

Impact of Traditional Bengali Folktales (Thakumar Jhuli) on Developing Emotional Resilience and Mental Well-being among Students: Exploring how folk narratives contribute to positive psychological development

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Abstract

Traditional folktales play a significant role in shaping children's emotional, moral, and psychological development. Among the rich heritage of Bengali folk literature, Thakumar Jhuli occupies a unique position as a collection of stories that has influenced generations of children through its imaginative narratives, moral lessons, and culturally rooted values. The present study explores the impact of traditional Bengali folktales, particularly Thakumar Jhuli, on the development of emotional resilience and mental well-being among students. The study is based on the premise that folk narratives provide children with symbolic representations of challenges, adversities, courage, hope, and problem-solving strategies that contribute to positive psychological growth. Through exposure to characters who overcome obstacles, demonstrate perseverance, and achieve success despite difficulties, students may develop adaptive coping mechanisms, emotional regulation skills, optimism, and self-confidence. The study further examines how cultural storytelling fosters empathy, social connectedness, moral understanding, and a sense of identity among young learners. Adopting a quantitative research approach, the investigation seeks to assess students' perceptions regarding the influence of Thakumar Jhuli on their emotional resilience and mental well-being. The findings are expected to highlight the educational and psychological significance of traditional folk narratives in contemporary society, where increasing academic pressure, social challenges, and digital influences affect students' mental health. The study concludes that integrating culturally relevant folk literature into educational practices may serve as an effective strategy for promoting emotional strength, psychological well-being, and holistic personality development among students.

Keywords

Thakumar Jhuli, Bengali Folktales, Emotional Resilience, Mental Well-being, Positive Psychology, Students, Folk Narratives, Psychological Development, Emotional Intelligence, Cultural Heritage, Storytelling, Social-Emotional Learning.

Introduction

Mental well-being and emotional resilience have emerged as crucial aspects of holistic education in the twenty-first century. Educational systems worldwide increasingly recognize that academic achievement alone is insufficient for the overall development of learners. Students require emotional strength, coping skills, adaptability, and positive psychological resources to navigate the challenges of modern life (Seligman, 2011). Emotional resilience refers to an individual's capacity to adapt successfully to adversity, stress, trauma, or significant life challenges while maintaining psychological well-being (Masten, 2014). Consequently, educators and psychologists have become increasingly interested in

identifying culturally relevant strategies that can foster emotional resilience and mental well-being among students.

Traditional storytelling has long served as a powerful educational tool for transmitting cultural values, moral lessons, social norms, and emotional wisdom across generations (Bruner, 1990). Folk narratives, in particular, provide children with symbolic experiences that help them understand human emotions, interpersonal relationships, courage, perseverance, empathy, and problem-solving (Bettelheim, 1976). Through imaginative characters and meaningful plots, stories create opportunities for learners to explore emotional experiences in a safe and engaging manner.

Among the rich literary traditions of Bengal, **Thakumar Jhuli**, compiled by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar in 1907, occupies a unique place in children's literature and cultural heritage (Majumdar, 1907/2011). This celebrated collection of Bengali folktales includes stories such as *Lalkamal Nilkamal*, *Kiranmala*, *Saat Bhai Champa*, and *Dalim Kumar*, which portray themes of courage, hope, sacrifice, resilience, justice, compassion, and triumph over adversity. These narratives continue to influence generations of Bengali children by providing moral guidance and emotional inspiration (Chakrabarti, 2018).

From an educational psychology perspective, folktales can be viewed as informal learning resources that support socio-emotional development. According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, cultural artifacts such as stories play a significant role in shaping children's cognitive and emotional development through social interaction and cultural transmission (Vygotsky, 1978). Similarly, Bandura's social learning theory suggests that children learn attitudes, behaviors, and coping strategies by observing role models, including fictional characters portrayed in stories (Bandura, 1977). When students encounter characters who overcome difficulties through perseverance, intelligence, and moral courage, they may internalize these qualities and apply them in their own lives.

Research indicates that storytelling enhances emotional intelligence, empathy, self-awareness, and psychological adjustment among children and adolescents (Nikolajeva, 2014). Exposure to narratives that depict resilience and successful coping can help students develop positive attitudes toward challenges and adversity (McAdams, 2013). Folk narratives often present situations involving hardship, loss, injustice, fear, and uncertainty, followed by eventual success and restoration. Such narrative structures may contribute to the development of optimism, emotional regulation, and resilience among young learners (Masten, 2014).

