

Beneath the Dalakit's Shadow: Community Perceptions of Fear and Reverence in Borongan City

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ABSTRACT

The belief system also has a vital role to play in the development of culture and tradition, and the way people view and understand nature. There are different belief systems about trees and their association with spiritual matters in the Philippines. There is a type of tree known as the Dalakit tree, which is scientifically known as *Ficus benjamina*. This type of tree is commonly believed to be the dwelling place of unseen spirits, and in Borongan, Eastern Samar people have stories and customs that show they respect the spirit world. The objective of the study is to explore the perceptions and meanings about the Dalakit tree and to identify the traditional beliefs about the tree that are still affecting people's views about nature and spiritual matters. The study used the modified ADDE for creating a multimedia output that consists of Analysis, Design, Development and Evaluation. The study systematically collected data from interviews and other sources that provided information on the perceptions of the local community. The information was then converted into a multimedia product and rated using the modified DepEd Region III Nueva Ecija Evaluation Rating Sheet for Storybooks and Big Books. Factor 1 was rated 4.6 and Factor 2 4.5, which were interpreted as highly acceptable; both met all required standards. With this, there is a strong basis for the idea that using multimedia to share cultural knowledge and stories increases cultural awareness and makes it more accessible to younger audiences.

Keywords: Dalakit, Cultural Beliefs, Multimedia, ADDE

INTRODUCTION

Ficus benjamina L. is an annual tree that belongs to the family mulberry (Moraceae), which usually grows in tropical and subtropical regions. For thousands of years, it has been used as an ornamental plant that grows up to 30 meters in height, strangler with multiple aerial roots, and stem with drooping foliage, multiple-stemmed, spread, white latex, and strongest root system. The long branches are generally dothed with the alternate, thick, simple, shiny, whole, elliptic, two to five-inch-long and evergreen leaves. For pollination, wasps play an important role in this species's reproduction (Kaur et al., 2023). The dalakit tree is the foundation of the origin and name of Dalaguete. In ancient times, before the coming of the Spaniards, these trees have been used by people as major landmarks. People gathered under its encompassing shades and conduct social and economic activities such as festivities, contest, trading meetings and other community gatherings. They establish market places under the shades of the dalakit where they sell their products and conduct trade with local roving traders bringing in Chinese and Asiatic goods from the port of Cebu (J. Gomora2013).

The capital of Eastern Samar is Borongan City, which is rich in folklore and indigenous beliefs that reflect the everyday experiences of its people. Historically, the name Borongan is derived from the word "borong," which refers to fog or mist (Provincial Government of Eastern Samar, n.d.). This foggy environment has long contributed to the community's perception of a boundary between the human world and the supernatural. Within this cultural context, the Dalakit tree is believed to serve as a dwelling place for spirits that coexist within the natural environment.

Despite modernization and urban development, the Dalakit myth remains embedded in cultural landscapes like Borongan's. It is suggested that myths play a larger role in our lives than we recognize (Berger, 2018). Many locals still express respect for the tree and fear spectral punishment. But these beliefs are waning over time, especially in the younger generation.

This is largely because traditional forms of storytelling such as myth-telling are being replaced with new forms, particularly digital. This leads to a cultural gap for where local myths are forgotten, misunderstood or oversimplified. Digital storytelling has emerged as a powerful instructional and cultural preservation tool. Through visual narratives and animation, digital media can evoke emotional engagement and foster deeper understanding of cultural narratives (Nasir et al., 2024). Reinterpreting local myths through animation offers an opportunity to preserve their original meaning while making them accessible and relevant to present and future generations.

This research aims to explore community perceptions of fear and relevance in Borongan City, particularly surrounding the Dalakit tree. Specifically, the study seeks to: (1) To explore community perceptions and lived experiences related to the sacred tree (2) To develop a digital art material based on the information gathered (3) Evaluate the data by using the modified evaluation tool of DepEd Region III Nueva Ecija Evaluating Rating Sheet for Storybooks and Big Books.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed qualitative research design guided by the modified ADDE instructional design framework on the Analysis, Design, Development and Evaluation. The design was selected to analyze the personal experiences and beliefs among individuals of Borongan City about the Dalakit tree. Through using phenomenology, the study aimed to probe the essential nature of how the community viewed the connection of folklore and the natural feature, focusing specifically on the paired themes of fear and respect.

