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THE EXISTENCE OF *DOLABOLOLO* ORAL LITERATURE IN THE LIFE OF TERNATE SOCIETY

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Abstract

This research aims to describe the existence of *Dolabololo* oral literature in four districts within the city of Ternate, as well as the factors affecting the limited use of *Dolabololo* among the Ternate community. This research used a qualitative descriptive method and was conducted in four districts within the city of Ternate. The research subjects included the native people of Ternate originating from these four districts, as well as the traditional leaders of the Ternate Sultanate. Data in this study, including traditional *Dolabololo* expressions, were obtained through interviews and written documentation, along with their responses regarding factors affecting the diminishing use of *Dolabololo*. The data acquisition process involved 1) observation, 2) interviews, 3) recording, and 4) documentation. The data analysis stages included data decreased, data presentation, and data verification. The results of this research indicate that the existence of *Dolabololo* oral literature in the life of the Ternate community in four districts within the city of Ternate has significantly decreased or diminished in usage. Dolabololo in the Ternate Island district comprises 32 types of *Dolabololo*, while the South Ternate City district has six types, and both North Ternate and Central Ternate districts each have only three types of Dolabololo still found in these two districts. Two factors affect the decreased use of *Dolabololo* in the life of the Ternate community: internal factors related to the awareness among the users themselves, and external factors related to environmental factors.

Keywords *Dolabololo* Oral Literature, Existence, Ternate Community.

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INTRODUCTION

The existence of *Dolabololo* oral literature within the Ternate community is currently facing serious challenges amid the forces of modernization and globalization. As a form of intangible cultural heritage, *Dolabololo* plays a crucial role in shaping the character, ethics, and social identity of the community. Similar findings have been reported in various other regions, where oral traditions are increasingly marginalized among younger generations due to the shift towards national or global languages (Hasanah & Andari, 2020; Pentury, Yusuf, & Nurdin, 2020). Recent field observations indicate that the use of *Dolabololo* is becoming increasingly rare, both in public communication spaces and within family settings, particularly among the younger generation. Interviews with traditional leaders and local residents reveal that only around 20–30% of individuals under the age of 25 are familiar with or able to use *Dolabololo* appropriately, while more than half of respondents stated that they have never encountered *Dolabololo* being used in daily conversations. This condition demonstrates a significant decline in the intergenerational transmission of oral traditions, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive research that focuses on the current existence and usage of *Dolabololo*.

Dolabololo serves as an important medium for preserving the cultural identity and social values of the Ternate community. As emphasized by Widihastuti (2021), oral traditions function as vehicles for the transmission of moral and social values, thereby reinforcing collective identity. *Dolabololo* encapsulates messages of mutual respect, communal solidarity (marimoi ngone futuru), and ethical principles governing interpersonal relationships (Ati & Gay, 2022). Ryolita & Nurhayani (2024) also view oral literature, or literature in general, as a form of local artistry with significant potential for research and study to ensure its preservation. However, the ongoing language shift toward the use of Indonesian or Ternate Malay in daily communication, combined with the lack of intergenerational transmission, has contributed to the erosion of *Dolabololo*'s social functions. Field findings reveal that *Dolabololo* is now largely confined to ceremonial contexts rather than being an active medium for everyday interaction.

The challenges in preserving *Dolabololo* stem from both internal and external factors. Internally, the declining role of families in transmitting Dolabololo has weakened the cultural foundation of younger generations (Ati, 2024). Externally, the forces of globalization, urbanization, and modern communication trends have contributed to the perception that *Dolabololo* is outdated and irrelevant to contemporary life. Similar phenomena have been documented globally, such as in

the Mbum community of Cameroon (Mekunda & Nkfunji, 2022), as well as in studies on the influence of digital media on oral traditions in Southeast Asia (Nugroho & Kesyafano, 2025). To address these challenges, several strategic measures are recommended, including integrating *Dolabololo* into formal education through local content curricula, developing culturally based teaching materials, and revitalizing oral traditions through nonformal initiatives such as intergenerational workshops, community storytelling programs, and digital archiving to ensure wider accessibility for the younger generation. These strategies align with global practices of digital storytelling implemented by the World Oral Literature Project and international cultural preservation initiatives (Marzagora & Orsini, 2025; Revel, 1998; Finnegan, 2012; UNESCO, 2023).

