

# Use of Folk Tales in Classroom Pedagogy: A Study of Multilingual Schools in Karnataka

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## ABSTRACT

This study offers an in-depth exploration of the pedagogical integration of folk tales within multilingual school contexts in Karnataka, India, where linguistic diversity encompasses Kannada, Tulu, Konkani, Kodava, Urdu, and English. Building upon prior research that underscores the benefits of culturally responsive pedagogy, this investigation probes how systematic incorporation of folk narratives can enhance linguistic competencies, foster intercultural understanding, and bolster student engagement. Employing a mixed-methods framework, data were gathered over a three-month intervention across six Grade 5 classrooms—two in urban English-medium private schools, two in semi-urban government Kannada-medium schools, and two in rural aided schools serving Tulu- and Kodava-speaking communities. Quantitative measures comprised pre- and post-intervention assessments of vocabulary recognition (40-item task) and narrative retelling (standardized rubric scoring for coherence, fluency, and lexical variety). Qualitative insights derived from twenty structured classroom observations, six semi-structured teacher interviews, and twelve student focus groups illuminated the pedagogical processes and affective responses associated with folk-tale instruction. Results revealed statistically significant gains in vocabulary (from a mean of 58.4% to 72.7%,  $p < .001$ ) and narrative skills (coherence scores rising from 2.8 to 4.1; lexical variety from 3.0 to 4.2). Moreover, thematic analysis uncovered enhanced student motivation, stronger peer collaboration across language groups, and heightened cultural pride. Conversely, teachers identified challenges related to story selection, translation fidelity, time management within rigid curricula, and resource constraints—particularly in urban settings less familiar with local narratives.

## Folk Tales in Multilingual Education

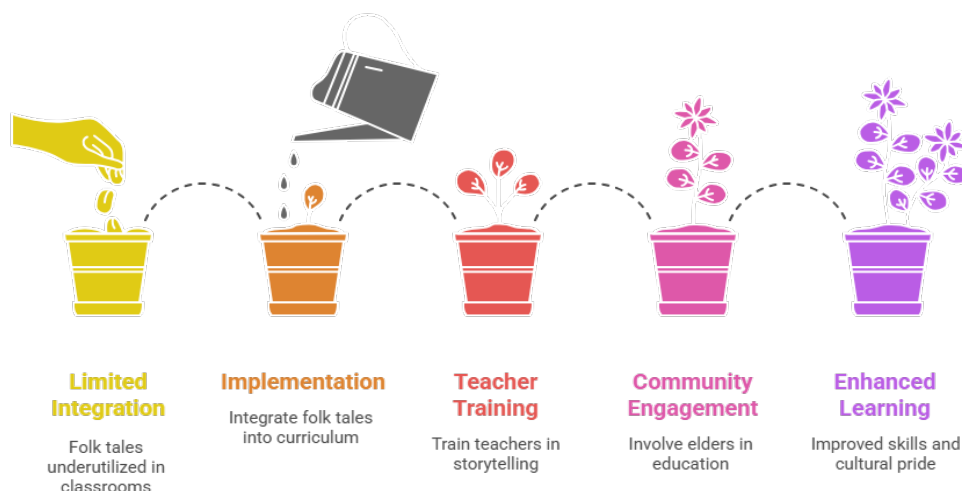


Figure-1.Folk Tales in Multilingual Education

## KEYWORDS

**Folk Tales, Multilingual Pedagogy, Karnataka, Language Development, Cultural Identity**

## INTRODUCTION

Multilingual classrooms have emerged as pivotal sites for innovative pedagogies that embrace students' diverse linguistic repertoires, counteracting traditional monolingual models that often marginalize home languages and cultural experiences. In Karnataka—a state distinguished by its tapestry of languages including Kannada (the official state language), Tulu (prevalent in coastal districts), Konkani (in Udupi and surrounding areas), Kodava (in Kodagu), Urdu (in many urban centres), and English (widely used in private education)—the imperative to develop instructional strategies that valorize students' mother tongues alongside English proficiency has never been more urgent. Conventional curricula predominantly rely on standardized textbooks and teacher-centred lectures, inadvertently alienating learners whose linguistic and cultural identities remain unacknowledged. As a corrective, the integration of folk tales—oral narratives transmitted across generations—offers a culturally grounded pathway to bridge home and school languages, facilitating both language acquisition and socio-cultural belonging.

