

Malaysia Folk Literature in Early Childhood Education

F. P. Chew, and Z. Ishak

Abstract—Malay Folk Literature in early childhood education served as an important agent in child development that involved emotional, thinking and language aspects. Up to this moment not much research has been carried out in Malaysia particularly in the teaching and learning aspects nor has there been an effort to publish “big books.” Hence this article will discuss the stance taken by university undergraduate students, teachers and parents in evaluating Malay Folk Literature in early childhood education to be used as big books. The data collated and analyzed were taken from 646 respondents comprising 347 undergraduates and 299 teachers. Results of the study indicated that Malay Folk Literature can be absorbed into teaching and learning for early childhood with a mean of 4.25 while it can be in big books with a mean of 4.14. Meanwhile the highest mean value required for placing Malay Folk Literature genre as big books in early childhood education rests on exemplary stories for undergraduates with mean of 4.47; animal fables for teachers with a mean of 4.38. The lowest mean value of 3.57 is given to lipurlara stories. The most popular Malay Folk Literature found suitable for early children is Sang Kancil and the Crocodile, followed by Bawang Putih Bawang Merah. Pak Padir, Legends of Mahsuri, Origin of Malacca, and Origin of Rainbow are among the popular stories as well. Overall the undergraduates show a positive attitude toward all the items compared to teachers. The t-test analysis has revealed a non significant relationship between the undergraduate students and teachers with all the items for the teaching and learning of Malay Folk Literature.

Keywords—Big Book, Early Childhood Education, Malay Folk Literature

I. INTRODUCTION

MALAYSIA is a multicultural and multilingual and are and communities live side by side, while maintaining their separate identities, live in peace and harmony. Malaysia’s emerging culture is a mixture and blending of more than 23 million people of mixed descent who are Malays, Bumiputras, Chinese, Indians and others who are Malaysian citizens. The Malays and Bumiputras form the predominant ethnic group in Malaysia, about 65%, compare to Chinese 25%, Indian 9%, and others 1% [1].

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Malay language is the national language and the medium of instruction in national and national type schools and in many tertiary institutions, whereas Malay literature is the national literature that preserves the cultural heritage of the Malays and Bumiputras. Malay literature has been incorporated in the Malay Language subject in secondary schools as a compulsory subject to be learnt by all the students since 2000. However, Malay literature is not a mandatory subject in preschool and primary schools.

II. PRESENT STATUS OF CHILDREN’S LITERARY BOOKS IN MALAYSIA

Children’s literature refers to good-quality trade books for children from birth to adolescence, covering topics of relevance and interest to children, through prose and poetry, fiction and nonfiction. Hence children’s books are about the experiences of childhood, both good and bad. Whether these experience happen in the past, present, or future, they still be relevant to the children today (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2008). In preschool, the primary goal of a literature program is the creation of a positive attitude toward literature. Children who enjoy and value literature will continue to read and appreciate it, thus it becomes the lifelong sources of emotional and cognitive enrichment [2].

In western countries, for instance the United States, children’s literature has been explored in depth in various aspect such as using literature to invite all children to learn about diversity of society [3] and its connection with information technology [4]; teaching religious diversity [5], facilitating emergent literacy skills [6], nurturing children’s concepts of time and chronology [7], helping children to cope with the loss of pet [8], human development and social skills [9], and so forth.

Many researchers doing studies on reading children literature include developing lifetime readers through literature [10]; parent-child interaction in story reading [11][12][13], how reading enhances speaking proficiency [14]; some studies show that reading achievement in preschool is closely related to the total of the reading hours of the children [15] and the literary activities carried out by the teachers [16].

However, research on early childhood literature still in its explorative stage in Malaysia. The publishing of children’s books has shown that the world of children’s literature is dominated by British and American children’s books [17]. Followed by this, reference books on curriculum and early childhood literature modules at the libraries were based on Britain, America, and Australia and so forth. Those books were

used by educators from all local education institutions from the lowest level to the highest level. Those childcare centers, pre-school operator have applied the theories and curriculum based on the overseas in local structure which is not suited to the local children.

