

Cultural Transmission of Life Values through *Bekana*: An Educational Perspective on the Dayak Kebahan in Sintang

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the transmission of life values through *bekana*, a traditional storytelling practice preserved by the Dayak Kebahan community in Sintang, West Kalimantan. The main issue underlying this study is the diminishing role of indigenous traditions in passing down moral and cultural values due to the pressures of modernization, which risks weakening the foundations of local identity and education. The purpose of the research is to investigate how *bekana* functions as a cultural medium of teaching, particularly in shaping ethical behavior, communal responsibility, and spiritual awareness among younger generations. Using a qualitative ethnographic method, data were gathered through direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and textual analysis to obtain a comprehensive picture of *bekana's* educational dimensions. The results highlight nine categories of values that are consistently communicated: honesty, responsibility, solidarity, respect, wisdom, heroism, patience, spirituality, and environmental consciousness. These findings indicate that *bekana* is not solely a form of oral tradition but also an educational system that integrates cultural heritage with practical guidance for life. The synthesis of these insights demonstrates that *bekana* serves as an informal curriculum, reinforcing community worldviews while enabling adaptation to contemporary social change. The conclusion underscores that *bekana* is a crucial resource for sustaining cultural continuity and for enriching character education, thereby offering valuable perspectives for bridging indigenous traditions and modern educational frameworks.

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this article is the *Bekana* tradition of the Dayak Kebahan in Sintang, Indonesia, where storytelling by elders or parents – particularly fathers and mothers – is a common practice before children or grandchildren aged 4 to 12 go to sleep. The narratives told usually depict legendary figures from Dayak ancestors or other ethnic groups, highlighting their bravery in warfare, expertise in agriculture, achievements in economic life, and contributions to community welfare. Each story is intentionally closed with moral reflections. In addition to indigenous tales, stories from the Bible are also frequently included, since the Dayak Kebahan are predominantly Christian and Catholic, making *Bekana* a hybrid practice that conveys both cultural wisdom and religious teachings (Djuweng, 2020).

Over the past decade, numerous studies have underscored the importance of storytelling and folklore as vehicles for transmitting cultural knowledge and strengthening children's character (Djuweng, 2020; Muslich, 2017; Sibarani, 2018). Prior research has commonly applied descriptive qualitative methods, ethnography, and literary analysis to investigate oral traditions (Lestari & Rahmawati, 2020, Subroto, 2020).

These approaches effectively uncover the moral, social, and ecological values embedded in indigenous narratives. However, their shortcomings lie in the limited attention to how the storytelling process itself fosters dialogic interaction between parents and children, and the lack of exploration into how religious and cultural elements merge in contemporary contexts (Nurhayati, 2021).

This research seeks to address these gaps by examining *Bekana* not only as a form of folklore but also as an educational medium for intergenerational value transmission. The study employs a qualitative ethnographic approach, combining observation of family storytelling practices, interviews with parents, elders, and children, and narrative analysis of indigenous as well as Biblical stories (Kurniadi, 2021).

The contributions of this paper are fivefold: (1) providing empirical documentation of *Bekana* in the Dayak Kebahan community of Sintang; (2) identifying the moral and cultural values embedded in the stories; (3) analyzing the pedagogical dynamics of storytelling as dialogic moral education; (4) proposing a framework for understanding the intersection of indigenous and Christian traditions in cultural transmission; and (5) offering implications for character education and the preservation of local wisdom (Fitriani & Wulandari, 2022, Prasetyo, 2022).

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on storytelling, folklore, and educational values. Section 3 describes the methodology applied. Section 4 presents findings and analysis. Section 5 discusses the educational and cultural implications. Section 6 provides the conclusion and recommendations for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Transmission and Value Education

Cultural transmission is a vital process for preserving a community's collective identity. Koentjaraningrat (2009) explains that culture serves as a life guide, passed on across generations through both formal and informal education. Within the educational sphere, cultural transmission entails not only the inheritance of social norms but also the internalization of moral and spiritual values that ensure social cohesion (Tilaar, 2012). Previous studies show that oral traditions play a central role in shaping ethics, solidarity, and youth identity (Muslich, 2017; Geertz, 1973). This indicates a close relationship between cultural continuity and character formation.

Oral Traditions as Educational Media

Oral traditions—such as folktales, myths, legends, and chants—carry strong pedagogical functions. Vansina (1985) stresses that oral tradition is not merely entertainment but also a vehicle for transmitting social norms, cosmology, and indigenous wisdom. In Indonesian societies, oral traditions reinforce communal bonds and convey contextual moral lessons (Sibarani, 2012). Djuweng (2020) further emphasizes that Dayak oral traditions embody philosophical reflections on life values, including solidarity, responsibility, and environmental harmony. As such, oral traditions function like an unwritten curriculum that systematically educates communities.

