



Folktales as Inclusive, Culturally Relevant Teaching Resources to Enhance Engagement and Participation in Sesotho Language Classrooms: Teachers' Perceptions

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Abstract

Folktales are old enduring oral stories which have been passed from generation to generation and serve as conveyers of Basotho traditions and customs. Their rich cultural and social content make them an inspiring and interesting topic to most learners in the Sesotho subject. This multiple-case study investigated how folktales as inclusive and cultural teaching resources enhance engagement and participation among Sesotho language secondary school learners. It also sought to explore the challenges faced by Sesotho language teachers in teaching folktales. The study is guided by Social Constructivism theory which emphasizes the critical significance of social interaction and cultural contexts in learning. Using a qualitative research approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight Sesotho teachers working in four Leribe district secondary schools. Six teachers were female, while two were male and they all taught Sesotho language as a subject from Grade 8 to Grade 11. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data guided by the objectives of the study. The findings show that teachers reported that Sesotho folktales appeared to enhance engagement and participation in their classrooms. Teachers reported that teaching strategies like role-playing, students' involvement in narrating folktales and critical thinking classroom discussions seemed to increase students' levels of participation and engagement. Although the findings show positive aspects of teaching folktales, they also reveal challenges for both teachers and learners. Teachers noted some challenges in teaching folktales including learners' and teachers' limited knowledge of folktales and learners' skepticism regarding belief in folktales. The study therefore highlights concerns about how teachers can pedagogically bridge belief and disbelief in folktales.

Introduction

For many indigenous writers, traditional stories are a way of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture (Vilakazi, 1945), in the hope that future generations will treasure them and pass the stories on further (Datta, 2018). Folktales have been an integral part of human culture and tradition for centuries, serving to preserve culture, pass down morals and values, and entertain audiences (Masowa, 2024). Traditionally, in most African countries, including Lesotho, these folktales were transmitted orally by older people to children around a fireplace. Fireplaces served as focal points for



oral storytelling traditions. According to Hadijah & Ainembabazi (2025), the fireplace was the classroom and the elders were teachers, especially elderly women. Medda (2025) asserts that in rural areas, community elders and grandparents traditionally served as storytellers, making folktales a form of social learning. The narrator of a folktale would begin by calling upon the audience's attention as follows:

Narrator: *Ba re e ne re* (they say it was said that, which is equivalent to, 'once upon a time')

Audience: *Qoi* (an interjection made by the audience to indicate that the narrator should continue the tale and that they are attentively listening)

The narrator then tells the folktale, and the audience keeps quiet to listen. At the end of the tale, the narrator says, '*ke ts'omo ka mathetho*' loosely translated as 'the folktale ends here' to inform the listeners that the tale has come to an end. This was seen as a way of informally educating children (Medda, 2025; Hadijah & Ainembabazi, 2025). Formal education in Lesotho begins at pre-school to the tertiary level, and folktales have been incorporated from pre-school to the secondary education level. This makes it apparent that, despite the role schools now play in education, traditional elements of informal education have not been abandoned in Lesotho's education system. The teaching and learning of folktales cut across pre-primary, primary and secondary education in Lesotho. At the secondary school level, the Sesotho syllabus has three papers, and folktales are part of Paper 3. Folktales together with Sesotho riddles and proverbs are taught in traditional literature under the topic '*Thlao le kholo ea ngoana Mosotho*', which can loosely be translated as 'The birth and growth of a Mosotho child'. These Sesotho riddles, proverbs, and folktales are taught with the objective to continue to inculcate indigenous knowledge and to teach "cultural values such as respect, confidence, patriotism, responsibility, cleanliness, trust, problem-solving, humility, creativity, and humility" (Ministry of Education and Training, 2020:15) in Basotho children. Folktales are told in a suspenseful and engaging manner and require the audience to pay attention to follow (Motsei & Phindane, 2021; Hayashi et al., 2022). Integrating folktales into school curricula enhances cultural and linguistic literacy because their interactive nature enables learners to participate and have a sense of belonging (Medda, 2025). There is existing literature suggesting that the teaching of folktales enhances learners' engagement and participation across diverse contexts, such as Kuwait, Turkey, and Indonesia (Koushki, 2019; Avcu, 2025; Zamiraxon & Madinabonu, 2025). Nonetheless, literature on how Sesotho folktales enhance learner engagement and participation in Lesotho secondary schools remains scant. Meanwhile, learner engagement and participation drive academic success. This study, therefore, aims to examine how folktales, as inclusive cultural artefacts, enhance student engagement and participation in Lesotho secondary school classrooms. It also aims to identify the challenges Sesotho teachers face in their classrooms when teaching folktales.

