

Preserving Local Languages Through Communication Media: The Role of Acehese Oral Literature in Eastern Coastal Aceh

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Abstract—Acehnese oral literature is a cultural heritage that encompasses folklore, hikayat, poetry, as well as historical, ethical, and cultural values passed down through generations. However, the rise of digital technology and shifting lifestyles among the younger generation in eastern coastal Aceh have led to the marginalization of oral traditions and local languages. This study explores the role of oral literature as a form of communication media in the effort to preserve the Acehese local language. Using a qualitative approach, the research identifies various forms of oral literature utilized by community leaders and cultural figures to convey messages and assesses their effectiveness in engaging the younger generation. The findings indicate that oral literature serves not only to promote cultural awareness but also to maintain the vitality of local languages through contextually relevant and culturally grounded channels. This practice demonstrates adaptability to modern times and facilitates the connection between local cultural identity and contemporary communication needs. The integration of cultural and linguistic values within a single narrative framework allows for the revitalization of local languages in harmony with the preservation of regional identity. This research affirms the significance of sustaining oral traditions through communication media as a strategic means of safeguarding local identity in the face of globalization.

Index Terms—Acehnese oral literature, communication media, local language, coastal Aceh, cultural preservation

I. INTRODUCTION

Oral literature is an intangible cultural heritage that has grown and evolved within the living spaces of traditional

societies. It functions not merely as entertainment but as a medium of social communication, moral education, and a repository of collective memory passed down across generations (Desfianti & Hudaidah, 2025). In Aceh, forms of oral literature such as *hikayat*, folktales, rhymes, and traditional poetry serve as vital instruments for preserving deeply rooted cultural values within the community. These narratives are rich in historical, ethical, and aesthetic meaning, and are intricately tied to the expression of the Acehnese language. The use of local language within such narratives positions oral literature not only as a reflection of cultural identity but also as a functional and contextual mechanism for language preservation. Consequently, oral literature holds a strategic function that must be protected amidst the complex pressures of social transformation.

Over the past two decades, Acehnese oral literature has faced an increasingly evident existential crisis. The waves of globalization and modernization have triggered substantial changes in patterns of communication, knowledge distribution, and cultural consumption. Younger generations, raised in the digital era, are more exposed to global content mostly in Indonesian or foreign languages through social media and entertainment platforms. Global popular culture, with its widespread reach, has gradually displaced local narratives as a source of knowledge, values, and entertainment (Rizqiya, 2024). As a result, oral literature has begun to lose its relevance as a source of value-based education and collective identity. This phenomenon highlights a growing generational disconnect in appreciating and continuing oral traditions. In fact, similar trends have been observed across other regions, such as in the weakening of traditional storytelling as a community-based tourism asset in Kedang Ipil, where modernization has overshadowed oral practices that once formed the identity of the village (Indriani et al., 2022).

The Acehnese language, as the primary medium of oral literature, has also been significantly affected. The decreasing use of the Acehnese language in daily conversations, public forums, and mainstream media has weakened intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. This trend not only threatens the survival of oral literature as a cultural expression but also accelerates the erosion of the local language as a core marker of Acehnese identity (Permata Sari et al., 2025). If left unaddressed, this situation could lead to the disappearance of the Acehnese language from the lived experience of the community. The loss of language correlates directly with the fading of the values, norms, and historical consciousness embedded within it. Therefore, the preservation of oral literature must become an integral component of broader efforts to sustain the Acehnese language. In this context, the efforts of Acehnese religious scholars to convey Islamic values through *hikayat* such as *Prang Sabi* reflect how oral literature has historically served as a medium for the internalization of spiritual and cultural norms (Hariad et al., 2025).

One strategic approach to preserving oral literature lies in the use of communication media. Broadly defined, media includes traditional channels such as community radio and public cultural forums, as well as digital platforms like YouTube, podcasts, and locally-based social media. The potential of media as a tool for reproduction and dissemination stems from its ability to reach diverse audiences across age groups. Oral narratives presented in audiovisual formats, digital recordings, or online storytelling content can enhance accessibility and appeal. Media can provide a more dynamic representation of oral traditions without sacrificing their cultural essence. This creates strategic opportunities to revitalize traditional forms in ways that resonate with digitally native audiences. As Pulungan (2024) emphasizes, the integration of traditional narratives with modern digital platforms can serve as a powerful instrument for religious and cultural diplomacy in a plural society.

