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Developing Culturally Responsive Literature Learning through Torajan “Ulelean Pare” Storytelling in the Introduction to Literature Course

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Abstract

This study investigates the implementation of Torajan Ulelean Pare storytelling in the Introduction to Literature course and explores its contribution to culturally responsive literature learning. The study was motivated by the limited integration of local cultural narratives in literature instruction, which often results in a disconnect between students’ cultural backgrounds and learning materials. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research involved one lecturer and 20 undergraduate students in an English Language Education Program at UKI Toraja, Indonesia. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, including students’ reflective journals and learning assignments. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that Ulelean Pare storytelling was implemented through three main stages: cultural orientation, storytelling engagement, and literary interpretation. The integration of local narratives enhanced student engagement by increasing participation, motivation, and collaborative interaction during learning activities. The findings also demonstrated that storytelling strengthened students’ cultural identity and cultural awareness by fostering appreciation for Torajan cultural values and indigenous knowledge. Furthermore, the use of Ulelean Pare promoted culturally responsive literature learning by connecting literary concepts with students’ cultural experiences, creating a more inclusive and meaningful learning environment. Students generally perceived the storytelling approach positively, reporting that it facilitated literary understanding while simultaneously supporting cultural preservation. This study contributes to the development of culturally responsive literature pedagogy by demonstrating the potential of indigenous storytelling as both a literary resource and a pedagogical tool in higher education. The findings suggest that integrating local cultural narratives into literature courses can enrich learning experiences and support the preservation of cultural heritage.

Keywords: culturally responsive learning, indigenous storytelling, Ulelean Pare, literature learning, Torajan culture.

INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) plays a crucial appreciation, and cultural awareness. However, literature courses in many English Language Education programs still rely predominantly on Western literary texts, providing limited opportunities for students to engage with local cultural narratives. This condition often creates a gap between students' cultural backgrounds and the learning materials, reducing the relevance and meaningfulness of literary learning. Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) emphasizes the integration of learners' cultural identities and experiences into educational practices, enabling students to connect academic content with their sociocultural contexts. Recent studies have shown that CRT contributes to greater student engagement, cultural competence, and inclusive learning environments (Setiawan et al., 2025; Agung et al., 2025).

Storytelling has been widely recognized as an effective pedagogical approach that promotes active learning, critical reflection, and meaningful knowledge construction. Research indicates that storytelling supports learners' comprehension, engagement, and identity development, particularly when narratives are rooted in indigenous or local cultures (Dutta & Keith, 2023; Bradbury & Carabott, 2026). Furthermore, indigenous and local literature has been found to strengthen students' cultural awareness and intercultural understanding while fostering a stronger connection between education and community knowledge systems. Studies in higher education contexts have demonstrated that culturally grounded literary texts contribute positively to students' learning experiences and identity formation.

Recent research has increasingly explored the integration of local narratives into educational settings. For example, studies have examined digital storytelling based on local literature, culturally responsive learning materials, and narrative-text instruction grounded in local traditions. These studies report positive impacts on learner motivation, literacy development, and cultural appreciation. However, most existing studies focus on language learning, digital literacy, or primary and secondary education. Research investigating the implementation of indigenous storytelling within higher education literature courses remains limited.

More specifically, little attention has been paid to the pedagogical potential of Torajan oral literature in English literature classrooms. Although *Ulelean Pare* contains rich cultural values, indigenous knowledge, and moral teachings, its integration into the Introduction to Literature course has not been sufficiently explored. Consequently, there is a lack of empirical evidence regarding how Torajan storytelling can support culturally responsive literature learning in higher education.

To address this gap, this study investigates the implementation of Torajan *Ulelean Pare* storytelling in the Introduction to Literature course. The study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How is *Ulelean Pare* storytelling implemented in the Introduction to Literature course? and (2) How does its implementation contribute to culturally responsive literature learning? Accordingly, the objectives of this study are to examine the implementation process and explore its contribution to culturally responsive literature learning. The novelty of this research lies in the integration of Torajan indigenous storytelling into an English literature course through a culturally responsive pedagogical framework. By positioning *Ulelean Pare* as both a

literary resource and a medium for cultural preservation, this study contributes to the development of locally grounded literature pedagogy in higher education.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the implementation of Torajan *Ulelean Pare* storytelling in the Introduction to Literature course and its contribution to culturally responsive literature learning. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interactions within a specific educational context. This study design allowed the researchers to investigate the integration of local cultural narratives into literature instruction and to examine how students responded to the learning process.

