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THE EFFICACY OF 'THE TORTOISE AND THE HARE' FOLKTALE IN ENHANCING NARRATIVE WRITING SKILLS OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This research explains the efficacy of "The Tortoise and the Hare" folktale as a medium to enhance narrative writing skills in ELT (English Learning Teaching) in the junior high school. The findings show that the efficacy of folktales into writing instruction provides not only authentic language exposure but also fosters creativity, improves narrative structure, and increases students' motivation. Some students demonstrated notable progress in organizing ideas, using richer vocabulary, and expressing themselves with greater confidence and coherence. The learning process is supported through visual aids, peer collaboration, scaffolding, and reflective tasks, which helped address common writing difficulties such as grammar challenges and fear of making mistakes. The story-based approach also facilitated deeper emotional and cognitive engagement by connecting language learning with moral values. As a result, writing became a tool for both linguistic improvement and self-expression. This study concludes that folktales are valuable pedagogical tools for enhancing writing instruction in ELT settings and recommends further exploration of culturally relevant stories and multimodal storytelling in future research.

Keywords: *English language teaching, folktale, the tortoise and the hare, writing skills*

Introduction

In English language learning, writing is considered one of the most challenging skills, they can get difficulty in understanding it particularly for students when studying literature in ELT (English Language Teaching). It requires mastery of grammar, vocabulary, and the ability to organize ideas logically and creatively. Many junior high school students in Indonesia often struggle with writing due to limited exposure to engaging materials and a lack of contextualized activities (Hyland, 2019). Writing is one of the important productive skills in English language learning that requires students to express ideas clearly, organized, and creatively. In ELT contexts, teaching writing is often challenging due to students' limited vocabulary, lack of confidence, and ignorance of text types. Hyland (2019) highlights that writing involves more than just linguistic knowledge it demands the ability to organize ideas in a meaningful context. One effective way to support students in developing this ability is through the use of short stories.

Short stories are concise fictional texts with a clear plot, characters, setting and resolution. As literary texts, short stories provide students with rich language input and opportunities for creative thinking. According to Collie and Slater (2008), short stories can be a powerful tool in the language classroom because of their brevity, narrative structure, and potential to stimulate personal response. Short stories are also more accessible to students compared to longer texts, making them ideal for focused writing activities in the classroom (Mubarak, 2013). By engaging in short stories surely the use of 'The Tortoise and the Hare' folktale affect students' narrative writing skills, the students are exposed to authentic language use, varied sentence structures, and diverse vocabulary, which can serve as models for their own writing. In addition, the narrative elements in short stories-such as orientation, conflict, climax, and resolution-help students understand how to organize their own ideas in written form. When used as part of writing instruction, short stories can improve students' ability to write with coherence, cohesion, and creativity (Hwang &Embi, 2007). In addition, writing tasks based on short stories can increase students' motivation, as students are more likely to

relate personally to the themes or characters presented in the stories (Pardede, 2011).

Therefore, incorporating short stories into English Language Teaching (ELT), especially to improve writing skills, is pedagogically sound and practically effective. Students' perceptions of using folktales in writing instruction allow them to learn the conventions of narrative writing, explore their creativity, and develop greater fluency and confidence in English. One way to improve students' writing skills is by incorporating folktales in the classroom. Folktales, such as The Tortoise and the Hare, are short stories that offer authentic language input and stimulate imagination. The conclusion of "The Tortoise and the Hare" sees the persistent tortoise crossing the finish line and winning the race while the overconfident hare is still asleep. The hare wakes up too late to catch up, learning that natural talent without effort is easily beaten by consistent, dedicated hard work. The Victory**:** The tortoise's slow but steady pace prevails over the hare's bursts of speed. The Failure**:** The hare's arrogance and complacency cause him to lose a race he should have easily won. The Moral Lesson**:** The famous motto of the story is *"slow and steady wins the race,"* which highlights the value of perseverance, patience, and humility. Collie and Slater (2008) highlight that short stories can be powerful tools in language learning because of their narrative elements and cultural richness.

