

Malay Digital Folklore: Using Multimedia to Educate Children Through Storytelling

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In the early centuries of human evolution, the information to express cultures, social contents, ideas, values, and the society itself were primarily developed by means of expression. This information was represented in the form of classical, signs, figures, traditional manuscripts and performing arts. On the other hand, it becomes less important or is even forgotten, especially by the younger generation, to understand the origin and the significance of this rich local content. Apparently, there are infrequent and minimal efforts given to bring back and preserve these local contents. Storytelling is frequently chosen to reflect way of life and thinking of the people during that era. This research selects one of the most famous groups of folklore in Malaysia namely the Malay folklore to critically understand and explore the characteristics, elements and functions. It covers seven types of the Malay folklore namely: (a) "Penglipurlara," (b) moral, (c) myths, (d) comical, (e) animal, (f) knights, and (g) adventure and mystery.

The aim of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of storytelling based on the local contents of Malay folklore. This study will look at current attempt to represent old contents with the present medium of visualisation based on multimedia capabilities and technologies such as three-dimensional (3D), interactivity, nonlinearity, Internet and web education contents. According to Boston (1997), access the to the World Wide Web (WWW or Web) is a victory for educational opportunity equity for groups who are disadvantaged to achieve the goal of equal outcomes. A

few selected students' works will be introduced as a result from this study. It will also revise the structure of storytelling in the first form of literature, especially on the social aspects of the Malay society. Animation has its strength to create an effective learning environment. This research will demonstrate animation as one of the medium to represent local contents. Wetzel, Radtke, and Stern (1994) explained, a variety of characteristics are used to make animations uniquely effective for instruction. It highlights the structure, procedure and narrative elements as the foundation to understand and represent old literature styles using multimedia technology. It is hoped that this framework will provide a guide for better multimedia development of local folklore and the development for digital content creation. The authors also believe that presenting material in an interactive manner is an effective technique for making learning and education process more memorable.

Records of the traditional Malay literature refer to the Indian and Islamic culture. It began with PreIndian era, which used verbal form as its medium and mainly in Sanskrit as well as old Malay language. The Indians then developed this verbal form into prose and poetry representations. The transition became more prominent when Indian literature is combined with the Islamic's verbal and written form known as lingua franca (the current Malay language). Some of the Indian (Hindu) epic representations are extensively used today in theatrical performances such as Mahabarata and Ramayana. The prominent features are shown in two types of plays namely noble and commoner. The former is being developed and represented in written form telling stories of the palace society (king, deputies, ministers, and aristocrats). The latter, on the other hand, tells the stories of villagers' activities (i.e. the "marhaen") that are widely expressed by common people.

CATEGORIES OF MALAY FOLKLORE

The Malay folklore can be categorised in three different forms. They are myths which consist of etiological and explanatory forms, legends, which is more a supernatural belief and "Penglipurlara" story which covers moral, beast, and comical stories where they happened in any world and at any time (Table 1).

Table 1
Summary of the Characterisation of the Malay Folklore

Form	Belief	Era	Venue	Criteria	Main Actors
Myth	Facts	Old era	Another world, Old world	Holy	Non-human, maiden, culture hero
Legend	Facts	New era	Today's world	Worldly or Holy	Human and Super-human
"Penglipurlara" story, Moral, Beast, Comical	Facts	Any time	Any world	Worldly	Human and Non-human

Based on the case studies summarised in Table 1, the authors outline several important features of Malay folklore:

- The literature is represented in a simple manner (analogies, symbolism, rhymes, idioms, and proverbs) and often relates to local content (i.e., past, present, and future).
- The commoners' literature is known to be the oldest form of representation (i.e., exists in all ethnic groups) in which is has no definite structure of writing (in prompt to).
- Almost all Malay folklore productions are developed on a nonprofit making basis, primarily to cater to the common interests of the commoners and aristocrats.

