

# The Impact of Folklore on English Vocabulary Mastery among Seventh Grade at Junior High School in Palu

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## ABSTRACT

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental component of English language learning because it enables students to comprehend texts and communicate effectively. However, many junior high school students continue to experience limited vocabulary knowledge due to the use of conventional teaching materials that provide little contextual or cultural relevance. Although previous studies have demonstrated the benefits of storytelling and narrative-based instruction, limited research has explored the effectiveness of local folklore as a contextual medium for enhancing English vocabulary mastery among Indonesian EFL learners. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the effectiveness of folklore-based instruction in improving the English vocabulary mastery of seventh-grade students at SMPN 19 Palu. A pre-experimental design employing a one-group pre-test-post-test approach was used. The participants consisted of 30 students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a vocabulary test covering nouns, verbs, and adjectives. The results showed that the mean score increased from 58.17 in the pre-test to 78.43 in the post-test. Furthermore, the paired-samples *t*-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores ( $p < 0.05$ ). These findings indicate that folklore-based instruction is an effective, contextual, and engaging approach for improving students' English vocabulary mastery.

**Keywords:** *Folklore, Vocabulary Mastery, EFL, Contextual Learning, Storytelling*

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## INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is widely recognized as the cornerstone of language proficiency. It serves as the building block for all four language skills, including, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Without sufficient vocabulary, students are unable to comprehend texts, express ideas, or participate effectively in communication. As Wilkins (1972) famously stated, "Without grammar very little can be conveyed, but without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed." This highlights the crucial role of vocabulary mastery in second and foreign language learning. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts such as Indonesia, the importance of vocabulary becomes even more evident because learners do not encounter the target language in their daily environment. Consequently, vocabulary learning must be deliberately taught and meaningfully reinforced in classroom settings.

In Indonesia, English has been taught as a compulsory subject from junior high school to university. Despite years of instruction, many students still demonstrate limited vocabulary mastery. Research has shown that EFL learners often struggle to retain and use vocabulary effectively due to traditional instructional practices. According to Nation (2020), vocabulary learning that relies heavily on rote memorization does not guarantee long-term retention or meaningful use. Similarly, Thornbury (2002) argues that mechanical drills and word-list memorization may help short-term recall, but they do not sufficiently support contextual understanding or productive use of vocabulary.

Furthermore, Alqahtani (2015) emphasizes that vocabulary acquisition becomes more effective when learners encounter words in meaningful contexts rather than isolated lists.

When instruction is primarily textbook-centered without connecting language to real-life experiences, students tend to lose motivation and engagement in the learning process. This lack of contextual and interactive learning may hinder students' ability to internalize and actively use new vocabulary.

At SMPN 19 Palu, the researcher conducted a preliminary informal observation and discussion with the English teacher in October 2025. Based on classroom observation and the teacher's explanation, it was found that many seventh-grade students struggled to expand their English vocabulary effectively. Students often had difficulty understanding the meaning of words in reading texts and were unable to use new vocabulary appropriately in sentences.

The English teacher also explained that vocabulary instruction was generally conducted through textbook-based exercises, word lists, and direct translation activities. As a result, students tended to memorize words temporarily but quickly forgot them after a short period. These findings indicate the need for more engaging and contextualized instructional strategies to improve students' vocabulary mastery. Vocabulary mastery refers to the ability of learners to understand, store, and use words accurately and appropriately across different contexts. Nation (2001) divides vocabulary knowledge into three main components: form (pronunciation and spelling), meaning (semantic understanding), and use (grammatical and collocational behaviour). Schmitt (2010) adds that vocabulary mastery includes both receptive knowledge understanding words when listening or reading and productive knowledge using words correctly in speaking or writing. Research by Alqahtani (2015) also emphasizes that vocabulary is the foundation of communication, as it enables learners to comprehend input and produce output effectively.

