Research Article

Exploring the Use of Folktale to Foster English Learning Skills : A Qualitative Perspective

Miftahul Jannah [1*], Darmawan [2], Desrin Lebagi [3,] and Wahyudin [4]

[1,2,3,4] Universitas Tadulako, Indonesia ; e-mail : Miftamita0501@gmail.com

* Corresponding Author : Miftahul Jannah

Abstract: This study aims to explore the use of folktales in enhancing English language skills among junior high school students within an EFL context. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through interviews with one English teacher and five ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 12 Palu, as well as document analysis of an English textbook. The findings reveal that folktales contribute to the development of language skills by increasing student motivation, reducing anxiety, and providing meaningful language input. Folktales were also found to be strategically integrated into textbook activities aligned with curriculum objectives. It is concluded that folktales represent an effective, culturally responsive medium for fostering English language learning.

1. Introduction

Folktales have long been recognized as powerful tools for cultivating and nurturing various aspects of child development, including language acquisition and cultural understanding. According to Hastini et al. (2023), a folktale typically narrates an event that transpired in a specific locale or explains the origin of that locale. These narratives, passed down through generations, possess an inherent ability to captivate young minds while imparting valuable life lessons and social responsibilities. They not only provide a means to impart cultural knowledge but also present opportunities for students to develop crucial language skills (Kaltsum & Utami, 2015). Therefore, incorporating folktales into English language instruction can be seen as an effective strategy to engage learners emotionally and cognitively, helping them to internalize both linguistic and cultural elements more naturally.

Since English has become an international language, it has become increasingly necessary for international students to develop their language skills. One approach that has gained traction in recent years is the use of folktales as a means to foster English learning skills. Traditional stories are useful source materials for English language education (Mahanand, 2021). Saad (2023) claims that folktales can be helpful for teachers to start exploring the possibilities of including them as pedagogical resources in their language classes. This indicates that folktales are not only culturally rich but also pedagogically versatile, offering teachers creative ways to facilitate language acquisition while maintaining student engagement.

From a linguistic perspective, folktales offer a rich resource for engaging junior high students in meaningful language learning activities. Particularly, the use of folktales, which are rich in cultural narratives and linguistic nuances, has emerged as a promising approach to fostering English language skills among junior high school students. As Kaltsum & Utami (2015) explain, folktales serve as valuable pedagogical tools in the English language classroom,

providing students with opportunities to engage with diverse perspectives, develop intercultural understanding, and enhance their overall language proficiency.

Several classroom-based techniques such as narrative retelling, dramatization, and writing story summaries have been used to build English language skills. Pricilia & Rahmansyah (2020) show that storytelling through folktales enhances speaking skills, while Ilma (2021) emphasizes their potential in overcoming listening difficulties due to predictable and familiar storylines. Bagus et al. (2018) support their use in developing reading comprehension, and Suryadi et al. (2022) confirm their contribution to structured writing tasks.

However, despite the growing interest in folktales as a pedagogical resource, many existing studies remain theoretical or focus primarily on product-oriented outcomes. There is a lack of qualitative research that thoroughly explores how folktales are utilized in the teaching and learning process, especially within the EFL classroom setting. In addition, most studies tend to emphasize either teacher or student perceptions in isolation, thus failing to provide a holistic view of classroom interactions and implementation challenges.

This study addresses these gaps by exploring how folktales are used in English instruction at SMP Negeri 12 Palu, specifically investigating their impact on students' speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. It builds on both teacher and student perspectives, offering a classroom-grounded analysis of folktale-based learning. To address the research questions, this study employs a qualitative descriptive approach by collecting data through semi-structured interviews and analyzing textbook content to capture how folktales are integrated into language instruction.

The contribution of this study lies in its empirical exploration of folktale-based English language learning within an EFL context, particularly in junior high school. It provides insight into how folktales are implemented in actual classroom settings, highlights both teacher and student perspectives, and reveals how these traditional narratives contribute to the development of integrated language skills. Additionally, the study offers practical considerations for educators seeking to apply culturally responsive pedagogy through the use of familiar, locally relevant texts

2. Literature Review

This study draws upon various prior research findings and theoretical foundations to investigate the integration of folktales in English language teaching. The use of folktales as a pedagogical tool has been the subject of multiple studies across different cultural and educational contexts, each highlighting their value in language learning.

Lwin (2017) conducted research on the use of Asian folktales in English language teaching across Asia and emphasized that folktales, with their common narrative structures and relatively simple language, are effective in enhancing students' language skills. This study also pointed out the cultural familiarity embedded within folktales, which increases student motivation and engagement. Similarly, Lwin and Marlina (2018) examined folktales in the framework of English as an international language and argued for the importance of integrating diverse cultural perspectives into language instruction. Their work serves as a foundation for understanding how folktales can be used to build intercultural communicative competence.

