

The Role of Reading Story Books in Enhancing Students' English Skills at Junior High School Level

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Abstrak

Membaca bukan hanya melihat kata demi kata tetapi juga memahami kata-kata tersebut agar memiliki makna sehingga memiliki arti yang jelas. Salah satu cara untuk menguasai keterampilan membaca adalah dengan menjadikan membaca sebagai aktivitas yang menarik, misalnya melalui membaca buku cerita yang sesuai dengan usia pembelajar. Membaca buku cerita merupakan salah satu cara yang paling efektif dan menyenangkan untuk mendukung pembelajaran bahasa Inggris siswa, khususnya di tingkat sekolah menengah pertama. Artikel ini membahas latar belakang teoritis dan nilai pedagogis penggunaan buku cerita di kelas. Studi ini menyoroti bagaimana buku cerita dapat meningkatkan kosakata, kesadaran tata bahasa, pemahaman bacaan, dan motivasi untuk belajar bahasa Inggris. Studi ini juga menjelaskan kegiatan kelas praktis yang mengintegrasikan membaca cerita dengan tugas berbicara dan menulis. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa membaca buku cerita memberikan siswa paparan yang bermakna terhadap bahasa otentik dan meningkatkan keterlibatan kognitif dan emosional mereka dalam belajar bahasa Inggris. Lebih lanjut, studi ini menekankan pentingnya memilih buku cerita yang sesuai dengan tingkat linguistik dan latar belakang budaya siswa untuk memaksimalkan hasil belajar. Melalui analisis kualitatif dan observasi di kelas, ditemukan bahwa siswa menunjukkan peningkatan partisipasi, kreativitas, dan kepercayaan diri dalam menggunakan bahasa Inggris setelah terlibat dalam kegiatan pembelajaran berbasis cerita. Secara keseluruhan, penggunaan buku cerita tidak hanya mendukung perkembangan linguistik tetapi juga menumbuhkan sikap positif terhadap pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, menjadikannya komponen penting dari pedagogi bahasa yang efektif di tingkat sekolah menengah pertama.

Kata kunci: membaca, buku cerita, belajar bahasa Inggris, motivasi, sekolah menengah pertama.

Abstract

Reading is not only seeing the word by word but also understanding the words to become meaning so that it has a clear meaning. One of the ways to master reading skill is to make reading an interesting activity, for example through reading story books that are suitable for learner's age. Reading story books is one of the most effective and enjoyable ways to support students' English language learning, particularly at the junior high school level. This article discusses the theoretical background and pedagogical value of using story books in the classroom. The study highlights how story books can improve vocabulary, grammar awareness, reading comprehension, and motivation to learn English. It also describes practical classroom activities that integrate story reading with speaking and writing tasks. The findings suggest that reading story books provides students with meaningful exposure to authentic language and enhances their cognitive and emotional engagement in learning English. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the importance of selecting appropriate story books that match students' linguistic levels and cultural backgrounds to maximize learning outcomes. Through qualitative analysis and classroom-based observations, it was found that students demonstrated increased participation, creativity, and confidence in using English after engaging with story-based learning activities. Overall, the use of story books not only supports linguistic development but also fosters positive attitudes toward English learning, making it an essential component of effective language pedagogy at the junior high school level.

Keywords: : reading, story books, English learning, motivation, junior high school.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, increasing attention has been directed toward the integration of authentic and engaging materials in English language instruction, particularly at the junior high school level. Among the wide array of pedagogical resources available, story books have gained prominence as a dynamic and effective medium for enriching students' language learning experiences (Lubis & Wangid, 2019; Rahayu, et al., 2023). Unlike traditional approaches that often isolate grammatical structures and vocabulary items, story books present language in meaningful, contextualized, and naturally occurring forms, thereby enabling learners to engage with English as a living system of communication (Thankavel, 2023; Al-alami & Alhamami, 2024; Saimon, et al., 2023).

