

# The Functions of University of Leiden's Malay Language Reading Materials Among Malaysian Children

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## Abstract

The discovery of special collection of Malay language children's stories at University of Leiden, Netherlands proves that the traditional Malay community cares for appropriate reading material for children. Based on Teuku Iskandar's note in the Catalogue of Malay, Minangkabau, and South Sumatran Manuscripts in The Netherlands, there are many stories of children in the archipelago that are stored in University of Leiden's Library, Netherlands. However, in this study the researchers only examine three stories in the Children's Story 26 May 1862 Collection. The stories in the collection do not have specific titles, only known as Story 1, Story 2 and Story 3 and 2 stories are contained in the collection of Parable stories. This disclosure is made because there is an opinion that the folklore today is hardly recognizable by the younger generation. This universal issue encourages the researchers to look into old Malay manuscripts and their relevance in the context of children today. Hence the objectives of this study are to classify and analyze folklore functions towards children. Hence, the method of the study involves 450 children randomly chosen according to the zones, the north, south, east and west zones of Peninsular Malaysia, as well as the Sabah and Sarawak zones. The findings show that there are still folk tales that have certain functions that can benefit children. The findings also show that children today are less vulnerable to the stories of their ancestral heritage.

**Keywords:** Malay manuscript, children, University of Leiden

## 1. Introduction

The discovery of children's stories in the Old Malay Collection at University of Leiden, Netherlands has proven that the traditional Malay community is aware of the need for a special collection of stories for children's generation. These concerns can be proven when they have been collecting children stories systematically. The stories are collected and arranged in a special note book either in roman or Arabic text. In the Leiden Netherlands Library, the collections of Malay manuscripts collected by Klinkert, J.A.W Van Ophuysen and Snouck Hurgronje were found.

The Archipelago children's storybook can be traced by the Catalogue of Malay, Minangkabau, and South Sumatran manuscripts in the Netherlands titled Children's Story. In this collection seven stories can be traced written in practice book 21 X 16 ½ cm; 24 lines per page which are stories collected by Soetan Zain but the date when the stories collected were not recorded. The stories contained in this collection are "The Stingray Story", "The Story of The Onion King", "The Paidas Story", "The Poor Story", "The Story of a Fakih", "The Story of Allah's Will" and "The Story of a Manjo". In addition, there are also children's stories collected in another book known as the Book of Revelation. This book is also an exercise book written by Soetan Padoeka on November 1, 1891. The story that can be traced in this collection is "The truth is a good ally", "Writers and carpenters", "A king with a wise man", "A king with a serpent" and "Ravens with a crow". In addition, there are also stories of parables. In this collection, stories about animal can be detected. The collection is a popular story and has many versions. An undated collection was collected by Moehammad Thaib and are the earliest recorded versions of the year was detected in 1867 but did not have a collector's name or copywriter. Among other children's stories that can be traced are the Children's Story of the village in Kota Gedang, there is no date of when the story was collected but it is recorded that the story was copied by Soetan Malintang. Collection of children's stories can

also be found in an unnamed notebook, in which there are story titles like Story 1, Story 2 and Story 3 dated 26 May 1862. In addition, the children's story can also be detected in the News of Old Folks manuscript collected by Muhammad Sa'id in 1888. The story collection is told by the elders in Aceh (Murti Bunanta, 2015). Apart from the above, there is a number of children's literature stored in special collections at University of Leiden Library, Netherlands.

1.1 Examples of Manuscripts in Malay at the University of Leiden, Netherlands

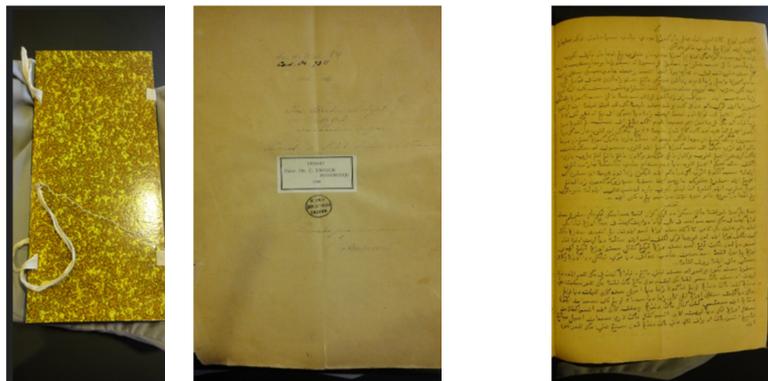


Figure 1. News of Old Folks Manuscript (1888)