In addition, Bagus (2018) investigated the practical use of folktales in improving reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Although this study acknowledged the cultural function of folktales, it focused primarily on the application of narrative texts for measurable outcomes in reading proficiency. Meanwhile, Pricilia and Rahmansyah (2020) claimed that folktale-based storytelling significantly improved students' speaking skills while simultaneously fostering character education. These findings were supported by Ilma (2021), who proposed folktales to address students' challenges in listening comprehension, as folktale storylines tend to be clear and easily understood.

While these prior studies provide valuable insights, several gaps remain. Most notably, many of them tend to focus on specific skills (e.g., reading or speaking) and emphasize quantitative outcomes. They often overlook how folktales are actually implemented in classrooms and how learners interact with them during the teaching and learning process. Moreover, some research is theoretical in nature and lacks contextual depth regarding classroom realities.

This study responds to those gaps by providing a qualitative, classroom-based perspective on how folktales are integrated into English instruction at SMP Negeri 12 Palu. It differs from previous research by focusing on both teacher and student experiences and exploring how folktales support the development of four core language skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—within the framework of the 2013 Curriculum. Furthermore, unlike many previous works that either prioritize the teacher's role or treat students as passive subjects, this study centers on both voices equally and captures their shared experiences in using folktales.

Thus, this research not only builds upon existing literature but also advances the field by offering a more holistic, practice-oriented view of folktale-based instruction in the EFL context. It bridges the gap between theory and application, contributing to the ongoing discourse on culturally responsive and meaningful English language teaching

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in sociocultural theory, particularly Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which highlights how learners can perform better with proper scaffolding within a social and cultural context (Irshad et al., 2021). Folktales, with their familiar structure and themes, serve as a scaffold to help learners internalize language through guided interaction and contextual cues.

Additionally, this study aligns with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes the importance of using language for real communication. Folktales provide an authentic and meaningful context for students to engage in speaking, writing, listening, and reading activities. Through tasks such as storytelling, retelling, and group discussion, students are encouraged to use English in communicative and interactive ways.

The research also draws from the concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). As cultural artifacts, folktales expose students to different values, beliefs, and practices, thereby supporting the development of intercultural awareness. According to de Bruijn (2019), folktales allow learners to participate in intercultural discourse and develop sensitivity to cultural diversity—a skill that is essential in global communication.

3. Proposed Method

This research employed a qualitative approach with an exploratory descriptive method to understand how folktales are utilized in English language teaching and their impact on students' language skills. The study focused on the experiences of both teachers and students at SMP Negeri 12 Palu. The subjects were one English teacher and five Grade 9 students selected from Class 9B using random sampling. Although folktales are introduced in Grade 8, they continue to be taught in Grade 9, making this level appropriate for the study.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis of the English textbook Bahasa Inggris: Think Globally, Act Locally. Interviews explored teacher and student perspectives on folktale-based instruction and how it influenced speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The textbook analysis identified how folktales were integrated into formal learning activities and how they supported language skill development. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The data were classified, organized, and interpreted to generate findings that addressed the research questions.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings obtained through interviews with one English teacher and five Grade 9 students of SMP Negeri 12 Palu, as well as document analysis of the English textbook used in their learning process. The analysis focuses on (1) the impact of using folktales in English language learning, (2) how folktales support the development of the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), and (3) the integration of folktales into the English textbook. The findings are discussed in relation to existing theories and studies.4.1. Figures and Tables

4.1 The Impact of Folktales on English Language Learning

The teacher stated that the use of folktales increased students' enthusiasm and confidence during English lessons. According to her: "Students were more enthusiastic when learning with folktales. They seemed more active and confident, especially when asked to speak." This was confirmed by several student responses. Student V stated: "I'm no longer afraid when asked to tell a story because I already know the story and I feel more confident."

Student II said:"Folktales make the class feel more enjoyable, so I feel braver to speak." Similarly, Student I shared: "I already know the story, so I'm not confused about how to arrange my words." These statements suggest that the cultural familiarity of the stories reduced language anxiety and allowed students to participate more freely in class.

4.2 Folktales and the Development of Language Skills

Speaking

Folktales contributed to the development of students' speaking skills through retelling, storytelling, and dramatization activities. Students were encouraged to express ideas using familiar vocabulary and simple narrative structures. Student I explained:"The teacher asked us to retell the story in English. At first, I wasn't sure, but after being guided, I was able to do it."