The study was conducted in the English Language Education Program at a UKI Toraja, Indonesia. The participants consisted of one lecturer teaching the Introduction to Literature course and 20 undergraduate students enrolled in the course during the academic year 2026/2027. The participants were selected using purposive sampling because they were directly involved in the implementation of *Ulelean Pare* storytelling as a learning activity.

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observations were conducted throughout the storytelling sessions to capture teaching strategies, student participation, classroom interactions, and learning activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the lecturer and selected students to explore their experiences and perceptions regarding the use of *Ulelean Pare* storytelling in literature learning. In addition, relevant documents, including lesson plans, teaching materials, students' reflection journals, and learning assignments, were analysed to support and triangulate the findings.

The research instruments included an observation checklist, an interview guide, and a document analysis protocol. The observation checklist focused on indicators of culturally responsive teaching, student engagement, and storytelling implementation. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions related to participants' experiences, perceived benefits, challenges, and cultural relevance of the learning activities. To ensure trustworthiness, data triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from observations, interviews, and documents.

Data were analysed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved data familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and report writing. The researchers first transcribed the interview recordings and organized all field notes and documents. Subsequently, meaningful units of data were coded and grouped into categories. Emerging themes were then identified to explain the implementation process and the contribution of *Ulelean Pare* storytelling to culturally responsive literature learning. The findings were interpreted by referring to the principles of Culturally Responsive Teaching and literature learning theories.

FINDINGS

The findings revealed that the implementation of Torajan *Ulelean Pare* storytelling in the Introduction to Literature course was

conducted through three main stages: cultural orientation, storytelling activities, and literary analysis. During the cultural orientation stage, the lecturer introduced students to the historical and cultural background of *Ulelean Pare* and its significance within Torajan society. In the storytelling stage, students listened to and discussed selected narratives, while in the literary analysis stage they examined literary elements, cultural values, themes, characters, and moral messages embedded in the stories.

Classroom observations indicated that the use of *Ulelean Pare* increased students' participation and engagement during learning activities. Students actively shared personal experiences and cultural knowledge related to the stories. Interview data further showed that the integration of local narratives made literary concepts more accessible and meaningful because students were already familiar with the cultural context of the stories.

The analysis also demonstrated that *Ulelean Pare* storytelling contributed to the development of culturally responsive literature learning. Three major themes emerged from the data. First, the storytelling activities strengthened students' cultural identity and appreciation of Torajan heritage. Students reported feeling proud to see their local culture represented in academic learning materials. Second, the stories facilitated meaningful literary interpretation because students could connect literary concepts with their lived experiences and cultural understanding. Third, the learning activities promoted active participation and collaborative discussion, creating a more inclusive learning environment.

Furthermore, students perceived the integration of *Ulelean Pare* positively. Most participants stated that local storytelling made literature learning more engaging compared to the exclusive use of foreign literary texts. They also expressed that the stories helped them better understand literary elements while simultaneously learning cultural values such as respect, cooperation, gratitude, and social responsibility.

The findings suggest that Torajan *Ulelean Pare* storytelling serves as an effective pedagogical resource for culturally responsive literature learning. The integration of local narratives not only supports students' literary understanding but also contributes to cultural preservation and the strengthening of local identity within higher education contexts.

Implementation of *Ulelean Pare* Storytelling in the Introduction to Literature Course

The findings revealed that the implementation of Torajan *Ulelean Pare* storytelling was integrated into the Introduction to Literature course through a series of culturally responsive learning activities. The storytelling sessions were designed to connect literary concepts with students' cultural backgrounds while facilitating their understanding of literary texts.

