The Effect of Using Folktales on Improving Reading Comprehension of the Tenth-Grade Students At MAN 1 Palu

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ABSTRACT

This investigation was conducted with the principal objective of examining the influence exerted by the utilization of folktales on enhancing the reading comprehension abilities of tenth-grade students at MAN 1 Palu. Employing a quasi-experimental methodology, the study encompassed two distinct cohorts: the experimental group, which engaged with narrative texts rooted in folktales, and the control group, which received instruction through conventional reading passages. The evaluative instruments comprised both pre-assessments and post-assessments, which incorporated multiple-choice items and essay prompts aimed at gauging comprehension at the literal level. Findings indicated that learners exposed to the folktale-based instructional approach exhibited a marked elevation in comprehension performance following the intervention. Specifically, the average achievement score within the experimental group rose from an initial mean of 28.21 to a post-treatment mean of 49.95. In contrast, the control group's mean score exhibited a modest increase, shifting from 28.45 to 30.05. Statistical validation using the Mann-Whitney U test produced a significance value of 0.007, thereby substantiating a statistically meaningful divergence between the two groups. This result necessitates the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis while concurrently rejecting the null. Consequently, it can be inferred that the incorporation of folktales into the reading curriculum substantively augments students' literal reading comprehension capabilities in the context of tenth-grade learners at MAN 1 Palu.
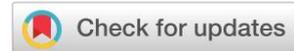
1. Introduction

Reading is a crucial cognitive skill and one of the four primary language competencies, alongside listening, speaking, and writing, that forms the foundation of language learning and academic achievement. More than just recognizing letters and words, reading requires students to comprehend, interpret, and evaluate textual information (Abbas et al., 2023; Fairuz et al., 2022; Irmayani et al., 2024; Junaid & Andini, 2025). According to Paige et al., (2024), reading comprehension is significantly linked to the development of students' critical thinking abilities, and improvements in one area positively influence the other. Reading is not only regarded as a tool for understanding texts, but also as a gateway to knowledge and cognitive development. As explained by Patel & Jain (2008), learners who develop strong reading skills tend to speak and write more effectively, reinforcing the role of reading as the fastest way to learn speaking and writing.

However, despite its importance, many students still struggle with reading comprehension. As noted by Gajria & McAlenney (2020), these difficulties may stem from limited vocabulary, inadequate strategies, or lack of motivation. In particular, the current generation of students is increasingly disengaged from reading due to digital distractions. Webber et al., (2024) emphasize that declining interest in reading among adolescents is often caused by competition with interactive media and a lack of engaging reading materials in schools. Preliminary observation conducted by the researcher at MAN 1 Palu also revealed several problems: many tenth-grade students showed low reading comprehension, had little exposure to literacy outside school, and were less motivated to engage in classroom reading activities. Teachers noted that conventional materials were often perceived as uninteresting, contributing to students' lack of enthusiasm and low achievement in reading.

Meanwhile, Kurikulum Merdeka, as Indonesia's national curriculum, emphasizes student-centered learning and encourages students to develop important skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and cultural awareness. In the context

of reading, students are expected to understand and interpret narrative texts, including their meaning, purpose, and linguistic elements. However, many students are still unable to meet these standards. Several studies show that students in this grade level face persistent difficulties in understanding different types of texts, including narrative, descriptive, and recount texts. These challenges are exacerbated by limited motivation, insufficient reading exposure, and lack of interactive strategies in the classroom. Saraswati et al., (2021) identified that these struggles include making inferences, understanding vocabulary, recognizing sentence structure, and grasping contextual meaning.

Given these issues, there is a pressing need for innovative and relevant instructional approaches that both improve reading comprehension and foster greater student interest. One such approach is the integration of folktales into the reading curriculum. Folktales are traditional stories passed down through generations, rich in moral values, cultural wisdom, and narrative structure. As stated by Mantra & Kumara (2018) folktales help students identify moral values, distinguish character traits, and build vocabulary and fluency in reading. These texts are often more engaging for students because they are relatable, culturally familiar, and inherently structured in a narrative format that supports comprehension development.