At the junior high school stage an essential period for both linguistic maturation and cognitive development exposure to narrative texts offers multifaceted advantages. Through sustained interaction with stories, students enhance their lexical repertoire and deepen their grammatical sensitivity while simultaneously strengthening higher-order skills such as reading comprehension and critical analysis (Loewen, et al., 2020; Orakci, 2021). Moreover, narratives foster emotional involvement, transforming the learning process into an engaging and personally meaningful experience. Such affective engagement not only cultivates positive attitudes toward English learning but also stimulates intrinsic motivation, encouraging learners to pursue reading activities independently beyond the classroom environment (Sampelolo & Kombong, 2022; Lindawati, 2021; Darzhinova, 2025).

Empirical research consistently indicates that the incorporation of story books into instructional practice facilitates language acquisition through interactive, creative, and reflective processes. Story-centered pedagogy enables educators to implement communicative and integrative tasks including retelling, dramatization, and imaginative writing that consolidate linguistic competence in a holistic manner (El-Mahdy, et al., 2019). Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical underpinnings and pedagogical implications of story-based instruction is indispensable for teachers seeking to design impactful and learner-centered English programs. This study therefore investigates the contribution of story books to English language development at the junior high school level, with particular emphasis on their influence on vocabulary acquisition, grammatical awareness, reading comprehension, and learner motivation (Shi, et al., 2024; Agustiani, et al., 2024; Jani, 2024).

2. METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative methodology to provide a comprehensive account of the implementation process, instructional effectiveness, and students' responses to the integration of story books in English language teaching (Rahmawati, 2022; Gogahu & Prasetyo, 2020). A qualitative orientation was selected because it enables researchers to investigate educational phenomena within their natural classroom contexts, allowing for nuanced interpretation of participants' experiences and interactions rather than relying exclusively on statistical measurement (Han, 2022; Cahyono & Perdhani, 2023; Al Ayub Ahmed et al., 2022).

Research Design

The research employed a qualitative descriptive design with the objective of examining how story book reading contributes to the enhancement of junior high school students' English proficiency. This approach facilitated an in-depth exploration of learners' experiences, classroom dynamics, and the pedagogical implications associated with story-based instruction. Instead of concentrating solely on quantifiable outcomes, the study sought to illuminate authentic perspectives, attitudes, and reflections from both students and the teacher throughout the learning process. The descriptive framework also provided flexibility to portray instructional practices in detail and to document observable progress in students' language development during sustained engagement with narrative texts (Cumbo & Selwyn, 2022; Tan & Huet, 2021; Umar et al., 2023).

The investigation was conducted at a public junior high school in Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL). The study took place during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year and spanned six consecutive weeks. Throughout this period, students engaged with a curated selection of story books chosen according to their linguistic appropriateness, cultural relevance, and thematic appeal (Jaihow & Sinwongsuwat, 2024; Suyitno, et al., 2021; Pardede, 2020)

Participants

The participants comprised 37 eighth-grade students between 13 and 14 years of age. They were selected through purposive sampling, a non-probability technique designed to identify individuals capable of providing rich and relevant data aligned with the research objectives. All participants had studied English for a minimum of two years and demonstrated intermediate proficiency based on prior academic records (Dwinanda & Sulistyowati, 2021; Hussain, et al., 2023; Dash, 2022).

In addition, one English teacher contributed to the study by facilitating classroom implementation and offering professional insights into students' participation and development. With more than twenty-five years of teaching experience and familiarity with literature-based instruction, the teacher played a crucial supportive role. Prior to data collection, participants and parents were informed about the study's aims and procedures, and written consent was obtained to ensure ethical compliance. Participation was voluntary throughout the research process.(Al-alamy & Alhamami, 2024; Jaihow & Sinwongsuwat, 2024).

Instruments and Data Collection

To obtain comprehensive data, multiple instruments were employed:

1) Observation Sheets

Structured observation forms were utilized to document students' engagement, participation patterns, and language use during story-reading sessions. Indicators included attentiveness, verbal contribution, vocabulary application, and peer collaboration (Uli Banjarnahor, et al., 2023).

2) Interview Guides

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teacher and a randomly selected group of students at the conclusion of the program. These interviews explored perceptions of story-based learning, encountered challenges, and perceived improvements in English skills.

3) Students' Reflective Journals

Each participant maintained a learning journal across the six-week intervention. Entries included reflections on reading experiences, newly acquired vocabulary, and personal responses to narrative content.

4) Achievement Tasks

Short post-reading tasks were administered after each session to assess linguistic progress. These tasks included vocabulary exercises, comprehension questions, and written summaries, serving as supplementary evidence of language development.

