



Applying Fairy Tales to Foster Students' Reading Comprehension

Syayyidina Ali¹

Universitas Muhammadiyah Bulukumba, Sulawesi Selatan, Indonesia

saydinahafid@gmail.com

Emirati²

Universitas Muhammadiyah Bulukumba, Sulawesi Selatan Indonesia

emiration@gmail.com

Correspondence: saydinahafid@gmail.com

Abstract

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The purpose of this research was to examine the influence of English fairy tales on students' reading comprehension in the 8th grade of SMP Negeri 1 Bulukumba. The study employed a quantitative method using a pre-experimental design with one group pre-test and post-test. A total of 27 students participated as the sample. Data were obtained from pre-test and post-test instruments, and analyzed through SPSS 26, focusing on descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and frequency) and inferential statistics using a paired sample t-test. The results demonstrated a notable progress in students' reading comprehension, where the mean score increased from 51.5 (classified as poor) to 74.3 (classified as average). The paired sample t-test revealed a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternative hypothesis was accepted. These findings confirm that the integration of English fairy tales as learning material and media significantly contributes to enhancing students' reading comprehension. Therefore, the application of fairy tales can be considered an effective media in teaching reading to 8th-grade students

Kata kunci:

English Learning, Fairy Tale, Folktale, Reading Comprehension

Introduction

In the Indonesian context, English is taught as a foreign language and functions as a medium for international communication. To achieve mastery of the language, students are required to develop proficiency in the four essential language skills: listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Reading is an essential activity through which people obtain information from written texts; when texts are adapted to the appropriate level, they enable students to develop fundamental reading skills while engaging with topics relevant to their lives (Richards & Eckstut-Didier, 2011). In daily life, students are constantly exposed to written materials such as newspapers, magazines, books, and online articles. These texts provide abundant information that contributes to their knowledge. In schools, written documents are also widely presented in learners' textbooks, making reading an integral part of the learning process. The primary goal of teaching reading in the context of English language learning is comprehension. Reading comprehension refers to the process of understanding the text being read; it is the central purpose of reading instruction. Students with strong comprehension skills are able to

learn and interpret texts more effectively. Academic reading comprehension also requires higher-order thinking skills, as students are expected to read critically. Such skills are assessed not only in language examinations but also across other subjects such as literature, geography, history, and biology. People read for a variety of purposes, such as gaining knowledge, pursuing education, or simply for enjoyment. It is often said that the more one reads, the more knowledge one acquires. Reading serves both educational and entertaining functions, and it is no exaggeration to claim that it provides countless benefits, whether the material is popular or scholarly.

Furthermore, reading comprehension is closely aligned with the objectives of the Independence Curriculum in Indonesia, which emphasizes genre-based character building. Within this curriculum, reading is recognized as one of the core competencies that language learners, particularly junior high school students, must master in order to participate actively in the learning process. The aim of teaching reading comprehension is therefore to help students become good readers—those who can process information quickly, efficiently, and automatically (Aziz, 2020). However, despite its importance, many students encounter difficulties in comprehending texts. They often lose motivation and become disengaged when faced with reading activities. As a result, they may fail to achieve the expected level of comprehension. For this reason, English teachers play a crucial role in motivating and guiding students to develop positive reading habits. Teachers must create engaging classroom activities that encourage students to view reading not as a burden, but as a meaningful and beneficial practice. By doing so, teachers can foster both motivation and comprehension, particularly among students in the early stages of secondary education.

The challenges described above can be addressed through the use of fairy tales as a learning media. A fairy tale is a type of folktale set in a magical realm often ruled by royalty, featuring characters who are typically portrayed as either wholly good or entirely evil (Romdoni, 2025); its form is narrative text which can increase students' interest and motivation in developing their reading comprehension. By engaging with fairy tales, students gain a clearer understanding of what they read, enabling them to identify key elements such as messages and morals. In addition, this process helps students expand their vocabulary. Using fairy tales as teaching materials offers multiple benefits: not only do they enhance reading comprehension, but they also utilize interesting narrative structures and characters to effectively convey ideas and messages to readers (Ramadhani, 2024). Based on observations at SMP Negeri 1 Bulukumba, the researcher found that students' reading comprehension was still relatively low. This was evident in their difficulties with understanding simple texts, recognizing words, retaining newly learned vocabulary, and expressing ideas in English. To address these challenges, one of the effective learning media that can be applied is the use of English fairy tales.

