Using Fairy Tales as a Medium for Performance-Based Assessment in English Learning

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Abstract: Fairy tales are universal narratives that are seasoned with the wisdom of years and valuable resources, making them a powerful tool for teaching English as a foreign language. The article examines the usage of fairy tales alongside with performance-based assessment to facilitate language comprehension and stimulate imagination. The significance of this paper lies in demonstrating fairy tales as an interactive and culturally tool for evaluating English language proficiency. Therefore, the main objective of the article is to investigate practical application of fairy tales in English language classrooms and examine how they can be assessed in educational settings. For attaining the aim of the research, the study was conducted with first-year university students, using a set of carefully selected fairy tales as the basis for classroom activities, including storytelling sessions, interactive reading activities, role-playing, and group projects, which were assessed based on fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy, and creativity. Data was collected through classroom observations, post-study survey and performance-based assessments using rubrics to evaluate the effectiveness of fairy tales in English learning. The findings reveal that educators should incorporate storytelling and performance-based assessments to create a more dynamic and student-centered learning environment.

Keywords: Fairy tales, Performance-based assessment, English language, Classroom activities

Introduction

Traditional methods of teaching and assessment in foreign language learning are predominantly reproductive in nature and often focus on grammar drills and memorization, which may not fully engage students. However, the demands of the modern world call for a shift toward more interactive approaches, emphasizing the development of key skills such as communication, critical thinking, and creativity (TESOL, 2020). In the context of English language learning, contemporary methodologies are grounded in the use of learners' creative potential and promote active learning, cultural awareness, and emotional involvement. One particularly effective tool in this regard is the use of fairy tales—an ancient form of storytelling that resonates deeply with human emotions. Fairy tales have the power to captivate attention, spark curiosity, enrich one's inner world, stimulate imagination, and foster intellectual growth (Cameron, 2001). Given their educational value, fairy tales align

naturally with performance-based assessment (PBA), which evaluates students through real-life communication and interactive tasks, thereby making the learning process more practical and engaging (Greet Mia Jos Fastre & Marcel R van der Klink, 2010).

This paper explores how fairy tale texts and associated activities can be relevant, enjoyable, and meaningful for learners, positively influencing their attitudes toward both the language and the learning process itself. Furthermore, the study examines how PBA serves as an effective method for assessing students' ability to apply language skills in authentic contexts. By emphasizing real-world application, PBA encourages student participation, collaboration, and active engagement. It often incorporates self-assessment and peer feedback, promoting a reflective and learner-centered educational experience (Greet Mia Jos Fastre & Marcel R van der Klink, 2010).

The combination of fairy tales and performance-based assessment offers a dynamic and interactive learning experience. Storytelling and role-playing activities allow students to express themselves naturally, while reading and interpretation tasks enhance comprehension and critical thinking (Cameron, 2001). Additionally, dramatization and group projects promote collaboration and communication, making language learning more engaging and effective. In the process of working with fairy tales in English language learning, students improve their speech in both their native and foreign languages. Their vocabulary becomes activated and enriched, and retelling fairy tales helps to develop emotionally expressive dialogic and monologic speech. As a result of purposeful instruction, students not only acquire language skills but also learn to use verbal means to express their emotions, which contributes to their communicative development and social adaptation (Bagg, 1991).

Method

The participants are the first – year university students studying English as a foreign language, selected based on proficiency level to ensure equal participation. When selecting fairy tales, we took into account both linguistic complexity and cultural relevance, using a carefully curated collection of tales. For the activities, we focused on developing four language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening). Consequently, the following activities were chosen, in line with the PBA criteria:

During an **interactive reading** session**,** students first explore the title – for example, "Jack and the Beanstalk." They are encouraged to share their thoughts on the concept of a beanstalk and discuss whether they believe in magical elements such as giants or enchanted plants. Following this, the teacher proceeds with reading the story aloud, pausing at strategic points to allow students to predict what might happen next in the narrative. As an alternative, the same activity can be conducted using audiobooks. In this case, students listen to the audio and subsequently share their opinions and reflections with the class, fostering a dynamic discussion. The purpose of this approach is to encourage students to practice communication at various levels, fostering both verbal and non-verbal skills, while simultaneously promoting critical thinking and enhancing their ability to analyze and reflect on the material (Skopinskaya, 1996).