The implementation consisted of three main stages: cultural orientation, storytelling engagement, and literary interpretation. During the cultural orientation stage, the lecturer introduced the cultural context, historical significance, and social values embedded in *Ulelean Pare*. Students were encouraged to share their prior knowledge and experiences related to Torajan traditions, creating a bridge between academic learning and local cultural knowledge.

In the storytelling engagement stage, selected *Ulelean Pare* narratives were presented through oral storytelling and guided reading activities. Classroom observations indicated that students

showed high levels of interest and participation during these sessions. Many students actively responded to the stories, asked questions, and discussed the cultural messages conveyed in the narratives. The familiar cultural context appeared to increase students' motivation to engage with literary content.

The literary interpretation stage focused on analysing literary elements such as theme, characterization, setting, conflict, symbolism, and moral values. Students worked individually and collaboratively to interpret the stories and relate them to both literary theories and contemporary social issues. The analysis demonstrated that students were able to identify literary elements more effectively because they possessed cultural familiarity with the narratives being studied.

Interview data further revealed that students perceived *Ulelean Pare* storytelling as a meaningful learning experience. They reported that local stories were easier to understand than unfamiliar foreign texts and enabled them to connect literary concepts with their everyday experiences. One student explained that the use of Torajan stories helped them understand how literature reflects cultural values and community life. Another student stated that learning through *Ulelean Pare* increased their appreciation of Torajan cultural heritage while simultaneously improving their literary analysis skills.

Document analysis of students' reflective journals and written assignments also showed evidence of active engagement with both literary concepts and cultural values. Students frequently referred to themes of respect, communal responsibility, gratitude, and social harmony when interpreting the stories. These findings indicate that the implementation of *Ulelean Pare* storytelling not only facilitated the learning of literary concepts but also created opportunities for students to explore and reflect upon their cultural identity.

The implementation of *Ulelean Pare* storytelling transformed the Introduction to Literature course into a culturally meaningful learning environment. The integration of local narratives enabled students to engage with literature through familiar cultural perspectives while fostering deeper understanding of both literary elements and Torajan cultural values.

Enhancing Student Engagement through Local Cultural Narratives

The findings indicated that the integration of *Ulelean Pare* storytelling significantly enhanced students' engagement in the Introduction to Literature course. Classroom observations revealed increased participation during storytelling sessions compared to conventional literature discussions. Students demonstrated greater enthusiasm in responding to questions, expressing opinions, and contributing to group discussions when literary concepts were explored through local cultural narratives.

One of the key factors contributing to student engagement was the familiarity of the cultural context presented in the stories. Students were able to relate the events, characters, values, and social practices depicted in *Ulelean Pare* to their own experiences and knowledge of Torajan culture. This cultural connection encouraged students to participate more actively because they felt confident sharing their perspectives and interpretations. As a result, classroom interactions became more dynamic and collaborative.

Interview data further showed that students found the learning activities more meaningful and enjoyable when local narratives were used. Many participants stated that they were more motivated

to read, analyse, and discuss literary texts because the stories reflected aspects of their cultural identity. Several students reported that they could better understand literary concepts such as theme, characterization, conflict, and symbolism when these concepts were illustrated through familiar cultural stories.

The storytelling activities also promoted collaborative learning. During group discussions, students exchanged interpretations, shared personal experiences, and compared cultural perspectives related to the narratives. This interaction encouraged deeper engagement with both the literary content and the cultural meanings embedded in the stories. The learning environment became more inclusive, allowing students to contribute actively regardless of their previous experience with literary analysis.

Evidence from students' reflective journals supported these findings. Many students described the storytelling sessions as interesting, interactive, and relevant to their lives. They expressed appreciation for the opportunity to learn literature through stories originating from their own cultural heritage. The reflections also suggested that students became more willing to explore literary texts and participate in classroom discussions when the learning materials were culturally familiar.

The findings demonstrate that the use of *Ulelean Pare* storytelling enhanced student engagement by creating meaningful connections between literary learning and students' cultural backgrounds. The integration of local cultural narratives increased motivation, participation, interaction, and confidence, thereby fostering a more active and student-centred literature learning environment.