Literature Review

Understanding engagement and participation, and the role of folktales in culturally relevant teaching

Student engagement is central to learning, as it can lead to many positive outcomes, such as student success and achievement (Fredricks et al., 2019; Xie et al., 2019). Although there are various ways in which engagement has been conceptualised (Sinatra et al., 2015), several researchers describe it from three perspectives: behavioural, cognitive and emotional engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004; Wang et al., 2011). *Behavioural* engagement refers to learners' involvement in academic tasks, such as answering and asking questions (Sinatra et al., 2015), and *cognitive* engagement refers to learners' psychological participation, including awareness, self-regulation, and the use of strategies in challenging academic tasks (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2012). *Emotional* engagement refers to students' affective and attitudinal



reactions to a learning process, including interest and enjoyment (Pekrun & Linnenbrink-Garcia, 2012). There is evidence that student engagement is crucial to learning success. Research demonstrates that students who are actively engaged in the learning process in schools show increased academic achievement (Lee & Smith, 1995; Roderick & Engle, 2001; Willingham et al., 2002). There are pedagogical practices related to students' engagement, including frameworks such as culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018), culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). These frameworks foreground the influence of sociocultural contexts on students' learning process and suggest that students learn effectively in classroom activities that are relevant to their experiences and backgrounds. This study was inspired by culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching activities that highlight the use of students' diverse cultural backgrounds as tools for teaching and learning. Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogical approach that incorporates and acknowledges students' cultural backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge into the learning process (Gay, 2018). The teaching of folktales, as traditional stories, aligns with culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy by connecting the curriculum to learners' diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences. This connection makes learning more effective, engaging and relevant. According to Anyichie et al. (2023), integrating learners' cultural backgrounds and experiences into the learning process can improve academic performance. Renu (2011) asserts that folklore is a distinctive component of culturally relevant pedagogy and an important tool for effective learning.

Folktales embracing the complexities of cultural diversity

Folktales are a source of understanding and knowledge of different cultures. Hajisoteriou et al. (2022) suggest that folktales can be introduced in classrooms to promote social justice pedagogy and enhance intercultural education goals, which inherently include aspects of inclusivity. The role of folklore, including fables, myths, fairy tales, and folktales, in a multicultural world is to bridge cultures across societies and promote mutual understanding by sharing the richness and diversity of various ethnic groups (Ruiz, 1995; Bekmatov, 2024). In the context of schools, a study conducted by Songsirisak et al. (2024) in Thailand found that folktale-based material developed secondary students' learning. It also showed that using ethnic folktales fostered multicultural understanding and a sense of belonging among students. Another study conducted in Thailand attests that folktales, as valuable sources of cultural heritage, increase students' awareness of diversity and the coexistence of human nature (Jitpranee et al., 2024).

Previous research has mostly focused on how folktales improve language skills and support second-language teaching (Nhung, 2016; Yumnam, 2021; Suryakant, 2024; Yakumbu et al., 2025; Morakabi, 2026). However, some studies have shown that storytelling can improve student engagement. Folktales, as part of the oral tradition of several African countries, have, to a certain extent, been shown to engage learners in secondary schools across different subjects, particularly in language classrooms (Khaleel, 2017; Koushki, 2019; Masowa & Moloi, 2025). Studies carried out by Koushki (2019), Avcu (2025) and Edi et al. (2025) showed that student participation increased when students narrated tales to their classmates, helping break the monotony of lessons by capturing students' attention and involving most of them in the learning activity. They further showed that local folktales promoted students' emotional engagement and contextualised English language learning, making the learning process more interactive, as most learners were involved in the learning activity. Avcu (2025) also found that teachers observed challenges in teaching folktales, such as time management, material sourcing, and language difficulties. Other studies highlighted that traditional oral elements, such as folktales, act as foundational tools in students' learning process, strengthening linguistic competence,