Student IV added:"When presenting the ending of the story, I learned how to organize my own sentences." The teacher noted that the familiarity of the story made students more willing to speak, since they were not pressured to generate ideas from scratch. Speaking activities became more meaningful and manageable through contextualized content.

Listening

Listening skills were developed through storytelling and video-based folktales. Students benefited from visual support and repetition strategies that helped them understand vocabulary and storyline details. Student I stated:"After listening twice, I understood the word 'boat' because I also saw the picture."

Student II shared:"Listening to folktales in video format helped me understand the story more easily." The teacher supported listening comprehension by combining oral narration with images and gestures, which helped students make connections between words and meanings.

Reading

Students improved their reading skills by engaging with folktales such as Sangkuriang and The Golden Star-Fruit Tree. They practiced identifying narrative structure and interpreting the story's moral message. Student III remarked:"Reading folktales repeatedly helped me understand the structure of the story." Student IV added:"I liked the pictures because they helped me understand the story." The teacher emphasized the orientation, complication, and resolution phases of each text, which helped students understand how stories are structured in English.

Writing

Although writing was considered the most difficult skill by students, the use of folktales provided accessible and structured content for them to practice composing texts. Student I said:"At first, I had difficulty writing, but after being given an example, I was able to arrange my own story.Student V shared:"I learned a lot of new vocabulary from the story and tried to write my own version of the ending." Through teacher guidance, students practiced writing by completing tasks such as summarizing the story, rearranging jumbled paragraphs, and writing alternate endings.

4.3 Textbook Integration

The English textbook used at SMP Negeri 12 Palu, Bahasa Inggris: Think Globally, Act Locally, includes a chapter on narrative texts featuring two folktales: Sangkuriang and The Golden Star-Fruit Tree. The stories are integrated with language skills tasks, including listening to stories, retelling, answering comprehension questions, identifying structure, and writing personal versions of the story endings. The textbook aligns with the 2013 Curriculum by combining language learning with moral and cultural education. It uses simple vocabulary and past tense forms that are appropriate for junior high students, supported by visual content that aids comprehension.

4.4 Discussion

These findings affirm that folktales are effective in fostering student engagement and supporting the development of English language skills. The increased confidence and motivation reported by students in this study are consistent with the findings of Mantra and Maba (2018), who emphasized the anxiety-reducing function of folktales in speaking practice.

The improvement in listening and reading supports Ilma (2021), who noted that the familiarity and simplicity of folktale narratives enhance students' comprehension. Likewise, Bagus (2018) highlighted their usefulness in vocabulary development and reading fluency. The positive outcomes in writing align with Suryadi et al. (2022), who recognized the potential of folktales to guide students in organizing written narratives.

In theoretical terms, these findings reflect Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which posits that learners develop higher cognitive functions through social and cultural tools such as language and stories. The use of folktales also supports the communicative language teaching approach, as students used language in meaningful contexts. Furthermore, folktales contribute to the development of intercultural communicative competence by reinforcing students' cultural identity while exposing them to different values and perspectives (de Bruijn, 2019).

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings and discussion presented in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that the integration of folktales in English language learning has a meaningful impact on the development of students' language proficiency. Specifically, the use of folktales contributes to enhancing speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills among ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 12 Palu. Moreover, the textbook analysis showed that folktales were meaningfully integrated into learning materials in alignment with the curriculum. The folktales *Sangkuriang* and *The Golden Star-Fruit Tree* were used to support instructional goals across all four language skills.

References

[1.]   Aleria, F. R. E. Y. A. (2020). Tagabawa Bagobo folk narratives structures. Journal of Advanced Research in Social Sciences and Humanities, 5(4), 150–163. https://doi.org/10.26500/jarssh-05-2020-0405

[2.]   Alper, B., Riche, N. H., Chevalier, F., Boy, J., & Sezgin, M. (2017). Visualization literacy at elementary school. Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, 5485–5497. https://doi.org/10.1145/3025453.3025877

[3.]   Aspers, P., & Corte, U. (2019). What is qualitative in qualitative research? Qualitative Sociology, 42(2), 139–160. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-019-9413-7

[4.]   Bagus, I., Mantra, N., Gede, D., & Kumara, A. G. (2018). Folktales as meaningful cultural and linguistic resources to improve students' reading skills. [Journal name missing], 25(2).

[5.]   Clark, A., & Fleming, J. (2019). "They almost become the teacher": Pre-K to third-grade teachers' experiences reading and discussing culturally relevant texts with their students. Reading Horizons, 58(3), 23–51.