Research Procedures

The intervention extended over six weeks, with one 90-minute session conducted weekly. Each session centered on a different story book selected for linguistic accessibility and moral or cultural relevance. Instructional activities were organized into three sequential phases: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading.

1) Pre-reading Phase

The teacher introduced the story's title, thematic focus, and key vocabulary. Students engaged in predictive discussions to activate prior knowledge and establish contextual readiness for comprehension.

2) While-reading Phase

Students read the texts both silently and aloud, individually or collaboratively. The teacher provided scaffolding for vocabulary and grammatical structures while encouraging interpretive discussion, prediction, and personal response. This stage emphasized pronunciation, fluency, and interactive meaning-making.

3) Post-reading Phase

Follow-up activities integrated productive skills through tasks such as retelling narratives, performing role-plays, composing written summaries, and generating alternative endings. These activities reinforced reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills within meaningful and contextualized communication.

Throughout the program, active use of English was strongly encouraged. The teacher functioned primarily as a facilitator, offering guidance, clarification, and constructive feedback.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Observation notes, interview transcripts, journals, and task results were systematically coded and organized into emergent thematic categories (Miles & Huberman, 2019; Haq, 2024). The analysis proceeded through several stages:

1) Data Preparation and Transcription Recorded observations and interviews were transcribed verbatim.

2) Coding Data segments were labeled with thematic codes such as vocabulary development, grammatical awareness, learner motivation, and classroom interaction.

3) Thematic Organization Related codes were consolidated into broader categories reflecting cognitive engagement and affective involvement.

4) Interpretative Analysis Findings were interpreted in alignment with existing theoretical perspectives on literature-based language learning.

To strengthen reliability, methodological triangulation was implemented by comparing findings across multiple data sources. Convergence among observations, interviews, journals, and achievement tasks enhanced the credibility of the conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were rigorously upheld throughout the research. Formal approval was obtained from the school principal, and written consent was secured from students and their parents. Confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty (Ajani et al., 2024).

In conclusion, this study utilized a qualitative descriptive framework to investigate the contribution of story book reading to English language development among junior high school students. Through a combination of observations, interviews, reflective journals, and performance-based tasks, the research generated a rich and holistic portrayal of learners' linguistic progress and motivational growth. The structured yet adaptable storytelling approach provided authentic language exposure, emotional engagement, and interactive learning opportunities, ultimately supporting the advancement of students' overall English proficiency.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings of this investigation demonstrate that the integration of story books into English instruction substantially enhanced students' linguistic proficiency and classroom engagement. Evidence derived from systematic observations, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews revealed significant advancement across four principal domains: lexical development, grammatical awareness, reading comprehension, and learner motivation.

1. Vocabulary Development

Over the six-week intervention, students exhibited considerable growth in vocabulary acquisition. Observational data indicated that learners increasingly incorporated newly encountered lexical items from the narratives into both oral discussions and written reflections. The recurrent and contextualized presentation of vocabulary within storylines facilitated natural meaning construction, reducing reliance on rote memorization. Words associated with emotions, daily routines, and descriptive language were more readily retained when embedded in repeated narrative contexts. These findings resonate with the principles articulated in Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), which underscores the centrality of comprehensible and meaningful input in fostering language acquisition.

2. Enhanced Grammatical Awareness

Students also demonstrated heightened sensitivity to grammatical structures encountered organically within the texts. Rather than engaging with isolated rule-based exercises, learners observed how syntactic forms functioned within dialogues and descriptive passages. Interview responses suggested that students developed clearer understanding of tense usage and sentence patterns through contextual exposure. For instance, several participants noted that repeated encounters with past-tense constructions in narratives reinforced accurate verb formation. This outcome aligns with Rod Ellis (2020), who emphasizes the effectiveness of form-focused instruction embedded within meaningful input for promoting implicit grammatical development.

