

USING STORYTELLING TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' VOCABULARY MASTERY AT SMP YABES SCHOOL MEDAN

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ABSTRACT

This study delved into the mastery of vocabulary among 25 grade eighth Students at SMP Swasta Yabes School through the use of storytelling. Storytelling emerged as a valuable tool for assessing students' proficiency in English. However, various challenges surfaced during English learning sessions, including the selection of appropriate materials, students' and teachers' proficiency in storytelling, and the readiness and nervousness of storytellers. As an English lecturer, the researcher identified vocabulary improvement as a common issue among students. This was evident when students were tasked with narrating stories in class before undergoing English vocabulary tests. Analysis of the test results revealed a range of scores, with the highest at 96 and the lowest at 65 for post-test, yielding an average score of 83,36. These findings underscore the necessity for students to refine their storytelling skills alongside enhancing their English proficiency comprehensively.

Keywords: *Storytelling, Vocabulary Tests, Mastery.*

INTRODUCTION

The exploration of vocabulary acquisition is a longstanding focus in educational research, driven by the recognized challenge of mastering vocabulary in the English learning process. Vocabulary, being the cornerstone of language, plays a pivotal role in enhancing various language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Zu et al., 2021). Individuals across age groups, from early childhood to adulthood, encounter difficulties in expanding and mastering their vocabulary. Traditionally, educators have relied on memorization techniques, acknowledging that not all learners possess the ability to memorize quickly. This challenge isn't confined to specific regions like Medan town; it's a nationwide concern in Indonesia, as evidenced by numerous studies and publications highlighting similar issues. Consequently, stakeholders and researchers within the education sector must collectively seek solutions to address this national dilemma.

Governments have initiated policies and initiatives to promote English language proficiency, recognizing its significance for national economic development. English education has been accorded priority status, evident through various measures such as the introduction of English or bilingual programs in schools, the provision of international study options in higher education, and the implementation of the Roadmap for Education Reforms across schools (Kaur et al., 2016). Despite these efforts, challenges persist, particularly in the translation of theoretical knowledge acquired through training programs into effective classroom practices, especially in rural and remote areas where qualified English language teachers may be scarce (Sunyakul & Teo, 2020). Urban-rural disparities further exacerbate the issue, with high-quality teachers often gravitating towards urban schools (Noom-ura, 2013).

Storytelling emerges as a dynamic pedagogical tool in English language instruction, renowned for its ability to create vibrant, interactive classroom environments. Early exposure to English provides children with a competitive edge in today's rapidly advancing world (Mufida & Abidin, 2021). Egan (1989) pioneered storytelling as an effective method for teaching young learners, harnessing its capacity to foster literacy comprehension and ignite imagination. Through storytelling, students engage in analytical thinking, learn

narrative structures, and achieve academic milestones (Agosto, 2016). This approach facilitates meaningful teacher-student interactions, fostering a conducive learning environment (Khudhair & Alnoori, 2017).

Storytelling not only stimulates fundamental cognitive abilities but also elicits active responses from children, such as verbal and non-verbal communication. Digital storytelling, as highlighted by Rahiem (2021), offers significant advantages, making learning more captivating, interactive, and theatrical. Hence, educators are encouraged to enhance their proficiency in utilizing technological resources to enrich the learning experience. Against this backdrop, storytelling serves as a vehicle for vocabulary acquisition, enhancing listening skills, promoting oral fluency, and nurturing communication skills in both verbal and written forms. This study endeavors to investigate the efficacy of storytelling in enhancing young learners' vocabulary mastery.

Based on the problem above, this research has the objective to prove whether storytelling is able to be improve students' vocabulary mastery at SMP Swasta Yabes School.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Vocabulary Mastery

Vocabulary, an essential component of language, encompasses words and their meanings. It represents the lexicon known and utilized by individuals. Each word constitutes a fundamental unit of language, possessing inherent meaning and the ability to be articulated or inscribed. The English lexicon is continually expanding, fostering enhanced cognitive abilities and facilitating the articulation of ideas. While dictionaries aim to encapsulate vast vocabularies, they inevitably fall short, unable to encompass the entirety of linguistic diversity. Moody (2005) underscores this limitation, asserting that even the most exhaustive dictionaries cannot encapsulate the entirety of our lexicon. The dynamic nature of language ensures a perpetual influx of novel terminology, propelled by advancements in science and evolving societal norms.