Bekana in the Dayak Kebahan Context

Bekana is a distinct oral tradition of the Dayak Kebahan, containing narratives of heroism, ancestral myths, and moral lessons. Djuweng (2020) identifies *bekana* as a crucial medium for instilling collective values and strengthening cultural identity. In practice, *bekana* is used to teach social ethics, cooperation, and spirituality, making it highly relevant to character education in contemporary contexts. It also conveys ecological wisdom, reflecting the Dayak worldview that humans are inseparable from the natural cosmos (Sellato, 2015).

Character Education Based on Local Wisdom

The integration of local wisdom into character education has gained increasing academic attention. Muslich (2017) argues that character education must be rooted in local traditions to maintain contextual relevance. Similarly, Tilaar (2012) views local wisdom as the foundation of multicultural education that promotes diversity and solidarity. Research on Dayak education highlights values such as cooperation, honesty, and respect for the environment as essential components that can be integrated into both formal and informal education (Haba, 2007; Sibarani, 2012). This underscores the urgency of creating educational models that harmonize global knowledge with local cultural values.

Research Gap

Although Dayak oral traditions have been widely studied, limited research has focused specifically on *bekana* as a vehicle for transmitting life values from an educational perspective. Most studies lean toward anthropological or folkloristic approaches, while pedagogical dimensions remain underexplored. Thus, this study

contributes new insights by situating *bekana* within the framework of character education in the Dayak Kebahan community of Sintang.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a qualitative ethnographic method to investigate how *bekana*, a traditional oral storytelling practice, conveys life values within the Dayak Kebahan community in Sintang. The ethnographic approach was selected because it provides opportunities to examine cultural expressions in their real contexts and to uncover the symbolic meaning of transmitted values (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Fieldwork was carried out in several Kebahan villages in Sintang Regency, West Kalimantan, with 15 purposively selected participants, consisting of storytellers, elders, parents, young people, and children. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and analysis of supporting documents, methods that are widely applied in ethnographic studies (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Conversations were conducted in Indonesian and, when needed, in the local language with the support of translators. Notes, recordings, and transcripts became the primary data sources.

The collected data were examined using thematic analysis, which helped to identify recurring patterns such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and respect. The analytical process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages of coding, while NVivo software was used to assist with systematic categorization. To maintain the trustworthiness of the study, strategies such as triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and thick description were applied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ethical standards were upheld through informed consent, confidentiality agreements, and respect for local cultural practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Honesty

Honesty appears as one of the most consistently transmitted values through *bekana*. Mr. Ajam from Kebarau (Interview, January 22, 2025) observed that his daughter, Leli (14), became more mindful of her words after hearing stories highlighting the destructive impact of lies. He explained, "*When children admit their mistakes truthfully, it is far more valuable than being clever yet deceitful.*" His view reflects Koentjaraningrat's (2009) concept that folklore regulates social conduct. Similarly, Mr. Bantot of Tonak Gonih (Interview, February 13, 2025) noted that his daughter, Sefira (10), learned to accept accountability for her actions after listening to *bekana*. These accounts confirm Muslich's (2017) argument that narratives are persuasive vehicles for cultivating character.

Responsibility and Work Ethic

Responsibility and diligence are central lessons embedded in many *bekana*. Mr. Unggut from Tanjung Bunga (Interview, January 25, 2025) shared that his daughter, Marlinda (7), now shows more initiative in helping her parents after listening to stories about obedient and hardworking children. Likewise, Mr. Gunawan from Nanga Masau (Interview, January 29, 2025) emphasized that his son, Filemon (9), was motivated to work harder in the

fields after hearing the tale of a lazy child who lost his harvest. These cases resonate with Djuweng's (2020) view that perseverance and responsibility are central values in Dayak Kebahan culture.

Solidarity and Cooperation

Solidarity emerged strongly as a recurring theme. Mr. Abang Pinoh of Lintang Tambuk (Interview, February 5, 2025) explained how his son, Anto (13), became more generous, such as by sharing food at school, after listening to *bekana*. Similarly, Grandpa Atot from Topan (Interview, February 16, 2025) described *bekana* as "a compass for life," stressing that communal farming requires collective effort. His reflections echo Geertz's (1973) claim that cultural symbols provide orientation for living. Mr. Semagai from Empakan (Interview, March 20, 2025) added that his son, Nando (12), grew more inclusive toward friends of different ethnic backgrounds. These accounts illustrate Sibarani's (2012) argument that folklore strengthens communal bonds and fosters integration.