In storytelling sessions, students not only focus on enhancing their pronunciation, intonation, and fluency, but also engage in expanding their vocabulary. To begin, they are introduced to a diverse range of rich and specific terms, such as words related to characters and their attributes, including "sorceress," "knight," "warlock," and "dragon slayer." They also explore vocabulary associated with the settings of fairy tales, like "enchanted forest," "kingdom in the clouds," "hidden realm," and "magical grotto." Additionally, descriptive terms for treasures and riches, such as "diamond," "obsidian," "golden chalice," "treasure trove," and "crystal goblet," are incorporated. Following this, students are tasked with creating their own stories using these newly learned words. Finally, they retell their narratives to practice articulating their ideas clearly and confidently, refining both their storytelling and language skills (Bagg, 1991).

Role-playing and dramatization offer an engaging and enjoyable way to learn. In this activity, students embody characters from the stories, acting out scenes while focusing on employing the appropriate tone, gestures, and emotions to effectively convey meaning. This approach not only enhances their confidence in speaking but also fosters creativity in dialogue, making language learning a dynamic, interactive experience. Furthermore, grammar concepts can be seamlessly integrated into the preparation for role-playing. For instance, the teacher can highlight the use of the Past Simple tense in narratives and the Present Simple tense in dialogues. Additionally, word order can be reinforced through reading and acting out fairy tales, further strengthening students' understanding of grammatical structures (Cameron, 2001).

Group projects elevate collaborative learning by challenging students to rewrite or reimagine classic fairy tales, such as creating a modernized version of Beauty and the Beast with a unique twist. Whether they choose to place the story in a contemporary setting or alter its key elements, the emphasis is on collaboration and innovation. Throughout the process, students must work together, communicate effectively, divide responsibilities, and produce a final project that reflects their shared ideas. The objective is to promote teamwork, inspire creativity, and offer students the opportunity to apply their language skills in a practical, real-world context. In doing so, students develop essential skills such as teamwork, writing, creative thinking, problem-solving, and effective communication (Skopinskaya, 1996).

To evaluate students' performance in the classroom activities, the following performance-based **assessment (PBA) criteria** were applied:

Table 1. PBA criteria

№	Interactive Reading & Listening Comprehension	Storytelling Sessions	Role-Playing & Dramatization	Group Projects
1	**Comprehension & Interpretation** – Ability to understand and analyze the story.	**Pronunciation & Intonation** – Clarity and accuracy in speech delivery.	**Character Portrayal** – Use of tone, gestures, and emotions to convey meaning.	**Writing & Language Use** – Clarity, coherence, and grammatical accuracy in writing.
2	**Prediction Skills** – Effectiveness in making logical guesses about the story.	**Vocabulary Use** – Incorporation of learned words into storytelling.	**Grammar accuracy** – Proper sentence structure and grammatical accuracy.	**Teamwork & Communication** – Collaboration, idea-sharing, and role distribution.
3	**Listening Skills** – Attentiveness and ability to extract key details.	**Creativity & Expression** – Ability to construct and narrate engaging stories.	**Collaboration & Interaction** – Effective teamwork and responsiveness to scene partners.	**Presentation & Delivery** – Effectiveness in presenting the final project.

