

FOLKLORE AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCE IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Folklore, as an essential part of cultural heritage, constitutes a significant instructional resource in primary education, contributing to the linguistic, cultural, and socio-emotional development of students. This study was motivated by the need to understand teachers' perceptions of the role of folklore in the teaching process, the frequency of its practical application, and the potential of folkloric material to shape students' personal experiences, values, and attitudes. The study is qualitative and descriptive. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires administered to 50 primary education teachers from the Korçë Local Educational Office. The questions were carefully designed to encourage extended and reflective responses (Richardson, 1992). Analysis has been conducted using thematic analysis (Rodrigues, 2006) through a structured process that involved repeated reading of the materials, initial coding, thematic categorization, and integrated data analysis. The results indicate that teachers value folklore as a motivational tool that increases student interest, strengthens cultural awareness, and supports the development of linguistic skills. However, significant challenges were identified regarding the lack of adapted resources, particularly digital materials and methodological guides, as well as the need for professional development in the areas of didactic integration and the ethical adaptation of folkloric content for early childhood. The study offers concrete recommendations for linking cultural heritage with innovative teaching approaches, emphasizing the importance of training modules and the creation of sustainable digital resources.

Keywords: folklore, cultural heritage, thematic analysis, education, primary education.

1. Introduction

1.1. Context and the importance of folklore : Folklore, regarded as a treasure of intangible cultural heritage, constitutes a vast universe of knowledge, values, and cultural expressions transmitted from generation to generation. It encompasses traditional forms of expression such as myths, legends, fairy tales, songs, folk games, proverbs, and riddles, which are primarily transmitted orally or through everyday social practices (Dundes, 1980, p. 2; UNESCO, 2003, p. 2). These forms represent collective memory and how communities articulate their experience, worldview, and value systems (Bascom, 1965, p. 4). In this sense, folklore should not be viewed as a static relic of the past but as a dynamic element that is constantly reinterpreted and adapted within new social and educational contexts (Dundes, 1980, pp. 1-10). Within the educational system, particularly in primary education, folklore represents a resource with high formative potential, as it creates continuity between the child's familial cultural experience and the formal school environment. This continuity strengthens the sense of belonging and builds cultural identity from an early age (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 242; Banks, 2009, p. 13).

1.2. Didactic values of folklore in primary education Folklore offers extensive didactic potential in primary education, acting as a bridge between the child's reality and the formal world of school

learning. Through its narrative, symbolic, and linguistic structures, folklore creates favorable conditions for the development of fundamental cognitive, linguistic, social, and emotional competencies, which form the foundation of primary education. One of the primary didactic values of folklore is its role in linguistic development. Fairy tales, poems, and other folkloric forms are characterized by rhythm, rhyme, repetition, and rich figurative language that help expand students' active vocabulary and improve both oral and written expression skills. Through continuous exposure to these linguistic structures, children develop sensitivity to language, intonation, and symbolic meaning, thereby laying the foundations for functional literacy and linguistic aesthetics (Bruner, 1996, p. 40). Beyond linguistic development, folklore contributes significantly to the formation of critical and cognitive skills. The analysis of folktales enables students to distinguish between good and evil, identify motives and consequences, and reflect on the characters' actions. This process stimulates the development of critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving in a reasoned manner, creating a learning environment in which children learn through interpretation and discussion rather than merely reproducing information (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 26). Another significant didactic dimension is the role of folklore in increasing motivation and interest in learning. Folkloric materials are often closely linked to children's familial and cultural experiences, making them more relatable and emotionally resonant. This experiential proximity increases student engagement and fosters intrinsic motivation to learn, making the educational process more meaningful and sustainable over time. At both psychological and social levels, folklore plays a key role in shaping children's individual and collective identity. Through exposure to cultural heritage, students develop a sense of belonging and respect for tradition, gradually building their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). In the Albanian context, this capital is not merely a relic of the past, but an active mechanism that guarantees the continuity of collective memory and protects cultural identity in the face of globalization processes (Sinani, 2012, p. 56). The moral content of folk stories, which addresses themes such as justice, altruism, honesty, and responsibility, serves as a powerful educational tool for the acquisition of universal values and the formation of healthy social attitudes. In this way, folklore functions not only as a source of content but also as a comprehensive didactic instrument that supports the student's holistic development. Its intentional integration into primary education contributes to a richer, more contextualized teaching approach that is sensitive to the child's cultural identity (Bruner, 1996, p. 130; Vygotsky, 1978, p. 39; Bourdieu, 1986, p. 245).