The eastern coastal offers a rich sociocultural context for examining media-based oral literature preservation practices. Communities in these areas maintain enduring religious and customary traditions that are closely tied to local language use. In East Aceh, for example, the *dayah* (Islamic boarding schools) and *meunasah* (village prayer halls) serve as hubs of intergenerational interaction. In social events such as religious gatherings, communal feasts, and Islamic celebrations, the Acehnese language remains the primary mode of communication. These practices indicate that oral tradition is not confined to the private domain but continues to shape the public sphere. Such dynamics open up pathways for media to reinforce the cultural functions of local language. Certain districts, such as Idi Rayeuk, Julok, and Peureulak, are well known for their efforts to preserve *hikayat*, traditional poems, and folktales. Activities such as oral storytelling and poetic performances still take place during customary and religious events. However, the forms of delivery are beginning to transform through audiovisual documentation and community radio broadcasts. These efforts pave the way for the revitalization of oral literature in more communicative formats that are readily accepted by younger generations. Media thus functions as a crucial bridge between the older generation, who are custodians of tradition, and the youth, who are its inheritors. In this way, communication media becomes a vital platform for sustaining the vitality of the local language. From a broader Islamic communication perspective, as Hefni (2015) asserts, media can function as a contemporary channel for da'wah that adapts to the changing cultural and technological landscapes.

Unfortunately, the relationship between oral literature, communication media, and language preservation has rarely been the subject of integrated scholarly inquiry. Previous studies tend to focus on the aesthetic, linguistic, or historical aspects of oral literature (Yulsafli & Erfinawati, 2022), while media studies often emphasize technological transformation and patterns of information consumption. Yet, the integration of both fields holds great promise for developing preservation strategies that are adaptive to the realities of contemporary cultural ecosystems. In a multicultural society like Aceh, media can act as a new cultural space where oral traditions are revitalized and transmitted more broadly. This research seeks to address this gap by bridging the fields of cultural literature and

communication. This study aims to examine how the existence of Acehese oral literature can be strengthened through the use of communication media as a strategy for preserving local language. The primary focus is directed toward the eastern coastal areas of Aceh, which have historically maintained a close relationship with oral traditions. The study will identify existing forms of oral literature, the communication channels through which they are disseminated, and the public's perceptions of the media's effectiveness in sustaining local language awareness. It will also investigate the extent to which digital media can serve as a participatory space for younger generations. The research hopes to offer a comprehensive view of the dynamics involved in local language preservation.

Employing a qualitative approach, this study seeks not only to describe the phenomenon but also to analyze the sociocultural dynamics that influence the success or limitations of preservation through media. It will explore the experiences of community members, cultural practitioners, and local media producers as primary data sources. Oral literature will be positioned as a living cultural content that evolves in tandem with societal change. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more inclusive and contextually relevant preservation strategies. Ultimately, this will support the continued vitality and transmission of oral literature to future generations. The primary contribution of this research lies in the integration of three key elements: oral literature as dynamic cultural heritage, communication media as a means of cultural transformation, and local language as an identity that must be preserved. Amid the tide of global cultural homogenization and linguistic dominance, media-based strategies rooted in local cultural practices become not only a viable option but a necessary imperative. This also affirms that cultural preservation is not merely a normative discourse but a practical effort that requires innovation and intergenerational collaboration. In this way, the richness of Indonesia's cultural diversity can be more vibrantly sustained. This research aspires to enrich academic literature and offer practical insights for cultural preservation advocates.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Acehnese Oral Literature as Cultural Heritage and Collective Identity*

