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Enhancing Language Awareness through Folk Tale-Based Instruction: An Experimental Study in Language Education

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Language awareness is a key component of foreign language learning; however, it is often developed through grammar instruction presented without meaningful context, which limits learners' ability to use language effectivelyUsing a quasi-experimental pretest–post-test control group design, 45 undergraduate students from two Indonesian universities were assigned to an experimental group receiving folk tale-based instruction and a control group receiving conventional grammar instruction over twelve 90-minute sessions. Quantitative data were collected using a standardized Language Awareness Instrument (LAI), written production tasks, and self-reflection measures, and analyzed using ANCOVA and related inferential statistics. Qualitative data from interviews and classroom observations were examined through thematic analysis.The results indicate that the experimental group achieved significantly greater gains in language awareness compared to the control group ($F(1,85) = 112.34$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .57$). Learners exposed to folktale-based instruction demonstrated improved language use, reduced errors in writing, and enhanced awareness of language learning processes. These findings suggest that culturally grounded narrative-based instruction provides an effective and pedagogically meaningful approach to language teaching in EFL contexts.

INTRODUCTION

The role of morphological awareness in literacy development has received increasing attention from researchers and educators over the past three decades. Morphological awareness, defined as the conscious awareness of and ability to manipulate morphemes the smallest meaningful units of language represents a crucial metalinguistic skill that bridges phonological, orthographic, and semantic processing in reading and writing development. Theoretical foundations for understanding language processing skills in learning contexts trace back to (Chomsky & Halle, 1968) seminal work *The Sound Pattern of English*, which formalized the relationship between phonology and morphology within generative grammar. Their framework established that the relationship between spelling and pronunciation in English supports learners' understanding of language patterns, providing important cues for word recognition and meaning construction, thereby positioning language awareness as fundamental to language learning.

Building upon this theoretical foundation, (Ehri, 2014) theory of orthographic mapping explains how learners develop connections between spelling, pronunciation, and meaning, which are essential for reading development. This perspective is further supported by (Perfetti, 2017) Lexical Quality Hypothesis, which emphasizes that well-integrated knowledge of word forms and meanings contributes to more effective reading comprehension. Recent meta-analytic evidence has strengthened this position, with (Liu et al., 2024) reporting a significant correlation (r = 0.565) between language

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awareness and reading comprehension across 44 studies. Research has further identified morphological awareness as an important predictor of spelling, reading fluency, and overall reading comprehension across diverse learner populations and instructional contexts. The developmental trajectory of morphological awareness follows a predictable pattern, with kindergarten and first-grade learners showing the ability to recognize simple word formation patterns that do not involve changes in pronunciation, while older learners gradually develop the ability to understand more complex word formation patterns by around the fourth grade.

Recent theoretical advances have further refined our understanding of morphological knowledge. The Morphological Pathways Framework (Levesque et al., 2021) delineates three distinct dimensions that support literacy skills: morphological decoding, morphological awareness, and morphological analysis. These dimensions appear to support different reading outcomes in distinct ways, with morphological knowledge helping children bind together semantic, phonological and orthographic information to build more detailed word representations in memory (Bowers et al., 2017). This enhanced representation facilitates more fluent and accurate reading and spelling, which may release resources for higher order language processing and thereby support reading comprehension. Recent longitudinal research has shown that preschool morphological awareness, assessed prior to formal literacy instruction, makes unique contributions to reading development beyond other oral language and cognitive predictors, underscoring the foundational role of morphological awareness as an oral language skill.

Contemporary research has demonstrated that morphological awareness is moderately related to multiple literacy skills, including phonological awareness (r = .41), orthographic awareness (r = .39), vocabulary (r = .50), word reading (r = .49), spelling (r = .48), text reading fluency (r = .53), and reading comprehension (r = .54) (Lee et al., 2023). Importantly, these relationships vary depending on the orthographic depth of the language, the type of language awareness (receptive vs. productive), different types of word formation patterns, and learners' L1/L2 status, suggesting that language awareness operates differently across diverse linguistic and educational contexts.