Previous studies show that research on oral literature has generally focused on cultural values, structural elements, and revitalization efforts. Yulsafli and Erfinawati (2022) found that oral literature in Sabang (Aceh) still functions as a medium for conveying cultural values, morals, and social norms, although its use is declining among the younger generation. Abdullah (2021) studied Ternate oral literature through the lens of ecocriticism and religiosity, emphasizing that these oral traditions are rich in local wisdom but do not delve deeply into the current existence of *Dolabololo* within modern society. Pentury, Yusuf, and Nurdin (2020) examined the linguistic structures and cultural values of Ternate oral literature descriptively but did not provide updated data on the distribution and use of *Dolabololo*. Kaswadi (2020) emphasized the importance of preserving oral literature as local wisdom but primarily discussed theoretical strategies without depicting its practical use in daily life. Meanwhile, Majid (2019) explored the revitalization of *Dolabololo* in Ternate through a historical approach, but did not clearly map the extent to which Dolabololo is still used in contemporary society.

From these studies, it is evident that no research has comprehensively examined the current existence of *Dolabololo* in the life of the Ternate community with updated field data from all four districts. No study has provided a detailed account of the number of *Dolabololo* types still in use, their levels of utilization, and the internal and external factors influencing their decline. Addressing this gap, this research introduces a novel contribution by mapping the existence of *Dolabololo* in four districts of Ternate, with findings indicating 32 types of *Dolabololo* on Ternate Island, six types in South Ternate, and three types each in North Ternate and Central Ternate. This study also investigates the factors contributing to the decline in *Dolabololo* usage, including the lack of speaker regeneration and the influence of modernization and globalization.

Aligned with previous research, this study draws on the perspectives of Widihastuti (2021), who states that oral traditions serve as a medium for the transmission of social, moral, and cultural values that shape collective identity. Similarly, Ati and Gay (2022) highlight the importance of family awareness and intergenerational knowledge transfer in maintaining oral traditions such as *Dolabololo*. From the perspective of cultural discourse, Hall's (1997) theory is relevant for understanding how cultural identity is continuously constructed through language practices and traditional expressions. Furthermore, Law No. 5 of 2017 on the Advancement of Culture emphasizes that oral traditions are part of intangible cultural heritage that must be preserved. Therefore, this research is significant not only academically but also in supporting policy efforts aimed at safeguarding local cultural heritage in Ternate.

This research focuses on the existence of *Dolabololo* oral literature in four districts within the city of Ternate and the factors affecting the limited use of *Dolabololo* in the Ternate community. Therefore, this study aims to describe the existence of *Dolabololo* oral literature in the four districts within the city of Ternate and to delineate the factors affecting the limited use of *Dolabololo* among the Ternate community. The results of this research are also expected to contribute unique insights into *Dolabololo* that can be utilized and further developed in subsequent studies.

METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative research design with a descriptive qualitative approach, focusing on *"The Existence of Dolabololo Oral Literature in the Life of the Ternate Community."* A qualitative approach was chosen to allow for an in-depth exploration of the cultural and linguistic phenomena surrounding Dolabololo within its natural context, without any form of manipulation or intervention (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Flick, 2018).

The research data consisted of *Dolabololo* expressions still actively used by the Ternate community, the meanings and cultural values embedded within these expressions, as well as the internal and external factors influencing their decline. The data sources were drawn from native residents across four districts: Ternate Island, South Ternate, North Ternate, and Central Ternate, alongside cultural leaders and traditional figures from the Ternate Sultanate, who serve as key custodians of local oral traditions.

Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, which are considered essential tools in qualitative cultural studies (Silverman, 2020). During observation, the researcher recorded the use of *Dolabololo* in various traditional ceremonies and everyday interactions, conducted between January and March 2025 across the four districts. For interviews, a purposive sampling technique was applied to select 16 key informants, including cultural leaders, elders, and community members with extensive knowledge of *Dolabololo*, in line with purposive sampling strategies highlighted by Palinkas, Horwitz, Grenn, Wisdom, Duan, and Hoagwood (2015). Documentation involved collecting written archives, photographs of traditional events, audio recordings of Dolabololo performances, and relevant literature that supports the understanding of oral traditions in Ternate.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which comprises three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data reduction, the researcher categorized and filtered the data to identify key patterns related to *Dolabololo* usage and factors influencing its decline. In the data display stage, the data were organized in the form of tables, descriptive narratives, and excerpts from interviews to provide a structured overview of findings. Finally, the analysis and verification stage involved critical interpretation of the data using Hall's (1997) cultural identity theory and perspectives on oral tradition preservation (Widihastuti, 2021), while also cross-referencing the results with previous studies to strengthen validity and depth of understanding.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This research focuses on exploring the existence of *Dolabololo* oral literature in the Ternate community, particularly in four districts: Ternate Island District, South Ternate District, North Ternate District, and Central Ternate District. Data were collected through observations and interviews with native residents and traditional leaders of the Ternate Sultanate.

