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Narrative Simplification in Primary School Textbooks: A Comparative Analysis of Indonesian Folklore

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Research Article

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Abstract

Background/purpose. Folklore has been simplified in the official elementary school textbooks in Indonesia. The simplification of folklore could alter its narrative structure and diminish its cultural significance. Simplification can become an educational paradox: teaching character but eliminating local identity. This study identifies the pattern of simplification of folklore texts and their implications for culture and education.

Materials/methods. Three folktales in two versions (complete and simplified) were analyzed qualitatively and descriptively using a narrative method. Folklore sourced from elementary school textbooks is analyzed using Vladimir Propp's theory, with simplification analysis rubrics, instruments, and narrative structure tables.

Results. Simplification causes folklore to lose its narrative structure: complications, climaxes, and resolutions. The characters' roles are reduced, the plot is streamlined, and the dominant elements of local culture are eliminated. Eliminating local terms, distinctive geographical settings, and cultural symbols makes folklore more universal, but it loses cultural substance.

Conclusion. The simplification of folklore texts in elementary school books leads to deculturation. Without strong pedagogical mentoring, students do not fully understand cultural values. This research emphasizes a simplification strategy that maintains a balance between educational goals and the authenticity of Indonesian culture. This research recommends developing simplification strategies that preserve essential cultural elements while enhancing students' narrative comprehension.

1. Introduction

Presenting folklore to children faces several challenges: complex language (Sumarwati et al., 2021), complex narrative structure (Roper, 2022), and controversial figures (Bastet & Houlbrook, 2023). These elements can make folklore difficult for children to understand and appreciate. This challenge has the potential to lead to a decrease in children's interest in folklore. Folklore texts use high-level language that is difficult for children to understand, including vocabulary and complex sentence structures not typically used in modern children's literature (Emeterio, 2022). These stories include multiple layers of meaning and non-linear plots that require a mature understanding to fully appreciate (Rosa, 2022). Folklore is also rich with characters and motifs rooted in local culture that may be unfamiliar to children from different backgrounds (Tropin & Mijić Nemet, 2022). Various strategies have been explored to overcome these challenges, such as adaptation, reconstruction, vehicle transfer, and other creative forms based on simplification efforts.

The simplification of folklore significantly affects children's understanding of the story's actual value and structure. Simplification involves condensing content and modifying language to make it easier for children to appreciate (Purnomoa et al., 2021). Some research states that simplified folklore, especially when illustrated, can significantly increase students' interest in reading (Indriani et al., 2023; Javourey et al., 2022). Simplified folklore can also effectively convey moral and educational values (Anwar et al., 2023). In addition, simplified folklore can serve as an effective medium for developing language skills (Merdiyatna, 2022).

However, the simplification of folklore faces big questions. Simplification of folklore can lead to a loss of the cultural depth and narrative inherent in traditional folklore (Ismaili & Neziri, 2024). Oversimplification can weaken educational content, leading to a superficial understanding of the story's themes and morals. This can undermine the potential of folklore education that serves to provide moral and social lessons (S. E. K. Dewi et al., 2022). The simplified version of folklore fails to adequately represent the diversity and richness of its traditions. Simplified versions of folklore also have the potential to lead to a homogeneous view of cultural narratives (Kartita et al., 2023).

Simplified folklore is used in the Indonesian elementary school curriculum, especially in Indonesian subjects. Three simplified folk tales were found in a textbook officially issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The use of folklore in the curriculum aims to address low literacy levels among Indonesian students by providing engaging, culturally relevant reading materials (Andriani, 2022). Integrating folklore in education also supports the national agenda of fostering national identity and unity. By disseminating folklore from different regions, the curriculum aims to promote "unity in diversity" and instill national values in young learners (Novianti, 2022). In addition, integrating folklore into the curriculum promotes character education by focusing on values such as courage, patience, loyalty, and intelligence (Amin, 2022).

Although folklore has long been used in primary education as a means of character formation and cultural literacy (Gabriel & Ukpi, 2023; Saxby, 2022), Research examining the transformation of the form and content of folklore in elementary school textbooks is still very limited. Folklore contained in textbooks often undergoes simplification in language, plot structure, characterization, and cultural symbols. This simplification is intended to accommodate students' initial literacy levels, but it is rarely accompanied by a critical evaluation of its narrative and cultural implications.

In other words, simplification intended to facilitate children's understanding can lead to deculturalization. Deculturalization results in the erasure of cultural identity in folklore. This is an urgent research gap to fill. This research is presented because no academic study systematically compares the original and textbook versions of folklore in terms of narrative structure and cultural implications. This research aims to close the gap by narratively analyzing three original versions of

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folktales and their elementary school textbook versions. This research aims to examine the impact of simplification on the preservation of cultural values in primary education.

Based on these gaps, this study specifically aims to identify patterns of simplification in narrative structures in primary school folklore textbooks, compare key narrative aspects between the original and simplified versions, and analyze the pedagogical and cultural implications of the simplification process. To achieve this goal, the study formulates three main questions: how is the narrative structure of folklore simplified in elementary school textbooks? What aspect of the narrative has undergone the most simplification in the process? How does simplification impact the preservation of local cultural values and the formation of children's literacy in the context of basic education? The formulation of this problem becomes the conceptual foundation and the direction of analysis in the overall study presented in this article.

We argue that simplification will lead to deculturalization and loss of local terms, distinctive geographical settings, and cultural symbols. Simplification makes folklore more "universal" but loses its local richness.

2. Literature Review

Previous studies have focused on exploring moral values in textbook folklore versions (Feize et al., 2021). Meanwhile, studies that specifically compare the narrative structures of the original and simplified versions and assess their impact on understanding cultural values and the educational function of stories are rare. Structural changes such as the elimination of climaxes, the reduction of conflicts, and the pruning of cultural figures can significantly impact how students understand stories and the values they contain (Boyd et al., 2020; Musaev et al., 2022).