Results and Discussion

To assess the effectiveness of fairy tales in performance-based assessment, we employed classroom observation as a key data collection method, focusing on student participation and tracking their performance across above-mentioned activities. The observations were conducted over six weeks with 28 students from the Department of American Studies and Translation at the Institute of Philology and Intercultural Communication. Data collection was based on a performance-based rubric and a classroom observation checklist, using a five-point scale ranging from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) to evaluate student progress. The overall results of student performance based on PBA criteria are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Aggregated classroom observation data

Assessment Criteria	Average Score (Week 1-2)	Average Score (Week 5-6)	Improvement (%)
Comprehension & Interpretation	3.2	4.5	+40.6%
Prediction Skills	2.8	4.2	+50.0%
Listening Skills	3.5	4.6	+31.4%
Pronunciation & Intonation	3.1	4.4	+41.9%
Vocabulary Use	2.9	4.3	+48.3%
Creativity & Expression	3.0	4.7	+56.7%
Character Portrayal (Role-Playing)	3.4	4.8	+41.2%
Grammar Accuracy	3.3	4.5	+36.4%
Collaboration & Interaction	3.6	4.9	+36.1%
Writing & Language Use	3.0	4.4	+46.7%
Teamwork & Communication	3.7	4.8	+29.7%
Presentation & Delivery	3.2	4.6	+43.8%

The observational data revealed significant improvement across all assessed areas, with students demonstrating a 40-50% increase in language comprehension, vocabulary use, and speaking fluency over six weeks. The most notable progress was in creativity and expression (+56.7%), attributed to engaging storytelling and role-playing activities that encouraged imaginative language use. Additionally, grammar and pronunciation improved by 36-42%, suggesting that contextual learning through fairy tales reinforced linguistic accuracy. Furthermore, collaboration and teamwork increased by 29.7%, highlighting the effectiveness of group projects and interactive storytelling in fostering communication and cooperative learning skills. After the completion of the lessons, students were asked to complete a post-survey to share their experiences. The results reflect their views on how working with fairy tales influenced their learning. The three most notable responses are illustrated in the following graphs.
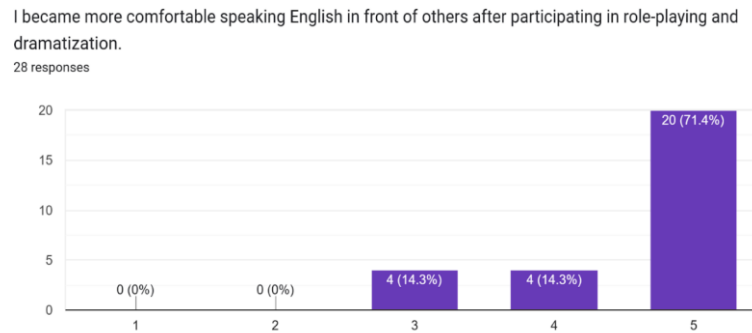

Figure 1. Role playing and speaking confidence

Figure 1 shows that the majority of students (71.4 %) agreed that role-playing and dramatization increased their comfort in speaking English in front of others. This indicates that incorporating interactive and performance-based tasks can positively influence students' speaking confidence.
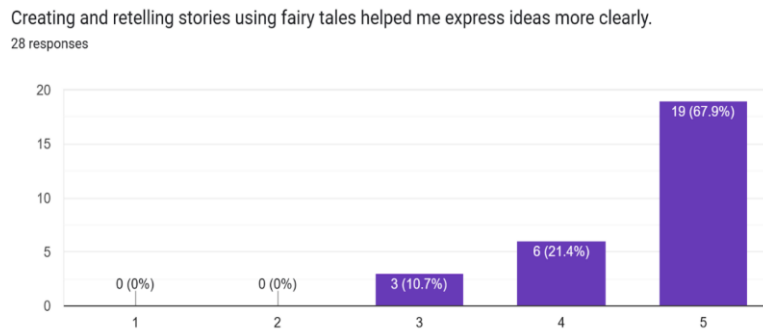