The Malay folklores can be categorized into seven types, namely:

1. *Folklore of "Penglipurlara"*: This type of story is the most common verbal form of expression due to the fact that it possesses unique qualities that differentiate itself from other common literature. This sense of "uniqueness" lies not only on the storyline but also on the narrator and the way in which he or she tells the story. The stories of "Penglipurlara" are usually derived from Roman classics that contain elements of adventure (Hamid, 1986). Some of the best productions are Hikayat Malim Dewa, Hikayat Malim Deman, Hikayat Anggun Cik Tunggal, Hikayat Terung Pipit, and Hikayat Raja Muda.

2. *Folklore of Myths*: It is known as “stories of the origin,” which combines various folklore beliefs (sacred). Characters are normally developed to represent gods and fairies. According to Danandjaja (1986) the events are believed to have happened in the past and no longer happening in the present world. Among the great myths are Naga Tasik Chini and Gunung Jerai.
3. *Folklore of Moral Values*: The term “moral values” means a folklore story that has a didactic element (e.g., contains a lot of political or moral messages). This folklore is usually targeted at children and the younger generation and deals with moral, lifestyle, social, cultural and religious issues. Unlike the “Penglipurlara,” the structure is simple with a few characters that often represent villagers and the society. Among the well-known stories are Si Tanggang, Batu Belah Batu Bertangkup, and Bawang Putih Bawang Merah.
4. *Folklore of Comical*: According to Danandjaja (1986), the comical stories invoked humour and laughter for those who tell, or listen to the stories. In fact, this illusion is either developed in the form of traditional (e.g., Pak Pandir) or contemporary comical folklore (i.e., Pak Belalang).
5. *Folklore of Animal*: According to Aarne (1964), animal stories are a very popular Malay literacy genre. The main protagonist is animal that can speak and think like a human being, particularly Hikayat Sang Kancil, Anjing and Bayang-bayang, as well as Ayam dan Kambing.
6. *Folklore of Knights*: The key purpose of these stories is to implant a sense of patriotism. The chosen idols tend to be prominent and they have strong characteristics, which relate to local epic such as Raja Haji, Tuk Janggut, Tuk Perak, and Tuk Dogol.
7. *Folklore of Adventure and Mystery*: Stories in this category encourage the young to travel and find new experiences. Some elements of superstitions (e.g., ghosts and devils) are seldom associated to explain the actuality of odd happenings in our lives. Among the acclaimed stories are Dukun Kapal, Sang Kelembai, Hantu Pontianak, and Langsuir.

STORYTELLING MEDIUM

According to Windstedt (1968), by referring to what happened in the past, the medium of which storytelling was used was very limited especially because it was spread verbally. It is undeniable that the second medium can be found in writings and pictures, as proven by those found on the many cave walls in Perak, Malaysia. According to Taib (1991), folklore at that time

has their own followers and worshippers, be it the ones who entertained the listeners, or the “witch-doctors” who apparently “strengthened” certain events or functions. The categories of medium lie in two parts:

- The active carriers of tradition. It is named as such because the narrators had to memorise, learn, and retell the stories to the society.
- The passive carriers of tradition. This applies to those members of the society who only hired the narrators and listened to the stories told.

Today, folklore materials are only found in libraries and places where literature analysis is made. Efforts on preserving it are still minimal, and often reproduced (edited and simplified) in conventional ways such as books and magazines for children.

REPRODUCING FOLKLORE IN ANIMATION MEDIUM

The new convergence of technology has promised a lot of possibilities and new insights that has never before made possible especially in terms of interactivity, animation, information technology, Internet, and multimedia. This new medium allows the user to become proactive in learning, exploring, and searching for informative contents. Like others, the attempt to preserve the Malay folklore is essential to ensure effectiveness in presenting information while satisfying the fact that the content would be easier to understand as well as encourage the users in gaining information.

According to Mankiewicz (1978), this can be seen in the Disney Animation Studio, whereby they have taken steps to produce some western folktales to educate and at the same time entertain their children. In a wider scope, animation is not only for children but also for adults. This is referring to the psychological proclamation that animation can be viewed as “light” entertainment materials as they are often humorous and amusing. As a consequence, the authors believe it is reasonable to choose animation as one of the multimedia elements for reproducing old contents; this is because it has great potential to attract the growing interests of the knowledge society. This selection is a part of multimedia elements and it will cover 2D-cel animation and 3D animation.