Research by Babič (2019) noted that the dominance of prose forms in the presentation of folklore and the elimination of proverbs or riddles limit children's exposure to figurative language and metaphorical concepts important for linguistic development and the understanding of cultural heritage. (Kutin, 2024) emphasized the need for children to experience reading folklore in its entirety, with its cultural context, to foster their appreciation and creativity, rather than simply simplifying it. However, as a study by Al-Abbas & Al-Abbas (2024) reminds us, simplification, such as idiom paraphrasing, is necessary to make the text age-appropriate, although it risks eliminating cultural nuances. Therefore, simplification must maintain the symbolic and imaginative elements of the story, as affirmed by the research of Matthiessen & Veloso (2023), Backman (2024), and Turner et al. (2023), who stated that the combination of the real-imaginary world and metafictive devices in children's literature enriches their interpretive power and critical literacy.

The simplification of folklore becomes a paradox when it becomes a path to losing cultural heritage. The loss of local cultural symbols in folklore can weaken the development of a child's cultural identity, as they provide the basis for a sense of belonging and cultural attachment. Sansbury et al. (2024) affirm that cultural symbols shape children's ethnic identities from an early age. On the other hand, the loss of symbols due to assimilation can decrease emotional health (Buckingham & Hutchinson, 2024) and damage self-identity and intergroup relationships (Fryberg & Eason, 2024). In a multicultural context, children also negotiate their identity amid discrimination (Vazquez et al., 2024), so integrating cultural heritage through education is crucial to strengthening identity awareness (Zheng & Guo, 2024). The preservation of oral myths (Marino-Jiménez et al., 2023) and cultural symbols has been shown to maintain attachment to place and national identity among diaspora children (Li et al., 2025). Therefore, the simplification of folklore in textbooks must be carried out without removing local cultural symbols, so that they continue to serve as a means of passing children's cultural identities down.

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Thus, this research fills a gap by conducting a critical narrative study of the form of simplification in elementary textbooks. In addition, this study examines the impact of folklore simplification on the quality of narrative, the delivery of cultural values, and its function as a medium of character education. This study is crucial for developing teaching materials based on local wisdom that are informative and transformative in fostering the identity and cultural literacy of elementary school students.

This research is based on Propp's theory (1968). Propp identifies several recurring functions in folklore, such as the struggle between right and injustice, represented by certain characters (Famoso, 2021). Propp emphasizes that the existence of these functions helps identify narrative patterns typical of traditional stories. These functions optimize the reader's or listener's understanding. This approach is relevant when simplifying narratives for children's readers because introducing these functions can make the story easier to appreciate.

Next, Widdowson (2019) and Van Dijk (1997) work on linguistic reduction. They highlight the importance of structure and language in building meaning in narratives. Widdowson argues that reducing linguistic information can improve comprehension when stories are presented more simply. A *Systemic Functional Linguistics* (SFL)-based approach can also be used to preserve meaning while making the text easier to understand (Siregar & Purbani, 2024). Van Dijk also points out that overly complex stories can confuse readers, especially when many cultural elements are unfamiliar. Van Dijk suggests narrative reduction (simplification) as a solution to convey important points while maintaining the essence of the story (Baker & Jenkins, 2015).

Greimas (2014), through his theory of narrative structure, introduced an actant model that focuses on the role of actors in the narrative. In this model, each actor has a position that defines the goals and conflicts in the story that underlie their actions (Anshory et al., 2023). By fusing these elements, the story's accessibility can be improved as readers can easily understand the interaction between the characters and their objectives. Greimas' theory also emphasizes the importance of cultural context in understanding narrative structure. This helps maintain depth of context while still putting the story first for easy understanding (Megawati, 2018).

3. Methodology

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, applying narrative analysis to examine the form and impact of simplifying the structure of folklore in elementary school textbooks. The focus of the research is on how the narrative structure of the original complex folklore is simplified when adapted into the learning format of elementary school children.

This research is designed in three main stages that are mutually sustainable. The first stage, preparation, includes selecting three folktales from elementary school textbooks, tracing their original versions from credible publication sources, and preparing analysis instruments in the form of narrative simplification rubrics and scoring guidelines compiled based on narrative studies. The second stage, data analysis, was carried out by reading both versions of the story in depth, identifying the presence of each narrative aspect, assigning a score using a Likert scale of 1-4, tabulating the results, and comparing the plot structure (orientation, complications, climax, resolution, and code) of each version of the story. The third stage, validation of findings, is carried out through triangulation of sources (by comparing several original versions) and peer examination by two researchers in children's literature and Indonesian language education to review the instruments and consistency of assessment results.

The object of this study is three folktales found in elementary school textbooks published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, namely "*Darman and Darmin*," from the Indonesian Language Textbook class V (Verawaty & Zulqarnain,

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2021), "*Persebaran Suku-Suku di Merauke*," (Distribution of Tribes in Merauke*)* Revised edition of the Indonesian Language Lesson textbook (Lestari & Zulqarnain, 2024) and "*Legenda Putri Komodo*." (The Legend of the Komodo Princess) from the Indonesian Language Lessons textbook for grade VI (Kumalasari & Latifah, 2022). Each story is analyzed in two versions: the textbook version and the full version (Balai Bahasa Provinsi Papua, 2012; Juhriah, 2016; Mampuono, 2023).

The selection of samples in this study was carried out purposively by considering the data source's relevance, representativeness, and affordability. Three folktales were selected from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology textbooks of the Republic of Indonesia because they are official sources widely used in elementary schools throughout Indonesia and directly influence students' cultural perceptions and literacy. The three stories analyzed represent Indonesia's geographical and cultural diversity while showing a contrasting form of narrative simplification compared to the complete version sourced from regional publications or linguistic institutions.