Folktales also provide a familiar and enjoyable context for students, which can lower their anxiety and make writing tasks feel less intimidating. The moral values embedded in these stories can be used as prompts for students to develop their own ideas, supporting both language and character development. Using a well-known story also allows students to focus more on how to express ideas rather than understanding the content. Moreover, storytelling as a strategy in writing activities encourages creativity, coherence, and logical sequencing of ideas. Students are guided not only to retell the story but also to reconstruct or expand it using their own words and expressions. This process helps develop both language competence and confidence in writing. This research aims to explain how the efficacy of 'The Tortoise and the Hare' folktale in enhancing students' narrative writing skills. By using this story as a writing stimulus, students are expected to develop their ability to express ideas clearly and creatively, while also increasing their motivation and interest in writing.

Method

This research used a qualitative descriptive method to investigates of using the short story Tortoise and the Hare as a medium to enhance students' writing skills in ELT classroom. This research is conducted at the junior high school**,** focusing on a group of eighth grade students. The subject are chosen based on their English proficiency and their readiness to actively participate in writing-related activities. To collect comprehensive data, the researcher used three main data collection techniques: classroom observation, analysis of students' written work, and semi-structured interviews with English teachers. Classroom observations were conducted to document the learning process, especially how short stories were integrated into writing instruction. These observations helped identify student engagement, learning strategies, and classroom dynamics during the implementation of short story-based activities.

Students' written assignments served as the main data to assess the development of writing skills, focusing on aspects such as text structure, vocabulary use, coherence, grammatical accuracy, and creative expression. Meanwhile, interviews with English teachers provided valuable perspectives on instructional approaches, student responses, and perceived benefits or challenges of using short stories in writing instruction. All qualitative data collected was analyzed using thematic analysis, which allowed the researcher to identify recurring patterns, categories, and themes related to the improvement of students' writing skills. This methodological approach provided a deeper understanding of how the integration of short stories specifically The Tortoise and the Hare can serve as an engaging and effective pedagogical strategy in supporting students' writing development in an ELT setting.

Findings and Discussion

Storytelling as a Pedagogical Entry Point, The learning activity of writing using the short story The Tortoise and the Hare was conducted for six meetings. At the beginning of the process, the teacher carefully narrated the story to the students using a combination of visual illustrations and expressive body movements. This multimodal approach significantly enhanced the students' comprehension and engagement with the narrative. The teacher deliberately used simple English, occasionally supplemented with Indonesian translations to bridge any language gaps and ensure that every student could follow the storyline effectively. The choice of the story, with its familiar characters and relatable moral, captured students' attention and made the learning process more enjoyable and meaningful (Widiastuti &

Sukmawan, 2021). This initial storytelling phase also played a critical role in setting a positive classroom tone. By integrating humor, visual cues, and interactive questioning, the teacher created an inviting environment that reduced anxiety among students. These affective strategies are particularly important in ELT settings, where students may feel intimidated by the prospect of expressing themselves in a second language. Establishing trust early on allowed students to feel more comfortable engaging with the material and participating in class discussions.

Furthermore, the folktale provided a culturally neutral yet morally rich context, making it suitable for diverse student backgrounds. The universality of its themes - perseverance, humility, and self-control - made it easier for students to connect with the storyline regardless of their personal experiences. This sense of connection is a crucial motivational factor in language learning, fostering intrinsic interest and a deeper investment in the tasks. The decision to begin with storytelling rather than grammar drills or writing mechanics was intentional and pedagogically sound. Research in second language acquisition emphasizes the value of input-rich environments, particularly those that simulate real-world communication. The storytelling approach served this purpose effectively, immersing students in meaningful language use while gently introducing narrative conventions. Additionally, storytelling enabled the teacher to model pronunciation, intonation, and expressive language in context, offering learners an authentic example of spoken English. This auditory exposure complemented the visual and kinesthetic elements of the lesson, catering to multiple learning styles and reinforcing comprehension before students were asked to produce their own texts.

