



Research Paper

# Folklore as a Pedagogical Resource in ELT: Bridging Language Learning and Cultural Identity

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## Abstract

*In recent years, English Language Teaching (ELT) has increasingly emphasized the need for culturally responsive and context-sensitive pedagogical practices. Within this framework, folklore emerges as a valuable pedagogical resource that can effectively bridge language learning and cultural identity. Folklore—comprising folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, and oral narratives—represents a rich repository of collective cultural memory and indigenous knowledge systems transmitted across generations through oral traditions. Incorporating such materials into ELT classrooms enables learners to engage with language not merely as a system of grammar and vocabulary but as a living medium of cultural expression and social meaning. This paper explores the pedagogical potential of folklore in enhancing language acquisition while simultaneously fostering learners' awareness of their cultural heritage. Drawing on theoretical perspectives of orality and literacy articulated by scholars such as Walter J. Ong, and culturally responsive pedagogy inspired by Paulo Freire, the study examines how oral narratives can function as effective teaching tools in ELT contexts. Folklore-based pedagogical practices—such as storytelling, retelling, dramatization, and discussion of folk proverbs and songs—encourage interactive learning and contribute to the development of key language skills including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Furthermore, the integration of folklore into language pedagogy helps bridge the often-perceived gap between global English and local cultural identities. By situating language learning within familiar cultural narratives, students develop greater motivation, engagement, and critical awareness of their own sociocultural contexts. Such an approach also aligns with contemporary efforts to decolonize English language education by validating indigenous knowledge systems and local traditions within academic spaces. The paper argues that folklore-based pedagogy not only enhances communicative competence but also promotes cultural preservation and identity formation among learners. Consequently, incorporating oral traditions into ELT classrooms can contribute to a more holistic, culturally grounded, and inclusive model of language education.*

**Keywords:** Folklore, English Language Teaching (ELT), Oral Tradition, Cultural Identity

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## I. Introduction

Language and culture are deeply interconnected, and the process of language learning extends beyond the acquisition of grammar, vocabulary, and communication skills. In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), the integration of cultural knowledge has become increasingly important because language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a carrier of social values, traditions, beliefs, and identity. Contemporary approaches to language teaching emphasize the need for culturally responsive pedagogy that enables learners to connect linguistic competence with cultural understanding. In multilingual and multicultural societies, this connection becomes particularly significant because learners often negotiate between local cultural identities and global linguistic practices. In this context, folklore emerges as a valuable pedagogical resource that can bridge language learning and cultural identity within ELT classrooms.

Folklore refers to the traditional cultural expressions, narratives, customs, beliefs, songs, proverbs, myths, legends, folktales, riddles, and oral traditions passed from one generation to another within a community. It represents the collective memory and lived experiences of people and reflects the social, moral, historical, and cultural realities of a society. Folklore is not merely a form of entertainment; it functions as a repository of indigenous knowledge, ethical values, communal identity, and linguistic richness. Since folklore is rooted in oral traditions and everyday cultural practices, it offers authentic and meaningful material for language teaching and learning. Through folklore, learners encounter language in context, enriched with emotions, symbolism, cultural references, and social meanings. Consequently, folklore provides opportunities for developing linguistic competence alongside intercultural awareness and cultural sensitivity.

The growing dominance of English as a global language has significantly influenced educational systems across the world. While English language education creates opportunities for global communication, academic mobility, and professional advancement, it has also raised concerns regarding cultural displacement and the marginalization of local identities. In many postcolonial and multilingual societies, ELT classrooms often prioritize Western cultural content, resulting in a disconnect between learners' linguistic experiences and their native cultural backgrounds. Such practices may lead to alienation, reduced learner engagement, and the perception that English is culturally distant from local realities. Therefore, incorporating folklore into ELT pedagogy becomes an effective strategy for making language learning culturally relevant and inclusive. By integrating indigenous narratives, oral traditions, and folk expressions into English language instruction, educators can create a learning environment that values students' cultural heritage while simultaneously enhancing language proficiency.

