



Original Research

Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Understanding Fairy Tale Questions: A Study of Literacy Integration in Indonesian Language Learning in State Junior High Schools in Padangsidempuan

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Abstract

The background of this research stems from students' low ability to interpret the content, meaning, and moral messages contained in narrative texts, particularly fairy tales. This study aims to analyze students' ability to understand fairy tale questions in Indonesian language learning at a public junior high school in Padangsidempuan City. The research method used was a mixed method with a sequential explanatory design, namely collecting quantitative data through comprehension tests on 120 students, followed by interviews with teachers and students to gain a deeper understanding. The results showed that students' ability to understand fairy tale questions was in the moderate category, with the greatest difficulties in the inferential and evaluative aspects. Factors influencing these difficulties include low interest in reading, limited language proficiency, a lack of literacy-based learning strategies, and conventional teaching methods. The role of teachers in implementing contextual literacy learning strategies, such as story mapping, discussion of meaning, and retelling, has been proven to improve students' comprehension skills. This study recommends that Indonesian language learning emphasize strengthening reading literacy, integrating moral values in fairy tales, and using engaging digital media to improve students' comprehension of narrative texts.

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1. Introduction

The background of this research elaborates on the importance of students' ability to understand story questions, particularly fairy tale questions, in the context of Indonesian language learning at public junior high schools in Padangsidempuan City. Story questions, which are often presented in the form of narratives or stories, pose a significant challenge for students in language and literature subjects (Taum, 2017). Difficulties in understanding story questions can hinder students from identifying important information and drawing appropriate conclusions. Furthermore, students also struggle to transform question

sentences into suitable models or representations, which is a crucial step in the problem-solving process (Gayatri et al., 2023).

In a broader context, the ability to read and comprehend texts, which is part of Indonesian language literacy, is closely related to students' ability to solve story questions (Sukri et al., 2022). Literacy is not merely the ability to read, but also the ability to analyze, evaluate, and communicate information effectively (Dewi, 2018). Students need to possess good literacy skills to understand the context of problems presented in story questions, identify keywords, and comprehend the relationships between pieces of information (McNamara et al., 1996). Research indicates that literacy ability, including reading comprehension, plays an important role in students' success in solving story questions (Jayanti & Cesaria, 2024).

Students' ability to understand story questions is one of the important aspects of Indonesian language learning, particularly at the junior high school level. In the context of learning at public junior high schools in Padangsidempuan City, this ability plays a very crucial role in shaping students' logical, critical, and creative thinking skills. Story questions, especially those in the form of long narratives or descriptions such as fairy tales, demand that students not only read the text but also understand the implied meaning within it, identify important information, and draw conclusions relevant to the problem context. Unfortunately, many students experience difficulties in understanding the contextual meaning of story questions due to limitations in reading literacy and a lack of ability to connect the story content with the question commands (Yarmi, 2025). This condition indicates the need for more in-depth learning strategies so that students can understand and interpret story questions effectively.

Students' difficulties in understanding story questions can be seen from their inability to identify main information, determine the core problem, and draw appropriate conclusions. In addition, many students struggle to transform question sentences into appropriate representational forms, such as diagrams, concept maps, or problem-solving models (Gayatri et al., 2023). This transformation from narrative text to conceptual form is an important stage in problem solving that demands higher-order thinking skills. Without a deep understanding of the text content, students tend to answer randomly or merely guess, rather than based on analysis. Therefore, understanding story questions is not merely a linguistic ability, but involves cognitive and reflective abilities that play an important role in academic success.

In a broader context, the ability to understand texts or reading comprehension is an integral part of language literacy. Literacy, in its modern sense, is not limited to the ability to read and write, but also encompasses critical thinking, evaluating, and communicating information effectively (Simbolon et al., 2024). According to Mukti et al., (2025) Indonesian language literacy is closely related to students' ability to solve story questions. Students with high literacy abilities find it easier to understand the purpose of questions, interpret meanings, and connect information across sections of the text. Conversely, low

literacy levels make it difficult for students to find main ideas and determine implicit meanings needed to answer questions accurately.