The efficacy of morphological awareness instruction has been well-documented through recent meta-analytic research. A 2024 meta-analysis examining 28 studies with 177 effect sizes found that morphology instruction produces small to moderate effects on reading and spelling outcomes, with larger effects observed for trained words compared to untrained words. There was evidence of transfer to untrained words for spelling outcomes, though not consistently for reading outcomes. Earlier comprehensive reviews by (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013) and (Kirby & Bowers, 2010) established that morphological instruction yields positive outcomes across multiple literacy domains. More recent research has specifically examined morphological awareness interventions for students who struggle with reading and writing, including students with disabilities, with effect sizes for standardized measures ranging from 0.0 to 0.97 (Brady & Mason, 2024). However, comprehensive and systematic reporting of morphological awareness interventions remains limited in the literature, creating a research-to-practice gap that constrains the implementation of evidence-based practices in authentic educational settings. Despite strong empirical support for morphological awareness instruction, current approaches often rely on grammar-focused activities presented without meaningful context, emphasizing isolated word manipulation and

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structural analysis. This instructional orientation contrasts with sociocultural perspectives on language learning, which highlight the importance of meaningful and context-rich language use in authentic communicative situations. From this perspective, Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) suggests that optimal learning occurs when learners receive appropriate support for skills that are still developing through guided interaction and collaboration. In educational practice, this involves teachers providing structured scaffolding to support learners' linguistic, conceptual, and academic development. Contemporary interpretations of ZPD further emphasize that learning develops through interactive engagement with others and is supported by personalized learning pathways, timely and targeted feedback, and opportunities for self-regulated learning. These principles underscore the importance of integrating language features within culturally meaningful learning activities that actively engage learners' cognitive and affective resources.

Folk tales offer a particularly promising medium for contextualized morphological instruction. Research on narrative pedagogy has established that folk tales possess distinctive structural and linguistic features that facilitate language acquisition. Storytelling has consistently shown to be a potent tool in facilitating language development, reducing acquisition challenges while fostering social and moral development. Recent reviews emphasize that digital and traditional storytelling help students learn all aspects of communication in relevant and meaningful settings (Murad et al., 2023). Traditional tales are particularly useful because teachers and parents can establish links between children's cultural heritage and school curricula, crafting narratives that reflect academic topics while remaining rich in local values, knowledge and customs (Pandith, 2024).

The linguistic characteristics of folk tales include concrete vocabulary, repetitive patterns, and formulaic structures that create predictable contexts for noticing morphological patterns. African folktales exemplify this through their creative narration, integration of multiple literary genres including prose, poetry and songs, and interactive call-and-response engagement that requires audience attention and participation (Wiysahnyuy & Valentine, 2023). Tales employ short and simple sentences following linear plots with cause-effect organization of events, and their thematic appeal fosters identification and positive affective responses that enhance language learning experiences.

Despite the extensive research on morphological awareness instruction and the recognized pedagogical value of folktales in language education, a critical gap remains in the empirical integration of these two domains. While meta-analytic evidence (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013) has established the effectiveness of morphological instruction in supporting literacy development, and narrative-based approaches have been shown to enhance vocabulary acquisition and cultural understanding (Nikolajeva, 2012), few experimental studies have systematically examined folktale-based instruction as a means of developing learners' language awareness at the word level. Furthermore, the theoretical tension between context-limited and context-rich instructional approaches remains insufficiently addressed. Existing instructional practices often rely on grammar-focused activities presented without meaningful context such as word manipulation exercises, affix identification tasks, and structural analysis—which are typically removed from authentic language use (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013). This gap highlights the need for more integrative instructional approaches that connect language

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form with meaningful use in educational settings. This pedagogical orientation conflicts with usage-based theories of language learning (Tomasello, 2003), which posit that linguistic knowledge emerges most effectively through meaningful language use in authentic situations, and with sociocultural frameworks (Vygotsky, 1978) that emphasize culturally mediated learning. While theoretical rationales suggest that embedding morphological instruction within narrative contexts could enhance learning by providing meaningful semantic scaffolding and reducing cognitive load (Zwaan, 2016), no empirical evidence has tested this hypothesis experimentally. No studies have directly compared folk tale-based morphological instruction with conventional approaches using experimental designs that can establish causal relationships. Consequently, we lack empirical data on whether, how much, and under what conditions narrative-based approaches outperform traditional methods. This evidence gap is critical given the resource investment required for curriculum development and teacher training, and it limits educators' ability to make evidence-informed decisions about instructional approaches.