stimulating students' motivation, sustaining student engagement, and fostering cultural awareness (Zamiraxon & Madinabonu, 2025; Pratiwi, 2025). The studies reviewed provide evidence that folktales can improve student engagement and participation, but they do not clearly identify teaching strategies to enhance participation.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by the theory of Social Constructivism, primarily developed by Lev Vygotsky (1978). Social constructivism theory is appropriate for this study because it views learning as a social and cultural process. Traditional oral narratives, such as folktales, are inherently cultural artefacts passed down through generations, making them ideal for this framework. The application of this theory in the teaching of folktales is evident when students share their interpretations of the tales and connect them to their own backgrounds and life experiences. Folktales, as components of local cultural heritage, provide a pertinent context for students, enabling individuals of varying abilities to engage in sharing and participating in the learning process. The teaching of folktales goes beyond entertainment as it promotes participatory and active learning. As students narrate folktales in their lessons, they not only improve their communication and literacy skills but also become more active participants in the learning process. The relevance of this framework to this study is that it validates folktales not just as stories but as interactive cultural resources that are effective for learning, as it interweaves curriculum content with cultural acknowledgement. Through folktales, learners come to understand their own culture and the diverse cultural beliefs of others. Using this theory, the study contends that folktales are important educational tools that align with contemporary pedagogical approaches, particularly those that emphasise learner-centred pedagogies and culturally responsive teaching. During the Sesotho folktale lessons, the learners operate within their ZPD, utilising the teachers' or other peers' storytelling cues to grasp moral lessons that they may not grasp through reading alone. The cues act as scaffolding, providing learners with an understanding that may not be achieved through independent reading. Folktales are cultural tools that use idiomatic expressions to mediate cognition. Learners may recall the events of a particular folktale and the consequences that befell characters who may have engaged in immoral or harmful actions. In other words, learners use the events of the tales as cognitive tools to control their own behaviour. One of the key concepts of the theory is that learning is collaborative and formed through mediated activity. In teaching folktales, teachers give learners the opportunity to collectively construct the meaning of the tales' events. These discussions serve as a mediation between what the tales dictate and how the learners understand them.

Methodology

Research Design, Method and Sampling

This study employed a qualitative research approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to explore how folktales enhance engagement and participation and the challenges teachers experience when teaching folktales. A multiple-case study design was used to provide in-depth contextual insight into the phenomenon under investigation (Yin, 2018). This study used purposive sampling (Merriam, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) to identify the research sites and participants. Eight Sesotho language teachers from four secondary schools located in Leribe district were selected as the participants of this study. The four secondary schools are government-run and admit students from all districts of Lesotho. Six teachers were female and two were male, and they all taught Sesotho as a subject from Grade 8 to Grade 11. These teachers all had more than 5 years of experience teaching all three Sesotho Papers, including Paper 3, which covers traditional Sesotho literature, such as folktales. To elicit qualitative data, semi-structured interviews lasting 40-55 minutes were conducted with teachers from



the four selected schools. Interviews were conducted in the Sesotho language at the schools where the teachers work. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the authors to ask follow-up questions.

Data Analysis

The data for this study were analysed thematically using the steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). In familiarising ourselves with the data, we (the authors) listened to the audio-recorded interview data twice before transcribing it. While the process of familiarisation with the data seemed time-consuming, it provided the authors with valuable orientation to the raw data and became foundational for all subsequent steps in the data analysis (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). After familiarising ourselves with the data by listening to the audio, we then transcribed it. The process of transcribing interview data involved converting participants' oral discourse into written text (Kvale, 2007). The authors, who are both bilingual in Sesotho and English, then translated the data into English. The primary author translated the Sesotho versions into English, and the secondary author translated the English versions back into Sesotho. The authors then compared the two Sesotho versions (the original and translated transcripts) and found no inconsistencies. Both transcripts, the original Sesotho and English translated versions, were reviewed by the participants to examine any discrepancies. The transcription of data was done concurrently with the description of data. After reading through the printed interview transcripts, we constructed initial codes, followed by sorting them into categories based on how similar they were to one another. After categorising the codes, initial themes were generated by sorting them into overarching themes and grouping them according to the research questions. Table 1 shows the code-to-theme exemplar. To ensure rigour, the primary author conducted independent coding, followed by shared coding and discussion with the secondary author. Discrepancies were solved by referring back to the data to ensure rigour. To ensure dependability and confirmability, audio-recorded data and transcripts were kept safely, and coding and thematic memos were documented briefly and clearly. Trustworthiness was maintained through member checking; the teachers were provided with direct quotes and a summary of the themes to verify whether the interpretations and findings reflected their perceptions. The authors also presented the study at a conference as a form of peer debriefing to validate the findings and elicit critical feedback.

