

Engaging Young Learners to Study English Through Storytelling Using E-Storybook

Tri Pujiani¹, Irfani Zuhrufillah², Ida Dian Sukmawati³, Riski Fitri Yani⁴

{tripujiani@uhb.ac.id¹, irfanizuhrufillah@uhb.ac.id², idadian.shb@gmail.com³,
rizkififi11@gmail.com⁴}

Universitas Harapan Bangsa, Purwokerto

Abstract. Teaching English to young learners is somehow challenging. They have unique characteristics such as being very active, easily getting bored and being distracted. The teachers are required to be creative in designing the lesson. Storytelling can be a powerful technique in teaching language to young learners. With the advance in digital technology, an e-storybook offers a new experience of a reading story. It offers opportunities to enjoy animations, hear and follow along with text using the read-aloud feature, and engage with interactive options to support active readers. This study aimed to find out the effectiveness of the storytelling technique using e-storybook in increasing young learners' learning engagement in English class. This study was a case study conducted in a kindergarten in Purwokerto. The data was collected through observation and interviews. The finding revealed that the students displayed higher enthusiasm during the storytelling activity. Moreover, the use of an e-storybook enabled the students re-read the story independently and actively control their reading pace to increase their understanding. The result of the study showed an increase in students' vocabulary mastery, text comprehension, and retelling skills. This study concludes that storytelling using an e-storybook is effective to improve young learners' engagement in English class. It is expected that the result of this study may give insight into teaching English to young learners practice.

Keywords: TEYL, storytelling, e-storybook, learning engagement.

1 Introduction

Nowadays, English has become the world's most widely used and commonly spoken language. As a universal language, English is one of the most influential languages used in many fields such as trade, business, and travel. Even more, English can be easily found in our daily life, such as in electronics, the internet, and in public places. With this growth, the need of learning English from an early age has increased significantly.

There are some reasons why English should be introduced at an early age. First, young learners, students aged 3-12 years old [1], are in the golden age. They are in the period to get the ability to learn a language easily. Many experts go along together that sooner is better in language learning for children [2]. Second, the ability to speak English improves the children's self-

confidence. Third, mastering the international language might be the key to a great career in the future[3], [4].

However, teaching English to young learners is not easy. There are many challenges during the learning process, not only from the students but also from the teachers. From the students, the obstacles include the variety of students' cognitive development, the lack of students discipline during the lesson, the lack of students' motivation to use English on daily basis, and the lack of support from parents. For the teachers, one of the challenges is the human resources itself. Many young learners' teachers come from a non-English educational background. Thus, they have limited mastery of TEYL methods and techniques as well as a lack of professional development. Other factors such as the status of English as a foreign language not a second language, the status of English as local content in which the curriculum is not by the existing learning condition, and also the socio-economic and cultural background also become barriers in teaching English for young learners [5]–[8].

Therefore, new strategies are needed in teaching English to young learners. The teacher should apply interesting activities in the classroom. To create an interesting classroom for young learners, one way that can be done is using teaching media. Teaching media is defined as a range of objects, pictures, and other things that can be used as an instructional tool to present and manipulate language and to involve students in activities [9], [10]. Because young learners are unique, have an attention span, and are easy to get bored [11], the use of media will keep their focus on the teacher. Thus, the classroom can be controlled easier. Moreover, the media used should be effective and applicable. It means that the media must support the learning activities and can help the students to understand the material easily[2].

Some research on TEYL previously conducted recommended that learning activities for young learners should include learning through stories, songs, role plays, and games [12]. Among them, storytelling is the most engaging one. Stories are regarded as valuable resources since they develop two language skills, listening and speaking naturally. Many benefits can be obtained from telling stories. Besides, they broaden the students' imagination, stories also speed up the process of acquiring new vocabulary. Additionally, stories are amusing and motivating so that they can help the students to focus on learning materials [13].

However, considering the problem existed that many young learners' teacher does not have English educational background, telling a story in English might be another challenge for them. They need an English storybook that can be a medium or guide to tell the story. In this digital era, in which things cannot be separated from Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the e-storybook offers a promising solution. E-storybook is the same as a common e-storybook, but it uses multimedia to support text on the screen [14]. Many research proved that the use of digital books may significantly increase students' vocabulary mastery [15], [16].