Research Locale

Borongan City, is located along the middle coastal part of the province Eastern Samar. The province itself comprises a part of Eastern Visayas region (Region VIII) of the Philippines. It has a land area about 475.00 km and according to the 2020 census, Borongan City has a population 71,961 with barangays and a density of approximately 151 people per square kilometer. (Retrieved from: <https://www.philAtlas.com>, 2026).

Research Respondents

The participants of this study were the locals in Borongan, Eastern Samar. A total of 15 respondents were composed of cultural informants and elders, they were selected based on their familiarity and experience to the dalakit myth. This study will used purposive sampling technique.

Table 1: Respondent's Profile

Respondent Type	Number	Role in the Study	Phase Involved
Cultural Informants / Elders	15	Provided myth narratives and cultural context	Analysis, Design, Development

Table 2: Evaluator's Profile

Highest Educational Attainment	Profession	Number
College Graduate	Teacher	10

Analysis Phase

In this phase, the researchers conducted an in-depth interview with the respondents from selected communities of Borongan City, which will be selected through purposive sampling. This method will ensure that the informants contains the specific knowledges that will meet and are necessary for the study's objectives (Aguinis, 2024). A semi-structured personal interviews was utilized as the main data gathering instrument. This method relies on open-ended questions within predetermined thematic framework that will allow the participants to have a flexible yet topic-centered responses (George, 2022). This approach will help the researchers to explore more into knowledges, oral traditions, and personal experiences while sustaining inquires remained focused on the topic. Thematic Analysis was approach will be used to organize and extract core data that were collected through the interviews. This process included, transcribing interviews and repeating patterns associated to the myth of Dalakit, the acts of respect and the consequences perceived of disturbing these sites. Through this process, the researchers were able to adapt and modify the questionnaires from Spradley's Ethnographic from Spradley's Ethnographic Interviewing, UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Documentation, Propp's Morphology of the Folktale, Campbell's Myth Functions, and NCCA Folklore Guides.

Design Phase

The researchers created visual concepts and illustrations regarding the Dalakit myth from the insights and information provided by the respondents during interviews. The designs were continuously updated throughout the interview process as researchers validated the accuracy of the sketches with regard to respondents' expertise. The concept art included full-body character design and background elements that related to the cultural, environmental, and spiritual significance of the Dalakit tree. Digital illustrations will be created using Ibis Paint, this software was chosen because it has complete features, is easy to use, provides video tutorials, can be saves in various formats (Farkhatun et al 2022).

Development Phase

During the development phase, the approved concepts and sketches were developed into the final digital output. To achieve this, the researchers will developed the sketches through the use of Ibis Paint software, focusing on the details, colors, and cohesion with proper consideration for the accuracy of the Dalakit myth. Continuous revisions were done until the output was appropriately tailored within the respondents' knowledge levels as intended by the research study.

Evaluation Phase

In this phase involved the assessment of the final output by a panel of experts using the Evaluation Rating Sheet for Story Books and Big Books of the Department of Education Nueva Ecija. The rating tool offered standardized criteria for evaluating the output in terms of its acceptability, quality, and effectiveness. To analyze the results, descriptive statistics particularly the weighted mean were employed. In addition, qualitative feedback from the evaluators will served as the basis for revising and validating the final output.

Data Analysis

In the Data Analysis phase, the researchers will use the modified Rating Scale Based on the DepEd–Nueva Ecija Evaluation Rating Sheet for Story Books and Big Books to analyze the collected data.

Table 3 Rating Scale Based on the DepEd–Nueva Ecija Evaluation Rating Sheet for Story Books and Big Books

Scale	Mean Range	Descriptive Rating	Interpretation
5	4.21 – 5.00	Excellent	Highly acceptable; meets all required standards

4	3.41 – 4.20	Very Satisfactory	Acceptable with minimal revisions
3	2.61 – 3.40	Satisfactory	Acceptable with moderate revisions
2	1.81 – 2.60	Fair	Needs major revisions
1	1.00 – 1.80	Poor	Not acceptable

Ethical Considerations

This multimedia research project adhered to established ethical standards throughout the processes of data gathering, content validation, and expert evaluation. Informed consent was obtained from all validators prior to participation, ensuring that they were fully informed of the study's objectives, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequences.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly observed. Any references to institutional records or contextual information used to guide content development were examined only in summarized form, with no personally identifiable information included. Evaluators' comments and ratings were treated with confidentiality and were reported solely in aggregated form to prevent individual attribution.