The pedagogical significance of folklore in ELT lies in its ability to promote all four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—through interactive and culturally meaningful activities. Folktales, myths, and legends can be used to develop reading comprehension, critical thinking, vocabulary acquisition, and narrative understanding. Folk songs, proverbs, and riddles contribute to pronunciation practice, listening skills, and communicative competence. Storytelling activities encourage speaking fluency, creativity, and learner participation, while writing tasks based on folklore stimulate imagination and cultural reflection. Because folklore often employs repetitive patterns, symbolic language, and simple narrative structures, it becomes especially useful for language learners at different proficiency levels. Moreover, folklore-based teaching promotes learner motivation because students are more likely to engage with familiar cultural content that reflects their own experiences and identities.

The relationship between folklore and cultural identity is another important aspect of this study. Cultural identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging to a particular cultural group shaped by shared traditions, language, values, beliefs, and historical experiences. In educational contexts, preserving cultural identity is essential because language learning should not require learners to abandon or suppress their native cultural backgrounds. Instead, effective language education should encourage learners to negotiate multiple identities and appreciate cultural diversity. Folklore contributes to this process by validating indigenous knowledge systems and creating opportunities for learners to connect local traditions with global communication practices. Through folklore, students gain awareness of their cultural roots while developing the linguistic competence necessary for participation in broader social and academic contexts.

Scholars in language pedagogy and cultural studies have increasingly emphasized the importance of culturally responsive teaching methods. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory highlights that learning occurs through social interaction and cultural mediation, suggesting that language acquisition is deeply connected to cultural context. Similarly, communicative language teaching approaches stress the importance of authentic materials and meaningful communication in language learning. Folklore aligns with these pedagogical principles because it provides culturally authentic content that encourages interaction, interpretation, and collaborative learning. In addition, postcolonial theorists argue for the inclusion of indigenous voices and local knowledge within educational frameworks to resist cultural homogenization and linguistic imperialism. The incorporation of folklore in ELT therefore becomes both an educational and cultural intervention that promotes inclusivity, representation, and learner-centered pedagogy.

The present study seeks to examine the role of folklore in enhancing English language teaching while preserving and promoting cultural identity. The study explores how folklore-based pedagogical practices contribute to language acquisition, learner engagement, intercultural competence, and cultural awareness. It also investigates the potential of folklore to create meaningful connections between local cultural traditions and English language education. By analysing the educational value of folktales, songs, proverbs, and oral narratives, the research aims to demonstrate that folklore is not only a cultural artifact but also an effective pedagogical tool capable of transforming ELT classrooms into culturally inclusive and linguistically enriching spaces.

The integration of folklore into ELT represents a significant shift toward culturally grounded language education. Folklore enables learners to experience language as a living cultural practice rather than merely a

formal academic subject. By bridging language learning and cultural identity, folklore-based pedagogy fosters linguistic competence, cultural confidence, and intercultural understanding. Therefore, the study highlights the importance of incorporating indigenous cultural resources into English language teaching to create more meaningful, inclusive, and context-sensitive educational practices in contemporary multilingual societies.

### **Objectives**

- To examine the role of folklore as an effective pedagogical resource in enhancing English language learning skills in ELT classrooms.
- To analyze how the integration of folklore in ELT contributes to the preservation and promotion of learners' cultural identity and indigenous knowledge.
- To explore the relationship between folklore-based teaching practices, learner engagement, and intercultural competence in English language education.

## **II. Literature Review**

The relationship between language and culture has remained a central concern in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Contemporary language pedagogy increasingly recognizes that language learning is not limited to grammatical competence but also involves cultural understanding, identity formation, and social interaction. Scholars in ELT and cultural studies have therefore emphasized the importance of culturally responsive teaching practices that connect learners' linguistic experiences with their cultural backgrounds. Within this context, folklore has emerged as an important pedagogical resource capable of enriching language learning while preserving cultural identity.