Data was collected through document analysis of both versions of the story. The researcher accesses, reads, and notes the narrative structure of each version of the story. To support the analysis process, this study uses two main instruments. First, the rubric of narrative simplification analysis consists of seven aspects: plot structure, characterization, number and role of characters, story setting, language and speech style, moral and cultural values, and conflict and complexity of problems. The simplification analysis rubric can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Folklore Simplification Analysis Rubric

Aspects	Explanation
Groove Structure	It covers the stages of the classic narrative: orientation, complications, climax, resolution, and coda.
Characterization	The depth of the character's depiction (traits, development, motivation).
Number and Role of Characters	The complexity of the number of characters and their narrative roles.
Story Background	The depth of the description of place, time, and atmosphere.
Language and Speech Style	Simplicity of sentences, diction, and narrative style (direct, descriptive, metaphorical, etc.).
Moral and Cultural Values	The extent to which moral messages and cultural values are still conveyed.
Conflict and Complexity of Problems	Whether the conflict and the dynamics of the story are simplified or maintained.

Each aspect is scored using a Likert scale of 1 to 4 to measure the level of simplification. Second, a classical narrative structure, including orientation, complications, climax, resolution, and coda, is used as a framework for comparing plot development between the original and simplified versions. The scoring guidelines can be seen in the following table 2.

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Table 2. Folklore Simplification Scoring Guidelines

Score	Simplification Rate	Description
1	Not Simplified	The aspect remains intact as in the original version.
2	Slightly Simplified	Only certain parts are compacted or reselected.
3	Simply Simplified	Many of the core parts are abbreviated or customized.
4	Highly Simplified	Almost all aspects are simplified to the point of losing complexity.

The collected data is then analyzed by assessing and recording the presence of each aspect in both versions of the story, tabulating scores for each aspect, and compiling a comparison of narrative structures in a table. These results are then critically interpreted to understand the pattern of simplification and its impact on the educational and cultural functions of stories.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this study applies two main strategies. First is source triangulation, which compares the story's original version from several credible publications to ensure the integrity of the narrative before comparing it to the textbook version. Second, peer examinations were conducted by involving two other researchers with a background in children's literature studies and Indonesian language education. The two colleagues examined the analysis rubric, scoring guidelines, and some samples of the principal researcher's assessment results. Their feedback is used to refine the rubric indicator's description, clarify the boundaries between score levels, and ensure consistent assessment results. This process supports objectivity and strengthens the credibility of the research findings.

Research boundaries are explicitly set to maintain the focus of the analysis and the validity of the findings. First, this study analyzes only folklore in Indonesian textbooks at the elementary school level because this subject is the only one that explicitly and systematically includes narrative texts in the curriculum. Second, the sample size was limited to three stories to allow for an in-depth narrative analysis, including the decomposition of structure, character functions, cultural symbols, and plot complexity, without sacrificing interpretive rigor. This limitation also acknowledges the limitations of the study, namely that the findings are not intended to be generalized to all forms of folklore presentation in primary education, but as preliminary studies that reveal the patterns and implications of simplification in depth.

4. Results

4.1. Narrative Simplification Pattern

In Table 3 of the score tabulation, the results of the analysis of three folktales that have been simplified and included in elementary school textbooks are presented: "*Darman and Darmin*," "*Persebaran Suku-Suku di Merauke*," and "*Legenda Putri Komodo*." The results of the analysis showed that the story "*Darman and Darmin*" obtained the highest total score (22 out of 28), while the other two stories, namely *"Persebaran Suku-Suku di Merauke*" (Distribution of Tribes in Merauke) and "Legenda Putri Komodo" (The Legend of the Komodo Princess), both obtained a score of 20. This score shows that although all three underwent simplification, the degree of reduction varied across aspects.

In more detail, the "story" aspect is maintained across all three stories. This is reflected in the relatively high score in this aspect (all stories score 4). This is due to the function of the setting as a

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marker of local identity in the context of folklore, which is considered important by the compilers of textbooks.

In contrast, the aspects of "number and role of figures" and "conflict and complexity of problems" exhibit the greatest levels of simplification. These two aspects in all stories score between 2 and 3. This score indicates a reduction in supporting figures and major conflicts. The elimination of this major conflict is most prominent in the "Legend of the Komodo Princess". The climax in the form of a fight between the brothers is eliminated. This makes the story more emotionally and dramatically fulfilling.

"Moral and cultural values" are still maintained in explicit and implicit forms. In some cases, such as in "Darman and Darmin", the moral message is no longer explicitly narrated at the end of the story, but is only implied through a comparison of the characters' behavior.

These findings suggest that the simplification process in primary school textbooks focuses on shortening the text or simplifying the language and the narrative layer. The simplification is seen in streamlining the plot structure, eliminating conflicts, and reducing the complexity of character development. As a result, stories that originally had internal dynamics and tensions became more linear and flat. Therefore, this simplification could reduce the reading experience that involves children's emotions, reasoning, and imagination. This condition shows that simplification is not only a technical-linguistic issue but also affects the construction of meaning in the text.

Although this strategy was carried out to adjust the text's readability level to students' cognitive capacity (pedagogical), these findings raise critical questions about its cultural and literacy consequences. The omission of complex narrative elements risks weakening the transmission of the cultural values inherent in folklore and limiting students' opportunities to practice understanding narrative structure. Thus, simplification without a supporting pedagogical strategy can undermine the role of folklore as a medium for developing narrative literacy and a means of internalizing cultural identity in children.

Table 3. Folklore Simplification Score Tabulation

Aspects	Darman & Darmin	Tribes in Merauke	Komodo dragon princess	Average
Flow Structure	3	2	3	2.67
Characterization	3	3	3	3.00
Number & Role of Characters	2	2	2	2.00
Story Setting	4	4	4	4.00
Language & Speaking Style	3	3	3	3.00
Moral & Cultural Values	4	3	2	3.00
Conflict & Complexity of Problems	3	3	3	3.00
Total Score	22	20	20	-

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4.2. Comparative Analysis of the Narrative Structure in "Darman and Darmin"

In Table 4, a comparison of the narrative structure of the story "Darman and Darmin" in two versions is presented: the complete version (Juhriah, 2016) and simplified versions (Verawaty & Zulqarnain, 2021). This comparison is based on five narrative stages — orientation, complication, climax, resolution, and coda —commonly used in narrative studies to map the story's structure.

The comparison results show that the textbook version undergoes significant shortening and simplification, especially at three important stages: climax, resolution, and coda.