METHODOLOGY

In this research, six animated stories were analysed in which four are local and two are foreign productions.

These four local animated stories are:

1. Kluang Man
2. Anak-anak Sidek
3. Usop Sontorian
4. Silat Legenda

While the other two foreign animated stories are:

1. Luxo Jr.
2. Mickey Mouse

By referring to these six animated titles, the authors have listed five characteristics for analysis. The characteristics are:

1. Storytelling—this will cover storyline and plot of the story, how successful and beneficial the story to the audience.
2. Message—the effectiveness of conveying the message is very crucial for each story. As a result, the authors include it as apart of the characteristics for analysis.
3. Character—this will identify how many characters involved and also define the characterisation for each character
4. Principles of animation—to analyse how each animation implement its principles. The principles of animation are categorised as squash and stretch, timing, anticipation, staging, follow through, overlapping action, straight ahead and Pose-to-pose action, slow in and out, arc, exaggeration, secondary action, and appeal.
5. Contents—It refers to the whole structure of the story including culture, setting, environment and overall concept of the story.

All five criteria have been critically observed and analysed. To accomplish this observation and analysis, the authors have conducted a survey based on a questionnaire. This questionnaire consists of 20 related questions and uploaded on the intranet web server (<http://pesona.mmu.edu.my/~izani>) as an auto generated survey form. The server is opened for one month (January to February 2000) for data collection and its web address

has been distributed to the Film Animation students of Faculty of Creative Multimedia, Multimedia University. It is essential to choose students from this faculty due to the students' specialisation in the field of animation and their deep understanding of the chosen subject matter. Finally, almost more than 100 respondents have given good responses and answers to the distributed questionnaire. For the findings of this research, the authors have selected necessary information for the final analysis. A comparative study was also conducted to study and understand the effectiveness of conveying the message. For this section, six short clips (between 10 to 15 minutes) were captured and attached to the survey form. The respondents were required to fill in the form by giving opinions and comparative points for review. The selected essential points were analysed and concluded in the message review section.

THE RESULTS

Storytelling

The analysis has exposed that the local storytelling (simple narrative) is prevailing to draw viewers attention as shown in Kluang Man and Anak-anak Sidek compare to Usop Sontorian or Silat Lagenda which use a contemporary approach (imagination). The animation of Anak-anak

Sidek and Kluang Man has an advantage as it uses local folklore (local hero) as the main storyline (Figure 1). Despite the interesting fact of combining both the futuristic world and the old Malacca Sultanate in Silat Lagenda, the structure becomes unnatural due to the rather disproportionate exaggeration of 2D and the 3D animation mediums.

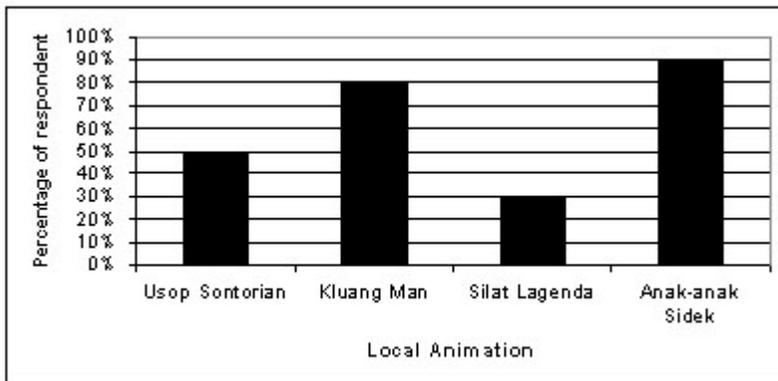


Figure 1. Statistic of the most popular local animation based on storytelling

Message

Stories with values play a very significant role to control the audience. The result (Figure 2) has shown that Mickey Mouse dominates this through several techniques of narrative structures. The messages in Mickey Mouse are understandable. Its objective is to teach and entertain as well as putting local culture under the limelight. The message of Luxo Jr is humorous and lightly entertaining. It also manages to convey the messages in the form of childlike behaviour through the expressions of emotions. In the local animation, Anak-anak Sidek, it has its own message in every series, which is more towards teaching and motivating children. These messages have moral values and make up an important asset in educating the younger generation. Meanwhile, although Silat Lagenda's time setting is futuristic, it still conveys the message that old heritage should be preserved regardless of time or eras. This is unlike Usop Sontorian, which has unambiguous message, which includes a universal advice. It appears to adopt the simplicity and sense of "locality" contained in the common literature.