Aprillianti and Wirastiwi [17] in their research developed an e-book by using a web application namely an e-book creator that is considered feasible, practical, and effective to be used. This application enables users to create, read, and share digital books easily. Moreover, this application is completed with many features such as adding text, pictures, audio, video, background, and so on that make the e-book created interesting.

Considering the benefits of e-book presented in Aprillianti and Wirastiwi's research [17], the researcher developed an e-storybook that combined the recommendation of previous research, Deani [12] and Aprillianti [17]. By using this e-storybook, the teacher might use read aloud feature in which the audio of the story will be played. The teacher could also check the meaning

of new vocabulary by clicking the word. Therefore, teachers with limited English proficiency should not be worried about applying storytelling in the classroom. Additionally, this e-storybook can be easily shared via a share link to enable the students to re-read the story at home by using their gadgets. It was expected that this e-storybook can be a solution to some problems that existed in teaching English to young learners mentioned above. This paper aimed to describe the implementation of an e-storybook in teaching English to young learners as well as how this media can engage the students during the learning process.

2 Methodology

This research investigated the implementation of storytelling techniques by using an e-storybook in teaching English to young learners. How it could engage the student's focus on the learning activities was explored. Thus, this research was a single case study which is research that investigates a real-life phenomenon in depth and within its environmental context. The benefit of a single case study is viewed from the detailed description and analysis to get a better understanding of "how" and "why" things happen. The type of case study is a non-random sampling technique. The case was chosen based on interest or for theoretical reasons [18]–[20]. The data was collected through observation and depth interviews with the respondent from January – June 2022 in a kindergarten in Purwokerto. One class was chosen as the object of this study in which the teacher applied an e-storybook to teaching English. The teacher was interviewed at the end of the semester to evaluate the learning process, especially in correlation with the use of the media. Then, the data was analyzed by filtering, classifying, and interpreting to be obtained an ideographic conclusion which means that this conclusion was specific and unique bound by value and place.

3 Findings

3.1 Classroom activities

Storytelling is not a new technique in teaching and learning for young learners. It has been proven as recommended teaching activity to introduce a new concept, value, and vocabulary. It was also not the first time for the lecturer to apply this technique. Therefore, it was not quite difficult for the teacher. The difference was that here she used digital media, which is an e-storybook. Before the class, she prepared all the tools needed such as a laptop, LCD projector, and speaker. She used an e-storybook as a whole class activity since the students are not facilitated with the individual gadget.

Here is one of example of classroom activity using e-storybook (Classroom Observation, 11032022). First, the teacher introduced the topic that day by sharing a question and having a brainstorming activity. For example, in introducing the topic of animals, the teacher said, "Do you like an animal?". When the students looked confused at hearing the term "animal" for the first time, the teacher repeat the question in Indonesian, "Animal...binatang, do you like an animal? Apakah kalian suka binatang?" Here the teacher used English and Indonesian as media of instruction since the students have not been used to using full English. Then, the students started mentioning the name of animals in Indonesian that they know. The teacher broke the

noise by giving a sign using her hand and said, "Well, let's go to the zoo with Ella! Ayo kita ke kebun binatang Bersama Ella! (Ella is the name of the character in the storybook). The students excitedly said, "Yeay!"

Then, the teacher clicked the link of the e-storybook that automatically generated to the e-book creator website. She opened the first page and clicked the audio button. Then, the audio of the text on that page was played. At this stage, the teacher let the students to listen how the text is read in English by the system. This stage aimed to introduce how the words are pronounced in English to the students. Then, the teacher turned off the audio and directed the students' attention to the picture or book illustration. She asked, "What is that? Apa itu?" The students answered, "Gajah!". The teacher responded, "Yes, right!" Then, the teacher re-read the text and sometimes focused on the blue and underlined words. She clicked it and was directed to the glossary in which there was provided the meaning of new words. The teacher asked the students to repeat her word.

"Elephant, gajah!"

"Big, besar!"

"Elephants are big!"

By using this e-storybook, the teacher not only introduced the new vocabulary on animals but also invited the students to describe them. Look at the following picture as an example.



Figure 1. The overview of the e-storybook.