Existence of Dolabololo Oral Literature

The findings reveal significant disparities in the number and types of *Dolabololo* expressions still known and used in each district. Table 1 summarizes the types of *Dolabololo* still recognized and used by the Ternate community across the four districts.

Table 1. DescriptionTypes of Dolabololo Still Known and Used in the Ternate Island District

Island	Fundamental Life Values	*Dolabololo* Expressions	Meaning in the Indonesian Language	Interpretation or Explanation
Ternate Island	Politeness	*Eli-eli susunyinga demo ma dero afa*	Remember to choose your words carefully; do not make a mistake when choosing words.	Appropriate words will create harmony and affection between speakers and listeners.
Ternate Island	Worldly Life	*Waktu wange dahe bunga muraha ma bou sai*	This world is like a flower; when exposed to heat, the flower withers and its fragrance disappears.	Conveys the beauty of the world and the problems caused by human actions.
Ternate Island	Prohibition of Harming Others	*Gogola yinga afa, nyinga ma bubang nyinga*	Do not hurt the heart because the heart pays back.	Harming others is equivalent to harming oneself; avoid hurtful behavior.
Ternate Island	Pluralism	*Hele fo nyonyomo-nyonyomo, ma nyonyomi ena bato*	Even though we have different paths, our goal is one.	Ancestors respected and accepted differences in life.
Ternate Island	Advice/ Consequences	*Bara jou no gulaha, no tuduba nage adi*	As a consequence of one's own actions, who else can be blamed?	Every action has consequences.
Ternate Island	Hope/ Opportunity	*Daka toma dehe doka, sema dehe ika moju*	One cape is still there; there are still other capes.	There is always another opportunity.
Ternate Island	Persistence	*Doro to waro marua, ara dodo ma to taru*	The known harbor, I anchor even in the dark moon.	Persistence and determination in difficult times.
Ternate Island	Habit Formation	*Doto se biasa poha biasa ua*	What has been taught will be lost to habits.	Bad habits can override good teachings.
Ternate Island	Respect/ Religion	*Gudu moju si tosuba ri jou si tononako*	From a distance, I have paid my respects, for he is the God I know.	Respect for higher power.
Ternate Island	Respect for Others	*Gudu-gudu to tede suba, karena no ronga budi se Bahasa*	From afar, I bow to your virtue and language.	Respect for people and their way of speaking.
Ternate Island	Social Adaptation	*Hau fo Makati pasi, moro-moro fo maku ise*	Fishing in different places, listening while singing.	Adapt to every situation with joy.
Ternate Island	Change/ Flexibility	*Jagamoi I tolole, to magali jagamoi*	When one branch is dry, I move to another.	Be adaptable to circumstances.
Ternate Island	Challenge/ Struggle	*Kangela fo hisa ngolo kore se bao ma gine*	Try as we might to fence off the sea, all we get is a load of storms and waves.	Life is full of struggles and challenges.
Ternate Island	Struggle	*Kangela fo padi gahe, caka gole lui gia*	I try to throw away the grass, but the fern grass cuts my hands.	Every effort has its difficulties.
Ternate Island	Perseverance	*Kangela to fai doro, oti dofu ma luleo*	I try to dig a harbor, a place for many boats to anchor.	Perseverance brings success.

