

MALAY FOLK LITERATURE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AMONG MALAYSIANS

CHEW FONG PENG & ZAHARI ISHAK



ABSTRACT: Malay folk literature in early childhood education served as an important agent in child development that involved emotional, thinking and language aspects. Up to this moment not much research has been carried out in Malaysia particularly in the teaching and learning aspects nor has there been an effort to publish “big books”. Hence, this article will discuss the stance taken by university undergraduates, teachers and parents in evaluating Malay folk literature in early childhood education to be used as big books. The data collated and analyzed were taken from 941 respondents comprising 347 graduates, 299 teachers and 295 parents. Results of the study indicated that Malay folk literature can be absorbed into teaching and learning for early childhood with a mean of 4.12 while it can be big books with mean of 4.02. Meanwhile the highest mean value required for placing Malay folk literature genre as big books in early childhood education rests on exemplary stories and animal fables with mean values of 4.22 and 4.19 respectively. The lowest mean value of 3.45 is given to lipurlara stories. The one-way ANOVA analysis has been concluded and has revealed a significant relationship between the graduates, teachers and parents with all the items for the teaching and learning of Malay folk literature or the items for the contents of the big book in early childhood education.

KEY WORDS: Malay folk literature, early childhood education, narrative and non-narrative stories, and big book in Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

Usually, every piece of literary or creative writing has a function to “educate” and “entertain” the reading public. It has been said that the basis of childhood literature is the ability to offer education and entertainment to society or its target groups. According to Othman Puteh (2000), the function of children’s literature should be expanded to cover current and future aspects of childhood. Children’s folk literature should be able to meet the needs of the minds and thought processes of its readers.

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MALAY FOLK LITERATURE

Malay folk literature is a product of literature owned by the Malay community that has been passed on through generations via oral transmission. Humorous stories, *pantuns*, proverbs and the like are not elements of a previous era but are still relevant in the current cultural landscape. Folk literature remains so, even in the written form. *Hikayat Malim Demam* remains to this day a folk tale generated through the oral tradition even when such stories are now widely available in printed form. The print media serves as a tool of dissemination during modern times.

There are two forms of Malay folk literature: the narrative and non-narrative forms. The narrative form is also called folk stories or oral tales, comprising several types such as *Lipurlara* tales or folklore, exemplary stories, animal fables, humorous stories, myths and legends. Meanwhile the major part of non-narrative material occur in verse; it includes folk sayings, folk songs, traditional lore, riddles, *pantuns* or rhymes, *gurindam* or couplets, and *seloka* or satirical poems and others (Mat Piah, 2003:5).

This article will focus on folk literature of the narrative form. In this category, myths and legends differ greatly from tales from *Lipurlara* stories, exemplary stories, animal fables and humorous stories. The differences are defined based on beliefs, the concepts of time and setting, religious status and the major characters. The differences are found in table 1 as follows:

Table 1:
Differences between Folk Literatures

Type	Belief	Time	Setting	Religious Status	Major Characters
Tales - <i>Lipurlara</i> , Exemplary, Animal, and Humorous stories	Fictional	Any time	Any place in world	Secular	Human, non-human
Myths	Real	Distance past	Other world, this world long ago	Sacred	Non human, gods, culture-hero
Legends	Real	Recent Past	The world as we know	May be either Sacred or secular	Human, sometimes Superhuman

Source: Abu Hassan Sham (1975:795)

The *Lipurlara* stories are usually stories that involve travel and adventures (Hamid, 1974:32). Among the popular *Lipurlara* stories that have been printed are *Hikayat Malim Dewa*, *Hikayat Malim Demam*, *Hikayat Anggun Che Tunggal*, *Hikayat*

Terung Pipit, Hikayat Awang Sulung Merah Muda, Hikayat Raja Muda, Cerita Raja Dera, Cerita Sulung Jawa and others. These *Lipurlara* stories function as a source of entertainment.