To review the lesson, the teacher provided some pictures of animals, asked the students to mention their names in English, asked them to describe their characteristics, and imitated them. This class is very interactive and the students looked very enthusiastic toward the lesson.

3.2 What the teacher said

After the class, the teacher was interviewed in-depth and semi-structured. The first question was about the features of the e-storybook. The teacher said that e-book creator provides comprehensive features facilitating students with different learning styles. It is commonly known that there are three types of learning, they are visual, auditory, and kinesthetics. The e-storybook was completed with the picture, audio, and also glossary. The students may improve their vocabulary, and train their listening skills and pronunciation skill at once.

About the content of the e-storybook, the teacher said that the story was simple and good for kids. It brought the students to learn from the context, not only the English skill but also the moral value behind the story. The materials presented were in line with the syllabus of kindergarten. Indeed, in creating the story, the writers used the kindergarten syllabus as a guideline and consulted it with the teacher.

Besides the learning media, how the teacher delivers the teaching materials play an important role in engaging the students during the lesson. The teacher said that she rarely taught using multimedia. It was new for the students. Thus, they were very enthusiastic to see big pictures on the screen and listen to people talk in English. The story was presented page by page to build the student's knowledge of the story and the language focus. The students were involved in the story by being given some questions or asked to repeat some words. This kind of interactive activity kept the students engaged in the lesson and avoided boredom. The teacher also said that overall, the student's English proficiency was improved, not only the vocabulary mastery but also in their speaking skill.

By using an e-storybook, the teacher benefited a lot. As said before that the teacher was not confident in teaching English since her educational background is young learners' teacher, not English, this application helped her in giving the example of how to pronounce the word and in introducing new vocabulary. Besides, by using this media the teacher not only taught the vocabulary but also how to use it in context, especially in a simple sentence and the moral value of the story. Then, since the classroom activities were very interactive and the students were involved a lot during the lesson, it helped the students to stay focused on the lesson so they could be managed well. Additionally, the teacher shared the link to the e-storybook on the parents' WhatsApp group and suggested the parents re-read the story before the children sleep. The parents did not need to worry about their English mastery because they just needed to simply play the audio button to activate the read-aloud feature. Thus, it might increase the students' learning comprehension.

4 Discussion

This research investigated how the use of an e-storybook engaged young learners in the English lesson. Students' engagement is defined as the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education [21], [22]. According to the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), students' engagement involves three dimensions: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. While behavioral engagement focuses on participation in academic, social, and co-curricular activities, emotional engagement focuses on the extent and nature of positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates,

academics, and school, and cognitive engagement focuses on students' level of investment in learning [22].

Students' engagement can be seen in their behavior during the class such as having more motivation to participate in class, enjoying achieving their learning goals, being more likely to persist through challenges in learning, and feeling intrinsically motivated to gain a new and deeper understanding [23]. It is considered one of the critical factors determining the success of learning. When students display high levels of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, they are more likely to excel academically, form a stronger sense of connection with their school, and have a more positive sense of social-emotional well-being [24].

To increase the students' learning engagement, teachers are suggested to embed interactive components into a lesson, build active and student-centered learning, employ varied teaching methods, use everyday practice to promote social and emotional connections, give real roles and responsibilities, use technology and integrate student interest into classroom content [22]–[24]. Regarding this, an e-storybook accommodates students' engagement in the classroom.

As learning multimedia integrated with digital technology, e-storybook gives new experiences to young learners. As said by the teacher that rarely used multimedia in the classroom, the use of an e-storybook might attract the students' attention easily because of their natural characteristics who are active learners and have big curiosity [25]. Furthermore, the e-storybook was designed specifically by considering the characteristics of children who tend to like imaginative things, colorful pictures, funny characters, and music [26]. Additionally, some features of this book promote an interactive mode in which the readers, the teachers and students, have control to choose their reading mode whether to read it by themselves or use read-aloud mode. Moreover, the ease to check the meaning of the difficult words enables the students to get more understanding and the audio provided trains the student listening and pronouncing skills at once.

The success of a classroom activity does not merely depend on the media used but also is influenced by the teachers' method of delivering the materials. To avoid boredom which often is the main problem in teaching young learners, the teachers are required to vary the teaching method that may involve the students. Especially in telling the story, the teachers need to vary the intonation, the volume of the voice, the expression, and the gestures [27]. In this case, the teacher involved the students in the story by presenting the story page by page and giving questions to the students sometimes. This kind of interactive activity kept the students focused on the lesson.