Systematic reviews consistently report that studies on morphological awareness often provide limited detail regarding instructional procedures, learning contexts, and implementation processes (Kirby & Bowers, 2010). This lack of clarity is even more evident in innovative approaches, where clear instructional frameworks, detailed teaching procedures, and adaptable classroom guidelines for integrating word-level language awareness with folktale-based instruction are still lacking. As a result, research findings are difficult to translate into sustainable and practical classroom applications.

Furthermore, most research on morphological awareness has been conducted with L1 English speakers in Western educational contexts, leaving important questions about how culturally responsive teaching approaches such as the use of indigenous folktales can support learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds. In particular, it remains unclear how such approaches can help learners connect differences between their first and second languages while also enhancing motivation and engagement. Given that folktales function as culturally familiar and widely accepted learning resources among teachers and parents (Dujmović, 2006), and have the potential to bridge cultural differences in multilingual classrooms, their role in developing learners' language awareness at the word level in EFL contexts remains underexplored.

This study addresses this gap by experimentally examining the effectiveness of folktale-based instruction in enhancing learners' language awareness. By systematically comparing narrative-based and conventional instructional approaches through a rigorous experimental design, and by providing clearly described instructional procedures, this study aims to generate evidence that is relevant for both theory and classroom practice. Specifically, the study seeks to determine whether folktales can serve as effective tools for language learning, identify the conditions under which such instruction is most beneficial, and offer practical guidelines that can support teachers in implementing effective language instruction in diverse educational settings.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quasi-experimental pretest–post-test control group design to investigate the effectiveness of folktale-based instruction in developing learners' language awareness. Two intact class sections were assigned to experimental (n = 45)

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and control (n = 43) conditions. Both groups received twelve 90-minute sessions over six weeks, taught by the same instructor to control for instructional effects. The experimental group received folktale-based instruction, while the control group received traditional grammar instruction covering identical content. This study involved 46 fifth-semester undergraduate students enrolled at Manado State University and Sariputra Indonesia University. Participants were selected from both institutions to ensure diverse representation in the study. The participants were selected from both institutions to ensure diverse representation in the study.

Data were screened for normality, outliers, and potential violations of statistical assumptions prior to analysis. Primary analyses included an Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to compare post-test scores on the Language Awareness Instrument (LAI) between groups while controlling for pre-test scores, with effect sizes calculated using partial eta-squared (η^2). Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare error rates in written production tasks, with Cohen's d used to estimate effect sizes. Chi-square tests were performed to examine group differences in self-correction performance, with odds ratios used to quantify the magnitude of effects. In addition, repeated measures ANOVA was employed to investigate differential gains across key dimensions of language awareness. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using an interactive model of data analysis following (Miles et al., 2014) involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. To enhance reliability, two researchers independently coded 30% of the transcripts, achieving substantial agreement ($\kappa = 0.82$). Field notes and exit tickets were analyzed using content analysis to identify patterns of learner engagement, common misconceptions, and indicators of learning progression. Finally, quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated through triangulation to strengthen the overall validity and interpretability of the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The initial assessment indicated that participants demonstrated limited language awareness at the word level in their native language. Before the intervention, testing using a standardized Language Awareness Instrument (LAI) showed that only 34.2% of participants were able to accurately identify sound changes occurring at word boundaries in Japanese folktale excerpts. As presented in Table 1, the mean LAI score for the experimental group (n = 45) was 12.8 (SD = 3.4) out of a possible 30 points, while the control group (n = 43) obtained a comparable mean score of 12.3 (SD = 3.6). An independent samples t-test confirmed that this difference was not statistically significant (t = 0.68, p = 0.498), indicating similar baseline proficiency across groups.

A closer examination of the LAI components further supports this finding. Across all components—nasal substitution, vowel deletion, consonant assimilation, and metalinguistic explanation both groups showed similarly low mean scores, with no statistically significant differences ($p > 0.05$). For example, scores for nasal substitution were 2.8 (SD = 1.2) in the experimental group and 2.6 (SD = 1.3) in the control group (t = 0.74, p = 0.462), while vowel deletion scores were 3.1 (SD = 1.4) and 3.0 (SD = 1.5), respectively (t = 0.33, p = 0.741). Similar patterns were observed for consonant assimilation and metalinguistic explanation, indicating that participants in both groups

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had not yet developed a strong understanding of word-level language patterns prior to the intervention.