Table 1: code-to-theme exemplar

Raw data/ Extracted quote	Code	Sub theme
<i>because folktales are interesting, students do not sleep in class and remain excited for the whole lesson</i>	Sustained excitement, active listening	Enhanced classroom attention and participation through folktales narrations
<i>as their peers narrate folktales</i>	Student-centred learning, peer teaching and peer participation	Collaborative participation and learning through folktales narrations
<i>as these children act out these folktales, they embody cultural values and they naturally build empathy as they step in the shoes of the characters</i>	Taking characters' perspectives, understanding values like compassion	engagement and embodiment through roleplay (transitioning from listening to participating through roleplay)
<i>some learners can start their folktales but are unable to finish them because they do not know them well</i>	Students forget the tales plot, unfamiliarity with the full versions of the tales	Folktales knowledge gaps
<i>in our modern contexts, learners are taught scientific reasoning, and they do not believe in such myths, they usually tell me that it is impossible</i>	Students use scientific judgement, demand evidence of certain events	Folktales disbelief



Ethical Considerations

The study followed the ethical considerations, and a permission letter to conduct research at the four secondary schools was obtained from the Ministry of Education and Training, Lesotho. The researchers presented the permission letter issued by the Leribe District Education Manager to the principals of the participating schools, requesting permission to collect data from the teachers, and the principals also granted us permission to conduct the study in their schools. Participants were informed about the study's aims and given information sheets about the research. Consent forms were signed by participants to indicate voluntary agreement to participate in the study. The participants were told that their participation was dependent on their agreement to participate willingly and voluntarily. They were further informed that they could withdraw from participating at any time they wished. The researchers asked for permission to audio-record the interviews. To ensure anonymity, the names of the participants and schools do not appear in the research and were kept confidential by the researchers. The researchers ensured that the participants were protected from emotional and physical harm. The data were kept safe and password-protected, making them available only to the researchers.

Results

This study explores how folktales, as inclusive, culturally relevant teaching resources, enhance learners' engagement and participation in Sesotho classrooms, as well as the challenges teachers face in teaching folktales. This section presents the results, and the participants' responses are displayed verbatim. The participants are referred to as Participant A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H for the purpose of anonymity.

Strategies Promoting Student Engagement and Participation Through the Teaching of Folktales

Students' Narrations of Folktales

The teachers indicated that during the folktales lessons, they asked learners to narrate the folktales they knew, and they observed that their learners listened attentively, and they also shared their stories with great enthusiasm. In the interviews with the teachers, one teacher made reference to the role of folktales and how they increased student classroom participation:

Because folktales are interesting, students do not sleep in class and remain excited throughout the lesson as their peers narrate them. Most learners love their Sesotho culture very much, and since most folktales teach traditional issues, learners enjoy them (Participant A).

Another teacher pointed out how all the students took part in narrating folktales:

We teach folktales from Grades 8 to 9, but in Grades 10 and 11, we only include them in our tests; we do not teach them directly. The actual teaching is done in Grades 8 and 9. Since we teach these folktales to young learners in Grade 8 & 9, I always observe that they enjoy them, and they all want to participate in narrating them. Most of them enjoy narrating those that have songs; they like singing. Even the audience becomes silent and attentive (Participant C).

Participant C further reported that, apart from the fact that folktales are funny and musical, another reason the learners enjoyed them, according to her observation, was that they made them feel a bit relaxed, as opposed to content-based topics like Sesotho grammar and composition writing.

Participant B reported that learners responded differently to the teaching of folktales; however, she observed that most learners showed much interest in them. This is how Participant B put it:



We teach folktales from Grade 8 to Grade 11; others do not seem to understand them, but most learners like them. I think the way in which I teach them makes them love them because while narrating a folktale, I even sing if there is a song involved in that particular tale, so I think they enjoy the singing part because they will be laughing and smiling as a way of showing their excitement.