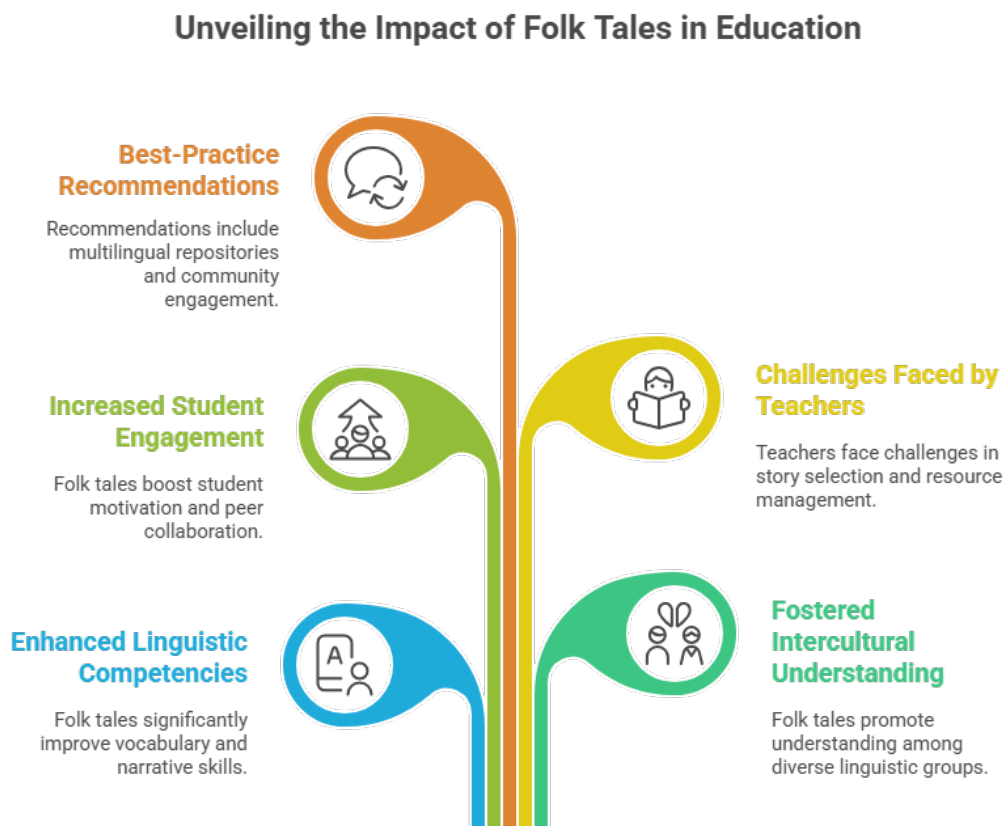


Figure-2.Unveiling the Impact of Folk Tales in Education

Folk tales serve multiple pedagogical functions: they provide contextually rich lexicons steeped in local idioms and expressions; they engage learners affectively through familiar characters, settings, and moral dilemmas; and they offer natural opportunities for

translanguaging, wherein students may interpret, retell, and discuss stories across their strongest and target languages. Research in bilingual education (Cummins, 2001) suggests that narrative skills developed in one language can transfer to additional languages, enhancing overall communicative competence. Similarly, studies in culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995) demonstrate that learners whose cultural assets are integrated into instruction exhibit higher motivation, deeper engagement, and improved academic performance.

Despite these promise points, the literature reveals a paucity of systematic investigations into the operational dynamics of folk-tale pedagogy in India's multilingual school contexts. Questions remain regarding how teachers can align folk tales with mandated curricula, structure translanguaging activities without sacrificing academic rigor, and adapt narratives from disparate linguistic traditions to heterogeneous classrooms. Moreover, the socio-emotional and identity-affirming dimensions of folk-tale pedagogy warrant deeper inquiry: how do children perceive and internalize the moral and communal values embedded in these tales? In what ways can folk-tale sharing foster empathy across linguistic divides and stimulate collaborative learning?