Qualitative analysis of interviews conducted before the intervention revealed three primary misconceptions among participants: (a) 67% believed that sound changes in words were arbitrary rather than rule-based, (b) 78% were unable to explain the relationship between word structure and pronunciation, and (c) 89% showed limited awareness of predictable patterns in sound changes when affixes are added to base words.

More detailed analysis of individual components, particularly nasal substitution, showed that participants in both groups struggled to recognize how nasal sounds change depending on the following consonant in connected speech. For instance, many participants failed to identify patterns such as the shift of /n/ to [m] before bilabial sounds (e.g., /p/, /b/) or to [ŋ] before velar sounds (e.g., /k/, /g/). These difficulties are consistent with the relatively low scores observed in this component and further indicate that learners had limited prior exposure to systematic patterns of language use at the word level.

Table 1. Comparison of Language Awareness Instrument (LAI) Scores

Assessment Component	Max Score	Experimental Group M (SD)	Control Group M (SD)	t-value	p-value
Overall LAI Score	30	12.8 (3.4)	12.3 (3.6)	0.68	0.498
Nasal Substitution	10	2.8 (1.2)	2.6 (1.3)	0.74	0.462
Vowel Deletion	10	3.1 (1.4)	3.0 (1.5)	0.33	0.741
Consonant Assimilation	10	3.6 (1.3)	3.5 (1.4)	0.35	0.729
Metalinguistic Explanation	10	3.3 (1.6)	3.2 (1.5)	0.30	0.765

*Note: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. Independent samples t-test was applied; p > .05 indicates no statistically significant difference.

The intervention consisted of twelve 90-minute sessions over six weeks, utilizing carefully selected Indonesian folktales containing rich word-level language features. These folktales were selected based on their authentic language use and strong cultural relevance. The instructional approach was based on a four-stage cyclical model integrating narrative engagement, language exploration, explicit instruction, and meaningful application. Each session followed this structured sequence to support effective learning.

Stage 1: Narrative Immersion and Contextualization (20 minutes)

Sessions began with expressive storytelling that engaged participants both emotionally and cognitively with the folktale content. The instructor used varied instructional techniques, including voice modulation, gestures, and visual support, to enhance comprehension and maintain learners' attention. Participants were encouraged to relate the stories to their own experiences and cultural background, activating their prior knowledge to support subsequent language learning activities.

Stage 2: Guided Discovery and Pattern Recognition (30 minutes)

Following narrative exposure, participants engaged in structured discovery activities designed to draw attention to language patterns embedded in the text. The instructor presented selected excerpts containing target language features and facilitated collaborative analysis through guided questioning that encouraged inductive

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thinking. Participants worked in small groups to identify recurring patterns, develop initial explanations, and test their understanding using additional examples from the text.

This stage employed scaffolding techniques including think-aloud modeling, graphic organizers for documenting language patterns, and differentiated support based on learner needs. The instructor strategically withheld explicit rule explanations, instead guiding learners toward independent discovery through carefully sequenced questions and progressively complex examples

Stage 3: Explicit Language Awareness Instruction (25 minutes)
After participants had the opportunity to discover patterns inductively, the instructor provided explicit instruction to consolidate understanding and introduce relevant terminology. This stage involved:

a. Formal explanation of language patterns using clear instructional examples
b. Introduction of key concepts (e.g., morphemes, sounds, and word variations)
c. Comparison between learners' initial ideas and established explanations of language use
d. Explanation of why certain sound patterns occur in language use (e.g., ease of pronunciation, word structure)
e. Linking specific patterns to broader principles of language learning.

The explicit instruction was carefully designed to build upon learners' emerging understanding, validating their discoveries while refining and extending their knowledge.

Stage 4: Meaningful Application and Creative Production (15 minutes)
Each session concluded with activities requiring participants to apply their understanding of language patterns in meaningful contexts. These included:

a. Analyzing language patterns in related folktales
b. Creating original sentences or short narratives demonstrating target language features
c. Identifying and explaining language patterns in contemporary Indonesian texts
d. Peer teaching activities in which participants explained language patterns to their classmates

