



## German Folktales as Interactive Teaching Strategies: Enhancing History and Culture Instruction Competence among German Teachers in Malang

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### Abstract

The teaching of German as a foreign language requires the integration of cultural and historical content to foster intercultural competence. However, an implementation gap often exists, where teachers recognize the value of materials like folktales (Märchen) but lack the pedagogical strategies to use them beyond superficial storytelling. This community service project aimed to bridge this gap by designing, implementing, and evaluating a workshop to enhance German teachers' competence in using folktales for critical history and culture instruction. The program engaged 12 German teachers from Malang, Indonesia. It followed a structured four-phase coaching model: (1) needs analysis via a Likert-scale questionnaire; (2) design of a multidisciplinary curriculum featuring curated folktales (*Hänsel und Gretel*, *Hans im Glück*, *Die Sterntaler*); (3) implementation through modeling, guided practice, and lesson plan development; and (4) evaluation using post-workshop questionnaires and qualitative feedback. Post-workshop evaluation revealed significant outcomes. Quantitatively, 92% of participants reported enhanced understanding of the historical-cultural dimensions of folktales, while 67% to 83.3% showed improved self-efficacy in designing and implementing folktale-based lessons. Qualitatively, the workshop catalyzed a paradigm shift, with teachers transforming folktales from entertainment into artifacts for critical cultural analysis (e.g., examining feudalism and the Great Famine). Crucially, the emergence of teacher agency was evidenced by requests for advanced workshops and exploration of deeper literary texts, indicating sustainable impact. The workshop proved highly effective in transforming teacher competence and confidence. The synergy of coaching, multidisciplinary content, and a focus on agency not only closed the implementation gap but also laid the foundation for a sustainable community of critical practitioners in German language education in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *Folktales, German as a Foreign Language, Intercultural competence, teacher agency*

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### Introduction

The development of competence in teaching history and culture within foreign language education represents a crucial aspect of modern educational practice, particularly in the increasingly globalized and multicultural world. Globalization has driven a paradigm shift in

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language pedagogy—from a narrow focus on vocabulary and grammar to competency-based learning models that integrate cultural dimensions into the curriculum. This aligns with Zhong et al.'s (2024) assertion that merely contextual and functional language knowledge no longer meets modern society's needs. This shift also acknowledges that communication in multicultural environments is complex and involves factors beyond purely linguistic aspects (Davitishvili, 2017; Oberste-Berghaus, 2024). Consequently, today's learners must possess intercultural awareness and competence to adapt to the dynamics of globalization and effectively interact with and appreciate diverse cultural contexts.

Language educators must integrate innovative learning methods to create immersive educational experiences in response to these demands. Such experiences emphasize authentic learning that reveals the triadic interconnection between language, culture, and history. This perspective is consistent with Byram's (2021) view that intercultural competence involves understanding how language functions as a carrier of cultural values and a nation's collective memory.

Currently, intercultural competence is widely recognized as an essential component of foreign language education. According to Kulgildinova & Zhumabekova (2017) and Byram (2021), intercultural competence encompasses an understanding of diverse cultural contexts and the ability to effectively communicate across these contexts. Gazioglu & Tanyeri (2021) reinforced this view by asserting that foreign language teachers should regard intercultural competence as a vital part of their professional development, especially when teaching linguistically diverse student groups. Furthermore, Byram (2021) stressed the importance of integrating cultural studies into foreign language teaching as an inseparable component of language education.

The implementation of multicultural and intercultural teaching methodologies is believed to enhance the effectiveness of foreign language learning processes. Vinnikova et al. (2021) emphasized that competent foreign language teachers must not only master the language but also possess a deep understanding of the socio-cultural elements that influence communication. Learning a foreign language inherently involves learning its associated culture, thereby helping students develop the ability to adapt and actively engage in a multicultural society.

German as a foreign language teaching in Indonesia currently faces various challenges, particularly in preparing students to engage with the global community. German language education in Indonesia is expected to integrate literary, cultural, and historical contexts effectively. This integration is crucial for fostering a comprehensive understanding of the language as it is deeply intertwined with culture and history. However, teachers still encounter difficulties in achieving this integration and implementing pedagogical strategies to enhance students' cultural and historical awareness.

German folktales (Märchen) are believed to hold significant potential in the search for innovative strategies to address these challenges and enrich the cultural dimension of language learning. Folktales can serve as effective learning media to bridge the gap between linguistic and cultural aspects, with narratives rich in historical context and cultural values. Schenker (2021) highlights the relevance of folktales in language learning contexts, arguing that they can serve as a means to develop students' language skills and enhance their engagement in the learning process. Meanwhile, Timlin et al. (2021) believe that folktales can encourage broader reflection on social and cultural contexts.