Figure 2. Clarity in expressing ideas

Here most students responded positively to this statement, with nearly 90% selecting 4 or 5 on the scale. This suggests that storytelling not only improves linguistic skills but also supports better articulation of thoughts in English.
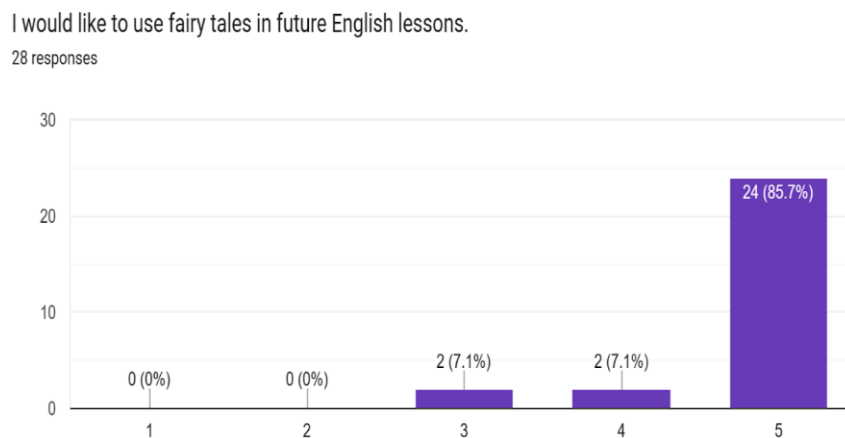

Figure 3. Interest in future use of fairy tales

The majority of students (85.7%) strongly expressed their desire to continue using fairy tales in future English lessons, while none selected options 1 or 2. This indicates a high level of satisfaction and enthusiasm toward integrating fairy tales into language learning. Based on the classroom observations and post-survey results, this study highlights the effectiveness of integrating fairy tales with performance-based assessment (PBA) in English language learning. The findings demonstrate that narrative-driven, interactive approaches significantly enhance student engagement, linguistic proficiency, and communicative confidence. However, certain aspects require further refinement, particularly when considering individual learning preferences and content selection.

While the majority of students actively participated in the classroom activities, observations revealed that a subset of students, despite demonstrating strong academic performance, exhibited lower levels of engagement in group-based tasks. These students displayed a preference for independent learning, suggesting that collaborative methods may not be equally effective for all learners. This highlights the necessity of incorporating individualized learning strategies into PBA to accommodate diverse learner profiles. Future adaptations of this methodology should integrate alternative assessment criteria that account for both collaborative and independent performance, ensuring that all students receive a comprehensive and equitable evaluation of their language skills.

Another key factor influencing the effectiveness of this approach is the selection of appropriate fairy tale materials. Not all fairy tales are structured with clear transitional sequences that facilitate interactive reading and predictive exercises. In some cases, the narrative flow lacks sufficient breaks, making it challenging to implement prediction-based activities effectively. Additionally, certain fairy tales may contain limited lexical variety, thereby restricting opportunities for vocabulary expansion. To optimize their pedagogical impact, fairy tales should be carefully selected based on their linguistic richness, narrative coherence, and suitability for specific classroom activities.

Conclusion

The integration of fairy tales into foreign language instruction has been widely recognized as an effective pedagogical approach. Their incorporation into lessons not only facilitates vocabulary expansion, grammatical accuracy, and reading comprehension but also fosters creativity, cognitive development, and engagement in language learning. Additionally, fairy tales serve as a valuable tool for enhancing students' memory, attention, and imagination—skills that are essential in mastering a foreign language. Furthermore, performance-based assessment (PBA) emerges as a viable alternative to traditional evaluation methods by allowing students to demonstrate their language proficiency through authentic communication, creative expression, and interactive learning experiences.

The study also revealed certain aspects that require further refinement. While many students benefited from collaborative activities, some high-achieving individuals exhibited difficulties in group-based tasks, underscoring the necessity of individualized assessment criteria. Moreover, the careful selection of fairy tales is crucial, as not all narratives provide ample opportunities for predictive exercises, interactive reading, or meaningful vocabulary development.

These findings highlight the significance of integrating interactive storytelling and PBA into language education while ensuring flexibility in assessment methodologies to accommodate diverse learner needs. Future research should investigate the long-term impact of fairy tale-based instruction on language acquisition, explore its comparative effectiveness against other literary genres, and develop adaptive assessment frameworks to further optimize learning outcomes.

Scientific Ethics Declaration

* The authors declare that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS Journal belongs to the authors.

Conflict of Interest

* The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest

Funding

Acknowledgements or Notes

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To cite this article: