

The Role of Oral Literature in Preserving the Maritime Cultural Identity of the Malay Community in the Riau Islands

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Abstract. Oral literature plays a significant role in preserving the maritime cultural identity of the Riau Islands community. This article examines how folklore, myths, legends, and pantun (traditional rhymed poetry) serve as media for conveying traditional knowledge, social norms, and cultural identity to younger generations. Utilizing qualitative methods and approaches, this research explores the role of oral literature in maintaining maritime cultural heritage amidst the currents of modernization and globalization.

1 Introduction

The Riau Islands, as one of the regions with a rich maritime culture in Indonesia, present various dimensions of life closely tied to the sea. The sea is not only a source of livelihood through fishing and trade but also the core of profound traditions and cultures. Within this maritime community, oral literature plays a crucial role. Oral literature encompasses various forms such as folklore, myths, legends, and pantun (traditional rhymed poetry), which have been passed down from generation to generation. As Geertz (1973) stated, oral traditions play a fundamental role in maintaining the continuity of local culture and preserving the collective identity of a community [1].

The existence of oral literature in the maritime society of the Riau Islands holds value beyond mere entertainment. Folktales and myths often contain important information about traditional navigation techniques, sea conditions, and fishing strategies used by their ancestors. According to Vansina (1985), oral literature preserves valuable collective history and local knowledge [2]. Furthermore, through stories and pantun, communities are taught about ethics, morals, and essential life values that help build social cohesion. Pantun, frequently used in customary ceremonies and religious rituals, reinforces the sense of togetherness and collective identity among maritime communities [3]. This aligns with Hasan's (2021) research, which emphasizes that oral literature preserves the history, traditions, and norms that govern society [4].

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However, in the era of modernization and globalization, the sustainability of oral traditions faces significant challenges. The influence of foreign cultures, lifestyle changes, and advancements in information technology can erode the existence of oral traditions that have become an integral part of the cultural identity of maritime communities. According to Giddens (1990), globalization brings waves of information that can alter cultural consumption patterns, including reducing appreciation for traditional aspects like oral literature. This is reinforced by Amir's (2019) findings, which show that younger generations are more inclined towards modern media and often neglect valuable oral cultural heritage. Therefore, efforts to preserve and revitalize oral literature become crucial for maintaining the maritime cultural identity of the Riau Islands community [5-8].

This research aims to analyze the role of oral literature in preserving the maritime cultural identity of the Riau Islands community. Using a qualitative approach and ethnographic methods, this study will explore how oral literature functions as a medium for conveying traditional knowledge, forming social norms, and reinforcing cultural identity. The research will also examine how local communities utilize oral literature in facing challenges posed by modernization and globalization, as well as what strategies can be implemented to preserve these traditions [9].

The qualitative approach with ethnographic methods allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of the role of oral literature in the daily lives of maritime communities in the Riau Islands. Data will be collected through in-depth interviews with community leaders, artists, and cultural experts, as well as participatory observation at various customary and cultural events. Data analysis will be conducted using a thematic approach to identify the roles and functions of oral literature within Riau Islands society. According to Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), preserving tradition through cultural revitalization can help solidify identity amidst modernization pressures [10].

The results of this research are expected to provide deeper insights into the importance of oral literature in maintaining the maritime cultural identity of the Riau Islands community. Additionally, this study aims to offer practical recommendations for local communities, governments, and cultural institutions in efforts to preserve and revive oral literature as part of maritime cultural heritage. These efforts are vital so that traditional values and knowledge contained within oral literature can continue to be passed down to future generations, ensuring that the maritime cultural identity of the Riau Islands remains preserved and sustainable. With a deeper understanding of the role of oral literature, it is hoped that the people of the Riau Islands can find new ways to maintain and promote their cultural heritage amidst modernization challenges.

2 Research Methods

This research employs a qualitative approach to explore the role of oral literature in preserving the maritime cultural identity of the Riau Islands community. This approach was chosen because it provides an in-depth contextual understanding of how oral literature is used and valued in everyday life among maritime communities. As Creswell (2014) noted, qualitative approaches allow researchers to explore phenomena within their original contexts while understanding meanings attributed by participants to their experiences [11].

The study is conducted in several areas within the Riau Islands known for their strong oral literature traditions: Tanjungpinang City, Bintan, and Lingga. These locations were selected

based on their communities' active practices in preserving oral literature. In this context, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) emphasize that direct participation in community life enables researchers to gain authentic and comprehensive insights [12].

