

Improving Students' Reading Literacy and Character Education through the Folktales Reading Program and Qreatif.id Platform

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Abstract

This community service project aimed to improve reading literacy and character education among elementary students through the integration of Minahasan folktales and the digital platform Qreatif.id. Conducted at SD Katolik St. Nikolaus Talawaan, North Minahasa, the program adopted a participatory and descriptive approach involving 20 third-grade students and three teachers. The activities combined guided reading sessions using local folktales and digital literacy training through Qreatif.id. Data were collected through pre- and post-tests, classroom observations, and reflective interviews, and analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The results revealed significant improvements in students' reading fluency, comprehension, moral reasoning, and motivation. The number of fluent readers increased from 20% to 75%, comprehension accuracy rose to 85%, and moral understanding improved by over 50%. Teachers also demonstrated greater confidence in integrating digital media into instruction. This study concludes that combining local cultural materials with digital platforms provides an effective, contextualized, and engaging model for literacy learning while promoting cultural preservation and 21st-century digital competencies.

Keywords: Reading Literacy, Folktales, Qreatif.id, Character Education.

INTRODUCTION

Reading literacy is a fundamental competency that underpins students' overall learning outcomes and cognitive development. In the early stages of education, particularly in elementary school, reading serves as the foundation for acquiring knowledge across disciplines. Nevertheless, the results of the National Assessment (*Asesmen Nasional*) conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2023 indicate that the reading literacy level of Indonesian students remains below the expected standard (Amir et al., 2024). Many students can decode words but struggle to comprehend, interpret, and evaluate textual meaning (Isnaini & Bengkel, 2022). This low literacy performance reflects a broader issue in early education: the limited exposure to engaging reading materials and the predominance of teacher-centered reading instruction that does not nurture curiosity, imagination, or critical thinking.

A number of scholars have attempted to address this challenge through various literacy-based learning models. For instance, the importance of picture books in building comprehension through visual clues (Chung, 2024; Gbadegehin et al., 2025; Sari & Fitriasia, 2022) or integrated reading methods that connect textual understanding with moral values (Ira Revina & Hairani Siregar, 2023). In addition, other studies further demonstrated that folktales play a crucial pedagogical role in transmitting moral lessons and reinforcing cultural identity (Avcu, 2025; Dahal & Bhatta, 2021), while further particular studies demonstrated that digital storytelling environments can enhance students' engagement and foster deeper comprehension by combining narrative structures with interactive learning elements (Mayorga et al., 2022; Sapan, 2024). The integration of digital platforms has been shown to enhance school efficiency and user engagement, indicating that well-designed technology can effectively support educational management and learning (Kalua, 2022). It means, reading folktales and learning to read through digital storytelling are applicable in improving students' reading literacy.

Despite these developments, few studies have focused on the integration of local folktales with digital literacy platforms to improve reading skills in elementary education. Most literacy programs either concentrate on the use of traditional texts or emphasize technology without cultural content. Therefore, this study introduces reading literacy through local folktales of Minahasa that truly represent the cultural heritage of North Sulawesi. In addition, this community service also used Qreatif.id, an interactive digital platform designed to support reading literacy activities. This integration represents a new pedagogical approach that not only develops reading skills but also cultivates cultural awareness and moral education through localized digital learning.

Situation Analysis and Partner's Condition

The community partner in this community service program is SD Katolik St. Nikolaus Talawaan. It is a private elementary school located in Talawaan Village, North Minahasa Regency, North Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. The school has a modest learning environment, limited access to digital learning resources, and a relatively small and limited library collection. Preliminary observations and interviews with teachers revealed that students' interest in reading outside the classroom remains low. Many students perceive reading as a compulsory school activity rather than an enjoyable habit. There were only 4 among 20 students who were able reading a full paragraph clearly and loudly without pauses and hesitation during the pre-test. Teachers also reported challenges in selecting reading materials that are both engaging and culturally relevant to students' daily lives. Additionally, while internet access is available, its use for educational purpose remains minimal due to limited teacher training in digital literacy.

Identified Problems

Based on the situational analysis at SD Katolik St. Nikolaus Talawaan, three main problems were identified:

1. Low reading motivation and comprehension among third-grade students due to monotonous reading materials.
2. Lack of culturally relevant texts that reflect students' local traditions and values.
3. Limited utilization of digital media as an interactive tool for literacy learning and character education.

These problems collectively hinder the development of a strong reading culture and reduce the effectiveness of literacy instruction at the early grade level.

