PROCEEDINGS
International Conference on Literature
Himpunan Sarjana-Kesusastraan Indonesia (HISKI)
E-ISSN 2988-4357

Women's representation in Putri Senuro and Putri Hijau: Comparative literature for gender literacy education

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Abstract: *This study examines the representation of women in two Indonesian folktales, Putri Senuro from South Sumatra and The Legend of Putri Hijau from North Sumatra, through comparative literature and feminist literary criticism. It aims to identify women's physical, psychological, and social representations and examine their relationships with power and social environments. It also explores the potential of these folktales for developing gender literacy among students of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Sriwijaya. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the study analyses words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, and narrative elements depicting female characters. Data were collected through close reading and note-taking, then interpreted by comparing similarities and differences between the texts. The findings show that both folktales portray women through beauty, courage, resilience, and social status. However, these representations are shaped by social norms and power relations that may restrict women's autonomy. Cultural differences also influence how beauty, honour, personal choices, and power are constructed. These folktales therefore offer valuable learning resources for encouraging critical reflection on gender constructions and strengthening students' gender literacy while appreciating Indonesia's cultural diversity.*

Keywords: *representation, women, comparative, feminist, gender*

INTRODUCTION

Folklore occupies an important position in literary and cultural studies because it preserves collective memories, cultural values, social beliefs, and ways of understanding human relationships a cross generations. As a form of traditional narrative, folklore does not merely function as entertainment but also conveys ideological and social meanings that are shaped by the communities in which the stories develop. Recent research demonstrates that folklore can be understood as a cultural text containing representations of identity, ideology, and power relations, while simultaneously functioning as a medium for moral and cultural education (Firdaus, 2025). Consequently, the study of folklore needs to move beyond the identification of cultural values toward a critical examination of the social constructions embedded within its narratives. One important issue that can be explored through folklore is the representation of women. Literary narratives frequently construct female characters through particular cultural expectations concerning beauty, morality, family, social position, obedience, and relationships with men. Such representations may reproduce dominant gender norms, but they may also provide spaces in which women negotiate, resist, or redefine their positions. From a feminist literary perspective, therefore, female

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How to cite (APA 7th): Gunaika, R., Nurhayati, N., Prasetyo, C. T., & Siwi, U. R. (2026). Women's representation in Putri Senuro and Putri Hijau: Comparative literature for gender literacy education. *Proceedings 35th KIK, 35*, 943-957. https://doi.org/10.68634/kik.v35i.136

characters should not be examined merely in terms of their narrative roles but also in relation to the structures of power that shape their identities, choices, and experiences. The representation of women in literary texts can consequently become an important entry point for examining how gender relations are culturally constructed and transmitted (Ningsih et al., 2024).

Among the diverse folktales of Indonesia, *Putri Senuro* and *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau* provide significant cultural narratives for examining the representation of women. *Putri Senuro*, also known as *Putri Pinang Masak*, is a folktale associated with Senuro Village, Tanjung Batu, Ogan Ilir, South Sumatra. The documented version of the story tells of Napisah, a woman originally from Banten who lived in the Palembang area. Her extraordinary beauty became widely known and attracted the attention of the ruler of Palembang, who intended to bring her into the palace. Rather than accepting this position, Napisah devised a strategy to disguise her beauty by darkening her skin with the water used to boil banana blossoms. When her deception was eventually discovered, she fled and settled in an area that later became known as Senuro (Wahyuni, 2026). In this narrative, the female protagonist's beauty becomes closely associated with male desire, social control, and vulnerability. Her decision to disguise herself and escape, however, also demonstrates her capacity to negotiate and resist a situation imposed upon her. The story further presents an important contradiction in the cultural construction of femininity. On the one hand, beauty is represented as a desirable quality that makes Napisah admired by men and recognised by the community. On the other hand, beauty becomes a source of suffering because it exposes her to unwanted attention and the exercise of male power. Previous research on *Putri Pinang Masak* similarly identifies the female protagonist's beauty as a source of physical and psychological suffering and relates this suffering to her positioning as an object of observation, sexual violence, and patriarchal power. Thus, *Putri Senuro* provides an important textual space for examining the relationship between female beauty, patriarchal power, resistance, and women's efforts to maintain control over their own lives (Kurnianto EA, 2021).