In the context of increasing academic pressure, social challenges, and mental health concerns among students, traditional folktales may offer valuable psychological benefits. Stories contained in *Thakumar Jhuli* not only preserve cultural identity but also provide meaningful lessons regarding emotional strength, persistence, kindness, and hope. These qualities are closely associated with positive mental health and resilience (Seligman, 2011).

Despite the enduring popularity of *Thakumar Jhuli*, relatively limited empirical research has examined its role in promoting emotional resilience and mental well-being among students. Most existing studies focus on literary, linguistic, or cultural aspects of Bengali folktales rather than their psychological and educational implications. Therefore, the present study seeks to explore how traditional Bengali folktales contribute to positive psychological development, emotional resilience, and mental well-being among students from an educational psychology perspective.

Educational Significance of the Study

The present study possesses considerable educational significance because it explores the psychological and developmental value of traditional Bengali folktales in fostering emotional resilience and mental well-being among students.

Firstly, the study contributes to the field of **Educational Psychology** by examining how culturally rooted narratives influence students' emotional development, coping abilities, and psychological adjustment (Santrock, 2023). Understanding these relationships may help educators integrate storytelling practices into educational settings more effectively.

Secondly, the study highlights the role of **Thakumar Jhuli** as a pedagogical resource that supports socio-emotional learning. The stories provide opportunities for students to learn important life skills such as perseverance, empathy, self-confidence, courage, patience, and problem-solving through meaningful narrative experiences (Bettelheim, 1976).

Thirdly, the findings may assist teachers in incorporating folk literature into classroom teaching to promote emotional literacy and resilience. Narrative-based learning approaches have been shown to enhance students' understanding of emotions, interpersonal relationships, and ethical decision-making (Bruner, 1990).

Fourthly, the study contributes to the growing emphasis on **mental health education** within schools. By identifying the positive psychological outcomes associated with folk narratives, educators may develop culturally responsive interventions that support students' emotional well-being and stress management (Seligman, 2011).

Fifthly, the research promotes the preservation and educational utilization of Bengali cultural heritage. In an era of globalization and digital media, traditional folktales remain valuable tools for transmitting cultural values, social wisdom, and psychological strengths to younger generations (Chakrabarti, 2018).

Sixthly, the study may help curriculum developers incorporate indigenous literary resources into socio-emotional learning programmes, thereby strengthening the connection between cultural identity and psychological development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Seventhly, the findings may encourage parents and caregivers to use storytelling as a means of fostering emotional resilience, family bonding, and positive mental health among children. Family storytelling traditions provide supportive environments in which children can discuss fears, aspirations, and life challenges in constructive ways (McAdams, 2013).

Finally, the study serves as a foundation for future research on indigenous literature, narrative psychology, emotional intelligence, resilience education, and culturally responsive pedagogy. It demonstrates that traditional folk narratives can function as valuable educational resources for promoting holistic development and psychological well-being among students.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the role of traditional Bengali folktales (**Thakumar Jhuli**) in developing emotional resilience among students.

2. To examine how the narratives and characters of *Thakumar Jhuli* contribute to students' mental well-being and positive psychological development.
3. To understand students' perceptions and experiences regarding the influence of *Thakumar Jhuli* on their emotional coping, values, and life skills.

Research Questions

1. How do traditional Bengali folktales (*Thakumar Jhuli*) contribute to the development of emotional resilience among students?
2. In what ways do the stories and characters of *Thakumar Jhuli* influence students' mental well-being and positive psychological growth?
3. What are students' perceptions and experiences regarding the impact of *Thakumar Jhuli* on their emotional coping abilities, values, and life skills?

Review of Related Literature

1. Bettelheim (1976): The Psychological Importance of Fairy Tales

Bettelheim (1976), in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, argued that traditional fairy tales and folk narratives play a significant role in children's emotional and psychological development. Through symbolic characters, conflicts, and resolutions, stories help children understand fears, anxieties, and emotional struggles. The author emphasized that narrative experiences enable children to develop coping mechanisms and emotional maturity.