In addition, not much research on children's literature materials has been done in Malaysia, what more on the development on early children literature in Malay language which is based on scientific research. Most of the children's literature in the Malaysian market now are not appealing, lacking in quality, is not systematic and not classified according to the children's age, and even not in-line with the current national development. This is due to the lack of copywriters with pedagogical experience and professional writers for children's works [18].

According to a rough survey done by Rahmat (2006) [19], approximately 2,714 titles of children literature book in Malay language published in Malaysia and Singapore between 1901 till 1982. The type of children literature book and its total numbers for each genre is shown in Table 1:-

TABLE I
TYPES AND NUMBERS OF CHILDREN LITERATURE BOOKS
PUBLISHED IN MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE BETWEEN 1901 -1982

Types	Total (Titles)
Folklore	899
Short story	621
Novel	545
Biography/ historiography	414
Poem	74
Drama	48
Others	113
Total	2714

Based on this survey, the evolution of children literature from the aspect of quantity is very slow and shows sign of stagnation. The total number of books is still negligible and needs to be upgraded into satisfactory numbers. Table 1 also shows that folklore outnumbered other types followed by short story, novel, biography/historiography, poem, drama and others. Not only does the industry publish a lot of folklore but it also shows that that is the earliest story book published. Almost all the folklore were copied from oral tradition and it is widespread throughout various part of the world. Even though literary works evolve and develop, in Malaysia upgrading in quantity is definitely higher than in quality; Malay children's literature, however, has not shown sign of its usage as motivation tool towards high achievement.

Based on the research done by Arshad (2006) [20], literature materials published in Malaysia were categorized at minimal level for the purpose of child development. He has done the research based on 820 children's story books published from 1996 to 2005. Some 50.2% of the books were published in Kuala Lumpur and 35.9% in Selangor itself. Results from this research shows that the quality of children's literature

published in Kuala Lumpur was not good. Its main characteristics are the specific theme for children, simple and light language, interesting illustration, simple story line and its plot.

The evolution of children story books in Malaysia has shown an increase in numbers, but the quality of story, paper, illustration, colors and others were not well considered. A study by Aman (2004) [21] indicated that the local book industry is dominated primarily by books produced for the domestic market focusing on school text books, revision guides or model answer books. On the average, print runs for school text books may range between 7,000 to 100,000 copies and between 5,000 to 10,000 for children's books under non text books category. Meanwhile Hamdan and A. Ishak (2004) [22] found that the primary school students in Malaysia, aged 7 to 12, regard newspaper as the most read and preferred publication followed by comic books (56%), novels (51.3%), activity books (45.2%), illustrated books (43.2%), magazines (44%), and reference books (40%).

III. MALAY FOLK LITERATURE READING MATERIALS FOR CHILDREN

While teachers can select from many genres of Malay children's literature, folk literature from the Malay world are a wonderful place to begin since these stories, as it the case of many stories from traditional cultures, are designed to transmit cultural values and more as well as entertain readers and listeners. Malay folk literature is a wisdom and heritage left by the ancient Malay society. *Si Tenggang* is an excellent example of a children's folk literature that exemplifies traditional Malay values. This folk tale relates the treason attitude that is socially condemned by the Malay community.

There are two forms of Malay Folk Literature, the narrative and non-narrative forms. The narrative form is also called folk stories or oral tales, comprising several types such as *lipurlara* tales or folklore, exemplary stories, animal fables, humorous stories, myths and legends. Meanwhile the major part of non-narrative material occur in verse; it includes folk sayings, folk songs, traditional lore, riddles, *pantuns* or rhymes, *gurindam* or couplets, and *seloka* or satirical poems and others [23].

The Malay folk literature holds the main place in Malay literature in comparison with stories based on classical Malay text or *hikayat*. Likewise the stories based on animals many of which have been generated to satisfy the needs of children who really love to read animal fables especially when the animals were given human attributes. Production of these stories, especially folk literature (local or overseas) show that the relationship between traditional literary works and the young today is not severed by the publication of literary writing. In fact, the relationship between the two through reading of children folk literature has been strengthened [24].