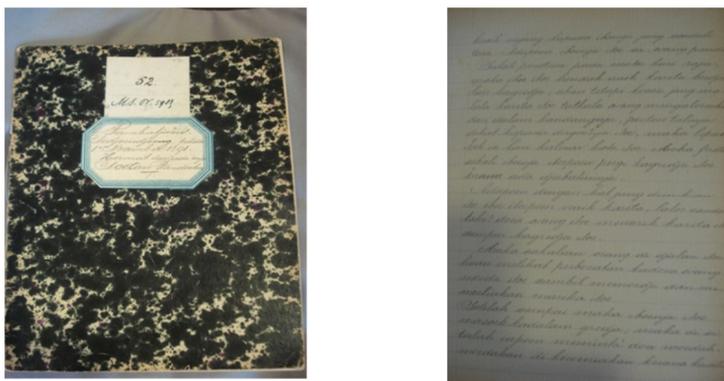


Figure 2. The Book of Revelation Manuscript (1 November 1891)

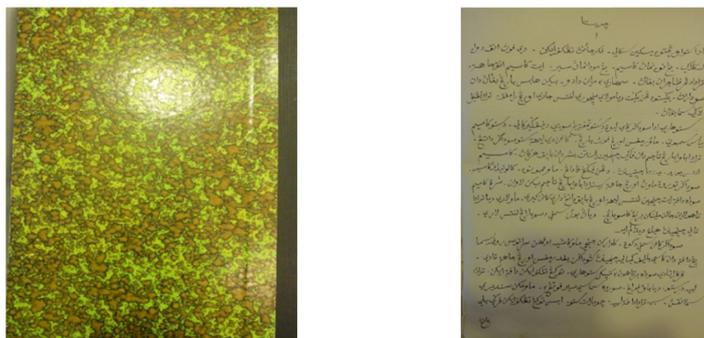


Figure 3. Kids Story Manuscript (26 May 1862)

The discovery of a special collection of Malay-language children's stories at the University of Leiden, Netherlands in the 19th century has proven that traditional Malay societies care for appropriate reading materials for children. Collections of children's stories are kept neatly in University of Leiden Library, Netherlands. In the colonial period, the Westerners were very concerned about the works of Malay literature. It is important for them to identify the Malay community from various aspects including culture, customs, ways of thinking, the heart of mind and so on. In this case the children's literary works are not missing from filling the space in the special collection at University of Leiden, Netherlands. Among them are the children's folklores. Folklore is a reflection of the minds and feelings of the Malay community traditions in appreciating the events happening around them and delivered verbally by oral speech. The story is collective that is shared by a society and has various versions.

The change of time has changed the form of presentation from oral literature to literary writing. According to Teuku Iskandar in *Catalog of Malay, Minangkabau, and South Sumatran Manuscripts in the Netherlands*, there are stories of Malay-language archipelago children collected. The manuscript is known as *Children's Story*. The stories in the manuscript do not have a specific title. Based on the detected manuscripts, the stories in the manuscript are only known as Story 1, Story 2 and Story 3. The stories are in Arabic dated 26 May 1862. In addition, the researchers will examine some of the stories about animal contained in the *Parable Stories* collection. The stories in these two collections are believed to enhance children's cognition as the traditional Malay community plans the messages to be delivered to a particular group. This is because the folklore has certain characteristics as there are cultural traditions passed down through generations and preserved by their society collectively.

According to Korrie Layun Rampan (2014: 1), folklore covers all beliefs, myths, legends, and customs maintained by a tribe or a nation through heredity. In the past, the folklore lived in an oral world. Thus the dissemination is very slow and its maintenance is very authentically difficult, because it depends on the storyteller. The more intelligent the storyteller, the more preserved the stories are. In the modern world, folklore can be stored in written form until the dissemination is faster and the story is more diverse.