Walter J. Ong's work on orality and literacy provides a significant theoretical foundation for understanding the educational value of folklore. In *Orality and Literacy* (1982), Ong argues that oral traditions play a crucial role in shaping human thought, memory, and cultural transmission. According to Ong, oral narratives preserve communal knowledge and social values through storytelling, repetition, rhythm, and performance. These features make folklore particularly effective in language teaching because oral narratives naturally support listening comprehension, pronunciation, memory retention, and communicative interaction. Ong further explains that oral traditions create participatory learning experiences, which are essential for meaningful language acquisition. His theory highlights the relevance of storytelling and oral expression in developing linguistic competence within culturally grounded contexts.

Paulo Freire's concept of culturally responsive and dialogic pedagogy also contributes significantly to folklore-based language teaching. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire criticizes traditional "banking" models of education in which learners passively receive information. Instead, he advocates a learner-centered approach that values students' cultural experiences and encourages dialogue, critical thinking, and participation. Folklore aligns with Freire's educational philosophy because it incorporates local narratives, indigenous knowledge, and community experiences into classroom learning. By using folk stories, songs, proverbs, and oral traditions, teachers can create culturally meaningful learning environments that empower learners and encourage active engagement with language.

Researchers in ELT have also emphasized the pedagogical advantages of using folklore in language classrooms. Collie and Slater argue that literary and cultural texts increase learner motivation because they provide authentic language use and meaningful contexts for communication (3). Folktales and oral narratives expose learners to natural language patterns, figurative expressions, and culturally embedded meanings, thereby enhancing vocabulary acquisition and interpretive skills. Similarly, Kramsch highlights that language and culture are inseparable, and effective language teaching must integrate cultural understanding alongside linguistic competence (8). From this perspective, folklore serves as a bridge between language learning and cultural awareness.

Studies on storytelling in education further support the use of folklore in ELT. Scholars such as Brian Sturm observe that storytelling promotes imagination, creativity, and emotional engagement among learners. Storytelling activities encourage learners to participate actively in speaking and listening exercises, improving fluency and confidence in communication. In addition, folk songs, riddles, and proverbs contribute to pronunciation practice, memory development, and critical thinking. Because folklore often employs repetitive structures and symbolic language, it becomes accessible and engaging for learners at different levels of language proficiency.

The integration of folklore in ELT is also associated with postcolonial and decolonial approaches to education. Postcolonial theorists argue that English language education has historically privileged Western cultural content while marginalizing indigenous voices and local knowledge systems. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o stresses the importance of preserving native cultural traditions and resisting linguistic imperialism through culturally rooted educational practices. Incorporating folklore into ELT classrooms challenges cultural

homogenization and validates local identities within academic discourse. Such practices enable learners to engage with English without abandoning their cultural heritage.

Existing literature therefore demonstrates that folklore functions as both a linguistic and cultural resource in language education. Scholars agree that folklore-based pedagogy enhances communicative competence, learner participation, cultural awareness, and identity formation. However, there remains a need for further research exploring how folklore can be systematically integrated into ELT classrooms to create inclusive, context-sensitive, and culturally sustainable educational models. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining the role of folklore in bridging English language learning and cultural identity.

### **III. Methodology**

The present study adopts a qualitative and analytical research methodology to examine the role of folklore as a pedagogical resource in English Language Teaching (ELT). The research is primarily library-based and relies on secondary sources such as scholarly books, journal articles, research papers, and theoretical texts related to folklore, language pedagogy, cultural identity, and ELT practices. Relevant concepts from Walter J. Ong's theory of orality and literacy and Paulo Freire's culturally responsive pedagogy are used as the theoretical framework for analysis.

The study critically analyses different forms of folklore, including folktales, proverbs, riddles, folk songs, and oral narratives, to evaluate their pedagogical significance in language learning. It also examines how folklore-based activities such as storytelling, dramatization, and oral interaction contribute to the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Through textual and conceptual analysis, the research explores the relationship between folklore, language acquisition, learner engagement, and cultural identity within ELT classrooms.