Table 2. Detailed Pedagogical Activities by Session

Session	Target Language Pattern Focus	Key Pedagogical Activities
1–2	Nasal substitution (meN- prefix)	Pattern sorting, minimal pair analysis, morpheme segmentation games
3–4	Vowel changes in affixation patterns (prefix–suffix combinations)	Structural mapping, rule formulation worksheets, prediction tasks
5–6	Consonant assimilation	Feature analysis activities, phonetic transcription, contrastive exercises
7–8	Multiple simultaneous processes	Complex problem-solving, error correction, rule integration
9–10	Word form variations	Distributional analysis, hypothesis testing, corpus investigation
11–12	Comprehensive review and application	Creative writing, peer analysis, metalinguistic reflection

The pedagogical approach incorporated multiple forms of differentiation to accommodate diverse learning needs, styles, and proficiency levels:

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a. Content Differentiation

Folk tales were selected to represent a range of linguistic complexity, from relatively transparent language patterns in early sessions to more complex and abstract relationships in later sessions.

b. Process Differentiation

Instructional activities were designed with flexible grouping arrangements and varied task structures. Higher-proficiency learners engaged in more independent analysis and were challenged to articulate underlying principles, while learners requiring additional support received more structured guidance through graphic organizers, worked examples, and collaborative learning opportunities with strategic peer pairing.

c. Product Differentiation

Assessment tasks and production activities offered choice and flexibility in how learners demonstrated understanding. Options included written explanations, oral presentations, visual diagrams, creative applications, or teaching demonstrations, allowing learners to leverage their strengths while developing new competencies.

Table 3. Differentiation Strategies and Implementation

Differentiation Type	Strategy	Implementation	Learner Response
By Readiness	Tiered activities	3 levels of pattern complexity within each session	89% reported appropriate challenge level
By Learning Style	Multiple modalities	Visual, auditory, interactive, and reading/writing tasks	92% engaged with preferred modality
By Interest	Folk tale selection	Student choice of tales for final project	100% completion rate
By Support Needs	Flexible grouping	Homogeneous for targeted instruction, heterogeneous for peer learning	87% positive peer interaction

The pedagogical approach employed continuous formative assessment to inform instructional decisions and provide responsive feedback. Assessment strategies included:

a. Ongoing Monitoring

During discovery activities, the instructor circulated among groups, documenting learner thinking through observational notes and audio recordings. Misconceptions and emergent understandings identified through this monitoring informed immediate instructional adjustments and targeted mini-lessons.

b. Exit Tickets

Each session concluded with brief written reflections requiring learners to articulate one key insight and one remaining question. Analysis of these reflections guided the pacing and emphasis of subsequent sessions.

c. Progressive Check-ins

At two-week intervals, participants completed brief diagnostic assessments targeting cumulative language awareness. Performance patterns revealed by these assessments enabled early identification of learners requiring additional support and informed decisions about when to advance to more complex material.

Table 4. Formative Assessment Tools and Response Rates

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Assessment Tool	Frequency	Purpose	Completion Rate	Instructional Response Rate
Observational notes	Every session	Monitor real-time understanding	N/A	78% led to in-session adjustments
Exit tickets	Every session	Gauge comprehension and questions	96.4%	100% informed next session planning
Guided verbal reflection activities	Sessions 2, 5, 8, 11	Assess metacognitive processes	93.3%	65% prompted individual conferences
Progressive diagnostics	Weeks 2, 4, 6	Track cumulative learning	97.8%	100% informed differentiation decisions
Peer assessment	Sessions 6, 12	Develop evaluative skills	91.1%	45% identified learning gaps

The intervention employed a gradual release of responsibility model, systematically transitioning from high instructor support to learner autonomy:

"I do" (Modeling)
Sessions 1-2 featured extensive instructor modeling of analytical processes, with explicit guided verbal explanations demonstrating how to identify word boundaries, recognize sound patterns, and formulate explanatory hypotheses.
"We do" (Guided Practice)
Sessions 3-7 emphasized collaborative analysis with decreasing instructor scaffolding. The instructor posed progressively more open-ended questions, provided less explicit guidance, and encouraged learners to take increasing responsibility for directing analytical processes.
"You do together" (Collaborative Practice)
Sessions 8-10 featured primarily peer-led analysis with instructor functioning as facilitator rather than director. Learners worked in structured groups to analyze new folk tales, with instructor intervention limited to addressing significant misconceptions or impasses.
"You do alone" (Independent Application)
Sessions 11-12 required independent analysis and application, with learners demonstrating mastery through individual projects and metalinguistic explanations.

