Kerokan: The Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge of the Javanese People

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Abstract

Indonesian people, especially the Javanese, believe that kerokan (scrapping) can treat masuk angin. As indigenous knowledge passed down from Javanese ancestors, kerokan has been practiced from generation to generation. The purpose of this study is to understand the process of preserving the tradition of kerokan in Java society. This study uses the qualitative descriptive method, with data obtained from interviewing and observation of Mrs. Rokayah, a Javanese woman who often performs kerokan treatments. The result is the preservation of kerokan knowledge via transfer of tacit knowledge from generation to generation.

Keywords— indigenous knowledge, knowledge preservation, kerokan

1. Introduction

One of the most common diseases suffered by Indonesians is the common cold (masuk angin); although in fact the term masuk angin is not recognized in modern medical terminology. Masuk angin refers to a person's body condition with symptoms of aches, bloating, dizziness, nausea, flu, and fever. Because it is considered a mild and common pain, people who get masuk angin usually do not go to see a doctor. To treat the symptoms of masuk angin, Indonesian people, especially Javanese people, usually perform traditional medicine called kerokan.

Kerokan (scrapping) is one of the traditional medicines in Indonesia that comes from indigenous knowledge. It existed and was developed in Indonesia, and especially in Java society. Indigenous knowledge is a knowledge possessed or controlled and used by a particular community, society, or ethnic group that is hereditary and developed in accordance with environmental changes (Agus Sadjono, 2010).

Kerokan as indigenous knowledge is a local Indonesian wisdom that has been passed down from generation to generation throughout the ancestry of the people. Thus, indigenous knowledge is passed on through the existing culture and thrives in present-day society. The purpose of inheriting indigenous knowledge is to preserve the existence of local wisdom which comprises the identity of a society and a nation. If indigenous knowledge is not successfully passed on to future generations, it is possible that it will be lost or destroyed.

Furthermore, Budi Agus Riswandi outlines the concept of indigenous knowledge as follows:

1. Indigenous knowledge is the result of practical thinking based on teaching and experience from generation to generation.
2. Indigenous knowledge is knowledge within a village area.
3. Indigenous knowledge cannot be separated from the community holder, including health, spirituality, culture, and language (Budi Agus Riswandi and M. Syamsudin, 2005: 29).

In order that the indigenous knowledge does not become extinct and can be utilized by future generations, it is necessary to preserve the knowledge carefully. This research discusses how the preservation of knowledge process is wholly maintained (Karsono, 2010).

Literature Review

The authors chose this study because the authors feel interested in examining how the process of inheritance and regeneration of knowledge about kerokan occurred. Consider, until now, no research has been completed that scientifically explains the process of knowledge inheritance for kerokan in Indonesia. Knowledge is information that changes something or somebody, either by becoming grounds for action, or by making an individual (or an institution) capable of different or more effective action (Drucker's, 1988).
Knowledge preservation is a process for maintaining knowledge important to an organization’s mission that stores knowledge or information over time and provides the possibility of recall for the future (Mazour, 2010). Unfortunately, tacit knowledge is difficult for organizations to exploit. Since it only resides inside people’s minds and memories, it cannot easily be found electronically (Stenmark, 2000).

According to Nonaka, et al (1995), in Munir’s book (2008), the dynamic interaction between one form of knowledge and another is called the conversion of knowledge. There are four methods of knowledge conversion: named socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization. Munir’s (2008:30–33) description for each mode of knowledge conversion follows:

1. **Socialization**
   - Refers to the conversion of tacit knowledge to tacit knowledge (tacit => tacit). This socialization is used to emphasize the importance of joint activities between the knowledge source and the recipient of knowledge in the process of tacit knowledge conversion. Because tacit knowledge is heavily influenced by its context and is difficult to formalize, it is necessary for an individual to experience tacit knowledge through joint activities, such as being together in one place, spending time together, or living in the same environment.

2. **Externalization**
   - Refers to the conversion of tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge (tacit => explicit). In this way, knowledge is documented so that it can be distributed to others and can become the basis for others to learn from. In the process of externalization, tacit knowledge is expressed and translated into metaphors, concepts, hypotheses, diagrams, models, or prototypes so that others can understand it.

3. **Combination**
   - Refers to the conversion of explicit knowledge to explicit knowledge (explicit => explicit). In this way, knowledge is combined and exchanged through media such as documents, meetings, telephone conversations, and communication over computer networks.

4. **Internalization**
   - Refers to the conversion of explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge (explicit => tacit). This method is very similar to the activity known as learning by doing. Through learning something new, explicit knowledge (in the form of machine operation manuals and recipes in cookbooks) is internalized for the learner, such as an employee or a cook. When internalization occurs in many people, then the explicit knowledge is distributed successfully throughout a company.

2. **Methods**

This research uses the qualitative descriptive method as the literature approach and literature review. The qualitative method utilizes descriptive data in the form of people’s written or oral words and observable behavior.

The use of the qualitative method in this study aims to determine how knowledge about kerokan was successfully preserved. Data for this study were obtained from observing and interviewing an informant named Mrs. Rokayah, a Javanese who has been practicing kerokan.