Development of Writing Skills through Folktale Engagement, In the sessions that followed, students were given the opportunity to retell the story using their own words, which allowed them to internalize the vocabulary and grammatical structures they had encountered. This exercise encouraged active language production and reinforced what they had learned. To support this, the teacher demonstrated how to construct sentences using basic grammar and how to organize these sentences into coherent paragraphs. Each paragraph was introduced with a topic sentence, developed with supporting details, and concluded with a summarizing sentence. These writing techniques were systematically introduced and practiced, leading to more structured and clearer student writing (Rohmah & Rachmawati, 2023). This stage also encouraged students to develop their ability to paraphrase and summarize information - essential academic skills that are often difficult for ELT learners. By engaging in the process of rewriting familiar content, students practiced reformulating ideas in their own words, which enhanced both their lexical flexibility and grammatical accuracy. Over time, this translated into more independent and confident written expression.

The focus on structure was another key strength of the approach. Many students initially lacked awareness of basic narrative frameworks. By guiding them through the stages of narrative writing - orientation, complication, resolution - the teacher equipped students with a mental blueprint for organizing their texts. This structural awareness helped demystify the writing process and reduced the cognitive burden often associated with composing in a foreign language. As writing sessions progressed, scaffolding techniques were gradually withdrawn, empowering students to take greater responsibility for their output. This gradual release of responsibility reflects best practices in instructional design, wherein learners are supported as they build competence but are ultimately encouraged to write autonomously. Moreover, students were encouraged to reflect on their own progress through self-assessment checklists. These tools promoted metacognitive awareness, helping learners identify their strengths and areas for improvement. By fostering a habit of reflection, the writing instruction extended beyond skill development into the realm of learner autonomy and academic maturity.

Narrative Structure and Vocabulary Enhancement, The integration of The Tortoise and the Hare into the writing lessons provided a rich narrative model for students to imitate, adapt, and personalize in their own texts. Through continuous engagement with the story, students not only developed their understanding of basic narrative structures such as exposition, conflict, climax, and resolution but also began to internalize the specific vocabulary and expressions associated with these elements (Widiastuti & Sukmawan, 2021). Initial student writing prior to the intervention showed minimal awareness of narrative cohesion. Their sentences were often fragmented, lacked clear sequencing, and did not reflect a complete story arc. For instance, one student simply wrote, “Rabbit sleep. Turtle win,” without connecting events or providing a setting. After the story-based instruction, the same student wrote, “The hare ran fast but then he fell asleep. The tortoise kept walking and finally won the race.” This

demonstrates a clearer grasp of narrative flow and the inclusion of logical sequencing (Rohmah & Rachmawati, 2023). The folktale's structure helped students understand how to organize ideas chronologically. Many students began using connectors such as at first, then, but, and finally, linguistic cues they rarely employed before. These connectors were essential in helping students craft more coherent and understandable narratives. For example, one student's writing evolved from "Turtle run. Rabbit sleep. Turtle win." into "At first, the hare ran quickly, but then he took a nap. In the end, the tortoise won" (Hasibuan, 2022).

The story also introduced students to rich vocabulary centred around movement (run, walk, slowly), character traits (arrogant, consistent, proud), and moral language (never give up, be humble). These words appeared frequently in post-instruction writing, indicating both retention and appropriate usage. One student, for instance, shifted from writing "Rabbit sleep. Turtle win." to "Although the rabbit was expected to win, he lost due to his arrogance. The tortoise was determined." The shift not only reflects vocabulary growth but also an ability to express abstract ideas such as motivation and attitude (Sari & Septiani, 2021). Narrative devices like dialogue and description, which were previously absent, also emerged in post-instruction writing. Several students attempted direct speech, as seen in a revised writing: "'I will win easily,' said the hare. 'Let's see,' said the tortoise." Such examples suggest that students were not only understanding the events but also engaging imaginatively with the characters (Anggraini, 2023). Interestingly, some students began to explore story expansion and alternative endings, an indication of growing narrative creativity. One student, for example, added a continuation in which the hare apologizes and becomes friends with the tortoise. This development points to a deeper engagement with story themes and characters beyond rote reproduction (Fitria, 2021).