Vocabulary is subject to various classifications. Nation (2008) delineates four tiers: high-frequency words, pervasive across all linguistic contexts; academic words, essential for scholarly discourse; technical terminology, indispensable within specialized domains; and low-frequency words, sporadically encountered. Thomas (in Hasby, 2007, p. 13) further categorizes vocabulary into oral, writing, listening, and reading categories, each serving distinct communicative functions. Given its pivotal role in language acquisition, vocabulary acquisition constitutes a fundamental aspect of language learning (Nation, 1990; Nunan, 2003). Schmidt (2000) underscores its significance, highlighting its profound impact on language proficiency across all modalities—speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Consequently, mastering vocabulary precedes proficiency in more intricate linguistic structures, forming the bedrock of linguistic competence.

According to Zimmerman in Anisa (2016), vocabulary occupies a central position within language learning and is of paramount importance for overall language proficiency. Neglecting vocabulary acquisition hampers the development of all four language skills. Inadequate vocabulary knowledge poses a significant obstacle to students' progress in English language learning. Additionally, research by Blachowicz, Fisher, & Watts-taffe (2005) underscores the crucial role of vocabulary in enhancing reading performance and enabling students to actively engage in social and academic classroom activities. Thus, effective vocabulary instruction tailored to individual students' strengths and weaknesses can benefit all learners significantly.

Proficiency in vocabulary empowers learners, enhancing their communicative efficacy. Conversely, deficiencies in vocabulary impede language acquisition and comprehension, manifesting as challenges in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, inadequate vocabulary can ensnare students in a cycle of frustration, hindering text comprehension and impeding learning strategies. Thus, concerted efforts must be directed towards augmenting the lexicon of EFL learners, mitigating obstacles to linguistic proficiency and fostering effective communication

Storytelling

According to Bishop and Glynn (cited in Alterio, 2003), storytelling emerges as an invaluable tool for teaching and learning, as it acknowledges students' imperative need to construct meaning from their experiences, drawing upon culturally derived frameworks. Moreover, storytelling fosters a conducive environment for students to collaboratively generate knowledge and glean insights from one another. By sharing and collectively reflecting on stories, students cultivate genuine connections with their peers, enriching their learning experiences.

Barzaq (as cited in Skhela, 2010) characterizes storytelling as a method of knowledge management, facilitating the dissemination of information tailored to specific audiences. She emphasizes the innate ability of stories to forge connections between disparate events and concepts. Furthermore, Barzaq highlights the efficacy of visual storytelling, which harnesses the power of imagery to convey narratives seamlessly. Taylor (2013) defines storytelling as the oral recounting of events, devoid of written text, aimed at engaging one or more listeners through a compelling narrative.

Effective storytelling necessitates adherence to five sequential components, as elucidated by Morgan and Dennehy (cited in Eck, 2006):

- a. The setting: Providing a vivid description of the time, place, characters, and context to immerse the audience in the narrative.
- b. Build-up: Sequentially unfolding events that foreshadow impending conflict, fostering suspense and captivating the audience's attention.
- c. Crisis: The climactic moment of the story, often marked by a pivotal event or revelation that propels the narrative forward.
- d. Learning: Highlighting the insights or lessons gleaned by the central characters, elucidating the moral or thematic underpinning of the narrative.
- e. Behavioral change: Illustrating how the characters' behaviors, awareness, or abilities evolve as a result of their experiences, emphasizing the transformative impact of the narrative on the listener's perspective.

