Research Article

Implementing Storytelling Method in Teaching English to Primary School Students

Rostina[1]*, Dien Afni Ariyati[2], Sri Hariati Mustari[3]

[1] Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia
[2] STIKES Amanah Makassar, Indonesia
[3] Institut Teknologi dan Kesehatan Nasional, Indonesia
* Corresponding Author: rostina@unm.ac.id

Abstract. Storytelling has been widely recognized as an effective method for teaching English to young learners because it presents language in meaningful and engaging contexts. This study aims to explore the implementation of storytelling in teaching English to primary school students and to examine the perceived benefits and challenges from the teacher's perspective. The study employed a qualitative descriptive research design involving one English teacher who taught Grade 6 students at SDN 261 Pinrang. The participant was selected through purposive sampling due to her experience in applying storytelling activities in English instruction at the lower primary level. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview and documentation, including lesson plans and teaching materials related to storytelling used in the classroom. The data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis by identifying recurring themes related to classroom implementation, student responses, perceived benefits, and instructional challenges. The findings reveal that storytelling was mainly implemented in listening and speaking activities using simple and familiar stories, visual aids, and follow-up tasks such as comprehension questions and story retelling. According to the teacher, storytelling contributed positively to students' listening skills, vocabulary acquisition, motivation, and confidence in using English. Students showed higher levels of attention, engagement, and willingness to participate during storytelling sessions compared to traditional teaching methods. However, several challenges were also identified, including difficulty in selecting age-appropriate and culturally relevant stories, limited instructional time, large class size, and the teacher's need for further training in designing effective storytelling activities. Despite these challenges, the study concludes that storytelling can create a positive and supportive learning environment when it is carefully planned and supported by adequate teacher preparation. The findings highlight the importance of instructional support to maximize the effectiveness of storytelling in primary EFL classrooms.

Keywords: English As A Foreign Language; Primary School; Qualitative Study; Storytelling; Young Learners

1. Introduction

English has become a crucial global language that connects people in many fields such as science, technology, business, and education. For primary school students who learn English as a foreign language (EFL), early exposure to the language can foster positive learning attitudes and support future communication skills. However, teaching English to young learners presents several challenges including low motivation, short attention spans, limited exposure to authentic language, and difficulty in understanding abstract linguistic rules (Wang & Luo, 2025). These challenges have encouraged educators to adopt teaching methods that are more engaging, meaningful, and suitable for young learners' developmental

needs. One pedagogical approach that has shown promise in supporting language learning in primary contexts is storytelling.

In the context of English language teaching (ELT), storytelling refers to teachers' use of narratives or stories as instructional input. This method involves presenting stories orally or through multi-media, and subsequently engaging students in activities such as retelling, role-playing, and discussion. Storytelling differs from traditional textbook-based instruction by situating language learning in meaningful contexts that reflect how language is used in real life. According to Wright (1997) and Fitzgibbon & Wilhelm (1998), storytelling provides advantages such as increased motivation, richer language input, opportunities for communication, and deeper student engagement compared to conventional approaches.

A growing body of research indicates that storytelling can support various aspects of English language learning, including speaking, listening, vocabulary acquisition, and literacy development. For example, studies in primary EFL classrooms show that students taught with storytelling techniques often demonstrate improved speaking skills and greater willingness to participate in class activities (Bertoli et al., 2025). Similarly, research conducted by Kalantari & Hashemian (2016) found that storytelling significantly enhanced young learners' vocabulary knowledge compared to traditional teaching methods, while also increasing students' interest in learning English. These findings suggest that storytelling can help young learners to internalize linguistic structures more naturally by listening and interacting with language in meaningful narrative contexts.

Storytelling also plays an important role in fostering literacy development among young learners. When stories are used as part of literacy instruction, they allow students to practice reading, listening comprehension, and narrative organization in ways that textbooks alone cannot achieve. In educational settings beyond Indonesia, research shows that storytelling can enhance emergent literacy skills, phonological awareness, and early reading comprehension for young EFL learners (Huang, 2006; Alkilani & Zhang, 2024; Nicolopoulou et al., 2015). Within primary classrooms, storytelling often integrates visual aids and interactive elements that help learners make connections between language forms and meaning which supports cognitive engagement and vocabulary retention.

Despite its recognized benefits, the implementation of storytelling in primary English classrooms is not without challenges. Teachers may have limited experience in selecting or adapting stories that are age-appropriate and culturally relevant for their students. Classroom constraints such as large class sizes, limited instructional time, and lack of materials further complicate effective storytelling implementation. In a study exploring primary teachers' use of storytelling, Férez Mora and Coyle (2023) noted that while future teachers recognize the potential of stories to foster linguistic competence, they struggle with designing tasks that actively engage learners and align with curricular goals. This highlights the need for both research and practical guidance to support teachers in creating storytelling activities that are pedagogically sound and responsive to learner needs.