A questionnaire distributed to 19 German language teachers in Malang in July 2025 revealed positive beliefs among teachers regarding the appeal of folktales as learning media. Although their practical experience in integrating folktales into teaching was limited, teachers intuitively believed that folktales could serve as effective tools for attracting student

interest and increasing engagement in language learning. This belief stems from the perception that the narrative and universal nature of folktales make them relatable to students' worlds, allowing emotional connections and enjoyable learning experiences. Furthermore, teachers clearly recognized that folktales are closely linked to German culture in general, viewing them as windows into understanding German societal values and characteristics.

However, the questionnaire results also identified an important issue: the superficial treatment of folktales as cultural content in the German language curriculum. This indicates the limited understanding of teachers of the multidimensional nature of folktales and their relevance in education. Without deeper comprehension, teachers might struggle to convey the nuances and complexities of these stories to their students. This aligns with Soltau's observation that folktales, while frequently used in language teaching, are often employed merely to fulfill cultural requirements without investigating their deeper cultural meanings. Such an approach can lead to limited engagement and understanding among students, who may fail to appreciate the historical and cultural contexts behind these tales.

Additionally, the questionnaire results showed that nearly all respondents had very limited experience in using German folktales as structured and integrated learning media. Only one or two cases exhibited sporadic and unsystematic implementation attempts. The majority of teachers admitted that they had never or rarely developed folktale-based teaching materials or designed learning activities that specifically explored the values within folktale texts.

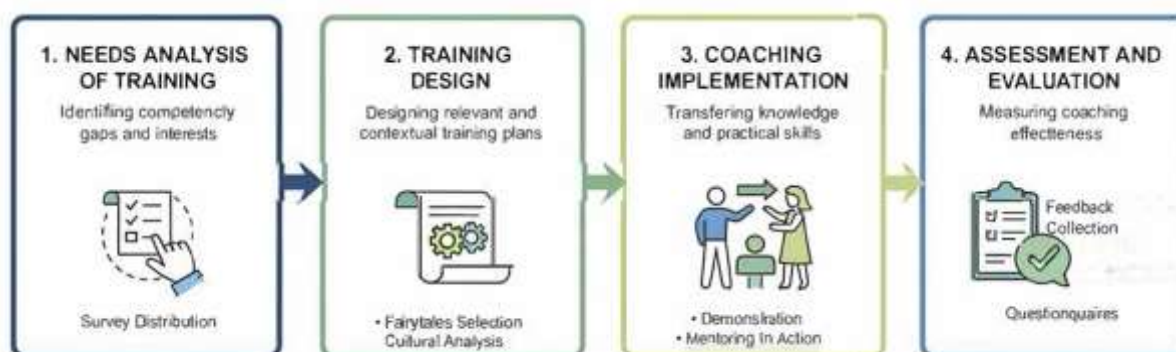
These findings reveal more than just limited variations in teaching methods. More profoundly, they indicate a critical implementation gap in German language teaching practices. This gap represents the chasm between the theoretical recognition of folktales' value and the absence of concrete actions to transform them into lived classroom learning experiences. As cautioned by Zipes (2012), teachers may remain trapped in utilizing folktales merely as entertainment or as simple storytelling, without being able to guide students toward a more critical analysis of the text, context, and ideology.

The urgent need to address this issue requires not only providing folktale knowledge to teachers but also equipping them with pedagogical tools, strategies, and the confidence to transform this knowledge into vibrant, interactive, and educationally rich classroom practices. Through the workshop titled "Interactive Learning Strategies with Folktales to Enhance German Language Teachers' Competence in Teaching German History and Culture in Malang," it is expected that teachers can enhance their ability to utilize folktales as multidimensional resources that spark discussion and active, critical student engagement. Folktales, with their universal narrative structure yet rooted in specific German contexts, serve as an ideal bridge to facilitate students' empathetic understanding of German culture and history.

The outcome of this enhanced competence is the emergence of more innovative and adaptive teachers capable of effectively integrating popular cultural narratives into the curriculum. This ensures that each teaching session conveys historical facts and cultivates cross-cultural competence and higher-order thinking skills. Thus, this competence enhancement not only improves the quality of German language teaching but also directly contributes to proficiency in critical cultural analysis.

## Method

This community service initiative was implemented through a workshop adopting a coaching approach based on the premise that this method creates optimal partnerships for achieving clearly defined learning objectives (Turchyn & Tsar, 2021). To ensure sustainability and impact, the program was designed as a continuous process consisting of four systematic phases, following Bangun W's professional development model (Bangun W, 2012).