Table 5. Scaffolding Progression Across Sessions

Sessions	Instructor Role	Learner Role	Support Level	Cognitive Load
1–2	Primary demonstrator	Observing, following models	High (80% instructor-led)	Low–Medium
3–5	Collaborative facilitator	Active participation with guidance	Medium–High (60% instructor-led)	Medium
6–8	Strategic questioner	Leading analysis with support	Medium (40% instructor-led)	Medium–High
9–10	Resource consultant	Peer-collaborative leadership	Low–Medium (20% instructor-led)	High
11–12	Observer-assessor	Independent demonstration	Low (10% instructor-led)	High

Following the intervention, the experimental group demonstrated substantial improvement in language awareness. Post-test LAI scores of the experimental group increased to a mean of 24.6 (SD = 3.1), representing a gain of 11.8 points or a 92.2% improvement from the pre-test baseline. In contrast, the control group, which received

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traditional grammar instruction without folktale integration, showed more modest improvement, reaching a mean score of 15.4 (SD = 3.8), representing a gain of 3.1 points or 25.2% improvement.

Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), controlling for pre-test LAI scores, revealed a statistically significant difference between groups ($F(1,85) = 112.34$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.57$), indicating a large effect size. These findings suggest that the folktale-based instructional approach was substantially more effective than traditional instruction in enhancing learners' language awareness.

Table 6. Pre-test and Post-test LAI Scores by Group

Group	Pre-test M (SD)	Post-test M (SD)	Mean Gain	% Improvement	Cohen's d
Experimental (n=45)	12.8 (3.4)	24.6 (3.1)	11.8***	92.2%	3.61
Control (n=43)	12.3 (3.6)	15.4 (3.8)	3.1**	25.2%	0.85

Note: Maximum score = 30 points. **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

Table 7. ANCOVA Results for Post-test LAI Scores

Source	SS	DF	MS	F	P	H^2
Pre-test score (covariate)	156.34	1	156.34	28.45	< 0.001	0.25
Group	617.28	1	617.28	112.34	< 0.001	0.57
Error	467.12	85	5.50	-	-	-
Total	1240.74	87	-	-	-	-

Note: Adjusted $R^2 = 0.63$

Analysis of written production tasks revealed that experimental group participants applied their understanding of language patterns at the word level more accurately in authentic writing contexts. Error analysis of 500-word narrative compositions showed that the experimental group produced significantly fewer language pattern errors (M = 3.2, SD = 1.4) compared to the control group (M = 7.8, SD = 2.3), $t(86) = 10.87$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 2.32$. Furthermore, experimental group participants demonstrated an enhanced ability to self-correct language-related errors during revision tasks, with an 84% successful self-correction rate compared to 43% in the control group. These findings suggest that the folktale-based approach not only developed explicit knowledge but also fostered internalized language awareness applicable to written production.

Table 8. Language Pattern Errors in Written Production Tasks

Error Type	Experimental Group M (SD)	Control Group M (SD)	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Nasal substitution errors	0.8 (0.6)	2.4 (1.1)	8.23	< 0.001	1.76
Vowel deletion errors	0.9 (0.7)	2.1 (0.9)	7.12	< 0.001	1.52
Consonant assimilation errors	1.0 (0.8)	2.3 (1.0)	6.67	< 0.001	1.42
Other language pattern errors	0.5 (0.4)	1.0 (0.7)	4.23	< 0.001	0.90
Total errors per 500 words	3.2 (1.4)	7.8 (2.3)	10.87	< 0.001	2.32

Post-intervention interviews revealed qualitative differences in metalinguistic reasoning between groups. Participants in the experimental group consistently used

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more appropriate language-related terminology and demonstrated a deeper understanding of language patterns at the word level. Thematic analysis identified four key themes in their responses: (a) recognition of the patterned nature of language structure; (b) awareness of the relationship between form and meaning; (c) understanding that language variation follows predictable patterns rather than occurring randomly; and (d) increased curiosity about how language works, including word origins. Representative comments from experimental group participants included statements such as: "I never realized that changes in words follow patterns now I can predict how words will change" and "Understanding why sounds change when we add prefixes makes me more confident in using new words correctly."