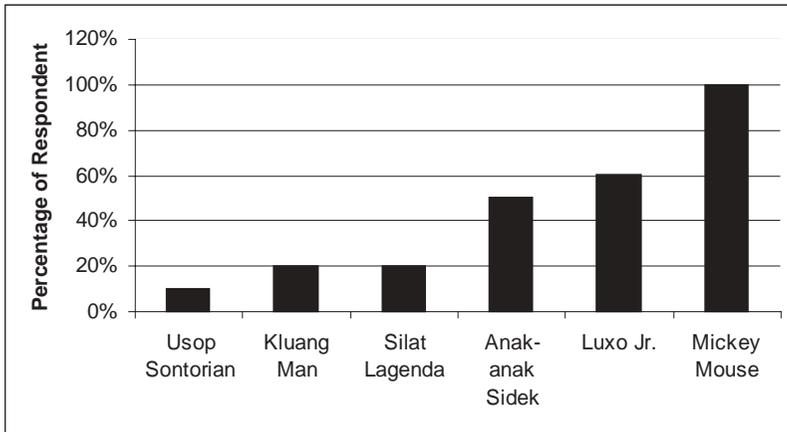


Figure 2. Priority on the message in storytelling

Character

Developing characters based on local content could be a strong element to establish point of interest. In this research, Usop Sontorian and Anak-anak Sidek represented quite a distinct feature compared to Kluang Man and

Silat Lagenda, which used a more futuristic element (i.e., western comic-like). Among the popular characters in Usop Sontorian are Usop, Kim, and Ravi, the combination of three main races (Malay, Chinese, and Indian). Anak-anak Sidek are characters based on actual life people like Misbun Sidek, Razif Sidek, Jalani Sidek, and Rashid Sidek, but these characters are simplified by using their nicknames during childhood. The main characters in Kluang Man are Kluang Man, Tiong Man, and Aishah. The cogency of characters distinguishes each character. In Silat Lagenda, the development of characters is based on the analysis done on Hang Tuah and his friends (Jebat, Kasturi, Lekir, & Lekiu), although the characters lack detail in their real characteristics. Characters in Mickey Mouse and Luxo Jr are developed from the beginning of the industry and have become a trademark, in addition to already being accepted internationally.

Principles of Animation Applied

It can be clearly seen that local animation efforts lack principles of animation, primarily on the timing and weight. In contrast, the western animations have applied almost all the principles that substantially help to convey the message (Table 2).

Table 2
Analysis of Criteria

Principles	Usop Sontorian	Kluang Man	Silat Lagenda	Anak-anak Sidek	Luxo Jr	Mickey Mouse
Storytelling	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Character	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Local Contents	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Squash & Stretch				Yes	Yes	Yes
Timing			Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Anticipation		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
Staging	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Follow through overlapping action				Yes	Yes	Yes
Straight ahead action and Pose-to-pose action				Yes	Yes	Yes
Slow in and out					Yes	Yes
Arc				Yes	Yes	Yes
Exaggeration					Yes	Yes
Secondary action					Yes	Yes
Appeal		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Usop Sontorian

Looking from the principles of animation's point of view, the characters are unconvincing because many of the principles are not well applied in the story. The usage of typical camera work and lack of good staging make the story mediocre entertainment. The most apparent weakness can be perceived from the timing factor and the "stiffness" of the characters' movements. Extracted from the respondents' views, many agreed that this series of animation is weak.