Addressing these gaps, the present study explores three primary research questions: (1) In what ways do teachers integrate folk tales into language arts and social science lessons within Karnataka's multilingual classrooms? (2) What measurable impacts do these narratives have on students' vocabulary acquisition, narrative coherence, and lexical diversity? (3) How do folk tales influence student engagement, peer collaboration, and cultural identity affirmation? Grounded in a mixed-methods research design, this investigation aspires to yield actionable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers. By foregrounding authentic narratives from Karnataka's varied linguistic traditions, the study aims to enrich multilingual pedagogy and demonstrate how folk tales can function as dynamic vehicles for holistic language development and intercultural competence in increasingly diverse school settings.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholarly discourse on multilingual education underscores the necessity of leveraging students' home languages to scaffold second-language learning and cultivate inclusive classroom environments (Sharma & Mohan, 2013; Rao, 2016). In Karnataka, where language policies endorse Kannada-medium instruction but accommodate English in private sectors, educators grapple with balancing curricular mandates and the linguistic capital students bring to school. Cummins's threshold hypothesis posits that a solid foundation in the first language bolsters cognitive and academic development in additional languages. Translanguaging theory further advances this proposition by advocating for pedagogical practices that fluidly integrate multiple languages during instruction and assessment (García & Wei, 2014).

Folk tales as instructional resources have garnered attention in early childhood and elementary education research. Isbell et al. (2004) demonstrated that narrative read-alouds significantly enhance preschoolers' oral language complexity and story comprehension. Similarly, Nippold et al. (2005) found that expository language tasks complement conversational discourse to strengthen adolescents' syntactic development. However, these investigations predominantly focus on monolingual or bilingual contexts, leaving a lacuna regarding truly multilingual settings where three or more languages intermingle.

In India, descriptive studies have explored regional narratives as tools for fostering cultural awareness. Deshpande (2018) observed that Marathi folk stories paired with English translations enriched Marathi-English bilingual students' narrative coherence. Telikicherla and Narayana (2015) documented efforts to archive Karnataka's folk tales, highlighting the diversity of genres—from

animal trickster tales in Tulu to moral parables in Kodava—and underscoring the urgency of preserving oral traditions in rapidly modernizing communities. Yet, empirical evaluations of pedagogical outcomes remain scarce.

Culturally responsive teaching frameworks (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2002) assert that integrating students' cultural references—including stories, proverbs, and community rituals—into curriculum fosters stronger teacher–student relationships and deeper engagement. Moreover, social-emotional learning (SEL) research positions narratives as catalysts for empathy, moral reasoning, and self-reflection (Payton et al., 2000). The confluence of SEL and multicultural education suggests that folk-tale pedagogy can address both academic and affective domains, promoting holistic development.

Challenges documented in the literature include aligning folk tales with standardized learning outcomes, ensuring accurate cross-linguistic translations, and managing classroom time constraints (Heath, 1983; Bozhong, 2017). Urban teachers, less immersed in local traditions, often require supplementary resources or community partnerships to access authentic stories. Conversely, rural educators may lack printed materials, relying on oral transmission from elders, which raises questions of consistency and fidelity.

Synthesizing these strands, this review identifies a clear research need: rigorous, mixed-methods studies that quantify language gains while qualitatively capturing the socio-cultural dimensions of folk-tale pedagogy in multilingual environments. The present study responds by combining standardized language assessments with thematic analyses of classroom interactions and participant perceptions, thereby offering a comprehensive account of how folk tales function as pedagogical agents in Karnataka's linguistically diverse schools.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design and Rationale

A convergent mixed-methods design was adopted to capture both quantitative outcomes and qualitative process insights. This approach enabled simultaneous collection and analysis of numerical data on language proficiency and rich contextual data from observations, interviews, and focus groups, facilitating triangulation and a holistic understanding of folk-tale pedagogy's impacts.