Meanwhile, *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau* is a traditional narrative associated with the Deli cultural region of North Sumatra. The story centres on Putri Hijau, a female figure whose exceptional beauty becomes known beyond her own kingdom. In the version examined in this study, the narrative begins with Putri Datuk Sunggal, who experiences pregnancy outside the expected social and familial order and is punished by her father through exile. She later gives birth to Putri Hijau, who grows into a beautiful woman whose reputation eventually reaches the ruler of Aceh. Putri Hijau refuses the proposal of the Acehnese ruler, and this refusal becomes one of the central sources of conflict in the narrative. The subsequent conflict develops into warfare between the two kingdoms, eventually forcing Putri Hijau to negotiate her surrender in order to protect her family and kingdom. She agrees to marry the ruler of Aceh under a number of conditions, but ultimately escapes with the assistance of a supernatural dragon figure and returns to Deli. The narrative of *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau* consequently constructs female identity through several interconnected dimensions: physical beauty, family relationships, social expectations, decision-making, and resistance to male authority. Putri Hijau is not merely portrayed as an object of male desire; she also demonstrates the capacity to make decisions, negotiate conditions, and attempt to protect members of her family. Earlier feminist research on this narrative has specifically examined women's

self-image and social image, including physical, psychological, and social dimensions of female representation (Gunaika, 2019).

The juxtaposition of *Putri Senuro* and *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau* is therefore particularly relevant to comparative literary analysis. Both narratives place female beauty at the centre of their conflicts and depict women whose lives are shaped by male authority and social expectations. Nevertheless, the protagonists respond to these circumstances through different forms of negotiation, resistance, and agency. Comparing the two narratives allows the study to examine not only similarities in patriarchal constructions of femininity but also differences in how women's agency is represented within distinct regional cultural traditions (Khater, 2026). Such comparison is important for developing gender literacy in literary education because students can be encouraged to recognise that representations of women in traditional narratives are culturally situated rather than neutral. The texts can consequently be read both as cultural heritage and as critical materials through which learners examine gender relations, power, resistance, and women's agency.

This issue becomes particularly relevant when folklore from different cultural traditions is placed within a comparative framework. Comparative literature provides an opportunity to examine literary works not as isolated cultural products but as texts that can be meaningfully compared through their similarities, differences, themes, and representations. Previous research comparing *Timun Mas* and *Kaguyahime no Monogatari*, for example, demonstrates that female protagonists in different cultural traditions may experience patriarchal constraints and respond to them in different ways (Firmansyah & Zulyeno, 2024). Such findings indicate that comparative literary analysis can reveal both shared patterns of gender construction and culturally specific forms of female agency. The pedagogical significance of comparative literary analysis is equally important. Literature learning can provide students with opportunities not only to appreciate aesthetic and cultural dimensions of literary works but also to develop critical awareness of social issues represented in texts. Kumlu and Çomoğlu (2021) found that comparative reading and discussion of fairy tales could contribute to the development of gender sensitivity and critical literacy among pre-service teachers. Similarly, comparative engagement with folklore can encourage learners to question how cultural narratives represent women and men, how gender relations are normalised, and how alternative interpretations can be developed. In this context, literature learning can become a space for developing gender literacy through critical engagement with culturally meaningful texts.

Despite the growing interest in comparative literature, feminist literary criticism, and the pedagogical potential of folklore, there remains a need for comparative studies that centre Indonesian regional folklore in gender-oriented literary learning. Existing comparative research has demonstrated the value of comparing female representations across different folklore traditions (Firmansyah & Zulyeno, 2024), while broader research has highlighted the pedagogical potential of folklore and its ideological dimensions (Firdaus, 2025). However, the comparison of Putri Senuro from South Sumatra and Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau from North Sumatra provides an opportunity to examine how female images are constructed within two Indonesian cultural traditions and how these representations can subsequently be transformed into resources for gender-oriented literary learning. This comparative perspective is important because it

