

THE ROLE OF FOLKTALES IN MOTIVATING AND IMPROVING STUDENTS' ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILL: A STUDY OF TEACHER PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the role of folktales in motivating and improving students' English speaking skills through a qualitative case study. The study was conducted at MTs Al-Hayatul Islamiyah Malang, involving an English teacher with extensive teaching experience. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and lesson plan documentation. The results showed that folktales effectively increased students' motivation, confidence, and participation in speaking activities. Through storytelling, role-playing, and group discussions, students became more active and less anxious when speaking English. Folktales provided a meaningful context that facilitated vocabulary development, fluency, and communicative competence. The study concluded that folktales are valuable teaching materials that support the development of speaking skills and learning motivation in EFL classrooms..

Keywords: *folktales; Motivating; Improving; Teacheng perceptions; English speaking skill*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most important language skills in English learning because it allows students to communicate ideas, opinions, and feelings effectively. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking is often considered the most challenging skill to master due to limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, pronunciation difficulties, and anxiety when speaking in front of others. According to Harmer (2012), speaking is a productive skill that requires learners to use language accurately and fluently in real-life communication. Similarly, Brown (2004) states that speaking involves a complex process that integrates grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and interactional competence. As a result, many students tend to avoid speaking activities for fear of making mistakes and being judged by their peers, which ultimately affects their motivation and learning outcomes.

Motivation plays a crucial role in the development of speaking skills. Students who are highly motivated are more likely to participate actively in classroom discussions, practice speaking more frequently, and show greater persistence in overcoming language difficulties. Gardner (1985) argues that motivation is one of the strongest predictors of successful second-language acquisition because it influences learners' attitudes, effort, and willingness to communicate. In addition, Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory (1978) emphasizes that language learning occurs through social interaction and meaningful communication. Therefore, teachers need to create engaging learning environments that encourage students to participate actively in speaking activities. One effective way to achieve this goal is by integrating meaningful and culturally relevant learning materials into classroom instruction.

Folktales have been widely recognized as valuable teaching materials that can support language learning while preserving cultural heritage. Folktales provide authentic contexts, familiar storylines, and moral values that help students understand language in meaningful situations. According to Tzeng (2020), folktales offer rich cultural content that promotes both language development and cultural awareness. Furthermore, Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) explains that learning becomes more effective when students engage directly in meaningful experiences. Through activities such as storytelling, role-playing, retelling stories, and group discussions, students can actively construct knowledge while practicing their speaking skills. The use of folktales also creates a relaxed and enjoyable learning atmosphere that reduces students' anxiety and increases their confidence in using English.

Previous studies have reported positive outcomes regarding the use of folktales in language learning. Abdul and Burhanuddin (2021) found that folktale-based instruction significantly improved students' speaking performance and confidence. Likewise, Nurhikma (2022) reported that storytelling activities using folklore enhanced students' fluency, vocabulary mastery, and motivation to speak English. A systematic review conducted by Ramli and Rahman (2024) further revealed that folktales increase student engagement and participation by providing enjoyable and culturally meaningful learning experiences. However, most previous studies have focused primarily on quantitative measurements of students' achievement, while limited attention has been given to teachers' perspectives, instructional strategies, and challenges in implementing folktales in speaking classrooms. Therefore, this study aims to explore how folktales are implemented in English speaking classes, identify the instructional strategies employed by teachers, and investigate the challenges encountered during the teaching process to provide a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of folktales in enhancing students' speaking

skills and learning motivation. To follow up on this, the following questions are the focus of this research.

1. How are folktales implemented in teaching speaking in the EFL classroom?
2. What instructional strategies are used by the teacher when implementing folktales in teaching speaking?
3. What challenges does the teacher encounter in implementing folktales, and how are these challenges addressed?

METHOD

This study used a qualitative case study design to understand how folktales can motivate and improve students' English speaking skills. This qualitative approach helped the researcher gather detailed descriptions from the real classroom experiences of an English teacher. The research took place at MTs Al-Hayatul Islamiyah Malang, focusing on the ninth-grade English class. The participant was an active English teacher with 11 years of teaching experience, chosen because she frequently uses stories to teach speaking.

