanese tradition, expressed through the term *wicakšana*, could be compared with *hikmah* in the Arabic tradition, allowing an exploration of the subtle nuances of meaning within each cultural context.

²⁹ Feda Ghnaim and Linda Alkhawaja, “From the Margins to the Center: A Reading of ‘Antarah Ibn Shaddad’ through Hegel’s Master-Slave Dialectic,” *Evolutionary Studies In Imaginative Culture* 8, no. 2 (2024): 1075–93, <https://doi.org/10.70082/esiculture.vi.1105>.

³⁰ Fitra Youpika et al., “The Endangered Central Malay Folklore: A Medium for Internalizing Character Values in Indonesian Language and Literature,” *International Journal of Language Education* 8, no. 1 (2024): 48–62, <https://doi.org/10.26858/ijole.v8i1.60908> Abstract.

³¹ Umar Faruk, “Ta’Lîmu Al-Qirā’ah Li an-Nāṭiqîn Bi-Ghayri Al-‘arabiyyah Bi an-Nuṣūṣ Al-Aṣīlah Al-Muhtawiyah ‘alā Ath-Thaqāfah Al-‘Arabiyyah,” *Arabiyatuna Jurnal Babasa Arab* 7, no. 2 (2023): 389–416, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v7i2.6621>.

Third, Local Contextualization Model

The local contextualization model involved the use of place names, figures, and classical Mataraman cultural concepts from the Tulungagung region, such as *Putri Gayatri*, *Pangeran Lembu Peteng*, *Gunung Budeg*, and other local toponyms, within *qira'ah* texts to create a familiar context for students.

This model adopted the principle of *meaningful learning*, where new knowledge (Arabic) was connected to existing cognitive schemas (local culture). Contextualization was achieved by adapting classical Arabic texts to include local elements. For instance, the place name “Tulungagung” could appear in the Arabic sentence "تولونج أجونج مدينة جميلة في جاوا الشرقية" (*Tulungagung madinatun jamilatun fi Jawā asy-Syarqiyah*). This process involved the systematic integration of local toponyms, not merely as superficial mentions, but as meaningful components embedded within grammar and vocabulary learning.³²

Students learned Arabic linguistic structures through geographical, historical, and cultural descriptions of places they knew intimately. This endeavor created a geographical anchoring effect, where students associated Arabic language patterns with familiar physical and cultural landmarks. For example, when learning adjectives in Arabic, students might describe the beauty of Popoh Beach, the grandeur of Penataran Temple, or the mystery of Selomangkleng Cave. Such associations were shown to increase retention rates, as linguistic information became linked to strong spatial and emotional memories.

The contextualization strategy also included the development of *qira'ah* materials that integrated local folktales with Arabic vocabulary and grammatical structures. For example, the legend of *Telaga Buret* could be retold in Arabic while retaining original character and place names, allowing students to learn Arabic while deepening their understanding of local cultural heritage.³³

The material development process employed a collaborative authoring approach, where students actively participated in creating the *qira'ah* texts. They contributed local information, verified cultural accuracy, and assisted in translation and editing. This participatory method produced authentic learning materials and fostered students' sense of ownership over their learning experience.

A significant innovation in this model was the creation of multimedia *qira'ah* packages that combined Arabic texts with local visual and auditory elements, such as photographs of landmarks, audio recordings of oral histories from community

³² David P. Ausubel, “The Effects of Cognitive Structure Variables on the Acquisition, Retention, and Transferability of Knowledge,” in *The Acquisition and Retention of Knowledge: A Cognitive View* (New York: Springer ScienceBusiness Media, 2000), 146–80, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-015-9454-7_6.

³³ Mohammad Zaka et al., “Development Of Arabic Language Teaching Materials Based On Archipelago Folklore: Service At The Malaysian Institute Of Teacher Education,” *Ta'awun: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* 05, no. 01 (2025): 138–50, <https://doi.org/10.37850/taawun.v5i01.812>.

elders, and virtual tours of locations mentioned in the stories. This multimedia integration provided an immersive learning experience that accommodated diverse learning styles.

Ultimately, this approach established a unique pedagogical space where language learning and cultural preservation intersected, fostering both linguistic competence and cultural appreciation. The local contextualization model contributed to the development of students' bicultural identities, enabling them to navigate and code-switch naturally between different cultural frameworks. Students also gained a deeper sense of cultural pride as they recognized that their local traditions held equal value and could engage in meaningful dialogue with Arabic traditions.