allows local literary traditions to become not merely objects of cultural preservation but also materials for critical literacy and gender awareness. Based on this gap, the present study focuses on the representation of women in *Putri Senuro* and *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau* through a comparative literary perspective. The study examines the ways in which female characters are represented in physical, psychological, and social dimensions, as well as their relationships with cultural expectations, social structures, and power relations. The comparison is intended to identify similarities and differences in the construction of female images in the two narratives. Furthermore, the study explores how these findings can contribute to building gender literacy through literary learning. In this way, the study positions folklore as both a cultural heritage and a pedagogical text through which students can critically examine gender representation, question socially constructed assumptions, and develop a more reflective understanding of gender relations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Comparative literature provides a framework for examining literary works across cultural, linguistic, geographical, and historical boundaries. In the study of folklore, a comparative perspective is particularly relevant because folktales emerge from specific cultural environments while often containing recurring themes, character patterns, social conflicts, and cultural values. Comparative analysis therefore enables researchers to identify both shared narrative patterns and culturally specific meanings embedded in literary texts. Previous research has demonstrated the usefulness of comparative literature in examining women's representation in folklore. Karina et al. (2022), for example, compared *Ni Anteh Pergi ke Bulan* and *The Bamboo-Cutter's Tale* and found similarities and differences in women's self-image, social image, and roles. The study demonstrates that comparing folklore from different cultural traditions can reveal how women's positions are constructed through distinct social and cultural contexts. Similarly, Firmansyah and Zulyeno (2024) compared *Timun Mas* and *Kaguyahime no Monogatari* and identified similarities in patriarchal constraints experienced by female protagonists as well as differences in their responses to those constraints. These studies establish comparative literature as a productive approach for investigating gender representation across culturally different narratives. In the present study, comparative literature is employed to place *Putri Senuro* and *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau* within a shared analytical framework while maintaining attention to the cultural contexts represented by each narrative.

Feminist literary criticism examines the ways literary texts construct, represent, and negotiate women's experiences within gendered social structures. Rather than treating female characters solely as narrative figures, feminist criticism considers how their identities, roles, actions, and relationships are shaped by patriarchal ideology and relations of power. From this perspective, the representation of women may reproduce dominant gender norms, but it may also create spaces for resistance, negotiation, and agency. This perspective is particularly relevant to folklore because traditional narratives often preserve social assumptions concerning femininity, family, sexuality, beauty, obedience, and women's social responsibilities. Studies of Indonesian folklore have shown the relevance of feminist literary criticism for revealing these dimensions. Karina et al. (2022) found that the female characters in *Ni Anteh Pergi ke Bulan* and *The*

Bamboo-Cutter's Tale display both similarities and differences in self-image, social image, and social roles, with their representations containing forms of feminist struggle related to gender equality. Firmansyah and Zulyeno (2024) similarly demonstrate that female protagonists in *Timun Mas* and *Kaguyahime no Monogatari* encounter patriarchal cultural structures, although their responses to these structures differ. More specifically, research on *Putri Hijau* has examined the representation of women through feminist literary analysis and identified tensions involving women's identity, freedom, patriarchal norms, and gendered power relations (Sihotang et al., 2024). Other recent research likewise interprets Putri Hijau as a female figure associated with strength, courage, autonomy, and resistance to patriarchal domination (Zaharani et al., n.d.). These studies suggest that *Putri Hijau* provides substantial material for feminist literary inquiry. However, the representation of women in *Putri Senuro* and *Putri Hijau* has not yet been brought together in a systematic comparative analysis focused on the construction of women's images across two Indonesian regional traditions.