To collect the data, the researcher used three techniques: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation. The interview guide was adapted from Rahayu et al. (2023) and focused on the teacher's strategies, challenges, and solutions. The interview lasted for 30 minutes and used both English and Indonesian to avoid misunderstandings. For the observation, the researcher joined three class sessions as a non-participant observer, using a checklist adapted from Fitriani (2020). The researcher also analysed the teacher's lesson plans (*Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran/RPP*) to check if the teaching process followed the written plan.

The researcher analysed the data using thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved listening to the interview recordings, transcribing the audio, reading the text carefully, and coding the data into specific themes based on the research questions. To check the validity of the data, the researcher used member checking (Doyle, 2007). The researcher gave the interview transcript back to the teacher to confirm that the data accurately reflected her actual answers and experiences.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study are compiled based on the data instruments used, such as interview results, observations, and lesson plans obtained from informants regarding the use of folktales as a learning medium in the classroom. The data obtained from the study indicate an increase in student learning motivation after the teacher implemented folktales as a learning medium in the classroom. The research findings are presented as follows.

The Implementation of Folktales in Teaching Speaking

The research data demonstrated that the teacher structured the folktale-based speaking lessons into three systematic phases: pre-speaking, while-speaking, and post-speaking activities. The details of these activities observed during the fieldwork are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *The Implementation of Teaching Speaking Using Folktales*

Phase	Speaking Activities	Data Sources
Pre-Activity	The teacher begins the lesson by asking a class representative to lead a prayer, then checks attendance, and The teacher briefly explains the material related to folktales and the learning objectives of using folktales as a learning medium.	Lesson Plan (RPP) and Observations.
While-Activity	After providing an initial explanation of folktales, activities related to folktales are conducted, starting with group discussions that create a positive learning environment, where students take on the role of characters in the discussion. The teacher then asks students to summarize and present the results of their discussions to the class.	Observations and Interviews.
Post-Activity	Following the main session, the teacher provides feedback on the activities carried out, assigns homework related to folktales, and discusses topics for the next meeting.	Observations and Lesson Plan

Based on observations and lesson plans (RPP), learning begins with a pre-activity phase, where the teacher always opens the class and asks a class representative to greet the class. In the pre-activity phase, the teacher explains the learning objectives in a communicative manner so that students understand what they will learn. Then, in the While-Activity phase, activities become more focused on student activities. In this phase, the teacher asks students to work in groups to discuss the story and act out characters in one of the existing folk tales. The folk tales used in learning are local stories familiar to students, such as Malin Kundang, Lake Toba, Timun Mas, Sura and Baya, and other stories. This can help support students' vocabulary skills to more easily identify and organize the results of the discussion according to their creative vocabulary abilities. After that, students present the results of their group discussions in front of their classmates. During this phase, students actively interact and speak English with their peers. Finally, in the post-speaking phase, the teacher concludes the lesson by providing feedback on

the activities, including students' pronunciation and vocabulary skills, to help them improve and remember correct pronunciation. To ensure better understanding of the material, the teacher assigns homework related to folktales to students.

Instructional Strategies Applied by the Teacher

The teacher used four main strategies to help students speak English using stories. These strategies are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. *Instructional Strategies in Folktales-Based Classrooms*

Strategy	Description	Data Sources
Folktales as Media	Using folktales as teaching materials helps students improve their speaking skills and motivates them to learn	Interview
Role-Play	Students play the roles of characters in folktales to help improve their confidence and speaking skills.	Observation and Interview
Storytelling	Teaching students to tell a story effectively helps them be creative and improve their speaking and communication skills.	Observation and Interview
Discussions	Conduct group discussions about themes, characters, and moral messages from folk tales, to encourage students to think critically and express their opinions.	Observation and Interview

Based on the observation results listed in the table above, it is known that teachers vary their teaching through several strategies, namely role-playing, storytelling, and discussion. These strategies are considered effective in increasing student motivation and showing improvements in speaking skills. In the learning process, teachers use folktales as a teaching medium. By introducing folktales, reading the stories interactively and asking students to retell them in their own words helps students improve their speaking skills. Then, role-playing and storytelling by playing characters in folktales helps motivate and build self-confidence in students. Then, group discussions to identify and present the results of discussions related to elements in folktales are carried out to encourage students to think critically, hone vocabulary skills in expressing opinions, and practice speaking skills. By using folktales as a teaching medium, it has been proven effective in helping students improve their speaking skills while encouraging them to be enthusiastic in learning, as well as encouraging students to think critically in expressing their opinions.