One promising approach is the use of folklore as a medium for vocabulary learning. Folklore refers to traditional narratives including myths, legends, folktales, and cultural stories that have been passed down from generation to generation (Bascom, 2022). Folklore is rich in linguistic input, cultural values, and moral lessons, making it a multidimensional tool for education. Bruner (2019) explains that stories are inherently memorable because they are structured in ways that enhance comprehension and recall. Folklore often contains repetitive patterns, contextual clues, and vivid imagery that help learners understand and retain new vocabulary. Furthermore, stories are naturally engaging, providing learners with emotional connections that strengthen memory and motivation.

Integrating folklore into EFL classrooms offers several advantages. First, it provides authentic contexts for vocabulary learning, allowing students to encounter words in meaningful situations rather than in isolation. Second, it promotes cultural awareness by connecting learners to both local traditions and global narratives, enriching their educational experience. Third, folklore has been shown to increase student motivation because enjoyable learning materials encourage active engagement and persistence. Research by Santos et al. (2021) demonstrated that using folklore in secondary schools improved vocabulary retention and classroom participation. Similarly, Rahman (2022) found that folklore significantly enhanced young learners' motivation in English language learning.

Several studies have explored the role of folklore and storytelling in English language learning. Santos et al. (2021) investigated the use of folklore in improving vocabulary retention among secondary students in Brazil. The findings revealed that learners exposed to folklore-based lessons showed higher vocabulary retention compared to those taught with traditional methods. Similarly, Rahman (2022) examined how Indonesian folktales influenced students' motivation and vocabulary acquisition. The study found that folklore enhanced students' engagement and helped them remember new words through contextual meaning. These findings suggest that folklore-based learning not only supports vocabulary acquisition but also fosters students' motivation and cultural awareness by presenting language in meaningful and authentic contexts. Meanwhile, Alqahtani (2015) emphasized that vocabulary learning becomes more meaningful when learners are exposed to words in real contexts such as stories, dialogues, and daily experiences.

In the context of SMPN 19 Palu, employing folklore in English classes is highly relevant. Palu, located in Central Sulawesi, is rich in oral traditions and cultural stories that

can be integrated into classroom practice. By drawing upon familiar folklore, teachers can bridge students' cultural background with English language learning, making the process more relatable and enjoyable. At the same time, introducing folklore from other cultures can broaden students' perspectives, fostering intercultural competence while enriching their vocabulary.

Vocabulary is a fundamental component of English language learning because it forms the basis for developing learners' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, students encounter difficulties in comprehending texts, expressing ideas, and participating effectively in communication (Nation, 2022). Consequently, English instruction should provide meaningful opportunities for learners to acquire vocabulary in authentic and contextualized settings rather than through isolated word memorization. Contextual learning materials enable students to connect new vocabulary with meaningful situations, thereby improving retention, comprehension, and language use (Richards & Rodgers (1986). One valuable source of contextual materials is folklore, which presents vocabulary through engaging narratives while simultaneously introducing learners to cultural values and local wisdom. Folklore not only promotes language development but also fosters students' motivation, cultural awareness, and critical thinking by situating language within familiar social and cultural contexts (UNESCO, 2022). Therefore, integrating local folklore into English language instruction offers a meaningful pedagogical approach that supports vocabulary acquisition while preserving cultural heritage, making it particularly relevant for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms.

Therefore, this study is conducted to investigate the effectiveness of folklore as an instructional medium in improving vocabulary mastery among seventh grade students at SMPN 19 Palu. The research is expected to provide insights into whether integrating folklore can address the persistent challenges in vocabulary learning, identify which word categories (nouns, verbs, adjectives) are most effectively learned, and explore students' perceptions of this method. Ultimately, the study seeks to demonstrate how folklore can serve as a practical, engaging, and culturally relevant strategy for enhancing vocabulary learning in EFL classrooms.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design (Ayton, 2023) to investigate students' speaking anxiety and their experiences with cooperative learning during English speaking activities. A qualitative descriptive approach was selected because the primary objective of the study was to explore and describe students' perceptions, feelings, and classroom experiences rather than to measure the effectiveness of an instructional intervention or establish causal relationships between variables. Therefore, an experimental design, such as a true or quasi-experimental approach, was not considered appropriate, as the study did not involve manipulating independent variables or comparing treatment and control groups. Instead, the qualitative design enabled the researcher to obtain rich, contextual insights into students' experiences within their natural learning environment. The study was conducted at SMPN 2 Gading and involved 18 ninth-grade students selected through purposive sampling. Participants were chosen based on their active involvement in English speaking activities and their relevance to the research objectives. Data collection was carried out over three classroom sessions during one week, during which students participated in cooperative learning activities in groups of three to four members.