1.3. Research problem and purpose : Even though the didactic values of folklore in primary education are recognized and documented, its practical implementation is often fragmented and unclear. Teachers face various challenges, including a lack of adapted resources, clear methodological guidelines, and opportunities for professional development related to the use of folkloric materials (Fullan, 2007, p. 92). This discrepancy between the didactic potential of folklore and actual teaching practices requires a systematized analysis and a structured approach that enables its effective integration into the primary education curriculum (Goodlad, 1979, p. 28). This research aims to address these gaps by analyzing teachers' perceptions regarding the use of folklore and identifying the factors that facilitate or hinder its integration into teaching. Based on this approach, the study provides several recommendations for policymaking and educational practices, supported by the real needs and experiences of both teachers and students (Fullan, 2007, p. 107).

To structure the research, this study focused on one main research question and three sub-questions: Main research question: How do primary education teachers perceive the role and value of folklore in the teaching process, and how do they practically utilize it in the classroom?

To structure the analysis, the main question is broken down into three sub-questions: Role and didactic values: What are the primary dimensions through which folklore contributes to the linguistic, social, emotional, and moral development of students? Forms and practices of use: In what ways do teachers utilize folkloric materials, and which methods are most effective for student motivation and engagement? Challenges and needs: What are the main obstacles teachers encounter in integrating folklore, and what support (resources, guidelines, training) would be necessary to improve this process? This structuring clearly links the research to teaching practices and enables a focused analysis that addresses not only the theoretical value of folklore but also its potential and limitations in the primary education environment.

2. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative, exploratory approach to analyze teachers' perceptions, experiences, and meanings regarding the integration of folklore into primary education. The qualitative approach was selected to provide a rich, contextual overview of the phenomenon, moving beyond the simple measurement of frequency of use and focusing on how teachers perceive, utilize, and adapt folklore in their teaching practice (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). The study population consisted of 50 primary education teachers (grades I-V) from the Korçë Local Educational Office (ZVA) who participated in the National Teacher Professional Development Program. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling to ensure that data were collected from experienced teachers and direct implementers of the curriculum (Patton, 2015, p. 264). Data were primarily collected through open-ended questionnaires, structured into three main areas: the didactic values of folklore, the resources and methods utilized, and the challenges or needs for training and additional materials. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, which unfolds in several phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 77-101): Reading and re-reading transcripts: Deep immersion in the data to gain an overall understanding. Generating codes: Identification of data fragments related to the research questions (e.g., codes such as motivational source, lack of materials, ethical issues). Generating themes: Organizing similar codes into broader themes that represent the study's main findings. Reviewing and defining themes: Finalizing three main themes: The Valuation of folklore; Implementation challenges: Resource and training needs. This process ensures that the results reflect the teachers' experiences and perceptions, supporting the link between empirical data and research questions (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2019, p. 114). The constructed methodology provides a comprehensive overview of current practices and identifies strategies for the effective integration of folklore in primary education, answering the research questions through the voices of the teachers. Furthermore, this research process is organically linked to theories of educational and cultural development; specifically, the importance of cultural narratives in constructing meaning (Bruner, 1996, p. 130), the role of social interaction in knowledge acquisition (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86), and the valuation of cultural capital that students bring to the formal environment (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). This theoretical-methodological integration guarantees that the study findings are not merely descriptive but are interpreted within a recognized scientific framework.

3. Findings

The thematic analysis of the data collected from the open-ended questionnaires administered to primary education teachers revealed a series of key themes that describe how folklore is perceived, utilized, and valued in teaching practice. The teachers' responses demonstrated a high level of conceptual consistency, reflecting a shared professional stance on the didactic and formative importance of folklore, as well as the challenges accompanying its systematic integration into primary education (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 82). The analysis identified six main themes, which are presented below.

3.1. Folklore as cultural wealth and a source of identity: One of the most consistent findings of the study is the teachers' definition of folklore as a spiritual, cultural, and identity-based wealth of the people. Participants consider folklore to encompass traditions, customs, songs, dances, myths, legends, and rites transmitted across generations, thereby contributing to the preservation of cultural identity. This finding aligns with Sinani's theory (2012, p. 56) regarding folklore as a source of identity. Teachers emphasize that incorporating folklore into instruction helps students understand the cultural and historical roots of their community, fostering a lasting connection between the past and the present. This identity dimension of folklore is seen as particularly vital in primary education, where the foundations of cultural awareness and the sense of belonging are formed. In this context, folklore is not perceived merely as instructional content but as an educational tool that supports the construction of children's individual and collective identities. Sample responses: "Folklore includes the traditions, customs, songs, and legends passed down through generations that constitute the cultural identity of our people." "Through folklore, students become acquainted with their cultural roots and the history of the area where they live." "Folklore is a way to preserve and transmit the cultural values that shape a sense of belonging."