Overall, the student's English proficiency was improved. This was in line with some previous research studies about the benefit of storytelling for young learners' classroom activities. Nasir [27] states that storytelling is a language tool that is well known for transferring morals and values from generation to generation. Telling a story can improve the children's language proficiency as well as develop their mental, social, and emotional developmental. Ermerawati [28] revealed that story recitation enhances young learners' noticing and rehearsal skills and later on facilitates second language acquisition. Moreover, Setyarini, et.al [29] proved that storytelling may improve children's Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). About the digital form of the storybook, Shamir, and Korat [15], [16] investigated that the use of an e-storybook enhances the children's vocabulary mastery, and reading and retelling comprehension.

5 Conclusion

Based on this study, it can be inferred that the use of an e-storybook as the media to teach English to young learners enhances the children's learning engagement. It helped young learners to keep their focus on the learning activities. Students' engagement is an important factor leading to the success of learning. When the students are actively involved in the learning process, they can achieve the materials easier. The telling story is a recommended activity to introduce language skills as well as mental, social, and emotional development. E-storybook optimizes this function. Therefore, it is suggested to teachers of young learners to apply teaching method that facilitates the children's cognitive, affective and psychomotor development such as storytelling. It is expected that the result of this study may enrich the knowledge in the field of Teaching English for Young Learners (TEYL).

Acknowledgement

Finally, we are very grateful to be able to finish this study. Special gratitude we dedicated to the students, teacher, and the school for allowing us to conduct this study. For the research team and all parties contributing to this study that we cannot mention one by one, thank you, and wish you all the best.

References

- [1] S. A. Bakhsh, "Using Games as a Tool in Teaching Vocabulary to Young Learners," *English Lang. Teach.*, 2016, doi: 10.5539/elt.v9n7p120.
- [2] S. Suharsih and A. Hamidiyah, "Realia: the effective media for teaching English for EYL," in *TEYLIN 2: From Policy to Classroom*, 2012, pp. 6–14.
- [3] S. E. Kusmaryati, "Teachers' Perspectives of Teaching English To Young Learners (a Descriptive Study At Primary Schools in Kudus)," *ELT Worldw. J. English Lang. Teach.*, vol. 7, no. 2, p. 94, 2020, doi: 10.26858/eltww.v7i2.9723.
- [4] N. Supriyanti, "Why do Our Children Need to learn English at Elementary Schools? A Critical Review on the provision of English to the Indonesia Elementary Schools By Nury Supriyanti," in *TEYLIN 2: From Policy to Classroom*, 2012, pp. 146–152.
- [5] F. Copland, S. Garton, and A. Burns, "Challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners: Global Perspectives and Local Realities," *TESOL Q.*, vol. 48, no. 4, pp. 738–762, 2014, doi: 10.1002/tesq.148.
- [6] N. S. Pramesty, A. Maghfiroh, and D. A. Mustikawati, "Teachers' Challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners in Rural Area at SDN 02 Sendang," *J. Pendidik.*, pp. 1–11, 2022.
- [7] Y. Prihatin, ... Y. E.-P. and, and undefined 2021, "Challenges in Teaching English to Young Learners in Southern Thailand (A Case Study of Indonesian Pre-Service Teachers' Perspectives)," *Psychologyandeducation.Net*, vol. 58, no. 2, pp. 6098–6107, 2021, [Online]. Available: <http://www.psychologyandeducation.net/pae/index.php/pae/article/view/3087>.
- [8] A. Widodo and S. R. Dewi, "Revealing Problems on Teaching English for Young Learners at Al – Azhar 55 Islamic Primary School Yogyakarta and How to Solve Them," *J. VARIDIKA*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 21–29, 2019, doi: 10.23917/varidika.v30i2.7571.

