

Improving Reading Comprehension of The Eighth-Grade Students of SMP Negeri 19 Palu Through Folklore

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Article Info

Received 2025-10-07

Revised 2025-11-17

Accepted 2025-11-18

Keywords:

Cultural-Based Learning

ELF Students

Folklore

Narrative tex

Reading comprehension

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of using folklore in improving the reading comprehension skills of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 19 Palu. The research employed a pre-experimental design with a one-group pre-test – post-test model. A total of 23 students were selected through a cluster random sampling technique. The data were collected through a reading comprehension test, administered before and after the treatment. The treatment involved teaching reading comprehension through selected Indonesian folktales, including "The Legend of Malin Kundang," "Cinderella," and "Tadulako Bulili." The data were analysed statistically using descriptive analysis and a paired-sample t-test with SPSS version 24. The findings showed an increase in the students' mean scores from 61.85 on the pre-test to 68.15 on the post-test. The significance value of 0.032 (< 0.05) indicated a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test results. Therefore, it can be concluded that using folklore as a learning medium effectively enhances students' reading comprehension, particularly in understanding narrative texts. Moreover, folklore can serve as an engaging and culturally relevant resource to foster students' motivation and interest in learning the English language.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is among the most important language abilities that allows people to comprehend and express ideas through written texts. To achieve full comprehension, readers must be able to grasp the meaning conveyed in the text [1]. In English language learning, the four major skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—are closely interrelated and support one another. Listening and reading are categorised as receptive skills because they involve receiving and understanding information, whereas speaking and writing are categorised as productive skills that focus on producing language [2].

Receptive skills are generally developed earlier and play a crucial role in enhancing productive abilities. Hence, students require continuous training to enhance their reading comprehension, as it serves as a foundation for academic and language success [3]. In this context, reading comprehension becomes a crucial element that determines students' overall performance in learning English as a foreign language.

For Indonesian students, reading English texts often presents significant difficulties because English is not their first language [4]. According to Sukyadi and Hamied [5], many Indonesian students still face challenges in understanding English texts due to their unfamiliarity with English vocabulary and limited exposure to reading materials. Students often face difficulties with reading comprehension, particularly in identifying main ideas, specific details, and word meanings, due to limited vocabulary and low reading motivation [6]. Their limited vocabulary and lack of exposure to English texts hinder their ability to understand what they read [7]. Students often face reading comprehension difficulties due to low motivation, limited basic English skills, lack of confidence in using the language, and unappealing learning materials [8]. As a result, students tend to answer questions without comprehending the overall meaning of the passage. Teachers, therefore, must apply creative methods and use materials that are familiar and relevant to students' experiences. This approach can help students engage more actively in learning and improve their ability to comprehend English texts effectively. Thus, identifying suitable teaching media that can bridge linguistic gaps and enhance student engagement becomes an essential step in addressing these challenges.

Based on an interview conducted at SMP Negeri 19 Palu, it was found that many eighth-grade students struggled to identify main ideas and specific information in reading texts. The results of their assignments showed that most students' reading comprehension scores were below the school's minimum passing grade of 75. To help students overcome difficulties in reading comprehension, teachers may integrate folklore as a culturally relevant learning medium. Folklore contains moral lessons and familiar cultural contexts that enable learners to relate new information to their existing knowledge, thereby facilitating better comprehension. This approach aligns with the concept of contextual learning, which emphasises that learning becomes more meaningful when it is connected to real-life and cultural experiences. Several previous studies have also shown that the use of folklore enhances students' motivation and improves their ability to understand narrative texts [9]. This indicates that their reading skills remain weak and require improvement. This situation emphasises the necessity of learning materials that support students' comprehension through more meaningful, familiar, and engaging content [10]. One possible solution to this issue is integrating folklore into the learning process. Folklore, which encompasses traditional stories, customs, and beliefs passed down through generations, reflects a community's identity, values, and cultural heritage [11]. Given these characteristics, folklore is considered a promising instructional medium that can provide contextual support and increase student interest in reading English texts.