Acehnese oral literature is a collective cultural expression that originates and thrives in traditional societies, especially in rural and eastern coastal communities of Aceh (Yulsaflī et al., 2018). Its diverse forms *pantun*, *hikayat*, *dendang*, *syair*, and *folklore* are passed down intergenerationally through oral tradition. In these practices, the local language serves not merely as a linguistic medium but as a cultural vessel carrying stories, advice, and values. Oral literature in Aceh thus functions not only as entertainment but as a means of preserving ethical norms and transmitting local wisdom (Yulsaflī & Erfinawati, 2022). Beyond its aesthetic value, oral literature anchors the collective identity and moral orientation of the Acehese people. This is especially true in the eastern coastal regions, where oral storytelling traditions remain closely integrated into daily life and community rituals. Functionally, Acehese oral literature has an educative, historical, and spiritual role. Narratives featuring religious values, heroism, and local philosophy are transmitted in accessible and culturally resonant ways. These stories provide not only moral instruction but also collective memory. According to Elmira et al. (2021), oral literature plays a crucial role in reinforcing the community's cultural resilience and rootedness in local values. It symbolically affirms the cohesion of social structures and sustains the relevance of the Acehese language as a living language of thought, feeling, and interaction. In the eastern coastal areas of Langsa, Aceh Timur, and Aceh Tamiang, this role is particularly salient, where oral narratives serve as both repositories of meaning and tools of cultural continuity.

Acehnese oral literature also reflects the sociocultural dynamics of the coastal communities, which are characterized by close ties between custom and spiritual beliefs. This interconnectedness is evident in narrative content that harmonizes ancestral values with local philosophies within a unified cultural expression. Oral literature in these communities becomes a dialogical space connecting generations, linking historical experience to contemporary values, and facilitating intergenerational cultural learning (Safriandi et al., 2022). Thus, preserving oral literature also entails preserving the Acehese language, since the two are inseparable. In this regard, oral literature represents a strategic cultural asset and a bulwark against the erosion of local identity under modern pressures.

B. *Traditional Media as a Vehicle for Oral Literature Dissemination*

Traditional communication media such as oral performances, community radio, and public cultural forums have long served as vital channels for preserving and transmitting oral literature in eastern coastal Aceh. In areas with limited digital access or strong adherence to traditional customs, these forms remain widely used and socially relevant. Community members often participate in storytelling events, religious gatherings, and ritual performances where *hikayat*, *pantun*, and *syair* are delivered. As noted by Feng et al. (2021), the use of culturally embedded traditional media enhances the effectiveness of communication by aligning messages with the audience's values and context. This creates emotional closeness and strengthens receptivity to moral and social messages embedded in the oral literature. Moreover, traditional media fosters community involvement and oral interaction, which are crucial for language retention. As stories are told in Acehese, the language remains actively used and valued. In this way, traditional media supports not only cultural sustainability but also linguistic preservation. Sarkowi et al. (2024) assert that such forms of communication act as barriers against cultural homogenization, promoting pluralism and cultural pride. In the context of eastern coastal Aceh, traditional media plays a dual role: it keeps oral traditions alive while nurturing the linguistic

landscape in which they are expressed. These media are thus not relics of the past, but adaptable tools for safeguarding local language and culture in the present.

C. Local Language Preservation and the Role of Oral Literature

Local languages constitute a core element of cultural identity and cognitive worldview (Budiarta, 2019; Indrawati & Sari, 2024). However, in today's globalized environment, they face increasing marginalization due to the dominance of national and global languages in education, media, and public life. This linguistic shift endangers not only vocabulary but also embedded cultural meanings and indigenous knowledge systems. As oral literature is almost always conveyed in the local language, its practice becomes a strategic entry point for language preservation. In the eastern coastal areas of Aceh, this connection is particularly critical, as the local language remains the heart of cultural transmission in many communities. Oral literature serves as a vehicle for both formal and informal language acquisition. Through repeated exposure to stories, idioms, metaphors, and expressions, young generations internalize the structure, meaning, and rhythm of the Acehnese language. These narrative forms offer more than passive language learning they foster active cultural engagement and emotional connection to the language. In familial and community settings, storytelling allows elders to pass on linguistic richness, fostering intergenerational continuity. This process ensures that language is not merely spoken but lived as part of shared experience.

In Aceh, revitalizing oral literature represents a proactive strategy to counter linguistic decline. When children and youth are encouraged to listen, retell, or even perform traditional stories, they are not only exposed to the language but also to the cultural values and historical consciousness embedded within them. In this way, oral literature is a bridge between past and future, and between language and lived identity. Its continued relevance hinges on its integration into accessible, contemporary communication platforms.