Good literacy skills help students understand the context of problems presented in story questions. They can identify keywords, find cause-and-effect relationships in the text, and summarize the story content more systematically (Harahap, 2024). Literacy also plays an important role in enhancing critical thinking skills, wherein students can assess the accuracy of information and connect story content with prior experiences or knowledge. Harida et al., (2023) emphasizes that reading literacy is the main foundation for students' academic success, particularly in understanding narrative-based questions. Therefore, improving literacy ability is a necessity in Indonesian language learning, especially in the context of fairy tale story questions that demand narrative understanding and moral values.

In an effort to improve students' understanding of story questions, the use of fairy tale texts in learning can be one of the effective solutions. Fairy tales, as one form of children's literature, play a strategic role in shaping students' imagination, creativity, and character (c). In addition to functioning as entertainment, fairy tales also serve as an educational medium rich in moral and cultural values. Through fairy tales, students can learn to understand narrative structure, recognize story plots, characters, conflicts, and the moral messages contained within them (Ramadhani and Suriani, 2025). Thus, learning using fairy tales can enhance students' ability to analyze narrative texts relevant to the story questions they face.

Fairy tales can also be an effective tool for teaching important concepts in story questions contextually. Through a narrative approach, teachers can instill understanding of language concepts, logic, and character values in an engaging and meaningful way (Rose & Johnson, 2025). Nevertheless, the implementation of fairy tale-based learning in schools is often not yet optimal. Many teachers still use conventional approaches that emphasize memorization of story content rather than deep understanding of literary elements and values contained within it. This causes students to be less actively and critically involved in analyzing story content, even though fairy tales have great potential to improve students' literacy abilities and character simultaneously.

Based on the aforementioned description, the integration between literacy learning and fairy tale appreciation becomes very important in improving students' ability to understand story questions. Literacy provides the foundation for text understanding and analysis, while fairy tales provide an engaging and meaningful narrative context for training these abilities. This integration is expected to help students understand story structure, identify important information, and develop critical and creative thinking skills (Badrih, 2025). Through this approach, teachers can also cultivate students' reading interest, enrich cultural insights, and instill moral values through enjoyable activities.

Thus, this research aims to analyze in depth the difficulties faced by public junior high school students in Padangsidempuan City in understanding fairy tale story questions, and to examine how literacy integration can help overcome these difficulties. This research is expected to contribute to the improvement of Indonesian language learning quality, particularly in the aspects of reading comprehension and story question solving. In addition, the results of this research are expected to provide practical recommendations for teachers and education practitioners in developing student-centered, literacy-based learning strategies that use fairy tale media as an effective means to cultivate critical, creative, and communicative thinking skills (Aini et al., 2025). In this way, Indonesian language learning will not only focus on cognitive aspects but also shape students' character and literary appreciation comprehensively.

2. Literature Review

The integration of literacy into Indonesian language learning, particularly by fairy tales and folklore, has been widely recognized as a crucial pedagogical approach to enhance students' comprehension skills and cultural awareness. Fairy tales, as narrative texts, provide not only linguistic input but also moral and cultural values that are essential for holistic education. However, numerous studies have highlighted persistent difficulties among junior high school students in Indonesia when confronted with questions related to fairy tales. These difficulties often manifest in the inability to identify narrative structures, comprehend implicit meanings, and interpret moral lessons embedded in the stories. Such challenges are closely linked to limited vocabulary mastery, insufficient exposure to diverse texts, and the lack of effective reading strategies tailored to narrative genres.

Previous research has demonstrated that differentiated learning strategies can significantly improve students' comprehension of narrative texts. For instance, students with lower literacy levels benefit from visual aids, scaffolding techniques, and collaborative learning activities, while advanced learners are better engaged through analytical tasks that require deeper interpretation of characters and plot development. In addition, multicultural literacy models that incorporate Indonesian folklore have been shown to foster not only reading comprehension but also empathy and tolerance, thereby strengthening students' socio-cultural literacy. Empirical evidence indicates that validated teaching materials based on local folklore substantially increase students' reading interest and literacy scores, underscoring the importance of contextualized learning resources in language education.