Ternate Island	Cooperation	*Loloro se jela-jela rangi ya mamote-mote*	Ipomoea pes-caprae and Coix lacryma-jobi entwine together.	Togetherness leads to strength.
Ternate Island	Patience	*Nage na sabar doka fangare, ira se laha bula maruku*	Whose patience is like mine, good or bad, just submit.	Patience in facing life.
Ternate Island	Cunning Consequences	*Nage sudo ngana malui, no loloji masirete*	Who told you to be sly? You feel the pain yourself.	Bad intentions bring bad results.
Ternate Island	Humility	*Ngone fo maici diri, ka nga nyawa ma salamat*	We humble ourselves for the safety of our souls.	Humility ensures safety.
Ternate Island	Gratitude	*Ngori doka si to ino, karana ni budi se Bahasa*	From afar, I come here because of your virtue and language.	Appreciation for kindness.
Ternate Island	Journey/ Life Struggle	*Ngori doka I gaba cina, jaha ua to ruru*	I am like a floating gaba china, floating without sinking.	Keep going despite hardship.
Ternate Island	Strategy	*Ogo moju si fo matuda, kore fo matai side*	When calm, we pull in; when windy, we spread the sail.	Strategic adaptation to circumstances.
Ternate Island	Mutual Help	*Rio-rio fo maku rio, Haso mai I dadi ka ahe*	Helping each other makes the heavy load light.	Cooperation brings relief.
Ternate Island	Diversity	*Sadang teo se ake, jame ma rasai salah*	Even fresh and saltwater taste different.	Diversity should be accepted.
Ternate Island	Arrogance Warning	*Sagadi no lau bole, afa no polisi gare*	Do not be too arrogant, or you will cross the line.	Arrogance invites trouble.
Ternate Island	Provision for Heart	*Side fo silam sari, tike nyinga ma luleu*	Adding a sail to the boat, seeking heart provisions.	Seeking emotional readiness.
Ternate Island	Prayer	*Tagi-tagi mi sabe, tego-tego mi sabea*	Pray when traveling, pray when sitting.	Always pray in every condition.
Ternate Island	Productivity	*Uto ma ngungano gahu, gahu ma ngungono sofo*	Planting to grow, growing to bear fruit.	Effort will bring results.
Ternate Island	Hospitality	*Wale-wale mail aha, hitu ni gunaga ini*	Even if not bringing anything, as long as coming.	Welcoming attitude.
Ternate Island	Spiritual Values	*Hate dunia ma bunga namo dofu yow agene hate syorga ma bunga namo koa I wogene*	The tree of the world blooms with many birds liking it, and the tree of paradise blooms with birds that want to like it.	Life in this world vs life in the hereafter.
South Ternate	Politeness	*Eli-eli susunyinga demo ma dero afa*	Remember to choose your words carefully.	Proper word choice fosters harmony.
South Ternate	Prayer	*Tagi-tagi mi sabe, tego-tego mi sabea*	Pray while traveling, pray while sitting.	The importance of constant prayer.
South Ternate	Persistence	*Doro to waro marua, ara dodo ma to taru*	The known anchorage, even at dark moon.	Keep going to known goals.
South Ternate	Habit	*Doto se biasa poha biasa ua*	What has been taught will be lost to habits.	Habit can overcome teachings.
South Ternate	Worldly Life	*Dunya ne doka nga saya, waktu wange*	This world is like a flower...	Impermanence of worldly life.

		dahe bunga muraha ma bau sai	
North Ternate	Prayer	*Tagi-tagi mi sabe, tego-tego mi sabea*	Pray while traveling, pray while sitting.
North Ternate	Habit	*Doto se biasa poha biasa ua*	What has been taught will be lost to habits.
North Ternate	Worldly Life	*Dunya ne doka nga saya, waktu wange dahe bunga muraha ma bau sai*	This world is like a flower...
Central Ternate	Prayer	*Tagi-tagi mi sabe, tego-tego mi sabea*	Pray while traveling, pray while sitting.
Central Ternate	Persistence	*Doro to waro marua, ara dodo ma to taru*	The known anchorage...
Central Ternate	Habit	*Doto se biasa poha biasa ua*	What has been taught will be lost to habits.

Source: Field data (2025)

In total, Ternate Island District remains the most active in terms of *Dolabololo* usage, with 32 known expressions, of which 15 are still commonly used in daily conversations. South Ternate District follows with six expressions, while North and Central Ternate Districts each retain only three expressions, though usage is very rare.

Factors Affecting the Decline in the Use of *Dolabololo*

Based on interviews with informants from the four districts, two major factors were identified contributing to the decline in *Dolabololo* usage: internal factors and external factors.