Lipurlara stories possess general characteristics that set them apart from other tales of Malay literature. Most *Lipurlara* stories are set within a royal backdrop, revolving around the princess and her prince. The prince is cast as a handsome, strong and invincible hero, whilst the princess possesses such beauty that is beyond words. These stories abound with magical and spiritual elements and angels, and there are no boundaries between the earthly and heavenly spheres.

Exemplary stories are folk tales that have didactic elements, provide a strong moral message and offer lessons to be learned. These exemplary stories are usually targeted at children, where the story contents are imbued with strong moral values based on social, cultural or spiritual elements (Mat Piah, 2006:104).

These exemplary stories are structured in brief and simplified formats. There are only few characters involved and they are made up of the typical individual. Unlike folk tales, these exemplary stories do not offer magical elements but occasionally allow the concept of reality to play a crucial role. Hence, most of the plots revolve around the real world with slight variations in location to include the village, the forest, the sea and occasionally the palace grounds.

In tandem with its primary role as a channel for moral education, the exemplary stories carry various themes that are related to good behavior, being loving, and caring towards mankind and animals, strengthening the family bond and others. The most important lesson is poetic justice, which is good deeds beget goodness and evil actions beget evil. Examples of such tales are *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah, Si Tenggang* and *Batu Belah Batu Bertangkup*.

Humorous tales are also known as “jokes” or “amusing anecdotes” (Danandjaja, 1986:118). Popular Malay humorous tales are the stories of *Pak Pandir, Pak Kaduk, Lebai Malang, Pak Belalang* and *Si Luncai*. There are also adapted stories such as *Mat Jenin, Abu Nawas* and *Musang Berjanggut*.

In this regard, some scholars group these traditional humorous tales into three categories befitting the traits of the main characters as follows: (1) Idiotic and unlucky: *Lebai Malang* or the Unfortunate *Lebai*, and *Pak Kaduk* or Father Pepperleaf; (2) Wise fool: *Pak Pandir* or Father Foolish; and (3) Tricksters: *Pak Belalang* or Father Grasshopper, and *Si Luncai* or Big Belly.

The groupings comprise five main cycles of comical tales known in Malay society. The humour is derived from the foolishness of the characters. Due to his foolishness, *Pak Kaduk* is fooled by the royalty to part with his chicken. *Lebai Malang* on the other hand, fails in his strategy, gives in to greed and goes home hungry. *Pak Pandir*, meanwhile is wise fool – loses his child, makes big losses, has a party that turned havoc and drops his salt into the water, among other things.

Humorous tales stress more on the comical aspects over other elements. Their function, which is to entertain, at times neglects the moral considerations. However, other functions will surface such as creating innuendo towards certain groups or just

satire. There are also folktales of humour that represent protest against a certain social issue or discontentment (Damandjaja, 1986:119-122).

Humorous tales are unsophisticated stories that are narrated in a casual manner. Hence, the structure is rather simplified. Most of the stories begin with a casual introduction of the main character, followed by the comical acts portrayed. Usually the main character links the tales together through several accounts that bind into one whole story involving the said main character, for example the story of *Pak Pandir*.

The animal fables are a popular traditional Malay folktale. These stories portray animals that can articulate and think like human beings. In Malay society, popular animal fables are the *Sang Kancil*, the *Dog and his Reflection*, and the *Chicken and the Goat*; however, *Sang Kancil* is the most popular. According to R.O. Windstedt, the story of the *Sang Kancil* originated in India. The similarities of these folktales in the South East Asia region are attributed to diffusion (Windstedt, 1969:6-7).

When analyzed by its functions, the animal story is not merely entertaining but serves as a moral lesson. The cunning and comical mousedeer is projected as the most convincing character to grab the child's attention. Among the lessons learned is that we need to sharpen our thinking in facing the trials of life, we need to be aware that many negative traits may ruin us and many other lessons.