Challenges and Solutions

The researcher found some challenges during the lessons, along with the solutions used by the teacher. These challenges and solutions are mapped out in Table 3.

Table 3. *Challenges and Problem-Solving in Classroom Execution*

Challenges	Problem Solving	Data Sources
Limited English language skills.	Implementing fun learning methods and provide vocabulary support and examples of expressions before speaking activities begin.	Interview
Lack of Motivation to Speak	Creating an interesting classroom atmosphere, giving rewards to students who dare to speak, and the importance of not being afraid to make mistakes.	Interview
Lack of interest in learning new vocabulary.	Encouraging students to look up the meaning of new vocabulary and provide vocabulary lists and example sentences to facilitate understanding.	Interview

During the interview, it was revealed that the teacher faced several challenges related to students' language skills and motivation during the teaching process. The teacher stated that students often stopped speaking because they forgot vocabulary or were afraid of being judged by their peers. To address this, the teacher had several methods that could be applied in the learning process. One method used was always teaching key words before starting any speaking assignment. Furthermore, the teacher did not focus too much on grammatical errors, so students felt safe and confident in speaking. By creating a relaxed and enjoyable classroom atmosphere, students became more enthusiastic about enriching their vocabulary and honing their language skills.

DISCUSSION

Based on the research conducted, it can be seen that the application of folklore in learning at MTs Al-Hayatul Islamiyah Malang plays an important role in motivating and improving students' English speaking skills. Through observations and interviews conducted with English teachers, it was discovered that the use of folklore with three phases, namely the Pre, During, and Post phases, was designed to improve students' speaking skills through interesting activities, so that students became active in speaking English. By focusing on interactive stories and providing a relaxed and conducive learning atmosphere, it encouraged students to express themselves in English. In addition, consistency in implementing learning activities also helped improve speaking skills, build vocabulary, and increase students' confidence in speaking in public. These results are in accordance with the statement put forward by Abdul and Burhanuddin (2021), that the use of folktales as a creative learning medium, with

interesting activities in the classroom, provides better results in developing students' speaking skills.

Furthermore, based on the findings, the application of folklore in learning is carried out in several ways, such as role-playing, storytelling, and conducting discussions. With strategies such as playing characters in the story, retelling the story with the students' version, and discussing the intrinsic elements of the story, learning with this model is considered more interesting in building students' self-confidence and speaking skills. Teachers at MTs Al-Hayatul Islamiyah Malang, in the results of interviews that have been conducted, also stated that this strategy makes students more enthusiastic, supports students' creativity, hones communication skills, and encourages students to think critically in expressing their opinions. This is in line with Ur (2012), who stated that students who participate in fun and satisfying speaking activities will have better language skills because they are interested in the learning process.

Although the strategies implemented are quite effective in student learning, there are challenges faced by MTs Al-Hayatul Islamiyah Malang teachers. Based on interviews conducted, the challenge is the students' limited English language skills, making it difficult for them to understand the material and communicate during class. In addition, an unsupportive classroom environment can also affect students' motivation and confidence in learning effectively. Therefore, MTs Al-Hayatul Islamiyah Malang teachers overcome these challenges by providing vocabulary support, including vocabulary lists, simple sentences, and pronunciation examples. In addition, teachers also create an interesting classroom atmosphere, by rewarding students who dare to speak, and encouraging students to overcome their fear of starting to speak. That way, students become more confident when speaking, in accordance with Asjuh and Rahman (2018), in their research which stated that students gave a positive response to the use of the material. English material based on regional folklore is considered interesting, motivating, and effective as learning material so that it receives a positive response from students in improving their English language skills.

