

A STUDY OF LOCAL WISDOM AS CULTURAL FOUNDATION IN TORAJA PROVERBS

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ABSTRACT

Toraja proverbs serve as a vital expression of local wisdom, encapsulating the cultural values, ethical principles, and social norms that shape the identity of the Toraja people. This paper explores the cultural foundations embedded in Toraja proverbs. Through a qualitative analysis of proverbs, the study examines how these values influence interpersonal relationships, community dynamics, and ethical conduct within Toraja society. Findings reveal that proverbs not only guide individual behavior but also as guidance in a Toraja society. It includes the importance of familial bonds, cooperation, leadership, persistence, loyalty, fairness, wisdom, sincerity, humility, and diligence. These values reflect the essence of Toraja's cultural identity and provide timeless guidance for maintaining harmony and character development

Keywords: local wisdom, proverbs, toraja

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's culture is a wonder because it has thousands of islands and more than 700 tribes that speak more than one language. All tribes have unique traditions, arts, and customs that are passed down from generation to generation (Ginting et al., 2020). This reflects the beauty of Indonesia's diversity, which unites the country with fascinating diversity. One of the most famous for its global culture in Indonesia is Toraja.

The Toraja people are famous as one of the communities rich in local wisdom. Toraja is known for its distinctive culture and traditions, including in their oral language and literature. Oral literature from these different regions is classified as cultural heritage (Society et al., 2012) while language is said to be part of Toraja culture, implying values and norms that must be a strong identity and pride of the Toraja people to build their character as reflected in the entire life of the Toraja people (Patiung & Sitoto, 2021).

Toraja sayings and proverbs are a unique way to convey values, habits, and wisdom in everyday life. The principles and habits that become the identity and pride of Toraja are seen in these proverbs, and this will be seen in the life of every Toraja.

In Toraja culture, local wisdom is closely intertwined with oral or spoken traditions that have been passed down from one generation to the next. Philosophically, local wisdom can be interpreted as an original knowledge system that is empirical and pragmatic (Utama & Junaedi, 2021). Another definition states that local wisdom as a cultural heritage in each region/region must be preserved to our generation from time to time (Gasong, n.d.).

The local wisdom in a society has the functions of conservation and preservation of natural resources, development of human resources, development of culture and science and warnings, beliefs, literature, and restrictions (Bachrong & Ansar, 2021; Syarifuddin & Hasyim Firmansyah, 2022).

Some cultures are passed down by word of mouth, not in the form of writing or inscriptions (Salu Situru & Tulak, 2022), including proverbs and sayings. A proverb is a short sentence structure with a consistent auditory beat (Silalahi & Nasution, 2018). Proverbs are sources of language that contain local wisdom, culture, and tradition. Through proverbs, people maintain the cultural identity of the community by representing the intellectual heritage that has been passed down from generation to generation.

Proverbs are often marginalized, even endangered, in the midst of modernization and globalization that penetrate every aspect of life. In fact, research that documents and thoroughly analyzes Toraja proverbs so that they can reveal the cultural meaning contained in them is very limited. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research that aims to further explore the cultural meaning in Torajan proverbs.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the cultural meaning of Toraja proverbs. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with indigenous elders to gain insights into how these proverbs are used in everyday life and their cultural significance. Additionally, content analysis was conducted on J.S. Sande's book of Toraja proverbs to identify recurring themes and values. Thematic analysis was applied to categorize the proverbs based on cultural values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of Toraja Proverbs reveals important insights into social norms and cultural values of Torajan people. The key findings are:

1. Unbreakable Blood Relations

The proverb “*bua’ raka nala dipasisarak mata mabusa dan malotong*” and “*dipori tang tikokang*” underscore the inviolability of familial bonds. Blood relationships are central to the social fabric of Toraja society and are considered sacred and unchangeable, forming the foundation for trust and solidarity.

2. Cooperation and Mutual Aid (*Gotong Royong*)

“*Misa’ kada’ dipotuo, pantan kada dipomate*” symbolizes the importance of cooperation in Toraja communities. The principle of *gotong royong* highlights the interdependence among members, where collective action is valued and necessary for community well-being.

3. Leadership

The proverb “*pada lao oninna manuk*” illustrates leadership as a communal role, once exclusively male, but now open to all members of the community. *Manuk* or the rooster, as a symbol of leadership, reflects the transition from patriarchal to more democratic leadership structures in modern Toraja society.

4. Persistence and Dedication

“*Lima matipa, lentek maringngan*” emphasizes perseverance and dedication in one's work. This concept suggests that hard work is an essential virtue in Toraja society, and dedication is considered a key to personal success and social respect.

5. Loyalty

“*Na mui uran bulaan jo tondokna tau, uran batu jo tondokta inang la dipebudabudai tu tondokta*” stresses the importance of loyalty to one's homeland. This proverb reflects the Toraja community's strong connection to their land and the responsibility to protect and honor it.