Table 9. Self-Correction Performance in Revision Tasks

Metric	Experimental Group	Control Group	χ^2	p-value
Errors identified correctly	89% (n=126/142)	58% (n=195/335)	45.67	< 0.001
Errors corrected successfully	84% (n=119/142)	43% (n=144/335)	67.89	< 0.001
Accurate revisions (no new errors)	91% (n=108/119)	67% (n=96/144)	23.45	< 0.001
Spontaneous detection (unprompted)	76% (n=108/142)	34% (n=114/335)	71.23	< 0.001

Table 10. Metalinguistic Awareness Interview Scores

Dimension	Max Score	Experimental Group M (SD)	Control Group M (SD)	t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Terminology usage	5	4.2 (0.7)	2.8 (0.9)	8.34	<0.001	1.78
Conceptual explanation	5	4.0 (0.8)	2.5 (1.0)	7.86	<0.001	1.68
Pattern recognition	5	4.3 (0.6)	2.6 (0.9)	10.45	<0.001	2.23
Rule articulation	5	3.8 (0.9)	2.3 (1.1)	7.12	<0.001	1.52
Confidence in application	5	4.1 (0.7)	2.9 (1.0)	6.67	<0.001	1.42
Total metalinguistic score	**25**	**20.4 (2.8)**	**13.1 (3.9)**	**10.23**	**<0.001**	**2.18**

Table 11. Thematic Analysis of Post-Intervention Interviews

Theme	Experimental Group (n=45)	Control Group (n=43)
Recognition of patterns in language structure	41 (91%)	18 (42%)
"Language follows predictable patterns"	38 (84%)	15 (35%)
"Changes are rule-governed, not random"	39 (87%)	16 (37%)
Form-meaning relationships	37 (82%)	14 (33%)
Understands morphology-phonology connection	35 (78%)	12 (28%)
Can explain why changes occur	33 (73%)	13 (30%)
Appreciation for linguistic variation	40 (89%)	19 (44%)
Recognizes dialectal/stylistic variation	36 (80%)	17 (40%)
Values linguistic diversity	38 (84%)	20 (47%)
Enhanced curiosity	39 (87%)	16 (37%)
Asks questions about language structure	37 (82%)	14 (33%)
Independently explores etymology	34 (76%)	11 (26%)

DISCUSSION

The findings provide strong empirical support for the integration of folktales as a pedagogical tool for developing language awareness at the word level and broader language skills. The substantial effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.57$) observed in this study suggests that contextually rich, culturally relevant narrative materials significantly enhance learners' ability to perceive, analyze, and internalize complex language patterns compared to grammar instruction presented without meaningful context. These results

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align with cognitive approaches to language learning that emphasize the importance of meaningful context. Usage based models of language learning (Tomasello, 2003) propose that language knowledge develops through exposure to authentic communicative input. Folktales, with their repetitive structures, formulaic expressions, and varied word patterns, provide the type of input frequency and contextual support that facilitates pattern recognition and rule formation.

The superior performance of the experimental group across multiple measures suggests that folktales serve several pedagogical functions simultaneously. First, they provide authentic examples of language patterns embedded in meaningful discourse, reducing cognitive load associated with processing abstract rules in isolation. Second, the narrative structure creates a mnemonic framework that enhances retention of language patterns. Third, the cultural familiarity and emotional engagement associated with folktales may increase attention and motivation, which are known to support learning (Krashen, 1982).

The strong performance of the folktale-based intervention can be attributed to several interconnected pedagogical mechanisms. The embedding of language patterns within coherent narratives reduces the cognitive demands typically associated with explicit language analysis. Rather than requiring learners to process isolated word lists or abstract grammar rules which impose high working memory demands folktales provide a meaningful framework that supports comprehension while directing attention to language use. This balance between meaning and form aligns with VanPatten's (2004) input processing model, which suggests that learners attend more effectively to language features when comprehension demands are manageable.

The narrative structure also enables repeated exposure to target language patterns across multiple meaningful contexts within a single text. For example, one of the selected folktales contained numerous instances of nasal sound changes distributed across various narrative contexts (e.g., character actions, dialogues, and descriptive passages), providing repeated exposure without the monotony of drill-based exercises. This type of contextualized repetition supports both conscious pattern recognition and implicit learning processes.