In terms of content, the *Sang Kancil* or Mousedeer does not merely portray the conflict between animals but also between animals and mankind. The antics of the sly *Sang Kancil* even outwits the human mind. In one folktale, a farmer who trapped the *Sang Kancil* finally sets him free, after assuming the animal was left for dead with foaming mouth and rigid body. However there was an instance when the *Sang Kancil* is outwitted when he competed with the snail in a running race.

In yet another folktale, the *Sang Kancil* played the role of mediator between two bickering parties, as is the case of the buffalo and the crocodile, or was consulted for his opinion and help, as portrayed in the folktale about the *Sang Kancil* and the giant. In fact in the *Hikayat Sang Kancil*, the mousedeer is a wise and fair judge.

Myths are stories regarded as true happenings and sacred. The protagonists involved in myths are supernatural beings, divine beings or semi divine. The events related happened in the past. Myths are connected to the acts of God in relation to the creation of man, phenomena and nature. They also tell of sacred history of a people or race (Mat Piah, 2003:9).

Hence, myths are meant to fulfil man's need to know; they explain matters outside what is accepted to the mind and knowledge of the past. Apart from that, myths are also the basis of the traditional beliefs of the Malays towards what is powerful in nature. After the arrival of Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic religion, myths eventually became stories that explain the origin of nature only.

From the viewpoint of structure, myths are usually moderate stories of varying motifs. In societies that have accepted them as fables, myths may be related by anyone; but in societies that still regard myths as sacred, they can only be retold by certain individuals, often accompanied by rituals. If the rituals are not adhered to, it is said that something bad will happen to the reciter or the tribe involved.

In contrast to myths, legends are prose stories populated by humans who at times exhibit unusual powers and are aided by supernatural powers. Legends are believed to have actually happened by the society but are not regarded as sacred. Legends are regarded as taking place in the not too distant past and take place in the real world (Danandjaja, 1986:66).

Zalilah Sharif and Jamilah Haji Ahmad [eds] categorize Malay legends into three major categories and their sub-categories as follows:

1. Legends of individuals:
 - Leaders/warriors such as *Panglima* Salleh.
 - Religious figures/wrongdoers/holy figures, for example, *Si Tenggang*, Mahsuri in Langkawi.
 - People involved in finding wealth/worldly pursuits.
2. Legends related to place names: (Mohd Khalid)
 - Related to historiography, such as Pekan Langgar in Kedah.
 - Related to special people such as Kampung Tok Pasai in Kuala Kedah.
 - Related to landmarks, such as Batu Gajah.
 - Related to tales of the ancients, such as Kampung Tekek in Tioman Island.
3. Personal memory or experience of a person related to a belief, especially to the invisible world, ghosts and so forth (Sharif & Haji Ahmad eds., 1993:109; and also Taib, 1983:14).

From the viewpoint of structure, legends are moderate stories although the exist legends with characteristics of other fables. Legends are in prose and are delivered in narrative form.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

To date, studies on feedback of the literary community toward children's folk literature are not readily available. Most literature reviews on folk literature center on folk literature in general and the stories only. The acceptance, views and opinions of the public regarding Malay folk literature have yet to be explored in depth. In fact, the publication of children's folk literature in Malay has never been adequately researched. Most of the children's literature in Malay is published from the adult viewpoint and is not creative in nature.

Hence, this study will use quantitative methods to ascertain the opinion of the public toward early children's literature in Malay. In the genre of Malay folk literature, what story is the most popular? What is the icon most loved by the Malay literature community? And what is the opinion of the literary community towards the suitability of Malay folk literature as reading material for children in Malaysia?

Respondents comprised three categories, namely: undergraduates from the early childhood education or Malay studies programs, teachers from childcare centers, and parents. These three categories were chosen because they are very involved in choosing suitable reading materials for children and because they are connected to and well versed in the field.

Before the fieldwork was undertaken, a pilot study was done to verify the instrument. Analysis showed the Cronbach Alpha of the instrument was 0.96, hence indicating its consistency and suitability for the study.