In the Malaysian classroom, cultural diversity is honored to help children develop and preserve their ethnic identity. Henceforth, the teaching of Malay folk literature to kindergarten children is vital for understanding Malay history,

art, culture and their life. As a majority community, other ethnics are encouraged to learn more about them which is necessary for understanding and living in a world of diversity.

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

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

Respondents of this study comprised two categories, namely: undergraduate students from the Early Childhood Education or Malay Studies programs and teachers from childcare centers. These two categories were chosen because they are very involved in choosing suitable reading materials for children and because they are connected to and well versed in the field.

Before the fieldwork was undertaken, a pilot study was done to verify the instrument. The instrument is a set of questionnaire developed based on the popular Malay folk literature list recognized by Malay scholars [25]. Analysis showed the Cronbach alpha of the instrument was .97, hence indicating its consistency and suitability for the study.

IV. PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

A total of 646 respondents were involved in this study, comprising 347 undergraduates and 299 teachers. Their details are as shown in Table 2.

TABLE II
RESPONDENTS' PROFILE

Social Background (N=646)	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
1. Location of home	Urban	306	47.4
	Rural	340	52.6
2. Ethnicity	Malay	429	66.4
	Chinese	103	15.9
	Indian	44	6.8
	Other	70	10.8
3. Language Spoken at home	Malay Language	428	66.3
	English	76	11.8
	Chinese	80	12.4
	Tamil	22	3.4
	Other	40	6.2
4. Gender	Male	147	22.8
	Female	499	77.2
5. Academic background	SDM/SDVM/MCE	45	7.0
	STPM/HSC/STP	339	52.5
	Certificate	28	4.3
	Diploma	94	14.6
	Bachelor degree	111	17.2
	Master	14	2.2
	Doctor of Philosophy	15	2.3

6. Age	21 – 30 years	527	81.6
	31 – 40 years	89	13.8
	41 – 50 years	29	4.5
	51 and above	1	0.2
7. Experience in using computers	Very frequent	398	61.6
	Frequent	103	15.9
	Rarely	121	18.7
	Never	24	3.7

Table 2 shows that 47.4% of respondents hail from urban areas while 52.6% came from rural areas. More than half or 66.4% of respondents are Malays, followed by Chinese (15.9%), others (10.8%) and Indians (6.8%). Language spoken at home is closely related to ethnicity, with 66.3% of respondents speaking in Malay, 11.8% in English, 12.4% in Chinese, 6.8% in Tamil, and 10.8% in other languages.

From the gender standpoint, there are more female respondents (77.2%) compared to males (22.4%). Most of the respondents have STPM (equivalent to A-Level) qualification (52.5%), followed by bachelor degree (17.2%), and diploma (14.6%). In other words, about 70% of respondents have secondary education. A majority or 81.6% of respondents are aged between 21-30 years, and more than half (61.6%) of all respondents use the computer in their daily lives very frequently.

V. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This study will use the mean and standard deviations to analyze the acceptance of the literary community toward the folk literature genre most suitable for use as big books for children. The researcher will then discuss the differences between the three categories of respondents (undergraduates, teachers and parents) regarding the suitability of folk literature for use as children's literature. The analysis will be done using independent sample *t*-test.

A. Mean and Standard Deviations

TABLE III
MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF RESPONDENTS TOWARDS FOLK LITERATURE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERATURE

Item (N=646)	Respondents	Mean	SD	Average Mean	Average SD
1. Folk literature used in preschool/ kindergarten:					
a. Stories on origin	U	3.5476	1.0143	3.5650	1.0274
	T	3.5853	1.0436		
b. Animal fables	U	4.4035	0.6617	4.2647	0.7990
	T	4.1037	0.9082		
c. Humorous tales	U	4.1297	0.8347	3.9628	0.9410
	T	3.7692	1.0184		
d. Legend	U	3.6455	0.9608	3.6424	0.9600
	T	3.6388	0.9606		
e. Exemplary stories	U	4.2565	0.7977	4.2090	0.8267
	T	4.1538	0.8571		
f. Lipurlara stories	U	3.5331	1.0205	3.5232	1.0170
	T	3.5117	1.0145		
2. Folk literature can be integrated in early childhood teaching and learning	U	4.3314	0.7389	4.2508	0.7888
	T	4.1572	0.8347		

