THE EFFECTS OF STORYTELLING TEACHING STYLE ON ELEMENTARY STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION

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Abstract: This study explores the impact of the storytelling teaching style on the reading comprehension of elementary school students at the School of Life, GSJA El-Roy, Semarang. It was discovered that reading comprehension in English for elementary students in 5th and 6th grades was still too low, and students' reading skills still needed to be improved. In addition to improving reading skills, storytelling fosters critical thinking and helps children understand the order and structure of stories. To assess the effectiveness of the storytelling method in enhancing students' reading skills, the writer used Classroom Action Research (CAR) and set a success scale above 8.5, measuring students' reading comprehension using various English vocabulary. A test was administered to 10 students, and the results revealed an average success scale of 9.3, indicating a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension skills. The writers suggest that future research need to conduct a follow-up assessment after an extended period would allow researchers to determine the long-term effects of the storytelling-based teaching strategy on students' reading comprehension skills.
Keywords: Storytelling teaching style, reading comprehension skills, classroom action research

INTRODUCTION

Storytelling has long been recognized as a powerful tool for engaging audiences and conveying important messages. In education, storytelling has also been linked to improvements in reading comprehension, particularly for struggling readers and English language learners. However, there is still much to learn about the specific features of storytelling that are most beneficial for improving reading comprehension outcomes and the contexts in which storytelling interventions are most effective.

Stories are valuable in organizing and remembering information, as they provide a structured narrative framework that aligns with our cognitive processes. Humans' minds employ schemas (cognitive frameworks) to arrange and understand information that aid in the organization, interpretation, and direction of our understanding of various ideas, events, or circumstances in light of our prior knowledge and experiences (Rumelhart, 1980). Stories offer a compelling framework that adheres to our pre-existing ideas. As such, the cognitive processes align with this structured narrative, making it simpler for our brains to process, comprehend, and recall the information being provided.

The improvement of students' attitudes toward storytelling is also significant, and it was found by Joffe et al. (1993), which focused on using oral storytelling interventions in classroom settings. The researchers found that a 10-week storytelling program significantly improved reading comprehension for first-grade students, particularly those with lower initial reading skills. Similarly, Hutton et al. (2017) found that 5-week storytelling program improved vocabulary skills for preschool children from low-income families. Moreover, Shudy et al. (1996) found that using novels to supplement traditional reading instruction led to significant improvements in reading comprehension outcomes for fifth-grade students. Similarly, Neuman and Celano (2001) found that High-quality storybooks in kindergarten classrooms lead to improved vocabulary mastering.

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More recent research has also explored digital storytelling interventions involving using technology (e.g., digital cameras, multimedia software) to create and share stories. Muhammad (2017) found that a digital storytelling intervention significantly improved reading comprehension for fifth-grade students in Pakistan. His findings align with Eka et al. (2021) who found that storytelling makes learning fun and effective and suggests steps teachers can take to create a conducive digital storytelling environment in the digital environment. Meanwhile, Nassim (2018), Joffe et al. (2019), and Petterson et al. (2020) have found that storytelling interventions lead to higher scores in reading comprehension and vocabulary tests. Successful storytelling interventions require using age-appropriate and culturally relevant stories and selecting stories based on the readers' level and interests (Cook et al., 2018; Hutton et al., 2017). A study by Li et (2017) found that the impact of storytelling on reading comprehension was influenced by cultural factors such as the role of storytelling in Chinese culture. Other factors that contribute to the success of storytelling in the classroom include students' positive perception of the activity, various activities, and teacher consistency (Inneke, 2018). Last, Ida et al. (2022) found that storytelling helps students improve reading skills and understanding of positive values but identified challenges such as limited time and self-confidence.

Research has shown that storytelling can be a powerful tool for improving reading comprehension outcomes, particularly for struggling readers and English language learners. However, there is still much to learn about the specific features of storytelling that are most beneficial for improving comprehension and the contexts in which storytelling interventions are most effective. Further research is needed to explore these questions and to identify the most effective ways to implement storytelling interventions in educational settings.