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

A total of 941 respondents were involved in this study, comprising 347 undergraduates, 299 teachers, and 295 parents. Their details are as shown in table 2.

Table 2:
 Respondents' Profile by Location, Ethnicity, Language Spoken at Home, Gender, Academic Background, Age and Experience in Using Computers

Social Background (N=941)	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
1. Location of home	Urban	545	57.9
	Rural	396	42.1
2. Ethnicity	Malay	573	60.9
	Chinese	198	21.0
	Indian	87	9.2
	Other	83	8.8
3. Language spoken at home	Bahasa Malaysia	596	59.9
	English	169	18.0
	Chinese	126	13.4
	Tamil	36	3.8
	Other	46	4.9
4. Gender	Male	255	27.1
	Female	686	72.9
5. Academic background	SPM/SPVM/MCE	120	12.8
	STPM/HSC/STP	365	38.8
	Certificate	53	5.6
	Diploma	150	15.9
	Bachelor degree	192	20.4
	Master	43	4.6
6. Age	Doctor of Philosophy	18	1.9
	21 – 30 years	600	63.8
	31 – 40 years	198	21.0
	41 – 50 years	132	14.0
	51 and above	11	1.2
7. Experience in using computers	Very frequent	453	48.1
	Frequent	212	22.5
	Rarely	234	24.9
	Never	42	4.5

Table 2 shows that 57.9% of respondents hail from urban areas while 42.1% are from rural areas. More than half or 60.9% of respondents are Malays, followed by Chinese (21%), Indians (9.2%), and others (8.8%). Language spoken at home is closely related to ethnicity, with 59.9% of respondents speaking in Malay, 18% in English, 13.4% in Chinese, 3.8% in Tamil, and 4.9% in other languages.

From the gender standpoint, there are more female respondents (72.7%) compared to males (27.3%). Most of the respondents have STPM (*Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia*) qualification (38.8%), followed by bachelor degree (20.4%),

and diploma (15.9%). In other words, about 70% of respondents have tertiary education. More than half or 63.8% of respondents are aged between 21-30 years, and nearly half (48.1%) of all respondents frequently use the computer in their daily lives.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:
A. MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

This study will use the mean and standard deviations to analyze the acceptance of the literary community toward the folk literature genre most suitable for use as big books for children. The researcher will then discuss the differences between the three categories of respondents (undergraduates, teachers and parents) regarding the suitability of folk literature for use as children's literature. The analysis will be done using one-way ANOVA.

Table 3:
Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents towards Folk Literature
for Early Childhood Literature

Item (N=941)	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Folk literature used in pre-school / kindergarten:		
a. Stories on origin	3.5675	1.0005
b. Animal fables	4.1520	0.8349
c. Humorous tales	3.8757	0.9534
d. Legend	3.6461	0.9426
e. Exemplary stories	4.1201	0.8552
f. Lipurlara stories	3.4580	0.9987
2. Folk literature can be integrated in early childhood teaching and learning.	4.1233	0.8590
3. Folk literature is appropriate to be made into big books for early childhood teaching and learning.	4.0213	0.8774
4. Folk literature that should be made into big books are:		
a. Tales of origin (myths)	3.8278	0.9521
b. Animal fables	4.1881	0.8250
c. Humorous tales	3.9766	0.8577
d. Legends	3.9299	0.8976
e. Exemplary stories	4.2168	0.9236
f. Lipurlara stories	3.4591	0.9707
5.i. Stories on origins (myths):		
a. Place	3.8746	1.0186
b. Animal	3.9692	0.9098
c. Natural phenomena	4.0797	0.8879
d. Plants and trees	3.9936	0.9050
5.ii. Origin of places:		
a. Malacca	4.2359	0.9142
b. Singapore	3.5080	1.0258
c. Mountain of Kinabalu	3.7768	0.8843