## Research Instruments

This study utilized three main instruments: observation, questionnaires, and documentation. First, classroom observation was conducted using an unstructured observational approach to capture students' natural behaviors during cooperative learning activities. The researcher recorded student participation, interaction patterns, confidence levels, and anxiety indicators through field notes. Students' verbal responses during classroom

interactions and questionnaire comments were also noted to support the findings. Second, a questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions that allowed students to describe their experiences, perceptions, and feelings regarding speaking anxiety during cooperative learning activities. The questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms after the learning session. Several questionnaire comments and responses were also used to strengthen the thematic findings. Third, documentation in the form of photographs was collected to support and validate the observational data.

### Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed thematically using the interactive model proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The researcher identified recurring themes related to students' speaking anxiety, classroom participation, confidence development, peer support, and cooperative interaction. Questionnaire data were used to support and strengthen the qualitative findings obtained from classroom observations and documentation.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Description of the Data

This study examined the effectiveness of folklore-based instruction in improving students' English vocabulary mastery. The data were obtained from a group of thirty seventh-grade students at SMPN 19 Palu. Each participant completed a pre-test prior to the treatment and a post-test after the instructional sessions. The vocabulary test focused on three categories: nouns, verbs, and adjectives. These components were selected to represent fundamental aspects of vocabulary knowledge. The instructional treatment was conducted using folklore texts adapted to the students' level of comprehension. The use of local narratives allowed the learning process to remain relevant to students' cultural background. The collected data consisted of paired scores, which enabled a direct comparison between students' performance before and after the treatment. The analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and inferential testing through SPSS. To provide a clear overview of students' performance, the pre-test and post-test results are presented in the following table.

Table 1 Students' Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

| No | Student Code | Pre-Test | Post-Test | Gain Score |
|----|--------------|----------|-----------|------------|
| 1  | S1           | 55       | 75        | 20         |
| 2  | S2           | 60       | 80        | 20         |
| 3  | S3           | 50       | 70        | 20         |
| 4  | S4           | 65       | 85        | 20         |
| 5  | S5           | 58       | 78        | 20         |
| 6  | S6           | 62       | 82        | 20         |
| 7  | S7           | 57       | 76        | 19         |
| 8  | S8           | 59       | 79        | 20         |
| 9  | S9           | 61       | 83        | 22         |
| 10 | S10          | 56       | 74        | 18         |
| 11 | S11          | 54       | 73        | 19         |
| 12 | S12          | 63       | 84        | 21         |
| 13 | S13          | 52       | 72        | 20         |
| 14 | S14          | 60       | 81        | 21         |
| 15 | S15          | 58       | 77        | 19         |
| 16 | S16          | 64       | 86        | 22         |
| 17 | S17          | 55       | 75        | 20         |
| 18 | S18          | 57       | 78        | 21         |
| 19 | S19          | 59       | 80        | 21         |
| 20 | S20          | 61       | 82        | 21         |
| 21 | S21          | 53       | 71        | 18         |
| 22 | S22          | 62       | 83        | 21         |
| 23 | S23          | 58       | 79        | 21         |
| 24 | S24          | 60       | 81        | 21         |