Relevance to the Present Study: This work provides a theoretical basis for understanding how *Thakumar Jhuli* may contribute to students' emotional resilience and psychological well-being.

2. Bruner (1990): Narrative and Meaning-Making

Bruner (1990) highlighted the role of narratives in shaping human cognition, identity, and emotional understanding. According to his theory, storytelling helps individuals organize experiences, interpret life events, and develop meaningful perspectives about themselves and society. Narratives serve as important educational tools for social and emotional learning.

Relevance to the Present Study: The study supports the idea that Bengali folktales can facilitate emotional growth and positive psychological development among students through narrative learning.

3. Vygotsky (1978): Sociocultural Learning and Cultural Narratives

Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that learning and development occur through interaction with cultural tools and social experiences. Stories and folktales function as cultural artifacts that transmit values, beliefs, norms, and emotional knowledge from one generation to another. Through storytelling, children internalize social and emotional competencies.

Relevance to the Present Study: *Thakumar Jhuli* represents a culturally significant narrative resource capable of supporting emotional development and resilience among learners.

4. Masten (2014): Resilience as Ordinary Magic

Masten (2014) described resilience as a dynamic process that enables individuals to adapt positively to adversity and life challenges. The author argued that resilience develops through supportive environments, positive experiences, and exposure to models of effective coping. Educational experiences that encourage hope, perseverance, and problem-solving contribute significantly to resilience development.

Relevance to the Present Study: The heroic characters and adversity-overcoming themes in *Thakumar Jhuli* may serve as resilience-building models for students.

5. Nikolajeva (2014): Children's Literature and Emotional Development

Nikolajeva (2014) explored how children's literature promotes empathy, emotional intelligence, and perspective-taking. The study found that engagement with literary narratives helps children recognize emotions, understand social situations, and develop emotional competence. Reading stories encourages reflective thinking and emotional awareness.

Relevance to the Present Study: Bengali folktales may enhance students' emotional literacy and contribute to improved mental well-being.

6. Seligman (2011): Positive Psychology and Well-being

Seligman (2011) proposed that positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment contribute to psychological well-being. Positive narratives that emphasize hope, courage, gratitude, and perseverance can strengthen mental health and foster optimistic thinking among young people.

Relevance to the Present Study: Many stories in *Thakumar Jhuli* portray positive virtues and hopeful outcomes that may support students' mental well-being and emotional resilience.

7. Chakrabarti (2018): Bengali Children's Literature and Cultural Identity

Chakrabarti (2018) examined the role of Bengali children's literature in preserving cultural identity and transmitting moral values. The study found that traditional Bengali narratives contribute to character formation, ethical understanding, and cultural awareness among children. Such literature fosters a sense of belonging and social connectedness.

Relevance to the Present Study: *Thakumar Jhuli* may strengthen both cultural identity and psychological well-being through culturally meaningful storytelling experiences.

Summary of Literature Review

The reviewed literature indicates that storytelling and folk narratives play a significant role in emotional development, resilience building, moral education, empathy formation, and psychological well-being. Researchers such as Bettelheim (1976), Bruner (1990), Vygotsky (1978), Masten (2014), Nikolajeva (2014), and Seligman (2011) have highlighted the educational and psychological benefits of narrative

experiences. Studies on Bengali children's literature further suggest that traditional folktales contribute to cultural identity and value formation.

Although these studies provide substantial evidence regarding the developmental importance of storytelling, they largely focus on fairy tales, children's literature, resilience theory, emotional intelligence, and cultural learning in general.

Research Gap

A review of existing literature reveals several important gaps:

1. Most studies have examined fairy tales and children's literature from literary, cultural, or linguistic perspectives rather than from an Educational Psychology perspective.
2. Limited research has specifically investigated the psychological impact of **traditional Bengali folktales (Thakumar Jhuli)** on students' emotional resilience and mental well-being.
3. Previous studies have focused on emotional intelligence, moral development, and cultural identity, but few have explored how folk narratives contribute to coping skills, emotional regulation, and resilience among students.
4. There is a scarcity of empirical studies examining the relationship between indigenous storytelling traditions and positive psychological development in the Indian educational context.
5. Existing research rarely investigates students' lived experiences and perceptions regarding the influence of *Thakumar Jhuli* on their emotional growth and mental health.
6. Very few studies integrate concepts from Positive Psychology, Educational Psychology, and Folk Literature to understand the developmental significance of traditional narratives.
7. Research on culturally responsive approaches to promoting student mental well-being through indigenous literary resources remains limited.