Proposed Solution

To address the identified challenges, the community service team implemented a literacy enhancement program consisting of two main components. First, the program focused on reading training through folktales. Students participated in guided reading sessions using printed Minahasan folktale storybooks already available at the school and local libraries. These sessions aimed to improve reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and moral understanding by engaging students with culturally familiar narratives. Teachers facilitated discussions to help students connect story themes with real-life values, fostering both literacy and character formation.

Second, the program introduced Qreatif.id website as a complementary digital literacy platform. Teachers and students were introduced and trained to use Qreatif.id for interactive reading exercises, comprehension quizzes, and vocabulary games that extend classroom learning (Somo & Kiptiyah, 2024; Vitoria & Fitriani, 2025). The platform served as a bridge between traditional reading and digital engagement, helping students strengthen their literacy skills in a more dynamic and enjoyable way while increasing teachers' confidence in using technology for literacy instruction.

Through the integration of these two components (traditional folktale reading and digital literacy practice), this community service sought to create an engaging, contextualized, and culturally responsive approach to reading education. This model emphasizes that literacy improvement can be achieved not only through technology but also through meaningful cultural content that resonates with students' identity and environment.

METHOD

Program Design

This community service program adopted a participatory and descriptive approach, emphasizing collaborative engagement between the facilitators, teachers, and students. The activities were designed to enhance reading literacy through a culturally grounded and technology-supported strategy, integrating local

Minahasan folktale reading and the use of Qreatif.id as a digital literacy platform. The implementation focused on both student literacy improvement and teacher empowerment in using contextual and digital learning tools. The Minahasan folktales used for this program were 4 Minahasa folktales entitled: 1) *Keke Panagian*, 2) *Danau Tondano* “Tondano Lake”, 3) *Burung Moopo* “Moopo Bird”, and 4) *Perbatasan Minahasa-Mongondow* “The Minahasa – Mongondow Border” (Damayanti, 2023; Djakaria et al., 2019; Moncol, 2019; Talangai, 2021; Wewengkang, 2016) ”.

Participants and Setting

The program was conducted at SD Katolik St. Nikolaus Talawaan. The participants consisted of 20 third-grade students and 3 teachers who were directly involved in literacy instruction and teaching Bahasa, English, Catholic Religion, and History respectively. The selection of the third-grade class was based on the observation that most students at this level were still developing basic reading fluency and comprehension skills. The school’s environment was limited in reading materials and digital facilities, made it appropriate setting for testing a simple, practical, and culturally relevant literacy intervention.

Stages of Implementation

The program was implemented through three main stages: preparation, execution, and evaluation to ensure a systematic process in enhancing students’ reading literacy through folktales and digital learning. The training lasted for three weeks (from 25 of September to 9 of October). Each training was conducted every Thursday and lasted for three hours (9 am to 12 pm). The team of community service just came at the first and third meeting while second meeting was handled by the assigned teachers.

Stage 1: Preparation and Coordination

This stage involved coordination meetings with the school principal and teachers to identify literacy needs and plan activity schedules. Teaching materials were selected, consisting of printed Minahasan folktales obtained from available local publications and libraries. The Qreatif.id platform was also reviewed and customized to fit the students’ reading level. Baseline data on students’ reading fluency and comprehension were collected through a short pre-test involving reading aloud and text comprehension questions.

Stage 2: Implementation of Reading Literacy Activities

This core stage included two main components. The first one is guided reading sessions, and the second one is integration training in using Qreatif.id website and application.

- a. Guided Reading Sessions: Students were engaged in reading Minahasan folktales in small groups. The facilitators modeled fluent reading, pronunciation, and intonation. After reading, teachers led comprehension discussions to connect story content with moral values and cultural themes.
- b. Qreatif.id Integration Training: Teachers and students were introduced to the Qreatif.id platform through short workshops. They learned to access interactive exercises such as comprehension quizzes, vocabulary games, and reading follow-ups. This phase encouraged students to continue reading independently both at school and at home using digital support.

Stage 3: Evaluation and Reflection

After the activities, students completed a post-test similar to the pre-test to measure improvements in reading fluency and comprehension. Teachers participated in a reflective discussion to share their experiences using Qreatif.id and assess its effectiveness as a literacy tool. Feedback was collected through observation sheets, questionnaires, and informal interviews with both students (only 5 among 20) and teachers.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Quantitative data from the pre and post-tests were compared descriptively to observe literacy improvements. Qualitative data from observations and interviews were coded thematically to identify patterns in students’ reading behavior, motivation, and teachers’ pedagogical responses. The triangulation of data ensured reliability and validity of findings.