All digital and printed materials generated during the validation process—including scripts, storyboards, and multimedia outputs—were securely stored and accessed only by the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all materials were archived or disposed of responsibly in accordance with institutional guidelines.

The study upheld the principle of beneficence by ensuring that all research activities minimized risk and supported positive educational and cultural outcomes. The primary purpose of the project was to produce multimedia materials that promote cultural awareness, ethical representation, and educational value. Prior coordination and written permission from appropriate academic authorities were secured to ensure compliance with institutional and ethical research standards before the conduct of validation activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presented the data obtained in analysis phase using the modified Research Questionnaire for Eastern Samar Myths. The questionnaire was designed to document the authentic origin, physical characteristics, cultural meaning and narrative functions of local myths. The findings showed that the Dalakit tree was viewed as a symbol of both fear and respect, which was rooted in ancient myths and tales that were handed down through generations in Borongan City. Most of participants described the Dalakit tree has a thick trunk, a wide canopy, and aerial roots that grow downwards until it touches the ground. Respondents also emphasized the importance of traditional practices, such as asking permission before approaching or passing by the Dalakit tree. Participants provided additional details through sharing their own stories and through relaying information obtained from older generations, some recalled warnings given during childhood, such as avoiding loud behavior or showing disrespect near the tree, especially at night. The information provided from the interviews illustrates the dalikit myth as something that goes beyond the story format and is also lived and practiced in people's everyday lives by the methods in which we remember and experience through the lived experiences of others.

The myth serves as an important means of uniting the community. The Dalakit myth is a cultural myth that assists people in understanding the nature of relationships with the Dalakit tree and their relation to nature. For those living in this community, it is much more than a basic spirit story; it urges people to be careful, respectful, and listen to what elders have said to them in regards to their relationship to the Dalakit and their natural surroundings. The data were gathered using the Reasearch Questionnaire for Eastern Samar Myths: A Research-Based Digital Storytelling Project. The questionnaire was designed to document the aunthentic

origin, physical characteristics, cultural meaning, and narrative functions of local myths prior for story adaptation.

Table 4 The questionnaire is structured into ten (10) thematic sections:

Section	Focus
A	Origin and Historical Background
B	Physical and Supernatural Description
C	Strengths, Powers, and Abilities
D	Weaknesses and Limitations
E	Behavior, Morality, and Intent
F	Cultural Function and Symbolism
G	Rituals, Beliefs, and Continuity
H	Variations and Multiple Versions
I	Modern Relevance and Continuity
J	Guidance for Story Adaptation

These questions are adapted from Spradley's Ethnographic Interviewing, UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Documentation, Propp's Morphology of the Folktale, Campbell's Myth Functions, and NCCA Folklore Guides.

Table 5. Thematic Summary of Interview Results on the Dalakit Myth

Thematic Category	Dominant Findings	Design Implication
Origin and History	Dalakit as an ancient tree believed to be inhabited by spirits or supernatural	Timeless setting and historical tone visual cues showing ancestral roots and folklore transmission
Physical Description	Large, thick root, wide canopy and eerie presence	Exaggerated roots and scale to an intimidating yet mystical design
Powers	Protect spirits, curse disrespectful individuals or cause illness	Supernatural effects through visual distortions, glowing elements
Weaknesses	Power is believed to weaken when proper respect, prayers or rituals	Rituals or respectful actions neutralize danger
Morality	The myth teaches respect for nature and consequences for disrespect toward sacred spaces	Portray moral contrast between respectful and disrespectful characters to highlight the lesson visually
Cultural	The myth serves as a warning and moral	Central moral message

function	guide	
Rituals and Taboos	Asking permission before passing, avoiding noise and offering prayers near the tree	Ritual gestures and quite, tense moments to reflect traditional practices
Variations	By location some view the dalakit as purely dangerous, others as a neutral	Alternate story versions
Modern Relevance	Youth know the myth but doubt	Modern retelling tone
Adaptation Guidance	Respondents emphasized respectful portrayal	Maintain cultural sensitivity