### **IV. Discussion**

The findings of this study demonstrate that folklore-based pedagogy offers significant pedagogical advantages in English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly in culturally diverse and multilingual contexts. By integrating folktales, oral narratives, proverbs, songs, and myths into classroom practices, teachers can create an interactive and culturally responsive learning environment that strengthens both linguistic competence and cultural consciousness. The discussion reveals that folklore is not merely supplementary classroom material; rather, it functions as a dynamic pedagogical tool capable of transforming the conventional ELT classroom into a space of dialogue, participation, and identity formation.

One of the central observations emerging from this study is that folklore enhances learner engagement and motivation. Traditional ELT methods often rely heavily on textbook-based instruction and decontextualized language exercises that may alienate learners from their lived realities. In contrast, folklore introduces familiar cultural references that resonate emotionally and intellectually with students. When learners encounter stories, proverbs, or songs rooted in their own cultural backgrounds, they experience a sense of recognition and belonging. This emotional connection increases participation and reduces anxiety associated with language learning. Students become more willing to speak, interpret, and discuss narratives because the content is already culturally meaningful to them. Such engagement supports communicative language teaching approaches that prioritize interaction and authentic language use.

The study further indicates that folklore-based pedagogy contributes substantially to the development of all four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Oral storytelling activities, for instance, strengthen listening comprehension and pronunciation skills while simultaneously exposing learners to narrative structures and vocabulary in context. Retelling stories in English encourages fluency, confidence, and grammatical experimentation. Similarly, reading translated or bilingual folk narratives enables students to connect familiar themes with new linguistic forms, thereby facilitating vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. Writing activities based on folklore—such as rewriting endings, composing reflections, or comparing regional variants of stories—encourage creativity and critical thinking. Thus, folklore creates a holistic language-learning environment in which linguistic skills are acquired through meaningful cultural interaction rather than mechanical memorization.

The discussion also highlights the importance of folklore in promoting culturally responsive pedagogy. Paulo Freire argues that education should emerge from learners' social and cultural realities rather than impose external knowledge structures upon them. In many postcolonial ELT contexts, English has historically functioned as a language associated with colonial power, elite education, and cultural displacement. Consequently, students may perceive English learning as disconnected from their local identities and traditions. The incorporation of folklore challenges this perception by demonstrating that English can serve as a medium for expressing indigenous experiences and cultural narratives. Instead of positioning local cultures as inferior to Western norms, folklore-based pedagogy validates students' cultural knowledge within academic discourse.

This approach democratizes classroom participation and enables learners to negotiate their identities more confidently in English.

Walter J. Ong's theories of orality and literacy are particularly relevant in understanding the pedagogical value of folklore. Ong emphasizes that oral traditions foster communal participation, memory, repetition, and performative expression. These characteristics align closely with interactive language-learning methodologies. Oral storytelling sessions encourage collaborative learning as students listen, respond, imitate, and reinterpret narratives collectively. Unlike purely written texts, oral narratives often involve gestures, rhythm, repetition, and audience interaction, all of which support language acquisition in multisensory ways. In this context, folklore becomes an effective bridge between oral cultural practices and formal literacy development. Learners move gradually from oral engagement with stories to reading, analyzing, and writing about them in English, thereby integrating traditional knowledge systems into modern educational frameworks.

Another important finding concerns the role of folklore in preserving cultural heritage and fostering identity formation. Globalization and the increasing dominance of English-language media have contributed to the marginalization of many indigenous languages and oral traditions. Younger generations are often more familiar with global popular culture than with their own regional folklore. Incorporating folklore into ELT classrooms helps counter this cultural erosion by reintroducing students to local histories, moral values, and collective memories. Through discussions of folk narratives, learners develop a deeper awareness of their cultural roots and social traditions. This process contributes to identity formation by allowing students to see their communities represented within educational spaces. Language learning thus becomes not only a linguistic exercise but also a means of cultural continuity and self-recognition.