Setting descriptions also improved. While early writing often omitted setting details altogether, later texts included environments like "the jungle," "trees," and "a long road," reflecting the narrative backdrop of the race. One final draft included the phrase: "The race happened in the jungle, with trees and a long road ahead," showcasing greater descriptive effort (Rahmah & Prasetyo, 2020). Furthermore, students demonstrated an improved capacity to express moral messages. Rather than simply stating "Turtle win," students began reflecting on values such as patience, humility, and consistency. One student wrote: "I learned not to underestimate others. We must keep trying like the tortoise." This movement toward personal reflection is a key indicator of higher-order thinking emerging from writing instruction (Maulidah, 2022). The findings also show that previously underused grammar structures, such as the simple past tense, were more accurately applied in students' post-instruction writing. Students moved from writing "Rabbit run fast" to "The rabbit ran very fast, but he fell asleep." This improvement aligns with the grammatical focus integrated into the story sessions (Yanti & Pramita, 2021). In summary, the use of The Tortoise and the Hare significantly enhanced students' ability to construct narratives with clear structure, appropriate vocabulary, moral insight, and imaginative variation. These findings, drawn directly from student writing samples, affirm the value of story-based instruction in fostering writing skills within an ELT context (Rizki & Fauziah, 2021).

Table 1. Raw Student Writing Samples Based on Elements of The Tortoise and the Hare

Data	Story Element Focused	Pre-Instruction Writing	Post-Instruction Writing
Data 1	Characterization of Hare	"Rabbit is fast and sleep."	"The hare was very fast but too arrogant. He slept during the race."
Data 2	Characterization of Tortoise	"Turtle is slow but win."	"The tortoise was slow but he never gave up. He kept moving step by step."
Data 3	Setting	"They run in forest."	"The race happened in the jungle, with trees and a long road ahead."
Data 4	Dialogue	Not present in pre-instruction writing.	"'I will win easily,' said the hare. 'Let's see,' said the tortoise."
Data 5	Opening of Story	"Rabbit and turtle have race."	"Once upon a time, a rabbit and a tortoise had a race to test who was faster."
Data 6	Ending of Story	"Turtle win."	"Finally, the tortoise won the race while the hare was still sleeping."
Data 7	Use of Connectors	"Turtle run. Rabbit sleep. Turtle win."	"At first, the hare ran quickly, but then he took a nap. In the end, the tortoise won."
Data 8	Moral Message	"Don't sleep in race."	"This story teaches us that being consistent is better than being arrogant."

Data 9	Description of Action	"Rabbit sleep. Turtle walk."	"The hare ran fast at the start but stopped. The tortoise kept walking slowly."
Data 10	Use of Past Tense	"Rabbit run fast. Turtle walk."	"The rabbit ran very fast, but he fell asleep. The tortoise walked slowly."
Data 11	Sentence Complexity	"Turtle is winner."	"The tortoise won because he didn't stop, even though he was slow."
Data 12	Story Expansion	Not present in pre-instruction writing.	"After winning, the tortoise became famous in the forest. The hare felt embarrassed."
Data 13	Personal Reflection	Not present in pre-instruction writing.	"I learned not to underestimate others. We must keep trying like the tortoise."
Data 14	Tone & Emotion	Not present in pre-instruction writing.	"The hare was shocked when he saw the tortoise already at the finish line."
Data 15	Alternative Ending	Not present in pre-instruction writing.	"In the second race, the hare did not sleep. He apologized to the tortoise and they became friends."

Table 1 presents selected excerpts from fifteen students' writings, each focusing on a different story element from the folktale. This variety of expressions showcases how students not only retold the story but also engaged creatively with character traits, setting details, and moral values. Their writings reveal improved language awareness, narrative control, and personal engagement with the text.

