

DEVELOPING READING SKILLS OF 5TH GRADE EFL LEARNERS THROUGH FOLKTALES

Madina Tashpulatova

Basic Doctoral Student, Navoi State University, Navoi, Uzbekistan

e-mail: tashpulatovamadina35@gmail.com

tel: +998934347868

Abstract

Reading competence is a crucial component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning at the primary education level. For young learners, reading development requires not only linguistic input but also meaningful, motivating, and culturally rich materials. This article examines the role of folktales in developing reading skills among 5th grade EFL learners. Drawing on theories of narrative-based learning, extensive reading, and communicative language teaching, the paper highlights how folktales contribute to reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and learner engagement. The analysis demonstrates that folktales, due to their predictable structure, repetitive language, and cultural relevance, create supportive conditions for effective reading instruction in primary EFL classrooms. The article concludes with pedagogical implications for integrating folktales into reading curricula to enhance both linguistic and cognitive development.

Keywords: EFL reading, folktales, primary education, reading comprehension, narrative-based learning

Introduction

Reading is one of the most essential skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, particularly at the primary education stage where learners establish foundational literacy abilities. For 5th grade learners, reading instruction should support the transition from basic decoding to meaningful comprehension and interpretation of texts. However, traditional reading materials often fail to engage learners emotionally or culturally, which may result in limited motivation and superficial comprehension.

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the use of literary texts, especially folktales, in EFL classrooms. Folktales represent an important form of

narrative literature that reflects cultural values, social norms, and moral lessons. Their simple structure, familiar themes, and repetitive language make them particularly suitable for young EFL learners. By integrating folktales into reading instruction, teachers can provide learners with meaningful contexts that support comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and critical thinking.

This article aims to explore how folktales can be effectively used to develop reading skills among 5th grade EFL learners. It focuses on the theoretical foundations of reading development and narrative-based instruction, as well as the pedagogical value of folktales in primary EFL education.

Reading Skills Development in Primary EFL Contexts

Reading in a foreign language is a complex cognitive process that involves decoding, vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness, and comprehension strategies (Grabe, 2017). For young learners, reading development is closely connected with motivation, background knowledge, and exposure to meaningful input. At the primary level, learners benefit most from texts that are engaging, contextually rich, and linguistically accessible. Effective EFL reading instruction at this stage emphasizes the development of key sub-skills such as:

- understanding main ideas and details;
- recognizing story structure;
- inferring meaning from context;
- predicting outcomes;
- developing reading fluency.

Research in EFL education highlights that learners' engagement with texts significantly influences reading achievement (Day & Bamford, 1998). When learners find texts interesting and relevant, they are more likely to participate actively in reading tasks and demonstrate improved comprehension. Folktales, as narrative texts with universal themes and emotional appeal, meet these criteria and provide a strong foundation for reading skill development.

Folktales as Narrative-Based Learning Resources

Folktales are traditional stories passed down through generations, often featuring clear moral messages, symbolic characters, and culturally embedded meanings.

From a pedagogical perspective, folktales offer several advantages for EFL reading instruction.

First, folktales typically follow a predictable narrative structure, including an introduction, conflict, climax, and resolution. This structure supports learners' understanding of text organization and helps them anticipate story development. Predictability reduces cognitive load and allows learners to focus more on comprehension and language use.

Second, the repetitive language patterns commonly found in folktales facilitate vocabulary acquisition and reinforce grammatical structures. Repetition enables learners to encounter words and expressions multiple times in meaningful contexts, which supports retention and automaticity.

Third, folktales are culturally rich texts that promote intercultural awareness. When learners engage with folktales, they not only learn linguistic forms but also gain insights into cultural values and traditions. This cultural dimension enhances comprehension and supports deeper engagement with the text (Sharifian, 2008). Studies have shown that narrative-based instruction using stories and folktales positively affects learners' reading comprehension, motivation, and language awareness (Ghosn, 2002; Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011).

Contribution of Folktales to Reading Skill Development

Folktales contribute to the development of reading skills in several important ways.

Reading Comprehension

The clear storyline and logical sequence of events in folktales help learners follow the text more easily and understand cause-and-effect relationships. Learners can identify main ideas, supporting details, and moral lessons, which enhances both literal and inferential comprehension.

Vocabulary Development

Folktales introduce vocabulary in meaningful contexts, making it easier for learners to infer meanings and retain new words. Recurrent expressions and familiar themes support vocabulary recycling and consolidation.

Cognitive and Critical Thinking Skills

Through discussions of characters' actions, motives, and outcomes, folktales encourage learners to think critically, make predictions, and express personal opinions. These activities strengthen higher-order reading skills essential for academic literacy.

Learner Motivation and Engagement

The imaginative nature of folktales increases learners' interest in reading. Enjoyable reading experiences foster positive attitudes toward reading in English and encourage learners to read more frequently, which further enhances proficiency.

Pedagogical Implications

Integrating folktales into 5th grade EFL reading instruction offers practical benefits for teachers and learners. Teachers can use folktales to design learner-centered reading activities that promote interaction and comprehension. Common practices include pre-reading prediction tasks, guided reading, vocabulary exploration, story retelling, and creative follow-up activities such as role-play or alternative endings. Curriculum designers may also consider including folktales as supplementary or core reading materials in primary EFL textbooks. Such integration supports communicative and culturally responsive teaching approaches, aligning reading instruction with learners' cognitive and emotional needs.

Conclusion

Folktales represent a powerful and effective resource for developing reading skills among 5th grade EFL learners. Their narrative structure, repetitive language, and cultural richness create favorable conditions for improving reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and learner engagement. This article has argued that folktale-based reading instruction supports both linguistic development and cognitive growth in primary EFL contexts. Incorporating folktales into reading curricula can enhance the quality of EFL instruction and foster positive reading habits among young learners.

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