



ENHANCING PRONUNCIATION THROUGH FOLKLORE BASED ROLE PLAY: EVIDENCE FROM INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract

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Pronunciation is a key but often neglected element of oral communication among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Indonesia. Conventional teaching methods primarily concentrate on mechanical drills, which provide little communicative exposure. This study examined the effectiveness of a folklore-based role play method in developing students' pronunciation ability at MTsN 8 Tulungagung. The study employed a one-group pre-test–post-test design with eighth-grade students, who learned from Indonesian folktales (e.g., *Timun Mas*, *Malin Kundang*) adapted into English scripts for interactive role-plays. Quantitative data were collected from pre-test and post-test pronunciation assessments, scored using a valid rubric covering accuracy, fluency, stress, and intonation. The results revealed a notable improvement in students' pronunciation performance following the implementation of the folklore-based role play, indicating that the treatment had a significant positive effect. These findings suggest that contextualized role play activities rooted in local culture can provide meaningful communicative practice, enhance learner motivation, and substantially improve pronunciation skills. The study thus contributes to pronunciation pedagogy by integrating cultural familiarity as both a motivational and linguistic resource in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Role Play; Indonesian Folklore; Pronunciation Proficiency; EFL Learning; Communicative Pedagogy

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INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is a core aspect in spoken interaction because it denotes the degree of ease in the understanding and interpretation of speech by listeners. In Indonesia's EFL environment, pronunciation mastery remains particularly demanding due to minimal contact with natural input and strong phonological influence from learners' mother tongues. Many students are nervous and insecure when speaking English, mostly because of frequent mispronunciations and the fear of judgment. For this reason, pronunciation instruction must also address not only linguistic precision but also emotional engagement and meaningful contextual practice.

However, despite its crucial role in communicative competence, pronunciation is often treated as a secondary component in English instruction. Several studies (e.g., Gilakjani, 2016; Derwing & Munro, 2015) have highlighted that in many EFL contexts, including Indonesia, pronunciation is marginalized in curricula and receives less instructional time compared to grammar or vocabulary. This neglect has practical implications: according to Education First's English Proficiency Index (2023), Indonesia ranked in the "low proficiency" category, with particular weaknesses in oral fluency and

pronunciation clarity among secondary-level learners. Moreover, observations from classroom practices show that most EFL students struggle with segmental sounds (such as /θ/ and /ð/) and suprasegmental features (stress, rhythm, and intonation), leading to reduced comprehensibility and confidence in real communication.

The traditional approach to pronunciation in Indonesian classroom instruction has relied on repetitive and mechanical drills. While these activities may result in temporary improvements in accuracy, they do little to develop functional communication or authentic language production. According to Harmer (2007) and Celce-Murcia et al. (2010), real pronunciation development takes place when learners employ language in communicative situations that authentically require appropriate stress, rhythm, and intonation. In these terms, role play becomes a strong pedagogical tool because it places learners in interactive, realistic situations that nurture fluency, correctness, and confidence all at once.

As Rojas & Villafuerte (2018) and Nguyen & Do (2017) have noted, role play has long been recognized as a communicative approach that connects linguistic ability with real-life practice. Learners, acting out different characters in staged situations, are engaged in negotiating meaning and expressing ideas spontaneously, enabling them to pick up pronunciation features contextually. However, despite its pedagogical potential, the use of role play for pronunciation instruction remains underexplored in Indonesian junior secondary settings. Most previous studies have focused on speaking fluency or vocabulary enrichment (e.g., Nurbaya & Hadi, 2020; Fitriana, 2022), but few have examined pronunciation outcomes, especially when contextualized through culturally relevant materials.

Folklore, in this regard, offers a unique and culturally grounded resource for language learning. It serves as a rich cultural and linguistic repository, affording learners a familiar narrative base on which to exercise their language. Integrating local stories like *Malin Kundang*, *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih*, and *Timun Mas* into English lessons not only gives voice to cultural heritage but also provides more interest and emotional engagement for the learners. According to Susanti (2024), attachment to well-known tales allows students to use expressive intonation and more natural speech rhythm as they perform, making pronunciation practice more meaningful.

Given these considerations, the present study is urgent and novel in its attempt to explore a folklore-based role play approach to pronunciation instruction. It seeks to fill the pedagogical gap by linking local cultural narratives with communicative pronunciation practice, addressing both linguistic challenges and affective barriers that hinder learners' oral performance. Specifically, the study investigates how contextualized role play rooted in Indonesian folklore can enhance the pronunciation ability of eighth-grade students at MTsN 8 Tulungagung, thereby contributing both to local-language pedagogy and to broader discussions of culturally responsive EFL teaching practices.

METHODS

The research adopted a quantitative methodology by implementing a single-group design that compared learners' performance before and after the intervention within a pre-experimental structure. This model was selected to determine how effectively Indonesian folklore-based role play enhanced students' pronunciation achievement. The design is summarized as follows:

Table 1.
 Quantitative Method One Group Pre-test Post-test

Group	Pre-Test	Treatment	Post-Test
Experimental	O ₁	X	O ₂

Where:

- O₁ = Pre-test before treatment
 X = Role play treatment using Indonesian folklore
 O₂ = Post-test after treatment

This design enables comparison of students' pronunciation performance before and after the intervention.

The participants were 30 eighth-grade students from MTsN 8 Tulungagung during the 2024/2025 academic year. The class was selected purposively based on the teacher's recommendation and students' relatively homogenous English proficiency. The study took place over five meetings (two weeks), covering the stages of pre-test, treatment, practice, and post-test implementation.