6. Fairness and Equality

The saying “*Da mu mentiro langngan buntu kalando*” conveys the principle of fairness, where all individuals are to be treated equally, regardless of their status. This value is a critical component of maintaining social harmony.

7. Wisdom in Speech

“*Disuka’ landona, dilebu’ kasallena*” encourages people to think before speaking. It highlights the value of wisdom in communication and warns against hasty words that can lead to unnecessary conflict.

8. Sincerity and Integrity

The saying “*Tallang tangkelesoan*” refers to individuals whose actions align with their words. This reflects the value of sincerity and the importance of being true to one’s word, which helps in building trust within the community.

9. Humility

“*Langngan ki tumbek ba’bana, ki killang pentiroanna*” advocates for humility and the seeking of divine guidance. This reflects the spiritual aspect of Toraja culture, where individuals are reminded to seek help from a higher power and stay humble.

10. Diligence

The proverb “*Lumbang ungkaro padang: rajin bercocok tanam*” emphasizes the value of hard work in farming, showing the Toraja community’s deep reliance on agricultural practices and the importance of diligence in achieving prosperity.

DISCUSSION

The proverbs discussed above represent key values that are deeply embedded in the culture of the Toraja people. These proverbs reveal a community-oriented society that emphasizes cooperation, fairness, and loyalty while recognizing the importance of leadership, integrity, and spiritual humility. Several of these values are also present in broader social theories and contemporary ethical discussions.

The findings on the leadership values of *To Parengnge’* in Tana Toraja provide a framework to understand the cultural depth encapsulated in Toraja proverbs. The principles of *kina* (wisdom and kindness) and *manarang* (intelligence and skill) resonate strongly with proverbs such as “*Pada lao oninna manuk*”, which symbolizes leadership as a collective responsibility grounded in competence and wisdom. Tadius et al. emphasize that effective leaders in Toraja must integrate these qualities to build harmonious and equitable communities (Tadius & Salu, 2021). This aligns with the broader cultural ethos of fairness and cooperation, as seen in proverbs like “*Da mu mentiro langngan buntu kalando*” (fairness and equality) and “*Misa’ kada’ dipoto, pantan kada di pomate*” (mutual cooperation). These values highlight the interplay between traditional leadership ideals and modern inclusivity, underscoring the enduring relevance of local wisdom in fostering social stability amidst contemporary challenges.

The findings from research on the meaning of *Singgi' Passikola* within *Kada Tominaa* discourse highlight the integral role of local wisdom in conveying moral and educational values (Baan, 2023). Toraja proverbs like “*Langngan ki tumbek ba'bana, ki killang pentiroanna*”, which emphasize prayer and humility, resonate with the *Singgi'* messages of gratitude and divine reliance found in Baan's study. Her research underscores how these oral traditions not only teach perseverance in education but also foster spiritual awareness and social cohesion. This alignment between proverbs and ritual utterances demonstrates that cultural expressions in Toraja society are deeply interconnected, serving as vehicles for character development and cultural preservation. Moreover, as Baan suggests, the incorporation of such local wisdom into modern educational curricula can ensure the continuation of these traditions, thereby reinforcing the identity and values of future generations.

The insights from a study on Minangkabau proverbs (Silalahi & Nasution, 2018) align with the broader theme of local wisdom reflected in Toraja proverbs. Both cultures use proverbs as tools to instill values such as leadership, humility, fairness, and religiosity. Minangkabau proverbs' educational, cultural, and linguistic functions parallel Toraja proverbs' role in maintaining societal harmony and fostering individual character. For example, the Toraja proverb “*Da mu mentiro langngan buntu kalandu*”, emphasizing fairness and justice, reflects the Minangkabau value of *alang arih binaso badan* (wisdom prevents self-destruction). Silalahi and Nasution's assertion that proverbs serve as character education tools underscores the importance of integrating Toraja proverbs into educational curricula to sustain cultural identity and build ethical individuals who can adapt to modern challenges.

CONCLUSION

The Toraja proverbs discussed reflect a rich cultural tradition that values family, cooperation, fairness, leadership, and sincerity. These proverbs continue to play a significant role in shaping the behaviors, attitudes, and relationships within the Toraja community. Despite the modern challenges posed by globalization, these proverbs remain relevant as they offer timeless wisdom on how to navigate social relations and personal conduct.

In a broader context, the values embedded in Toraja proverbs align with contemporary discussions in social sciences on solidarity, fairness, leadership, and personal integrity. As Toraja society continues to evolve, these proverbs serve as a reminder of the importance of maintaining a balance between tradition and modernity. By preserving and interpreting these

proverbs, the Toraja people ensure that their cultural heritage remains a guiding force in the face of change.

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