Gender literacy refers to the ability to recognise, interpret, question, and critically reflect upon gender representations, roles, relations, and inequalities within social and cultural contexts. Within literary education, gender literacy is closely connected to the ability of learners to read literary texts critically rather than accepting representations of women and men as natural or universal. Literary works may reproduce particular assumptions about femininity and masculinity, but they can also provide opportunities for learners to question those assumptions and consider alternative perspectives. Thus, literary learning can function as a space in which students develop critical awareness of the ways gender is represented and negotiated through cultural narratives. The pedagogical potential of comparative literary reading is supported by Kumlu and Çomoğlu (2021), who found that comparative discussion of fairy tales contributed to gender sensitivity and critical literacy among pre-service teachers. Their findings indicate that placing literary narratives in comparison can encourage learners to recognise gender issues that may remain less visible when a text is read in isolation. Similarly, research on folklore from Indonesian and global traditions demonstrates that folklore contains ideological representations, social identities, and power relations and can therefore be approached through critical literacy in educational contexts (Firdaus, 2025). From this perspective, gender literacy does not simply mean acquiring knowledge about gender equality. It involves developing the capacity to identify gender stereotypes, examine unequal relations of power, recognise women's agency, and critically interpret the cultural assumptions embedded in literary narratives. In the context of this study, *Putri Senuro* and *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau* are therefore positioned not only as objects of literary analysis but also as potential pedagogical texts through which learners can critically engage with representations of women and develop gender awareness.

The use of folklore in literary learning provides an opportunity to connect literary appreciation with cultural literacy and critical reflection. Because folklore is closely connected to local cultural traditions, its incorporation into literature classrooms can enable students to engage with texts that are culturally familiar while simultaneously examining the values and assumptions contained within them. Comparative approaches can further expand this process by encouraging students to place different narratives alongside one another and identify similarities, differences, and cultural particularities.

Previous research has demonstrated the educational potential of comparative folklore. A comparative study of Indonesian and Korean legends, for instance, found that comparative folklore analysis could be transformed into teaching materials and could support learners' understanding of cultural contexts. In relation to gender, Kumlu and Çomoğlu (2021) demonstrate that comparative reading of fairy tales can contribute to gender sensitivity and critical literacy. These findings suggest that literary learning can move beyond the transmission of plot, moral values, and literary elements toward a more critical engagement with cultural representation. Accordingly, the comparison of *Putri Senuro* and *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau* can provide students with an opportunity to examine how female characters are positioned within their respective cultural narratives, how patriarchal expectations operate, and how women negotiate or resist those expectations.

The existing literature establishes three important tendencies. First, comparative studies of folklore have demonstrated that women's images and roles can be meaningfully examined across different cultural traditions (Karina et al., 2022; Firmansyah & Zulyeno, 2024). Second, feminist studies of *Putri Hijau* have examined the representation of women, particularly issues of identity, freedom, patriarchal constraints, and women's resistance (Sihotang et al., 2024; Zaharani et al., n.d.). Third, research on comparative literary education indicates that comparing narratives can contribute to gender sensitivity and critical literacy among learners (Kumlu & Çomoğlu, 2021). Nevertheless, these strands of research have largely been examined separately. There remains limited research that simultaneously connects the comparative analysis of women's images in two Indonesian regional folktales, feminist literary interpretation, gender literacy, and literary learning. More specifically, *Putri Senuro* and *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau* have not been systematically compared as two cultural narratives through which the construction of women's images can be examined and subsequently translated into a pedagogical framework for developing gender literacy. The present study addresses this gap by comparatively examining the representation of women in *Putri Senuro* and *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau* through a feminist literary perspective and by considering the pedagogical implications of the findings for literary learning. The study therefore extends previous research in two directions: theoretically, by bringing two Indonesian regional folktales into a comparative feminist framework; and pedagogically, by positioning the findings as a basis for developing gender literacy through literary education. This approach views folklore not merely as a repository of cultural heritage but as a critical cultural text through which learners can examine gender construction, power relations, women's agency, and the cultural assumptions surrounding women's social positions.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research method to examine the representation of women in the folktales *Putri Senuro* and *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau*. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focuses on interpreting textual meanings, narrative representations, social relations, and gender constructions rather than measuring variables numerically. The descriptive qualitative method enables the researchers to describe and interpret phenomena found in literary texts systematically while maintaining their cultural and narrative contexts. The primary sources of data

were the texts of *Putri Senuro*, a folktale originating from South Sumatra, and *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau*, a folktale associated with North Sumatra. The data consisted of words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, narrative descriptions, and events that represent female characters, women's physical and psychological characteristics, social positions, relationships with male characters, experiences of power relations, and forms of agency or resistance. The selection of textual data was based on its relevance to the research focus, particularly representations that demonstrate how femininity and women's social roles are constructed within the two narratives.