Primary school students differ from older learners in several ways, including cognitive development, attention capacity, and motivation patterns. Young learners typically benefit from instruction that is dynamic, contextualized, and multisensory. Storytelling aligns well with these needs because narratives naturally combine language input with visual, emotional, and interactive elements. This combination can help learners grasp new vocabulary, sentence structures, and pragmatic language use without relying solely on rote memorization. In fact, research has shown that storytelling activities such as retelling or dramatization and stimulate both cognitive and affective domains, leading to enhanced comprehension and retention of language features (Tihal, 2025).

In addition to linguistic benefits, storytelling can support a positive learning environment by reducing anxiety and increasing confidence among young learners. A study investigating the effects of storytelling on students' confidence and participation reported that storytelling activities encouraged learners to engage more freely with the target language, which in turn built their self-confidence and classroom interaction skills (Bertoli et al., 2025).

Similarly, the inclusion of narratives in instruction has been associated with increased intrinsic motivation for language learning because stories are inherently interesting and meaningful to children (Kalantari & Hashemian, 2016).

However, the effectiveness of storytelling depends on multiple factors, including the teacher's ability to select engaging materials, scaffold language input appropriately, and design follow-up activities that reinforce learning objectives. Without proper planning, storytelling may become a passive listening exercise rather than an interactive learning experience. Therefore, educational practitioners emphasize the need for teacher training and resource development to maximize the benefits of storytelling (Férez Mora and Coyle, 2023). With strong pedagogical design, storytelling can create a language-rich environment that supports students' communicative competence, critical thinking, and creative expression.

In summary, the storytelling method offers a promising approach for teaching English to primary school students by situating language learning within meaningful and engaging narrative contexts. Research evidence has shown that storytelling can enhance language skills such as speaking, listening, and vocabulary, while also increasing student motivation and confidence. However, successful implementation requires careful selection of materials, teacher preparation, and classroom strategies that actively involve learners. This article will explore these theoretical foundations and empirical findings in greater depth to provide insights into how storytelling can be implemented successfully in primary English classrooms, the benefits it offers, and the challenges educators must address.

2. Method
Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. Qualitative descriptive research is appropriate when the aim of the study is to describe phenomena as they occur naturally without manipulation or experimental treatment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the context of this study, the researcher sought to explore how storytelling is implemented in teaching English to primary school students and to understand teachers' perceptions of its benefits and challenges.

A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain in-depth insights into classroom practices and teaching experiences. Rather than focusing on numerical data, this design emphasizes meaning, context, and participants' perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach is suitable for examining instructional methods such as storytelling, which involve interaction, creativity, and classroom dynamics.

Participant

The participant of this study was one English teacher at SDN 261 Pinrang who taught in Grade 6. The teacher was selected using purposive sampling because she had direct experience in teaching English through storytelling activities. Purposive sampling allows researchers to deliberately select participants who possess specific characteristics and experiences that are relevant to the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The selected teacher had experience teaching English to primary school students and regularly applied storytelling as part of classroom instruction. Focusing on a single participant enabled the researcher to obtain in-depth and detailed insights into the implementation of storytelling in an authentic classroom context. Although the study involved only one teacher, the data provided rich qualitative information regarding teaching strategies, classroom interactions, and challenges encountered during storytelling activities.

Data Collection

Data were collected using interview and documentation. Semi-structured interview was conducted with the teacher to gather information about their experiences, perceptions, and challenges in using storytelling as a teaching method. Semi-structured interview allow flexibility while still focusing on key research questions, making them suitable for qualitative educational research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In addition, documentation was used to support the interview data. The documents included lesson plans, teaching materials, storybooks, and classroom activity records related to storytelling. Documentation helps researchers understand how teaching methods are planned and implemented in real classroom settings (Bowen, 2009). The combination of interviews and documentation helped strengthen the credibility of the findings through data triangulation.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis. First, the interview recordings were transcribed into written text. The researcher then read the transcripts and documents several times to become familiar with the data. Next, the data were coded by identifying recurring themes related to the implementation of storytelling, perceived benefits, and challenges faced by teachers.

After coding, the data were organized into categories and interpreted to answer the research questions. This process followed the steps of qualitative data analysis proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which include data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. By using descriptive analysis, the researcher aimed to present the findings in a clear and systematic manner that reflects the real teaching practices observed in the classroom.