Storytelling

Storytelling refers to a method that conveys or shares a narrative or sequence of events through words, images, or other forms of communication. It is usually provided through the presentation of characters, settings, conflicts, and resolutions within a structured narrative framework while utilizing various elements such as plot, dialogue, description, and imagery to engage the audience and convey a message or meaning (Khamsuk & Whanchit, 2021). Storytelling is an effective teaching strategy for children to enhance their reading abilities and engagement with the material (Satrini, 2019; Fitri & Ginting, 2021). Additionally, listening to stories during learning promotes creativity, empathy, self-confidence, and overall cognitive and emotional growth (Hammond, 2015; Wajnryb, 2003; Sitaresmi & Ginting, 2022).

Previous studies on storytelling

In addition to improving reading skills, storytelling fosters critical thinking and helps children understand the order and structure of stories. For example, Renandya (2007) claims that storytelling can improve the comprehension of stories and assist students in transitioning from receptive reading while employing their reading and listening abilities to productive speaking and writing skills. Moreover, Cron (2012) argues that "we are wired to turn to story to teach us the way of the world." It means that, as humans, we are inclined to seek out stories to understand and learn about the world around us. Thus,

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storytelling is deeply ingrained in our nature and plays a significant role in making sense of our experiences, making connections, and gaining insights into life's complexities.

A narrative has been found to enhance reading comprehension among pupils, particularly when contextualized and tailored to their abilities and cultural backgrounds. According to Eng and Chandrasekaran (2014), narrative improves pupils' reading comprehension. Two entertaining short stories were used in this study, and they were chosen based on the participants' reading abilities and cultural backgrounds. The findings showed that using narrative to teach English to ESL students is successful; pupils are exposed to the language when the narrative is contextualized.

Moreover, a basic examination of the contextualized storytelling approach (CSA) with EFL learners was also carried out by Huang (2006). He used various extra linguistic resources in this research study to aid comprehension learning, including objects, body language, music, sound effects, and visual material (Huang, 2006). The narrative is crucial for fostering L2 learners' reading comprehension, according to Huang (2006). Similarly, Chang et al. (2010) investigated how well storytelling helped 52 native Taiwanese speakers in the fifth grade improve their reading abilities. The students were exposed to two distinct teaching strategies: project-based learning and project learning with digital storytelling tasks. The results showed that digital storytelling leads to better reading comprehension than the project-based approach.

METHOD

The current study was conducted at a school in Semarang, under the guidance of the school's head coordinator. Prior to the commencement of the research, informed consent was obtained from the school administration, parents or guardians of the participating students, and the students themselves (Ginting, 2022). Through a brief interview with the coordinator, it was revealed that the English language skills and reading comprehension of elementary students in the 5th and 6th grades were found to be lacking and required improvement. It was observed that English classes were only held once a week, with limited time allocated solely for assignments. In order to address these issues and enhance students' reading comprehension, the writer implemented a storytelling-based teaching strategy, which has a theoretical basis in making the teacher's pattern of instruction more understandable and memorable for the students.

The research employed a classroom action research (CAR) method, which involves a cyclical process of data analysis aimed at addressing and resolving the identified problems. The CAR method consists of four stages.

The first stage is planning. During this stage, the writer identified the specific area that required attention and observation and developed appropriate instruments to record relevant facts during the implementation. The planning stage also involved identifying authentic problems based on the teacher's experience in daily teaching activities, rather than relying solely on external observations. Additionally, lesson plans were prepared in accordance with the teaching schedules. The second stage is implementation. In this stage, the designed contents and strategies were put into action in the classroom, following the scenarios outlined in the planning stage. The writer created teaching materials such as narrative stories and interactive props based on biblical themes, as the research was conducted in a

Christian school. It was important to present diverse stories to prevent student boredom and engage them as the teacher narrated the stories. Interactions between the teacher and students were encouraged to establish a reciprocal learning environment. The third stage involved the application of observation techniques to the students. During this phase, the writer administered a test to assess the students' progress and gather data. The fourth and final stage is reflection. In this stage, the writer thoroughly reviewed the research results obtained from the implemented actions and evaluated them by analyzing the collected data, which was derived from the test administered earlier. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the data, encompassing the collection, organization, summarization, and presentation of the data. The findings were then presented in the form of diagrams and tables.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Statistical validation