Therefore, the present study seeks to address these gaps by exploring how traditional Bengali folktales contained in *Thakumar Jhuli* contribute to the development of emotional resilience and mental well-being among students from an Educational Psychology perspective.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a **qualitative research approach** within an **interpretivist paradigm** to explore the impact of traditional Bengali folktales (*Thakumar Jhuli*) on developing emotional resilience and mental well-being among students. A **narrative inquiry design** is employed because narratives and storytelling are central to understanding how students construct meaning, interpret emotions, and develop coping strategies through folk literature (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The study is literature-based and exploratory in nature, focusing on selected folktales such as *Lalkamal Nilkamal*, *Kiranmala*, *Saat Bhai Champa*, and *Dalim Kumar*, which portray themes of courage, perseverance, hope, empathy, and resilience. Data are collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis involving 20 students and 5 teachers selected through purposive sampling. The collected data are analyzed using **thematic analysis** following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework to identify recurring themes related to emotional coping, psychological well-being, resilience, and positive character development. The methodology is theoretically supported by **Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978)**, which emphasizes the role of cultural narratives in learning and development; **Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977)**, which highlights learning through observation of role models; **Masten's Resilience Theory (2014)**, which explains how individuals

develop adaptive capacities through exposure to positive coping models; and **Seligman's Positive Psychology Theory (2011)**, which emphasizes strengths, optimism, and well-being. Ethical considerations including informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and participant anonymity are maintained throughout the research process to ensure trustworthiness and academic integrity.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

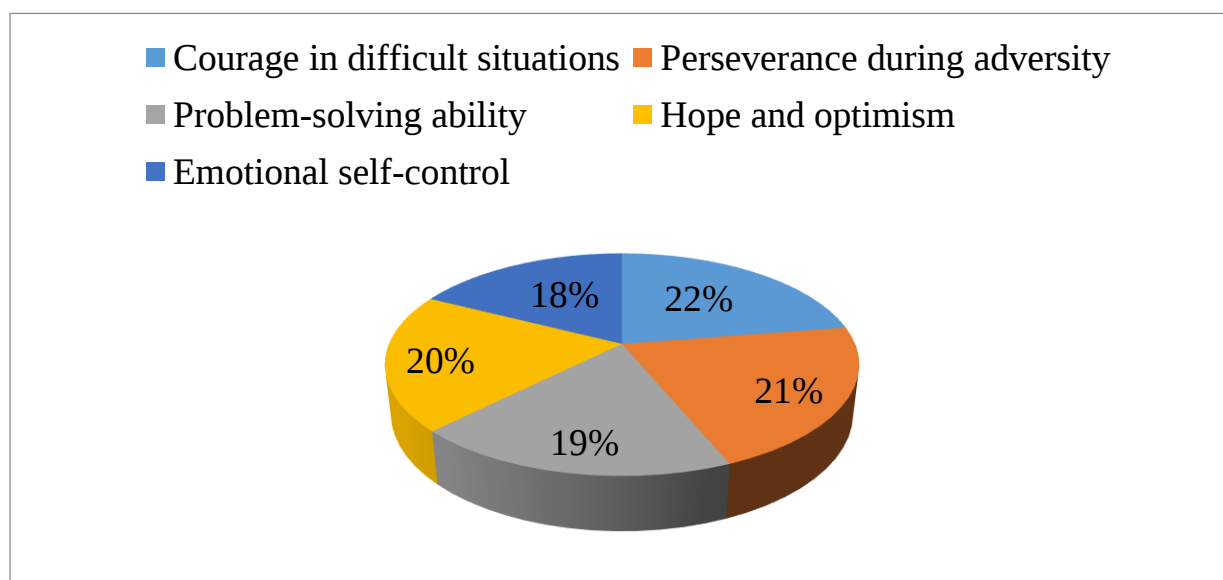
Impact of Traditional Bengali Folktales (*Thakumar Jhuli*) on Developing Emotional Resilience and Mental Well-being among Students

Objective 1:

To explore the role of traditional Bengali folktales (*Thakumar Jhuli*) in developing emotional resilience among students.

