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# PIONEERING EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

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# PIONEERING EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

## Series 2025


Chief Editors:
Nur Alyani binti Khairol Anuar
Muhammad Irfan bin Mokhtar

Editors:
Aqeela binti Ahmad Kamiri
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07-3818455
edgii.apbpg@gmail.com

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# Preface

Pioneering Educational Perspectives: Series 2025 is a collection of thought-provoking insights and research contributions exploring contemporary educational trends and practices. This eBook presents a diverse range of perspectives on innovative teaching methodologies, digital learning strategies, and transformative approaches in education. Designed to serve as a resource for educators, researchers, and practitioners, it aims to inspire meaningful discussions and advancements in the field. Through carefully curated chapters, this publication offers fresh ideas and practical solutions to enhance learning experiences in an ever-evolving educational landscape.

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# UNLEASH YOUR ENGLISH: UNLOCKING ESL LEARNERS' POTENTIAL THROUGH FOLKTALE-BASED VIRTUAL DRAMA

Shakiratul Hanany Abd Rahman

*Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language, Universiti Malaysia Sabah*

*Corresponding author: hanany@ums.edu.my*

**ABSTRACT**

Motivated by the rapid transition to online learning during the pandemic, this intervention explored the potential of folktale-based virtual drama in Malaysian tertiary ESL classrooms. Two local folktales of *Si Tanggang* and *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah* were selected for the virtual drama for two key reasons: their familiarity provides students with a sense of comfort in working with well-known narratives and roles (Stinson, 2012), and they also serve to revive these traditional stories for students who may be less acquainted with them. As Cintya (2023) suggests, more research is needed to preserve traditional folktales; otherwise, they risk being forgotten by future generations. Therefore, conventional drama strategies were adapted for the virtual platform, creating a novel approach that not only allowed ESL students to learn English in a more engaging and interactive manner, but also endeavoured to revive the folktales amongst the youth.

**KEYWORDS:** Virtual drama, Folktale, Engagement, Interaction, Language learning

## PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVE

In Malaysia, despite 11 years of learning English before entering Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), ESL learners still struggle to attain adequate English literacy (Che Musa et al., 2012). Lack of English proficiency and poor communication skills are the major reasons why Malaysian graduates face rejection from employers (Yusof & Mohamad, 2018). A key challenge in developing speaking skills among ESL learners stems from low motivation, lack of self-confidence, anxiety, and inhibition (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021). Language anxiety, stemming from fears of making grammatical errors, discourages participation in class (Abdullah et al., 2024). Moreover, the Malaysian educational context often emphasises correctness over fluency, which can exacerbate anxiety levels among students who feel pressured to perform perfectly rather than express themselves freely (Badrasawi et al., 2021; Rose Suzila et al., 2021).

Drama is one of the approaches that has proven its efficacy to help ESL learners learn the language. However, although drama has proven effective for ESL learning, the integration of technology in drama remains underexplored, particularly in the Malaysian context. Moreover, while the younger generation may have some familiarity with folktales, their depth of knowledge and engagement is generally limited due to modern influences and changes in family dynamics regarding storytelling practices (Cintya, 2023; Yuliantari, 2021). In the context of Malaysia, knowledge about folktales is declining among the youth; in fact, many have no idea that these stories exist (Ahmad et al., 2018). Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for revitalising interest in folktales through the technology. As Yuliantari (2021) suggests, technology can be utilised to present these stories in engaging formats that resonate with younger audiences. Therefore, the objective of this research is to innovate language

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learning by developing a folktale-based virtual drama module that enhances ESL learner interaction and engagement while revitalising local folktales for younger generations.

## DESIGN DESCRIPTION

The virtual drama utilises Malaysian folktales, specifically *Si Tanggang* and *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah*, as pre-texts to launch the dramatic world. A pre-text, or stimulus, is vital for establishing a strong foundation in drama, encompassing various forms such as stories (O'Neill, 1995). The module was designed based on the insights obtained from a Needs Analysis conducted with ESL learners and instructors from various HEIs in Malaysia, as well as personal interviews with international drama and English Language Teaching (ELT) practitioners who experienced conducting drama online, namely Susan Hillyard and Ezekiel Chattell. Conventional drama strategies were adapted to suit the online learning environment with the aim to enhance ESL learners' interaction and engagement; the module was then reviewed by experts in the field before its implementation. Microsoft Teams was used as the primary platform, and additional digital tools used include Wakelet, Vevox, Kahoot!, Referendum, Nearpod, WhatsApp, and YouTube, enabling spontaneous English use and diverse virtual dramatic activities.