Another teacher shared that they taught folktales from Grade 8 to 11, although in Grade 11, they mostly did exercises rather than the actual teaching. In his response, Participant D said:

Grade 8 learners are very fond of folktales. Folktales bring life to my classroom because they are interesting, and participation improves a lot. Again, folktales are those ancient tales that are mostly funny, and most of them include songs, so these kids become extremely excited during these lessons. When I ask them to narrate them, most of them take part, and they even want to narrate more than one tale.

Teachers E and G also explained that they observed that this strategy engaged learners in a different way as they seemed to pay more attention to other learners when they told tales than when it was the teacher who narrated them. This is what one teacher stated:

Before a learner narrates a tale, I tell all of them to go outside and get a small stick or a twig and stick it in their hair. Basotho believed that when tales are narrated during the day, both the narrator and the listeners will grow horns because folktales are narrated at night, so this action of placing a small stick in the hair was a protective measure to avoid growing horns (Participant G).

Participant G further reported that learners get engaged as they go outside the classroom to get twigs as part of narrating tales during the day.

Classroom Discussions that Foster Critical Thinking

The teachers reported that, in teaching folktales, they engaged learners by developing their critical skills. In an interview, one teacher articulated her teaching strategy:

To ensure active participation from all learners, I sometimes organise them into groups of four and ask them to discuss the lessons to be drawn from the folktales they have narrated in our Sesotho lessons. As they state the lessons they learned from those tales, they also support with evidence from those tales, (Participant C).

Participants A, D and E expanded on the role of folktales by sharing that they seemed to improve critical and analytical skills. They further claimed that they ensured that they engaged learners by asking them to analyse events in the folktales. Participant A noted:

As they analyse the events in the folktales, different perspectives come up, and learners support their arguments with evidence from the tales. What makes the analyses more interesting is that they speak in Sesotho, which gives them confidence to express themselves freely.

Role-playing

Two teachers pointed out that they teach folktales by giving learners the opportunity to assume the roles of characters and act them out. Teacher F noted, "As these children act out these folktales, they embody cultural values, and they naturally build empathy as they step in the shoes of the characters". Teacher H stated that when they teach tales through active drama, they enable learners to be active creators rather than passive listeners. "This method of teaching engages more learners in participation as they take roles of characters in the tale, unlike when I narrate the tales to them or when one learner narrates a tale" (Participant H).



Challenges Encountered in Teaching Folktales

Limited Knowledge of Folktales

Although, according to the teachers' observations, learners enjoyed the folktale lessons, the teachers' responses show that there are challenges in the teaching and learning of folktales. The most common challenge reported by the teachers was the learners' limited knowledge of folktales. Some teachers complain that they have limited knowledge of folktales due to insufficient access to documented folktales. Participant B pointed out:

Most learners like narrating their own folktales in class, but some learners can start their folktales but are unable to finish them because they do not know them well. It is also not easy to help them at times because there are some folktales which I do not know as a teacher. There are also some learners who actually mention that they have not heard of folktales before, neither from their primary schools nor from their homes or families.

Participant C raised a concern that some learners, especially from the urban areas seemed not know folktales and they claimed that they had never been taught folktales at their primary schools. *"I have noticed during the past years that most learners who complain that they were never taught folktales at their previous schools are learners who come from English medium schools or privately-owned primary schools"* (Participant C). Participant D complained that sometimes he spent more time on teaching folktales because some learners are not knowledgeable about them, and they would claim that they were hearing them for the first time. Participant D articulated a recurring concern:

The fact that I sometimes spend more time teaching folktales to help those who do not know them means other topics get sidelined in terms of time allocation. Again, learners who do not know them show less interest and even perform poorly on the tests.

Time Constraints

Three participants reported that one challenge they sometimes faced was being unable to manage their time because most learners seemed interested in participating in narrating their tales. They further pointed out that some tales were too long, especially those that included songs. Participant A said:

Some of these tales, which learners like, are very long and consume more time than the time allocated for teaching folktales. For example, the tale titled 'Tselane le Limo' is very long and involves a lot of singing, and it is not easy to stop learners in the middle of their narratives since they become very excited as they narrate them.