3.2. Didactic and interdisciplinary values of folklore : The data indicate that teachers value folklore as a comprehensive didactic resource, offering numerous opportunities for interdisciplinary integration. According to Bruner (1996, p. 40), narrative structures assist in the creation of meaning, and teachers validate this by noting the development of language and critical thinking through fairy tales and proverbs. Their responses mention various forms of folklore, such as fairy tales, folk songs, traditional games, adages, riddles, dramatizations, and rituals, which are used across different subjects, particularly in the Albanian language, arts education, and civic education. Teachers emphasize that folklore assists in: Language and expression development. Vocabulary enrichment. Understanding figuration and symbolism. Building critical and creative thinking. In this framework, folklore is viewed as a medium that facilitates the link between instructional content and the students' daily experiences, making the learning process more meaningful and functional. Sample responses: "Folkloric materials assist in enriching vocabulary and developing oral and written expression skills." "Folklore creates opportunities for interdisciplinary connections, especially between the Albanian language, art, and civic education." "Fairy tales and folk stories help students more easily understand moral and cultural messages."

3.3. Folklore as a motivational factor and stimulant for student engagement : Another significant finding relates to the motivational role of folkloric materials. This is linked to Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1986, p. 243), as the use of folklore in school represents a valuation of the cultural capital brought from the family environment, thereby increasing intrinsic

motivation. According to the teachers, students show increased interest and active involvement during lessons that use stories, songs, games, and other folkloric elements. Student motivation is conveyed through: Familiar folkloric characters. The narrative structure of the stories. Emotional and symbolic elements. The connection to family and community experiences. Teachers report that folklore makes lessons more engaging and lively, fostering participation, discussion, and collaboration among students. This emotional and cognitive engagement is seen as a key factor in increasing intrinsic motivation and improving learning outcomes. Sample responses: "Students show great interest when we work with fairy tales and folk songs because they recognize them from their families." "Folklore makes the lesson more engaging, and students participate more actively in discussions." "Folkloric characters motivate children and encourage them to express their thoughts."

3.4. *Development of linguistic, creative, and observational skills* : The findings indicate that folklore contributes significantly to the development of students' literacy and creativity. Drawing on Vygotsky (1978, p. 26), the use of folkloric symbols aids in the transition from mechanical learning to interpretive learning. Teachers note that working with fairy tales, legends, and folkloric texts help students improve their reading, writing, and storytelling skills and develop their imagination and creative thinking. Furthermore, folklore is viewed as an important tool for developing observational skills. Through analyzing natural elements, characters, situations, and folkloric symbols, students learn to observe carefully, interpret, and reflect on the meanings of the text and its context. This process supports not only cognitive development but also children's metacognitive and emotional skills. Sample responses: "Fairy tales and legends help students develop reading and storytelling skills." "Folklore stimulates students' imagination and creativity through dramatizations and illustrations." "Students learn to observe details and symbols in stories and interpret them."

3.5. *Collaboration and the construction of social experiences through folklore* : Another dimension emphasized by teachers is the role of folklore in fostering collaboration and social interaction. This demonstrates the importance of the social learning environment, which Vygotsky highlights as essential for the primary school age. Folkloric activities are often carried out through group work, projects, presentations, dramatizations, and the collection of materials from the family and community. Teachers report that these activities: Strengthen social skills. Foster communication and collaboration. Develop responsibility and respect for others' opinions. In this manner, folklore contributes to the construction of personal and social experiences that positively shape students' attitudes and values. Sample responses: "Students collaborate on projects and group work to collect folktales and songs." "Folkloric activities help children respect each other's opinions." "Group work during dramatizations strengthens communication and responsibility."