## VISUALS

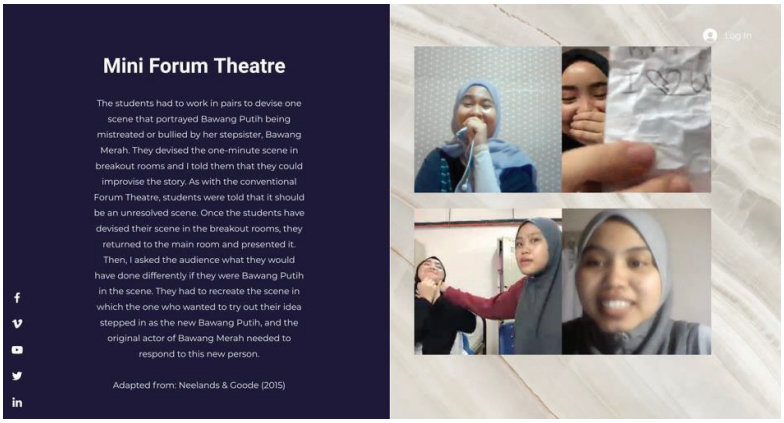



*Figure 1: Screenshot from the website showcasing one of the virtual drama activities for Bawang Putih Bawang Merah*

## NOVELTY AND UNIQUENESS

This module represents an innovative blend of drama, technology, and local folktales for language learning, a unique approach not previously implemented in Malaysia. Although a virtual folktale project called the *Hikayat Land* was conducted in Malaysia by Masmuzidin et al. (2012), it was specifically to inculcate moral values through a virtual learning environment to young children, rather than for English language learning. Utilising the concept of 'Mashup' (Cameron, 2009), the intervention combines various media—text-based, participatory, and mobile—through the digital tools utilised. This engagement strategy caters to tertiary ESL learners described as 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001), moving away from traditional methods to more diverse and interactive learning experiences. Additionally, the module revitalises local folktales, preserving cultural heritage while enhancing students' language skills through immersive, reflective activities. By adapting conventional drama techniques for online delivery, the intervention fosters creativity and collaboration, demonstrating the adaptability of drama-based pedagogy in contemporary education.

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## BENEFITS TO MANKIND

Based on the empirical evidence gathered, this module offers two key benefits: improved interaction and increased engagement. The module has proven to help students build confidence, reduce speaking anxiety, and enhances their willingness to communicate. This leads to more student talk and greater use of the second language (L2) in a supportive and welcoming environment. In terms of engagement, the module fosters active participation and generates intrinsic motivation through creative and interactive tasks. As students become more involved, their motivation to learn English heightens, making language learning more enjoyable and effective. Together, these benefits promote both English proficiency and a positive yet engaging language learning experience.

## COMMERCIAL POTENTIAL

This module has strong commercialisation potential through various avenues. It can be introduced via workshops or webinars as part of teacher training to familiarise educators with the pedagogy. Additionally, the module can be offered as an extracurricular activity in schools or universities to enhance students' language and cultural skills. By partnering with schools and HEIs, it can be integrated into the curriculum to enrich English learning experiences. Furthermore, the module offers opportunities for virtual cultural exchange programmes, fostering collaboration with international students and teachers to share and explore local stories across different cultural contexts.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this module combines creative drama techniques with the revitalisation of local folktales to enhance language learning in an engaging and culturally enriching way. By adapting traditional drama strategies for online delivery, it fosters increased student interaction, improving confidence, reducing anxiety, and encouraging greater use of the second language (L2). The module also enhances student engagement by promoting active participation and intrinsic motivation, making the learning process more enjoyable and meaningful. Its commercial potential is evident through applications in teacher training, extracurricular activities, curriculum integration, and international cultural exchange programmes. Looking ahead, future directions could include expanding the module to incorporate additional digital tools and platforms to further enhance interactivity and accessibility. It could also be adapted for diverse cultural contexts, allowing for the exchange of a wider variety of folktales. Collaboration with global institutions could further promote cross-cultural understanding and English language promotion, making the module applicable in various international educational settings.

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