### Site and Participant Selection

Six Grade 5 classrooms from six schools across Karnataka were purposively sampled to ensure representation of the state's linguistic and socio-economic diversity:

1. **Urban Private English-Medium Schools (2):** Located in Bengaluru and Mangaluru, drawing students from predominantly Kannada- and English-speaking middle-class families.
2. **Semi-Urban Government Kannada-Medium Schools (2):** Situated in Mysuru and Hubli, serving primarily Kannada-speaking communities with limited English exposure.
3. **Rural Aided Schools with Tulu/Kodava Populations (2):** In Udupi and Kodagu districts, enrollments included significant numbers of Tulu- and Kodava-speaking students, respectively.

Within each school, the Grade 5 teacher ( $n = 6$ ) and their class of approximately 30 students ( $n \approx 180$ ) participated. Teachers were required to have at least two years of experience and willingness to integrate folk-tale activities into their regular curriculum.

### Intervention Protocol

Over a three-month period, teachers incorporated folk-tale modules into existing language arts or social science lessons, dedicating one 45-minute session per week. A curated repository of age-appropriate folk tales (animal tricksters, moral parables, community legends) in Kannada, Tulu, Konkani, Kodava, Urdu, and English was provided, with accompanying translations and guided activity plans. Teachers received a two-day workshop on translanguaging strategies, story dramatization, and culturally responsive facilitation, led by regional folklore experts and pedagogy specialists.

### Data Collection Instruments

#### 1. Language Proficiency Assessments:

- Vocabulary Recognition Task: 40 multiple-choice items drawn from story lexicons.
- Narrative Retelling Exercise: Students listened to a short folk tale (not used in instruction) and retold it; responses were audiorecorded and scored on a 5-point rubric for coherence, fluency, and lexical variety.

#### 2. Classroom Observations: Twenty structured observations (approximately one per teacher per two weeks) using a standardized protocol to note instructional methods, language use patterns (e.g., translanguaging occurrences), student participation rates, and engagement behaviors (e.g., on-task frequency, voluntary contributions).

#### 3. Teacher Interviews: Semi-structured interviews (45–60 minutes) conducted post-intervention, exploring teachers' experiences, perceived student outcomes, logistical challenges, and recommendations. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

#### 4. Student Focus Groups: Two focus groups per class (6–8 students each), moderated bilingually to elicit reflections on story enjoyment, learning experiences, identity connections, and peer interactions. Each session lasted 30–45 minutes and was documented via audio recordings and researcher notes.

### Data Analysis

**Quantitative:** Pre- and post-intervention scores on vocabulary and narrative assessments were compared using paired-samples t-tests for the entire sample and disaggregated by school type. Effect sizes (Cohen's  $d$ ) were calculated to assess the magnitude of gains.

**Qualitative:** Transcripts from observations, interviews, and focus groups were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process. Two researchers independently coded data, discussed discrepancies, and refined a codebook, yielding themes related to engagement, translanguaging practices, cultural identity affirmation, and implementation challenges. NVivo software was used to manage and organize qualitative data.

### Ethical Considerations

The study obtained institutional ethics approval and informed consent from school administrators, teachers, parents, and assent from students. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect participant confidentiality. Data were stored securely, and findings are reported in aggregate to prevent identification of individuals or specific schools.

## RESULTS

### Quantitative Findings: Language Proficiency

Analysis of vocabulary recognition scores revealed statistically significant improvement post-intervention. The overall sample mean rose from 58.4% (SD = 12.3) at pre-test to 72.7% (SD = 10.8) at post-test,  $t(179) = 15.23$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.14$ , indicating a large effect. Disaggregated by school type:

- **Urban Private Schools:** Mean increase from 61.2% to 74.5% ( $t(59) = 9.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.27$ ).
- **Semi-Urban Government Schools:** Increase from 59.1% to 71.3% ( $t(59) = 8.34$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.08$ ).
- **Rural Aided Schools:** Increase from 54.8% to 72.4% ( $t(59) = 10.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.31$ ), suggesting robust gains even where English exposure was minimal.