Kluang Man

The bleak applications of the principles that can be detected are the timing factor and the stiff movement again. There are some efforts in exploring camera movement but here it is still using typical staging. Through close analysis and interviews, there is little application of the principles. Also, there is the "awkward" combination of 3D and 2D mediums that mar the structure of the story hence, the dull visual effect.

Silat Legenda

Basic principles such as timing and the character movement become the main problems in this animation. Good camera work, staging, and other principles appear abandoned, although they prove to produce better animations than the ones previously mentioned (Kluang Man and Usop Sontorian). Also, the 3D and 2D elements are not matched when combined.

Anak-anak Sidek

This is a good example for a local animation story where the principles of animation are applied. Camera work is not a typical approach and staging is very good especially in terms of angle shot that clearly shows the director's creativity. However, some of the movements still look rigid and there is a lack of minor details that can bring the characters to life; but this animation deserves some credit.

Mickey Mouse

Where Disney studio and Mickey Mouse are concerned, the applications of principles are inarguably present. This is due to the fact that Walt Disney himself was an animator, so he understood animation better. Mickey Mouse has a very good staging and camera manipulation. In addition, Disney's animators, who have years of experience, have worked out the principles, and their works make suitable reference with respect to the technical aspect.

Luxo Jr.

Based on John Lasseter's experience as a traditional animator from Disney Studio, this animation is full of its principles. Camera work is used effectively to support the visual and the staging is very meaningful. Clearly, they have taken advantage of the principles. This is apparent in the injection of emotions and feelings into these abstract object-turned-characters.

Local/ Folklore Contents Applied

The research has shown that local animations used common literature instead of local folklore (Table 3). This is similar to Luxo Jr. as it used contemporary storytelling. Unlike both, Disney approached local content that is influenced from traditional culture of cowboys and Red Indians.

Table 3
Local/Folklore Contents Applied

Stories	Local/Folklore Contents Applied
Usop Sontorian	<p>It is without dispute that the local contents are significant, especially in terms of the culture, setting and environment of the village.</p> <p>The story also does not go far beyond the usual events and happenings.</p> <p>In terms of folklore content, no elements of this are taken as the ground for this republication although the purpose is to entertain and educate.</p>
Kluang Man	<p>It is solely local and revolves around the settings of town, cities and villages. Contemporary culture is also prominent in this story.</p> <p>There is no folklore content as it is imaginative and does not hold on to classic folklore.</p>
Silat Lagenda	<p>Two perspectives apply to Silat Lagenda because there are the futuristic and the Malacca Sultanate setting in this story. Where local contents are concerned (the Malacca Sultanate), the village setting and some Malay elements are used.</p> <p>However, in the futuristic setting, local contents are difficult to be identified because they were not highlighted, especially in terms of the props and setting which are used to develop based on the story's own concept.</p> <p>In terms of the folklore's perspective, the history of Hang Tuah and friends as reference to build the characters in this story manages to "remind" the younger generation of Malacca empire. It can be said here that the Malacca Sultanate is only an element to help build-up of the story though not carrying any folklore elements.</p>
Anak-anak Sidek	<p>This series successfully integrated the local contents in creating storytelling.</p> <p>All of the events happen in a village and merge culture like "kenduri" (traditional party for certain celebration) to enrich the local contents.</p> <p>From the aspect of folklore, this story is not based on folklore as a foundation, but elements of moral values are still present.</p>
Mickey Mouse	<p>This analysis perceives the animation of Mickey Mouse as having some local contents since it originated in the west, whereby the cowboys and Red Indians are considered local.</p> <p>The application of folklore is limited, as the story told is very much contemporary at the time.</p>
Luxo Jr.	<p>The local contents seem barren and it is amazing how this story is universal and well accepted by many walks of life. This goes back to the process of making, which deals more with the experimentation on technical parts and how to bring the characters to life.</p>

EFFORTS GIVEN TO PRESERVE LOCAL CONTENTS FOR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

From this research, the authors would like to give emphasis to a few efforts taken by local students. Faculty of Creative Multimedia students in Multimedia University took these efforts to preserve and reproduce old folklore contents in form of digital format; this includes interactive contents in CD-ROM and some 3D animated shorts. Apparently, this gives encouragement and opportunity to the local talents to reuse existing moral value for education and motivation purposes. Here the authors would like to review the digital output that has been implemented with local folklore. The outputs are in the form of interactive contents and 3D animations. Some of the outputs are taken from the previous folklore version and some are manipulated and improved to make it more interesting.