D. The Impact of Globalisation and Digital Culture on Oral Traditions

Globalization has transformed the way culture is consumed and communicated. The younger generation, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas of Aceh, increasingly turns to short-form digital content, global entertainment, and social media, often in Indonesian or foreign languages (Nur Areefa & Sobirin, 2024). As a result, traditional narrative forms such as hikayat and pantun are perceived as outdated, slow-paced, and irrelevant. This shift in media preference poses a serious threat to the viability of oral traditions as sources of education, identity, and entertainment. The decline in oral tradition use has direct implications for local language survival. With fewer children hearing or speaking Acehnese in storytelling contexts, language transmission is disrupted. Siregar (2022) notes that the prestige associated with global languages accelerates language shift and cultural assimilation. Without intentional revitalization, oral literature may lose its role as a living tradition and instead become a static archive. Therefore, new strategies are needed to reintroduce oral literature to modern audiences, especially the youth, in formats they find familiar and engaging.

E. Digital Media as a Tool for Revitalizing Oral Literature

To adapt oral literature to contemporary media ecosystems, digital platforms must be employed strategically. In recent years, initiatives such as YouTube storytelling channels, podcast series, and TikTok-based cultural education content have shown promise in reaching younger demographics. When hikayat or pantun are presented with audio-visual elements, subtitles, or interactive components, they become more accessible and compelling to digital-native audiences. This approach does not replace the tradition but rather transforms its delivery to align with current communication habits. Community-led digital archiving and performance-sharing projects can also foster local engagement and ownership. By involving local storytellers, youth groups, and cultural activists, oral literature becomes a participatory, evolving practice rather than a relic. This form of digital communication ensures that the Acehnese language remains visible in online spaces, challenging the dominance of global languages. More importantly, it frames oral literature not as a museum piece but as a living, relevant, and adaptable form of expression.

F. Novelty and Research Contribution

The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach to three critical areas: the role of oral literature, the strategic use of communication media (traditional and digital), and the preservation of the Acehnese language, especially in eastern coastal Aceh. While prior research (Yulsafli & Erfinawati, 2022; Elmira et al., 2021) has explored the cultural or aesthetic aspects of oral literature, and others (Sarkowi et al., 2024) have focused on communication strategies, very few have examined how media platforms can serve as active agents in both transmitting oral literature and revitalizing local language. This study positions itself as a cross-disciplinary effort that bridges cultural studies, linguistics, and media communication. It highlights the lived practices of coastal communities where oral tradition is not just heritage but also a living communication tool. By focusing on how oral literature can thrive through communication media, this research offers practical insights for policy makers, educators, and cultural practitioners. It challenges conventional preservation models by proposing that oral literature must enter the digital domain not only for survival, but for meaningful, intergenerational relevance.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach with an ethnographic research type.

Ethnographic research is employed to deeply explore the perspectives and lived experiences of the community in interpreting their cultural practices, particularly the use of oral literature as a component of local communication media (Spradley, 2007; Simarmata et al., 2023). This approach was chosen because the study aims to reveal the function, meaning, and cultural value of Acehese oral literature as it is utilized through various communication media both traditional and digital as a strategy to preserve the local language in the eastern coastal areas of Aceh. Data were collected using three main techniques: participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted during various social and cultural events such as traditional performances, community feasts, local festivals, and community media broadcasts that featured elements of oral literature. Interviews were held with traditional leaders, cultural practitioners, local media managers, and community members directly involved in the preservation or use of oral narratives. Document analysis included audio-visual recordings, content from YouTube and community radio, as well as local manuscripts and cultural archives related to traditional storytelling practices.

The data collected were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction was used to select and focus on information relevant to the research objectives (Zain, 2025), while data presentation was carried out in the form of descriptive narratives supported by direct quotations from informants. To ensure the validity of the data, triangulation of techniques and sources was performed, along with member checking to confirm the accuracy of the information analyzed. This methodological design supports the main objective of the study, which is to identify how oral literature is employed across various communication media and how such practices contribute to the sustainability of the Acehese language and the local cultural identity of communities in eastern coastal Aceh. The research stages are illustrated in the following figure.