Despite these advancements, a critical gap remains in the literature. Most studies have concentrated on elementary school contexts, leaving junior high school students underexplored, particularly in relation to their specific difficulties in answering comprehension questions about fairy tales. Furthermore, existing research tends to emphasize the effectiveness of instructional models rather than conducting a systematic

diagnosis of students' cognitive and linguistic challenges. This gap is significant because understanding the precise nature of students' difficulties is essential for designing pedagogical interventions that directly address their needs. For example, while narrative comprehension has been broadly studied, the specific obstacles faced by students in Padangsidempuan, such as distinguishing between explicit and implicit information, recognizing cultural references, and applying critical thinking to moral lessons have not been adequately documented.

In synthesizing the existing body of research, it becomes evident that literacy integration through fairy tales holds great promise for enhancing Indonesian language learning. However, the unique contribution of the present study lies in its focus on analyzing students' difficulties in understanding fairy tale questions at the junior high school level. By identifying the cognitive, linguistic, and cultural barriers that hinder comprehension, this research provides a foundation for developing more targeted instructional strategies. Such an approach not only enriches the academic discourse on literacy integration but also offers practical implications for educators seeking to improve language learning outcomes in Indonesian schools.

3. Method

This research used a Mixed Methods approach with a Sequential Explanatory design. In the first stage, quantitative data were collected to identify the level of students' difficulty in understanding fairy tale story questions. Subsequently, qualitative data were collected to explain in depth the findings of the quantitative results. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to obtain a more comprehensive understanding, both numerically and narratively, of the phenomenon of students' difficulties in understanding story questions and the effectiveness of literacy integration in Indonesian language learning (Sugiyono, 2013).

The research subjects were students of junior high schools in Padangsidempuan City, selected using purposive sampling techniques. The selection of subjects was based on the consideration that students had received fairy tale material in Indonesian language learning and had diverse literacy ability variations.

The objects of this research included (1) students' difficulties in understanding fairy tale story questions and (2) the process of literacy integration in Indonesian language learning.

The types of data used were quantitative and qualitative data.

1. Quantitative data were obtained through fairy tale story question comprehension tests to measure the level of difficulty and students' literacy abilities.
2. Qualitative data were obtained through observation, interviews, and document studies, which were used to explore the causal factors of difficulties and the learning strategies applied.

Primary data sources came from students and Indonesian language teachers, while secondary data sources came from learning documents such as Lesson Implementation Plans (RPP), teaching modules, student work results, and field notes.

3.1 Data Collection Techniques

a. Observation

Conducted directly during Indonesian language learning processes that contained fairy tale material. The aim was to observe teacher-student interaction, student activities in understanding fairy tale texts, and the application of literacy strategies in learning activities. Observations were recorded using structured observation sheets.

b. Story Question Comprehension Test

A written test in the form of fairy tale story questions was administered to students to measure their ability to understand story content, intrinsic elements (characters, plot, setting, and moral message), as well as the ability to draw conclusions and analyse text content. Test results were analysed to see error patterns and students' difficulty levels.

c. Semi-Structured Interview

Interviews were conducted with several students and Indonesian language teachers to obtain in-depth information about the difficulties experienced by students, causal factors, and teacher strategies in helping students' understanding of fairy tale story questions.

d. Document Study

Included analysis of RPP, teaching modules, student work results, and teacher notes. The aim was to see the extent to which literacy was integrated into learning and how it was implemented in the classroom.

3.2 Data Validity Techniques

Data validity was ensured through the following techniques:

- a. Source and Method Triangulation, comparing results from various techniques (tests, observation, interviews, and documents) to ensure consistency of findings.
- b. Extension and Persistence of Observation, conducted to ensure that the data obtained were accurate, in-depth, and representative.
- c. Discussion with Experts and Colleagues, preliminary results were consulted with supervising lecturers and literacy experts to obtain additional perspectives and validation of data interpretation.

Data analysis was conducted through two stages, namely quantitative and qualitative analysis.

1. Quantitative Analysis

Data from comprehension test results were analyzed descriptively by calculating average scores, percentages of student difficulties, and distribution of comprehension levels (high, moderate, low). These results were used to identify main areas of difficulty in understanding fairy tale story questions.

2. Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model encompassing three stages:

- a. Data reduction: selecting, summarizing, and focusing data on relevant aspects.
- b. Data presentation: organizing data in narrative, table, or matrix forms to find patterns and relationships between factors.
- c. Conclusion drawing and verification: drawing conclusions based on analyzed data and checking data validity through triangulation.

The combination of these two analyses allows the researcher not only to know quantitatively the extent of students' difficulties, but also to understand the causes and contexts of these difficulties in depth.

3.3 Research Procedure

The research procedure was carried out through several main stages as follows:

1. Preparation Stage

Composing the research proposal, conducting literature studies, developing research instruments (tests, observation sheets, and interview guidelines), and arranging research permits with the school party.

2. Data Collection Stage

Implementing classroom observations, administering fairy tale story question comprehension tests, conducting interviews with students and teachers, and collecting learning documents.

3. Data Analysis Stage

Analyzing test and interview results using a combination of descriptive quantitative and qualitative analysis to find difficulty patterns and their causal factors.

4. Conclusion Drawing Stage

Compiling research findings, drawing conclusions, and providing strategic recommendations for improving fairy tale-based literacy learning at junior high schools.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Fairy Tale Story Comprehension Test Results

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25 through four stages: validity test, reliability test, difficulty level, and discriminating power.

a. Validity Test

The validity test was used to determine the extent to which test items were able to measure the ability that should be measured, namely students' comprehension of fairy tale texts, as can be seen in the following table:

Table 4.1 Validity Test Output Results (SPSS)

Question Number	Pearson Correlation towards Total	Sig. (2-tailed)	Description
X1	0,524**	0	Valid
X2	0,07	0,567	Tidak valid
X3	0,389**	0,001	Valid
X4	0,603**	0	Valid
X5	0,396**	0,001	Valid
X6	0,329**	0,006	Valid
X7	0,498**	0	Valid
X8	0,22	0,07	Tidak valid
X9	0,420**	0	Valid
X10	0,598**	0	Valid

Based on the table above, it was found that: Of the 10 test items, 8 items (X1, X3, X4, X5, X6, X7, X9, and X10) had Sig. values < 0.05 , thus declared valid. Two items (X2 and X8) had Sig. values > 0.05 , thus not valid and should be revised or removed from the instrument. The highest correlation values were found in X4 ($r = 0.603$) and X10 ($r = 0.598$), indicating a strong relationship with the total score, meaning these items were highly representative in measuring junior high school students' fairy tale reading comprehension ability. It can be concluded that the fairy tale comprehension test instrument consisted of 8 valid items and 2 items that needed to be improved or eliminated. Thus, this instrument is feasible for use in measuring junior high school students' reading comprehension of fairy tale texts after minor refinement of the two invalid items.

b. Reliability Test

The reliability test was used to determine the level of reliability (consistency) of the fairy tale comprehension test instrument. An instrument is said to be reliable if the results are consistent when used repeatedly under the same conditions. Analysis was

conducted using SPSS 25 with the Cronbach's Alpha method (Puspitasari & Hasanudin, 2026).

Table 4.2 Reliability Test Output Results

Reliability Statistics	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
	0,484	10

Based on the calculation results, the Cronbach's Alpha value = 0.484, which is in the "moderate" category. The reliability category determination can be seen in the following table:

Table 4.3 Interpretation of Cronbach's Alpha Values

Range	Category
0,800–1,000	Very High
0,600–0,799	High
0,400–0,500	Moderate
0,200–0,399	Low
<0,200	Very Low

The value of 0.484 indicates that this fairy tale comprehension test has fairly good internal consistency, although it has not reached the high category. This can be influenced by several factors, such as: The presence of two invalid items (X2 and X8) that lower the overall reliability value. The diversity of difficulty levels between items that is not yet balanced. Differences in students' understanding of fairy tale story contexts, which can affect answer consistency. Reliability values in the "moderate" category are still acceptable for initial research stages (pilot test), especially in the context of developing reading comprehension instruments for children's literature texts. With a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.484, the fairy tale comprehension test instrument is declared to have moderate reliability. This means the instrument can be used in research with the note that the researcher needs to revise the wording or refine test items to improve test result consistency in the future.

c. Difficulty Level of Questions

The difficulty level test aims to determine how easy or difficult test items are for students to work on. Calculation was conducted using the Descriptive Statistics → Frequencies menu in SPSS 25. The mean value of each item indicates the proportion of students who answered correctly.