Research conducted by Farhan, Kamal, and Sarip (2024) found that using role-playing games (RPGs) as learning media significantly increased students' interest in and motivation to read Arabic texts. This finding supports previous research, suggesting that local contextualization in *qira'ah* learning can also foster an interactive and engaging learning experience for students.³⁴

An interesting phenomenon observed during the implementation of this model was the emergence of creative linguistic expressions, where students began to produce hybrid forms that blended Arabic linguistic elements with Javanese cultural concepts. For instance, they used the term "الحكمة الجاوية" (*al-hikmah al-jawiyyah*) to denote Javanese local wisdom, or "البطل الماتارامي" (*al-batal al-mataramiy*) to describe heroic figures within the Mataram cultural context.

The collective implementation of these three models highlights the potential of culturally responsive pedagogy in Arabic language education. By incorporating familiar narratives and cultural contexts, educators could design more engaging and effective learning experiences, respecting students' cultural backgrounds while facilitating the acquisition of the target language. The success of these models indicates that integrating local wisdom into foreign language pedagogy offers a promising pathway toward culturally sustainable educational practices.³⁵

These findings carry important implications for the development of Arabic language curricula that emphasize not only linguistic competence but also global citizenship rooted in local identity. These models form a pedagogical ecosystem in which students undergo transformative learning experiences that enhance their

³⁴ Ali Farhan, Muhammad Kamal, and Mohamad Sarip, "Developing Role Playing Games for the Skill of Reading the Arabic Language," *Arabiyyatuna Jurnal Bahasa Arab* 8, no. 2 (2024): 487–508, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v8i2.9858>.

³⁵ Yazid Bin Isa, Ibrahim Bin Abdullah, and Mohd Shahzuwan Bin Ahmad Razak, "Implementation of Arabic Cultural Knowledge in Teaching Arabic Language in Schools," *International Journal of Social Science Humanity & Management Research* 04, no. 02 (2025): 406–11, <https://doi.org/10.58806/ijsshmr.2025.v4i2n17>.

linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness.³⁶ This holistic approach affirms that effective language learning is inseparable from its cultural context, and that integrating local wisdom strengthens, rather than hinders, the mastery of the target language.³⁷

Student Responses to Local Cultural Approaches

The implementation of Mataraman folktales in *qira'ah* learning demonstrates a significant positive impact on student responses. The results of this study provide a comprehensive overview of how a local cultural approach can serve as a catalyst for improving the quality of Arabic language learning, particularly in reading comprehension (*qira'ah*).

Research data collected through interviews with 26 respondents revealed three main dimensions of student responses to this local cultural approach. These dimensions are interrelated and form a synergy that enhances the overall effectiveness of learning.³⁸

First, Motivation Dimension: Fostering Enthusiasm for Learning

The motivational aspect of learning showed a notable improvement. 78% of students (20 out of 26 respondents) reported an increased interest in learning.³⁹ These results suggest that when students can relate the material to a familiar cultural context, their learning experience shifts from being passive to active and meaningful.

Students exhibited greater enthusiasm for learning, reflected in their active participation during class discussions and their diligence in completing assigned tasks.⁴⁰ This phenomenon indicates that Mataraman folktales successfully created an emotional bridge between students and the learning material, transforming the process from an academic obligation into an enjoyable and engaging experience.

Second, Cognitive Dimension: Building Bridges of Understanding

Regarding comprehension, 65% of students stated that familiar cultural contexts helped them predict the meaning of Arabic texts. This finding aligns with the schema theory proposed by Anderson and Pearson (1984), which emphasizes the importance of background knowledge in reading comprehension.⁴¹

³⁶ Muhammad Thohri, "Development of Arabic Language Curriculum Focused on Diversity and Inclusion," *An Nabighoh* 26, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.32332/annabighoh.v26i1.31-50>.

³⁷ Michael Byram, *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 1997), <https://doi.org/10.21832/byram0244>.

³⁸ Interview data from students of the Arabic Language and Literature Study Program at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung, October-November 2024 period.

³⁹ Data was obtained through quantitative analysis of student responses to a validated learning motivation questionnaire.

⁴⁰ Active participation was measured by the frequency of contributions to class discussions and the quality of task completion during the implementation period.

⁴¹ Richard C. Anderson and P. David Pearson, "A Schema-Theoretic View of Basic Processes in Reading Comprehension," in *Interactive Approaches to Second Language Reading* (Cambridge:

The Mataraman cultural framework enables students to construct cognitive bridges between prior knowledge and new material. In the context of *qira'ah* learning, Arabic texts are no longer perceived as distant or foreign, but as meaningful expressions that connect with the cultural wealth internalized since childhood.

Third, Affective–Cultural Dimension: Strengthening Identity and Pride

The strengthening of cultural identity emerged as the most prominent aspect, experienced by 83% of students. Their pride in local culture increased significantly, accompanied by greater awareness of Mataraman’s cultural richness. These findings reinforce Gay’s (2010) argument on the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy in enhancing students’ self-efficacy and motivation to learn.⁴²

This dimension holds profound significance, as it relates not only to Arabic learning but also to the formation of character and identity. When students take pride in their own culture, they tend to become more open to understanding other cultures and languages, including Arabic.