Picture 1. Methods of implementing workshop

The first phase focused on needs analysis to map the initial competency landscape of the participants. This mapping was conducted using a Likert-scale questionnaire distributed to members of the Malang Branch of the Indonesian German Language Teachers Association (IGBJI). The questionnaire was designed to identify gaps in five key aspects of folktale utilization, from understanding types of Märchen and classroom experience to the ability to connect folktales with the context of medieval German history.

The design phase was conducted to develop a relevant and contextual intervention based on identified competency gaps. This design aligns with the principles of Azarova (2020) and addresses not only technical needs but also potential psychological barriers, such as self-doubt. This effort was realized through the curation of three strategic folktales (*Hänsel und Gretel*, *Hans im Glück*, and *Die Sterntaler*) as analysis materials, the development of comprehensive cultural-historical modules, and the formulation of a coaching-based lesson plan model that underwent expert validation. Simultaneously, strict logistical coordination was conducted with the IGBJI Malang Branch to create a conducive training environment.

The core of the program was the coaching implementation phase, where the actual transfer of knowledge and practical skills occurred. This phase was executed through a sequential series, beginning with the instructor's demonstration or modeling of how to integrate folktales into critical cultural-historical analysis. Subsequently, teachers were actively guided in developing their own teaching materials, culminating in individual coaching to produce implementation-ready folktale-based lesson plans. This practical and collaborative approach aligns with the findings of Zablotska et al. (2023), affirming the effectiveness of coaching in enhancing motivation and learning outcomes.

The evaluation phase was designed with dual objectives to complete the program cycle: measuring the effectiveness of skill transfer and collecting constructive feedback for future improvements. The primary mechanism involved analyzing responses from post-training questionnaires, focusing on changes in perceptions, teacher self-efficacy improvement, and material relevance. Makukhina (2023) emphasized that such evaluation data are crucial for reflecting on program success and informing subsequent community service cycle planning.

The data in this community service activity was obtained through structured questionnaires and simple reflections from participants, then analyzed using descriptive quantitative methods and simple thematic analysis. This analytical procedure was only intended to support the structured evaluation of the program, not to form a complete empirical research design.

## Results

The workshop was successfully conducted on July 27, 2025, with the participation of 12 German language teachers. This event represented the culmination of thorough preparation, including needs analysis through questionnaires and scientific curation of materials. Three Grimm brothers' folktales—*Hänsel und Gretel*, *Hans im Glück*, and *Die Sterntaler*—were strategically selected not only for their popularity but for their profound historical value. These works function as authentic windows into understanding European Medieval socio-economic conditions, such as famine, poverty, and feudal structures, thereby providing a solid cultural foundation for language learning.



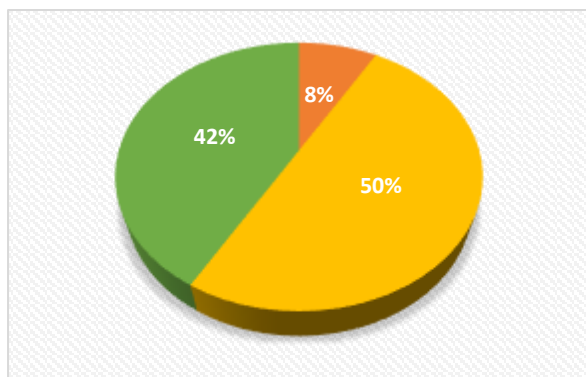
Figure 2. Workshop Implementation

The workshop commenced with the modeling phase, where the presenter went beyond merely introducing folktales to actively demonstrate the integration of historical and cultural content into language teaching. Through an immersive learning simulation using *Hänsel und Gretel*, the presenter exemplified how simple elements like the "famine motif" could be transformed into an entry point for critical historical discussion. This demonstration vividly illustrated the paradigm shift from using folktales as entertainment to employing them as interactive tools for cultural analysis.