Strengthening Cultural Identity and Cultural Awareness

The findings revealed that the integration of *Ulelean Pare* storytelling contributed significantly to strengthening students' cultural identity and cultural awareness. Through exposure to traditional Torajan narratives, students gained a deeper understanding of the cultural values, beliefs, customs, and social practices embedded within their local heritage. The storytelling activities provided opportunities for students to explore the relationship between literature and culture while reflecting on their own cultural backgrounds.

Classroom observations showed that students frequently connected the stories to cultural practices and traditions that they had experienced in their families and communities. During discussions, students shared personal stories and cultural knowledge related to Torajan customs, demonstrating an increased awareness of the relevance of local culture in contemporary life. This interaction enabled students to recognize the importance of preserving indigenous knowledge and cultural traditions through educational practices.

Interview data further indicated that *Ulelean Pare* storytelling fostered a sense of pride in Torajan culture. Many students expressed appreciation for the inclusion of local cultural narratives in a university-level course, noting that such materials are rarely incorporated into formal academic learning. Students reported that the learning activities encouraged them to value their cultural heritage and to view local stories as important literary and educational resources rather than merely traditional folklore.

The analysis of students' reflective journals revealed that cultural values embedded in *Ulelean Pare*, such as mutual respect, communal responsibility, gratitude, perseverance, and social harmony, were frequently identified and discussed. Students

demonstrated an ability to interpret these values within both traditional and contemporary contexts. Moreover, they recognized how literature serves as a medium for transmitting cultural knowledge across generations.

The findings also suggest that the use of local narratives promoted cultural awareness beyond the preservation of cultural identity. Students became more conscious of the diversity of cultural perspectives represented in literary texts and developed a greater appreciation for indigenous knowledge systems. This awareness encouraged them to critically examine the relationship between culture, literature, and society while acknowledging the significance of local wisdom in shaping community values.

The implementation of *Ulelean Pare* storytelling strengthened students' cultural identity by reinforcing their connection to Torajan heritage and increasing their appreciation of indigenous cultural values. At the same time, it enhanced cultural awareness by encouraging critical reflection on the role of culture in literary interpretation and social life. These findings highlight the potential of culturally responsive literature learning to support both academic development and cultural preservation in higher education.

Promoting Culturally Responsive Literature Learning

The findings demonstrated that the implementation of *Ulelean Pare* storytelling promoted culturally responsive literature learning by connecting literary instruction with students' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. The integration of local cultural narratives enabled students to engage with literary concepts through familiar contexts, making the learning process more relevant and meaningful. Rather than perceiving literature as a collection of distant and unfamiliar texts, students viewed literary study as closely related to their own cultural identities and social realities.

Classroom observations revealed that the use of *Ulelean Pare* created an inclusive learning environment in which students felt comfortable expressing their ideas and cultural perspectives. Students actively participated in discussions, drawing upon their knowledge of Torajan traditions and community practices to interpret literary themes and characters. This process validated students' cultural experiences and encouraged them to become active contributors to knowledge construction rather than passive recipients of information.

Interview findings further indicated that students appreciated the opportunity to study literature through materials that reflected their cultural heritage. They reported that culturally relevant narratives facilitated comprehension of literary concepts and encouraged deeper engagement with textual analysis. Students also expressed that the learning activities helped them recognize the value of local wisdom as an important source of literary and cultural knowledge. The inclusion of indigenous narratives allowed students to see their culture represented and respected within the academic setting.

Document analysis supported these findings by showing that students consistently incorporated cultural perspectives into their literary interpretations. In their reflective journals and written assignments, students connected literary themes to Torajan values such as mutual cooperation, respect for elders, social responsibility, and communal harmony. These reflections demonstrated that literary understanding was enriched through the integration of cultural knowledge and personal experience.

The findings also revealed that *Ulelean Pare* storytelling encouraged critical reflection on the relationship between literature, culture, and society. Students were able to compare traditional values presented in the stories with contemporary social issues, enabling them to develop both literary and cultural understanding. This process fostered higher levels of critical thinking while promoting respect for cultural diversity and indigenous knowledge systems.