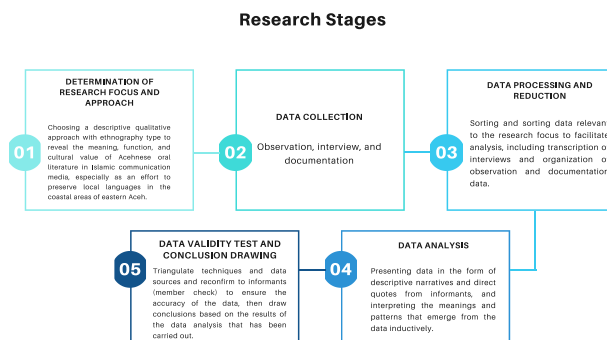


Figure 1.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Oral Literature in Eastern Coastal Aceh as a Means of Local Language Preservation

Based on the interviews, oral literature in the eastern coastal region of Aceh remains strongly present in community life, particularly through forms such as *seumapa*, *hadih maja*, and *hikayat*. These literary genres are not only found in ceremonial events such as weddings, circumcisions, and *kenduri* (communal meals), but are also embedded in daily interactions. *Hadih maja*, for instance, is often used as a reference for giving advice or expressing views on life. Meanwhile, *hikayat* and *seumapa* enrich local speech practices by conveying moral values and collective history through stories and metaphors. The existence of these forms indicates that oral literature is not merely a cultural relic but a living tradition continuously upheld by local communities.

An interview with a traditional leader (Informant 2, a customary elder) revealed:

“We still recite *hadih maja* at *kenduri* and family events. Young people enjoy listening because the language is beautiful and meaningful. I usually say, ‘*Gadoh bak jeut, tapak hana meu.*’ That means don’t be arrogant even if you’re smart, because knowledge is not for showing off”.

This statement highlights the transformative role of oral literature in transmitting life values to younger generations. In this context, oral literature functions not only as a reminder of the past but also as an ethical guide in daily social life.

Within the coastal communities of Eastern Aceh, oral literature serves as a vehicle for passing on values, knowledge, and customary norms across generations. This aligns with the study by Fahmi et al. (2016), which emphasized that oral literature in East Aceh is a key medium for preserving local cultural continuity. When a mother sings a lullaby in classical Acehese, she is not only soothing her child but also passing on linguistic identity. As one housewife (Informant 4) explained:

“I still sing the same lullabies my mother taught me. The lyrics are full of advice don’t be lazy, respect your parents. My child loves the line that says: ‘*Bek rame le droe, hana droe nyang tulong lam panyang.*’ That teaches not to be selfish”.

This quote affirms the important role of women in preserving local language and oral literature within the domestic

sphere, making them central figures in the cultural transmission process.

The language used in oral literature is generally classical Acehnese, with dialectal features specific to the eastern coast. This dialect contains vocabulary and syntactic structures that differ from the Acehnese spoken in the central or western regions, revealing the internal linguistic diversity of the Acehnese community. In *hadih maja*, for instance, symbolic expressions and metaphors are abundant, reflecting the local wisdom of coastal societies. The continued use of Acehnese in these forms shows that it still fulfills pragmatic, aesthetic, and ideological functions in everyday life.

The involvement of traditional leaders, *teungku* (religious clerics), and community members plays a key role in sustaining these oral traditions. One cleric (Informant 5, a preacher) noted:

“When I give sermons, I often quote *hadih maja* so that Acehnese people remember their ancestral language. Like during last Maulid, I said: ‘*Kiban ta mita ridha Tuhan, lam leubeh ta han ngon jurangan.*’ It means we must be obedient and sincere”.

This quote shows that oral literature is not just used to reinforce religious teachings but also to maintain cultural identity within religious spaces. This organic collaboration between religion and custom creates a preservation ecosystem that grows from collective awareness, rather than depending on formal institutions. Oral literature becomes part of daily social interaction, proving that cultural preservation can grow from within the community.