Item (N=941)	Mean	Standard Deviation
d. Tioman Island	3.5792	0.8905
e. Cini Lake	3.7269	0.9161
f. Jerai, Perak and Tegal Moutain	3.6174	0.9040
g. Bukit Merak in Kelantan	3.5569	0.9851
5.iii. Origin of natural phenomena:		
a. Earthquake	3.8045	1.0699
b. Rainbow	4.1594	0.8493
c. Ghost	2.9192	1.2010
6.i. Animal fables:		
a. <i>Sang Kancil</i>	4.3741	0.8432
b. <i>Chicken and the Goat</i>	3.6918	0.9344
c. <i>The Dog and its Reflection</i>	4.1753	0.8226
6.ii. Tales of <i>Sang Kancil</i> (SK):		
a. <i>SK and the Tiger</i>	4.0234	0.9717
b. <i>SK and the Crocodile</i>	4.2933	0.8648
c. <i>SK and the Snail</i>	3.7439	1.0102
d. <i>SK and the Buffalo</i>	3.8491	1.0161
e. <i>SK and the Giant</i>	3.7163	1.0362
7. Humorous tales:		
a. <i>Lebai Malang</i>	3.9702	0.9324
b. <i>Pak Kadok</i>	3.9330	0.8817
c. <i>Pak Pandir</i>	4.1403	0.8427
d. <i>Pak Belalang</i>	3.9734	0.8532
e. <i>Si Luncai</i>	4.0043	0.8238
8. Legends:		
a. <i>Princess of Sadong</i>	3.7697	0.9288
b. <i>Mahsuri (Langkawi)</i>	4.2147	0.7994
c. <i>Panglima Salleh</i>	3.6812	0.8766
d. <i>Princess of Gunung Ledang</i>	4.1530	0.8095
e. <i>Princess of Hang Li Po</i>	4.0149	0.8429
f. <i>Princesfo Santubgn</i>	3.7668	0.9463
9. Exemplary stories:		
a. <i>Si Tenggang</i>	4.1785	1.0000
b. <i>Batu Belah Batu Bertangkup</i>	4.1158	0.9181
c. <i>Bawang Putih Bawang Merah</i>	4.2221	0.8484
d. <i>Awang Sebelah</i>	3.6823	0.8679
10. Lipurlara stories:		
a. <i>Hikayat Malim Dewa</i>	3.5962	1.0338
b. <i>Hikayat Malim Demam</i>	3.6387	0.9693
c. <i>Anggun Che Tunggal</i>	3.5186	0.9184
d. <i>Awang Sulung Merah Muda</i>	3.6302	0.9267
e. <i>Terung Pipit</i>	3.5643	0.9348

Table 3 clearly shows the acceptance of the literary community towards Malay folk literature in early childhood education is positive. Among the six genres of folk literature, they agreed that animal fables (Mean 4.1520, SD 0.8349) and exemplary stories (Mean 4.1201, SD 0.8552) are the most likely to be used by teachers in the kindergartens or pre-schools in teaching because these have high moral values. Folk literature was found to be acceptable for integration into early childhood education (Mean 4.1233, SD 0.8690) and can be used as big books for education purposes (Mean 4.0213, SD 0.8874).

The question surrounding the genre of folk literature most suitable for use as big books in early childhood education is answered by exemplary stories (Mean 4.2268, SD 0.9236) and animal fables (Mean 4.1981, SD 0.8350) as the first choice and second choice respectively. This is strongly related to the preferences of teachers in using these two genres in their preschool teaching. Exemplary stories and animal fables are also found to have moral values and hidden messages. In contrast, *Lipurlara* stories are not suitable given their functions of emphasizing entertainment only.

Mythical stories in this involve stories of origin only. The stories of origin are divided into four types, namely place, animal, nature and plants. Natural phenomena (Mean 4.0797, SD 0.8879) are cited as the most suitable for uses as big books for children, followed by origin of plants (Mean 3.9936, SD 0.9050), origin of animals (Mean 3.9692, SD 0.9090), and ending with origin of place (Mean 3.8700, SD 1.0180).