FINDINGS

The literacy enhancement program integrating Minahasa folktales and the Qreatif.id platform brought significant improvements in students' reading fluency, comprehension, and moral value understanding. The program also increased their motivation to read and improved teachers' confidence in utilizing digital learning media. Data were gathered through pre- and post-tests, classroom observations, and reflective interviews with teachers and selected students. The results consistently show that students demonstrated better reading accuracy, clearer pronunciation, deeper comprehension, and greater awareness of moral lessons embedded in the stories. Furthermore, both students and teachers responded positively to the integration of technology and culture in literacy activities, viewing it as more enjoyable and meaningful than traditional reading instruction.

1. Improvement in Reading Fluency

Reading fluency was assessed through students' ability to read a short text aloud with correct pronunciation, appropriate speed, and clear intonation. The pre-test revealed that most students were hesitant and struggled with smooth reading. Only 4 out of 20 students could read a short passage fluently without repeated pauses or mispronunciations. After the intervention, students showed substantial progress in both accuracy and confidence during reading sessions.

Tabel 1. Comparison of Reading Fluency Scores

Reading Fluency Level	Pre-Test (n=20)	Post-Test (n=20)	Improvement
Fluent (no hesitation, clear intonation)	4 (20%)	15 (75%)	+55%
Moderate (minor pauses and errors)	7 (35%)	4 (20%)	-15%
Struggling (frequent pauses and mispronunciation)	9 (45%)	1 (5%)	-40%

The results in Table 1 suggest that consistent guided reading sessions, supported by teachers' modeling of pronunciation and tone, helped students develop greater reading fluency. Many students also gained confidence by participating in group readings, where they practiced listening and repeating correct sentence rhythms. Teachers noted that storytelling through local folktales created a familiar and emotionally engaging context that made reading practice more natural and enjoyable.



Image 1. Students' Folktale Reading Activity

2. Improvement in Reading Comprehension

In addition to fluency, reading comprehension was measured by students' ability to recall story content, identify main ideas, and answer comprehension questions based on the Minahasan folktales. In the pre-test, only a few students were able to identify characters and main events accurately. After the intervention, students exhibited remarkable progress in understanding narrative structure, sequencing, and cause-effect relationships.

Tabel 2. Comparison of Reading Comprehension Scores

Reading Fluency Level	Pre-Test (n=20)	Post-Test (n=20)	Improvement
Identifies main characters and setting	8 (40%)	18 (90%)	+50%
Summarizes the main idea or event	5 (25%)	16 (80%)	+55%
Answer comprehension questions correctly	6 (30%)	17 (85%)	+55%
Draws simple inferences from the story	4 (20%)	14 (70%)	+50%

Students demonstrated better retention of story details and greater ability to connect story events with moral conclusions. This improvement can be attributed to the guided comprehension discussions held after each reading session, where teachers encouraged students to think beyond literal meanings. The use of Qreatif.id further reinforced comprehension skills through interactive quizzes and vocabulary exercises that made learning more dynamic and self-paced.

3. Development of Moral Value Comprehension

A major focus of the program was to help students internalize the moral lessons conveyed through Minahasan folktales. Each story carried distinct ethical messages such as honesty, cooperation, humility, and respect for others. During the pre-test, students tended to recall events but had difficulty explaining the *why* behind characters' actions or linking moral themes to their own lives. After participating in reflective reading sessions, students exhibited more mature reasoning and could clearly articulate lessons learned from the stories.



Image 2. Students Retold the Folktales and the Moral Lessons of the Stories

The Tabel 3 below shows the students' moral value comprehension that can refer to their character development. The table also compared the pre-test and post-test, along with the improvement regarding their moral understanding.

Tabel 3. Students' Moral Value Comprehension (Character Development)

Moral Understanding Indicator	Pre-Test (n=20)	Post-Test (n=20)	Improvement
Identifies moral value in the story	5 (25%)	16 (80%)	+55%
Explains why a character's action is good / bad	4 (20%)	14 (70%)	+50%
Connects moral to personal behavior or daily life	3 (15%)	12 (60%)	+45%
Demonstrates value understanding in classroom behavior	2 (10%)	10 (50%)	+40%

These results indicate that folktales effectively served as a medium for moral and character education. Students became more empathetic and reflective during class discussions. For example, after reading *Burung Moopoo*, students expressed that helping others without expecting anything in return is an important value. Similarly, *Legenda Danau Tondano* inspired discussions on gratitude and unity. Teachers reported noticeable positive behavioral changes, such as students voluntarily assisting peers during group work.

This finding aligns with two previous studies that emphasized that folktales are powerful pedagogical tools for transmitting local wisdom and ethical values. Through moral reflection questions (“What can we learn from this story?” or “Have you experienced something similar?”), students not only grasped the story's moral but also related it to their everyday experiences as an essential aspect of character formation and cultural identity development (Lebagi et al., 2025; Mphasha, 2015).