Storytelling stands out as a dynamic technique employed in English language teaching, fostering an environment of excitement, activity, and interaction within the classroom. Early exposure to English equips children with a significant advantage in navigating the contemporary landscape of science and technology (Mufida & Abidin, 2021). Egan (1989) introduced storytelling as a compelling method for early childhood education, recognizing its capacity to enhance children's literacy comprehension and ignite their imaginations. By engaging in storytelling, children are prompted to develop analytical thinking skills, master story structure, and achieve academic milestones (Agosto, 2016). The interactive nature of storytelling cultivates a fruitful exchange between teachers and students, amplifying its effectiveness as a pedagogical tool (Khudhair & Alnoori, 2017).

Storytelling emerges as a potent means of nurturing children's foundational abilities, encouraging active participation and eliciting responses through verbal and physical engagement. Through storytelling, children are prompted to vocalize sounds, words, and

sentences, thereby reinforcing their grasp of vocabulary and language structure. Rahiem's (2021) study underscores the advantages of integrating digital technology into storytelling, enhancing engagement by rendering activities more dynamic, interactive, and entertaining. Consequently, teachers are encouraged to enhance their proficiency in leveraging technological resources, thereby enriching the learning experience.

Against this backdrop, storytelling emerges as a catalyst for language acquisition, facilitating word recognition, bolstering speaking proficiency, and honing oral and written communication skills. This study endeavors to explore the efficacy of storytelling in bolstering the vocabulary mastery of young learners. By harnessing the immersive power of narrative, educators aim to foster a conducive learning environment that nurtures linguistic proficiency and facilitates holistic language development.

The Advantages of Storytelling

Numerous benefits are associated with incorporating storytelling into educational practices, as synthesized by Eck (2006) from various scholarly perspectives:

1. **Enhancing Classroom Atmosphere:**

Storytelling contributes to a conducive learning environment by fostering relaxation and alleviating apprehensions among learners. Engaging narratives, often infused with humor, create a sense of community and belonging within learning communities, surpassing the efficacy of conventional teaching methods.

2. **Promoting Deeper Engagement:**

Storytelling captivates students on a profound level, transcending mere dissemination of information. Through emotional and personal connections as well as vivid visual imagery, learners are immersed in the content, enhancing comprehension and retention. Emotionally charged learning experiences facilitate easier storage and recall of information, augmenting the effectiveness of storytelling as an educational tool.

3. **Facilitating Active Learning:**

Storytelling mirrors the benefits of experiential learning by promoting active engagement. The evocative imagery and character identification stimulated by narratives encourage students to become active participants in the learning process. Research suggests that such engagement leads to enhanced understanding and application of acquired knowledge within real-world contexts, thereby enriching the learning experience.

Vocabulary Mastery

When it comes to enhancing vocabulary acquisition, particularly in early childhood education, a variety of methodologies prove instrumental in bolstering children's proficiency in foreign languages. Among these methodologies, storytelling stands out as a paramount and highly effective approach (Pertiwi et al., 2021). Through storytelling, children not only learn new vocabulary but also hone their language skills by observing and imitating the teacher's expressions and gestures, thereby grasping the contextual meaning of words (Ekawati, 2022). Similarly, game-based approaches empower children to actively engage in vocabulary acquisition, fostering confidence in communication and social interaction (Ling & Aziz, 2022). The utilization of storytelling in vocabulary instruction not only facilitates language mastery but also promotes psychological and physical well-being, enabling children to navigate social environments with ease (Isik, 2016).

Drawing from theoretical insights, each instructional method offers distinct advantages, with storytelling particularly renowned for its multifaceted benefits in nurturing children's linguistic, psychological, and physical development. Through storytelling, children not only expand their vocabulary but also cultivate essential language skills while concurrently bolstering their psychological resilience and physical well-being. This multifaceted approach underscores the efficacy of storytelling as a versatile tool for

fostering holistic growth and development in young learners.