The statement presented by Korrie Layun Rampan (2014) is true. Folklore that is being modified in the present day clearly shows the various forms and mode. However, there are criticisms from researchers who have stated that traditional values in folklore today are not preserved. This causes the folklore that is modified in modern times is said to have deviated from the cultural traditions inherited from generations. In addition, there is an opinion that the folklore today is hardly recognizable by the younger generation. The children's story selected in the study is a story recorded in the 19th century, which is in the epic period of the stories from oral traditions were collected, written and printed. In this case, Ding Choo Ming (2013: 163) stated that the Dutch and British are involved in the collection and copying of the manuscripts in the 19th century. This means that the story is still being copied to the written form of oral literature. According to Nik Rafidah Nik Muhamad Affendi, Awang Azman Awang Pawi and Rahimah Hamdan (2018) in the 19th century, it is found that stories of animals' characteristic in the Malay world have been collected. This study found a number of selected folklore collections available at University of Leiden Library, Netherlands. The collection is a popular Archipelago folklore collected in the 19th century. The specialty of the story was found in three versions of *Tjarito-Tjarito Sederan Pengadjaran to Manosia* (1867), no collector's name, *Tjerita-Tjerita Peroepama-an* (1871) collected by Tweede Druk. Both books were printed in Batavia. Meanwhile, the third version of the manuscript entitled *Tjarita-tjarita paroepamaan* was hand-written in an exercise book by St. Malintang, a teacher at Paya Kumbuh dated 20 December 1894.

The researchers will then examine whether the stories collected for these children can attract them and increase their cognition and the original message of the traditional Malay community is achieved. Cognition means mental processing to interpret, study, and understand something (Dewan, 2005: 803). Cognition is an intellectual process such as perceptions, thoughts, memories and languages in which information from the outside world is acquired, changed form, stored, recovered and used. Since cognition is an intellectual process, it means cognition involves high mental processes such as thinking, speaking, storing information stored for the conquest, making various decisions or solving problem (Mohamed, 2010; Budiman, 1998). According to Ma'rof Redzuan and Haslinda Abdullah (2008) cognition is useful and has function. Humans use cognition to survive physically and to live in a social world. Hence this study aims to classify and analyze the functions of University of Leiden's Malay Language reading materials among Malaysian children.

The objectives of the study were to classify and analyze the functions of University of Leiden's Malay Language reading materials among Malaysian children.

## **2. Method**

This study involved 450 children aged 10 to 12. Children of this age group can already think abstractly. A total of 75 children were taken as samples representing each zone in Malaysia such as Sabah Zone, Sarawak Zone, Western Zone (Selangor), Eastern Zone (Kelantan), Northern Zone (Perak) and South Zone (Johor). The researchers use interviews and questionnaires.

### *2.1 Story Synopsis*

In the collection of children's stories 26 May 1862, there are three untitled children's stories recorded. The stories are known as Story 1, Story 2 and Story 3. Story 1 tells about a poor old man who has two children named Kasim and Sabar. Kasim grew up becoming a naughty boy while Sabar became a good boy. Sabar helps his father with the daily chores such as cleaning the fish and others while Kasim likes to do illegal work such as

robbing and stealing. One day Kasim had robbed a rich merchant's ring. Kasim escaped by swimming to the opposite side. Unfortunately the robbed ring fell into the river. The merchant announced to the other residents if anyone who found his ring would be rewarded. Soon the poor old angler brought back the fish. He told Sabar to clean one of the fish and sell the others. While Sabar was cleaning the fish he found the merchant's ring. He immediately went to the merchant's house. Sabar was happy to get the prize money. Sabar impatiently waited for his father. Not long afterwards, his father came home crying. His father told him that Kasim had been arrested and sentenced to death. The two of them got a punishment for what they did.

Story 2 on the other hand tells about two friends. One blind and one deaf. Both of them complement each other. However, irrational actions caused them to make mistakes that are detrimental to themselves. Blind and deaf live in a very poor condition. One night, the blind heard a sound of cricket and he could not sleep. Blind told deaf to find the cricket. Deaf looked for it and eventually finds the cricket in a hole with money. After that day deaf will always look inside the hole in case there is still money. They are very happy that there is a man who always put money in their doorways. One day blind and deaf went out of the house to beg for money from the rich. He knocked on the door at a house. The owner of the house opened the door, and asked for blind and deaf to wait for a moment because he wanted to take the money. Suddenly the owner of the house saw two dogs that wanted to pollute his house area. He asked his servant to chase away the dog. Blind asked deaf who is the dog. Deaf without investigating said both of them. Both of them left right away because they were humiliated. The rich man who knows nothing returns with money and finds blind and deaf gone. One night, it was raining heavily. Blind and deaf were talking about the man who insulted them. Suddenly there was a knock on the door. Deaf opened the door. The person wanted to take shelter at their home. Deaf found that he was the rich man they went to ask for money, and then whispered it to blind. Without thinking they stabbed the rich man in anger as they suspected they were insulted by him. Before he died the rich man said he was very sad with blind and deaf action. He was the one who put money in blind and deaf's house doorways but this is how they repay him.