3. Results and Discussion
Results

This section presents the findings of the study based on data obtained from an in-depth interview with one English teacher and documentation analysis. The results reflect the teacher's experiences in implementing storytelling in an English class at the primary school level. The findings are organized into several themes related to classroom implementation, perceived benefits for students, and challenges in practice.

Implementation of Storytelling in the English Classroom

The findings show that storytelling was implemented as part of listening and speaking instruction. The teacher explained that storytelling was usually conducted at the beginning or middle of the lesson to introduce new vocabulary and language expressions. Stories with simple plots, familiar characters, and clear moral values were selected to suit the students' language proficiency and cognitive development.

During the storytelling process, the teacher delivered stories orally while using visual aids such as pictures and printed storybooks. In some lessons, short animated videos were also used to support students' understanding. According to the teacher, visual elements helped students follow the storyline and grasp the meaning of unfamiliar words more easily. This finding supports Wright's (1997) argument that storytelling becomes more effective when supported by visual and contextual cues.

After the storytelling session, the teacher conducted follow-up activities such as asking simple comprehension questions, inviting students to repeat key vocabulary, and asking students to retell parts of the story using short sentences. Documentation from lesson plans showed that storytelling activities were linked to specific learning objectives, particularly vocabulary acquisition and basic sentence patterns.

Perceived Benefits of Storytelling for Students' Language Learning

Based on the teacher's perspective, storytelling provided clear benefits for students' English learning. One of the most significant benefits was improvement in students' listening skills. The teacher observed that students were more focused and attentive during storytelling sessions compared to traditional instruction.

Vocabulary learning was also reported as a major benefit. The teacher stated that students were able to remember new words more easily when the words appeared repeatedly in a story context. This finding aligns with Kalantari and Hashemian (2016) who found that storytelling supports vocabulary retention because words are introduced in meaningful and memorable situations.

In addition, the teacher noticed increased student confidence during English lessons. Students were more willing to answer questions and participate in simple speaking activities related to the story. The teacher believed that storytelling reduced students' anxiety because the activities emphasized understanding meaning rather than producing grammatically perfect sentences.

Student Engagement and Learning Motivation

Another important finding was related to student engagement. The teacher reported that storytelling created a more enjoyable classroom atmosphere. Students showed enthusiasm, curiosity, and emotional involvement, especially when stories were related to daily life or contained interesting characters.

The teacher also explained that storytelling helped maintain students' attention for a longer time. As young learners tend to lose focus quickly, storytelling was considered an effective way to sustain concentration. This finding supports Nicolopoulou et al. (2015) who argue that storytelling enhances engagement by combining language learning with imagination and emotional connection.

Challenges in Using Storytelling

Despite the positive outcomes, the teacher also faced several challenges. One challenge was selecting stories that matched students' language level while still being interesting and educational. The teacher reported difficulty in finding story materials that were simple, culturally appropriate, and aligned with the curriculum.

Time limitation was another challenge. Storytelling activities required sufficient time, particularly when follow-up activities such as retelling or discussion were included. The teacher also mentioned that large class size made it difficult to involve all students actively.

Furthermore, the teacher felt the need for more training in designing effective storytelling activities. This finding is consistent with Férez Mora and Coyle (2023) who highlight that teachers often require pedagogical support to integrate storytelling meaningfully into English instruction.

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that storytelling is an effective instructional method in a primary EFL classroom, even when implemented by a single teacher. The results support previous research emphasizing the role of storytelling in providing meaningful language input and promoting student engagement (Wright, 1997; Ellis & Brewster, 2014).

Storytelling as Contextualized Language Input

The teacher's use of storytelling allowed students to experience English in a contextualized and meaningful way. Rather than learning vocabulary in isolation, students encountered language through narrative contexts. This supports communicative language teaching principles which emphasize meaningful input and interaction (Richards, 2006).

The findings also align with Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis, which suggests that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input in low-anxiety environments. Storytelling created such an environment by presenting language naturally and reducing students' fear of making mistakes.

Effects on Motivation and Confidence

The results indicate that storytelling positively influenced students' motivation and confidence. The teacher observed that students were more willing to participate and interact during storytelling activities. This supports Kalantari and Hashemian's (2016) findings that storytelling increases learners' intrinsic motivation and reduces anxiety.

The emotional and imaginative nature of stories helped create a supportive learning atmosphere, which is particularly important for young learners. Ellis and Brewster (2014) emphasize that young learners benefit from activities that integrate emotional engagement with language learning, which storytelling naturally provides.