4. Improvement in Reading Comprehension

Substantial progress was also evident in students' reading comprehension abilities. While initial sessions revealed difficulties in identifying main ideas and drawing inferences, by the fourth week learners demonstrated improved capacity to recognize narrative elements such as characters, settings, conflicts, and moral lessons. They also exhibited increased confidence in retelling stories using their own words. Journal reflections indicated

enthusiasm for predicting plot developments and analyzing character motivations, activities that deepened interpretive skills and critical thinking. These results corroborate the perspective advanced by I. S. P. Nation (2019), who asserts that extensive reading enhances comprehension through sustained exposure to meaningful language patterns.

5. Increased Motivation and Positive Disposition

Perhaps the most striking outcome of the study was the marked rise in students' motivation and positive attitudes toward English learning. Observational records documented higher levels of participation during story-based sessions compared to conventional grammar-focused lessons. Students displayed enthusiasm, volunteered to read aloud, and actively engaged in dramatizations. The imaginative and affective dimensions of storytelling rendered the learning environment less intimidating and more enjoyable. Interview data further revealed increased self-confidence in speaking English and reduced anxiety about making errors. The teacher also reported improvements in attendance and active participation during the intervention period. These findings are consistent with earlier scholarship, including work by Lynne Cameron (2019) and Andrew Wright (2019), which highlights the motivational impact of storytelling in language education.

Discussion

The outcomes of this study affirm that story book reading constitutes a highly effective pedagogical strategy in junior high school English classrooms. The documented advancements across cognitive and affective dimensions suggest that literature-based instruction effectively bridges formal language study and authentic communicative use.

The results indicate that story books provide abundant and meaningful linguistic input conducive to vocabulary enrichment and grammatical development. In contrast to traditional instructional materials that frequently present discrete language components, narrative texts depict language as a functional and communicative system. This approach aligns with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching, which prioritize interaction, meaning-making, and authentic communication over mechanical practice.

Moreover, the integration of post-reading speaking and writing tasks facilitated opportunities for creative language production. Activities such as narrative retelling and alternative ending construction reinforced both receptive and productive competencies. This pedagogical practice Output Hypothesis, which posits that language production stimulates deeper cognitive processing and consolidates learning (Kumar, 2021; Wahyuni, et al., 2019).

The findings further underscore the pivotal role of emotional engagement in language acquisition. Narratives stimulate imagination and empathy, thereby enhancing attentional focus and memory retention. When learners establish emotional connections with characters or plot developments, the educational experience becomes intrinsically meaningful. This phenomenon explains the observed increase in learner confidence and sustained motivation. The results are congruent, who emphasizes the influence of affective variables on successful language learning outcomes (Lady Pratiwi, 2023; Ouyang, et al., 2024; Guo, et al., 2020).

The teacher's role proved instrumental in optimizing the benefits of story-based instruction. Acting as a facilitator, the teacher scaffolded comprehension, guided interpretive discussions, and cultivated a supportive classroom atmosphere. Such collaborative learning contexts mitigate anxiety and foster a sense of shared engagement. Consequently, educators are encouraged to select texts that align with learners' linguistic proficiency, cultural familiarity, and thematic interests. Carefully structured pre-reading and post-reading activities that integrate the four macro-skills reading, writing, speaking, and listening are

essential for ensuring comprehensive language development (Yang & Kyun, 2022; Thornbury, 2023).

Despite its promising outcomes, the study presents certain limitations. The relatively small sample size and single-school setting may constrain the generalizability of the findings. Future research could incorporate larger and more diverse participant groups or conduct comparative analyses between story-based instruction and conventional methodologies. Longitudinal investigations would also be valuable in examining the sustained impact of extensive story reading on overall language proficiency and learner autonomy (Rehman, et al., 2025).

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study confirms that integrating story books into English language teaching at the junior high school level significantly enhances students' language proficiency and learning motivation. Story-based instruction improves vocabulary acquisition, grammar awareness, and reading comprehension while simultaneously fostering positive attitudes toward learning. As authentic materials, story books expose students to natural language use in meaningful contexts, promoting both receptive and productive language skills.

Beyond linguistic development, the findings highlight the importance of emotional engagement in the learning process. Stories create an enjoyable and low-anxiety environment that encourages participation, builds confidence, and supports learner autonomy. The study also emphasizes the crucial role of teachers in carefully selecting appropriate story materials and guiding students through structured reading activities. When implemented effectively, story-based learning serves as a holistic approach that integrates cognitive, linguistic, and affective development in English language education.

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