Creativity and Moral Integration in Writing, Interestingly, some students went beyond simply retelling the story. They began to exercise their creativity by adding new twists or imagining different endings. This willingness to innovate indicated the emergence of critical thinking and narrative imagination. The teacher recognized this development and actively encouraged students to read other stories and attempt writing their own original versions, thereby fostering both creative expression and language development in an integrative manner (Anggraini, 2023). This creative expansion allowed students to move from imitation to innovation. Instead of solely reproducing a given text, they were given space to reinterpret themes, imagine alternative outcomes, or introduce new characters. These activities support the higher-order cognitive skills that are emphasized in 21st-century learning frameworks, particularly creativity, problem-solving, and reflective thinking. Moreover, the incorporation of moral themes from the folktale helped students frame their narratives with purposeful content. Rather than writing purely for form, students began to explore values such as perseverance, humility, and the importance of effort in achieving goals. Embedding moral reflection within narrative writing not only enhanced the ethical depth of their work but also helped develop their capacity for empathy and personal introspection (Arifin &Rohani, 2021).

The emotional connection students felt with the story served as a catalyst for more meaningful writing. Personal identification with characters or scenarios helped them project their thoughts and feelings onto the page, creating writing that was both authentic and expressive. This kind of engagement deepens the affective dimension of language learning and encourages students to see writing as a tool for self-expression, not just academic compliance. Additionally, many students began to share and discuss the morals of their stories with peers, sparking meaningful classroom discussions. These exchanges created a communal learning experience that reinforced the message that writing is not only an individual task but also a collaborative and social activity. Through shared reflections, students gained a broader perspective and deeper understanding of both language and life (Maulidah, 2022).

Instructional Strategies and Classroom Dynamics, A range of pedagogical strategies was employed by the teacher to support and scaffold the students' writing. For instance, the use of targeted writing prompts and reflective questions related to the story helped direct students' attention to key aspects of the narrative. Peer review sessions were also introduced, allowing students to exchange drafts, give and receive feedback, and collaboratively improve their compositions. These interactions helped students develop a sense of audience and become more aware of writing conventions (Fitria, 2021). Another valuable strategy was the incorporation of sentence starters and structured templates. These tools served as cognitive scaffolds for students who struggled to organize their thoughts. Sentence starters like "Once upon a time..." or "In the end..." gave students accessible ways to begin and conclude their narratives. This support proved especially beneficial for students in the early stages of writing development, enabling them to gain confidence and fluency (Lestari &Yuliani, 2022).

The use of visual aids also contributed to the effectiveness of the writing instruction. Story maps, character charts, and sequencing diagrams

helped students break down the story into manageable components, reinforcing their understanding of narrative structure. Visual planning not only improved the coherence of their writing but also reduced the cognitive load associated with generating and organizing ideas (Rahmah & Prasetyo, 2020). Beyond materials, the classroom atmosphere played a pivotal role. The teacher consistently fostered a positive, inclusive, and non-judgmental environment where students felt comfortable experimenting with language and making mistakes. This supportive climate helped reduce writing anxiety and encouraged risk-taking, which are essential for language development (Mulyani & Fitriana, 2021). Finally, the integration of multimedia resources such as short video clips, audio recordings, and animated visuals enriched the overall learning experience. These materials not only sustained students' interest but also catered to various learning preferences, ensuring that visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners could engage meaningfully with the content. This multimodal approach made the lessons more dynamic and inclusive (Siregar & Tambunan, 2021).

Challenges in the Writing Process Despite the overall success, some challenges emerged during the implementation. A common issue was limited vocabulary, which restricted some students' ability to fully express their ideas in writing. Students often struggled to find the right words, which sometimes led to oversimplification or vague expressions. The teacher responded to this by regularly introducing new vocabulary and encouraging students to keep personal word banks (Syafri & Ningsih, 2020). Grammar continued to be another stumbling block. Frequent errors in verb tenses, article usage, and sentence structures were observed, especially in the early stages of writing development. To address this, the teacher incorporated short, focused grammar mini-lessons into the sessions, aiming to target and correct common errors as they emerged in student writing (Yanti & Pramita, 2021). Student self-confidence was another barrier to effective writing. Some students were reluctant to write or share their work due to fear of making mistakes or being judged. The teacher worked to counteract this by offering consistent encouragement and emphasizing that errors were a natural part of the learning process. Celebrating small successes helped boost students' morale and foster a more resilient learning mindset (Kusuma &Ramadhani, 2022).