Story 3 tells about gold craftman and master. They live next to each other's village. However, the master was an arrogant man. He hates an orphan named Piatu. Piatu was sold to the gold craftman at low price. Even the black stone left by Piatu's father was thrown in front of the gold craftman's door. The gold craftman took care of Piatu very well. Piatu were given education and succeeded in becoming a great merchant. The black stone thrown by the master was polished by the gold craftman, apparently it was a diamond gem. The gold craftman made a big ring out of the stone for Piatu. The gold craftman gets a reward with what he does. Piatu took care of the gold craftman very well while the master became poorer and suffered loss after loss. The three stories give their own message to children and teach them to think. In addition, there are two animals to be discussed in this paper. The stories of the Parable, among the collections in this story are "Goat and Tiger" and "Rooster". The story is presented in a concise form. The "Goat and Tiger" story revolves around three goats that survive from being a tiger victim for listening to their mother. In the story of "The Rooster" revolves around the pretentiousness of a rooster who fights for area which leads to a disaster.

### **3. Discussion**

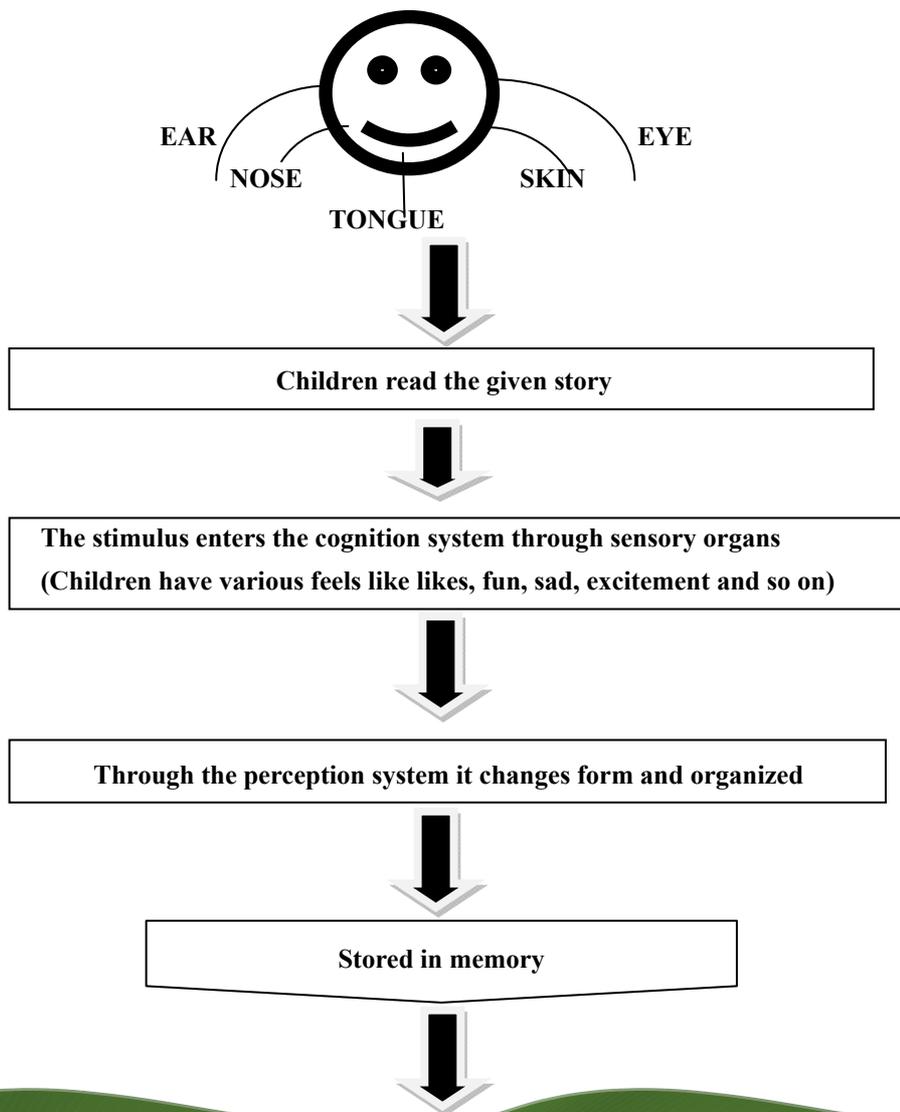
The stories show the rides of life that hover around the lives of children. The message of the traditional Malay community is that children must be wise in thinking about solving a problem. Solving problems wisely will give a good impression in life but inefficiency in solving problems will bring negative implications. Various ways of solving problems directly and indirectly improve the children thinking ability. In addition, exposure to new experiences for children is also important. Such experiences can sharpen the children mind to think critically especially towards continuity survival. Studies show that there are still folk tales that are relevant to the 21st century children and have certain functions for children today. The results of the study are parallel to the studies of Normaliza Abd Rahim, Awang Azman Awang Pawi & Nik Rafidah Nik Muhamad Affendi (2018) and Normaliza Abd Rahim (2014) where Malay folklores help children in understanding the values in the stories. On the other hand, this study is similar to the findings of Normaliza Abd Rahim, Nik Rafidah Nik Muhammad Affendi & Awang Azman Awang Pawi (2017) and Sawyer (2012) where the exposure of the folklore will improve children's thinking skill as well as proactive in the classroom.