Data collection is carried out through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document studies. In-depth interviews are conducted with community leaders, artists, cultural experts, and practitioners of oral literature to gather information regarding the roles, functions, and meanings of oral literature in society. Interview questions are semi-structured to allow flexibility in exploring deeper information based on informants' responses and experiences [13]. Additionally, document studies involve collecting and analyzing texts such as folktales, pantun, as well as audio and video recordings of oral literature performances; this aligns with Bowen's (2009) suggestion that documents can be valuable data sources supporting qualitative research [14].

Data analysis is performed thematically using coding techniques to identify main themes emerging from interview data, observations, and document studies. The analysis process includes several stages: first, recorded interview data are transcribed for easier further analysis; next, coding is performed by labeling segments relevant to the research aim to identify main themes and sub-themes related to the role of oral literature in preserving maritime cultural identity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes and sub-themes emerging from this coding process are then categorized to find patterns and relationships among various aspects related to oral literature and cultural identity. The results from categorization are analyzed interpretatively to understand deeper meanings regarding the role of oral literature within the context of maritime culture among Riau Islands communities. This interpretation is supported by Clifford Geertz's (1973) concept of thick description where researchers strive to interpret hidden meanings behind social interactions and culture [10].

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 The Role of Oral Literature in Social Life

Oral literature plays a crucial role in the social life of maritime communities in the Riau Archipelago. As a region comprising many islands with populations dependent on the sea, oral literature serves not only as a medium of entertainment but also as a means of communication, education, and cultural identity reinforcement. Below are some key roles of oral literature in the social life of maritime communities in the Riau Archipelago.

Oral literature helps strengthen cultural identity and community solidarity among maritime populations. According to Surya et al. (2021), "pantun, gurindam, and syair are not merely entertainment but are essential tools for instilling values of togetherness and preserving cultural identity among community members" [7]. Through stories, pantun, syair, and gurindam, local values and traditions are passed down from generation to generation. This fosters a sense of connection among community members and with their history and culture.

Oral literature also functions as an informal educational tool. Setiawan (2022) emphasizes that "through folklore and legends, coastal communities gain lessons about morality and wisdom relevant to daily life" [11]. Legends, myths, and folk tales impart moral values, ethics, and life wisdom. Gurindam and pantun are often used to convey advice and teachings beneficial in both personal and social contexts.

In communities primarily composed of fishermen and sailors, oral literature serves as a means to convey important information and local history. Rahman and Fitriani (2023) state

that "oral literature plays a vital role in preserving and transmitting knowledge about navigation, weather, and historical events, all of which are crucial for the survival of maritime communities" [9]. Stories about the sea, weather, navigation, and significant historical events are conveyed through various forms of oral literature, aiding communities in understanding and remembering knowledge pertinent to their lives.

Oral literature also serves as entertainment and recreation. In social events and community gatherings such as traditional celebrations, ceremonies, and festivals, oral literature often forms part of the entertainment. Performances of pantun, syair, and tembang can enhance community bonding and delight its members. Oral literature is frequently an integral part of various ceremonies and rituals. For instance, during weddings, births, or funerals, pantun and syair are used to express hopes, prayers, and tributes. This helps maintain the significance and sanctity of these traditional ceremonies.

The maritime cultural identity of the Riau Archipelago is shaped by various elements ranging from language, oral literature, customs to local wisdom associated with the sea. The Riau Malay language is not only a tool for daily communication but also a carrier of oral traditions such as pantun, syair, and gurindam. Through these forms of oral literature, cultural values and maritime knowledge are inherited. Pantun is often used in traditional ceremonies, weddings, and conflict resolution, reflecting how communities convey messages wisely and diplomatically. Additionally, customs like fishing rituals, prayer ceremonies before sailing, and sea festivals exemplify how maritime culture is lived out in daily life. Local wisdom regarding weather patterns, sea currents, and natural signs becomes part of invaluable traditional knowledge. This knowledge not only aids in fishing activities but also distinguishes the maritime communities of the Riau Archipelago from others.