Time limitations within the classroom schedule also posed a significant constraint. The stages of the writing process - planning, drafting, revising, and publishing - often required more time than was available during a single class period. This led to some activities being rushed or unfinished. To mitigate this, the teacher occasionally assigned parts of the writing tasks as homework, ensuring continuity in the students' learning (Handayani & Nurhayati, 2020). In some cases, student motivation fluctuated throughout the writing process, especially when they encountered difficulties. To maintain engagement, the teacher integrated short breaks, motivational messages, and positive reinforcement techniques. These adjustments helped re-energize students and reminded them of their progress and potential, reaffirming their ability to grow as writers.

Reflections on the Impact of Folktale-Based Instruction, Nevertheless, the gradual improvement in students' writing abilities was evident. Over time, and with consistent practice, their work reflected greater clarity, organization, and grammatical accuracy. This progression was not only a result of effective instruction but also of the students' perseverance and commitment to learning. The visible improvements served as a source of motivation and a testament to their development (Rachmadani & Hapsari, 2023). In conclusion, integrating the short story The Tortoise and the Hare into English writing lessons at the junior high school led to significant pedagogical benefits. The combination of storytelling, visual aids, collaborative learning, and structured teacher guidance created a comprehensive and engaging learning environment. Although some obstacles remained, the use of short stories proved to be an effective strategy for enhancing students' writing skills in ELT contexts, as it provided both linguistic input and meaningful content that inspired students to write (Rizki & Fauziah, 2021). Importantly, the use of folktales bridged the cognitive and emotional dimensions of learning. Students were not only writing better but also writing with more purpose, voice, and cultural awareness. These qualitative changes signal a deeper transformation in how students relate to writing as a communicative and expressive act. The implementation of this strategy also underscores the importance of integrating literature into language learning, especially in environments where motivation and engagement are key concerns. Stories offer an immersive experience that goes beyond mechanics, allowing learners to explore, imagine, and construct meaning in context. Furthermore, this case study offers practical implications for ELT educators. It highlights the need for contextually relevant,

emotionally resonant, and pedagogically sound materials to enhance writing instruction. The success of this approach suggests that even in resource-limited settings, creativity and thoughtful planning can yield meaningful educational outcomes. Future research could explore the use of other local or international folktales to diversify content, adapt to different proficiency levels, and build cross-cultural competencies. The integration of technology-enhanced storytelling tools might also open new avenues for interactive, personalized learning experiences in writing classrooms.

Conclusion

This research has highlighted the pedagogical value of incorporating folktales, particularly The Tortoise and the Hare into English writing instruction for ELT contexts at the junior high school. The findings reveal that folktales can serve as powerful instructional tools, not only in providing meaningful and authentic language exposure but also in fostering creativity, improving narrative structure, and increasing student's motivation. The students showed significant development in organizing their ideas, expanding their vocabulary, and expressing themselves more confidently and coherently in writing. The story-based approach created a student-centred, engaging learning environment supported by various strategies such as visual aids, peer collaboration, structured scaffolding, and reflective exercises. These methods addressed common writing challenges in ELT contexts, including grammar issues, vocabulary limitations, and anxiety about making mistakes. Over time, students began producing more elaborate, organized, and expressive compositions, reflecting both linguistic improvement and personal growth. Moreover, the integration of moral values from the story helped students connect language learning with life lessons, deepening both their cognitive and emotional engagement. This connection enhanced their ability to write with purpose and meaning, making writing not just a technical skill but also a form of self-expression and reflection. In conclusion, the use of folktales like The Tortoise and the Hare offers a promising strategy for improving writing skills in ELT settings. It bridges the gap between linguistic theory and classroom practice by creating an enjoyable yet effective learning experience. Future research could explore the integration of other culturally relevant folktales or multimodal storytelling techniques to further enrich writing instruction and support diverse learner needs.

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