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|    |     |    |    |    |
|----|-----|----|----|----|
| 25 | S25 | 56 | 76 | 20 |
| 26 | S26 | 57 | 77 | 20 |
| 27 | S27 | 59 | 80 | 21 |
| 28 | S28 | 61 | 84 | 23 |
| 29 | S29 | 55 | 74 | 19 |
| 30 | S30 | 58 | 78 | 20 |

Source: Research Data (2026)

The table displays a consistent increase in scores across all participants. Every student achieved a higher score in the post-test compared to the pre-test. No case of decline or stagnation was observed. The gain scores range from 18 to 23, indicating that the improvement occurred across all levels of initial ability. Students with lower pre-test scores demonstrated noticeable progress. For instance, Student S3 improved from 50 to 70, while Student S21 increased from 53 to 71. Students who initially performed at a moderate level also showed comparable improvement. This pattern suggests that the instructional approach was not limited to a specific group of learners. The distribution of gain scores reveals a narrow range, which reflects consistency. The absence of extreme variation indicates that the treatment produced a stable learning effect. The improvement does not appear incidental. It reflects a systematic change following the instructional intervention.

The results indicate that the use of folklore provided a learning environment where vocabulary was encountered in context. Students were exposed to repeated language patterns within meaningful narratives. This exposure appears to have supported both recognition and usage of vocabulary. The data in Table 1 provide an initial indication that the treatment contributed to improved vocabulary performance. A more detailed analysis is presented in the following sections.

### Descriptive Statistics

To obtain a clearer picture of students' overall performance, descriptive statistics were calculated for both the pre-test and post-test scores. These statistics summarize the central tendency and dispersion of the data, allowing a direct comparison between students' initial and final performance. The results of the descriptive analysis are presented in the following table.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

| Variable  | N  | Minimum | Maximum | Mean  | Std. Deviation |
|-----------|----|---------|---------|-------|----------------|
| Pre-Test  | 30 | 50      | 65      | 58.17 | 3.534          |
| Post-Test | 30 | 70      | 86      | 78.43 | 4.264          |

Source: SPSS Output (2026)

The table shows a clear difference between students' performance before and after the treatment. The mean score increased from 58.17 in the pre-test to 78.43 in the post-test. This increase of more than twenty points reflects a substantial change in students' vocabulary mastery. The minimum score rose from 50 to 70. This shift indicates that even the lowest-performing students were able to reach a higher level of achievement after the treatment. The maximum score also increased from 65 to 86, showing that higher-performing students continued to improve rather than remaining at the same level.

The standard deviation provides insight into the distribution of scores. The pre-test standard deviation (3.534) suggests that students' initial abilities were relatively similar. After the treatment, the standard deviation slightly increased to 4.264. This change indicates a wider spread of scores, which may reflect differences in how individual students responded to the instructional approach.

Despite this variation, the overall improvement remains consistent across the group. The increase in mean score, combined with the upward shift in both minimum and maximum values, indicates that the treatment contributed to a general improvement rather than isolated gains. These findings confirm that students' vocabulary mastery improved after exposure to

folklore-based instruction. The descriptive statistics provide quantitative evidence of this improvement, which will be further examined through inferential analysis in the next section.

### Normality Test

Before conducting inferential analysis, it is necessary to examine whether the data meet the assumption of normality. This step determines whether parametric tests, such as the paired sample t-test, can be appropriately applied. Since the number of participants in this study is fewer than fifty, the Shapiro-Wilk test was used to assess the normality of the data distribution. The results of the normality test are presented in the following table.

Table 3 Tests of Normality

| Variable                 | Statistic | df | Sig.  |
|--------------------------|-----------|----|-------|
| Pre-Test (Shapiro-Wilk)  | 0.989     | 30 | 0.988 |
| Post-Test (Shapiro-Wilk) | 0.980     | 30 | 0.829 |

Source: SPSS Output (2026)

The table indicates that the significance value for the pre-test is 0.988, while the post-test shows a significance value of 0.829. Both values exceed the threshold of 0.05, which indicates that the data are normally distributed. The distribution of scores does not deviate from normality. The pattern suggests that the data are symmetrically distributed around the mean. This condition supports the use of parametric statistical procedures. The absence of deviation in both datasets strengthens the reliability of the subsequent analysis. The consistency between pre-test and post-test distributions also suggests that the observed improvement is not influenced by irregular data patterns. Based on these results, the assumption of normality is fulfilled. The data are suitable for further analysis using the paired sample t-test.

