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The Effectiveness of Preserving Iban “Ensera” (Folktales) Through The Medium of Wai FM Radio in Miri Division

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ABSTRACT

Iban is the largest ethnic group in Sarawak, constituting about 30% of the population of Sarawak. Like other Dayak in Sarawak, Iban did not have a writing system earlier. Instead, they relied on a rich oral tradition to pass on ancient knowledge and traditions. Being a component of the indigenous knowledge, “ensera” (Iban folktales) was transmitted through orality. The art of “ensera” or Iban storytelling is one aspect of the expressive arts of Iban oral literature. With the advent of globalisation and modernisation, much of the traditional cultures of the Ibans have eroded. As the present generation’s Iban Language proficiency is declining, Iban Literature is vulnerable to be gradually forgotten. The main purpose of this paper is to examine the effectiveness of preserving the oral tradition of “ensera” in Miri Division through the medium of the Iban radio weekly programme named “Pengigat Tuai”. The sample population for this study consisted of 75 respondents from four Iban longhouses and residential areas in Miri, who are active listeners of Wai FM from three categories; the child generation, the parent generation, and the grandparent generation. The study indicated that the preservation of Iban Ensera through the medium of radio is effective with majority listeners from the grandparent and parent generations.

Keywords: Ensera, Iban folktales, oral literature, oral tradition preservation



THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PRESERVING IBAN “ENSERA” (FOLKTALES) THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF WAI FM RADIO IN MIRI DIVISION

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INTRODUCTION

Iban Radio Stations

Since the 1950s, the Iban community in Sarawak has listened so much to the radio as a channel for information dissemination, news and entertainment (Postill, 2006; Lim 2019). In longhouses, the Iban community has long relied on local radio stations as a source of platform to share news and events to other Iban longhouses including deaths and mourning events of family members. One of the most popular Iban radio stations that have served the Iban community is the Iban Section of Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM). The Iban Section of RTM in the 1980s was a pivotal mass medium that served as an ethnic/rural radio station for the Ibans. Then, the radio was popular as it was the easiest and cheapest medium that connected the Ibans in longhouses to the outside world. In 1997, CATS Radio, Sarawak's first commercial radio station, was launched. Now, the Iban Section of RTM serves as an entertainment radio station and has been rebranded as Wai FM. "Pengigat Tuai", aired by Wai FM, is the modern medium of narrating Ensera/Iban folklore through radio. The language used in both Iban radio stations is the Iban Language (Postill, 1997). A study involving the Iban community in Merotai, Sabah reported that the minority Iban in Merotai rely on the Iban Section of RTM in Sarawak to keep themselves connected with Iban language and other Iban heritage culture (Langub, 2011). Radio is deemed significant not only as a source of rural radio of the Iban community, but a study by Coluzzi (2010) involving the Iban community in Temburong district of Brunei Darussalam indicated Iban radio stations in Sarawak are essential for the community to maintain their heritage language, inclusive of oral literature. A recent action research involving a rural school located in Limbang Sarawak noted that students in remote areas rely on the radio for entertainment due to limited access to the internet as well as other technology (Sabuk and Aziz, 2021).

The Introduction to Iban Ensera

Ensera or Sera, in its local terms, is oral Iban literature disseminated through storytelling. According to Sather (2001), Ensera is a collection of fictional narratives presented for entertainment. Ensera, composed of fictive narratives, is normally poetically structured (Sandin, 1994). The sung versions of Ensera are known as "Kana " in local term (Sandin, 1994). Richards, the author of "Iban Augury" and "An Iban-English Dictionary" defines Ensera or Sera as an epic or saga sung in poetic language with explanations and