There are several previous studies that support the use of folktales as an effective strategy to improve students' reading comprehension. A study conducted by Enni et al., (2024) showed that the implementation of folktales in reading instruction notably improved the reading comprehension of eleventh-grade students at SMK Tiwikrama Mamuju, as evidenced by the substantial gains observed between their pre-test and post-test outcomes. In a related study, Laras et al. (2024) found that incorporating Kaili folktales into reading activities significantly enhanced the comprehension skills of ninth-grade students at SMPN 20 Palu. These findings demonstrate a meaningful advancement in students' ability to grasp and interpret written texts. In addition, research by Thamrin & Kurniawan (2023) explored students' perceptions of reading lessons using local folktales and found that students responded positively. They felt more motivated and engaged when learning through culturally familiar stories. However, those studies mostly used pre-experimental designs without control groups and lacked collaborative learning activities. Therefore, this research fills the gap by using a quasi-experimental design with both experimental and control groups, and incorporates interactive learning through group discussions using Central Sulawesi folktales to improve both reading comprehension and student participation.

Central Sulawesi, the site of this study, possesses a rich tradition of oral folktales that reflects the values, beliefs, and history of the local community. Using local folktales in English language instruction serves a dual purpose: it not only strengthens students' reading comprehension but also deepens their cultural identity and appreciation. Monica & Soplantila (2024) support the use of culturally contextualized materials to increase student engagement and reading outcomes. In this study, folktales from Central Sulawesi were selected as reading materials to improve reading comprehension at the literal level. In order to enhance students' reading comprehension skills, a structured approach to reading instruction is essential. Following this principle, the researcher adapted from Mulatu & Regassa (2022) outlined in the study, there are three phases of the teaching framework, which consists of pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading, to effectively guide students in interacting with the text. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the effect of utilizing folktales on improving the reading comprehension skills of tenth-grade students at MAN 1 Palu. It is expected that the integration of cultural texts will facilitate students' understanding, increase their engagement, and foster an appreciation of local wisdom through purposeful and meaningful reading activities.

2. Methodology

This study was structured within a quasi-experimental research design that involved the participation of two independently assigned groups: the experimental group and the control group. The experimental group received instruction using folktale-based reading materials, while the control group was exposed to conventional reading texts. However, only the experimental group received the instructional intervention, which incorporated folktales into the reading lessons. The selected folktales included The Legend of Poso Lake, The Legend of Bagga Stone, Bulava Mpongeo, Tadulako Bulili, Randa Ntovea, Lasaeo, and Rumongi. These stories, rooted in Central Sulawesi culture, were chosen for their engaging narratives, rich moral values, and cultural familiarity, which were expected to enhance students' comprehension and connection to the texts. The framework of this research design is outlined schematically in accordance with the model presented by Arikunto (2013):

Group	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
Experimental Group	O_1	X	O_2
Control Group	O_3	-	O_4

Where:

O1= Pre-test of Experimental Group

O2= Post-test of Experimental Group

O3= Pre-test of Control Group

O4= Post-test of Control Group

X = Treatment

- =No Treatment

This study utilized a purposive sampling method to select participants, concentrating on specific classes recommended by the English teacher at MAN 1 Palu. Two existing classes were chosen to receive different instructional strategies. The experimental group received reading instruction through the use of folktales, in contrast the control group was instructed using commonly used or textbook-based materials. reading materials. This arrangement was intended to analyze the outcomes of folktales in improving students' reading comprehension abilities.

The research population consisted of all tenth-grade students at MAN 1 Palu during the 2024/2025 academic year, totaling 167 students across nine classes. Each class contained around 18 to 20 students. From this population, two classes were purposefully selected based on differences in student ability and the teacher's recommendation. Class X-C, which included 19 students, was selected to be the experimental group, while Class X-D, made up of 20 students, acted as the control group. These classes were chosen not only due to their comparable academic levels but also for their availability and willingness to take part in the study. Thus, the total sample size was 39 students.

Data were gathered using two forms of assessment. Prior to the instructional treatment, a pre-test was conducted to measure students' initial reading comprehension capabilities. Following the intervention, a post-test was used to evaluate the progress made any changes in their reading abilities, as well as assess any improvements in students' performance. Both tests consisted of a mix of multiple-choice questions and essay items, providing a well-rounded evaluation of students' reading comprehension skills.

The scoring rubric in this research was used to assess two types of tests, namely multiple choice and essay questions. For multiple choice questions, students received a score of 1 if they answered correctly and a score of 0 if their answer was incorrect or not answered. Meanwhile, essay questions are assessed based on the quality of the student's answers in identifying information from the reading text. If the student's answer is accurate, detailed, and consistent with the text, it is given a score of 10; if the answer only includes general information without details or is only partially consistent with the text, it is given a score of 5; and if there is no answer, the score is 0.

After conducting the pretest and posttest, the researcher continued with the data analysis stage using SPSS statistical software. The initial step in this process involved scoring the students' test results to obtain a quantitative representation of their achievements. Next, descriptive statistical analysis was performed to calculate the mean value, which aimed to provide an overview of the development of reading comprehension after the treatment was applied.

To review the data distribution pattern, the Shapiro-Wilk test was used, which is appropriate for relatively small sample sizes, i.e., less than fifty subjects. The significance criterion was set at 0.05; a significance value exceeding this limit indicates that the data is normally distributed, while a value below it indicates a violation of the normality assumption.

Furthermore, the Levene test was applied to examine the equality of variances between groups. The test results showed that the variances between groups were not uniform, indicating a violation of the assumption of homogeneity. Given the failure to meet the prerequisites of normal distribution and homogeneity of variance. In order to assess potential statistically significant distinctions between the control and experimental groups, the Mann-Whitney U test was selected

as a non-parametric analytical tool. All analysis procedures were carefully carried out using the statistical features available in the SPSS program.

3. Result and Discussion

This section outlines the research findings at MAN 1 Palu using a quasi-experimental design. Pre-tests and post-tests assessed students' reading comprehension before and after instruction. The experimental group used Central Sulawesi folktales, while the control group used conventional texts. Results were analyzed to determine the impact of folktales on students' reading skills.

3.1 Pre-Test Result

Before any instructional intervention was implemented, the students' initial reading comprehension abilities were assessed through a pre-test. The experimental group (Class X C) recorded a mean score of 28.21, with individual scores distributed between the minimum value of 3 and the maximum of 66. Meanwhile, the control group (Class X D) achieved a slightly higher average of 28.45, with scores falling between 6 and 66. These results suggest that both groups demonstrated relatively low levels of reading comprehension at the outset. The standard deviation for the experimental group was 24.776, indicating a greater variability in their scores, while the control group showed less variation. The standard deviation was calculated to be 14.110. This preliminary data constituted a vital reference for evaluating the effectiveness of the folktale-based instructional intervention applied to the experimental group during the post-test phase. The detailed results of this analysis are presented in the following section:

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-Test Experiment	19	3	66	28.21	24.776
Pre-Test Control	20	6	66	28.45	14.110
Valid N (listwise)	19				

3.2 Post-Test Result

Following the implementation of the treatment, students' progress in reading comprehension was gauged through a post-test. The experimental group (Class X C), taught using folktales, achieved a mean score of 49.95, up from 28.21 in the pre-test, with scores ranging from 13 to 81. The control group (Class X D), taught using conventional methods, had a mean score of 30.05, slightly increasing from 28.45, with scores between 11 and 58. These results show that the experimental group made more significant progress, indicating that folktale-based instruction was more effective in improving students' reading comprehension. The results of the descriptive statistical analysis are presented as follows:

Table 2. Descriptive Statistic of Post-Test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Post-Test Experiment	19	13	81	49.95	24.068
Post-Test Control	20	11	58	30.05	15.209
Valid N (listwise)	19				

3.3 Statistical Analysis

To assess the normality of data distribution, homogeneity of variance, and differences in reading comprehension scores between groups using folk tale-based learning and groups receiving conventional teaching, inferential statistical analysis was performed. Given the limited sample size (fewer than 50 participants), to assess the assumption of data normality, the Shapiro-Wilk test was administered. The findings revealed that the distribution of pretest scores within the experimental cohort significantly deviated from normality ($p < 0.05$). In contrast, the posttest data from the same group, as well as both pretest and posttest scores from the control group, exhibited distribution patterns consistent with normality ($p > 0.05$). Subsequently, Levene's test was employed to evaluate the homogeneity of variances between groups. The analysis produced a significance value below the 0.05 threshold, thereby indicating unequal variances across the samples. In light of the violation of key parametric assumptions—namely normality and homogeneity of variance—a non-parametric alternative, the Mann-Whitney U test was chosen to compare the posttest results. The analysis results indicated a

statistically significant difference ($p = 0.007 < 0.05$), suggesting that the use of folk tales in the learning process had a significant positive impact on reading comprehension in the experimental group compared to the control group.

3.4 Discussion

This research endeavored to explore the potential impact of embedding folktales texts within the learning process on students' reading comprehension outcomes at the tenth-grade level in MAN 1 Palu. Using a quasi-experimental methodology, this study included an experimental group as part of its design, which was taught using culturally relevant folktales from Central Sulawesi, and a control group, which received conventional instruction. A pre-test was conducted to assess the students' baseline reading comprehension levels, followed by six meetings involving folktale-based reading activities as the treatment. This intervention demonstrated the potential of integrating local narratives into classroom instruction to foster greater student engagement and improve reading comprehension skills.