The effectiveness of using fairy tales as a media to improve students' reading comprehension has been demonstrated in various previous studies, (Hairunnisyah et al., 2024), (Musyaffa et al., 2023) and (Ongkodihardjo et al., n.d.) stated that using fairy tale illustrated version can improve students' reading comprehension. (Wahyuni, 2021) fairy tales are proven to catch the young learners' reading interest as they provide imaginative and enchanting content; affective and cognitive factors influence the students' reading interest. (Romdoni, 2025) and (Unisa, 2023) stated that implementing fable story as the source of learning reading comprehension is good because making the students interesting to read. (Desmiyati & Sukirlan,

2014) Fairy Tale can improve students' reading comprehension especially in recognizing the main idea. (Aisyah et al., 2024) concluded that the using fable text was successful to increase the students' capability in reading comprehension especially in narrative text. While (Ramadhani, 2024) stated that most students responded positively to the use of fairy tales in learning narrative texts; they enjoyed reading fairy tales, which not only enhanced their reading comprehension but also entertained them and enriched their vocabulary. And (Chandra et al., 2021) imaginative fairy tales not only provide students with new ideas and inspiration but also embed positive values within their narratives, making it easier for teachers to foster character development and support the educational process in elementary schools. (Abdullah et al., 2024) stated that the use of fairy tales can serve as an effective tool for enhancing reading skills. This approach has the potential to support learners at different proficiency levels in developing their reading abilities, regardless of their initial stage in learning English. And even fairy tales and folktales can help develop English listening skills among primary school students (Fadzilah & Wahyuningsih, 2024).

These are the reasons why the researcher intends to test its effectiveness at SMPN 1 Bulukumba and further explore the use of English fairy tales as a folktale in enhancing students' reading comprehension across different contexts and respondents.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a single-group pre-experimental design with pre-test and post-test, using a quantitative methodology. According to (Gay et al., 2006), a pre-experimental design involves only one group or class that is administered both a pre-test and a post-test. This design was selected as it enables a direct comparison of students' reading comprehension before and after the treatment using English fairy tales. In this procedure, one group was given a pre-test (O), followed by the treatment (X), and then a post-test (O). The effectiveness of the treatment was measured by comparing the results of the pre-test and post-test. During the treatment phase, English fairy tales were used as instructional material to support students' reading comprehension. The design was illustrated as follows:

<i>Pre-test</i>	<i>Treatment</i>	<i>Post-test</i>
<i>O1</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>O2</i>

Description:

- **O1:** Pre-test (administered before the treatment)
- **X:** Treatment (implementation of English fairy tales)
- **O2:** Post-test (administered after the treatment)

Location, Population and Sample of the Study

The research was carried out at SMP Negeri 1 Bulukumba, South Sulawesi. The population of this study comprised the eight-grade students of SMP 1 Bulukumba in the 2024/2025 academic year. As stated by (Gay et al., 2006), a population refers to a group of individuals or objects possessing certain qualities and characteristics from which researchers draw conclusions. The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling, through which one class (VIII.A) consisting of 27 students was selected as the sample for this study.

Instrument of the Research

The instrument employed in this study was a reading comprehension test. The pre-test was administered in the form of multiple-choice questions to assess students' initial reading comprehension. During the treatment, students were engaged in activities such as drawing conclusions from selected English fairy tales and completing true/false worksheets based on statements related to the texts. Following the treatment, a post-test consisting of multiple-choice questions was administered to evaluate students' reading comprehension after the intervention. The pre-test scores served to measure the students' baseline ability, while the post-test scores reflected their comprehension improvement after the application of the treatment.