According to Ur and Nugroho (2012), effective vocabulary acquisition involves attention to five key aspects:

- a. **Form:** This encompasses pronunciation and spelling. Learners need to understand both how a word is pronounced and how it is spelled. Teachers play a crucial role in ensuring accurate presentation and learning of these aspects.
- b. **Grammar:** Teaching the grammatical aspects of a new word is essential, especially if it deviates from general grammatical rules. Learners should be provided with information about any irregularities in the word's form as part of the teaching process.
- c. **Collocation:** Understanding the typical combinations of words in specific contexts is vital for language learners. Teachers may find it beneficial to teach collocations alongside vocabulary, as these combinations contribute to natural-sounding language usage.
- d. **Aspect of Meaning:** Vocabulary instruction should cover denotation (the word's literal meaning), connotation (the emotional or cultural associations it carries), and appropriateness for different contexts. Learners benefit from understanding not only what a word means but also how and when it is used appropriately.
- e. **Word Formation:** Breaking down vocabulary items into their component parts helps learners understand how words are constructed. Teachers may focus on common prefixes and suffixes but should also acknowledge that many words undergo changes in meaning or form through affixation.

In summary, mastering vocabulary involves more than memorizing words; it also enhances pronunciation, listening, and writing skills. The deeper the understanding and command of vocabulary, the more proficient learners become in both spoken and written English.

Teaching Vocabulary

In the pursuit of developing proficiency in all four language skills, vocabulary instruction stands out as a foundational component. Anggriani (2012) highlights the significance of teaching vocabulary in English education, emphasizing its integral role in language learning, as it correlates with proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Wallace, as cited in Nilawati (2009), outlines several key considerations for effective vocabulary instruction:

- a. **Aims:**

The primary objective of vocabulary instruction is to facilitate teachers in formulating instructional materials tailored to students' needs.

- b. **Quantity:**

Teachers must judiciously select the number of vocabulary items to introduce, avoiding overwhelming learners with an excessive amount of new words. Prioritizing clarity and comprehension ensures effective learning.

- c. **Need:**

Vocabulary selection should be based on students' practical communication needs, ensuring relevance and applicability in real-life contexts.

- d. **Frequent exposure and repetition:**

Repetitive practice is essential for mastery. Teachers should provide ample opportunities for students to encounter and use target words, both orally and in writing, fostering deeper understanding and retention.

e. Meaningful presentation:

Clarity in presenting target words is crucial. Teachers should employ methods that ensure the clear and unambiguous understanding of word meanings to facilitate effective learning.

f. Situation and presentation:

Students should understand the contextual appropriateness of word usage. Teachers play a vital role in guiding students to use vocabulary appropriately, considering situational factors and audience preferences in communication settings.

By adhering to these factors, educators can enhance vocabulary instruction, thus facilitating comprehensive language acquisition and proficiency across all language skills.

Challenges in Vocabulary Acquisition

Mastering vocabulary is integral to acquiring proficiency in a foreign language, enabling students to effectively engage in oral communication, comprehend written texts, and navigate various linguistic contexts. However, Indonesian students, particularly when learning English, encounter several hurdles in expanding their vocabulary, impeding their language acquisition journey.

One primary difficulty lies in the students' struggle to grasp the practical application of newly acquired vocabulary within communication contexts. Bridging this gap requires assistance in integrating new words into their linguistic repertoire effectively.

Thornburry (2002) identifies several factors contributing to these challenges:

- a. Pronunciation: Research indicates that words with intricate pronunciation patterns pose greater learning difficulties. Some students find it challenging to articulate words with unconventional sounds accurately.
- b. Spelling: Inconsistencies between sound and spelling often pose obstacles. Words with silent letters, such as "foreign" or "honest," can perplex learners.
- c. Length and Complexity: Longer words present greater cognitive load compared to shorter ones. English's reliance on high-frequency, simpler terms underscores their importance in facilitating learning progression.
- d. Grammar: Divergences in grammatical structures between the target language and the learner's native language can impede comprehension and usage.
- e. Meaning: Understanding words with nuanced meanings and multiple interpretations can prove challenging. Learners may struggle to grasp additional meanings after encountering the primary definition, while unfamiliar cultural contexts may further compound the learning process.