Note:
U Undergraduate students
T Preschool teachers

Folk literature was found to be acceptable for integration into early childhood education (mean 4.2508, SD 0.7888) and can be used as big books for education purposes (mean 4.1378, SD 0.8507). The question regarding the genre of folk literature most suitable for use as big books in early childhood education

is answered by animal fables (Mean 4.3406, *SD* 0.7272) and exemplary stories (Mean 4.3189, *SD* 0.8860) as the first choice and second choice respectively where teachers (Mean 4.3846, *SD* 0.7299) prefer animal fables, but the undergraduate students (Mean 4.4784, *SD* 0.6509) favor exemplary stories to be formed into big books. Exemplary stories and animal fables are found to have moral values and hidden messages. In contrast, *lipurlara* stories (Mean 3.4591, *SD* 0.9707) are not suitable given their functions of emphasizing entertainment only.

Mythical stories in this study involve stories of origin. The stories of origin are divided into four types, namely place, animal, nature and plants. Natural phenomena (mean 4.1455, *SD* 0.8356) are cited as the most suitable for use as big books for children, followed by origin of animals (mean 4.0882, *SD* 0.8408), origin of plants (mean 4.0604, *SD* 0.8668), and ending with origin of place (mean 3.9211, *SD* 1.0046).

Stories about the origin of the rainbow received the best response among stories on origin of natural phenomena (Mean 4.2384, *SD* 0.8365). Even so, the mean score of all the respondents for rainbow was lower than that for the origin of place (Malacca) (Mean 4.2833, *SD* 0.9006); however respondents found that origins of natural phenomena were better suited to be turned into big books than stories about origin of places. This could be because the origin of Malacca is known through school history text books compared with the story of the origin of rainbow which is not that popular among the non-Malays.

Among the Malay animal fables, it was found that *Sang Kancil* was the most popular choice (mean 4.4241, *SD* 0.8838) to be made into big books for children. The story of *Sang Kancil and the Crocodile* (mean 4.4118, *SD* 0.8112) was regarded by all the respondents as the most suitable because it taught us how to treasure the kindness of those who help us and not to betray them. The story of *Sang Kancil and the Crocodile* comes in many versions but all reflect that a weak animal such as Sang Kancil has the ability to outwit an arrogant and stupid crocodile.

From the aspect of humorous stories and comedy, out of five local Malay characters, *Pak Pandir* (mean 4.2972, *SD* 0.7725) proved to be the most popular. His character of being clever but stupid at the same time is always entertaining. In fact in the Malaysian mass media, Pak Pandir is the character most often made the main character of comedies, for example in the NTV7 movie *Pak Pandir Moden* about a man who lives in a flat in the city and always creates funny events in life.

The story of *Mahsuri in Langkawi* (Mean 4.2957, *SD* 0.7880) is a well-known legend; in fact the story of *Mahsuri* has become the main attraction for tourists to Langkawi. Thus, the story is regarded as the main legend suitable for transformation into big books for children, according to the undergraduate student respondents (mean 4.3746, *SD* 0.7474). Besides that, the story of the *Princess of Gunung Ledang* (mean 4.2678, *SD* 0.7601) is popular among the preschool teachers (mean 4.2174, *SD* 0.7876). This story has been learned through the KOMSAS (Literature Component in Malay Language) text

books in Form Four in secondary schools from 2000 till 2009. *Princess of Gunung Ledang* was made into a mega movie in 2004 and a theatre production (musical) at Istana Budaya in 2005 and 2006, making the character widely known.