B. Islamic Communication Media as a Vehicle for the Sustainability of Acehnese Oral Literature

This study found that the preservation of Acehnese oral literature such as *seumapa*, *hadih maja*, and *hikayat* is closely tied to the active role of Islamic communication media in the lives of eastern coastal communities. Interviews with religious leaders, teachers, and community elders confirmed that these literary forms remain alive in various religious and social events, particularly weddings, *kenduri*, and circumcisions. Direct field observations also showed that the use of classical Acehnese in these contexts is not merely symbolic but a living tradition passed down through generations.

A young preacher (Informant 6, a local Islamic speaker) explained:

“I intentionally relearned *hadih maja* so I could include it in my sermons. For example, when talking about patience, I use: ‘*Bek lale, bek geutanyoe manah, ta kiban jinoe droe khanduri poma jatah.*’ People immediately understand because the language is familiar to them”.

This indicates that preachers intentionally employ oral literature as a strategic means of da’wah, embedding Islamic values within a cultural framework. This illustrates a dynamic process of intertextuality, where religious and traditional languages mutually reinforce each other.

Islamic communication media also plays a significant role in the digital sphere. A manager of a local TikTok da’wah account (Informant 7, a religious content creator) shared:

“I open my content with *hikayat* or *hadih maja*. For example, when talking about respecting parents, I quote: ‘*Kiban awak teuka beusama, nyan lam bak abu droe tanyoe geuh mula.*’ It helps remind viewers of our traditions, not just religion”.

By combining engaging visuals with familiar linguistic styles, this method effectively extends oral literature’s reach to younger generations accustomed to digital media. In this way, Acehnese oral literature is revitalized as part of a modern religious narrative.

Women’s religious groups also contribute significantly to this effort. In a community prayer gathering, one female participant (Informant 8, a community religious leader) noted:

“At every *pengajian*, I insert *hadih maja*. I remind the village girls: ‘*Udep bak linto, hana ta peu na buleun, buleun hana sinyak.*’ It teaches patience and discourages jealousy”.

This example shows that oral literature continues to function as a medium of moral instruction, even in informal and domestic religious settings.

A key finding of this research is that this preservation effort is not the result of government policy or curriculum programs, but rather emerges organically from the community’s own initiative. Religious leaders, mosque youth, and women’s prayer groups all use available platforms whether pulpits or social media to embed local values into religious discourse. This shows that cultural and linguistic preservation can evolve bottom-up, rooted in lived experience and social engagement.

In conclusion, Islamic communication media in Eastern Coastal Aceh functions not only as a tool of da’wah but also as a medium for the preservation and revitalization of Acehnese oral literature. This research demonstrates that local language preservation can effectively coexist with religious practice, especially when both are framed within a culturally reinforcing narrative. This community-based communication model offers a compelling solution to language preservation in the digital age and presents a replicable approach for other regions facing similar challenges.

V. CONCLUSION

Acehnese oral literature plays a vital role as a living cultural heritage that not only reinforces the collective identity of Eastern Coastal Aceh communities but also serves as a medium for social, educational, and spiritual communication. Through the use of traditional forms such as folktales (*hikayat*), poetic expressions (*hadih maja*), and ceremonial rhymes (*seumapa*), this oral tradition becomes a powerful tool for transmitting cultural wisdom, ethical values, and

religious teachings. Moreover, it preserves the richness of the Acehese language in the face of modernization and the increasing dominance of global languages in daily communication. However, lifestyle shifts among the younger generation and the prevalence of national and foreign languages in digital platforms have caused a gradual decline in the transmission of local culture and a marginalization of the Acehese language. In this context, Islamic communication media emerge as a strategic channel for revitalizing both oral literature and local linguistic identity. The integration of oral literature in Islamic preaching through hikayat, verses of advice, and metaphorical expressions demonstrates how religious discourse can simultaneously preserve cultural narratives while deepening Islamic understanding.

This study affirms that the sustainability of Acehese oral literature is being organically maintained through collective efforts of community actors, including religious leaders, educators, mothers, and digital content creators. Their initiatives exemplify a community-based preservation model rooted in lived tradition and adapted to both physical and digital communication spaces. Therefore, revitalizing oral literature through Islamic communication media is a culturally relevant and adaptive solution to address the challenges of globalization while safeguarding the linguistic and cultural identity of Eastern Coastal Aceh.

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