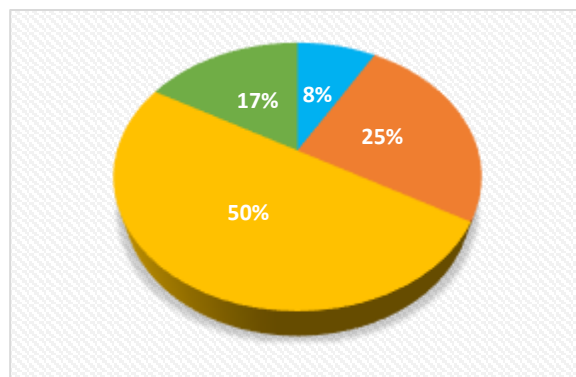
This phase was followed by the Guidance and Structured Practice session, which formed the core of the coaching approach. Teachers were actively divided into small groups to design their own lesson plans with intensive mentoring from the presenter. The guidance process focused on two main aspects: first, training teachers in selecting and developing innovative learning media, such as Interactive Character Cards designed to reflect Medieval society; second, encouraging deep analysis of the three folktales to extract more complex cultural and historical values, such as the feudal system in *Hans im Glück* or the concept of philanthropy in *Die Sterntaler*.

Through this applied cycle of modeling and guidance, teachers transitioned from passive participants to active developers of unique and contextual lesson plans. This process effectively transformed their intuitive beliefs into measurable pedagogical competence, simultaneously demonstrating the success of the coaching method in bridging the implementation gap between theory and classroom practice.

The post-workshop evaluation revealed significant impacts on the competence and self-efficacy of the participants. As shown in Chart 1, 92% of participants (42% strongly agreed and 50% agreed) confirmed enhanced understanding of the connection between folktales and German history and culture. This improvement was not only cognitive but also procedural, cultivated through the workshop's multidisciplinary approach. In-depth analysis of *Die Große Hungersnot*. (the Great Famine of 1315-1317) in *Hänsel und Gretel* as reflecting social and environmental conditions, along with examination of the feudal economic system in *Hans im Glück*, empowered participants to conduct critical cultural analysis. This was reflected in participant HR's emphasis on understanding the *Mittelalter* (Medieval Period) and TS's observation of folktales' relevance to "current issues."



**Chart 1.** The ability to utilize fairy tales to teach German history/culture

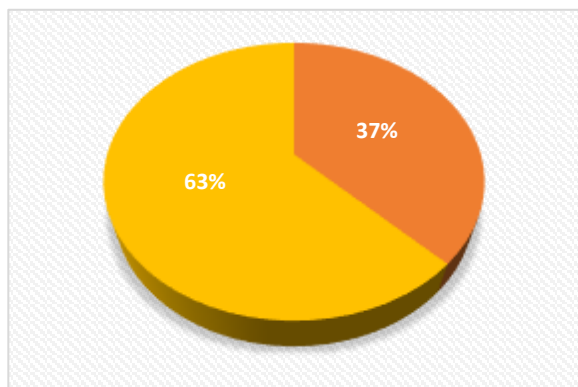


**Chart 2.** Teacher self-efficacy

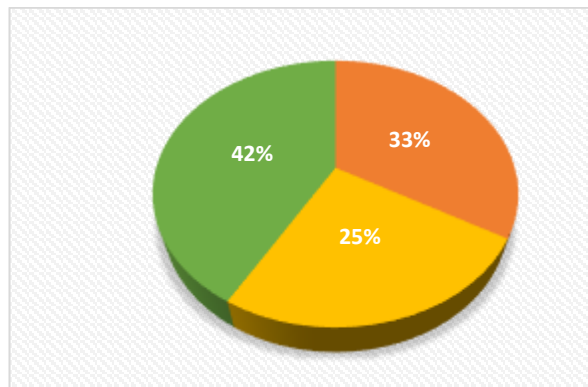
Furthermore, Chart 2 indicates encouraging growth in teacher self-efficacy. Sixty-seven percent of participants (8 of 12 people) agreed or strongly agreed that they were now more capable of utilizing folktales for teaching history and culture. This finding reflects the success of coaching in building procedural confidence. However, the presence of 25% neutral respondents and 8.3% who disagreed indicates that some participants require time and on-going support to consolidate these complex new skills. These responses enrich the analysis by demonstrating that pedagogical transformation is a process, and intensive long-term coaching may be necessary for universal belief conversion.

The coherence between methodological understanding and practical confidence provides strong evidence of the success of the intervention. This is evident in consistent data patterns: after 75% of participants mastered analytical strategies (procedural knowledge), 83.3% (66.7% agreed, 16.7% strongly agreed) reported increased confidence in integrating German cultural values into teaching. This causal progression—from knowledge to self-efficacy—confirms that the workshop successfully bridged the implementation gap. Participant RM's statement, highlighting understanding of "actionable steps," reinforces this finding, showing teachers gained not only insights but practical tools to transform folktales from mere entertainment to critical historical cultural documents.