1. Internal Factors

The primary internal factor is the declining awareness among community members, especially parents, about the importance and educational value of *Dolabololo* expressions in daily communication. Many respondents revealed that parents today rarely use the Ternate language, let alone *Dolabololo* expressions, when communicating with their children.

2. External Factors

The external factors include social and environmental influences, where the use of *Dolabololo* is perceived as outdated. Modernization, the influence of national language dominance (Indonesian), and the growing use of Malay Ternate in communication further discourage *Dolabololo* usage. Figure 1 presents the categorization of the factors influencing the decline in *Dolabololo* usage.

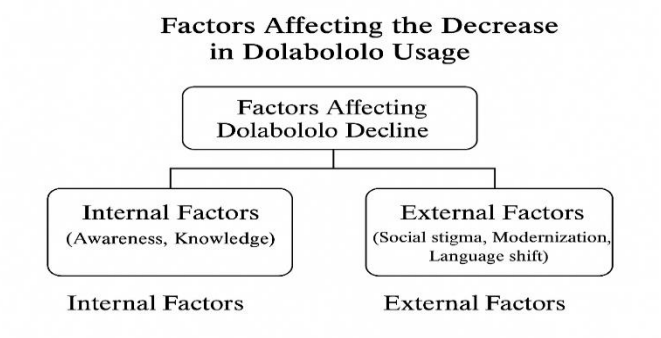


Figure 1. Factors Affecting the Decrease in *Dolabololo* Usage

Discussion

The Existence of *Dolabololo* Oral Literature in the Life of the Ternate Community

The findings of this study reveal a significant decline in the presence of *Dolabololo* oral literature in Ternate, both in terms of the number of expressions still actively used and the level of intergenerational transmission. From the perspective of cultural identity, Hall (1997) argues that cultural identity is not static but is continuously constructed through language, tradition, and collective memory. *Dolabololo*, as a medium of local wisdom and traditional values, plays a central role in shaping the cultural identity of the Ternate community. However, the decreasing use of *Dolabololo* indicates a weakening of cultural collective memory, which may lead to identity erosion in the future. This finding is consistent with Widihastuti (2021), who emphasizes that oral traditions are vulnerable to extinction if not revitalized amidst the forces of modernization and globalization.

Dolabololo plays a crucial role in transmitting cultural values such as respect, honesty, tolerance, and social harmony, as reflected in the metaphorical structure of its expressions (Ati & Gay, 2022; Smith, 2018). These values are not only moral guidelines but also constitute cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that reinforces social cohesion. Unfortunately, this study found that the younger generation tends to perceive Dolabololo as outdated or irrelevant in modern social interactions. This aligns with Gay (2016) and Crystal (2014), who highlight the fading awareness of life values embedded in traditional expressions due to lifestyle changes and language shifts. Consequently, *Dolabololo* no longer functions effectively as a medium for cultural value education within families and communities.

Internal and External Factors Influencing the Decline of *Dolabololo*

The decline of *Dolabololo* is influenced by internal factors, such as the lack of public awareness to preserve oral traditions and the reduced use of local languages in domestic communication. Parents now tend to use Indonesian or Malay Ternate, which, according to Karim and Hasim (2018),

reflects a broader trend of language shift in urban Ternate. This study confirms that intergenerational knowledge transfer is no longer functioning effectively, causing younger generations to become unfamiliar with Dolabololo expressions. This finding supports Ati and Gay (2022), who emphasize that family awareness and intergenerational transmission are key to sustaining oral traditions.

From an external perspective, modernization and globalization have fostered a social stigma that labels *Dolabololo* as "old-fashioned." Majid (2017) asserts that socio-cultural changes, particularly in urban areas, often marginalize traditional expressions in favor of more modern and globalized forms of communication. This aligns with Liu, Zhang, and Chen (2022), who found that traditional performance arts, such as Chinese opera, have lost appeal among younger audiences due to perceived incompatibility with modern lifestyles. Similarly, Hu and Md Noor (2024) highlight that while young people in Sichuan, China, demonstrate relatively high awareness of intangible cultural heritage, their actual participation in its practice remains low. UNESCO reports similar trends globally, noting that globalization and modernization pose significant threats to the survival of intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2023). This study reinforces Majid's observations by documenting how young people feel embarrassed to use *Dolabololo* in daily conversations for fear of appearing outdated or unmodern (Hasanah & Andari, 2020). This phenomenon reflects a cultural tension between the pursuit of modernity and the preservation of local heritage.