Stories about the origin of the rainbow received the best response among stories on origin of natural phenomena (Mean 4.1594, SD 0.8493). Even so, the mean score for rainbow was lower than that for the origin of place (Malacca) which had a Mean of 4.2359 and Standard Deviation of 0.9142. However, respondents found that origins of natural phenomena were better suited to be turned into big books than stories about origin of places. This could be because the origin of Malacca is known through school text books compared with the story of the origin of rainbow which is not that popular among the non-Malays.

Among the Malay animal fables, it was found that *Sang Kancil* was the most popular choice (Mean 4.3741, SD 0.8432) to be made into big books for children. The story of *Sang Kancil and the Crocodile* was regarded by the respondents as the most suitable because it taught us how to treasure the kindness of those who help us and not to betray them. The story of *Sang Kancil and the Crocodile* comes in many versions but all reflect that a weak animal such as *Sang Kancil* has the ability to outwit an arrogant and stupid crocodile.

From the aspect of humorous stories and comedy, out of five local Malay characters, *Pak Pandir* (Mean 4.1403, SD 0.8427) proved to be the most popular. His character of being clever but stupid at the same time is always entertaining. In fact, in the Malaysian mass media, *Pak Pandir* is the character most often made the main character of comedies, for example in the NTV7's movie *Pak Pandir Moden* about a man who lives in a flat in the city.

The story of *Mahsuri in Langkawi* (Mean 4.2147, SD 0.7994) is a well-known legend. In fact, the story of *Mahsuri in Langkawai* has become the main attraction for tourists to Langkawi. Thus, the story is regarded as the main legend suitable for transformation into big books for children, according to the respondents. Besides that, the story of the *Princess of Gunung Ledang* (Mean 4.1530, SD 0.8095) and the *Princess of Hang Li Po* (Mean 4.0149, SD 0.8429) are popular among the respondents. These have been learned through the KOMSAS (Literature Component in Malay Language) textbooks in Form Four and Form Five in schools. *Princess of Gunung Ledang* was made into a mega movie and a theatre production (musical) at Istana Budaya, making the character widely known, whereas *Princess of Hang Li Po* is usually associated with the origin of the *Baba-Nyonya* in Melaka.

Analysis of findings on exemplary stories shows that *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah* (Mean 4.221, SD 0.8484) is the most popular story among the respondents. The popularity of the story means it is often made into material for Indonesian drama series or *Telenovela* to deliver moral values to society. The drama series of the modern version of *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah* was aired over TV3, and received great response from Malaysian society recently.

The story of *Si Tenggang* (Mean 4.1785, SD 1.0000) came second among the respondents, showing that Malaysian society regards it as meaningful. This story has social values arising from family ties as it deplores the actions of an ungrateful child.

Lipurlara stories are folk tales with the lowest mean scores. All the *Lipurlara* stories in this study had mean scores below 4.0000. In fact, *Hikayat Malim Demam*, the most popular in this category, only obtained a Mean score of 3.6487 (SD 0.9693). This is due to the characteristics of *Lipurlara* stories, which place more importance on entertainment and do not have values to be taught. These tales tell of the invisible world, the palace and perfect heroes and heroines and are not suitable for big story books.

B. ANALYSIS OF ONE-WAY ANOVA

Before one way ANOVA was done, test of homogeneity of variances was done. There was statistically significant difference at the $p < 0.05$ level in all the items about Malay folk literature among the three independent groups namely undergraduates, teachers and parents. Analysis of one way ANOVA was done to identify any differences among the three groups of respondents towards 9 items of folk literature. Table 4 details the results of the analysis.

Table 4 shows the analysis of one-way ANOVA of all the variables of folk literature in early childhood education among the undergraduates, teachers and parents. Results show that there are significant differences at the level of $p < 0.05$ among the Malaysian population towards the Malay folk literature. This reflects that all three groups agree that folk literature should be integrated into teaching and learning as a learning tool in the early childhood curriculum with an F value of 6.030 at the level of $p < 0.05$. They also have a very different agreement for making folk literature as big books for children with an F value of 32.370 at the level of $p < 0.01$.