At the orientation stage, both versions retain the introduction of the main characters, Darman and Darmin, along with an initial portrayal of their differences. However, the original version offers a more detailed orientation and vivid characterization. In contrast, the textbook version provides only a brief description, without exploring the atmosphere or the family values that accompany it.

The difference is even more pronounced at the complication stage. In the full version, the conflict unfolds as Darman steals and disturbs the villagers, while he continues to work hard and help his mother. In the textbook version, these complications are reduced to a normative narrative: Darman is described as a child who "often gets into trouble," but with no concrete examples or consequences for his actions.

The climactic stage is the part most affected by the simplification process. The full version shows the climactic conflict when Darman is arrested and thrown into prison. This climax shows the real consequences of bad behavior. However, in the textbook version, this climax is omitted entirely, so the storyline ends before the reader can experience the dramatic satisfaction of resolving the conflict.

Likewise, at the resolution stage. In the complete version, Darmin is shown as an exemplary child who is loved by the people and makes his mother happy, not in the textbook version. This causes Darmin's character to appear flat, without development or reward for his good behavior.

The level of coda that usually contains moral messages is also missing in the textbook version. The full version conveys the explicit mandate that goodwill will be repaid with goodwill and evil will receive punishment. In contrast, the textbook version does not convey the message directly, making the narrative more open and less reflective.

These findings show that simplified versions of folklore in primary school textbooks highlight the character's normative and static character, without adequate plot development or logical consequences of the character's actions. Characters are usually portrayed in black-and-white/good-bad, with no room for ambiguity, inner conflict, or the dynamics of character change. As a result, the storyline loses the narrative tension necessary to foster the child's ability to understand the cause-and-effect of actions in the story structure. This loss of complexity makes the story more like a one-way moral statement than a whole-fledged narrative experience.

This tendency has profound implications for the function of folklore as a medium for learning ethics and cultural literacy. When the story presents only a normative character, without a plot and consequences, the student is not prompted to reflect on the moral choices or cultural values in the story. In fact, this kind of cognitive and emotional engagement is important for building ethical reasoning and deep cultural appreciation. Thus, simplification that emphasizes too much role model without narration actually weakens folklore's role in forming moral sensitivity and cultural awareness in children.

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Table 4. Comparison of Darman-Darmin Folklore Narrative

Narrative Stages	Full Version	Textbook Version	Simplification Notes
Orientation	Darman and Darmin were introduced as siblings. Darman is described as lazy and grumpy; Darmin as diligent and obedient.	Direct introduction to two sibling characters with different characteristics.	The presentation of the setting and family dynamics is condensed, without a description of the atmosphere or the setting of the place.
Complications	Darman often caused trouble and stole. He harmed the villagers and caused problems. Darmin remained calm and worked hard to help his mother.	It is only mentioned that Darman is lazy and likes to make trouble; Darmin likes to help.	Details of the conflict are removed, leaving only a general character description. Darman's social conflicts in the community were eliminated.
Climax	Darman was arrested by residents for his actions and put in prison. Darmin received an award from the village.	There is no climax. The story stops after describing each other's behavior.	The most important part of building moral retribution is wholly removed. There were no real consequences for Darman's behavior.
Resolution	Darmin became an exemplary young man, and his mother was happy. The villagers are following the example of Darmin.	There is no resolution; The story is closed without further development.	Character resolution and narrative progression are omitted. The story stops abruptly.
Coda	It is a moral message that diligent and honest children will get a good return.	There is no explicit moral message, only implied.	The moral message is not explicitly written; it loses its reflective function for the child reader.

4.3. Comparative Analysis of the Narrative Structure in "Persebaran Suku-Suku di Merauke"

In Table 5, the results of the comparison of the narrative structure of the folklore *Persebaran Suku-Suku di Merauke* (Distribution of Tribes in Merauke) are presented in two versions, namely the complete version (Balai Bahasa Provinsi Papua, 2012) and simplified versions in primary school textbooks (Lestari & Zulqarnain, 2024). Comparisons were made using five main narrative stages: orientation, complications, climax, resolution, and coda. In general, the textbook version retains the

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outline of the storyline but significantly simplifies the depth of conflict, the nuances of local culture, and the dramatic intensity.

At the orientation stage, the full version introduces the main character (Tete) with his two dogs, who live in the forest. The setting and typical culture of Papua, including the use of local terms such as *befak* and *warak*, are introduced thickly. In the textbook version, the orientation is shortened, the main character is not named (Tete is omitted), and elements of local culture are not shown. This makes the opening of the story feel more generic.

The complication stage in the full version develops from Tete's curiosity about his dogs, who come home full. He followed them to a large tree. This marked the emergence of the initial conflict. The textbook version still retains this structure, but with a much more concise narrative and without the nuances of emotional tension.

Significant differences appear in the climactic stage. In the full version, Tete prepares to attack because he thinks there is a threat from a creature inside the tree. The tension increases as a sound from inside the tree indicates the presence of humans. This narrative builds a rich symbolic ethno-cultural conflict. In the textbook version, this conflict is muted: the main character opens a tree and meets a human directly, without tension or preparation for war, making the story safer for the child but less emotionally profound.

The resolution stage in both versions indicates the existence of a peace agreement. In the full version, the humans who emerge from the tree apologize and explain their origins. Tete wisely divided the territory according to the language they spoke. In the textbook version, this part is conveyed in a concise manner, namely that it is said that humans are scattered in different places. This shows that in textbooks, resolutions are portrayed as peace scenes, with little elaboration on the negotiation process or cultural considerations.

Finally, at the Koda stage, the full version affirms the moral and cultural message of linguistic and ethnic diversity as the basis for a peaceful and mutually respectful division of territory. In the textbook version, the coda is presented as final information, more descriptive than reflective, namely that humans end up living separately in their respective territories.

Based on these descriptions, the findings suggest that simplified versions of folklore in elementary school textbooks still retain the basic framework of the story, but are missing several important elements that make up the depth of their narrative. The dimension of conflict that was initially the main driver of the story's tension tends to be eliminated, local cultural symbols are reduced, and the reflective processes that usually arise through conflicting values in the story become limited. Stories that initially present social and cultural dynamics turn into a linear, merely descriptive-informative narrative. The shrinkage of these elements makes the story more structurally shaking, while remaining intact scrupulously.