3.6. *Challenges and the need for resources and didactic support*: Despite the positive valuation of folklore, teachers also highlight several challenges. One of the most frequent problems concerns the lack of adapted resources in school libraries and the need for contemporary *didactic* materials, including folklore books, albums, anthologies, and digital resources. The absence of rich libraries and digital resources confirms Goodlad's "research-practice gap" (1979, p. 28). Teachers emphasize that they are often forced to rely on personal resources, students' families, or online sources, which makes the integration of folklore dependent on individual experience rather than a structured support system. Teachers stress the need for professional training (Fullan, 2007, p. 92)

to transition from individual initiatives to a structured system. This finding highlights the need for the following: Enriching school libraries. Methodological guides for the use of folklore. Professional training for teachers. Sample responses: "The school library has few folklore books, and they are often insufficient for the students' needs." "There is a need for updated books and materials on folklore." "It would be useful to have methodological guides for using folklore in the classroom."

3.7.

4. Discussion of findings

4.1. Folklore as a didactic and identity guide in primary education : The study findings indicate a broad consensus among teachers regarding the value of folklore as an educational and identity-forming tool. Teachers perceive folklore not merely as cultural content but as a pedagogical element that helps shape students' cultural identity and links learning to their social and historical reality. This approach aligns with socio-cultural theories of learning, particularly Vygotsky's (1978, p. 86) concept of learning as a process mediated by culture and language. Folklore, as a cultural product transmitted across generations, functions as a "mediating tool" that makes knowledge understandable and accessible for early childhood learners. In this context, folklore also appears as a form of what Bourdieu (1986, p. 243) terms "cultural capital," equipping children with symbolic codes, values, and narratives that strengthen their sense of belonging and cultural self-esteem.

4.2. The impact of folklore on student motivation and engagement : One of the study's findings relates to the role of folklore in increasing student motivation and active engagement. Teachers report that the use of folktales, songs, and characters makes the instructional process more attractive, emotional, and comprehensible for children. This result supports contemporary approaches to active pedagogy, according to which emotions and aesthetic experiences play a key role in the learning process. According to Bruner (1996, p. 40), learning through narrative is particularly effective, as storytelling helps organize experience and construct meaning. Folklore, with its narrative and symbolic structure, creates optimal conditions for this type of learning. The emotional involvement of students, as evidenced in the teachers' responses suggest that folklore also helps reinforce long-term memory and foster a positive relationship with the learning process.

4.3. Development of linguistic, creative, and social skills: The discussion of the findings shows that folklore has a multidimensional impact on student development. Beyond the motivational aspect, teachers observe significant improvements in literacy skills, vocabulary enrichment, *and* creativity. This supports the idea that folklore serves as a rich linguistic environment, where students are exposed to various language structures, figuration, and rhythm. Moreover, activities such as dramatization, illustration, and group work foster the development of social and collaborative skills, transforming learning into a collective and interactive process. These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing the importance of integrated and dialogue-based learning methods in primary education.

4.4. Discrepancy between theoretical valuation and practical implementation: A critical aspect emerging from the discussion is the clear discrepancy between the high theoretical valuation of folklore and its actual use in teaching practice. Although teachers express strong *convictions* about the importance of folklore, its integration into teaching remains limited and often incidental. This

discrepancy is not due to a lack of motivation for involvement on the part of the teachers, but rather to structural impediments, such as a lack of curated resources and limited time. These findings suggest that the problem is systemic, not individual, and requires intervention at the institutional and curricular levels.

4.5. The need for structural support and professional development : The discussion of the findings clearly highlights the need for sustainable support for teachers in the form of adapted resources and specific training on the didactics of folklore. Teachers require not only materials but also methodological guidelines to help them use folklore in an ethical, creative, and interdisciplinary manner. This reinforces the idea that effective integration of folklore requires a pedagogical ecosystem in which educational policy, curriculum, and professional development work in harmony. In light of these findings, folklore emerges as a component with high potential to interconnect pedagogical theory with teaching practice. It can serve as a bridge between academic knowledge and students' cultural experience, contributing to a more inclusive, meaningful education that is sensitive to cultural context.