Data were collected through close reading and note-taking techniques. The researchers read both folktales repeatedly to obtain a comprehensive understanding of their narrative structures and cultural contexts (Khoifin, 2026). Relevant textual units were identified, recorded, and classified according to predetermined analytical categories. The categories included the physical image of women, psychological image, social image, gender roles, relationships between women and men, patriarchal power, women's agency, and forms of resistance or negotiation. The collected data were subsequently organised according to each category to facilitate systematic comparison between the two narratives.

Data analysis was conducted through three interconnected stages: identification, interpretation, and comparison. First, textual data related to women's representation were identified and categorised. Second, the selected data were interpreted using feminist literary criticism to examine the construction of femininity, gender expectations, power relations, and women's agency within each narrative. Third, the findings from the two folktales were compared to identify similarities and differences in the representation of women. The comparative analysis also considered the cultural context of each narrative so that similarities were not interpreted as evidence of identical cultural meanings (Makki, 2025).

The interpretation was subsequently connected to the concept of gender literacy in literary learning. The findings were examined to determine how representations of women in the two folktales could be used as materials for encouraging learners to identify gender stereotypes, question unequal power relations, recognise women's agency, and reflect critically on gender representations in literary texts. Thus, the analytical process moved from textual interpretation to comparative analysis and finally to consideration of its pedagogical implications (Gidiotis, 2026). The validity of the interpretation was maintained through repeated reading, systematic categorisation of textual evidence, and comparison of findings across the two literary texts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis of *Putri Senuro* and *The Legend of Putri Hijau* has been conducted systematically and comprehensively by examining the physical, psychological, and social representations of female characters, as well as their positions within existing power relations. Through comparative literary analysis and feminist literary criticism, the study identifies the similarities and differences in how women are portrayed, how they respond to social expectations, and how they exercise agency within their respective cultural contexts. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 1 to provide a clearer overview of women's representation in both folktales.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Women's Representation in Putri Senuro and The Legend of Putri Hijau

Analytical Aspects	Putri Senuro	The Legend of Putri Hijau	Comparative Interpretation
Physical Representation	The female character is portrayed as exceptionally beautiful. Her beauty attracts male attention and becomes a source of vulnerability.	Putri Hijau is depicted as extraordinarily beautiful, attracting the attention of a powerful male ruler.	Beauty is a dominant feature in both narratives and influences how women are perceived and positioned within society.
Psychological Representation	The female character demonstrates courage, resilience, and strategic thinking when facing threats.	Putri Hijau demonstrates courage, determination, and the ability to make decisions concerning her own life.	Both female characters possess psychological strength and are not entirely portrayed as passive figures.
Social Position	The woman's beauty places her in a vulnerable position under the authority and desire of a powerful man.	Putri Hijau occupies a socially significant position and becomes involved in political and power-related conflicts.	Women's social positions are shaped by cultural expectations, male authority, and broader power structures.
Power Relations	Male authority and desire threaten the woman's freedom and personal security.	Male political power influences Putri Hijau's choices and creates pressure concerning marriage and personal autonomy.	Both narratives reveal patriarchal structures that influence women's lives and limit their freedom.
Women's Agency	Agency is expressed through disguise, concealment, and escape as forms of self-protection.	Agency is expressed through refusal, negotiation, decision-making, and resistance.	Women exercise agency through different strategies shaped by their respective cultural and narrative contexts.
Feminist Interpretation	The female character's actions represent resistance to male control and an attempt to protect her autonomy.	Putri Hijau's decisions demonstrate women's capacity to negotiate power and challenge male authority.	Both narratives position women as subjects capable of responding to patriarchal constraints, although their forms of resistance differ.