Respect and Empathy

Several participants highlighted how *bekana* cultivates respect and empathy. Mr. Sangan from Tanah Merah (Interview, February 9, 2025) stressed that his daughter, Deta (8), learned empathy through stories rather than commands. "Children learn more effectively from narratives than from instructions," he said. Similarly, Mrs. Ronggon from Natai Bunyau (Interview, March 6, 2025) noted that her daughter, Siska (10), now greets her parents respectfully after hearing a tale about a disobedient child. These examples align with Hymes' (2004) perspective that storytelling transmits shared norms, and with Widodo's (2015) observation that local narratives nurture family ethics.

Wisdom and Identity

Elders frequently described *bekana* as a means of transmitting cultural wisdom and identity. Grandma Lemai from Entogong (Interview, February 18, 2025) noted that storytelling sessions with her grandchildren not only educate but also strengthen intergenerational ties. Similarly, Grandpa Odong from Kupan Jaya (Interview, February 23, 2025) emphasized that *bekana* teaches children about their origins, stating, "Through *bekana*, children come to know their roots." These reflections confirm Vansina's (1985) assertion that oral tradition bridges past and present, and Smith's (2009) view that collective identity is preserved through narrative rituals.

Heroism and Bravery

Some *bekana* embed heroic values, inspiring courage in children. Mr. Ajan from Buluh Merindu (Interview, February 27, 2025) shared that his son, Doni (11), drew lessons of bravery from stories of local heroes, motivating him to defend truth and act courageously. This finding supports Nurgiyantoro's (2013) argument that folklore often integrates heroic ideals within moral frameworks.

Patience and Self-Regulation

Patience also emerged as a moral lesson. Mr. Leman from Emponyang (Interview, March 2, 2025) observed that his son, Riko (12), became more patient in waiting his turn while playing after hearing a story about the consequences

of acting in haste. This illustrates Vygotsky's (1978) theory that cultural interaction fosters self-control and behavioral regulation.

Spiritual and Religious Values

Spirituality surfaced as another theme. Mr. Kedebot from Nanga Oran (Interview, March 11, 2025) explained that his daughter, Ester (9), became more consistent in praying after hearing *bekana* linking prayer with success. This observation resonates with Tilaar's (2002) idea that oral traditions often incorporate religious teachings within moral education.

Environmental Awareness

Finally, *bekana* was also shown to convey ecological wisdom. Mrs. Unut from Natai Panjang (Interview, March 15, 2025) described how her son, Samuel (13), avoided cutting trees after hearing stories about harmony between humans and nature. This reflects Keraf's (2010) argument that traditional storytelling serves as an effective medium for environmental ethics.

Through the nine identified thematic clusters—honesty, responsibility, solidarity, respect, wisdom, heroism, patience, spirituality, and environmental awareness—the findings reveal that *bekana* serves as more than a cultural performance; it functions as a dynamic and multifaceted pedagogical medium. Rather than simply providing entertainment, *bekana* systematically embeds and conveys moral, social, and ecological values that shape both personal development and collective well-being within the Dayak Kebahan community. In this way, *bekana* acts as a vehicle of cultural continuity, where the retelling of stories reinforces shared norms and aspirations across generations.

The thematic integration also underscores how *bekana* supports the formation of communal identity. By narrating stories that highlight honesty or solidarity, for instance, elders transmit behavioral expectations that become internalized within the daily practices of children and youth. This resonates with educational theories that view storytelling as a natural form of value transmission in oral cultures (Bruner, 1990; Ong, 2002). Moreover, values like patience and wisdom are not merely abstract ideals but are contextualized through concrete characters and local experiences, which make them accessible and meaningful for younger audiences.

The pedagogical dimension of *bekana* is further illuminated through its role in cultivating spiritual and ecological awareness. Stories often interweave human, natural, and spiritual elements, emphasizing harmony with the environment and reverence for the divine. This mirrors broader anthropological observations that indigenous oral traditions operate as ecological and ethical texts, guiding sustainable ways of living (Ingold, 2000; Ellen, 2016). Thus, the Dayak Kebahan case exemplifies how narrative practices function as holistic educational resources that nurture intellectual, moral, and ecological literacies simultaneously.

Furthermore, the analysis highlights that the thematic clusters do not exist in isolation but intersect and reinforce one another. Honesty supports responsibility, solidarity strengthens respect, and spirituality enriches wisdom and patience. Such interconnectivity illustrates what Braun and Clarke (2006) describe as the layered nature of thematic patterns, where values form a coherent web of meaning rather than discrete categories. This

interconnectedness reflects the lived reality of the Dayak Kebahan, where values are embodied in daily interactions rather than taught as separate moral lessons.