Analysis of findings on exemplary stories shows that *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah* (mean 4.3529, *SD* 0.8217) is the most popular story among the teacher respondents (mean 4.2642, *SD* 0.8977). The popularity of the story means it is often made into material for Indonesian drama series or “*Telenovela*” to deliver moral values to society. The drama series of the modern version of *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah* was aired over TV3, and received great response from Malaysian society recently. The story of *Si Tenggang* (mean 4.3329, *SD* 0.9313) came second among the respondents but received the highest mean score among the undergraduate students (mean 4.5476, *SD* 0.7678), showing that Malaysian society regards it as meaningful. This story embraces very strong social values arising from family ties and respect of a son to his mother.

Lipurlara stories are folk tales with the lowest mean scores. All the *lipurlara* stories in this study had mean scores below 4.00; in fact *Hikayat Malim Demam*, the most popular in this category, only obtained a mean score of 3.73 (*SD* 0.99) overall, mean score of 3.93 (*SD* 0.97) among the undergraduate students. For preschool teachers, the most popular *lipurlara* story was *Hikayat Malim Dewa* (mean 3.5284, *SD* 1.5284). This is due to the characteristics of *lipurlara* stories, which place more importance on entertainment and do not have values to be taught. These tales tell of the invisible world, the palace and perfect heroes and heroines, long and complex plot, and are not suitable for big story books.

B. Analysis of independent Sample t-test

Analysis of independent sample *t*-test was done to identify any differences among the two groups of respondents towards 10 items of folk literature. Table 4 details the results of the analysis.

TABLE IV
ANALYSIS OF T-TEST BETWEEN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
AND PRESCHOOL TEACHERS WITH ITEMS OF MALAY FOLK
LITERATURE

		Mean	SD	df	t	Sig	η
1. Folk literature may inculcate positive values among children	U	4.6455	0.5571	644	4.898	0.000	0.036
	T	4.3512	0.9450				
2. Folk literature should be modernized in line with the times	U	3.5994	1.2508	644	0.614	0.539	0.001
	T	3.5385	1.2669				
3. Folk literature should maintain its theme and plot	U	4.4467	0.8006	644	4.952	0.000	0.037
	T	4.1104	0.9257				
4. Big book of folk literature in Malaysia is satisfying	U	3.2565	0.8503	644	0.221	0.826	0.000
	T	3.2408	0.9565				
5. Malaysia folk	U	4.2248	0.9503	644	3.945	0.000	0.024

literature is more suitable for teaching & learning early children compare to western folk literature	T	3.9197	1.0135				
6. Folk literature should be presented in modern ways like VCD/DVD or interactive VCD/DVD for the purpose of teaching & learning early children	U	4.5418	0.6718	644	6.125	0.000	0.055
	T	4.1317	0.9956				
7. Folk literature should be made as teaching materials on web page	U	4.3775	0.7123	644	4.349	0.000	0.029
	T	4.1070	0.8681				
8. Developing ICT of folk literature help in teaching & learning early children	U	4.4524	0.6584	644	6.989	0.000	0.071
	T	4.0201	0.9084				
9. Curriculum of early childhood education is eligible to teaching children literature	U	3.3977	1.1163	644	-759	0.079	0.005
	T	3.5552	1.1554				
10. Module for teaching & learning children should be developed for education purpose	U	4.3602	0.7251	644	3.586	0.000	0.020
	T	4.1438	0.8085				

Significant at the level of $p < .05$, alternative $p < 0.10$

Note:

U Undergraduate students

T Preschool teachers

η eta value

Table 4 shows the analysis of independent sample *t*-test of all the variables of folk literature in early childhood education among the undergraduate students and preschool teachers. Results show that there are significant differences at the level of $p < .05$ among the Malaysian population toward Malay folk literature overall. Eventhough undergraduate students (mean 4.6455, *SD* 0.5571) and teachers (mean 4.3512, *SD* 0.9450) agree that folk literature may inculcate positive value among children, students' opinion were found more positive with $t(644)=4.898$, $p=0.00$, $\eta=0.036$.

Due to Malay literature is the heritage of Malaysian national literature, the respondents shown their concern about the continuity of the literature among the children. This reflected from the data that all two groups think that the folk literature reading materials should be maintained its theme and plot with $t(644)=4.952$, $p=0.000$, $\eta=0.37$.