Based on the research findings, students' reading comprehension skills were relatively low prior to the treatment, as shown by the pre-test results in both groups. Students struggled with identifying explicit and implicit information, vocabulary in context, and understanding main ideas, reflecting their limited ability to analyze narrative texts. To address this, the researcher used folktales as a teaching medium in the experimental group, integrating local stories from Central Sulawesi.

The implementation involved various activities such as identifying story elements, answering comprehension questions, and discussing moral values. This helped enhance students' vocabulary, inference-making, and interpretation skills. According to Yanbastieva-Petrova (2023), the use of interesting and relatable texts increases students' engagement and comprehension by encouraging them to interact meaningfully with the content.

The use of folktales aligned with constructivist and socio-cultural learning theories. It activated students' background knowledge, aiding their understanding of the texts. This is supported by Konzulin (2019), socio-cultural theory, which argues that meaningful learning occurs when students are exposed to culturally relevant and context-rich materials.

The findings from the post-test indicated that students in the experimental group exhibited considerably enhanced reading comprehension compared to their counterparts in the control group. Learners exposed to folktale-based instruction showed greater proficiency in recognizing central ideas, making logical inferences, and grasping word meanings. These results are consistent with earlier research findings by Istiq'faroh et al., (2020) and Monica & Soplantila (2024), which demonstrated that folktales improve comprehension and student engagement.

Some challenges encountered during the treatment included students' limited vocabulary and their initial unfamiliarity with analyzing story structure and extracting moral values. Many students struggled to understand key terms within the folktales, which affected their ability to grasp the overall meaning of the texts. This aligns with Ibrahim et al., (2016), who emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge is a critical component of reading comprehension; when students lack sufficient vocabulary, it becomes difficult for them to decode text, infer meaning, and engage critically with the content. Furthermore, students were not accustomed to breaking down narrative elements such as plot, character development, conflict, and resolution, nor were they confident in articulating the lessons or values embedded in the stories. These difficulties initially hindered their reading performance and engagement during the early stages of the treatment.

Recognizing the importance of addressing these limitations in order to maximize the effectiveness of the intervention, the researcher implemented several instructional strategies to support students throughout the learning process. To overcome these obstacles, the researcher incorporated several scaffolding strategies throughout the instructional sessions. Prior to reading, students participated in vocabulary previews, where key terms and culturally specific expressions from the folktales were introduced and discussed. This pre-teaching of vocabulary helped students build a foundational understanding that supported their comprehension during reading. Guided reading activities were also implemented, allowing students to process texts in manageable sections with teacher support and discussion prompts. Additionally, collaborative class discussions were conducted to encourage students to reflect on the narrative structure and to share their interpretations of the moral messages. These interactive strategies not only enhanced students' vocabulary acquisition but also fostered their confidence and analytical abilities, leading to more meaningful engagement with the texts. As a result, students gradually developed stronger comprehension skills and became more adept at navigating and interpreting narrative texts.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher concluded that students' reading comprehension can be significantly improved through the integration of folktales as a teaching medium. Prior to the treatment, students demonstrated relatively low reading comprehension skills, as evidenced by the pre-test scores in both the experimental and control groups. However, after undergoing six meetings of folktale-based instruction, students in the experimental group showed marked improvement in various aspects of reading, including their ability to identify explicit and implicit information, interpret vocabulary in context, and analyze main ideas and supporting details. This improvement was further validated by the results of the Mann-Whitney U test, which produced a significance value of 0.007, indicating a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups. Additionally, the experimental group achieved higher mean scores on the post-test compared to the control group, reinforcing the effectiveness of the intervention.

The use of folktales, particularly those rooted in Central Sulawesi culture, not only made the reading material more engaging and relatable but also contributed to deeper comprehension by activating students' background knowledge and cultural understanding. This aligns with socio-cultural learning theories, which emphasize the importance of contextual and meaningful materials in fostering cognitive development. The narrative structure, moral values, and cultural familiarity embedded in the folktales enabled students to connect more personally with the text, thereby enhancing their motivation and ability to interpret meaning.

Therefore, it can be stated with confidence that incorporating folktales into reading instruction has a meaningful and positive impact on students' reading comprehension, especially at the tenth-grade level in MAN 1 Palu. The findings of this research suggest that educators should consider utilizing culturally relevant literature, such as local folktales, as a valuable pedagogical tool to improve literacy skills while simultaneously preserving and promoting cultural heritage. Future research may expand on these findings by exploring the long-term effects of folktale integration and its applicability across different grade levels and educational contexts.

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