#### *3.1 Help Children Learn to Solve Problems*

Information in folklore is a cognition material for children who reads them. Beneficial material can help children learn to solve life-related problems. Information is a matter of cognition. Information obtained by children as a result of reading, being transformed, stored, and used. Most of this information is dealt with in terms of categories or concepts. The concept is the basis of other cognitive skills which is problem solving. Story 1, Story 2 and Story 3 are recorded in a book. Story 1 and Story 3 give information to the children that "Good deeds will

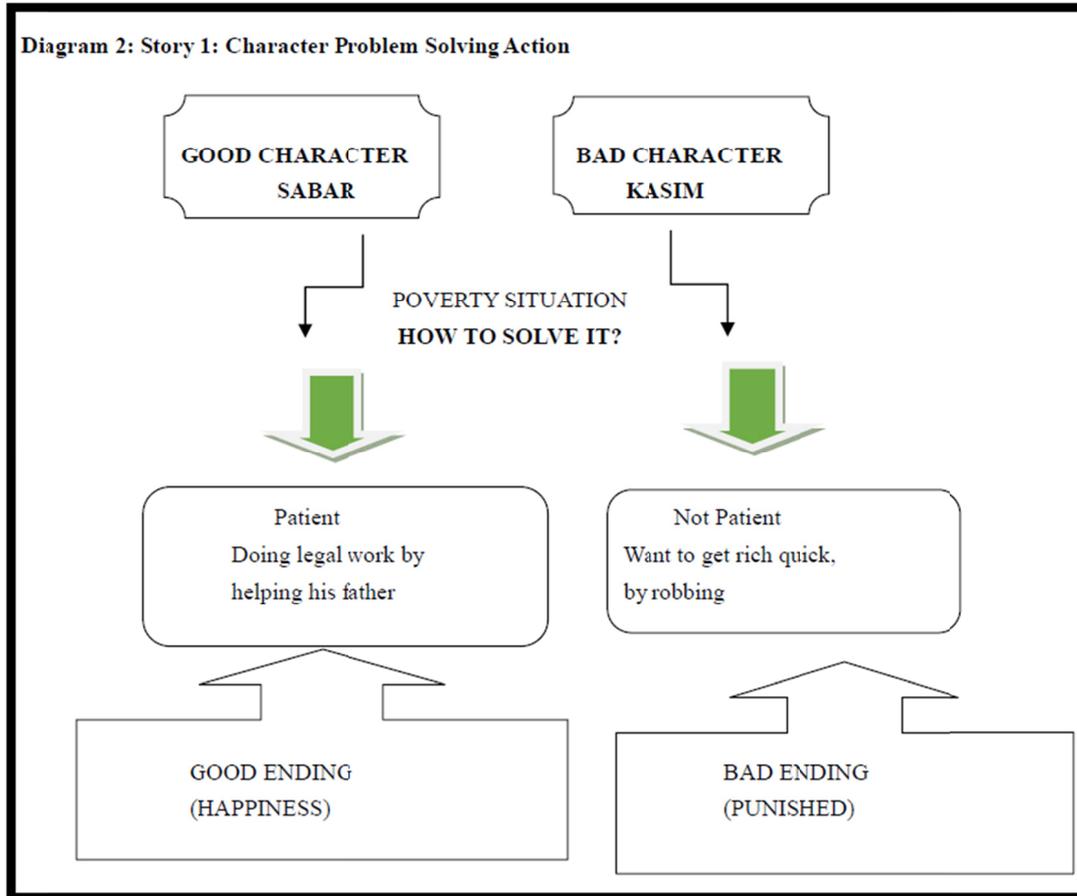
receive a good reward" and "Evil deeds will get a bad response". Story 2 invites children to think first before acting and children can conclude that "Rush attitude will lead to disastrous". Interesting reading material will encourage children to read. Children will feel like, happy, excited, sad, angry and many more. This stimulus will enter the cognition system through the sensory organs. According to Mahmood Nazar Mohamed (2010), through the system perception changes form and being organized. It will then be stored in memory and taken out by the children to solve the problem.