Pedagogical Challenges and Implications

Although storytelling was effective, the challenges identified in this study highlight important pedagogical implications. The teacher's difficulty in selecting appropriate materials

and managing time indicates the need for better instructional resources and professional development. Without proper planning, storytelling may become teacher-centered and limit student interaction.

This finding supports Férez Mora and Coyle's (2023) argument that teachers need practical guidance on task design and curriculum alignment when using storytelling. Teacher training programs should therefore include hands-on practice in storytelling techniques and activity design.

4. Conclusion

This study explored the implementation of storytelling in teaching English by the English teacher who taught Grade 6 students at SDN 261 Pinrang. The findings indicate that storytelling can be effectively used as an instructional method to support English language learning in primary classrooms. By presenting language through stories, the teacher was able to create a learning environment that was more meaningful, enjoyable, and suitable for young learners' developmental characteristics.The results showed that storytelling contributed positively to students' listening skills, vocabulary development, motivation, and confidence. Students were more attentive and engaged during lessons, and they were more willing to participate in speaking activities related to the stories. These findings support previous research suggesting that storytelling provides contextualized language input and reduces learners' anxiety by focusing on meaning rather than accuracy. As a result, students were able to interact with English more naturally and comfortably.Despite these benefits, the study also revealed several challenges in implementing storytelling. The teacher experienced difficulties in selecting appropriate story materials, managing limited instructional time, and ensuring active participation from all students, especially in large classes. In addition, the findings highlighted the teacher's need for further training and guidance in designing effective storytelling activities that align with curricular objectives. These challenges suggest that storytelling requires careful planning and pedagogical support to be implemented successfully.In conclusion, storytelling is a promising method for teaching English to primary school students, even when applied in a single-teacher classroom context. When well-prepared and supported, storytelling can enhance language learning, increase student motivation, and create a positive classroom atmosphere. Therefore, it is recommended that schools and teacher education programs provide adequate resources and training to help teachers integrate storytelling effectively into English instruction. Future research may involve more participants or different school contexts to gain a broader understanding of storytelling practices in primary EFL education.

References

Alkilani, G. Y., & Zhang, Q. (2024). *Effect of dramatic storytelling on emergent literacy in EFL: Evidence from the UAE kindergartens.* Literacy Research and Instruction, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/19388071.2024.2329877

Bertoli, S. M., Janggo, W. O., Kristiansi, M., & Kristiansi, M. (2025). *Implementing storytelling method in EFL classroom context: Challenges and opportunities. Educational: Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan & Pengajaran, 4*(4). https://doi.org/10.51878/educational.v4i4.4163

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal, 9*(2), 27–40. https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Ellis, G., & Brewster, J. (2014). *Tell it again! The storytelling handbook for primary English language teachers.* British Council. Retrieved from https://pedagogie.ac-limoges.fr/lv.iahautevienne/IMG/pdf/d467_storytelling_handbook_final_web.pdf

Férez Mora, P. A., & Coyle, Y. (2023). *Storytelling in EFL primary education: Defining a sociocritical and participatory model with pre-service teachers.* Thinking Skills and Creativity, 49, 101360. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2023.101360

Fitzgibbon, H. B. and Wilhelm, K. H. (1998) Storytelling in ESL/EFL classrooms. TESL Reporter,31(2): pp.21-31.

Huang, H.-L. (2006). *The effects of storytelling on EFL young learners' reading comprehension and word recall*. English Teaching & Learning, 30(3), 51–74. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/13433348.pdf

Kalantari, F., & Hashemian, M. (2016). *A story-telling approach to teaching English to young EFL learners. English Language Teaching, 9*(1), 221–232. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n1p221

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Nicolopoulou, A., Cortina, K. S., Ilgaz, H., Cates, C. B., & de Sá, A. B. (2015). *Using a narrative- and play-based activity to promote low-income preschoolers' oral language, emergent literacy, and social competence*. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 31, 147–162. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2015.01.006

Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research, 42*(5), 533–544. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

Richards, J. C. (2006). *Communicative language teaching today*. Cambridge University Press.

Tihal, W. (2025). *Unveiling the power of storytelling to enhance EFL listening and speaking: An action research study*. Academicus International Scientific Journal, 16(32), 25–35. https://dx.medra.org/10.7336/academicus.2025.32.03

Wang, H., & Luo, M. (2025). *The application of story-based teaching method in English language teaching for young learners in a primary school. International Journal of Social Science and Education Research, 8*(8), 143–149. https://doi.org/10.6918/IJOSSER.202508_8(8).0017

Wright A. (1997) Creating stories with children. Oxford: Oxford University Press.