1. **Hikayat Sang Kancil**

Produced by: Yusran Mazalan

Duration: 3 minutes

This is a story about a stingy and stubborn mouse deer that attempts to cross a drain to get some fruits on other side. Before he jumps across the drain, he found a sign reminding him about poisonous fruits on other side. He still insists on getting the fruits, and finally he was found dead for eating poisonous fruits (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Main character of Hikayat Sang Kancil

2. **A Race**

Produced by: Mohd Izani bin Zainal Abidin

Duration: 3 minutes

This is a very popular version of folklore. It can be found even in other countries with the different characters. This version has been manipulated and the story line has been twisted from the original one. To ensure it still has its own moral value, the maker has included the original moral value like “what goes around always comes around.”

3. **Ansel and Getel**

Produced by: FCM students

Duration: 4 minutes

Ansel and Getel is an imitation from the original Hansel and Gretel. The makers of this interactive 3D animated short have managed to modify the storyline to make it more interesting and entertaining. This version is different from the original due to its interactivity in which users can control the characters. To complete this animation, the makers need to furnish a few different endings to ensure that the audience enjoys the animation (Figure 4).



Figure 4. An interesting interactive short animation to educate children, Ansel and Getel

4. **Another point of view**

Produced by: Juhaida Joemin

Duration: 2 minutes 30 sec

The idea of this animation was originally developed by its maker. However, the maker creates this animation with some influence from an old Malay proverb. Juhaida uses a few local characters like a monkey, a crocodile and a bird. With some painstaking efforts on facial animation, this animation is quite entertaining and lifelike (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Juhaida’s short animation emphasises a local proverb

5. The crow and a jar

Produced by: Hafizah

Duration: 2 minutes

This animation is based on an old folklore. It is a story about a thirsty crow looking for some water during a drought season. By using his creativity, the crow manages to get some drink (Figure 6).

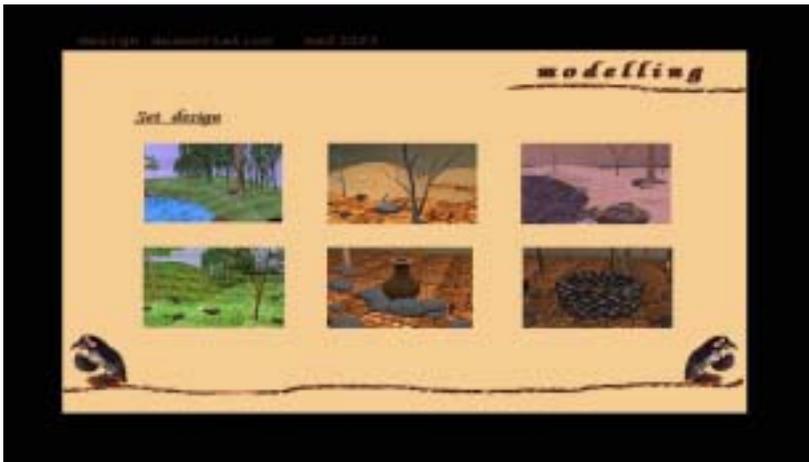


Figure 6. Some environments from “The crow and a jar” animation

CONCLUSION

Animation has the potential to convey ideas compared to text-based or analogue medium. It could be more powerful with a strong story line with the right context (local content). The principles of animation carry a lot of weight to ensure the message is conveyed at the right time, the right moment, and in a proper way. The use of local content in local animation production is still minimal. Perhaps it could be concluded that local animation is still in the premature stage and has a long way to establish characteristics such as Japanese animes, Disney, and Warner Brothers cartoons. With the efforts taken by some of the local animation students, the authors see this as another good endeavour to bring back old folklore and preserve it in digital format (multimedia) for future generations.

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