5. Conclusions

Based on the thematic analysis of the data and the discussion of the findings, the study reaches several key conclusions that shed light on the role, potential, and limitations of utilizing folklore in primary education. The study confirms that primary education teachers value folklore as a resource of high pedagogical and cultural importance. It is perceived as a tool that supports the linguistic, emotional, and social development of students, as well as the building of cultural identity and a sense of belonging. This valuation is consistent and widespread among participants, regardless of differences in experience or school context. A significant conclusion of the study is that integrating folkloric materials positively impacts student motivation, active participation, and emotional experience. Folklore makes the instructional process more attractive and comprehensible, transforming learning from a formal activity into a vivid and meaningful experience for primary-cycle children. The findings indicate that folklore supports the development of a broad spectrum of skills, including literacy, creativity, critical thinking, and social and collaborative skills. Through storytelling, singing, dramatization, and group work, students engage in active, creative, and interactive forms of learning. Despite the widespread recognition of folklore's value, the study highlights a discrepancy between theoretical valuation and its systematic use in teaching practices. The integration of folklore is often incidental, limited to symbolic or extracurricular activities, and not consistently included in daily and interdisciplinary planning. The study concludes that the primary obstacles to the effective use of folklore are not due to a lack of will on the part of teachers, but rather to structural factors: the lack of curated, age-appropriate resources, curricular overload, and the absence of specific training in the didactics of folklore. These limitations directly affect the quality and sustainability of the integration of folklore into teaching. A fundamental conclusion of the study is that the effective integration of folklore requires intentional intervention at the institutional and curricular levels. The provision of structured resources, professional development for teachers, and methodological guidance are prerequisites for transforming folklore from a theoretically valued resource into a sustainable and systematized teaching practice.

6. Recommendations for policymaking and educational practices

6.1. Recommendations for educational policymaking : It is recommended that folklore be addressed more clearly and systematically within national curricular documents, not only as cultural content but also as an interdisciplinary didactic tool. This would help avoid sporadic use and create a sustainable framework for its implementation in the instructional process. The institutions responsible for educational policies are recommended to develop specific methodological guidelines on the didactic use of folklore in primary education. These guides should include concrete examples of activities, planning models, and best practices that facilitate the teachers' work. The study highlights the need to enrich school libraries with folklore books adapted to the students' age and the teachers' needs. Intentional investment is recommended in anthologies, scholarly books, didactic materials, and updated resources that support folklore-based teaching. It is recommended that teacher professional development programs include specialized modules on the didactics of folklore, emphasizing its connection to the development of students' linguistic, social, and cultural competencies. Such training would help increase teachers' professional confidence and creativity.

6.2. Recommendations for educational practices Teachers are recommended to integrate folklore into daily and medium-term planning, treating it as an organic part of the instructional process rather than an elective or symbolic activity. Such an approach increases the coherence and pedagogical impact of folkloric materials. The use of active learning methods, such as group work, dramatization, research projects, presentations, and ICT in teaching, is recommended to maximize the educational potential of folklore. These methods assist in developing students' collaborative, creative, and communicative skills. The study suggests that involving parents, grandparents, and the local community can significantly enrich the learning experience. It is recommended that teachers encourage the collection of folkloric materials from the family and community environment, transforming folklore into a bridge between school and real life. The use of digital resources is recommended as a supplement to traditional folkloric materials, ensuring that content is reliable, age-appropriate, and aligned with learning objectives. This approach helps make folklore relevant to younger generations.

7. Study limitations and suggestions for future research

7.1. Study limitations : Although this study provides valuable data on teachers' perceptions, several methodological limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings: Lack of direct observation: The study relies on teacher self-reporting. Consequently, the results reflect professional attitudes but do not include direct observation of concrete implementation in real classroom situations. Geographical context: The sample is limited to the Korçë Local Education Office (ZVA) region, which limits the generalizability of the findings at the national level, although it offers a representative overview of this specific context. Nature of written data: Some responses were concise or mechanical, requiring a more detailed process of semantic interpretation to extract full meanings, which may have reduced some individual nuances of expression. One-sided perspective: The study focuses on teachers, leaving out the perspectives of students or parents, who are key factors in the folklore integration ecosystem.

7.2. Suggestions for future research : Based on the identified limitations, several directions for future research are recommended to expand and deepen knowledge of the role of folklore in primary education. Firstly, future research could combine qualitative and quantitative methods, including structured classroom observations, analysis of student products, and measurements of the impact of folkloric materials on the development of linguistic, creative, and social skills. Secondly, it would be of interest to conduct comparative studies between urban and rural schools, or between different regions, to identify differences and similarities in the use and valuation of folklore in teaching. Another research direction involves incorporating students' perspectives through interviews, focus groups, or creative expression methods to better understand how they experience and interpret folklore in the learning process. Furthermore, future research could focus on the role of professional teacher training and its impact on the quality of the didactic use of folklore, as well as the analysis of digital folkloric resources and their educational potential. Finally, the development of interdisciplinary studies that link folklore with civic education, aesthetic education, and cultural awareness is recommended, contributing to a more comprehensive and contemporary approach to primary education.

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