Table 4.4 Difficulty Level Determination Criteria

Value Range	Categori
0,00–0,20	Difficult
0,21–0,70	Moderate
0,71–1,00	Easy

Table 4.5 Difficulty Level Calculation Results

Queastion Number	Mean	Categori
X1	0,83	Easy
X2	0,99	Easy
X3	0,93	Easy
X4	0,87	Easy
X5	0,94	Easy
X6	0,78	Easy
X7	0,59	Moderate
X8	0,96	Easy
X9	0,25	Moderate
X10	0,72	Easy

Based on the results above, most items (7 out of 10) were in the "easy" category, while 3 other items (X7, X9, and partially X10) were in the "moderate" category. No questions were in the "difficult" category. This distribution indicates that overall the test difficulty level was fairly proportional, with a dominance of questions that were easy for junior high school students to understand. Nevertheless, the diversity of difficulty levels needs to be increased so that the test is better able to differentiate students' diverse abilities, for example by adding several analytical or inferential questions. For example, question number 1 has a mean value of 0.40 thus categorized as "moderate," indicating that approximately 40% of students answered correctly. Meanwhile, question number 2 with a mean of 0.99 is categorized as "easy," meaning almost all students answered correctly.

Overall, the analysis results show that the difficulty level of the fairy tale comprehension test questions is in the moderate–easy category. This means the instrument is quite appropriate for the average ability of junior high school students, and can be used in research with slight revisions to several questions so that the distribution of difficulty levels is more balanced.

d. Discriminant Power Of Questions

The discriminating power test aims to determine the ability of each test item to distinguish between students with high and low abilities. Analysis was conducted using the Pearson Correlation value between the score of each item (X1, X2, ..., X10) and the total test score (Total) from the validity test results.

Table 4.6 Discriminant Power Determination Criteria

Value Range	Category
0,40–1,00	Good
0,30–0,39	Accepted and Needs revision
0,20–0,29	Need Revision
0,00–0,19	Rejected

Tabel 4.7 Discriminant Power Test Results

Number Question	r count (Pearson Correlation)	Categori
X1	0,524**	Good
X2	0,07	Rejected
X3	0,389**	Accepted and Needs revision
X4	0,603**	Good
X5	0,396**	Accepted and Needs revision
X6	0,329**	Need Revision
X7	0,498**	Good
X8	0,22	Need Revision
X9	0,420**	Good
X10	0,598**	Good

Based on the results above, it can be known that most items (6 out of 10 items) have discriminating power in the good category ($r \geq 0.40$). Two items (X3 and X5) are in the "accepted and needs revision" category, meaning they can still be used with slight revisions to the wording or question form. Two other items (X2 and X8) have low correlation values ($r < 0.20$), thus needing to be replaced or significantly revised because they are not yet able to distinguish between high-ability and low-ability students. For example, question number 1 has r calculated = 0.524, categorized as good, meaning this question effectively distinguishes students who truly understand the story content from those who do not yet understand. Conversely, question number 2 with $r = 0.070$ shows low discriminating power, possibly because the answer key is too easy to guess or the indicator measured is not relevant to the expected comprehension ability.

Based on test results from 69 respondents, a tendency was obtained that students were able to understand fairy tale content at the literal level, such as identifying characters, plot, and story setting. However, difficulties were still found at the inferential and evaluative levels, for example drawing implicit conclusions or evaluating the story's moral message. This indicates the need for strengthening narrative and reflective literacy learning so that students can think more critically and deeply about reading texts. Overall, the analysis results show

that the fairy tale comprehension test instrument has fairly good discriminating power, with the majority of items able to effectively distinguish students' ability levels. This instrument is feasible for use in initial research stages, but it is recommended to revise several items with low correlation values so that the overall reliability and validity of the instrument increasingly improve.