3.2 Efforts to Preserve Maritime Cultural Identity

The preservation of maritime cultural identity is continuously pursued by various parties, including the government, non-governmental organizations, and local communities. For example, local governments have initiated various programs to preserve maritime culture, such as sea festivals, traditional boat races, and training for young generations in fishing skills. These programs aim not only to maintain traditions but also to raise awareness of the importance of maritime culture for regional identity. Non-governmental organizations and local communities also play an active role in these preservation efforts. They organize educational activities and training aimed at teaching maritime knowledge and skills to younger generations. Additionally, documentation and publication regarding local wisdom and maritime traditions are carried out to ensure that this knowledge does not disappear over time. One concrete example is the efforts of fishing communities in the Riau Archipelago who collaborate with universities to document and publish their traditional knowledge about the sea. Through this collaboration, knowledge about traditional fishing techniques, the use of natural signs, and customs related to the sea can be preserved and disseminated. As time progresses, the challenges in maintaining maritime cultural identity become increasingly complex. Modernization and globalization bring significant changes in various aspects of life, including how communities interact with the sea. These changes are evident in fishing technology, migration patterns, and increasingly modern lifestyles. New technologies in the fishing industry often displace more sustainable traditional practices. Moreover, economic pressures also influence how communities perceive the sea and their maritime culture. Many residents are shifting professions from fishermen to other sectors that are considered more economically advantageous. This change not only reduces the number of traditional fishermen but also threatens the sustainability of knowledge and cultural practices related to the sea.

3.3 Preservation of Local Languages

Oral literature plays a significant role in the preservation of local languages. Language is one of the most vital aspects of culture, and its use in oral literature ensures that it remains alive and relevant. In the Riau Archipelago, many folk tales and traditional songs are conveyed in local languages, helping to maintain the vocabulary and structure of those languages. The preservation of language through oral literature is crucial in the context of globalization, which often leads to the dominance of major languages and the neglect of minority languages. By continuously using local languages in literary narratives, the communities in the Riau Archipelago can maintain linguistic diversity and ensure that their languages remain an integral part of their identity. Preserving local languages poses a significant challenge in an era of globalization that increasingly dominates the world with major languages and broader cultures. In the Riau Archipelago, oral literature plays a crucial role in preserving local languages, serving as a bridge to maintain linguistic diversity and ensure that regional languages remain alive and relevant. By integrating local languages into various forms of oral literature such as folk tales, songs, and poetry, communities can preserve and celebrate their linguistic wealth. Oral literature serves as an effective medium for preserving local languages naturally and contextually. Folk tales, myths, legends, and traditional songs are often delivered in local languages, ensuring that these languages remain used in everyday social and cultural contexts. By using local languages in oral narratives, communities can preserve vocabulary, grammatical structures, and speaking styles that are part of their linguistic identity.

3.4 Preservation Strategies

To maintain and develop oral literature, several strategies can be proposed for implementation in the Riau Archipelago. These strategies include integrating formal education, documentation and digitization, promotion and revitalization, as well as collaboration with media. With this comprehensive approach, it is hoped that oral literature will continue to thrive and evolve while remaining relevant for future generations.

Formal education is one of the primary strategies for preserving oral literature. According to Pratama (2021), "integrating oral literature learning into school curricula is an effective step to ensure that young generations connect with their cultural heritage" [11]. Integrating oral literature and maritime culture learning into local school curricula will ensure that young people gain a deep understanding of their cultural heritage. A curriculum that includes materials on oral literature such as folk tales, traditional songs, and poetry can introduce students to the richness of local culture from an early age. Training for teachers is also essential to ensure they possess adequate knowledge and skills to teach oral literature effectively. Additionally, community involvement in the educational process such as inviting traditional storytellers for lectures or workshops can add a practical and engaging dimension to learning.

Documentation and digitization are crucial steps for preserving works of oral literature. As noted by Fadilah and Siregar (2022), "digitization allows oral literature to remain relevant in the modern era and helps preserve cultural works that may be lost over time" [5]. The documentation process involves collecting, recording, and storing various forms of oral literature such as folk tales, poetry, and traditional songs. By using modern technology such as audio and video recordings along with digital storage methods, these works can be securely preserved for future generations. Digitization not only aids preservation but also distribution; digitized works can be published online through websites or social media platforms, allowing for wider access and facilitating the dissemination of

information about oral literature. This also makes it easier for researchers, students, and the general public to study and appreciate oral literature.

Promotion and revitalization of oral literature are key strategies to attract the interest of younger generations. Organizing cultural festivals, poetry competitions, and other activities involving oral literature can create an enjoyable atmosphere. Cultural festivals showcasing performances of oral literature, exhibitions, and workshops can serve as effective platforms to introduce and celebrate cultural heritage to a broader audience. For instance, Suwito (2023) states that "cultural festivals and competitions in oral literature play a vital role in reviving young people's interest in their rich oral traditions" [11-14]. Poetry competitions or storytelling contests can provide opportunities for young people to actively participate and showcase their creativity in oral literature. Furthermore, collaboration with schools and universities to organize events related to oral literature can enhance awareness and interest among students.