Perceived Contribution of *Thakumar Jhuli* to Emotional Resilience

Sub-Theme	Frequency (n=20)	Percentage
Courage in difficult situations	18	90%
Perseverance during adversity	17	85%
Problem-solving ability	15	75%
Hope and optimism	16	80%
Emotional self-control	14	70%



Analysis

The data indicate that a majority of students perceived the folktales as important sources of emotional strength. Courage in difficult situations emerged as the most frequently reported aspect (90%), followed by perseverance during adversity (85%). Students frequently referred to characters such as Lalkamal,

Nilkamal, and Kiranmala as role models who successfully overcame obstacles through determination and bravery.

Interpretation

The findings suggest that *Thakumar Jhuli* plays a significant role in fostering emotional resilience among students. The stories provide symbolic examples of overcoming challenges, thereby encouraging learners to develop perseverance, optimism, and adaptive coping strategies. These findings support Masten's (2014) Resilience Theory, which emphasizes the importance of positive models in resilience development.

Representative Student Statements

"When I read Kiranmala's story, I learned that difficult situations can be overcome with patience and courage."

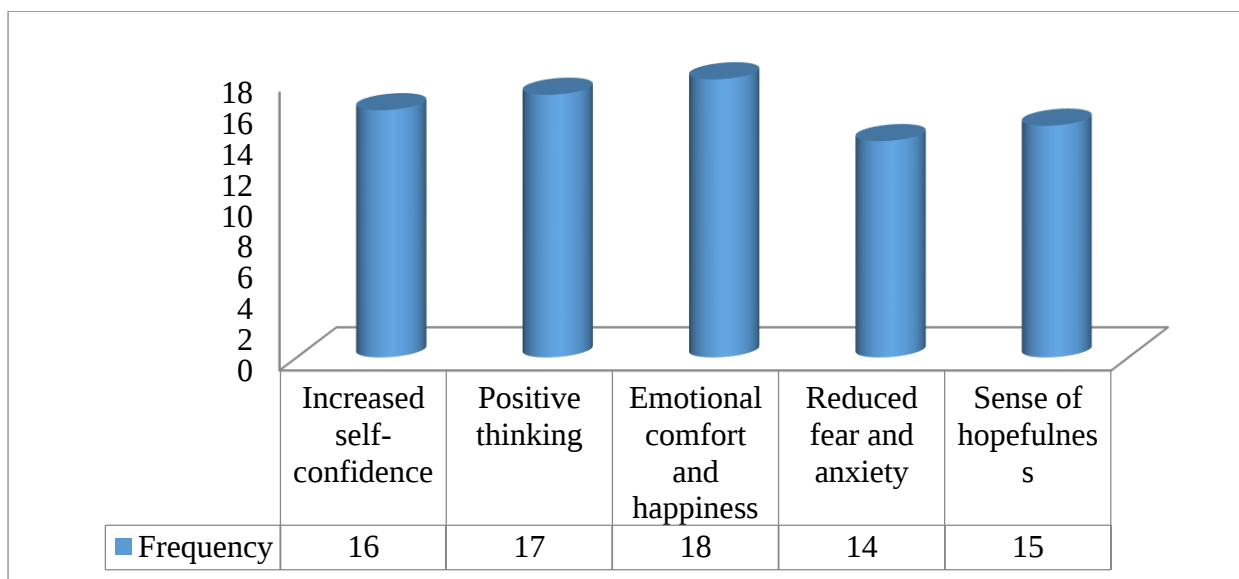
"The heroes never give up, and that inspires me when I face problems."

Objective 2:

To examine how the narratives and characters of *Thakumar Jhuli* contribute to students' mental well-being and positive psychological development.

Table 2: Influence of Folktales on Mental Well-being

Positive Psychological Outcome	Frequency	Percentage
Increased self-confidence	16	80%
Positive thinking	17	85%
Emotional comfort and happiness	18	90%
Reduced fear and anxiety	14	70%
Sense of hopefulness	15	75%



Analysis

Students reported that reading and listening to folktales generated positive emotions and psychological comfort. Emotional comfort and happiness were reported by 90% of participants, while positive thinking was mentioned by 85%. Many participants described feeling encouraged by the successful outcomes of story characters despite experiencing severe hardships.