Participant D complained that sometimes more time was spent when he taught folktales because he was forced to accommodate learners who complained that they were not taught folktales in their previous schools and therefore were not knowledgeable about them. *"I have to teach them the roles of folktales and how to narrate them, so it sometimes takes much time"* (Participant D). Another teacher raised the concern that some of her learners, especially those from urban areas in Lesotho, seemed to show less interest in folktales, and that the strategies she sometimes employed to arouse their interest took more time. Participant B further pointed out:

Sometimes I, myself, narrate some folktales to my learners, and I have to choose those that include some performances like singing, so that the learners' interest may be aroused, so you will understand that such tales will take more time and more lessons.



Learners' Scepticism in Folktales Belief

According to the teachers' reports, learners were reluctant to believe the events in the folktales. All eight teachers indicated that they mostly experienced this challenge with learners in the senior classes, Grade 9, 10 and 11. One teacher emphasised that sometimes learners plainly show her that they do not believe the events in the folktales, even though they still demonstrate their interest in them. *"These children will tell you directly that some of the events in the tales are not practical and cannot happen"* (Participant A). Participants B and C shared the same sentiment. *"There are no serious challenges except that the learners sometimes do not believe in ideas like growing horns if they tell lies, and many other issues"* (Participant B). Participant D expanded on the same issue, *"as they listen to the folktales, learners sometimes make exclamatory remarks or interjections such as 'ahh' which indicate that they do not believe the events that are being told, especially the older ones in senior classes"*. Participant H also explained that her learners actually questioned her about whether some of the events were true. Participant H noted:

In one tale called 'Moshanyana le moriana' (loosely translated as 'the boy and medicine'), there is a man who falls pregnant because he drank some medicine he was told not to drink. So, in our modern contexts, learners are taught scientific reasoning, and they do not believe in such myths; they usually tell me that it is impossible.

Participant G showed that, even though his learners expressed disbelief in these tales, he made sure to explain the objective of each tale, with the aim of instilling morals, such as warning them against engaging in activities that might endanger their lives.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine how folktales improved student engagement and participation in Sesotho classrooms, as well as the challenges teachers face in teaching them. According to the teachers' observations, the findings suggest that student engagement is enhanced by learners' participation of narrating folktales in class. According to the teachers' claims, as the learners take turns telling stories, they all have the opportunity to participate and pay attention throughout the lesson. This finding underscores the importance of narrative-based learning, which shows that narratives are inherently engaging and motivate learners to participate actively in the learning process. As teachers encourage learners to narrate their own folktales, they foster student-centred learning, which promotes deeper learning and student engagement. Narrating folktales strongly aligns with Vygotsky's Social Constructivism, which holds that learners construct knowledge through social interaction and active engagement rather than being passive recipients of information. This finding is corroborated by the finding of Wiysahnyuy & Valentine (2023), who indicate that *"when students narrate folktales and draw lessons from the folktales, it instils active participation of students in the learning process"* (p. 6). The findings also suggest that holding classroom discussions about the events of the tales the learners have narrated engages learners and improves critical thinking. The teachers noted that the choice and use of folktales that enhance the learners' critical thinking foster student engagement and inclusivity in their Sesotho classrooms. As learners contribute to classroom discussions by analysing the events in the folktales, they share perspectives that reflect their diverse backgrounds. This means these classroom discussions encourage diverse perspectives and stimulate critical thinking skills among learners, thereby fostering a conducive learning environment. This finding aligns with social constructivism, which posits that collaborative learning involves individuals of varying abilities who share and participate to help one another comprehend the acquired knowledge. The findings indicate that folktales can be an important resource for participatory pedagogy. Participatory pedagogies are crucial in schools as they promote socialisation among learners (Nsamenang, 2016). The findings suggest that teaching folktales is beneficial for student engagement, which is *"a strategy for improving*



educational achievement" (Dunleavy & Milton, 2008: 5). Folktales increase cultural awareness and enhance respect for diversity by depicting the lifestyles and traditions of different societies. Through these folktales, learners from different cultural backgrounds learn about each other's cultures, fostering respect for diversity and multiculturalism in the classroom. This is supported by Yunus et al. (2019), who argue that integrating culturally relevant narratives fosters deeper learning, which encourages learners to participate actively. The findings suggest that the strategies employed by the teachers in teaching folktales create an inclusive classroom environment, which enables learners to participate actively in the learning process. As proposed by Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant pedagogy bridges the gap between the curriculum and the learners' cultural backgrounds, thereby fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