Meanwhile, the presentation of this simpler version of the story makes it more accessible and appreciated by children's readers, especially regarding readability and clarity of message. However, this convenience is also accompanied by the loss of narrative power, which is crucial in shaping children's understanding of complex values such as tolerance, negotiation skills, and awareness of cultural identity. Without conflict, cultural symbols, and space for reflection, stories no longer serve as a safe space for children to explore differences, formulate attitudes, and negotiate values. Thus, simplification that focuses only on accessibility risks reduces the potential of folklore as a medium for forming social sensitivity and cultural awareness.

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Table 5. Comparison of Narratives of Folklore of the Distribution of Tribes in Merauke

Narrative Stages	Full Version	Elementary Textbook Version (Simplified)	Comparison Notes
Orientation	Tete was introduced as the first human living in *Befak*, accompanied by two dogs named *Nggarembu*—detailed background: Papuan forests and local traditions.	An unnamed man lives in the jungle of Papua, accompanied by two dogs named *Nggarembu*.	The simplification of cultural terms ("Tete", "*befak*") was eliminated. Onboarding is made more universal and neutral.
Complications	Tete was suspicious because the dog was full without him feeding it. Suspicion and resentment develop.	Same: men are suspicious because the dog is full.	The plot of events is still maintained, but without a deep reflection of the characters.
Climax	Tete followed the dog, hearing a sound from inside the *warak* tree. He went home, prepared for war (*war make-up*, weapons), and then returned to the tree in anger.	The man immediately followed the dog, heard a voice, then opened the tree and saw a man inside.	Important parts (war readiness, angry expressions, cultural symbols) are eliminated, and conflicts are made light.
Resolution	Tete was angry, the tree man apologized, then Tete divided the area according to language/tribe. Tete understands all languages.	The man asked and listened to the apology, then divided the territory according to the tribe.	Resolution is still there, but without strong emotions or spirituality.
Coda	The final narrative: the tree people live peacefully in their respective territories; the origin of the tribes in Merauke, the heritage of Tete.	The end of the narrative is similar: the tribes are scattered and live in different areas of Merauke.	The message remains, but the mythological and spiritual impression is drastically reduced.

4.4. Comparative Analysis of the Narrative Structure in "Legenda Putri Komodo"

Table 6 contains a comparison of the narrative structure of the story "The Legend of the Komodo Princess" in two versions: the full version titled The Story of the Dragon Princess (Mampuono, 2023)

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and simplified versions of the elementary textbooks (Kumalasari & Latifah, 2022). Generally, both versions raise the theme of brotherhood and harmony between humans and nature. However, the elementary textbook version underwent significant simplification, especially regarding conflict tension and emotional depth.

At the onboarding stage, the full version opens the story with an imaginative narrative. The Dragon Princess is depicted as a mythological creature living on Magic Island, married to Majo. This mythological and magical setting creates an atmosphere typical of Eastern folk tales. In the textbook version, the story's introduction is summarized into information that Princess Naga and Majo live on Komodo Island. Magical nuances and symbolic mentions such as "Magic Island" are omitted. This makes the story more imaginatively neutral.

The stages of complications in both versions are still the same, namely, the Dragon Princess gives birth to two children, one human (Gerong) and one Komodo dragon (Orah). They were then separated. However, the full version develops inner tension through the Dragon Princess's doubts and fears about her children's future. On the other hand, the textbook version only conveys that the children are raised separately, without depicting the emotional dilemma of the mother.

The climactic stage is the part most affected by the simplification process. In the full version, there is a dramatic conflict when Gerong and Orah grow up They fight each other because they do not recognize each other. This scene contains important symbolism about identity conflict, ignorance, and rejection of the "other". In the textbook version, this climax is completely omitted. The story goes straight to the meeting between the two characters without conflict. This makes the groove feel flat and minimal dynamics.,

The resolution stage in the full version describes the process of emotional reconciliation. After realizing they are brothers, Gerong and Orah reconcile and accept their fate. The textbook version condenses this process into instant awareness after the meeting, without any inner process or deep dialogue.

Finally, the Koda stage, in its full version, contains a promise between humans and Komodo dragons to coexist and an invitation to protect nature. This message is conveyed in a reflective and meaningful way. In the textbook version, the coda comes as a normative sentence that "*they live in peace and take care of each other*," without symbolic elaboration or a broader ecological dimension.

Thus, the findings of this study show that the simplification process in elementary school textbooks tends to remove various dramatic and symbolic elements that were initially the main strength of folklore. The tension between events, the ambiguity of the characters, and the cultural symbols that represent local values are often omitted to create a more concise and direct narrative. The removal of these elements causes the originally layered structure of the story to shrink into a flat linear plot, with no room for the reader to interpret meaning deeply or experience complex aesthetic experiences. In other words, the story shifts from a reflective narrative form to a mere exposure to instructive information.

While this simplification strategy is aligned with the pedagogical goal of improving readability and ease of understanding for elementary school students, it carries significant risks in the form of a loss of narrative richness and depth of cultural value contained in its full version. Without dramatic elements that provoke empathy and cultural symbols affirming local identity, students miss opportunities to develop critical narrative literacy skills and potentially fail to build an emotional and intellectual connection to their cultural heritage. As a result, simplification that overemphasizes the didactic aspect can indirectly erode the function of folklore as a medium of value inheritance and the formation of cultural resilience.