Following the comparative analysis of women's representation in both folktales, the findings were further examined in relation to their pedagogical implications for literary learning. The analysis highlights how the representation of women, gender stereotypes, power relations, and female agency can serve as important materials for developing students' gender literacy. In this context, the two folktales offer opportunities for students of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program at FKIP Universitas Sriwijaya to develop critical awareness, recognise gender inequalities, and appreciate cultural diversity through literary interpretation. The pedagogical implications of these findings are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Pedagogical Implications of Folktale Analysis for Developing Gender Literacy

Findings	Gender Literacy Aspects	Learning Activities
Women's beauty influences their social position and relationships with men.	Critical awareness of gender stereotypes and beauty standards.	Students identify and discuss how women's physical appearance shapes their representation in the narratives.
Female characters experience pressure from male authority and social expectations.	Awareness of gender inequality and unequal power relations.	Students examine how patriarchal structures influence women's choices and social positions.
Women demonstrate courage, decision-making, and resistance.	Recognition of women's agency, autonomy, and capacity for resistance.	Students compare the strategies used by both female characters to respond to social pressure.
The two folktales reflect different cultural contexts.	Appreciation of cultural diversity and contextual understanding of gender.	Students compare how cultural backgrounds influence the construction of female identity.
Both narratives contain gender-related values and assumptions.	Critical and reflective reading of gender representations in literary texts.	Students formulate critical interpretations of gender roles and discuss their relevance to contemporary society.

Discussion

The analysis of *Putri Senuro* and *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau* reveals that the representation of women in both folktales is closely connected to beauty, social expectations, power relations, and women's capacity to make decisions. Although the two narratives emerge from different regional cultural contexts, both position female characters within social structures that influence their identities, choices, and relationships with men. At the same time, the female protagonists are not represented entirely as passive figures. Their responses to social pressure demonstrate different forms of agency, including concealment, negotiation, decision-making, and resistance. These findings indicate that women's representation in the two folktales contains a complex interaction between patriarchal constraints and women's attempts to exercise control over their own lives. The findings are discussed through a comparative feminist reading of the two narratives and are subsequently connected to their pedagogical implications. The analysis is organised into three interconnected dimensions. The first examines the representation of women in *Putri Senuro* and *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau*, particularly in terms of physical, psychological, and social images. The second compares the construction of female identity, power relations, and women's agency in the two narratives. The third discusses the application of the findings in literary learning involving students of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Sriwijaya (FKIP UNSRI), with particular attention to the development of gender literacy. Through this structure, the discussion moves from textual interpretation to comparative analysis and finally to the pedagogical use of folklore as a medium for critical gender awareness.

The Representation of Women in Putri Senuro and Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau

The analysis of *Putri Senuro* and *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau* reveals that women are represented through interconnected physical, psychological, and social dimensions. In both narratives, female beauty occupies an important position in the construction of women's identities. Beauty is not merely presented as an aesthetic characteristic but

becomes a social attribute that influences how female characters are perceived, treated, and positioned within their communities. This representation demonstrates that the female body can become a site where social expectations and power relations are negotiated. In *Putri Senuro*, the protagonist's extraordinary beauty becomes a central element in the development of the narrative. Her beauty attracts male attention and ultimately places her in a vulnerable position. The representation of beauty therefore contains a contradiction: it gives the female character social visibility and recognition, but at the same time exposes her to unwanted male desire and control. From a feminist perspective, this construction demonstrates how women's bodies may be transformed into objects of social and patriarchal control. Nevertheless, the character does not remain completely passive. Her decision to disguise her appearance and leave the situation demonstrates an attempt to regain control over her own life. Her actions can consequently be interpreted as a form of agency within a social structure that restricts her choices (Calasanti, 2025).

A similar but not identical construction can be observed in *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau*. Putri Hijau's extraordinary beauty becomes known beyond her immediate social environment and attracts the attention of a powerful male ruler. Her beauty therefore functions as both an individual characteristic and a narrative mechanism that generates conflict. However, the character is represented not merely through physical beauty. She also demonstrates psychological strength, decision-making capacity, and the ability to negotiate with male authority. Her refusal to accept an unwanted proposal demonstrates that she possesses personal preferences and the capacity to determine her own position, even when her decision has broader political consequences.