However, the findings also reveal that teachers face challenges in teaching folktales. One of the challenges highlighted by the teachers is learners' limited knowledge of folktales, which negatively impacts effective teaching. Teachers reported that some learners complained they were never taught folktales in their primary schools, which runs counter to the Lesotho primary school syllabus. As early as Grade 3, learners are taught how to appreciate and respect Basotho culture through listening to and retelling the Sesotho folktales '*Ntetekoane*', '*Moleso oa likhomo*'. According to the Grade 3 syllabus, at this level, learners are taught how to narrate folktales and make sense of the events in these tales. The findings of this study indicate that some learners are not taught folktales at their primary schools, suggesting that some Lesotho primary schools do not adhere to the syllabus. Failure to adhere to the syllabus may lead to ineffective teaching, disrupted learning and poor academic performance. Another challenge teachers encountered was poor time management, which, according to the teachers, resulted from learners' limited knowledge of folktales. It is evident that when teachers have to provide remedial lessons to learners who were not taught folktales in their primary schools, time allocated to other concepts or learning areas will be compromised. While providing remedial lessons to bridge learners' knowledge gaps may be a good strategy, it can be a waste of time for learners who do not need them, as teachers will be repeating content they have already grasped. Revisiting foundational concepts missed by some learners in primary schools may affect effective syllabus completion, as more time is spent teaching folktales. The findings of the study also reveal learners' scepticism about folktale beliefs, which is a reaction to be expected. According to Roper (2018), scepticism regarding belief in magic, ghosts and traditional healing has been given little attention by researchers and yet it exists. It is expected that learners may not believe in folktales, since they are prose narratives considered fiction (Valk, 2021). According to some folklorists, scepticism towards traditional beliefs does not mean disrespect but rather the act of critically evaluating them (Pudney, 2019). This suggests that students should be allowed and encouraged to question scenarios and evaluate different viewpoints. However, the teachers' role in this regard should be to use folktales as pedagogical tools that help learners think critically and develop an understanding of the meaning embedded in them and the moral principles they instil. To achieve this, teachers must understand the objectives of moral education that are aligned with the psychological and cognitive characteristics of secondary school students. In this way, learners will understand folktales as artefacts that help shape their morals, education, and upbringing, rather than as cultural relics meant for entertainment only. According to the teachers' observations, the same learners who showed disbelief in some tales interestingly participated and showed excitement when the tales were being narrated. This behaviour as reported by the teachers, underscores the continued relevance of folktales in enhancing engagement and participation in Sesotho classrooms. The fact that learners still show interest in the folktales despite some scepticism suggests they are not rejecting the tales outright. However, the critical question that remains an unanswered gap in the literature is how teachers should pedagogically



bridge belief and disbelief in teaching folktales. This remains an important area that future research must address.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that the teaching of folktales is a culturally responsive strategy which fosters engagement, participation and cultural awareness in classrooms. Incorporating folktales creates diverse, rich learning experiences that tap into all learners' cultural backgrounds. The teachers attested that integrating folktales into their teaching creates a culturally responsive and engaging learning environment. Research has demonstrated the importance of student engagement and inclusivity on students' academic outcomes. This study suggests that folktales may play an important role in enhancing student engagement and inclusivity, while also highlighting a few challenges teachers encounter when teaching folktales. The study has also established that selecting folktales relevant to learners' cultures and social contexts fosters active participation among learners. Furthermore, the study revealed that teaching folktales through role-playing can be an effective strategy for enhancing participation and engagement. However, despite the potential benefits of teaching folktales for student engagement and participation, the study identified several challenges. The challenges include teachers' and learners' limited knowledge of folktales, time constraints and learners' scepticism about folktales. To address these challenges, the study recommends that the Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training ensure that learners are taught folktales at the primary level, as the findings reveal that some learners are not taught folktales at their primary schools, contrary to the syllabus. This can help teachers manage their time effectively when teaching folktales, rather than spending extra time providing remedial lessons to bridge learners' knowledge gaps. Despite the identified challenges, the findings of this study underscore the importance of folktales as inclusive, culturally relevant resources for promoting student engagement and participation in Sesotho classrooms.

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