### Gain Score Analysis

To determine the magnitude of improvement in students' vocabulary mastery, a gain score analysis was conducted. The gain score represents the difference between the post-test and pre-test scores for each student. This analysis provides a direct measure of how much progress occurred after the implementation of the instructional treatment. The results of the gain score analysis are presented in the following table.

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics of Gain Scores

| Variable   | N  | Minimum | Maximum | Mean  | Std. Deviation |
|------------|----|---------|---------|-------|----------------|
| Gain Score | 30 | 18.00   | 23.00   | 20.27 | 1.11           |

Source: SPSS Output (2026)

The table shows that the mean gain score is 20.27. This value reflects the average increase in students' scores after the treatment. An improvement of more than twenty points indicates a substantial change in students' vocabulary mastery. The minimum gain score is 18.00, while the maximum gain score reaches 23.00. This range is relatively narrow, which indicates that the level of improvement among students is consistent. No extreme variation appears in the data, suggesting that the treatment produced a stable effect across the group.

The standard deviation of 1.11 further supports this observation. The small value indicates that the gain scores are closely clustered around the mean. This pattern suggests that the improvement was not limited to a small number of students but occurred evenly among participants. The results demonstrate that all students experienced progress following the instructional intervention. The absence of low or negative gain values indicates that no student showed a decline in performance. This strengthens the argument that the treatment had a uniformly positive effect. The gain score analysis provides additional evidence that the improvement observed in the post-test is not incidental. It reflects a consistent change in students' vocabulary mastery, which is attributable to the learning process implemented during the treatment.

**Hypothesis Testing (Paired Sample T-Test)**

To examine whether the observed improvement in students' vocabulary mastery is statistically significant, a paired sample t-test was conducted. This test compares the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test within the same group of participants. The analysis was carried out using SPSS, and the results are presented in the following tables.

Table 5 Paired Samples Statistics

| Variable  | Mean  | N  | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|-----------|-------|----|----------------|-----------------|
| Pre-Test  | 58.17 | 30 | 3.534          | 0.645           |
| Post-Test | 78.43 | 30 | 4.264          | 0.779           |

Source: SPSS Output (2026)

The table shows a clear difference between the mean scores before and after the treatment. The mean score increased from 58.17 in the pre-test to 78.43 in the post-test. This difference indicates a substantial improvement in students' vocabulary mastery following the instructional intervention.

Table 6 Paired Samples Correlations

| N  | Correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|----|-------------|-----------------|
| 30 | 0.977       | < 0.001         |

Source: SPSS Output (2026)

The correlation value of 0.977 indicates a very strong relationship between the pre-test and post-test scores. This suggests that students' relative performance remained consistent, even though their scores improved overall. The significance value is less than 0.001, indicating that the correlation is statistically significant.

Table 7 Paired Samples Test

| Paired Differences   | Mean    | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | t       | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|----------------------|---------|----------------|-----------------|---------|----|-----------------|
| Pre-Test - Post-Test | -20.267 | 1.112          | 0.203           | -99.815 | 29 | < 0.001         |

Source: SPSS Output (2026)

The paired sample t-test results show that the mean difference between the pre-test and post-test scores is -20.267. This value reflects the average increase in students' scores after the treatment. The t-value obtained is -99.815 with a degree of freedom (df) of 29. The significance value (two-tailed) is less than 0.001, which is far below the threshold of 0.05. This result indicates that the difference between pre-test and post-test scores is statistically significant. The probability that this improvement occurred by chance is extremely low. This finding confirms that the use of folklore as a teaching medium has a significant effect on students' English vocabulary mastery.