Table 12. Pedagogical Design Principles and Implementation Guidelines

Design Principle	Key Components	Implementation Strategies	Expected Outcomes	Common Pitfalls to Avoid
Strategic Text Selection	Linguistic density, cultural accessibility, authenticity	Corpus analysis, pilot testing, cultural consultation	High engagement, adequate pattern exposure	Oversimplified texts, culturally irrelevant materials
Balanced Pedagogical Approach	Four-stage cycle, appropriate sequencing	Structured lesson plans, flexible pacing, diagnostic teaching	Deep understanding, transferable knowledge	Skipping stages, premature explicit instruction
Systematic Scaffolding	Gradual release, differentiation, ZPD calibration	Tiered activities, flexible grouping, continuous assessment	Sustained engagement, appropriate challenge	Insufficient scaffolding, premature independence
Comprehensive Assessment	Multiple methods, formative/summative balance	Exit tickets, diagnostics, production tasks, self-assessment	Accurate diagnosis, targeted instruction	Over-reliance on single measures, assessment without response

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Responsive Teaching	Ongoing monitoring, instructional flexibility	Observational notes, guided verbal reflection activities, in-session adjustments	Meeting diverse needs, preventing misconceptions	Rigid adherence to plans, ignoring learner signals

Implementing this pedagogical approach successfully requires specific instructor competencies:

a. **Language Knowledge**
   Instructors need a solid understanding of word-level language patterns to facilitate discovery, respond to learner hypotheses, and provide accurate explicit instruction. However, they do not need to be language specialists content knowledge at the advanced undergraduate level appears sufficient.
b. **Pedagogical Flexibility**
   The responsive, discovery-oriented nature of the approach requires comfort with ambiguity and ability to adjust instruction based on real-time assessment. Instructors accustomed to highly scripted lessons may require support developing this flexibility.
c. **Assessment Literacy**
   Using multiple formative assessment methods effectively requires training in observational documentation, diagnostic interpretation, and instructional response. Professional development should emphasize assessment as learning tool rather than merely evaluative mechanism.
d. **Cultural Competence**
   Working with folk tales requires awareness of cultural contexts, potential sensitivities, and appropriate ways to honor traditional knowledge. Instructors should collaborate with cultural experts when working outside their own heritage traditions.

CONCLUSION

This study provides strong empirical evidence that folktale-based instruction is a highly effective pedagogical approach for developing language awareness at the word level among EFL learners. Using a quasi-experimental design supported by rigorous quantitative and qualitative analyses, the findings demonstrate that learners exposed to culturally grounded narrative-based instruction significantly outperformed those receiving conventional grammar instruction across all measured dimensions of language awareness. The large effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.57$) indicates not only statistical significance but also substantial educational relevance.

The results further show that embedding instruction within meaningful narrative contexts enables learners to understand relationships between sound and word patterns as structured and predictable rather than arbitrary. Participants in the experimental group demonstrated substantial improvement in identifying, explaining, and applying key language patterns (e.g., nasal sound changes, vowel changes, and consonant assimilation) in both controlled assessments and authentic writing tasks. Their higher self-correction rates also suggest deeper internalization of language knowledge and greater reflective control in language use.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings contribute to bridging the gap between traditional grammar-focused instruction and sociocultural as well as usage-

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based approaches to language learning. The study highlights that language awareness develops more effectively when learners engage with language patterns in meaningful, culturally relevant contexts. The instructional model—integrating narrative engagement, guided discovery, explicit instruction, and meaningful application aligns with Vygotskian principles of scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development, while also supporting cognitive perspectives that emphasize the role of context, repetition, and salience in learning.

Pedagogically, this study offers a practical and adaptable instructional framework for language educators. Folktales function not only as engaging materials but also as rich linguistic resources that support comprehension, reduce cognitive load, and promote sustained learning. The findings suggest that culturally responsive narrative-based instruction can effectively support higher-level language awareness, even for complex language patterns that are traditionally taught through abstract rule-based approaches.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The sample was limited to undergraduate EFL learners in an Indonesian context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other learner groups, such as younger students or learners from different linguistic backgrounds. In addition, the study focused on a selected set of language patterns at the word level, which may not fully represent the broader range of language features encountered in real-world language use.

Future research should expand this line of inquiry by examining the effectiveness of narrative-based instruction across different age groups, proficiency levels, and cultural contexts. Longitudinal studies are also needed to investigate the sustained impact of this approach on broader literacy outcomes, such as reading comprehension and vocabulary development. Furthermore, comparative studies across different languages and narrative traditions would provide deeper insight into the cross-linguistic applicability of folktale-based instruction.

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