**Diagram 1: Cognitive Process Flow Adapted From Mahmood Nazar Mohamed (2010)**



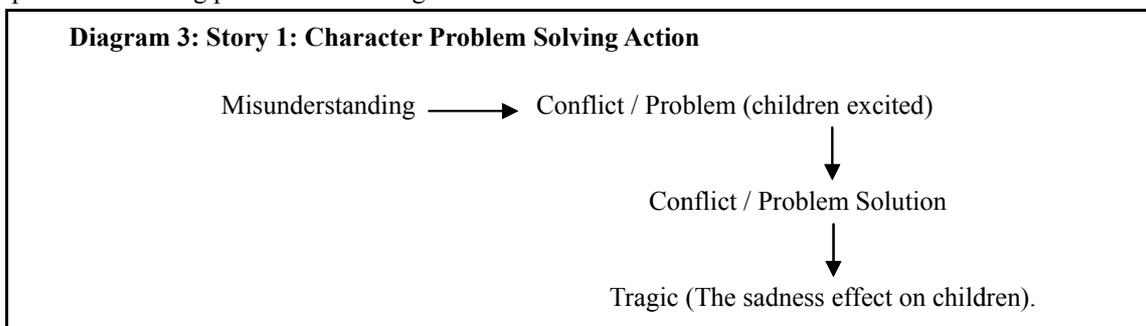
**RELEASED FOR THE PURPOSE OF SOLVING PROBLEM AND DECISION MAKING**

In Story 1, traditional Malay societies do not impose heavy stories on children. They deliver the information directly and invite children to think about problem solving.