From the analysis of the interview data, it was clear that respondents share a common sentiment of fear and respect for the tree, which was deeply rooted in their cultural beliefs and stories passed down through the ages. Most of the participants referred to the tree as sacred and mysterious, relating it to spirits or other invisible entities. However, the data also relate to one of the key points of interest, which was the role of the community elders and informants in maintaining and passing down the beliefs and stories, ensuring the continued influence of the tree on the lives of the people. From the data and phenomena, it was clear that the tree is not only an aspect of the environment but also one of the most important cultural symbols passed down through the history of the people. The sketches presented in this study were created using Ibis Paint.



Figure 1: shows an initial sketch of the Dalakit tree.

The tree is depicted with wide, spreading branches and dense foliage, hinting at its grand and mysterious presence. This preliminary illustration is not finalized and serves as a basic visual representation of the tree's symbolic and cultural significance, leaving room for refinement in the final design.



Figure 2: the trunk of the Dalakit tree

It highlights its thick and rugged structure, reflecting age and the necessary toughness for survival. Many participants perceived the trunk as being really huge and tall, which also supports the perceived age of the tree: old and mighty. The rough texture of the tree and its wide base were more or less typically associated with strength and stability, which, as explained, is supposed to signify in local beliefs the presence of unseen forces at work. This physical characteristic further contributes to the sense of fear and respect surrounding the Dalakit tree, as the trunk is treated not just as a part of nature but as a symbol deeply embedded into the local mythology and cultural discourse.



Figure 3: Final sketch of the dalakit tree

This figure illustrates the final sketch of the Dalakit tree based on the descriptions given by the respondents. It has a dense leaf cover and long dangling aerial roots, which were often associated with the mysterious and the existence of unseen entities as described by the respondents and the trunk of the tree represent the respondents' views or notions about fear and reverence for the Dalakit tree, which embody the cultural symbolism for the sacred or supernatural qualities depicted in the folklore narrated by the cultural informants from the community.

In the development phase, the researchers developed some concept art and designs for the dalakit tree using the information that was gathered from the participant interviews. Several modifications from the design phase are seen. The conceptualization stage was important in order to proceed creating the material. Using the software Ibis Paint, the illustration is digitally created by sketching the main elements, refining the line art and details to accurately represents the concept of the dalakit tree and its cultural significance.



Figure 4. Sketches of multiple variations of Dalakit tree using Ibis Paint



Figure 5. Sketch of tambalan a traditional healer

The sketch of the Tambalan healer using ibis Paint is done in clean line art, focusing on simple outlines and clear details. The figure shows traditional clothing and a calm posture, with minimal elements like ritual to represent healing.



Figure 6. Material of the story using Microsoft Publisher

Presents the development of the story material using Microsoft Publisher. The software was used to organize and compile the narrative text, illustrations, and layout into a book format. Through Microsoft Publisher, the story elements such as the cover page, introduction, main story, images, and supporting texts were arranged systematically to produce a clear and visually appealing presentation.

In the evaluation phase, the researchers used a modified DepEd Region III Nueva-Ecija Evaluation Rating Sheet for Storybooks and Big Books. Once the material had been developed, the researchers or developers finalized the data gathered from evaluation tool. The material that undergoes a professional evaluation to determine whether the multimedia output reacquires revisions or if further analysis of the topic is necessary.

Table 6. The table shows the results of the evaluation (Factor 1)

Parameter	Grand Mean	Descriptive Rating	Interpretation
Story	4.5	Excellent	Highly acceptable; meets all required standards
Sociocultural Sensitivity	4.5	Excellent	Highly acceptable; meets all required standards
Development Aspect	4.5	Excellent	Highly acceptable; meets all required standards

Plot/Storyline	4.5	Excellent	Highly acceptable; meets all required standards
Characters	4.3	Excellent	Highly acceptable; meets all required standards
Visuals	4.6	Excellent	Highly acceptable; meets all required standards
Language	4.5	Excellent	Highly acceptable; meets all required standards
Grammar	4.6	Excellent	Highly acceptable; meets all required standards

Table 6 presents the result factor 1, which provides a comprehensive assessment of the graphic narratives literacy and content-related dimensions. While the visuals and grammar achieved a high grand mean of 4.6. This indicates that the researchers was successful in maintaining the integrity of the recorded oral traditions by converting folklore into a visual medium and the proper grammar. While the character achieved high degree of professional acceptability, it yielded relatively the lowest mean of 4.3, this indicates that it could be improve more. Furthermore, the story, sociocultural sensitivity, development aspect, plot/storyline and language each obtained a mean of 4.5.