The implementation of *Ulelean Pare* storytelling embodied key principles of culturally responsive learning by recognizing students' cultural identities, utilizing local cultural resources, and creating meaningful opportunities for participation and reflection. The findings suggest that culturally grounded literature instruction not only enhances students' understanding of literary concepts but also supports inclusive, relevant, and culturally sustaining educational practices in higher education.

Students' Perceptions of *Ulelean Pare* Storytelling

The findings revealed that students generally held positive perceptions toward the implementation of *Ulelean Pare* storytelling in the Introduction to Literature course. Interview data and reflective journals indicated that students viewed the storytelling activities as engaging, meaningful, and relevant to their cultural backgrounds. They appreciated the opportunity to learn literary concepts through narratives that reflected their own cultural experiences and local traditions.

One of the most frequently reported benefits was the increased accessibility of literary learning. Students stated that they found it easier to understand literary elements such as theme, characterization, setting, conflict, and moral values when these concepts were presented through familiar cultural narratives. The cultural relevance of *Ulelean Pare* enabled students to connect theoretical literary concepts with real-life experiences, making the learning process more comprehensible and enjoyable.

Students also perceived the storytelling activities as contributing to a stronger appreciation of Torajan culture. Many participants expressed pride in seeing local stories incorporated into higher education learning materials, emphasizing that indigenous narratives deserve recognition as valuable literary resources. They believed that the integration of *Ulelean Pare* not only enriched literature learning but also contributed to the preservation and promotion of Torajan cultural heritage among younger generations.

Furthermore, students reported that storytelling encouraged active participation and collaborative learning. They felt more confident expressing their opinions, sharing cultural knowledge, and engaging in classroom discussions. Several participants noted that the storytelling sessions created a supportive learning environment where diverse perspectives were respected and valued. This experience enhanced their motivation to participate in literary analysis and interpretation activities.

Despite these positive perceptions, some students identified minor challenges. A few participants indicated that certain cultural symbols, traditional expressions, or historical references within the stories required additional explanation from the lecturer. Others suggested incorporating multimedia resources, such as videos or digital storytelling, to enhance understanding and engagement. Nevertheless, these challenges did not diminish the overall positive learning experience.

Students perceived *Ulelean Pare* storytelling as an effective and culturally meaningful approach to literature learning. The integration of local narratives enhanced their understanding of literary concepts, strengthened their appreciation of Torajan culture, and fostered active participation in the learning process. These findings suggest that culturally grounded storytelling can serve as a valuable pedagogical strategy for promoting both literary learning and cultural sustainability in higher education.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the implementation of Torajan *Ulelean Pare* storytelling contributed significantly to the development of culturally responsive literature learning in the Introduction to Literature course. The integration of local cultural narratives enabled students to engage with literary concepts through familiar cultural contexts, thereby making literature learning more meaningful and relevant. This finding supports the principle of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), which emphasizes the importance of connecting academic content with students' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences (Gay, 2018). By incorporating *Ulelean Pare* into classroom instruction, the learning process moved beyond the transmission of literary knowledge and became a platform for cultural affirmation and identity development.

The increased student engagement observed during storytelling activities is consistent with previous studies highlighting the pedagogical value of storytelling in fostering active participation and meaningful learning. Students demonstrated greater willingness to participate in discussions, share personal experiences, and critically analyse literary elements when learning materials reflected their own cultural realities. This finding aligns with Dutta and Keith (2023), who argue that storytelling promotes learner engagement by creating emotionally and culturally relevant learning experiences. Similarly, research on indigenous literature has shown that culturally grounded narratives enhance students' motivation and sense of belonging within educational settings.

Another significant finding is the role of *Ulelean Pare* storytelling in strengthening students' cultural identity and cultural awareness. The results indicate that students developed a stronger appreciation for Torajan cultural heritage and recognized the educational value of indigenous narratives. This finding supports the view of Ladson-Billings (1995) that culturally relevant pedagogy should empower learners academically while simultaneously fostering cultural competence. Through engagement with *Ulelean Pare*, students were able to explore cultural values such as mutual respect, social responsibility, gratitude, and communal harmony. These values not only enriched literary interpretation but also contributed to students' understanding of their cultural identity within contemporary society.