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Table 6. Comparison of the Narrative of the Legend of the Komodo Princess Folklore

Narrative Stages	Full Version: *The Story of the Dragon Princess*	Elementary Version: *The Legend of the Komodo Princess*	Simplification Notes
Orientation	The Dragon Princess lives on the Magic Island, is married to Majo, and is depicted in a mythological setting and a magical atmosphere.	Princess Naga and Majo live on Komodo Island, briefly introduced.	The cultural and magical setting is reduced, and the narrative goes straight to the family context.
Complications	Putri gave birth to two children: Gerong (human) and Orah (Komodo dragon). Because they are different forms, they are separated.	It is the same: giving birth to two children in different forms, then being separated.	The core of the complications is maintained, but not emotionally developed.
Climax	Gerong and Orah grew up fighting without knowing they were brothers. Identity and emotional conflicts occur.	There is no fight or tension; they grow in different places.	The conflict-filled climax is omitted, and the story becomes flat without tension.
Resolution	After the fight, they realized a blood relationship. There was a touching reconciliation.	They met and immediately recognized each other as brothers.	Resolutions are made more concise, without emotional processes or relationship dynamics.
Coda	They promise to keep the peace between humans and Komodo dragons, a symbol of nature conservation and diversity.	They live in peace and take care of each other.	Core values are retained, but ecological and symbolic messages are simplified.

Based on the analysis of the narrative structure of the three folktales, it was shown that the simplification process in elementary school textbooks was carried out in a consistent pattern: reducing conflict, shortening narratives, and reducing the depth of emotions and cultural symbolism. This simplification does make the story easier for children to understand. Nevertheless, simultaneously, the simplification also obscures the literary power and important narrative values contained in the full version.

The climactic stages, resolution, and coda are the parts that undergo the most pruning or omission. The loss of a significant conflict (such as a fight between characters or social tension) causes the narrative to lose its dramatic power and reflective value. Climax should be an important part of

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character education through folklore. As a result, students receive only normative and flat images of good or bad, without a cause-and-effect context or emotional dynamics that can foster empathy and deeper understanding.

On the other hand, the setting and basic characterization are retained in the simplified version, albeit with minimal depth. This reflects the efforts to continue to introduce local cultural elements. However, the setting and characterization are not always accompanied by the conveyance of cultural nuances, spirituality, or the symbolism of local wisdom inherent in the complete version.

A worrying peak is the loss of the structure of the coda, which is the part where moral messages, cultural values, or final reflections are usually conveyed explicitly. In the context of basic education, the absence of a coda causes stories to stop without emphasis on value, undermining the potential of stories as affective and social learning tools.

Thus, narrative simplification in elementary school textbooks is directed mainly at achieving cognitive functions, namely the ability to read and understand the content of stories literally. Folklore that was originally rich in conflict, moral ambiguity, and cultural symbols is reduced to a straightforward narrative emphasizing clarity of information and completeness of content. This approach does support the pedagogical goal of ensuring basic readability and comprehension for early childhood students. However, at the same time, it also removes the potential for stories to build emotional engagement, empathy, and ethical reasoning. In its simplified form, folklore becomes more like an informative text than an evocative narrative experience.

This tendency leaves room for critical discussion for curriculum developers and teaching material writers about balancing pedagogical demands and preserving the richness of folklore narratives. Without appropriate interventions, the presentation of folklore that is only oriented towards cognitive function risks ignoring the affective and critical dimensions that are important for the formation of character and cultural awareness of students. Thus, the enrichment of teaching materials needs to consider pedagogical strategies that emphasize the ease of reading and encourage students to reflect, feel, and assess morally, so that folklore's educational and cultural functions can go hand in hand.

5. Discussion

The simplification process in elementary school textbooks is understood as a positive pedagogical strategy. This process aims to tailor the story to early childhood's cognitive level and literacy (Anggraini et al., 2022). However, the results of this study show that simplification does not always have a neutral impact. Rather, when done systematically without considering narrative structure and cultural context, simplification can lead to the loss of the essential dimensions that make up the identity of folklore (Fadhli, 2020; Safitri, 2024). One of the most significant consequences is the deculturalization, which is the release of narratives from the cultural, geographical, and symbolic roots that accompany them (Mantra & Gana, 2018; Masykuroh, 2020; Sperry & Sperry, 2021).

These findings challenge the simplification benefit claims made by Javourey et al. (2022) and Siregar & Purbani (2024). Both studies prove that simplification improves readability and comprehension, especially for beginner or weak readers. However, they focus on linguistic and cognitive aspects, without evaluating their impact on cultural values and narrative structures. This study shows that when simplification is only directed at cognitive efficiency, it risks becoming a form of deculturalization, eliminating the symbolic and cultural elements essential for forming children's identity. Simplification is also criticized by Pellicer (2024), who warns of the loss of the transformative power of fairy tales due to the elimination of symbolic language.

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In addition, the findings of this study also expand on the findings of Lammert & C. Godfrey (2023), which highlight the practice of censoring risky topics in children's literature. In the context of textbook versions of folklore, this censorship appears in the form of the elimination of conflict, symbolic violence, or ambivalent values, which are precisely the core dynamics of folklore. This makes stories lose their critical function to trigger moral reflection, as idealized in the critical literacy approach (Turner et al., 2023). These findings align with Junaidi et al. (2022), who affirm that when folklore is presented intact, it can increase students' social intelligence. This means the presentation of folklore in an oversimplified form hinders its socio-educational potential.

Folklore serves not only as entertainment or an introduction to moral values, but also as a representation of the local world, i.e., a community's social, historical, and spiritual landscape (Mantra & Gana, 2018). In the full version, stories such as "*The Distribution of Tribes in Merauke*" and "*The Legend of the Komodo Princess*" contain many local terms, distinctive geographical references, and symbols that are only meaningful in specific cultural contexts. However, the simplified version in the textbook systematically removes those elements (Tarchi et al., 2019). The names of the characters are generalized, the setting is omitted or not mentioned, and the typical vocabulary of the region is replaced with a standard equivalent that is considered more "general" or "neutral" (Fadhli, 2020; Frausel et al., 2021).

As a concrete example, the story "*Distribution of Tribes in Merauke*" in the full version refers to the character as "Tete" and uses local terms such as "*befak*" and "*warak*". This mention not only serves as a cultural marker, but also forms a typical Papuan mythological setting. However, the textbook version removes all such terms. This action makes folklore seem no longer rooted in Papua, but instead turns into a generic narrative about the "man from the tree" that can happen anywhere. This release of local context is not only a loss of information but also a loss of identity (Safitri, 2024; Scott et al., 2020).