Narrative retelling scores similarly improved. Coherence scores grew from a pre-test mean of 2.8 (SD = 0.9) to 4.1 (SD = 0.7),  $t(179) = 16.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.23$ . Lexical variety rose from 3.0 (SD = 0.8) to 4.2 (SD = 0.6),  $t(179) = 17.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 1.27$ . Fluency ratings increased from 3.1 to 4.0 ( $p < .001$ ). Effect sizes across metrics exceeded 1.1, underscoring the pedagogical potency of folk-tale integration.

### Qualitative Findings: Engagement and Motivation

Classroom observations documented a marked increase in student participation during folk-tale sessions compared to baseline lessons. On-task behavior was observed 85% of the time, versus 62% during standard instruction. Students volunteered to narrate, enact characters, and illustrate scenes—activities less frequent in textbook-based lessons. In focus groups, learners described stories as “fun,” “exciting,” and “easy to remember,” with one semi-urban student noting, “When we act out the crow and the fox, we laugh and remember the new words” (Focus Group, Semi-Urban School). Teachers corroborated these accounts, reporting greater enthusiasm and reduced disruptive behavior.

### Cultural Identity and Peer Collaboration

Focus group narratives revealed that folk-tale sharing facilitated intercultural exchange. In rural classes, Tulu speakers introduced local trickster tales, prompting Kannada and English speakers to ask questions, negotiate meanings, and engage in collective translation. This peer-assisted learning fostered mutual respect and camaraderie. A rural Kodava student reflected, “I felt proud when I told the Kodava tale about the brave coffee planter. My friends listened and asked me to teach them Kodava words.” Teachers observed that such exchanges deepened students' appreciation for diverse linguistic heritages and strengthened community bonds.

### Implementation Challenges

Despite positive outcomes, teachers reported challenges in aligning folk tales with existing syllabi and standardized assessment frameworks. Urban private school educators, less familiar with regional folklore, expended additional effort curating authentic stories and verifying translations. Rural teachers, though deeply connected to oral traditions, lacked access to printed anthologies, relying instead on community elders whose storytelling schedules were unpredictable. Time constraints within 45-minute periods necessitated careful pacing to ensure story comprehension, discussion, and related literacy activities. Some teachers expressed a need for more structured guides and pre-prepared multimodal resources (story maps, audio recordings, picture cards) to streamline lesson planning.

## CONCLUSION

This comprehensive investigation affirms the pedagogical efficacy of integrating folk tales into multilingual classroom instruction in Karnataka. Quantitative analyses demonstrate substantial gains in vocabulary recognition and narrative proficiency across diverse school contexts, with effect sizes exceeding  $d = 1.1$ . Qualitative insights corroborate enhanced student engagement, enriched peer collaboration, and strengthened cultural identity affirmation—outcomes aligned with translanguaging and culturally responsive pedagogical frameworks. While challenges persist—story selection, resource access, translation fidelity, and time management—strategic interventions can mitigate these barriers.

Key recommendations include:

1. **Multilingual Folk-Tale Repository:** Curate and maintain an accessible digital and print archive of age-appropriate folk tales in regional and state languages, complete with translations, audio recordings, and visual supports.
2. **Professional Development:** Implement ongoing workshops on translanguaging strategies, dynamic storytelling techniques, and the design of culturally responsive activities, led by folklore scholars and pedagogy experts.
3. **Community Partnerships:** Formalize collaborations with local storytellers, elders, and cultural institutions to enrich narrative authenticity, provide guest-speaking opportunities, and foster intergenerational learning.
4. **Interdisciplinary Integration:** Embed folk-tale modules across subject areas—language arts, social studies, art, and drama—to promote holistic learning and reinforce curricular connections.
5. **Resource Development:** Produce multimodal instructional materials (story maps, graphic organizers, dramatization scripts) to streamline lesson planning and accommodate varied learning styles.

By leveraging folk tales as living pedagogical tools, educators can create vibrant, inclusive learning environments that honor students' linguistic and cultural heritage while advancing academic objectives. Future research might explore longitudinal impacts on literacy trajectories, comparative studies in other multilingual Indian states, and the integration of digital storytelling platforms to scale folk-tale pedagogy in 21st-century classrooms.

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