The other items connected to folk literature that showed big differences between the three categories of respondents were tales of origins of places ($F=7.811$, $p < 0.01$); origin of natural phenomena ($F=9.792$, $p < 0.01$); *Sang Kancil* stories ($F=12.476$, $p < 0.01$); humorous stories ($F=38.004$, $p < 0.01$); legends ($F=18.977$, $p < 0.01$); exemplary stories ($F=22.756$, $p < 0.01$); and *Lipurlara* stories ($F=27.677$, $p < 0.01$).

Even though the three categories of respondents agree that folk literature should be made into big books for children, they have different views regarding humorous stories, *Lipurlara* stories and exemplary stories. This is due to undergraduates accepting the three types of stories with an open mind that children

Table 4:
Analysis of One-Way ANOVA between Undergraduates, Teachers and Parents
with Items of Malay Folk Literature

Statement	Group	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1. Folk literature can be integrated into early childhood teaching and learning.	Between groups.	211.217	2	105.608	6.030	0.003
	Within groups.	16427.396	938	17.513		
	Total.	16638.612	940			
2. Folk literature should be made into big story books.	Between groups.	1079.935	2	539.968	32.370	0.000
	Within groups.	15646.923	938	16.681		
	Total.	16726.859	940			
3. Tales of origin of place names.	Between groups.	309.087	2	154.544	7.811	0.000
	Within groups.	18557.912	938	19.785		
	Total.	18866.999	940			
4. Tales of the origins of natural phenomena.	Between groups.	80.313	2	40.157	9.792	0.000
	Within groups.	3846.828	938	4.101		
	Total.	3927.141	940			
5. <i>Sang Kancil</i> story.	Between groups.	328.163	2	164.081	12.476	0.000
	Within groups.	12336.164	938	13.152		
	Total.	12664.327	940			
6. Humorous stories.	Between groups.	936.187	2	468.093	38.004	0.000
	Within groups.	11553.388	938	12.317		
	Total.	12489.575	940			
7. Legends.	Between groups.	565.622	2	282.811	18.967	0.000
	Within groups.	13911.694	938	14.911		
	Total.	14477.316	940			
8. Exemplary stories.	Between groups.	547.784	2	273.892	22.752	0.000
	Within groups.	11291.680	938	12.038		
	Total.	11839.464	940			
9. <i>Lipurlara</i> stories.	Between groups.	861.438	2	430.719	27.667	0.000
	Within groups.	14603.011	938	15.568		
	Total.	15464.448	940			

Significant at the level $p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.01$

should read such stories, but teachers and parents would like to see different types of stories, which contain lessons and values being made into big books. Humorous tales and *Lipurlara* stories are regarded as more of entertainment, less suitability to be made as big books for the preschool children, but exemplary stories were found acceptable because of their moral value.

Thus, the three groups of respondents show small differences of opinion regarding stories about origins of places, natural phenomenon, *Sang Kancil* stories and legends which are found suitable for use as big books for children because the four types of stories mentioned above are easy to understand and interesting.

All the above items are significant at the $p < 0.01$ level except for folk literature which can be integrated into early childhood teaching and learning which was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.

DISCUSSION

Malay folk literature represent oral traditions usually told to children who are about to go to bed (Osman, 1976:8). Hence, folk literature are suitable for use as reading materials for children considering that such stories contain noble values, guidance for living and valuable lessons.

The respondents comprising undergraduates, teachers and parents agree that folk literature can be integrated into early childhood teaching and learning. Hence, teachers in kindergartens and pre-schools are fond of using animal fables and exemplary stories compared to other types of stories because the two types of stories contain educational motives of moral importance.