Undergraduate students (mean 4.2248, *SD* 0.9503) and teachers (mean 3.9197, *SD* 1.0135) agreed that Malaysia folk literature is more suitable for teaching & learning early children compare to western folk literature with t value=3.945, $p = .631$. Parallel with the ICT era, the two groups also agree that folk literature should be made as teaching materials on web page with $t(644)=4.349$, $p = .000$, $\eta=0.029$.

Teachers (mean 3.5552, *SD* 1.1554) shown higher agreement compare to undergraduate students (mean 3.3977, *SD* 1.1163) that curriculum of early childhood education in Malaysia is eligible to teaching children's literature, but their opinions show significant difference with $t(644)=-1.759$, $p = .000$, $\eta=0.005$. Realizing the above problem, undergraduate students (mean 4.3602, *SD* 0.7251) and teachers (mean 4.1438, *SD* 0.8085) show the same agreement that modules for teaching and learning of children should be developed for education purpose with $t(644)=3.586$, $p = .000$, $\eta=0.020$.

Besides that, undergraduate students (mean 4.5418, *SD* 0.6718) and teachers (mean 4.1317, *SD* 0.9956) show significant difference in opinion about whether folk literature should be presented in modern ways such as VCD/DVD or interactive VCD/DVD for the purpose of teaching and learning early children with $t(644)=6.125$, $p = .000$, $\eta=0.055$. However, both groups agree that interactive VCD/DVD may interest the children with activities, games and exercises. This is lacking in Malay folk literature materials found in Malaysia nowadays.

Item of developing ICT of folk literature help in teaching & learning early children with $t(644)=6.989$, $p=0.000$, $\eta=0.071$, also shown significant difference of views between undergraduate students (mean 4.4524, *SD* 0.6584) and teachers (mean 4.0201, *SD* 0.9084). Students were found to be more open to accepting the ICT materials compared to teachers. This item received the highest eta value ($\eta=0.071$); the effect size of this item is moderate and shows that this is the most important thing to be considered in developing children's literature in Malaysia.

All the above items are significant at the $p < .05$ level except for "Curriculum of early childhood education is eligible to teaching children literature" which was significant at the $p < .10$ level.

Two items showed no significant differences of opinion between the undergraduate students and teachers. They were quite disagree that folk literature should be modernized in line with time with $t(644)=0.614$, $p = .539$, $\eta = .001$. These two groups also show the same disagreement that big book of folk literature in Malaysia are satisfying with $t(644)=3.221$, $p=0.826$, $\eta=0.000$. However, teachers (mean 3.2408, *SD* 0.9565) show more disagreement compared to undergraduate students (mean 3.2565, *SD* 0.8503) probably because teachers, based on their teaching experience, strongly feel the dissatisfaction of the shortage of big books of folk literature in Malaysia.

Even though the two categories of respondents agree that folk literature should be made into big books for children, undergraduate students show more positive attitude toward the above 10 items compare to teachers with higher mean score, except the item curriculum of early childhood education in Malaysia is eligible to teaching children literature.

VI. DISCUSSION

The respondents comprising undergraduate students and preschool teachers agreed that folk literature can be integrated into early childhood teaching and learning. Hence, teachers in

kindergartens and preschools are fond of using animal fables and exemplary stories compared to other types of stories because the two types of stories contain educational motives of moral importance due to the popularity of these stories in Malaysia.

Respondents also stated their agreement that Malay folk literature should be made into big books for early childhood education. In this regard, animal fables and exemplary stories are favored by the respondents overall because such stories have been impressed deep in their souls. Among the animal fables, *Sang Kancil* is the most popular and most preferred. According to Osman (1991) [26], *Sang Kancil* stories contain the trickster motive and this quality frames the role and the story is also called a “beast epic”.

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

Among the exemplary stories, the story of *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah* is the most popular and well known to many compared to other stories. This is because this story touches on family and relationship between humans, especially family ties. The questions raised involve problems of family daily life regarding the theme of importance of family members regardless their intelligence, beauty or wealth.