- [9] M. A. Syakur, "the Use of Board Game in Teaching Speaking To Young Learners," *English Educ. J. English Teach. Res.*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 149–155, 2020, doi: 10.29407/jetar.v5i2.14633.
- [10] N. N. Sari, "the Use of Octaland Flashcard Apps As Media in," *JEOPALLT*, vol. 10, no. 01, pp. 94–104, 2022.
- [11] R. Oktaria and P. Putra, "Child Education in the Family As an Early Childhood," *J. Ilm. PESONA PAUD*, 2020.
- [12] A. Deani and P. Widodo, "Active Learning in Teaching English for Young Learners," *Holistics J.*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 32–38, 2020, doi: 10.4108/eai.11-11-2020.166957.
- [13] S. Stachurska, "Exploiting storytelling in a young learners ' classroom," pp. 165–182, 2013.
- [14] K. Roskos and S. Widman, "Investigating Analytic Tools for e-Book Design in Early Literacy Learning," vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 218–240, 2009.
- [15] O. Korat, "Reading electronic books as a support for vocabulary, story comprehension and word reading in kindergarten and first grade," *Comput. Educ.*, vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 24–31, Aug. 2010, doi: 10.1016/J.COMPEDU.2009.11.014.
- [16] A. Shamir, "Processes and outcomes of joint activity with e-books for promoting kindergarteners' emergent literacy," *EMI. Educ. Media Int.*, vol. 46, no. 1, pp. 81–96, 2009, doi: 10.1080/09523980902781295.
- [17] P. Aprillianti and W. Wiratsiwi, "Pengembangan E-Book Dengan Aplikasi Book Creator Pada Materi Bangun Ruang Untuk Siswa Kelas V Sekolah Dasar," *Pros. Semin. Nas. Penelit. dan Pengabd. Masyarakat*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 80–88, 2021, [Online]. Available: <http://prosiding.unirow.ac.id/index.php/SNasPPM>.
- [18] H. Dumez, "What is a case, and what is a case study?," *BMS Bull. Sociol. Methodol. Bull. Methodol. Sociol.*, vol. 127, no. 1, pp. 43–57, 2015, doi: 10.1177/0759106315582200.
- [19] M. Widdowson, "Case Study Research Methodology," *Int. J. Trans. Anal. Res. Pract.*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2011, doi: 10.29044/v2i1p25.
- [20] H. G. Ridder, "The theory contribution of case study research designs," *Bus. Res.*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 281–305, 2017, doi: 10.1007/s40685-017-0045-z.
- [21] D. COJOCNEAN, "Developing Young Learners' Oral Skills Through Storytelling With Lego®," *Rev. Pedagog. - J. Pedagog.*, vol. LXVII, no. 1, pp. 105–121, 2019, doi: 10.26755/revped/2019.1/105.
- [22] L. Bernstein, "What is Engagement - and Why does it Matter?," *Engaged*, 2015. .
- [23] M. D. Toth, "Why Student Engagement is Important in a Post-COVID World | Learning Sciences International," *Learning Sciences International*, 2021. <https://www.learningsciences.com/blog/why-is-student-engagement-important/>.
- [24] E. Sutton, "Student Engagement: Why it's Important and How to Promote it," *Branching Minds, Inc.*, 2021. <https://www.branchingminds.com/blog/student-engagement-remote-in-person>.
- [25] J. Norena, "SOME MEANINGFUL AND FUN ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING," *Holist. J.*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 16–22, 2020.
- [26] T. Pujiani, W. Harsiwi, and N. Almustaflikhah, "The Use of Animation Video as Online Learning Media to Teach English for Young Learners," *Acitya J. Teach. Educ.*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 244–251, 2022, doi: 10.30650/ajte.v4i1.3220.

- [27] N. I. Chairina Nasir, "TELL US STORIES , PLEASE ! STORYTELLING FOR YOUNG LEARNERS OF ENGLISH," Proc. Int. Conf. Roles Parents Shap. Child. Characters, no. 1995, pp. 77–81, 2018.
- [28] A. B. Ermerawati, "the Effects of Story Recitation for Young Language Learners," J. Lang. Lang. Teach., vol. 6, no. 1, p. 1, 2018, doi: 10.33394/jollt.v6i1.807.
- [29] S. Setyarini, A. B. Muslim, D. Rukmini, I. Yuliasri, and Y. Mujianto, "Thinking critically while storytelling: Improving children's HOTS and English oral competence," Indones. J. Appl. Linguist., vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 189–197, 2018, doi: 10.17509/ijal.v8i1.11480.