Table 1. Student Responses to the Local Cultural Approach

Response Aspects	Number of Students	Percentage (%)	Key Indicators
Increased Motivation	20 out of 26	78%	• Increased interest in learning • Greater enthusiasm for participation • Active involvement in class discussions
Ease of Understanding	17 out of 26	65%	• Familiar cultural context helps predict meaning • Use of cultural schemas in comprehension • Ease of connecting concepts
Strengthening of Cultural Identity	22 out of 26	83%	• Increased pride in local culture • Awareness of Mataraman’s cultural wealth • Appreciation of ancestral heritage

The data in the table show that strengthening cultural identity received the most positive response (83%), followed by increased motivation (78%) and ease of understanding (65%). These findings suggest that integrating Mataraman folktales affects not only cognitive outcomes but also affective and cultural dimensions of learning.

Cambridge University Press, 1988), 255–91, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139524513.007>.

⁴² Geneva Gay, “Culturally Responsive Teaching,” in *Handbook of Urban Education* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 23, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429331435-16>.

This response pattern reveals a hierarchy of learning needs, beginning with the emotional–cultural aspect (cultural identity), followed by the motivational aspect (increased motivation), and culminating in the cognitive aspect (ease of understanding). This supports the idea that effective learning cannot be separated from the learner’s cultural context and identity.

The findings of this study have broad implications for developing more contextual and meaningful approaches to Arabic language learning. Implementing Mataraman folktales has been proven not only to enhance *qira'ah* effectiveness but also to promote holistic learning by integrating cognitive, affective, and cultural components.

Based on student responses, the following key findings are concluded:

- 1) Increased Motivation (78%)
 - 20 out of 26 students reported a substantial increase in learning interest.
 - Higher enthusiasm and engagement were reflected in consistent attendance and active participation.
- 2) Ease of Understanding (65%)
 - Familiar cultural contexts significantly assisted students in predicting the meanings of Arabic texts.
 - The Mataraman cultural schema served effectively as cognitive scaffolding in understanding text structure and content.
- 3) Strengthening of Cultural Identity (83%)
 - Pride in local culture showed the greatest increase among the three dimensions.
 - Awareness of Mataraman’s cultural richness evolved into a deeper appreciation of ancestral heritage, which in turn strengthened intrinsic motivation to learn.

These three dimensions interact synergistically to create a learning ecosystem that supports the achievement of optimal *qira'ah* competence while preserving and celebrating the richness of local culture as a valuable educational resource.

Effectiveness of Methods in Improving *Qira'ah* Skills

To measure the effectiveness of Mataraman folktales on students’ *qira'ah* skills, this study employed a pretest and posttest design, which has been proven reliable for measuring changes in learning performance. The evaluation covered four aspects of *qira'ah* skills: literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, critical comprehension, and reading–writing integration.⁴³ These four aspects were chosen because they represent a comprehensive spectrum of reading abilities, ranging from basic understanding to higher-order thinking skills.

⁴³ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (California: SAGE, 2014).

The evaluation instrument underwent expert validation and reliability testing, resulting in a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.876.⁴⁴ This indicates a high level of internal consistency and reliability in measuring the intended construct. Since this value exceeds the commonly accepted minimum threshold of 0.70 in educational research, it provides strong confidence in the validity of the measurement results.

The results revealed consistent and significant improvements across all measured aspects, indicating that the Mataraman folktales-based learning approach had a broad positive effect on students' *qira'ah* skills. The greatest improvements were observed in inferential and critical comprehension (each increasing by 23%). This finding suggests that the local cultural approach not only enhances basic comprehension but also stimulates deeper and more critical engagement with Arabic texts.

Table 2. Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Results of *Qira'ah* Ability

Assessment Aspects	Pretest (%)	Posttest (%)	Improvement (%)
Literal Comprehension	58	76	18
Inferential Comprehension	45	68	23
Critical Comprehension	42	65	23
Reading–Writing Integration	35	52	17

The data in Table 2 provide a clear overview of the effect of Mataraman folktales across different dimensions of *qira'ah* skills. All aspects demonstrated substantial improvement, showing a pattern worthy of deeper analysis.