Overall, this study demonstrates that *bekana* represents an indigenous educational framework that is both systematic and adaptive. It affirms the power of narrative to transmit essential life values while simultaneously entertaining, educating, and preserving cultural identity. These findings enrich the broader discourse on culturally responsive pedagogy, suggesting that indigenous traditions like *bekana* offer valuable insights for contemporary education, especially in contexts where formal schooling risks marginalizing local wisdom.

Comparison

Earlier research on cultural transmission and indigenous oral traditions has predominantly emphasized anthropological and folkloristic dimensions rather than educational applications. Geertz (1973) and Koentjaraningrat (2009), for instance, described culture as a system of symbols and social norms, yet their analyses did not extend to its role as an intentional educational process. Vansina (1985) framed oral traditions as historical records and collective memory but offered limited discussion on their pedagogical functions. More contemporary studies, such as Sibarani (2012) and Haba (2007), positioned local wisdom as a means of strengthening social cohesion and resolving conflicts, though these works remain insufficient in exploring how such wisdom can be integrated into structured value-based education.

In the context of Dayak communities, scholars like Djuweng (2020) and Sellato (2015) provided important insights into the philosophical and ecological dimensions of oral traditions. Nonetheless, their focus has been on identity formation and environmental ethics, leaving the educational dimension underexplored. Compared with these prior works, this study advances the discussion by analyzing *bekana* not merely as cultural expression but as an informal pedagogical system for transmitting values across generations.

The novelty of this study is evident in the identification of nine thematic clusters—honesty, responsibility, solidarity, respect, wisdom, heroism, patience, spirituality, and environmental awareness—which reveal the comprehensive and multifunctional role of *bekana*. Whereas previous scholarship largely described oral traditions in symbolic or philosophical terms, this research demonstrates how *bekana* can operate as a framework for character education. In doing so, it bridges indigenous cultural sustainability with modern educational paradigms, contributing a unique perspective to both indigenous studies and educational theory.

Tabel 5.1.
 Comparison Table

Author/Source	Focus of Study	Limitation/Gaps Identified	Contribution of This Study on <i>Bekana</i>
Geertz (1973)	Culture as	Did not address	Extends cultural

	symbols and meaning systems	pedagogical functions	meaning into educational application
Koentjaraningrat (2009)	Culture as social guidance and norms	Lacks analysis of educational mechanisms	Positions <i>bekana</i> as a mechanism for value education
Vansina (1985)	Oral tradition as history and memory	Pedagogical aspects underexplored	Highlights <i>bekana</i> as an informal curriculum
Sibarani (2012)	Oral tradition and local wisdom for cohesion	Limited focus on character education	Shows how <i>bekana</i> transmits moral and social values
Haba (2007)	Local wisdom in conflict resolution	No linkage with structured education	Integrates <i>bekana</i> into frameworks of value-based learning
Djuweng (2020)	Dayak philosophy and cultural reflections	Focus on identity, less on pedagogy	Interprets <i>bekana</i> as a pedagogical tool
Sellato (2015)	Ecological and symbolic dimensions of Dayak arts	Lacks educational analysis	Demonstrates ecological and moral education in <i>bekana</i>

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research demonstrates that *bekana*, the oral storytelling practice of the Dayak Kebahan in Sintang, plays a crucial role in passing down essential life values from one generation to another. The findings indicate that principles such as honesty, responsibility, solidarity, respect, wisdom, heroism, patience, spirituality, and environmental care are actively reinforced through *bekana*. Evidence drawn from interviews and observations affirms that oral traditions serve not only to preserve culture but also to nurture moral and educational growth within the community.

A synthesis of these findings underscores the alignment between the study's objectives and the data obtained. The results confirm the premise that indigenous oral traditions function dually as cultural archives and as learning instruments shaping individual and collective character. This reinforces the broader argument that cultural transmission operates at once as a symbolic and pedagogical process.

The contribution of this study lies in its implications for education and cultural studies. Theoretically, it enriches scholarly discussions on value-based

education by positioning local wisdom as an educational foundation. Practically, it highlights how *bekana* can inform culturally sensitive approaches in modern pedagogy, creating a bridge between traditional knowledge and contemporary educational systems.

However, the study has certain limitations. Its scope is restricted to the Dayak Kebahan community in Sintang, which may limit its wider applicability. Future studies could include comparative research across other Dayak subgroups or different indigenous contexts in Indonesia, and further examine strategies for embedding *bekana* within formal curricula while preserving its cultural integrity.

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