**Chart 3.** Teachers' innovation commitment



**Chart 4.** Participants expressed plans

Finally, the program demonstrated sustainable impact, as evidenced by Chart 3 on teachers' innovation commitment (teacher agency). As shown in Chart 4, most participants expressed plans to further use and develop folktale-based materials, with some even requesting advanced workshops. Requests for deeper literary text materials and "deep learning application development" indicate participants have developed broader pedagogical imagination. These findings emphasize that program sustainability is measured through its ability to foster agency and communities of practice. Thus, this workshop not only achieved short-term goals but also laid the foundation for a critical and innovative community of German language teaching practitioners in Malang.

## Discussion

The success of this program was fundamentally supported by a structured coaching approach. It used modeling-guidance-practice cycles that served as scaffolding for progressive competency transfer (Malderez, 2009). This framework was effective because it moved beyond traditional knowledge transmission and created authentic learning experiences. The process taught practical skills and also triggered transformative learning. It did this by reconstructing teachers' professional beliefs and identities. This is clearly seen in their ability to analyze complex sociological topics such as the Great Famine and its literary representations. The integration of historical and sociological disciplines further strengthened this approach. It became genuinely critical content-based learning (Byram, 2021), where folktales acted as media for deconstructing socio-historical discourses and building students' critical cultural awareness (Bland, 2022). These findings strongly support the historical-contextual approach. They show how well literary texts can be connected to historical contexts to achieve deeper cultural understanding (Bland, 2023).

The significant self-efficacy improvement (67%-83.3%) among participants shows that coaching helps build teachers' procedural confidence and pedagogical competence (Richard, 2017). This is important because high self-efficacy predicts successful pedagogical innovation and implementation fidelity (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). However, the persistent 25% neutral responses honestly show the complexity of deep pedagogical belief change. This reveals the existence of "professional discomfort zones" that need sustained support and strategic scaffolding (Farrell, 2024). These nuanced responses do not lessen the program's success. Instead, they show that self-efficacy development through coaching is an ongoing process. Long-term, differentiated scaffolding is needed for full internalization, especially when dealing with complex multidisciplinary content that requires big pedagogical changes.

This innovative approach is further strengthened by recognizing folktales' unique potential in facilitating intercultural understanding and critical thinking through systematic thematic element comparison and contextual analysis (Rachmawati et al., 2022). The methodology successfully develops students' analytical capabilities regarding the intricate interconnections between language, culture, and historical contexts (Soltau, 2021), while also providing opportunities for applying theoretical knowledge in authentic contexts through technology-enhanced collaborative projects. The significant emergence of teacher agency, demonstrated through spontaneous requests for advanced workshops and exploration of more complex literary materials, strongly demonstrates the program's success in fostering sustainable critical capacity and professional autonomy (Fullan, 2016). This remarkable transformation shows teachers evolving from passive knowledge recipients into active producers of learning innovation through participating in professional communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), suggesting strong potential for long-term impact beyond the immediate workshop context.

In practical terms, these substantial findings clearly imply the necessity for developing integrated coaching-multidisciplinary-agency models in foreign language teacher professional development. The demonstrated effectiveness of using folktales as portals to cultural and historical understanding offers German language education a new paradigm that aligns with contemporary educational demands for critical literacy and intercultural competence. However, responsible generalization of these encouraging findings must acknowledge several constraints: the limited sample size from a single institutional branch, substantial reliance on self-reported data without complementary classroom observations, and the program's relatively brief duration for assessing long-term impact on student learning outcomes. This community service activity has several limitations that need to be acknowledged, namely, the small number of participants limits the generalization of findings, and reliance on data reported by participants themselves has the potential to cause subjective bias. The short duration of the intervention also limits the ability to assess long-term changes in teacher competency. Future research and community engagement should therefore implement similar models across broader contexts using longitudinal designs, while incorporating multiple authentic assessment methods to comprehensively measure actual learning transfer to classroom practice and student outcomes.

## Conclusion

Based on the program implementation and evaluation, two main conclusions can be drawn. First, the coaching-based workshop model with its modeling-guidance-practice sequence proved effective in creating transformative learning spaces for teachers. This approach successfully transferred procedural knowledge about integrating German history and culture through folktales while building self-efficacy through responsive and contextual mentoring.

Second, teacher responses as indicators of program success demonstrated a multidimensional impact. Significant improvements were achieved in conceptual understanding and pedagogical confidence in teaching folktales as critical cultural material. On the other hand, the emergence of teacher agency, marked by requests for advanced workshops and exploration of more complex materials, proves that the program has triggered intrinsic motivation for sustainable professional development. Thus, the synergy between the structured coaching model and positive teacher responses has not only bridged the implementation gap but



also created a solid foundation for developing a critical community of practitioners in German language education across Indonesia.

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