Although several studies have examined the use of folklore in English language learning, most have been conducted in various educational settings and regions of Indonesia [12]. Only a few have explored its application among junior high school students

in Palu City, where cultural background and learning contexts may differ. This study, therefore, aims to fill that gap by investigating whether the use of folklore can significantly improve the reading comprehension of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 19 Palu. Teaching English through folklore has been proven to promote both linguistic and cultural understanding [13]. Folklore can enhance vocabulary, reinforce grammar, and improve reading and listening comprehension [14]. However, despite these documented advantages, empirical studies focusing specifically on students in the Palu region remain limited, highlighting the need for further investigation within this local context.

Additionally, activities such as retelling stories and creating alternative endings stimulate creativity, improving writing and speaking skills, while role-playing enhances fluency and motivation [13]. Thus, the present study explores the effectiveness of incorporating folklore as an instructional tool in improving the reading comprehension of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 19 Palu. The results are expected to benefit students by fostering motivation, assisting teachers in developing innovative reading strategies, and providing valuable references for future researchers in the field of language education. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to the development of culturally responsive teaching practices that support both linguistic and character development in English classrooms.

2. METHOD

This research employs an experimental design, which, according to Pelo et al. [15], is a scientific method involving the manipulation of one or more independent variables to determine their effect on dependent variables. It provides a structured approach to identify cause-and-effect relationships in a controlled setting. As stated by Asiva [16], quantitative research involves methods that systematically investigate social phenomena through the analysis of quantitative or statistical data, enabling researchers to draw objective and measurable conclusions. This research employs a pre-experimental research design, specifically a One-Group Pretest-Posttest Model, in which a single group is tested before and after receiving treatment. Nursyahidah [17] emphasises that this design enables researchers to compare scores before and after the intervention, thus providing more accurate results. However, because pre-experimental designs often lack key components such as control groups or random assignment, they may have limited internal validity, making it challenging to confirm direct causal relationships. Despite this limitation, the design remains suitable for preliminary investigations in educational contexts. The study population consists of all eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 19 Palu, totalling 95 students, divided into four classes. The sample is selected through cluster random sampling, which is particularly useful when it is not feasible to list every individual in the population. Banerjee and Chaudhury [18] define a sample as a subset of a population that reflects its characteristics. Cluster sampling provides equal opportunities for each class to be chosen, offering a more practical and efficient approach to classroom-based research. Therefore, the selected sample is considered representative of the broader population and appropriate for the aims of this study.

Two variables are identified in the present research: the independent variable represents the use of folklore in teaching, and the dependent variable is students' reading comprehension. Data collection involves two instruments: a pre-test and a post-test. The pre-test measures students' initial comprehension ability, while the post-test evaluates progress after the treatment. A pre-test was administered in August 2025 to assess students' initial reading comprehension prior to the implementation of the treatment. The test served to identify each participant's proficiency level and ensure comparability prior to the teaching intervention. This approach allowed the researcher to establish a clear baseline for evaluating the effectiveness of folklore-based instruction. The treatment is conducted over several sessions, during which students engage in reading and analysing Indonesian folklore to enhance their understanding and vocabulary development. To analyse the data, the researcher employs SPSS version 24. Descriptive statistics, such as the mean, maximum, minimum, and standard deviation, were initially employed to summarise students' performance. A normality test is then conducted to determine data distribution, followed by a paired sample t-test to compare pre-test and post-test results [19]. This study aims to determine whether the use of folklore has a significant effect on improving the reading comprehension skills of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 19 Palu. The use of both descriptive and inferential analyses ensures that the study provides a rigorous evaluation of students' learning outcomes.

The study employed a pre-experimental design with a single group, consisting of a pre-test and a post-test. This design was chosen because it allows the researcher to examine the effect of the treatment in a natural classroom setting where establishing a control group was not feasible. The treatment was implemented over four meetings, each lasting one month, with each session focusing on a different folklore text to develop vocabulary and comprehension skills. Two experts in English education validated the reading comprehension test used in this study, and its reliability was examined through a pilot test conducted with students from another class [20]. These validation procedures were crucial in ensuring that the assessment instrument accurately measured students' comprehension abilities and yielded reliable results.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis results revealed that applying folklore as a teaching medium in reading instruction improved the reading comprehension performance of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 19 Palu. The results from the students' pre-test and post-test showed that the integration of folklore substantially improved their skills in comprehending and interpreting English reading materials. Overall, the quantitative findings consistently demonstrate that students benefited academically from the folklore-based instructional intervention.