The findings further suggest that local cultural narratives can serve as effective resources for facilitating literary interpretation. Students were able to analyse themes, characterization, conflict, and symbolism more effectively because they possessed prior cultural knowledge related to the stories. This supports constructivist learning theory, which posits that learners construct new knowledge by connecting it to existing experiences and prior understanding. The use of culturally familiar narratives therefore enabled students to engage in deeper literary analysis while reducing the cultural distance often associated with foreign literary texts.

The study also contributes to the growing body of research on culturally responsive learning by demonstrating the relevance of indigenous storytelling in higher education literature courses. While previous studies have primarily focused on local culture integration in language learning or primary and secondary education, this research extends existing knowledge by examining the use of Torajan oral literature in an English literature course. The findings therefore address an important gap in the literature regarding the application of culturally responsive pedagogy in higher education contexts.

Several students emphasized the importance of incorporating local cultural materials into university learning. As one participant stated:

“Learning literature through *Ulelean Pare* helped me understand literary concepts more easily because the stories were familiar to me. At the same time, I learned more about my own culture.”

Another student explained:

“I felt proud because Torajan stories were discussed in class. Usually, we only study foreign texts, but this activity showed that our local stories also have important literary values.”

These responses illustrate how culturally relevant learning materials can foster both academic engagement and cultural pride. The quotations also demonstrate that students perceived *Ulelean Pare* not merely as traditional folklore but as a valuable literary resource worthy of academic exploration.

The findings support and extend existing theories of culturally responsive and culturally relevant pedagogy. The implementation of *Ulelean Pare* storytelling validated students’ cultural identities, enhanced engagement, facilitated literary understanding, and promoted cultural preservation. The study highlights the potential of indigenous storytelling as a pedagogical strategy for creating inclusive and culturally sustaining literature learning environments in higher education.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

This study investigated the implementation of Torajan *Ulelean Pare* storytelling in the Introduction to Literature course and its contribution to culturally responsive literature learning. The findings revealed that the integration of *Ulelean Pare* was successfully implemented through cultural orientation, storytelling engagement, and literary interpretation activities. The use of local cultural narratives increased students’ participation, facilitated literary understanding, strengthened cultural identity, and enhanced cultural awareness. Furthermore, the storytelling activities created a more inclusive and meaningful learning environment by connecting literary concepts with students’ cultural backgrounds and lived experiences.

The findings support the principles of culturally responsive pedagogy, which emphasize the importance of incorporating learners’ cultural knowledge into educational practices. By utilizing *Ulelean Pare* as a literary and cultural resource, this study demonstrates that indigenous storytelling can serve as an effective pedagogical strategy for promoting both literary learning and cultural preservation in higher education. The study therefore contributes to the growing body of knowledge on culturally

responsive literature learning by extending its application to the context of Torajan oral literature and English literature instruction.

However, this study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in a single university and involved a relatively small number of participants, which limits the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts. Second, the study focused primarily on students’ experiences and perceptions during one course, without examining the long-term impact of storytelling on students’ literary competence and cultural development. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted within the specific context of this research.

This study advances the understanding of how indigenous cultural narratives can be integrated into literature education to create culturally relevant and culturally sustaining learning experiences. It highlights the potential of local oral traditions not only as objects of literary study but also as valuable pedagogical resources that support meaningful learning and cultural continuity.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, literature lecturers are encouraged to integrate local cultural narratives and indigenous storytelling into literature instruction to create more culturally responsive learning environments. Educational institutions may also support the development of teaching materials that incorporate local wisdom and cultural heritage as part of curriculum innovation.

For future research, scholars may investigate the implementation of indigenous storytelling in different educational contexts, disciplines, and cultural communities. Comparative studies involving multiple universities or diverse cultural groups would provide a broader understanding of the effectiveness of culturally responsive literature learning. Future studies may also employ mixed-methods or experimental designs to examine the impact of storytelling on students’ literary competence, critical thinking skills, intercultural awareness, and academic achievement. In addition, further research could explore the integration of digital storytelling technologies to preserve and promote indigenous narratives in contemporary educational settings.

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