Collaboration with mass media and social media is an important strategy for promoting oral literature and educating communities about the significance of maritime culture. Mass media such as television, radio, and newspapers can be utilized to broadcast programs featuring oral literature like documentaries, interviews with traditional storytellers, and reports on cultural festivals. Social media also offers a vast platform for promotion and education; by creating engaging content such as performance videos, posts about folk tales, and articles on local culture, communities can reach a wide audience effectively. Social media campaigns may include hashtags, contests, and collaborations with influencers to raise awareness and participation in preserving oral literature.

4 Policy Implications for Preserving Oral Literature In The Riau Archipelago

The preservation of oral literature in the Riau Archipelago requires effective policy support to ensure the sustainability and development of this valuable cultural heritage. Well-designed policy implications can have a significant impact on protecting and promoting oral literature, as well as integrating these cultural practices into various aspects of community life.

Educational policies that integrate oral literature and maritime culture into school curricula are key steps in preservation. These policies should include curriculum development that incorporates oral literature materials, such as folktales, pantun, and traditional songs, as well as training for teachers to effectively teach these materials. This integration not only helps preserve oral literature but also enhances students' understanding of their cultural heritage.

Documentation and digitization policies are crucial to ensure the preservation of oral literature works. Governments and cultural institutions need to allocate funds for documentation projects involving audio and video recordings and digital data storage. These policies should include the establishment of digital archives accessible to researchers, students, and the general public. Support for the development of digital platforms, such as websites or applications containing collections of oral literature, is also essential.

Cultural promotion policies should include support for organizing cultural festivals, pantun competitions, and other events featuring oral literature. Governments and relevant institutions need to provide funding and resources to support these events and facilitate local community involvement. These policies should also include the development of programs that engage young people in oral literature activities to spark their interest and participation.

Community empowerment policies should include support for training storytellers, artists, and local cultural practitioners. Training programs and funding for local cultural initiatives can help develop community skills and capacity in maintaining and developing oral literature. These policies should also encourage active community participation in planning and implementing cultural events.

Collaboration initiatives between local communities and cultural institutions also need to be established in these policies. These partnerships can strengthen social networks and increase community involvement in the preservation of oral literature.

Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be included in oral literature preservation policies to ensure the effectiveness of implemented programs and initiatives. Regular evaluations of preservation policies and activities should be conducted to assess their impact, identify challenges, and make necessary adjustments. This includes gathering feedback from communities and stakeholders to ensure that the policies effectively meet preservation goals.

The policy implications for preserving oral literature in the Riau Archipelago require a comprehensive and integrated approach. By developing educational policies, supporting documentation and digitization, promoting culture, empowering communities, and establishing monitoring mechanisms, governments and relevant institutions can ensure that oral literature remains alive and relevant. Effective policies will help preserve this valuable cultural heritage, ensuring that future generations can continue to enjoy and appreciate the richness of their oral literature.

5 Conclusion

Oral literature plays a crucial role in maintaining the maritime cultural identity of the Riau Archipelago community. Through the transmission of traditional knowledge, the formation of social norms, and the strengthening of cultural identity, oral literature contributes significantly to preserving maritime cultural heritage. Therefore, efforts to preserve and revitalize oral literature need to be continued so that the maritime cultural identity of the Riau Archipelago is maintained and can be passed on to future generations. Oral literature, particularly folktales and pantun, serves as the primary medium for transferring knowledge about maritime life. Information related to navigation techniques, sea conditions, and fishing strategies is passed down through generations through these literary forms. The knowledge contained in oral literature allows communities to maintain local wisdom and skills that are important in their daily lives at sea. Through myths and folktales, oral literature functions to teach and reinforce social norms and cultural values. Stories and pantun often contain moral messages that emphasize values such as hard work, courage, and solidarity. In this way, oral literature helps communities understand and adhere to social norms that are important for community cohesion and social harmony. Oral literature also plays a key role in strengthening the maritime cultural identity of the Riau Archipelago community. Through traditional ceremonies and cultural festivals involving oral literature, communities celebrate and affirm their identity. Oral literature becomes a means to connect the current generation with their ancestors, strengthening a sense of togetherness, and preserving the uniqueness of maritime culture amidst the increasingly strong influence of globalization. Modernization and globalization are major challenges in preserving oral literature. The influence of external cultures and lifestyle changes can threaten the sustainability of oral traditions that have been an important part of the cultural identity of the Riau Archipelago community. Therefore, the preservation and revitalization of oral literature need to be carried out in a planned manner and involve all elements of society.

These efforts must include education about the values of oral literature to the younger generation, support from the government, and active participation from local communities

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