Data were collected through a pronunciation test consisting of reading and role-playing tasks. Students' performances were recorded and assessed using a rubric adapted from Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) and validated by three English education experts. The rubric evaluated four components:

1. Articulation accuracy
2. Word stress and intonation
3. Fluency and rhythm
4. Overall intelligibility

Each component was scored on a 1–10 scale, producing an overall mean pronunciation score per student.

The instructional phase centered on developing pronunciation skills through English role-play activities constructed from Indonesian folktales. Learners were organized into several small teams, with each group receiving a distinct narrative such as Timun Mas or Malin Kundang. They collaboratively rewrote and converted their assigned tale into an English dialogue script, while the teacher provided targeted guidance on producing appropriate intonation, rhythmic patterns, and articulatory features aligned with the characters' lines.

The teaching sequence was as follows:

1. Pre-Test: Students performed a short reading aloud task for baseline pronunciation measurement.
2. Treatment Session 1–3: Students received input on pronunciation features, practiced dialogues, and rehearsed role play performances.
3. Post-Test: Students performed the adapted folklore dialogues and were re-evaluated using the same rubric.

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics via SPSS version 21. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) summarized pre-test and post-test scores.

A paired sample t-test was used to determine whether the difference between pre-test and post-test mean scores was statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

The hypothesis testing criteria were as follows:

H_0 (null hypothesis): There is no significant difference in students' pronunciation proficiency before and after using folklore-based role play.

H_a (alternative hypothesis): There is a significant difference in students' pronunciation proficiency before and after using folklore-based role play.

If the significance value (p-value) is less than 0.05, H_0 is rejected, indicating that the treatment has a significant effect..

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Results

The pronunciation test was administered before and after the treatment. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of students' scores in the pre-test and post-test.

Table 2.
Descriptive Statistics of Students' Pronunciation Scores

Test Type	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Pre-Test	30	7.21	0.68	6.00	8.00
Post-Test	30	8.87	0.55	8.00	10.00

The data show a clear improvement in students' pronunciation scores after the treatment. The mean score increased from 7.21 in the pre-test to 8.87 in the post-test, with a decrease in standard deviation, indicating more consistent performance among students.

A normality test was performed using the Shapiro–Wilk test to ensure that the data met the assumptions for parametric testing. Results indicated that both pre-test ($p = 0.125$) and post-test ($p = 0.091$) values were greater than 0.05, confirming that the data were normally distributed.

To determine the statistical significance of the improvement, a paired sample t-test was conducted using SPSS version 21.

Table 3.
Paired Sample t-Test Results

Variable	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Post-Test – Pre-Test	1.66	0.563	29	0.000

The significance value ($0.000 < 0.05$) indicates a statistically significant improvement in students' pronunciation after the use of folklore-based role play. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted. This means that role play using Indonesian folklore effectively improved pronunciation proficiency among the students.

Discussion

The results of the study clearly indicate that incorporating Indonesian folklore into role-play activities significantly improves learners' pronunciation skills. The rise in average scores from 7.21 to 8.87, along with the very strong t-test significance level ($p < 0.001$), shows that culturally grounded role-play can serve as an effective instructional strategy for strengthening pronunciation in EFL settings.

These findings are consistent with the views of Celce-Murcia et al. (2010), who argue that sustained progress in pronunciation is better achieved through meaningful communicative practice than through repetitive drill-based methods. By engaging students in contextualized performance, the role-play sessions helped them direct attention not only to individual sounds but also to broader suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation that naturally occur in real communication.

The emotional closeness students felt toward familiar folktales also contributed greatly to their learning. Because they recognized the characters and cultural backgrounds, students were more willing to express themselves and were able to produce speech with more natural prosody. This result mirrors the conclusions of Susanti (2024) and Dwiyantri & Lolita (2023), who found that culturally relevant narratives heighten motivation, confidence, and expressive delivery in drama-based language tasks.

From an affective standpoint, using role play helped reduce learners' speaking anxiety while encouraging them to communicate more freely. Kim & Hwang (2024) emphasize that high anxiety tends to hinder accurate pronunciation, and the collaborative, performance-oriented environment offered through role play appeared to ease this pressure, allowing students to speak more fluently and with more stable pronunciation patterns.

Overall, the study emphasizes the value of integrating communicative techniques with meaningful cultural content. Employing folklore as the foundation for role-play activities not only sharpens learners' pronunciation accuracy but also fosters cultural appreciation, supporting the Merdeka Curriculum's objective of incorporating local wisdom into the educational process.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that Indonesian folklore integrated into role-play activities effectively enhances learners' pronunciation performance in the EFL context. The comparison between students' performance before and after the intervention implies a great and meaningful improvement, and it can therefore be assumed that the instructional treatment strongly positively influenced their pronunciation development.

Such an approach succeeded for several reasons: the communicative and interactive role-play tasks allowed learners to practice pronunciation purposefully; by being culturally familiar with the folktales selected, students were more motivated and emotionally engaged in the process, and the structured guidance during the performance sessions allowed them to refine both segmental accuracy and suprasegmental aspects such as stress, rhythm, and intonation.

Based on these findings, educators are encouraged to integrate culturally grounded storytelling into communicative pronunciation instruction. Role play based on folklore does indeed ensure a cognitive and relevant learning context that helps learners internalize the phonological patterns of English while continuing to maintain strong ties with their cultural roots. Further research is needed with more robust designs, such as

including control groups or making longitudinal measurements, to consolidate the outcomes reported herein. The investigation of digital or multimedia folklore-based role play could also further extend its use and effectiveness in the contemporary EFL classroom.

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