3.1. Results

A pre-test was administered to assess the students' reading comprehension prior to the implementation of folklore-based instruction. This test helped determine if the students were at the same level before the treatment was administered. The researcher did the pre-

test in August 2025. The data on students' reading comprehension achievement were obtained from pre-test and post-test scores. Table 2 presents a comparison between the two tests to determine whether there was a significant improvement in reading after the use of folklore in teaching. The results of the pre-test are summarised in the table below:

Table 1. Result of Pre-test

No	Initials	Students' Scores		Raw Score	Max. Score	Standard Score
		Multiple Choice	Essay			
1	AH	14	15	29	40	72,50
2	ARAS	15	13	28	40	70,00
3	AS	18	15	33	40	82,50
4	ATC	12	13	25	40	62,50
5	DAF	5	12	17	40	42,50
6	FAP	11	14	25	40	62,50
7	FS	16	17	33	40	82,50
8	H	4	12	16	40	40,00
9	IM	10	13	23	40	57,50
10	KI	17	19	36	40	90,00
11	KS	15	11	26	40	65,00
12	LOCA	8	4	12	40	30,00
13	MA	16	15	31	40	77,50
14	MAM	8	12	20	40	50,00
15	MAP	15	9	24	40	60,00
16	ME	16	15	31	40	77,50
17	MF	6	3	9	40	22,50
18	MFY	17	10	27	40	67,50
19	MGAA	18	15	33	40	82,50
20	MRP	10	8	18	40	45,00
21	NA	13	15	28	40	70,00
22	NK	16	13	29	40	72,50
23	PBS	9	7	16	40	40,00
TOTAL						1422,50

After teaching the class using folklore, the students were administered a post-test to evaluate the progress of their reading comprehension following the treatment. This assessment was conducted in September 2025, and the results are summarised in the table below. Drawing on the pre-test and post-test outcomes presented earlier, the researcher used SPSS software to evaluate whether incorporating folklore resulted in a notable improvement in students' reading comprehension abilities. The present analysis involved a comparative examination of pre-test and post-test outcomes to determine whether a discernible improvement had occurred in the participants' performance metrics.

Table 2. Result of Post-test

No	Initials	Students' Scores		Raw Score	Max. Score	Standard Score
		Multiple Choice	Essay			
1	AH	16	15	31	40	77,50
2	ARAS	17	13	30	40	75,00
3	AS	17	14	31	40	77,50
4	ATC	15	11	26	40	65,00
5	DAF	18	11	29	40	72,50
6	FAP	12	8	20	40	50,00
7	FS	15	6	21	40	52,50
8	H	13	10	23	40	57,50
9	IM	10	12	22	40	55,00
10	KI	18	19	37	40	92,50
11	KS	15	15	30	40	75,00
12	LOCA	8	8	16	40	40,00
13	MA	17	12	29	40	72,50
14	MAM	12	9	21	40	52,50
15	MAP	18	10	28	40	70,00
16	ME	17	15	32	40	80,00
17	MF	9	10	19	40	47,50
18	MFY	19	18	37	40	92,50
19	MGAA	18	19	37	40	92,50
20	MRP	13	10	23	40	57,50
21	NA	15	15	30	40	75,00
22	NK	13	17	30	40	75,00
23	PBS	15	10	25	40	62,50
TOTAL						1567,50

Descriptive statistical methods were employed to summarise the dataset, encompassing metrics such as the total number of observations, maximum and minimum scores, mean values, and other pertinent descriptive indicators.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistic

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-test	23	68	23	90	61.85	18.219
Post-test	23	53	40	93	68.15	14.775
Valid N (listwise)	23					

The normality test is used to determine whether the dataset's distribution conforms to the characteristics of a normal distribution. Normality tests differ in terms of statistical power, as well as in the complexity of their computation and the requirement for specific critical values [21]. In this study, the researcher used the Shapiro-Wilk statistic to test the normality of the data. The Shapiro-Wilk test is a popular method for determining whether

data follows a normal distribution. It is quite powerful and works by examining the relationships between data elements [22].

Table 4. Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pre-test	.123	23	.200*	.952	23	.322
Post-test	.137	23	.200*	.952	23	.323

Based on the results presented in the table, it can be inferred that:

1. The significance value of the pre-test is 0.322, which is greater than 0.05, indicating that the data are normally distributed.
2. The significance value of the post-test is 0.323, also greater than 0.05, demonstrating that the data follow a normal distribution.

Parametric tests are inferential statistical techniques used to test population hypotheses, assuming that the data follow a specific distribution (typically a normal distribution) and are performed on interval or ratio scale data [23]. For this research, the researcher uses paired sample statistics because the researcher chose one class and also intended to examine the differences observed in students' performance from the pre-test to the post-test. A paired-samples t-test is used to analyse whether the mean scores of two related datasets differ significantly, typically involving the same participants assessed at multiple time points. When identical measurements are administered repeatedly to the same group, this statistical approach is classified as a repeated-measures t-test [24].

Table 5. Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-test	61.85	23	18.219	3.799
	Post-test	68.15	23	14.775	3.081

The mean score of the pre-test was 61.85, while the mean score of the post-test increased to 68.15. This result indicates that students performed better after being taught through the use of folklore stories.

The output of the paired samples correlation analysis reveals a correlation coefficient of 0.699 with a significance level of 0.000, which is lower than the conventional threshold of 0.05. These findings suggest a strong and statistically significant association between the pre-test and post-test scores, indicating that students' performance before and after the treatment is interrelated.

Table 6. Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Pre-Test & Post-Test	23	.699	.000

The paired samples t-test revealed a mean difference of -6.304 between pre-test and post-test scores, accompanied by a standard deviation of 13.183 and a standard error of 2.749. The 95% confidence interval ranged from -12.005 to -0.604. The computed t-statistic was -2.293, with 22 degrees of freedom, yielding a two-tailed significance level of 0.032. Given that this p-value falls below the 0.05 threshold, a statistically significant disparity exists between the pre-test and post-test outcomes. Consequently, the implemented intervention (such as a targeted instructional approach) appears to exert a meaningful impact on student learning achievements.

Table 7. Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Pre-test - Post-test	-6.304	13.183	2.749	-12.005	-.604	-2.293	22	.032

The result of the paired-sample t-test showed a significance value of 0.032, which is lower than the 0.05 threshold. Therefore, it can be concluded that there was a significant difference between students' pre-test and post-test scores. These findings suggest that using folklore as a learning medium has a positive and significant impact on improving students' reading comprehension.

3.2. DISCUSSION

The findings of this research showed that using folklore as a teaching medium significantly improved the reading comprehension of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 19 Palu. The students' mean score increased from 61.85 on the pre-test to 68.15 on the post-test, indicating progress in their understanding and accuracy. Initially, a pre-test was administered to assess students' comprehension through multiple-choice and essay questions. The treatment was then conducted using various Indonesian folklore stories, which helped students understand the text better and enriched their vocabulary.

The improvement in students' reading comprehension may be attributed to the cultural familiarity and moral values presented in folklore stories. Such stories often reflect students' everyday lives, which helps them connect new vocabulary and textual structures to their existing knowledge. These connections activate prior schemata, facilitating comprehension and memory retention. Furthermore, folklore narratives typically feature repetitive linguistic forms and clear plot patterns that facilitate vocabulary development and enhance comprehension of text organisation. As a result, students become more engaged and confident readers. Although a few participants initially showed low motivation, the use of culturally rich stories encouraged active participation and curiosity, creating a more meaningful reading experience.