In structural narrative theory, as Greimas explains, removing symbolic elements in a story cannot be considered mere narrative saving. The narrative consists not only of what is told, but also how and from whose point of view the story is being told (Lenninger, 2021; Wenno et al., 2021). By trimming the *duration, focalization, and semantic depth* contained in the full version, textbooks have replaced children's readers' experience of contact with local wisdom (Shirazi et al., 2021) with the consumption of a universal moral story that is flat and homogeneous. The absence of symbolic elements of the narrative can lead to a loss of meaningful dimensions for children in understanding the cultural and social context from which the story originates (Bitetti et al., 2019; Pathmalingam et al., 2022)

Deculturalization also occurs at the level of functional narrative structures. Based on Vladimir Propp's theory (1968), Traditional folklore has a specific pattern of function that reflects social actions and societal values. However, the elementary textbook version leaves only the initial function (character introduction) and the final function (resolution), without showing the crucial process of conflict, struggle, or character transition. In "Darman and Darmin", the process of redeeming good characters and the fall of evil characters is eliminated. As a result, the moral value that emerges does not come from the structure of the action, but from the direct statement of the narrator. This makes the story more dogmatic than narrative (Fernandes, 2018; Sofyanto & Kanzunnudin, 2023; Suprapti et al., 2024).

More than just simplifying texts, this practice also implies equalizing cultural values. Story simplification includes linguistic contraction and structural shrinkage. However, if it is not accompanied by cultural sensitivity, simplification will only create universal folktales without cultural roots and loss of local nuances. While maintaining locality, folklore is part of the formation of national identity. This is what becomes a paradox in education: folklore is taught to instill love for the

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homeland (Murdianto, 2023; Sawita et al., 2024; Stefani et al., 2024), but the form conveyed erases the local identity in which the story grows.

One of the main functions of folklore is to convey value through cultural symbols and metaphors, not just through explicit messages. In "*The Legend of the Komodo Princess*", the metaphor of humans and Komodo dragons as siblings contains ecological and spiritual reflections on the relationship between humans and nature. However, the elementary school version only conveys the message of "living in peace and taking care of each other,". This eliminates metaphors about tension, miracles, and moral dilemmas. This release of metaphors takes away children's opportunities to build imagination and empathy for the world's complexity (Bastet & Houlbrook, 2023; Harrison, 2016; Ismaili & Neziri, 2024).

In short, what happened was not just a technical trimming of the text, but a change in the form and meaning of the narrative. Folklore in elementary school textbooks became light and understandable. However, on the other hand, it also becomes flat and loses depth. Children can understand "what's going on" but are not invited to feel "why and how it is important." In the long run, this simplification can produce a generation of technically literate readers, but poor in cultural awareness and historical depth (Graff, 2017; Rand & Morrow, 2021; Sperry & Sperry, 2021).

This condition shows that elementary school textbooks are not only pedagogical instruments, but also an arena for the production of cultural discourse. When folklore is composed and modified for formal educational purposes, the narrative undergoes a kind of ideological mediation that cannot be ignored. The versions that appear in the textbook are not neutral. The textbook version of folklore reflects only confident choices of values and representations. If this process is not carefully monitored, textbooks can become agents of cultural homogenization, not nurturers of diversity.

Therefore, textbook compilers, curriculum, and child literacy developers need to consider the balance between pedagogical accessibility and narrative-cultural integrity. Instead of avoiding local terms or complex plots, narratives can be modified with careful adaptation strategies: for example, inserting a glossary, contextual illustrations, or story introductions that help children understand their symbolic meaning and geographical setting. A good education is not what makes everything easy; it is one that invites students to grow and understand complexity in a directed and fun way.

Pedagogical Implications

The simplification of folklore is intended to facilitate understanding for children, especially elementary school students who are still developing reading and narrative thinking skills (Breit-Smith et al., 2016; Robbins, 2005). Simple language, light conflict, and linear plots allow children to appreciate the story without too much cognitive burden (Terreni et al., 2021).

However, on the other hand, this simplification should not be understood as a single solution, let alone considered sufficient to transmit cultural values (Moxnes, 2006). This study shows that textbook versions of folklore omit a distinctive cultural context. Without additional pedagogical strategies, elementary school children can absorb stories superficially and fail to understand the values, symbols, and local wisdom that are the substance of folklore (D. M. Dewi, 2019). In other words, ease of access is not automatically proportional to the depth of understanding.

The findings of this study show that textbook versions of folklore in Indonesia have experienced significant cultural contexts, ranging from geographical settings, local symbols, to socio-historical values. Eliminating this cultural context on the grounds of simplification can improve the readability of folklore for elementary school students. As a result, students tend to absorb stories superficially as normative moral stories without recognizing the local values, symbols, and wisdom that become the substance of folklore. This finding aligns with Kutin's (2024) warning that folklore loses its aesthetic and educational value when reduced to mere text because the pedagogical power of

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folklore lies in its cultural context and texture, not just text. In this context, textbook folklore versions fail to present a complete cultural experience, thus losing the potential to form empathy and student engagement.

This practice also contrasts with the findings of (Rech & Wolffenbüttel, 2025) in Brazil, which showed that integrating folklore with the cultural realities of students can enrich educational practices and increase the relevance of learning. On the other hand, in Indonesia, the elimination of cultural elements distances the story from the child's life experience, weakening its affective relevance. These findings also reflect a pattern that Okumuş & Arslan (2024) and Karagoz & Çakman (2023) reported in Turkey: removing cultural heritage elements in textbooks can lead to a fragmented understanding of cultural identity. This loss of context has a direct impact on the formation of student identity, as Lisowska (2024) asserts that regional folklore plays an important role in instilling a sense of belonging and cultural identity in students in Poland.