Table 7 Result of the evaluation (Factor 2)

Parameter	Grand Mean	Descriptive Rating	Interpretation
Prints	4.7	Excellent	Highly acceptable; meets all required standards
Book design & Layout	4.5	Excellent	Highly acceptable; meets all required standards
Paper and Binding	4.6	Excellent	Highly acceptable; meets all required standards

Table 7 presents the evaluation results for factor 2, which focused on the physical quality and craftsmanship of the printed material. The parameter of prints achieved the highest grand mean of 4.7 indicating that the multimedia material retained their clarity and professional quality throughout the printing process. While the book design & layout achieved grand mean of 4.7 and paper & binding parameter obtained 4.6.

Table 8 The total Grand mean of Factor 1 and Factor 2 using the modified DepEd Region III Nueva-Ecija Evaluation Rating Sheet for Storybooks and Big Books.

Factors	Grand Mean	Interpretation
1	4.6	Highly acceptable; meets all required standards
2	4.5	Highly acceptable; meets all required standards

Table 8 provides a summary of the evaluation results, categorizing the developments performance was divided into two primary domains: Factor 1 (Literary and Content Quality) and Factor 2 (Physical Quality and Craftsmanship). Factor 1 achieved grand mean of 4.6 and Factor 2 with a grand mean of 4.5. which carries interpretation of Highly acceptable; meets all required standards. This shows how well the storybooks storyline and physical execution.

According to the data, the researchers successfully achieved in technical requirements of high quality of print and requirements of folklore preservation. This summary demonstrates the project overall effectiveness and verifies that the final output achieved professionally and educationally produced.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that community perceptions and lived experiences strongly affirm the sacred nature of the Dalakit tree. Participants consistently associate the tree with spiritual presence, often describing it as a dwelling place of unseen beings and a site that requires respect and caution. These beliefs are reflected in everyday practices, such as offering prayers, saying respectful phrases, and avoiding disturbance of the area. Moreover, lived experiences, including personal stories and shared narratives, reinforce the idea that the tree holds protective and sometimes punitive powers. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the Dalakit tree is not merely a natural element but a culturally and spiritually significant symbol that continues to shape the community's beliefs, behaviors, and connection to their environment.

The study succeeded in turning these cultural stories into visual storytelling by collecting narratives, experiences, and perspectives from community members. The material content reflects the participants' respect, worries, and actual experiences related to the sacred tree. In addition to keeping these stories intact, the multimedia material of the collected data made them more engaging and easier to relate to, which could help younger audiences understand the cultural importance of the Dalakit myth.

Furthermore, the modified DepEd Region III Nueva Ecija Evaluation Rating Sheet for Storybooks and Big Books was utilized to assess the multimedia material. Factor 1 (literacy and Content Quality) achieved grand mean of 4.6 and Factor 2 (Physical Quality and Craftsmanship) achieved grand mean of 4.5 The evaluation results showed that the material successfully communicated the story of the Dalakit myth, together with its cultural values and educational message. The evaluation showed that the output has the potential to act as a cultural and educational tool, helping to preserve and promote local folklore.

In summary, the study emphasizes the significance of protecting cultural heritage by recording and artistically presenting local myths. The study promotes cultural preservation and creative educational approaches by examining the origins of the Dalakit myth, highlighting the community's experiences, and assessing the results using a standardized evaluation method.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The future researchers are encourage to conduct further research on the dalakit tree and the associated myths. Include a wider range of respondents in other communities in order to enhance the knowledge base on local folklore and beliefs. This may help to capture more stories and beliefs that have been shared over the years. Future projects could enhance the multimedia output even more by utilizing other contemporary media, like mobile-friendly platforms, interactive storytelling, and animation. To preserve quality, cultural accuracy, and educational efficacy, it is strongly advised to conduct ongoing assessments using approved educational resources or instruments.

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