Respondents also stated their agreement that folk literature should be made into big books for early childhood education. In this regard, exemplary stories and animal fables are favored by the respondents overall because such stories have been impressed deep in their souls. Among the animal fables, *Sang Kancil*, is the most popular and most loved. According to Mohd. Taib Osman, *Sang Kancil* stories contain the trickster motive and this quality frames the role and the story is also called a beast epic (Osman, 1981:7).

The popularity of *Sang Kancil* is indicated by numerous tales involving *Sang Kancil* in connection with other animals and creatures such as the tiger, buffalo, snail, giant and others; all these stories portray the wisdom of *Sang Kancil* in overcoming much bigger and more fierce animals. The respondents showed a very strong preference for the story of *Sang Kancil and the Crocodile*.

Among the exemplary stories, the story of *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah* is the most popular one and well known to many compared to other stories. This is because this story touches on family and relationship between humans. The questions raised involve problems of daily life that can be used as examples.

On the other hand, *Lipurlara* stories are folk literature eliciting the lowest mean among the respondents. All the *Lipurlara* stories in this study achieved a mean score of below 4.0000, indicating that these stories are less suitable compared with other types of stories as reading materials for children because they are characterized as entertainment. Hence, these long and complex stories are less suitable to be read by children.

Nevertheless, the three categories of respondents show significant differences of opinion towards all types of folk literature for use as storybooks for children. The biggest difference was seen in humorous stories, followed by *Lipurlara* stories and exemplary stories. This is because humorous stories and *Lipurlara* stories emphasize entertainment and were regarded as less suitable by teachers and parents. Although exemplary stories were regarded as very suitable for use in big books with the highest scores, the three groups showed very significant differences of opinion.

It is probable that parents and teachers regard exemplary stories such as *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah* and *Si Tenggang* as difficult to understand by children at the pre-school and kindergarten level because of the deep thinking needed to understand them.

Findings of this study show that most popular folk literature are suitable as big books. The stories have been learned by Malaysian society through school text books, whether history books or KOMSAS. Besides that, the mass media plays a role in popularizing folk literature by making it the main content of films, drama series or theatre productions, for example the stories of *Pak Pandir*, *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah* and *Princess of Gunung Ledang*.

Hence, to revive folk literature as materials for early childhood education, suitable stories should be chosen as compulsory stories or text books in kindergartens/pre-schools. The materials can be used in activities by teachers to attract children, such as in drama, story telling, singing, dancing, pantomime and so forth. Teachers should be encouraged to use these materials for solving problems, relate the materials to situations faced, explain and evaluate or make conclusions based on the reading materials and use them to create something new.

According to a survey by Hadijah Rahmat in Singapore, the development of children's literature is very slow from the quality aspect. This proves that the number of books is still too low to fulfil the ever rising requirements and demand for children's literature. Hadijah Rahmat also stated that folk literature takes the first place compared to classical Malay texts or histories (Rahmat, 2006). The same goes for animal fables many of which are produced to satisfy the needs of children who like stories on animals given human characteristics. The production of these tales, especially folk literature (local and foreign), shows that the relationship between oral literature and children now cannot be broken with the birth of written literature. In fact the relationship between the two through the reading of children's literature is very strong indeed.

Materials, including works of literature, are important educational and entertainment tools, especially for children. This is because literature books can more easily attract the attention and liking of children who have a natural preference for creative and imaginative works compared to other types of ordinary works. Hence, the role and influence of children's literature cannot be underestimated and needs to be given appropriate attention.

CONCLUSION

Folk literature serves several functions: education and didactic appropriate to the type of society and culture in Malaysia. Hence, folk literature can be made into content for studying Malay society and culture, as well as reading material suitable for children especially. Malaysian society shows a positive and open attitude toward folk literature in early childhood education. This shows the enduring nature of Malay folk literature in Malaysia, and it should be made an inheritance for the

younger generation in line with the Malay saying “*melentur buluh biarlah daripada rebungnya*” (to bend the bamboo start from the shoot).

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