The use of Indian folklore in ELT classrooms offers several practical examples of these pedagogical possibilities. Stories from the Panchatantra, for example, can be employed to teach narrative sequencing, moral interpretation, and vocabulary development. Because these stories are already familiar to many learners, students can focus more confidently on language expression and interpretation. Similarly, Akbar-Birbal tales encourage critical thinking and conversational practice through humor and problem-solving. Regional folk traditions such as Odia folktales, Rajasthani ballads, or Bengali folk songs can also enrich classroom interaction by introducing diverse linguistic and cultural perspectives. Activities such as role-play, dramatization, group storytelling, and comparative analysis encourage collaborative learning and intercultural dialogue. Such practices demonstrate that folklore can function simultaneously as linguistic content, cultural resource, and creative pedagogical strategy.

The discussion also reveals that folklore-based pedagogy supports critical pedagogy and decolonizing approaches in ELT. Conventional English curricula in many institutions continue to privilege Western literary texts and cultural references while neglecting local traditions. This imbalance can reinforce cultural hierarchies in which indigenous knowledge systems are perceived as secondary or irrelevant. Folklore integration challenges such hierarchies by repositioning local narratives within academic discourse. Students learn that their own cultural traditions possess literary, philosophical, and pedagogical value comparable to canonical Western texts. In this sense, folklore-based ELT contributes to epistemic inclusivity and cultural empowerment. It encourages learners to critically examine the politics of language, representation, and cultural authority embedded within educational systems.

However, the study also acknowledges certain challenges associated with implementing folklore-based pedagogy. One major limitation involves the availability of pedagogically suitable materials. Many folk traditions exist primarily in oral form and may not be systematically documented or translated into accessible English-language resources. Teachers may therefore face difficulties in selecting authentic and age-appropriate materials for classroom use. Additionally, educators require adequate training to integrate folklore effectively into language instruction without reducing it to superficial entertainment. The success of folklore-based pedagogy depends largely on the teacher's ability to connect cultural narratives with clear linguistic objectives and interactive classroom activities.

Another challenge relates to the diversity of learners' cultural backgrounds. In multilingual classrooms, selecting folklore from one community may unintentionally marginalize others. Teachers must therefore adopt inclusive strategies that represent multiple traditions and encourage intercultural exchange among students. Comparative folklore activities, where learners share narratives from different regions and communities, may help address this issue while fostering mutual respect and cultural understanding.

Overall, the discussion confirms that folklore possesses immense pedagogical potential within ELT contexts. Its integration into language teaching enriches classroom interaction, strengthens linguistic competence, promotes cultural awareness, and supports identity formation. By connecting language learning with local cultural experiences, folklore-based pedagogy offers a more inclusive and context-sensitive alternative to conventional ELT practices. It enables learners to engage with English not as a foreign imposition but as a flexible medium through which indigenous voices and cultural memories can be expressed and preserved. Consequently, the incorporation of folklore into ELT classrooms contributes to the development of a

holistic educational model that values linguistic proficiency alongside cultural sustainability, critical consciousness, and social inclusion.

Folklore has emerged as an important pedagogical resource in English Language Teaching (ELT) because it creates a meaningful connection between language learning and cultural experience. In multilingual societies such as India, where oral traditions continue to shape collective memory and social identity, folklore provides culturally familiar content that enhances learner engagement and communicative competence. The integration of folklore into ELT classrooms enables learners to interact with English through narratives, symbols, values, and linguistic expressions rooted in their own cultural contexts. Such an approach moves beyond conventional grammar-centered teaching methods and promotes language learning as a socially and culturally situated practice.

Walter J. Ong emphasizes that oral traditions preserve cultural knowledge through repetition, storytelling, rhythm, and performance, making them highly effective for communication and memory development (Ong 34). Indian folklore, rich in folktales, myths, riddles, songs, and proverbs, naturally supports oral interaction and collaborative learning. Storytelling activities based on Indian folktales can significantly improve listening and speaking skills because learners actively participate in narration, interpretation, and discussion. For example, stories from the Panchatantra provide moral lessons through simple narrative structures and memorable animal characters.