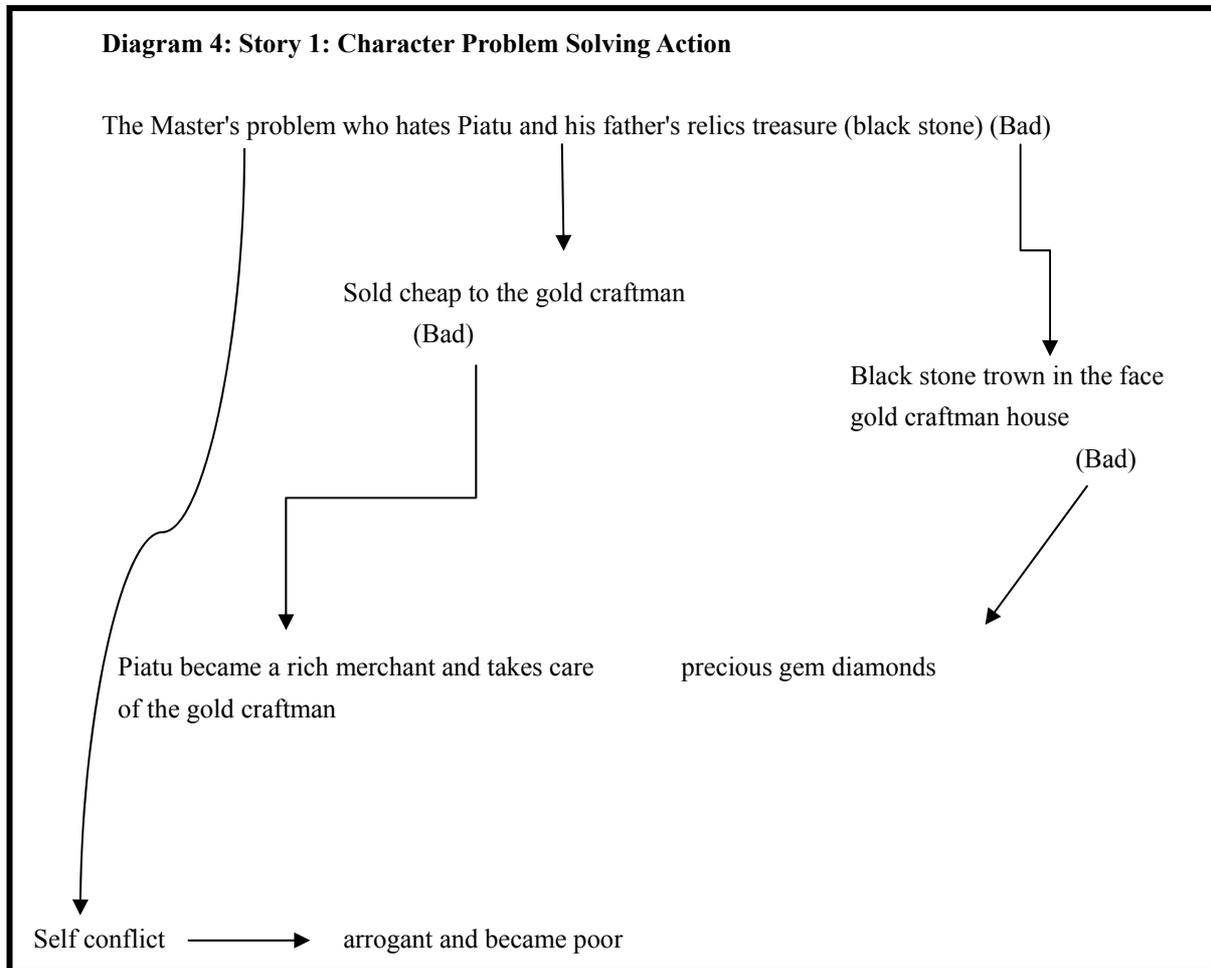
Based on the diagram above, children can see two different perspectives. A character action on complicated situations like poverty will affect their lives in the future. For example, Sabar's character is a good character, patient in facing the poverty of life while Kasim's character is a childlike character who is facing impatience in poverty. Both of these characters are poor angler's son. How do they solve the problem, to get out of poverty shackles? Sabar is a patient child. Despite being poor, he was grateful and looking for a living by seeking a lawful living by helping his father. Sabar has finally become rich with unexpected sustenance. However, Kasim is a child who is rebellious of a poor life. Kasim wants to get rich quickly. He does not want to live in poverty. Kasim disrupted the security of the locals by robbing. Finally Kasim was arrested and sentenced. Children can think if you act without thinking like Kasim you will get a bad retaliation. Every problem should be solved wisely. So they made an overall conclusion 'do not make crime' which covers all things.

In story 2, the traditions of the Malay community are subtly trying to convey messages to children not to make a rush decision in solving problem. In addition they also clearly state that human's complement each others live. This is clearly detected through the characters the 'blind' and 'deaf'. However, brief thoughts and rush actions in the process of solving problems will bring loss to oneself.



Based on the observation for Story 1, children are affected with the events happening. The ending of such stories allows children to think deeper before making a decision. A tactless problem-solving style has a negative effect.

Story 3 teaches children to think more critically. Problems of a master who hates the ugly Piatu and do not like the legacy left by Piatu's that has no black stone value.



Based on the figure above, solving a problem unwisely can lead to negative implications. The "Piatu" and "black stone" left by Piatu's father are degraded and deemed to be problematic and poor by the master, but both of these "bad" have a distinctive value later on. For example, Piatu eventually became a rich merchant. In fact Piatu is also a good adopted child who cares for the gold craftsman who defends it. The black stone that was thrown in front of the merchant's house then became a valuable diamond gems after being polished by the master and this was apparently unexpected by the master. The rich master eventually fall into poverty. Based on field studies, children show their responses that they understand the meaning behind the above stories.