During the learning process, the researcher began each session with warm-up activities related to the folklore text. Initially, only a few students participated, but their

engagement increased in later sessions. The students were asked to read the stories, underline difficult words, and discuss their meanings in groups. Although they found some words challenging, the researcher guided them to use context to infer meanings, which improved their confidence and comprehension [25]. It has been demonstrated that advanced students are more proficient at utilising context clues than intermediate students, and that EFL students' comprehension of texts is significantly influenced by their ability to infer the meaning of challenging terms.

A post-test was administered after the treatment to evaluate the improvement, and most students showed better results; however, a few remained less motivated to learn English. Some challenges arose, such as a limited vocabulary and low concentration during reading sessions. To overcome these challenges, the researcher employed engaging folktales, such as "The Legend of Malin Kundang" and "Cinderella," which incorporated moral lessons and familiar cultural elements. According to Fatmawaty et al. [9], Students' low motivation and limited vocabulary often hinder reading comprehension, which is consistent with the results demonstrated in the current research. The results show alignment with prior research. Pelo [15], which revealed that folklore effectively improved students' reading comprehension at MAN 1 Palu. Similarly, Baroqqah and Angraini [26] confirmed that folklore enhanced students' achievement at MAN 2 Palembang. According to Batubara and Hasibuan [27], the reading comprehension abilities of elementary school students were successfully enhanced by the use of folklore. Discovered that using folklore in the classroom can help students become more proficient readers of narrative texts [26]. According to Adam et al. [28], incorporating folklore media into reading education may help students better comprehend texts, particularly in recognising key details, plot points, and moral lessons in narrative texts. Fatmawaty et al. [9] also showed that folklore increased students' engagement and comprehension when reading narrative texts. These findings support the conclusion that folklore is an effective medium for improving students' reading comprehension and motivation while promoting cultural understanding.

Although the findings of this study reveal a meaningful improvement in students' reading comprehension, some limitations should be acknowledged. The number of participants involved was relatively small and taken from a single school, which may limit the extent to which these results represent wider student populations. The treatment was also conducted within a short time span, so the learning progress captured in this study reflects only a brief instructional period. Furthermore, the reading assessment relied solely on multiple-choice items and an essay, which do not fully capture more complex aspects of comprehension, such as drawing inferences or evaluating information. Hence, future researchers are encouraged to involve a larger and more diverse group of students, extend the duration of the intervention, and apply various types of assessment to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of students' reading abilities.

Despite these limitations, this study offers useful implications for teaching practice. The integration of folklore in reading instruction can make learning more engaging and contextually meaningful for students, encouraging their interest and participation in classroom activities. Therefore, English teachers may consider incorporating local cultural stories into reading lessons as one means of improving students' comprehension.

Additionally, schools are recommended to enrich their reading resources and create a learning environment that promotes students' reading habits and sustained achievement.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the data and the discussion, it can be concluded that the use of folklore as instructional media contributes positively to the improvement of eighth-grade students' reading comprehension at SMP Negeri 19 Palu. The comparison between the pre-test and post-test scores demonstrates a noticeable increase in students' performance. These findings suggest that integrating folklore into the learning process serves as an effective approach to enhancing students' ability to comprehend reading texts.

The findings of this study reveal that integrating folklore into English reading instruction can significantly enhance students' ability to comprehend narrative texts. Through familiar cultural elements and moral lessons, folklore helps students interpret meaning more effectively while promoting engagement and enjoyment in learning. Therefore, folklore-based reading instruction can be regarded as a valuable pedagogical approach to improve both language proficiency and cultural understanding among EFL learners.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mashuri, S.Pd., M.A., and Moh Abraham Akbar Eisenring, S.Pd., M.Pd., for their valuable guidance and support throughout the research process, and to Andi Patmasari, S.Pd., M.Pd., for his constructive input as a reviewer. I also express my appreciation to I Gustia S.Pd, an English teacher at SMP Negeri 19 Palu City, along with all participating students, for their cooperation throughout this research. Lastly, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to my parents, family, and friends for their unwavering support, motivation, and encouragement throughout the completion of this research.

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