The largest increases occurred in inferential and critical comprehension (23% each), followed by literal comprehension (18%) and reading–writing integration (17%). This pattern indicates that Mataraman folktales have a distinct advantage in cultivating higher-order thinking skills. The significant gains in inferential comprehension reflect students' enhanced ability to read “between the lines” and grasp implied meanings in Arabic texts. Meanwhile, improvements in critical comprehension demonstrate their growing ability to evaluate, analyze, and synthesize textual information.⁴⁵

These findings are consistent with Kramsch's research, which posits that incorporating cultural content in foreign language learning enhances comprehension because learners can draw upon their existing cultural schemas.⁴⁶ In this study, Mataraman folktales functioned as a cognitive bridge, enabling

⁴⁴ Lee J. Cronbach, “Coefficient Alpha and the Internal Structure of Tests,” *Psychometrika* 16, no. 3 (1951): 297–334, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02310555>.

⁴⁵ Lorin W. Anderson and David R. Krathwohl, *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (London: Longman, 2001).

⁴⁶ Claire Kramsch, “Culture in Foreign Language Teaching,” *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research* 1, no. 1 (2013): 57–78, <https://doi.org/10.1590/2176-457333606>.

students to activate their prior cultural knowledge to better understand Arabic texts.

The 23% improvement in critical comprehension indicates that students not only comprehend explicit meanings but also analyze and evaluate information more deeply. This marks a shift from passive to active reading, an essential skill in Arabic learning, given the language's complex structure and layered meanings in both classical and modern texts.

Although the improvement in reading–writing integration was slightly lower (17%), it still represents significant progress. This domain is the most complex because it requires synthesizing receptive (reading) and productive (writing) skills; therefore, a 17% gain is considered a satisfactory achievement.⁴⁷

Statistical analysis using a paired t-test confirmed that the improvements in all aspects were significant ($p < 0.05$), with a large effect size (Cohen's $d > 0.8$) for inferential and critical comprehension. These results affirm that Mataraman folktales are pedagogically effective and have a substantial practical impact in Arabic language learning at the higher-education level.

Supporting this, Fitriyana et al. (2025) found that implementing a synergetic learning approach in extensive reading improved outcomes, collaboration, and student engagement. This aligns with the present findings, showing that *qira'ah* learning grounded in local culture not only enhances reading ability but also promotes interaction and cooperation throughout the learning process.⁴⁸

The large effect sizes for inferential and critical comprehension confirm that the observed differences are statistically and practically significant. In language learning, such large effect sizes indicate that the intervention meaningfully improves students' ability to comprehend Arabic texts.⁴⁹

In conclusion, this research contributes to the development of Arabic language learning theory grounded in local culture. The success of Mataraman folktales in enhancing *qira'ah* skills demonstrates that contextual and cultural learning principles can be effectively applied in foreign language education. This opens opportunities to develop similar models incorporating local cultural elements from various regions of Indonesia.

Ultimately, this study provides an alternative methodology that Arabic language teachers can implement across educational levels. This approach not only enhances students' academic competence but also strengthens their cultural identity, making Arabic learning more meaningful and sustainable.

⁴⁷ William Grabe and Fredricka L. Stoller, *Teaching and Researching Reading*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315726274>.

⁴⁸ Azizah Fitriyana, Mamluatul Hasanah, and Syuhadak, "The Quality Learning of Extensive Reading with Synergetic Learning Approach," *Arabiyatuna Jurnal Bahasa Arab* 9, no. 1 (2025): 179–204, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v9i1.11104>.

⁴⁹ Luke Plonsky and Frederick L. Oswald, "How Big Is 'Big'? Interpreting Effect Sizes in L2 Research," *Language Learning* 64, no. 4 (2014): 878–912, <https://doi.org/10.1111/LANG.12079>.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that integrating Mataraman folktales into Arabic reading (*qira'ah*) instruction significantly enhances students' reading comprehension skills. Analysis of 26 respondents revealed substantial improvements across all measured dimensions: literal comprehension (18%), inferential comprehension (23%), critical comprehension (23%), and reading-writing integration (17%), all statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Beyond linguistic gains, this culturally responsive approach also yielded positive affective outcomes: 78% of students reported increased motivation, 65% found the texts easier to understand, and 83% experienced a strengthened sense of cultural identity. These findings confirm that connecting students' existing cultural schemas with new learning content fosters meaningful and contextually relevant language learning experiences.

The research provides theoretical and practical contributions to Arabic language pedagogy. Theoretically, it enriches *qira'ah* learning by validating the integration of culturally responsive pedagogy and schema theory, demonstrating that local cultural knowledge can serve as an effective catalyst for reading comprehension. Practically, it offers an innovative solution to persistent challenges such as low motivation and comprehension difficulties in Arabic instruction. Furthermore, the holistic evaluation instrument developed in this study presents a more comprehensive assessment tool by integrating linguistic and cultural dimensions. This adaptable model opens new opportunities to expand culturally grounded Arabic language instruction across diverse Indonesian contexts and to extend the approach to other language skills, including listening (*istima*), speaking (*kalam*), and writing (*kitabab*).

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