[6.]   de Bruijn, A. (2019). From representation to participation: Rethinking the intercultural educational approach to folktales. Children's Literature in Education, 50(3), 315–332. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-017-9330-x

[7.]   De Janasz, S. C., & Katz, A. J. (2021). Using in-depth interviews in careers research. In Handbook of Research Methods in Careers (pp. 255–266). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788976725.00021

[8.]   Hasanah, N., & Gunawan, W. (2020). Exploring EFL teachers' understanding and beliefs in intercultural communicative competence in Indonesian context. Indonesian EFL Journal, 6(2), 121–132. https://doi.org/10.25134/ieflj.v6i2.3380

[9.]   Hastini, Lebagi, D., Bochari, S., Mukrim, & Wahyudin. (2023). Investigating the local folktales in the English language teaching textbooks: A case from Central Sulawesi. Asia Social Issues, 17(1), e259785. https://doi.org/10.48048/asi.2024.259785

[10.]   Ibrahim, M. R. M. (2015). Peran pemuda dalam menjaga serta melestarikan kebudayaan Indonesia. [Journal name missing], 6.

[11.]   Ilma, T. (2021). Examining the effectiveness of folktale in enhancing students' listening comprehension on narrative story. Journal of Language Learning and Research (JOLLAR), 3(1), 30–39. https://doi.org/10.22236/jollar.v3i1.5379

[12.]   Irshad, S., Maan, M. F., Batool, H., & Hanif, A. (2021). Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): An evaluative tool for language learning and social development in early childhood education. Multicultural Education, 7(6), 234–242. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4940172

[13.]   Kaltsum, H. U., & Utami, R. D. (2015). Folklores as English teaching media for the young learners. In International Conference on Science, Technology and Humanity (pp. 386–392). http://utsurabaya.files.wordpress

[14.]   Lwin, S. M. (2017). Asian folktales for teaching English in Asia. Journal of Asia TEFL, 14(4), 773–777. https://doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2017.14.4.12.773

[15.]   Lwin, S. M., & Marlina, R. (2018). Using folktales as a way to operationalise the paradigm of teaching English as an international language. Asian Englishes, 20(3), 206–219. https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2018.1440279

[16.]   Mahanand, A. (2021). Role of traditional stories for English language education. Foretell, 42, 74–83.

[17.]   Marzuki, M. J. (2018). An analysis of the teaching methodology used for the teaching of English in an Indonesian senior high school. Edulangue, 1(2), 143–151. https://doi.org/10.20414/edulangue.v1i2.419

[18.]   Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook (R. Holland, Ed.). SAGE Publications.

[19.]   Nazlia, & Situmorang, J. (2020). The development of local cultural-based interactive instructional media in learning English. In Proceedings of AISTEEL 2019 (Vol. 384, pp. 29–33). https://doi.org/10.2991/aisteel-19.2019.7

[20.]   Nyoman Mantra, I. B., & Maba, W. (2018). Enhancing the EFL learners' speaking skill through folktales based instruction. SHS Web of Conferences, 42, 00017. https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20184200017

[21.]   Pricilia, G. M., & Rahmansyah, H. (2020). Penerapan metode folktale based storytelling dalam mengajarkan keterampilan berbicara mahasiswa di Institut Pendidikan Tapanuli Selatan. Jurnal Education and Development, 8(4), 395–395. https://journal.ipts.ac.id/index.php/ED/article/view/2070

[22.]   Ramadhani, R., Pasanrangi, A. M., & Soraya, A. I. (2022). Awakening Mother Nature: The study of motif-index in Putri Tandampalik. In Proceedings of the 9th ASBAM International Conference (ASBAM 2021) (Vol. 660, pp. 301–306). https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220408.041

[23.]   Saad, S. (2023). Folktale comes alive: A virtual ESL learning package to engage ESL learners. Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH), 8(1), e002095. https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v8i1.2095

[24.]   Salim, H., & Hanif, M. (2021). English teaching reconstruction at Indonesian elementary schools: Students' point of view. International Journal of Education and Practice, 9(1), 49–62. https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.61.2021.91.49.62

[25.]   Suryadi, S., Hufad, A., Leksono, S. M., Sultan, U., & Tirtayasa, A. (2022). The use of Banten folklore and vocabulary mastery on the students' narrative text writing skill. Ethical Lingua, 9(1). https://doi.org/10.30605/25409190.381

[26.]   Wijayanti, R. A. (2024). Linguistic diversity in education: Strategies for inclusive learning environments. English Language and Education Spectrum, 4(1), 30–46. https://doi.org/10.53416/electrum.v4i1.228