In addition to weakening identity formation, eliminating cultural context decreases student engagement. This study shows that textbook versions of stories trimmed with conflicts, symbols, and cultural values become monotonous and do not arouse students' curiosity. This finding aligns with the findings of Kusumah & Yani Fitriyani (2024) in the case of Joko Poleng's story, where the presentation of stories that are poor in context decreases interest and results in superficial understanding. Therefore, these findings support the calls of Zahrika & Andaryani (2023) and Ismaili & Neziri (2024) to develop a culture-based curriculum that aligns folklore with local identity and presents contextual learning experiences. Thus, this study emphasizes that the simplification of folklore in textbooks cannot be separated from strengthening the cultural context; Without it, folklore loses its affective, aesthetic, and functional role in shaping students' cultural identity.

The implication is that teachers and curriculum makers need to apply a complementary and contextual pedagogical approach. Simplification of folklore should be accompanied by verbal mentoring, such as class discussions that relate the story to the original cultural setting (Quý & Phương, 2023), explain the meaning of a local term, or even retell the full version orally with the teacher's guidance (Adomat, 2009). This kind of complement helps literal understanding and reinforces the affective and cultural dimensions of learning.

Additionally, complementary texts such as glossaries of cultural terms or full-length stories can also be an effective alternative (Fiorentino & Howe, 2004). Children can be introduced to two versions of the story: the textbook and the full version. Then, it is elaborated on in class as a cultural reflection. This strategy encourages dual literacy: not only reading literacy, but also cultural and reflective literacy (Ribeiro, 2016).

Another important thing is the existence of cultural introductions or contextual notes in textbooks. When a simplified story loses cultural symbols, the introductory narrative can bridge students to the world from which the story originated. This introduction does not have to be long, but it is enough to show that the story originated in a particular region, has a specific meaning in the community, and contains local wisdom that deserves appreciation (Cao, 2024; Lwin & Abbott, 2016).

These findings differ paradigmatically from Javourey et al. (2022) and Siregar & Purbani's (2024) studies, which emphasized simplification as a pedagogical tool to improve readability and comprehension. The two studies positioned simplification as a prerequisite for novice readers to access the material, but did not examine the affective and critical consequences of the loss of story complexity. On the other hand, the findings of this study are closer to the position of Turner et al. (2023), who affirm the need for children's literature to be selected not only because of its readability, but because of its ability to spark critical literacy and ethical discussions on complex issues. This means that simplification without a supporting pedagogical strategy weakens the potential of folklore as a medium for forming critical reasoning.

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The narratives from Johnson et al. (2025), Nation et al. (2022), Simpson & Cremin (2022), and Cavanagh (2023) confirm that the goal of children's literary education goes far beyond just readability. Children's literacy should build critical thinking, cultural awareness, and social justice, and expose them to complex vocabulary and syntax that enrich their language development. They also emphasized the importance of presenting challenging and culturally diverse texts so that students can connect literacy with their social reality and develop empathy and awareness of social injustice.

In addition, the results of this study also show that without cultural introduction or oral discussion as a companion, students cannot capture the original cultural values that have been removed in the process of simplification. This reinforces Pellicher's (2024) statement about the risk of losing the transformative power of fairy tales due to the removal of symbolism, while echoing the findings of Junaidi et al. (2022) that folklore is actually effective in increasing social intelligence when presented in its entirety and contextually. In other words, simplification does facilitate initial understanding, but without a reflective pedagogical design, simplification risks lowering the affective, social, and cultural outcomes of children's literacy learning.

Without these approaches, simplified folklore would be nothing more than a simple moral text, containing lessons about good and evil, but poor in experience, symbols, and reflections. Children can get to know fictional characters like Putri Komodo or Darman, but do not know where they come from, what values they represent, and how the story lives in society. This makes simplification a pedagogical practice that is prone to losing the content of cultural education if it is not critically controlled.

6. Conclusion

Overall, this study shows that the simplification of folklore in elementary school textbooks has consequences more than just linguistic simplification. This process affects the narrative structure, removes important functions in the storyline, and reduces the symbolic richness that represents local cultural values. The analysis of the three folktales shows that the simplified version tends to lose the geographical orientation, cultural metaphor, and complexity of the characters' actions that are characteristic of the folk narrative. Simplification does make it easier for children to understand, but if done without a contextual pedagogical strategy, folklore risks losing its educational power and transformative function. Stories have become more universal, but they have lost their local roots, which should be a medium for strengthening students' national identity and cultural literacy. Therefore, in preparing and adapting folklore in textbooks, the balance between readability and cultural integrity must be considered. A careful, collaborative, and pedagogical curatorial approach is needed so that folklore remains a vehicle for value education and the preservation of the cultural wealth of the archipelago in the classroom.

7. Suggestion

This research provides advice to several parties. First, for writers and textbook compilers, it is necessary to consider that folklore is a literacy tool and a means of cultural inheritance. Therefore, efforts to simplify folklore must be done carefully. Instead of omitting locality, textbook authors and compilers should include a simplified glossary of localities from folklore. Second, teachers and education practitioners must develop contextually-based learning based on folklore. Simplified folklore should be used as a bridge to deeper learning, not as the only source of learning. Third, for the next researcher, it is expected to explore simplified folklore from textbooks across levels and other regions more deeply. With a comparative study of simplified folklore, a comprehensive study was produced on the impact of the simplification of folklore from various perspectives. Finally, policymakers need to consider the importance of accessibility based on authenticity. Regulations on simplifying folklore must involve literary experts, anthropologists, educators, and local culture practitioners.

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Declarations

Author Contributions. Zulfa Fahmy: Carrying out all research procedures starting from concept development, literature review, data collection and processing, article writing. Authors have read and approved the published version of the article
Teguh Supriyanto: guides, review, and revises manuscripts according to their field of expertise
Agus Nuryatin: guide, reviews, and revise manuscripts according to their field of expertise
Yusro Edy Nugroho: guide, review, and revise manuscripts according to their field of expertise

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Ethical Approval. This study did not involve human subjects or sensitive personal data. Ethical approval was not required. However, all data used in this study respect privacy and follow academic citation standards.

Data Availability Statement. All data generated and analyzed during this study, including textual materials and evaluation rubric, are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Acknowledgments. During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used Scite.ai and Scispace.com in order to explore relevant scholarly ideas and compare the alignment of the study's findings with existing literature. The author(s) declare that they reviewed and edited the final output as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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