Dialogue with Previous Studies and Theoretical Discourse

Compared with previous studies, this research provides a unique mapping of the current condition of *Dolabololo* across four districts in Ternate, presenting detailed data on the number of *Dolabololo* expressions still in use—32 in Ternate Island District, 6 in South Ternate, and three each in North and Central Ternate. While Hasim and Faruk (2020) emphasize the educational values of *Dolabololo*, this study goes further by offering empirical field data on its actual usage. Similarly, Pentury, Yusuf, and Nurdin (2020) examined the linguistic structure and cultural values of oral literature but did not provide updated data on its current societal use. Recent scholarship highlights that such granular, community-level mapping is essential for the sustainable safeguarding of endangered oral traditions, particularly when integrated with participatory digital documentation methods (Zhang & Li, 2024; Park & Thanapornsangsuth, 2023). This study fills that gap by combining cultural analysis with direct community-level observation, aligning with global recommendations for revitalizing intangible cultural heritage through context-based community

engagement (UNESCO, 2023).

From a theoretical standpoint, Hall's (1997) framework of cultural identity helps explain that the decline of *Dolabololo* is not merely a linguistic issue but also a sign of shifting identity constructions within the Ternate community. Oral literature is part of a symbolic system that preserves cultural continuity; when it diminishes, the collective sense of identity also weakens. Widihastuti's (2021) assertion about the role of oral traditions in moral and social education further underscores the importance of revitalizing Dolabololo as part of cultural preservation efforts.

Author's Reflections and Antithesis

The author argues that *Dolabololo* should not be viewed merely as an artifact of the past but as a dynamic cultural resource that can be adapted to contemporary contexts. Modernization, often perceived as the primary cause of the decline of oral traditions, could instead serve as a medium for revitalization if strategically utilized—through digital platforms, educational curricula, or creative industries. This perspective challenges the deterministic view that modernization inevitably leads to the loss of local culture. On the contrary, the decline of *Dolabololo* can be mitigated through deliberate cultural policies and intergenerational collaboration.

This study affirms that the preservation of Dolabololo cannot rely solely on community initiatives but also requires systematic policy support. Law No. 5 of 2017 on the Advancement of Culture asserts that oral traditions are part of intangible cultural heritage that must be protected and preserved (Republik Indonesia, 2017). Consistent with recent studies, integrating intangible heritage into local education systems and community-based cultural programs has been shown to enhance its sustainability (Chen & Huang, 2023; González & Moreno, 2022). International research also highlights that government-backed initiatives and cross-sectoral collaboration are critical for revitalizing endangered oral traditions in the modern era (Jong & Tien, 2023). Therefore, the revitalization of Dolabololo should be integrated into formal and non-formal education, cultural festivals, and government programs. The novelty of this research lies in its holistic approach, combining empirical data with theoretical discourse to provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and local stakeholders in safeguarding Ternate's oral literature.

Theoretical Contributions and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study enriches the discourse on cultural identity and oral tradition preservation by integrating field findings with Hall's (1997) theory of cultural identity and Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital. The findings demonstrate that the decline of Dolabololo

is not only a linguistic issue but also reflects a weakening network of values, norms, and collective identity. Practically, this research offers concrete recommendations for local governments, educational institutions, and cultural communities to design research-based revitalization programs, such as Dolabololo-based local curricula, regular cultural festivals, and the digitization of *Dolabololo* expressions to make them accessible to younger generations. Thus, this study is expected to serve as both an academic foundation and an inspiration for cultural preservation strategies in Ternate.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussions of the research presented earlier, it can be concluded that the existence of oral literature *dolabololo* in the life of the Ternate community in the four districts in the city of Ternate has significantly declined or decreased in its usage. Ternate Island District is the district that is most familiar with and uses *dolabololo*, compared to the other three districts. Furthermore, North Ternate District, along with Central Ternate District, are districts that have almost ceased to use or incorporate *dolabololo* into their daily communication. Factors affecting the decrease in the use of *dolabololo* in the life of the Ternate community include internal and external factors. Internal factors include a lack of awareness about the importance and benefits of learning and using *dolabololo* in daily communication. Furthermore, the external factor is the environmental factor that causes users of *dolabololo* to feel embarrassed or outdated if they use it.

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