On the other hand, *lipurlara* stories are folk literature eliciting the lowest mean among the respondents. All the *lipurlara* stories in this study achieved a mean score of below 4.00, indicating that these stories are less suitable compared with other types of stories as reading materials for children because they are characterized as entertainment. Hence these long and complex stories are less suitable to be read by kindergarten children.

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

Hence, to revive Malay folk literature as materials for early childhood education, suitable stories should be chosen as compulsory stories or text books in kindergartens/preschools. Using Malay folk literature is a wonderful way to validate the culture and life of Malays within the classroom and explore the various genre of folk literature. Teachers and students can develop other creative ways to explore the materials and incorporate them across the curriculum, such as literature circle discussion; reader's theater; reflecting on the “universal significance of the text”; aesthetic response through art, music, or drama; and connecting one's own ideas and experiences to the words or art in the materials [27].

Nevertheless, the two categories of respondents show significant differences of opinion toward all types of folk literature for use as storybooks for children. The biggest difference was seen in the item “developing ICT of folk literature help in teaching & learning early children”; followed by “folk literature should be presented in modern ways like VCD/DVD or interactive VCD/DVD for the purpose of early childhood teaching and learning”. These are two items that gave moderate beta value that draw our attention that Malay folk literature need to be developed in ICT form so that it will attract the attention and interest of the children of the new era.

This finding is parallel with the study done by Moore-Hart (2004/2005) [28] that assessing information about cultures might enhance understanding of the multicultural stories that children are reading and increase recognition of the cultural traditions, beliefs, or values within the stories. By applying Hoffman's (1996) theories, she further found that students need opportunities to explore cultures in more depth. Wiggleworks, by Scholastic, for example, uses multimedia formats that allow students to read, write, take notes, and manipulate texts from various cultures. Through multimedia profiles, students encounter culturally diverse mentors and authors in the workplace or hear music and songs from people in different regions of the world.

The linkage of books and cyberspace will allow us to explore how to promote reading through new technologies, meeting the needs and expectations of young generations who are growing up surfing the World Wide Web. However, according to Leo (2004) [29], printed publishing will continue to play an important role, due to the existing socio-economy imbalance beside other obstacles which hinder the growth of multimedia publishing, such as: economy, technology, culture, and social system. Therefore, printed and multimedia publishing must co-exist to satisfy the needs of their audience.

Accordingly, the statement of the International Reading Association (IRA) and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2005) [30] suggested that quality of book choices, computer software and multimedia materials should be sufficient to foster interest in reading. This is to overcome the lack of exposure of children to materials based on the diversity of families and cultural background from which the children come. In this case, Morrow (2005) [31] considers that the number of five books for every child is the minimum number in order to create a print-rich environment.

Materials including works of literature are important educational and entertainment tools, especially for children. This is because literature materials can more easily attract the attention and interest of children who have a natural preference for creative and imaginative works compared to other types of ordinary works. Hence carefully choosing Malay folk literature material, using such clear criteria as outlined here, will yield selections that provide avenues into the hearts and culture of Malays. Through exploration of the above-mentioned work of literature, the children can reach beyond the mainstream culture. Young readers may come to appreciate the various folk literature represented by Malays,

which is especially important in the multicultural society in Malaysia.

Literature about Malay peoples reflects both the universal qualities of human experience and the unique dimension of the main part of the country, where social mores and cultural norms differ from the Chinese, Indian, Eurasian and so forth. It is suggested to teach Malay folk literature in all kindergartens regardless of the ethnic background. According to Tami and Bob (2007) [32], such instruction integrates an examination of attitudes, accurate information, and literary exploration, involving both teachers and students in developing a broader appreciation of the potential of all cultural groups and may prevent acts of ethnic violence in future.

VII. CONCLUSION

Folk literature serves several functions: education and didactic appropriate to the type of society and culture in Malaysia. Hence folk literature should preserve the flavour of the culture of the country of its origin by being made into reading materials, as well as reading material suitable for children especially. Malaysian society shows a positive and open attitude toward folk literature in early childhood education either in big book or information technology form. This shows the enduring nature of Malay folk literature in Malaysia, and it should be made an inheritance for the younger generation.

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