Data Collection

The following are the steps in this design:

1. Pre Test

In the initial session, students were administered a pre-test to evaluate their reading comprehension skills. The researcher provided a simple English narrative text, which students were required to read. Subsequently, they answered a set of multiple-choice questions based on the text which consisted of 25 items. The results of this assessment were collected to determine students' baseline comprehension levels and to serve as a reference point for measuring progress following the treatment.

2. Treatment

The treatment phase, conducted after the initial test, was designed to enhance students' reading comprehension through the use of fairy tale texts. The treatment was implemented in several stages: (1) introducing the topic and explaining the learning objectives; (2) engaging students in a brief brainstorming or discussion about their prior experiences with fairy tales; (3) presenting a picture or the title of the selected fairy tales to stimulate interest and encourage predictions about the story's content; (4) having students read the fairy tale text individually and in small groups; (5) guiding students to comprehend the narrative and identify its moral message during the while-activity phase; (6) facilitating a discussion on the content of the story, followed by group activities such as drawing simple conclusions from the fairy tales; and (7) assigning independent post-activity exercises, which involved completing worksheets consisting of true/false statements related to the fairy tales.

3. Post Test

In the final session, a post-test was administered to evaluate the improvement of students' reading comprehension after the implementation of English fairy tales in the learning process. Students were instructed to read the assigned fairy tale texts and respond to multiple-choice questions based on the content. The results of the post-test were then reviewed and compared with the pre-test scores. Subsequently, the researcher analyzed the data to determine whether the use of fairy tales as learning material had led to a significant enhancement in students' reading comprehension.

Data Analysis

Data collection was carried out to examine whether the treatment had a positive impact on the reading comprehension of 8th-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Bulukumba. The study employed quantitative data analysis, consisting of numerical data that were processed through statistical methods. Specifically, a paired sample t-test was utilized to determine whether a significant difference existed between two mean scores at a given probability level. This test was applied to compare students' pre-test and post-test scores in order to evaluate the effectiveness of English fairy tales in enhancing reading comprehension. All data were analyzed using SPSS version 26.

Result and Discussion

The researcher presented the frequency and percentage distribution of students' scores. The categorization of students' performance on the preliminary test was outlined as follows:

Table 1. The rate percentage and frequency of students' score in pretest

Category	Range	Pretest	
		Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	91-100	-	-
Good	76-90	-	-
Average	61-75	2	7.4%
Poor	51-60	12	44.4%
Very Poor	< 50	13	48.2%
Total		27	100%

Based on the data presented in Table 1, none of the students obtained scores in the excellent or good categories on the pre-test. A total of 7.4% of students were categorized as average, 44.4% as poor, and 48.2% as very poor. Thus, the vast majority of students (92.6%) were classified in the poor and very poor categories, while only a small proportion (7.4%) reached the average level.

Table 2. The rate percentage and frequency of students' score in posttest

Category	Range	Pretest	
		Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	91-100	-	-
Good	76-90	8	29.7%
Average	61-75	18	66.6%
Poor	51-60	1	3.7%
Very Poor	< 50	-	-
Total		27	100%

Based on the post-test data presented in Table 2, the majority of students demonstrated improvement in their reading comprehension. A total of 29.7% (8 out of 27) obtained scores in the good category (76–90), while 66.6% (18 out of 27) were classified in the average category

(61–75). These results indicated a marked improvement compared to the pre-test, as most students' scores shifted into the average and good categories.

Table 3. The Descriptive Statistics of Students' Mean Score in Pre-test and Post-test

Test	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest	27	30	70	1390	51.5	8.750
Posttest	27	60	85	2005	74.3	6.752

Based on the table above, students' post-test scores showed a clear improvement compared to their pre-test scores after the treatment was implemented. The mean score increased from 51.48 on the pre-test to 74.26 on the post-test. This substantial rise in the average score indicates that the treatment had a significant positive effect on enhancing students' reading comprehension.