Moreover, the findings related to the application of folktales as a learning medium at MTs Al-Hayatul Islamiyah are also supported by previous similar studies. The application of folktales in learning is considered to motivate and improve students' speaking skills. This aligns with the theory proposed by Piaget and Vygotsky (1978), which states that improved speaking skills and student motivation make it easier to engage and contribute to discussions as part of social interaction. Furthermore, the learning strategies implemented, based on interviews with MTs Al-Hayatul Islamiyah teachers, can enrich students' vocabulary and apply it in learning. This is also in line with research conducted by Mardiana and Kurniawan (2021), which stated

that listening to and discussing folktales in learning can improve students' vocabulary understanding and speaking skills.

Furthermore, the learning strategies implemented, based on interviews with teachers at MTs Al-Hayatul Islamiyah, had a positive impact on boosting student self-confidence. By creating a relaxed and conducive learning environment, students became enthusiastic about participating in the lesson. Therefore, the implementation of strategies such as role-playing, storytelling, and discussions can increase students' motivation to understand the material presented. Students also become more confident when expressing their opinions in public. This is in line with research conducted by Suryani (2020), which also stated that innovative story-based learning methods can increase students' activeness and self-confidence so that they become more enthusiastic about being involved in the learning process. Thus, students' speaking and language skills also increase significantly.

In addition, the improvement in students' speaking skills was also driven by the teacher's strategies in managing classroom interactions during the lesson using folktales as a medium. The findings indicate that the teacher successfully created a communicative atmosphere in which students were encouraged to actively respond to the story. This aligns with research by Mardiana and Kurniawan (2021), who stated that narrative-based teaching, such as folktales, requires a strategic teacher role to transform the learning atmosphere from passive to active and communicative classroom activities. Through this interactive process, students are directly involved in the learning process, thus influencing their speaking skills. Ultimately, this dynamic supports the findings of Nurhikma's research (2022), which showed that the strategic implementation of folklore in the classroom significantly improved students' speaking skills.

However, this study has several limitations, considering that it is a qualitative case study focusing on only one English teacher at MTs Al-Hayatul Islamiyah Malang. The qualitative data obtained from interviews, observations, and lesson plan documentation are also limited to reflecting the specific situation, student demographics, and conditions at the school. Therefore, although the results on motivation and speaking improvement are quite insightful, they cannot be generalized to all junior high schools or quantitative research with large samples. This is a common characteristic of qualitative designs as discussed by previous researchers in language education methodology (Asjuh & Rahman, 2018).

Thus, despite its small scope, this study provides useful insights into English language learning, particularly in junior high schools. The practical success of this study suggests that teachers can expand the use of learning modules from the Ministry of Education and Culture, such as English for the Archipelago, by incorporating local or international folktales as

supplementary learning materials. It is recommended that EFL teachers develop speaking learning activities using stories as a learning medium to hone students' speaking skills. These results also support the assertion by Ramli and Rahman (2024), who suggest that folktales are an effective medium in language learning, and future researchers can explore their impact on other skills such as writing.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that using folktales as an English teaching method effectively improves students' motivation and speaking skills. Familiar stories like *Malin Kundang* and *Lake Toba* help create a fun, low-stress learning environment. By using interactive techniques like videos and group discussions, the teacher successfully engaged unmotivated students and increased their participation. Ultimately, when students feel comfortable and motivated, they participate more actively, which supports the achievement of learning goals.

However, challenges like fear of speaking and maintaining student enthusiasm still remain. Therefore, educators must continuously adapt their teaching methods. Teachers should explore folktales from various cultures to give students a broader perspective. Additionally, providing more visual and multimedia aids can make the learning materials more engaging and easier to understand. To build students' self-confidence, speaking activities should be integrated systematically into each learning session, such as giving students opportunities to retell the stories in their own words.

This study acknowledges some shortcomings, as it focused solely on teacher perceptions, motivation, and student improvement. To get a better understanding of the problems that hinder motivation, future researchers should engage more directly with students and use Classroom Action Research (CAR) methods. Future research should also explore how folktales can develop students' social skills, including cooperation, empathy, and communication, and how group activities affect classroom social dynamics. Finally, future studies could explore how involving parents in teaching folktales at home influences children's motivation and attitudes toward language learning.

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