4.2 Teacher Interview Analysis (Qualitative)

Interview data were obtained from five Indonesian language teachers at three public schools in Padangsidempuan. Analysis was conducted using a thematic approach with the assistance of Atlasti (Pather et al., 2020)

Table 4.8 Main Findings

Theme	Finding Description	Representative Quotation
A. Student Difficulties	Students have difficulty in understanding implied meanings in stories, especially moral messages and relationships between events.	"The children often answer literally, they can't yet draw meanings from events."
B. Inhibiting Factors	(1) Lack of habits in reading long texts; (2) minimal practice in understanding narrative; (3) use of conventional methods.	"They usually get bored if the text is long. So they read in pieces."
C. Teacher Strategies	Teacher tries using story mapping approaches, group discussion, and literacy assignment based on values.	"I ask them to retell the fairy tale content in their own words."
D. School literacy Support	Literacy programs are still limited to fifteen minutes of reading before learning activities yet not fully integrated into Indonesian language learning.	"The school literacy exists but hasn't been directed toward literary text analysis."

Teachers realize that the main obstacle is not students' language ability, but the lack of reading habits and deep understanding of story structure. This shows the importance of literacy integration oriented toward meaning comprehension, not merely reading texts.

4.3 Synthesis of Literacy Integration in Overcoming Fairy Tale Reading Difficulties

Based on quantitative and qualitative analysis results, it was found that students' comprehension level of fairy tale texts was in the moderate category, with dominant difficulties in the inferential aspect, namely the ability to draw implied meanings, conclude moral messages, and evaluate characters. This finding indicates that students still need more contextual and literate learning approaches.

Literacy integration becomes the main solution to overcome these difficulties. Several forms of integration recommended include:

a. Contextual Literacy Approach

Fairy tale reading learning should be linked with students' real experiences, such as family situations, school environment, or daily events. This contextual connection helps students understand moral messages in stories in a more meaningful and applicable way.

b. Story-Based Learning Model

This strategy emphasizes activities of retelling fairy tale content, making plot maps, and analyzing characters and conflicts. Through these narrative activities, students' analytical thinking abilities and literary appreciation can develop simultaneously.

c. School Literacy Strengthening

Literacy activities need to become part of school culture, not merely incidental activities. For example, through joint reading programs, fairy tale reading corners, or storytelling competitions that cultivate reading habits and sharpen the ability to understand narrative texts.

d. Digital Literacy Integration

The utilization of digital media such as fairy tale videos, animations, or interactive reading applications can increase reading interest while enriching students' understanding of story content. Digital literacy also trains students' ability to select and evaluate information in an enjoyable context.

Overall, the research results show that integrative literacy strengthening is an effective approach to improving fairy tale comprehension at the junior high school level. Teachers play an important role as facilitators who connect texts with students' lives and utilize diverse learning media. Thus, Indonesian language learning not only focuses on text comprehension aspects, but also on character formation, empathy, and appreciation of human values in literary works.

5. Conclusion

Based on the research results conducted regarding students' ability to understand fairy tale story questions in Indonesian language learning at public junior high schools in Padangsidempuan City, it can be concluded that students' ability is generally in the moderate category. Most students are only able to understand text content at the literal

level, namely identifying characters, plot, and story setting, but still experience difficulties in understanding implied meanings, moral messages, and evaluating characters. This condition indicates that students' critical and analytical thinking abilities toward narrative texts still need to be improved. These difficulties are caused by several factors, including students' low reading interest, limited vocabulary, and learning methods that are still teacher-centered and lack contextual literacy approaches. The validity and reliability test results of the instrument show that most of the items used are valid and sufficiently reliable to measure students' comprehension ability. The research findings also show that teachers have an important role in improving students' understanding through the application of innovative learning strategies, such as story mapping, group discussions, and retelling focused on meaning comprehension. Literacy integration in Indonesian language learning has proven effective in helping students understand fairy tale texts more deeply and reflectively. Therefore, continuous efforts are needed in developing engaging and relevant literacy-based learning, so that students not only understand texts superficially, but are also able to interpret, evaluate, and connect moral values in stories with their real lives.

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