The comparison demonstrates that both narratives associate femininity with beauty, but they do not reduce female identity exclusively to physical appearance. The female protagonists also possess psychological and social qualities, including courage, determination, strategic thinking, and the ability to respond to social pressure. These representations complicate a purely passive image of women in traditional narratives. Women may experience restrictions imposed by patriarchal structures, but they can also negotiate those restrictions through individual decisions and forms of resistance.

The findings support previous research indicating that folklore can simultaneously reproduce gendered cultural expectations and provide representations of female agency. Firmansyah and Zulyeno (2024), for example, found that female protagonists in different folklore traditions may experience patriarchal constraints while responding to those constraints in different ways. The present study extends this observation by demonstrating that similar tensions between beauty, power, and agency can also be identified in two Indonesian regional narratives. Thus, the female characters in *Putri Senuro* and *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau* should not be understood simply as representations of traditional femininity. They also constitute narrative spaces through which women's agency and resistance can be examined.

Comparative Construction of Female Identity, Power, and Agency

A comparative reading of the two narratives reveals both significant similarities and important differences in the construction of female identity (as shown in table 1). The most prominent similarity is the positioning of female beauty within relations of power. In both stories, beauty attracts male attention and becomes connected to the

decisions made by powerful men. Consequently, female identity is initially constructed through an external gaze in which women become objects of desire, admiration, and social judgment. This pattern demonstrates how patriarchal structures can define women's social value through physical appearance.

However, the two narratives differ in the ways their female protagonists respond to these structures. In *Putri Senuro*, the protagonist's response is characterised by concealment and withdrawal. Disguising her appearance and leaving the social environment that threatens her can be interpreted as a strategy for protecting herself and reclaiming control over her life (Muskan, 2025). Her agency therefore emerges through avoidance and self-protection. Resistance does not necessarily take the form of direct confrontation; it may also appear through strategic decisions that allow women to escape structures of domination. In *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau*, female agency is represented more explicitly through negotiation and decision-making. Putri Hijau does not simply accept the authority of the male ruler. Her refusal and subsequent negotiation indicate that she possesses a degree of autonomy in determining her response to patriarchal power. Even when political circumstances limit her available choices, she continues to exercise agency through negotiation and strategic action. Her representation consequently demonstrates that women's agency may operate within, rather than entirely outside, structures of power.

These similarities and differences are significant for comparative literary studies because they demonstrate that patriarchal representation is not necessarily uniform across cultural traditions. Both narratives contain gendered power relations, but the forms of women's response to those relations are shaped by the particular narrative and cultural contexts. The comparison therefore allows readers to recognise that gender is constructed through culturally specific narratives while also identifying broader patterns of women's marginalisation and resistance (Khaja, 2025). From a feminist literary perspective, the two stories also reveal a tension between women as objects and women as subjects. As objects, the female characters are valued, desired, and controlled through their physical beauty and social status. As subjects, however, they make decisions, negotiate circumstances, and attempt to determine their own futures. This duality is particularly important for understanding traditional literature. Rather than categorising folklore as either patriarchal or liberating, a feminist reading can reveal the complex coexistence of domination and agency within the same narrative.

The findings also have implications for the concept of gender literacy. When students compare the two narratives, they can identify that representations of women are not neutral descriptions but are connected to social values and power relations. Students can therefore move from asking "What is the female character like?" to asking "Why is she represented in this way?", "Who determines her choices?", "What forms of power operate in the narrative?", and "How does the character respond to those forms of power?" Such questions transform literary interpretation into a critical process of understanding gender.

Building Gender Literacy through Comparative Literary Learning

The findings of this study were subsequently applied in literary learning involving students of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Sriwijaya (FKIP UNSRI). The

application positioned *Putri Senuro* and *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau* as comparative literary texts through which students could examine women's representation and develop critical awareness of gender relations. The learning process connected literary appreciation with feminist interpretation and critical discussion of gender representation. The learning activities were organised around comparative reading. Students first read and identified textual passages that represented women's physical, psychological, and social characteristics. They then compared the female characters in the two narratives by examining their relationships with family, men, society, and structures of authority. Through this process, students were encouraged to distinguish between representations of women as objects of social expectations and representations of women as subjects capable of making decisions (Sulla, 2025). The subsequent discussion focused on several critical questions concerning gender representation. Students were encouraged to examine why female beauty occupies such a prominent position in both narratives, how male authority influences the lives of female characters, whether the women possess meaningful choices, and what forms of resistance or negotiation are available to them. Such activities encouraged students to interpret literary texts beyond plot and characterisation by examining the ideological and social meanings underlying the narratives.