*3.2 Provide New Experiences to Children*

Story 1, Story 2 and Story 3 are folklore collected in the 19th century especially for children. The story gives new experiences to children. The children's experience is not as wide as adults, based on the story they hear or read they know the lives around them. They even got some lessons from it. The experience they get from reading Story 1 is wisdom in solving problems and good morals essential to continue survival. Patience is one of the most important aspects in dealing with a various life rides. Good deeds usually end well and evil acts usually end up badly. In Story 2 children begin to understand that in life they can not make decisions in a rush. The consequences of a hastily decisions will be detrimental to yourself.

While in Story 3 children realize that in life you do not look down on others. The one that we despise and considered useless now will be a respected person in the future. In conclusion, children can learn some useful things as a life line from their ancestral heritage stories. The new experience gained through this reading experience can increase the child cognition. They have begun to think rationally to face the challenges in real life.

A field study of 450 children aged 10 to 12 shows that they have a 'curiosity' for things that hover around their

lives. The concept of such stories still attracts them. This group is excited and begins to think of the problems that occur in the story. Based on an interview method, most of them say such stories teach them to think about how to solve a problem. From the 450 children, 71% of them strongly agree that the features of such stories can improve their thinking ability, 16% of them agree while 13% of them are uncertain. Based on the data, it can be concluded that majority of the children are still able to accept the traditional Malay heritage story as a useful story and it can increase their cognition.

### 3.3 Lays Down Past Cultural Values to Children's Audiences

People's literature is part of the folklore. It is also a legacy of the former generation until it is considered by its members as part of the life tradition. This literary outcome is the property of all of them in it and there is no individualistic (Zaini Ozea, 1984; Rejab, 2001). Thus, in the studied animal stories, it can be seen how the value of culture is developed from one generation to another. According to Jan Vansina (2014), every message is part of the traditional Malay culture. These messages are delivered in the language of a culture and its content is understood in the substantive cognitive terms of a culture.

The "messages" of traditional Malay societies can be traced in folklore. Based on some stories the children are able to understand what the elders would say in the ancient times. Among them is the value of respecting the elderly, especially parents. In the "Goats and Tigers" story, the elderly advice was traced about respecting and listening to older people's advice. Three goats survived from being the victim of the tiger for listening to their mother's advice. The goat's mother instructs her three children not to open the door to strangers in her absence. The "rooster" story featured two chickens are fighting over an area to be claimed theirs. The winning chicken is acting proud and strong. His act attracted the attention of an eagle and the chicken was struck by the eagle. The messages of the traditional Malay community that can be cited in this story are not to be arrogant because arrogant attitude leads to a disastrous life. These 'messages' culture can be accepted by children. After they heard and read the folklore given, they will spontaneously remind each other. For example, "you have to listen to your mother", "be thankful", "don't do bad things or go to hell", "to be a wise person not to be deceived", "not to be arrogant" and so on. According to Noriah Taslim (2012; 2016), based on this rigorous and prolonged social order, it has embraced a culture of courtesy and affirms a communication procedure between an orderly and civilized individual. Malay culture utilizes various narrative forms to remark, teach and control its members. According to Nik Rafidah Nik Muhamad Affendi, Awang Azman Awang Pawi and Rahimah Hamdan (2018) the thought in the animal story still attracted the attention of the children despite the existence of the story since a while ago. Animal characters that act as humans attracted their attention. Even children are happy to read animal stories that can meet their psychological needs such as elements of self-esteem and affection. Majority of children in Malaysia like to read animal stories that can stimulate their thinking towards positive moral formation.

Based on the study of 450 children, in average they can understand the culture of the "messages" of traditional Malay societies. 76% of the 450 children are able to explain quickly and persuade the message by the elderly found in the story read together with the researchers. 19% of them can explain the message by the elderly based on stories read with the researchers although not as quickly as the first group. 5% of the children's group just stayed silent and did not show any reaction in the interest of examining the message by the elderly. Overall, the "messages" culture presented in the form of stories can benefit the children.

This study implicates children all the around the world in understanding the stories behind the folklore. Children will be able to use the values in the folklore in their everyday lives and share the knowledge they obtained from the stories to their friends at schools. On the other hand, this study implicates educators and researchers and selecting stories from the folklore to disseminate values and culture among children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This way, children with technology in mind, will appreciate the folklore and storytell the stories to their children. This way, the folklore will not be forgotten. It is hoped that future studies will focus on the strategies in disseminating the Malay folklore to children from all over the world.

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