Addressing these challenges necessitates tailored instructional strategies that focus on pronunciation practice, spelling reinforcement, exposure to varied grammatical structures, and contextualized learning experiences to enhance meaning comprehension. Through targeted interventions, educators can support students in overcoming these obstacles and advancing their vocabulary acquisition skills effectively.

The Advantages of Utilizing Storytelling

Storytelling as an educational tool offers a plethora of benefits, as synthesized by Eck (2006) from the insights of numerous researchers dedicated to exploring its efficacy in teaching and learning contexts.

Fostering a Positive Learning Environment: Storytelling contributes to enhancing the ambiance within the classroom. Engaging narratives have the power to alleviate learners' anxieties and create a relaxed atmosphere, often punctuated with moments of amusement and levity. Moreover, well-crafted stories foster a sense of camaraderie and inclusivity within learning communities, surpassing the efficacy of conventional teaching methods in nurturing a shared sense of belonging.

Deepening Engagement: Unlike many conventional teaching approaches, storytelling captivates students on a profound level. By immersing learners in narratives replete with emotional resonance and vivid imagery, storytelling forges personal connections that resonate deeply with individuals. The emotive dimension of storytelling renders learning experiences more memorable and easily retrievable, given the propensity of emotionally charged experiences to leave a lasting imprint on learners' memories.

Facilitating Experiential Learning: Storytelling shares parallels with experiential learning methodologies due to its capacity to engender active engagement. The evocative imagery conjured by narratives facilitates character identification, compelling students to become active participants in the learning process. Research indicates that such immersive engagement correlates with heightened comprehension and enhanced practical application of acquired knowledge within real-world contexts.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts an experimental research approach utilizing quantitative descriptive methods, entailing sequential stages of data collection and interpretation culminating in the production of final data. Employing pre-tests, treatments, post-tests, questionnaire administration, and data evaluation.

The research population comprises 25 8th-grade students from a public junior high school in Sidoarjo, distributed across ten classes. The selection criteria focused on students familiar with technology and enrolled in a curriculum featuring basic competence in recount texts. Preliminary investigations revealed students' access to computer laboratories with internet connectivity and habitual use of smartphones in the classroom, facilitating the research implementation.

Collaboration between the researcher and teachers facilitated participant selection and material preparation. One classe, comprising 25 students, were chosen based on similar mean scores in English subjects and designated as the Pre-Test group and Post-Test Grop. The students in Pre-test group got treatment during research period and gave them a test so we could evaluate their achievement after learning by using storytelling method.

In tandem with the teacher, the researcher prepared assignments and materials, including three recount texts transformed into digital stories via the online platform Voicethread. Voicethread offers diverse features for creating digital narratives, including cloud-based story composition, multimedia integration, comment sharing, and public/private sharing options. EG students accessed these stories after downloading the platform and creating user accounts.

Prior to treatment implementation, both experimental and control groups undertook a pre-test to assess vocabulary mastery levels. The test, administered using Microsoft PowerPoints and displayed via LCD projectors, incorporated QR code links enabling smartphone access to Google Form-based assessments. Participants were prohibited from using dictionaries or notes during the test, which comprised 105 vocabulary items drawn from the prepared stories, encompassing nouns, adjectives, and verbs with four options per item.

Table 1
Vocabulary List

Noun	Verb	Adjective	Adverb	Preposition	Conjunction	Interjection
Dog	Run	Big	Quickly	In	And	Wow!
Cat	Eat	Small	Slowly	On	But	Oh!
House	Sleep	Tall	Carefully	Under	Or	Ouch!
Car	Jump	Short	Loudly	Over	Nor	Hey!