3. **Results and Discussion**

Almost everyone in Indonesia, especially the Javanese, is familiar with traditional treatment methods such as kerokan. Kerokan is a method of scraping certain body part points using a blunt object (Wojowasito & Wasito, 1980). Typical tools used for kerokan can be coins, onions, pieces of ginger, and other dull objects. In addition, kerokan also requires lubricating fluids such as telon oil, olive oil, balsam, eucalyptus oil, coconut oil, or body lotion. This lubricating fluid is used to avoid irritation of the skin or creating blisters while scraping (Tamtomo, 2012).

The origins of when and how kerokan became traditional medicine in Indonesia, especially in Java, are hard to pinpoint because of the absence of written documents. However, the method and technique of kerokan has certainly been inherited by the current generation through its ancestors. From the results of interviews with the informant, we know that the current kerokan methods and techniques are similar to those used in the past. Only some of the tools have changed; for example, in ancient times, the ancestors used coconut oil or cooking oil, and now a balm is typically used instead. The use of coins hasn’t changed very much; in the past, coins were used, and in the present, the coin that works best is a 1–thousand-rupiah coin.

Mrs. Rokayah stated that her kerokan knowledge is based on a hereditary practice conducted by her ancestral family. Moreover, the knowledge of kerokan from Mrs. Rokayah’s mother’s family was transmitted in the oral tradition. This is relevant with regard to Hart’s theory that the oral tradition is a process of transitioning knowledge from one generation to the next by way of spoken communication (Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre & Wolfe, 1995).
Mrs. Rokayah said that her knowledge of kerokan derived from her mother. Mrs. Rokayah stated that the tradition of kerokan had been practiced by the family of her ancestors. Mrs. Rokayah's mother had begun to be taught by her mother during elementary school, and since then, Mrs. Rokayah felt happy whenever she was taught scraping by her mother. After junior high school, Mrs. Rokayah began to scrape others.

It turns out that the tradition of kerokan was not only used as a treatment habit by the family of Mrs. Rokayah: in fact, almost all the people in her village in Pemalang, Central Java, used the traditional treatment of kerokan. This is because almost all residents continue the tradition of scraping with their offspring, transferring their knowledge of scraping orally to each other without any media. Based on direct observation of Mrs. Rokayah, we understand that kerokan cannot be done by just anyone. The practice requires mastery. Kerokan looks like it might be easy to do, but there are certain steps and techniques that must be learned, and that Mrs. Rokayah learned from her mother:

1. Prepare a fine coin, for example Rp. 1000 coin and balm.
2. First, apply a balm to the back with light massage in order to prepare the skin and muscles for scraping.
3. Pinch the coin using your thumb and index finger.
4. Start scraping from top to bottom on the right and left sides of the spine, followed by sideways on the left and right sides of the back.
5. Do this repeatedly until the skin is red or blackish; do not scrape over the bone.
6. Scraping pressure must not be too strong or too weak; the angle of the coin to the body is about 45 degrees.
7. When finished, apply a balm to the back using light massage.

Thus, the preservation of knowledge kerokan in Mrs. Rokayah’s family occurred from the transfer of tacit knowledge which was done orally through the socialization method. The process of inheritance of kerokan knowledge has lasted for generations within her family. Tacit knowledge is the knowledge, experience, and expertise possessed by someone who has the knowledge stored in their mind and is able to show it to someone else. Managing the tacit knowledge of every individual in the organization makes it easy for the knowledge to continue to be used by people in need. Tacit knowledge (including cognition and skill) can be stored but is more difficult to share and formulate.

According to Polanyi, there is always knowledge that will remain tacit, so the process of knowing is as important as the knowledge itself: 80% of knowledge is tacit knowledge and only 20% is explicit knowledge (O’dell & Grayson, 1998). The knowledge transfer from Mrs. Rokayah's family to her offspring is happening verbally, in accordance with Sithole's statement which says that indigenous knowledge is usually only stored in one's mind and passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation (Sithole 2007).

In Indonesia, although the practice of traditional kerokan still has pros and cons in the community; it still exists and survives in a modern era of medicine, even with easy access to modern health care practices. According to Mrs. Rokayah, the factors that influence why she and the residents in her village like kerokan is because their parents taught them that they were not supposed to take drugs when they get a mild illness such as masuk angina. Due to their upbringing, the parents’ words are embedded in Mrs. Rokayah’s mind, and she and the other villagers know that if they get masuk angina, then their first action will be kerokan. Taking medicine or a drug is the last resort, only used if kerokan does not successfully cure masuk angin. This is communicated as a teaching: "mild sick do not take medicine.”

Another factor that caused Mrs. Rokayah to prefer kerokan was the connection she felt between her and her mother when she is doing kerokan. So, it is not merely a medical practice, but there is a relationship, affection, and communication with her mother that cannot be replicated by any other method. Whenever Mrs. Rokayah was scraped by her mother, there was a moment of intimacy between mother and daughter. While practicing kerokan, they are also chatting with each other. With kerokan, Mrs. Rokayah felt the affection and togetherness that cannot be replaced by other medicinal methods. Later after Mrs. Rokayah got married and had children, she taught her knowledge about kerokan to her husband and children. Mrs. Rokayah said she had even scraped her four-year-old granddaughter who was fussy from a cold or a fever, but she used a sliced onion, not a coin for scraping the child.

4. Conclusions

Kerokan knowledge preservation through the transfer of knowledge is one way to maintain a tradition in society, so that knowledge that already exists in society can continue to be an important element in a culture, and not become extinct. In addition, the most important thing in the preservation of indigenous knowledge is to make the knowledge-owner community aware of the importance of sharing and preserving their knowledge for the next generations.
References