Folklore-based activities in ELT classrooms effectively connect language learning with cultural identity through familiar narratives and oral traditions. For instance, teachers can use stories from the Panchatantra to teach sequencing, moral interpretation, and vocabulary development through storytelling and role-play activities. Akbar-Birbal tales encourage speaking and critical thinking through dialogue-based classroom discussions. Similarly, regional folk songs and proverbs from Odisha, Bengal, or Rajasthan can improve pronunciation, listening comprehension, and contextual understanding of language. Students may also compare local folktales with English fairy tales, promoting intercultural awareness and analytical skills. Such examples demonstrate how folklore transforms ELT into a culturally meaningful and participatory learning experience.

The use of Tenali Raman stories to develop conversational English, humor, and inferential comprehension skills through dramatization and dialogue writing. Tribal folktales from Santhal or Gond communities can be incorporated into reading and translation activities that encourage vocabulary enrichment and cultural discussion. Folk riddles and proverbs may be used to teach figurative language, sentence structure, and critical interpretation. Teachers can also employ traditional lullabies and folk songs to improve pronunciation, rhythm, and listening skills. Story-circle activities, where students narrate family or regional oral traditions in English, further strengthen fluency, confidence, and cultural identity while fostering collaborative learning in multilingual classrooms.

Folklore helps language learning by presenting language in meaningful cultural and social contexts rather than through isolated grammar exercises. For example, the Indian folktale *The Monkey and the Crocodile* from the Panchatantra can be used to teach sequencing words such as “first,” “then,” and “finally,” while students improve speaking skills through storytelling and role-play. Because the story is familiar, learners focus more confidently on language expression and comprehension.

Similarly, Akbar-Birbal stories help students develop conversational English and critical thinking. In classroom activities, students may reenact dialogues between Akbar and Birbal, which improves pronunciation, fluency, and interactive communication. These humorous stories also encourage participation and reduce fear of speaking English.

Folk songs such as the Assamese Bihu songs or Rajasthani folk ballads can improve listening skills, pronunciation, rhythm, and vocabulary acquisition. Students learn new words more effectively because music and repetition aid memory retention. Proverbs such as “Unity is strength” or regional sayings translated into English help learners understand figurative language, sentence structure, and cultural wisdom. Comparing Indian proverbs with English equivalents also promotes intercultural understanding. Another effective example is the use of tribal folktales from Santhal or Gond communities in reading comprehension activities. Students read the stories in English and discuss themes such as nature, community, and morality. This process develops reading, interpretation, and writing skills while simultaneously preserving indigenous cultural knowledge. Thus, folklore creates a learner-centered environment where language acquisition becomes interactive, culturally relevant, and emotionally engaging.

## **V. Conclusion**

The present study highlights the significant role of folklore as an effective pedagogical resource in English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly in culturally diverse and multilingual learning environments. By integrating folktales, myths, proverbs, folk songs, riddles, and oral narratives into classroom practices, ELT can move beyond conventional grammar-oriented methods toward a more interactive, culturally responsive, and

learner-centered approach. Folklore enables students to engage with language as a living form of cultural expression, thereby strengthening both communicative competence and cultural awareness.

The discussion demonstrates that folklore-based pedagogy contributes meaningfully to the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills through activities such as storytelling, dramatization, retelling, dialogue practice, and comparative interpretation. Familiar cultural narratives reduce learners' anxiety and encourage active participation, creativity, and critical thinking. At the same time, folklore strengthens learners' connection with their cultural heritage and validates indigenous knowledge systems within academic spaces. This is especially important in postcolonial contexts where English is often perceived as detached from local identities and traditions.

The study also establishes that folklore supports culturally responsive and decolonizing approaches to ELT by bridging the gap between global English and local cultures. Theoretical insights from Walter J. Ong and Paulo Freire further reinforce the importance of oral traditions, participatory learning, and context-sensitive pedagogy in language education. Through folklore, learners are not only acquiring linguistic skills but are also developing cultural confidence, social awareness, and identity formation.

Although challenges such as lack of resources and teacher training remain, the pedagogical potential of folklore in ELT is undeniable. Therefore, educators and curriculum designers should encourage the systematic inclusion of folklore-based materials and activities in language classrooms. Such an approach can contribute to a more inclusive, holistic, and culturally grounded model of English language education that promotes both linguistic proficiency and cultural preservation.

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