Noun	Verb	Adjective	Adverb	Preposition	Conjunction	Interjection
Tree	Talk	Fast	Quietly	Between	Yet	Alas!
Book	Walk	Slow	Happily	Among	So	Hurray!
Chair	Sing	Happy	Sadly	Behind	For	Oops!
Table	Dance	Sad	Well	Before	Because	Ah!
Friend	Read	Bright	Badly	After	Although	Ugh!
City	Write	Dark	Suddenly	Above	While	Bravo!
River	Think	Beautiful	Always	Below	Since	Yikes!
Idea	Drive	Ugly	Never	Inside	Therefore	Haha!
Happiness	Swim	Delicious	Frequently	Outside	However	Phew!
School	Play	Spicy	Rarely	With	Moreover	Eww!
Computer	Cook	Cold	Seldom	Without	Nevertheless	Ahoy!

Following the pre-test, The group undergo treatment in a classroom following the teacher's lesson plan for the English subject. Their task is to watch the stories and note down unfamiliar words before engaging with reading comprehension questions. The researcher anticipates that students will swiftly acquire new vocabulary due to the visual aids accompanying the storytelling. The treatment involves three sessions, each featuring a different story.

The students got lesson about storytelling before went to post-test. The lesson was about 3 month and there were a test to evaluate their achievement. The students must memorize 105 words by reading story or listening the story with projector support.

The subsequent stage involves the post-test, which mirrors the pre-test questions. Initially, a PowerPoint presentation displays a QR code linking to a Google Form test, which students are instructed to scan and complete within 45 minutes, comprising 105 questions. Students are prohibited from accessing dictionaries or notes during the test, which serves to evaluate their mastery of vocabulary.

FINDING

Based on the test, the following result can be drawn :

Table 2
Result of Test

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Result of Test		
Item	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Sum	25	25
N	1296	2084
Mean	51,84	83,36
Highest score	65	96
Lowest Score	32	62

The Post-Test score (2084) is higher than Pre-Test score (1296). The difference between the total scores of the pre-test and post-test is 788, which means that there is an increased score of the Post-Test about (60,8%). There was an increase in the average score of Pre-Test (83,36) and Post-Test (51,84). The difference between the pre-test and post-test of the average score is 31,52. The highest score of Post-Test is 96 and Pre-Test is 65. There is a huge difference. The lowest score is also different, the Pre-Test was 32 and Post-Test was 62.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this research underscore the significant impact of storytelling on children's vocabulary acquisition. Through storytelling, children not only improve their vocabulary but also gain confidence in articulating their thoughts, having grasped a substantial amount of English vocabulary. In light of the contemporary technological landscape, educators need to prioritize the integration of advanced learning tools into their teaching methodologies. Given that today's young learners belong to the Alpha generation, characterized by their innate familiarity with digital technologies, it becomes imperative to adapt teaching strategies to suit the digital age. Consequently, transforming traditional storytelling into digital formats can effectively enhance and expand children's vocabulary, aligning with their developmental needs in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

Research findings indicate that utilizing storytelling effectively enhances students' vocabulary proficiency at SMP Yabes School Medan, comprising 25 students during the 2022/2023 academic year. Through the implementation of storytelling methods, notable improvements in students' vocabulary mastery were observed. The incorporation of storytelling into English language learning elicited positive responses from students, fostering a sense of enjoyment and engagement in the learning process. Students expressed feelings of happiness and enjoyment as they embarked on their English language journey through storytelling sessions. This approach not only facilitated vocabulary acquisition but also contributed to a more vibrant and dynamic learning environment. The interactive and immersive nature of storytelling captivated students' interest, enabling them to learn and enhance their vocabulary skills in an enjoyable and meaningful manner. Consequently, storytelling emerged as a valuable pedagogical tool for promoting effective vocabulary development among students at SMP Yabes School Medan.

SUGGESTIONS

Upon completion of this study, several recommendations emerge for consideration:

1. English instructors are encouraged to integrate storytelling into their classroom practices to enhance students' vocabulary proficiency.
2. Both educators and learners should be prepared to embrace the storytelling method as a fundamental approach to teaching and learning.
3. For future researchers interested in extending this line of inquiry, it is advisable to broaden the scope beyond a single student cohort. Additionally, involving students from various academic semesters could enrich the research findings. Moreover, researchers can explore alternative teaching styles to further enhance students' vocabulary acquisition.

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