4. Students' Increased Reading Motivation and Engagement

Another notable outcome was the rise in students' motivation to read. During the first few sessions, regarding was viewed merely as an academic obligation. However, once students engaged with familiar cultural stories and digital activities, their participation became more enthusiastic. Teachers observed that students began requesting additional stories and showed excitement in accessing reading tasks on Qreatif.id. This shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation reflects the success of combining storytelling and interactive technology to create joyful learning experiences. The following table presents the changes in students' reading motivation and engagement, comparing observations before and after the program implementation.

Tabel 4. Students' Increased Reading Motivation and Engagement

Indicator	Pre-Activity Observation	Post-Activity Observation
Students' attitude toward reading	Reading perceived as a school task	Reading perceived as enjoyable and self-driven
Number of students voluntarily participating in reading activities	3 or 20 students (15%)	15 of 20 students (75%)
Students requesting additional stories	1-2 students occasionally	12 of 20 students regularly requested new stories
Enthusiasm in Qreatif.id reading tasks	Average login: once per week	Average login: three times per week
Motivation type	Mainly extrinsic (due to assignment)	Mostly intrinsic (interest-driven)

The data clearly show an improvement in students' reading enthusiasm and participation. The increase from 15% to 75% of students who voluntarily participated indicates that folktale-based reading combined with digital access successfully transformed reading habits. Students' shift toward intrinsic motivation demonstrates that culturally familiar materials can significantly increase engagement and sustained interest in literacy activities.

5. The Use of Qreatif.id

The introduction of Qreatif.id platforms (website and mobile apps) did not only complement the traditional reading sessions but also strengthened students' digital literacy skills. Students learned to navigate digital story content, complete quizzes, and engage in vocabulary games. Teachers reported that the platform provided new opportunities for independent learning and formative assessment, allowing them to monitor progress more effectively. The digital interface also encouraged collaboration between teachers and students, reducing the technological gap often present in early education classrooms. The table below summarizes the improvements in students' digital literacy and technology engagement.

Tabel 5. Integration of Qreatif.id

Digital Literacy Aspect	Before Intervention	After Intervention
Platform familiarity	None	18 of 20 students (90%) could navigate and complete tasks independently
Engagement with online content	Minimal participation in digital activities	17 of 20 (85%) of students completed digital quizzes and vocabulary games
Teacher-Student collaboration	Mostly teacher-centered learning	Increased collaborative discussions and feedback via Qreatif.id
Formative assessment use	Conducted manually through paper worksheets	Automated tracking and online quiz results integrated
Technological confidence	Low confidence; hesitant to use devices	High confidence; 80% of students showed eagerness to explore new features

Overall, Qreatif.id served as both a literacy and digital empowerment tool. The shift from none to 90% in students' ability to navigate the platform shows substantial digital literacy growth. In addition, students' willingness to participate in online activities reflects a growing sense of technological competence and autonomy as key components of 21st-century learning.



Image 3. Qreatif.id and Folktales Platform from *Dongeng Kita* Forum

6. Teacher Empowerment and Pedagogical Impact

Teachers participating in the program appreciated how the integration of folktales with Qreatif.id expanded their teaching repertoire and aligned with contextual, character-based education principles. Post-activity reflections revealed that teachers intended to continue using similar methods by combining cultural materials and online tools in other subjects, showing a sustainable pedagogical impact beyond the program's duration.

Tabel 6. Teacher Empowerment and Pedagogical Impact

Indicator	Before Program	After Program
Teachers' confidence using digital tools	1 of 3 (33,3%) felt confident integrating digital media	5 of 5 teachers (100%) demonstrated high confidence
Pedagogical strategies	Focused on textbook-based reading	Integrated folktales, Qreatif.id, and character-building tasks
Attitude toward cultural-based teaching	Limited emphasis on local content	Strong appreciation and frequent use of folktales in lessons
Collaboration and sharing among teachers	Rarely shared teaching resources	Regular sharing of lesson ideas and online resources
Sustainability of practice	Uncertain continuity	2 of 3 teachers (67%) planned to maintain and expand the use of Qreatif.id

The results reveal that the program had a transformative effect on teaching practice. All participating teachers showed higher digital confidence and pedagogical creativity. Their readiness to sustain the use of Qreatif.id and cultural storytelling demonstrates that the program successfully built long-term teaching capacity and fostered innovation within the classroom environment.