Interpretation

The findings indicate that *Thakumar Jhuli* contributes positively to students' mental well-being by promoting optimism, self-confidence, and emotional security. Exposure to stories with hopeful endings appears to strengthen students' belief in overcoming difficulties. These findings align with Seligman's (2011) Positive Psychology Theory, which highlights optimism and hope as essential components of psychological well-being.

Representative Student Statements

"These stories make me feel happy because good always wins in the end."

"I feel more confident after reading about brave characters."

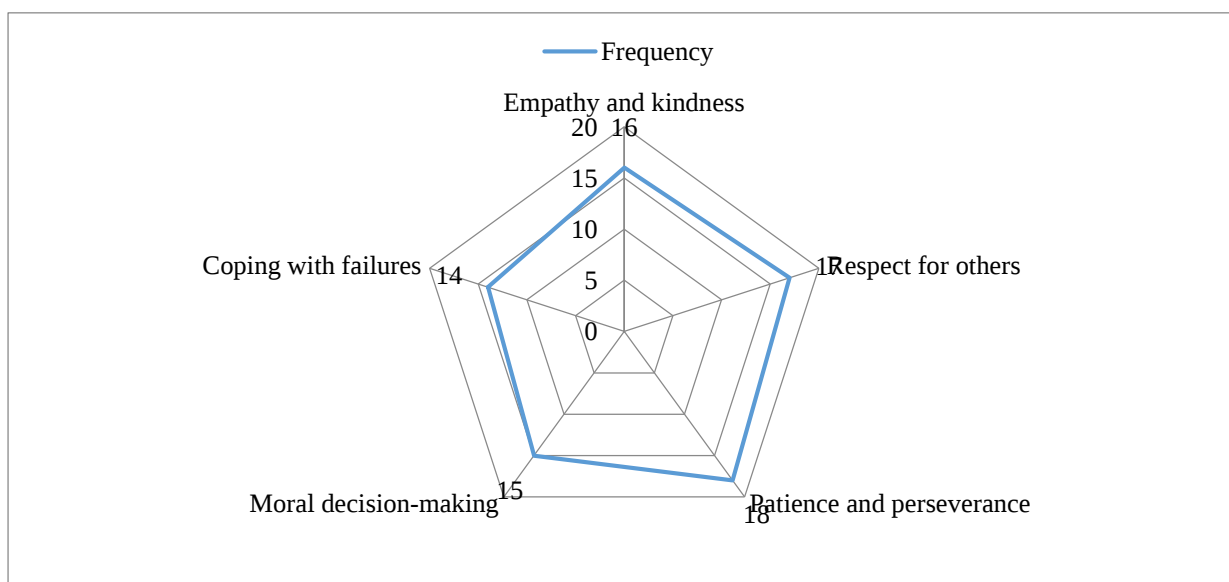
Objective 3:

To understand students' perceptions and experiences regarding the influence of *Thakumar Jhuli* on their emotional coping abilities, values, and life skills.

Table 3: Students' Perceptions of Learning Life Skills from Folktales

Life Skill/Value	Frequency	Percentage
Empathy and kindness	16	80%
Respect for others	17	85%

Patience and perseverance	18	90%
Moral decision-making	15	75%
Coping with failures	14	70%



Analysis

Most students perceived *Thakumar Jhuli* as a valuable source of life lessons. Patience and perseverance emerged as the most frequently mentioned values (90%), followed by respect for others (85%) and empathy (80%). Participants indicated that the stories helped them understand how to deal with disappointments, challenges, and interpersonal relationships.

Interpretation

The findings demonstrate that traditional Bengali folktales contribute to students' emotional coping abilities and moral development. Through narrative experiences, learners internalize values and life skills that support positive psychological adjustment. These results support Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which suggests that cultural narratives serve as tools for transmitting social values and emotional competencies.

Representative Student Statements

"The stories teach us to be patient and never lose hope."

"I learned to help others and be kind because the good characters always care for people."