Table 4. The Result of Paired Sample Test

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. error mean	95% Confidence interval of the Difference		T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pretest								
	Posttest	-22.778	4.458	.858	-24.541	-21.014	-26.551	26	.000

The results of the paired sample t-test showed that the Sig. (2-tailed) value was 0.000, which is lower than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (H_1) was accepted, while the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected. This finding indicates that the application of English fairy tales significantly improved the reading comprehension of 8th-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Bulukumba in the 2024/2025 academic year.

Discussion

The analysis of pre-test and post-test data revealed a significant improvement in the reading comprehension at the 8th grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Bulukumba. This improvement is reflected in the higher frequency and percentage of students who achieved better scores on the post-test compared to the pre-test. The marked difference between the two sets of scores demonstrated the effectiveness of teaching reading comprehension through English fairy tales. Overall, the post-test results provide strong evidence that this method successfully enhanced students' reading comprehension.

Several factors contributed to the success of improving students' reading comprehension through the application of English fairy tales. First, students demonstrated a high level of interest, as fairy tales served as an engaging learning medium that captured their attention. Second, the researcher's careful selection of fairy tales proved effective, as the stories were adapted to students' language proficiency levels, thereby facilitating comprehension and helping them recognize key story elements. Finally, the structured learning activities, implemented in three stages, played a crucial role in enhancing comprehension: (1) pre-activity, in which students discussed and predicted the content of the story; (2) while-activity,

which involved reading the fairy tales in depth, engaging in group discussions, analyzing contextual meaning, and drawing conclusions; and (3) post-activity, where students completed worksheets consisting of comprehension questions. This systematic approach effectively engaged students throughout the learning process and significantly improved their reading comprehension. So, teachers could integrate students' understanding and interests with their own perspectives on the lessons conveyed through fairy tale, thereby designing engaging and effective topics that foster students' creativity across multiple dimensions (Wu et al., 2025).

In addition to these findings, the researcher also identified several advantages and disadvantages of using English fairy tales as a learning media or teaching material. The advantages include, first, their effectiveness in improving students' reading comprehension by introducing key vocabulary and encouraging students to predict relevant content related to the story. Second, fairy tales offer flexibility in the selection of themes and levels of difficulty, allowing teachers to adapt the stories to students' abilities and thereby facilitate the learning process. Third, the narrative nature of fairy tales is inherently engaging, which increases students' interest in reading and supports a deeper understanding of the story's context. Furthermore, fairy tales-based learning media are easily accessible and can be applied in diverse learning environments, enabling students to learn anytime and anywhere without spatial or temporal limitations. Nevertheless, as with any learning material, the use of fairy tales also has its drawbacks. One notable limitation is that fairy tales are often brief and relatively simple, which may hinder the development of ideas in depth. As a result, students' understanding of the broader meaning or moral message of the story can sometimes be restricted.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effectiveness of using English fairy tales to improve the reading comprehension of eighth grade students at SMPN Negeri 1 Bulukumba. Employing a pre-experimental design with a one-group pre-test and post-test involving 27 students, the research measured students' reading comprehension before and after the treatment. Data analysis using SPSS version 26 revealed a significant improvement, with the mean score increasing from 51.48 on the pre-test (classified as poor) to 74.26 on the post-test (classified as "average"). The paired sample t-test yielded a significance value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), confirming the rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis.

The improvement was attributed to students' heightened interest in engaging materials that matched their proficiency levels, as well as the structured learning stages implemented: pre-activity (introduction and prediction), while-activity (reading and group discussion), and post-activity (comprehension exercises). However, the study also identified a limitation: fairy tales are often short and simple, which may restrict deeper exploration of ideas and reduce students' ability to fully grasp the moral lessons. Overall, the findings demonstrate that English fairy tales serve as an effective teaching material for enhancing reading comprehension, especially in fostering inferential skills and the ability to interpret implied meanings.

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