The classroom application demonstrated the pedagogical potential of comparative folklore for developing gender literacy as shown in table 2. Through comparison, students could identify similarities in the gendered treatment of women while also recognising differences in the ways female agency was represented. This comparative process is important because reading a single narrative may lead learners to regard its representation as culturally or socially natural. In contrast, juxtaposing two narratives enables students to recognise that representations of femininity vary across cultural contexts and can therefore be critically examined. The learning process also encouraged students to understand that feminist literary criticism does not require the rejection of traditional cultural narratives. Instead, it provides a framework for reading those narratives critically and contextually. Students can appreciate *Putri Senuro* and *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau* as Indonesian cultural heritage while simultaneously questioning the gender assumptions embedded within them. This dual perspective is essential for developing gender literacy because it allows cultural appreciation and critical reflection to operate together (Haikuo, 2025).

The application of the study at FKIP UNSRI therefore demonstrates a connection between comparative literature and gender-oriented literary education. The two folktales can function as pedagogical texts through which future Indonesian language and literature teachers learn to identify gender representation, analyse power relations, recognise women's agency, and facilitate critical discussions of gender in literature classrooms. This finding is consistent with Kumlu and Çomoğlu (2021), who demonstrate that comparative reading of literary narratives can contribute to gender sensitivity and critical literacy. In the present study, this pedagogical potential is extended to Indonesian regional folklore and situated within the context of Indonesian language and literature education.

Accordingly, the contribution of this study extends beyond identifying similarities and differences between two folktales. The comparative analysis demonstrates that local literary texts can become resources for developing critical gender awareness. *Putri*

Senuro and *Putri Hijau* provide students with opportunities to recognise how cultural narratives construct women's identities, how patriarchal power operates within those narratives, and how female characters negotiate or resist social constraints. Comparative literary learning can thus transform folklore from a cultural artefact that is primarily appreciated for its heritage value into a critical pedagogical resource for developing gender literacy.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the representation of women in *Putri Senuro* and *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau* is constructed through complex relationships between beauty, social expectations, patriarchal power, and women's agency. Although both folktales emerge from different regional cultural traditions, they share a significant pattern in which female beauty becomes an important factor shaping women's social positions and relationships with male authority. However, the female protagonists are not represented solely as passive objects of patriarchal power. Their actions reveal different forms of agency through strategies of concealment, negotiation, decision-making, and resistance. The comparison therefore demonstrates that women's representation in folklore involves both the reproduction of gendered social structures and the possibility of female agency within those structures.

The comparative perspective further reveals that cultural differences influence the ways women's identities and responses to power are constructed. *Putri Senuro* emphasises a form of agency expressed through withdrawal and self-protection, whereas *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau* presents more explicit forms of negotiation and decision-making in confronting male authority. These differences demonstrate the importance of reading folklore comparatively because the juxtaposition of two narratives makes visible both shared patriarchal patterns and culturally specific representations of women's experiences.

The study also demonstrates the pedagogical potential of comparative folklore for building gender literacy in literary learning. The application of the study involving students of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Sriwijaya (FKIP UNSRI), shows that the two folktales can be used to encourage learners to critically examine gender representation, power relations, women's agency, and cultural assumptions concerning femininity. Comparative literary learning enables students to move beyond understanding folklore as cultural heritage and to engage with it as a critical text that invites reflection on gender relations. Ultimately, *Putri Senuro* and *Kisah Riwayat Putri Hijau* demonstrate that Indonesian regional folklore can function simultaneously as a repository of cultural memory and a pedagogical resource for critical literacy. Integrating comparative literature, feminist literary criticism, and gender literacy in literary education can provide learners with opportunities to appreciate cultural heritage while critically questioning the gender constructions embedded within literary narratives.

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