Image 4. The Team, Students, and Teachers in Charge of the Community Service

DISCUSSION

The integration of Minahasa folktales and Qreatif.id in this community service program proved to be an effective approach in improving students' reading literacy and promoting character education. The findings demonstrate that contextualized reading materials, particularly those rooted in students' local culture, can enhance reading fluency, comprehension, and moral awareness. This result supports previous studies which emphasize that culturally relevant pedagogy increases engagement and meaning-making in literacy learning (Avcu, 2025; Lebagi et al., 2025; Mphasha, 2015). When students encounter familiar cultural elements, they not only read more actively but also relate the stories to their lived experiences. This process fosters both linguistic and emotional connections with the text.

The significant improvement in reading fluency and comprehension, as indicated by the rise from 20% to 75% fluent readers and 85% comprehension accuracy, highlights the importance of guided reading combined with meaningful story content. Minahasan folktales provided an authentic context for students to explore vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence rhythm in a natural and enjoyable way. These results are in line with the findings of Chung (2024) and Gbadegesin et al. (2025), who argue that story-based learning encourages active information processing through narrative logic and imagery. Moreover, moral reflection embedded in folktales allowed students to connect reading experiences with character development, strengthening both their moral reasoning and empathy.

The effectiveness of Qreatif.id in supporting literacy learning aligns with the broader trend of digital innovation in educational management system. Similar studies in North Sulawesi have demonstrated that responsive web-based information systems significantly improve efficiency, accuracy, and user accessibility in educational services (Kalua A L et al., 2024). The integration of Qreatif.id further supported the improvement of literacy and digital skills. Students developed familiarity with digital platforms and demonstrated independence in completing interactive exercises. The 90% rate of students successfully navigating and completing online tasks shows that even in resource-limited schools, digital platforms can play a vital role in modern literacy education. Through quizzes, vocabulary games, and online reading tasks, students practiced comprehension and language use in a more interactive environment, aligning with 21st-century competencies such as digital literacy, problem-solving, and collaboration.

Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges emerged during the implementation, particularly from the teachers' perspective. While teachers acknowledged the pedagogical benefits of Qreatif.id, many expressed difficulties in sustaining its use due to the paid features and subscription costs. Some essential functions, including full access to reading materials, assessment analytics, and advanced exercises, required a premium account. For schools with limited funding, especially small private institutions such as SD Katolik St. Nikolaus Talawaan, these costs became a barrier to continuous use. Teachers admitted feeling burdened by the subscription fees, even though they valued the platform's contribution to student engagement and learning outcomes.

This finding highlights an important implication for the use of educational technology in low-resource contexts. The sustainability of digital literacy initiatives depends not only on user training and pedagogical readiness but also on affordability and accessibility. Without financial support or institutional partnerships, the long-term integration of such platforms may be difficult to maintain, despite their proven educational value. Future implementations should therefore consider negotiating institutional access, seeking community sponsorship, or developing open-access alternatives that align with local school capacities.

At the pedagogical level, the program also empowered teachers to design literacy lessons that combine traditional and digital resources. Teachers transitioned from passive users of materials to active designers of literacy experiences. Their willingness to continue using cultural materials and integrating online tools suggests the emergence of a sustainable teaching model that balances cultural preservation, literacy skill-building, and technological adaptation.

CONCLUSION

The literacy enhancement program implemented at SD Katolik St. Nikolaus Talawaan successfully improved students' reading fluency, comprehension, and moral value understanding through the integration of Minahasan folktales and Qreatif.id. Quantitative results demonstrated notable progress in reading accuracy, which increased from 20% to 75%, comprehension which rose from 25–30% to 80–85%, and moral reasoning which improved from 15–25% to 60–80%. Qualitative observations also confirmed that students became more motivated, confident, and engaged in reading activities, while teachers gained pedagogical insights into contextual and technology-supported instruction.

The dual emphasis on local cultural content and digital engagement proved to be effective in bridging traditional literacy with modern learning practices. Students not only enhanced their linguistic abilities but also deepened their understanding of local values and character education. Teachers, in turn, experienced professional growth and increased confidence in integrating digital media into literacy lessons.

Nevertheless, sustainability challenges were identified, particularly related to the paid features of Qreatif.id. Although the platform's tools contributed significantly to improving literacy instruction, the subscription costs limited full access for teachers and schools with restricted budgets. This indicates the need for more inclusive digital literacy programs that offer open or subsidized access for under-resourced institutions.

To conclude, the integration of Minahasan folktales and Qreatif.id demonstrates that culturally responsive and technology-supported literacy instruction can create meaningful and engaging learning experiences. Future community service and educational initiatives should continue to explore instructional models that combine local culture, moral education, and affordable technology in order to promote equitable literacy development among young learners in Indonesia.

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