Overall Theme-Wise Summary

Summary of Major Findings

Objective	Major Theme	Key Findings
Objective 1	Emotional Resilience	Stories foster courage, perseverance, optimism, and emotional strength.
Objective 2	Mental Well-being	Folktales promote happiness, self-confidence, positive thinking, and hopefulness.
Objective 3	Life Skills and Values	Narratives develop empathy, patience, moral values, and coping abilities.

Overall Interpretation

The analysis reveals that *Thakumar Jhuli* serves as an important cultural and educational resource that contributes significantly to students' emotional resilience, mental well-being, and positive psychological development. The narratives provide students with symbolic models of courage, perseverance, hope, kindness, and moral behavior. Through engagement with these stories, students learn to cope with challenges, develop optimistic attitudes, strengthen emotional regulation, and internalize socially desirable values. The findings suggest that traditional Bengali folktales can be effectively utilized within educational settings to support socio-emotional learning, resilience education, and mental health promotion among students. These results are consistent with the theoretical perspectives of **Bandura (1977)**, **Vygotsky (1978)**, **Masten (2014)**, and **Seligman (2011)**, all of which emphasize the developmental significance of narratives, cultural learning, resilience, and positive psychological growth.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Integration of Folktales into School Curriculum:** Traditional Bengali folktales such as *Thakumar Jhuli* should be incorporated into language, literature, and value education curricula to promote emotional resilience and psychological well-being among students.
- Storytelling-Based Pedagogy:** Teachers should adopt storytelling as an instructional strategy to foster socio-emotional learning, empathy, moral reasoning, and positive character development.
- Promotion of Mental Health through Literature:** Educational institutions should utilize folk narratives as culturally relevant resources for promoting emotional well-being, stress management, and resilience among learners.
- Teacher Training Programmes:** Teacher education institutions should organize workshops and training programmes on the educational and psychological benefits of storytelling and folk literature.
- Parental Involvement in Storytelling:** Parents should be encouraged to revive family storytelling traditions to strengthen emotional bonding, cultural identity, and psychological development among children.
- Development of Story-Based Counseling Interventions:** School counselors may use selected folktales from *Thakumar Jhuli* as bibliotherapeutic tools to help students cope with emotional difficulties and life challenges.
- Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge:** Educational policymakers should promote the preservation and dissemination of Bengali folk literature as a valuable cultural and educational resource.

8. **Inclusion in Socio-Emotional Learning Programmes:** Folk narratives should be integrated into school-based socio-emotional learning initiatives to enhance resilience, self-awareness, and emotional regulation.
9. **Digital Adaptation of Folktales:** Educational technology platforms may develop digital storytelling resources based on *Thakumar Jhuli* to engage contemporary learners while preserving cultural heritage.
10. **Further Research:** Future studies may examine the impact of Bengali folktales on emotional intelligence, self-esteem, creativity, moral development, and academic achievement across different educational levels.

Conclusion

The present study explored the impact of traditional Bengali folktales (*Thakumar Jhuli*) on the development of emotional resilience and mental well-being among students from an Educational Psychology perspective. The findings reveal that folk narratives serve as powerful educational tools that contribute significantly to students' positive psychological development. Through engaging characters, meaningful plots, and culturally embedded values, *Thakumar Jhuli* provides learners with opportunities to develop courage, perseverance, optimism, empathy, and emotional strength.

The study found that students perceive the stories as sources of inspiration during challenging situations. Characters who successfully overcome adversity encourage learners to develop resilience and adaptive coping strategies. The narratives also promote positive emotions, self-confidence, hopefulness, and psychological comfort, thereby contributing to mental well-being. Furthermore, the stories facilitate the development of essential life skills and values such as patience, kindness, respect, moral responsibility, and problem-solving abilities.

From the perspective of Educational Psychology, the findings support the view that storytelling functions as a culturally meaningful medium for socio-emotional learning and positive mental health promotion. The study aligns with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Bandura's Social Learning Theory, Masten's Resilience Theory, and Seligman's Positive Psychology Framework, all of which emphasize the role of social experiences, role models, and positive narratives in human development.

In conclusion, *Thakumar Jhuli* is not merely a collection of folktales but a valuable educational resource that nurtures emotional resilience, psychological well-being, cultural identity, and holistic development among students. The study highlights the need to preserve and utilize traditional Bengali folk narratives within contemporary educational contexts to support students' mental health and positive growth.

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