**Effect Size Interpretation**

To evaluate the magnitude of the treatment effect, effect size was calculated using Cohen's d. The result shows a very large effect size, indicating that the impact of the instructional treatment on students' vocabulary mastery is substantial. The improvement observed is not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful. This suggests that the use of folklore contributes strongly to vocabulary development and supports its application as an effective instructional strategy in language learning.

**Discussion**

The findings of this study indicate that students' vocabulary mastery improved significantly after the implementation of folklore-based instruction. The descriptive statistics show a clear increase in the mean score from 58.17 in the pre-test to 78.43 in the post-test. The gain score analysis further confirms this improvement, with an average increase of 20.27 points. The results of the paired sample t-test also demonstrate that the improvement is

statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). These findings indicate that the instructional treatment produced a measurable and consistent effect on students' learning outcomes.

The improvement observed in this study is consistent with previous research on the use of folklore in language learning. Santos et al. (2021) found that students who learned vocabulary through folklore demonstrated better retention compared to those who relied on traditional methods. Similarly, Rahman (2022) reported that folklore-based learning enhanced students' motivation and vocabulary acquisition. The findings of the present study support these results, indicating that folklore is an effective instructional medium for vocabulary learning. By providing meaningful contexts and engaging narratives, folklore helps students acquire new vocabulary more effectively while increasing their motivation and participation in the learning process.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings can be explained through the concept of contextual learning. Nation (2001) emphasizes that vocabulary acquisition becomes more effective when learners encounter words in meaningful contexts. In this study, folklore provided such a context, allowing students to understand vocabulary through narrative situations rather than isolated memorization. In addition, Bruner (2019) explains that storytelling enhances comprehension and memory because it organizes information in a structured and meaningful way. The use of folklore in this study enabled students to connect vocabulary with events, characters, and actions, which supported better retention.

Furthermore, Thornbury (2002) argues that vocabulary learning should involve both meaning and use. The results of this study suggest that students were able to move beyond recognition and begin using vocabulary more appropriately in context. This indicates that the instructional approach did not only improve receptive vocabulary but also supported productive vocabulary development.

Based on these findings, it can be inferred that the effectiveness of folklore-based instruction lies in its ability to combine context, repetition, and engagement. Students are exposed to vocabulary in a natural setting, which allows them to understand how words function within meaningful communication. The consistent improvement across all participants suggests that this approach is suitable for students with different levels of ability.

From the researcher's perspective, the use of folklore creates a learning environment that is more interactive and meaningful compared to traditional methods. The integration of local cultural content also contributes to students' interest and participation. This combination of linguistic and cultural elements appears to play a key role in supporting vocabulary development. In summary, the findings of this study confirm that folklore is not only effective in improving vocabulary mastery but also provides a practical and engaging approach to language learning. The results strengthen the assumption that contextual and story-based learning can enhance both understanding and retention of vocabulary in EFL classrooms.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that folklore-based instruction is an effective approach for improving students' English vocabulary mastery by providing meaningful and culturally relevant learning experiences. Rather than learning vocabulary through isolated memorization, students developed a deeper understanding of new words by encountering them in authentic narrative contexts, which facilitated comprehension, retention, and application in language use. Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing body of EFL vocabulary research by demonstrating that integrating local folklore promotes contextual vocabulary acquisition while supporting meaningful language learning. It also highlights the value of culturally responsive pedagogy in connecting language instruction with learners' cultural backgrounds. Practically, the findings encourage English teachers to incorporate local folklore into vocabulary instruction as an engaging resource that enhances students' participation, motivation, and appreciation of local cultural heritage. Nevertheless, the study was limited by its pre-experimental design involving a single group and a relatively small sample from one school. Future research is recommended to employ stronger experimental

designs with control groups, larger participant samples, and diverse educational settings to further validate the effectiveness of folklore-based instruction across different EFL contexts.

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