Levene's test for equality of variances was conducted to assess whether the assumption of equal variances holds. The test resulted in an F-value of 0.558, with a corresponding p-value of 0.465. Since the p-value is smaller than 0.05, there is significant evidence to suggest equal variances between the groups. Based on this statistical findings, it can be inferred that there is a significant difference in the means between the two groups of scores being compared. The first group representing students' reading comprehension baseline has a significantly lower mean compared to the second group representing students' reading comprehension baseline after being taught with the storytelling method.

Table l. Mean differences

	VAR00002	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
VAR00001	1.00	10	7.3000	.94868	.30000
	2.00	10	9.3500	.74722	.23629

Table 1 shows that an average success scale of 9.3, indicating a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension skills. Meanwhile, the writers set a success scale above 8.5, measuring students' reading comprehension using various English vocabulary.
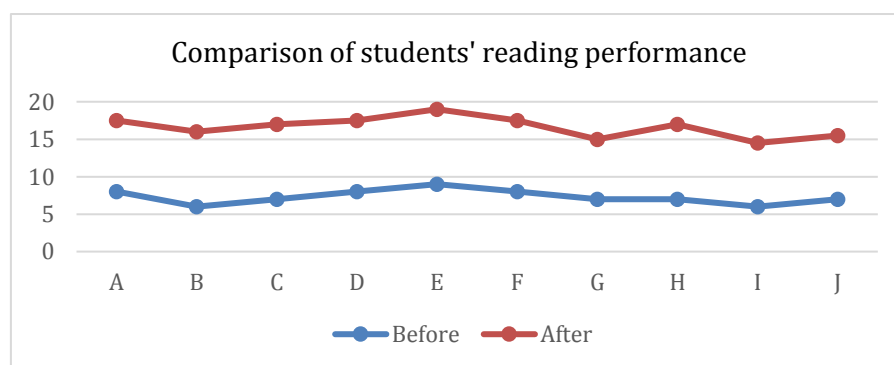

Figure 1. Comparison of students' reading performance before and after the implementation of the story telling method

This students' achievement is related to how the writers have designed their teaching activities using the storytelling method. They meticulously planned to teach the students the "Mary and Martha" Bible story with the explicit goal of enhancing their reading comprehension in English. To facilitate this process, the writers prepared teaching materials that included the story itself and complementary

flashcards, aiming to support ongoing learning and enable students to vividly imagine the storyline. Furthermore, they strategically designed warm-up questions related to the "Mary and Martha" story, such as inquiring about the students' personal experiences with household chores and their preferences. These thought-provoking questions were carefully crafted to pique students' interest and encourage active engagement with the text. Over a period of seven weeks, from March 28th to May 16th, 2023, the writers dedicated time to teach 5th and 6th grade elementary school students, employing a comprehensive approach. The instructional journey commenced by introducing the captivating story of "Mary and Martha" to the students, utilizing various teaching materials such as stories, flashcards, and comprehension questions.

In the fourth week of instruction, students were given the opportunity to memorize the stories and deliver oral readings in front of the class. While some students demonstrated commendable pronunciation skills and coherent memorization, others faced challenges in memorizing the material accurately. However, following the oral reading test, it became evident that the students' English proficiency, which had previously been below average, had significantly improved. This improvement was a direct result of the method employed, which emphasized repeated reading and effective memorization techniques. During the observation stage, the writer conducted an exam aimed at further improving students' reading comprehension in English. The remarkable results of this exam provided compelling evidence of the students' significant improvement in English reading comprehension. Their enhanced understanding of the vocabulary used and their ability to analyze the material demonstrated the success of the writer's teaching approach and testing methods.

Factors contributing the improvement of students' reading comprehension

The writers have observed four factors that contribute the students' reading skill improvement using the storytelling method: engagement, contextualization, visualization and practice.

Engagement

Engagement refers to the active involvement, enthusiasm, and emotional investment of individuals in a particular activity, task, or learning experience (Ginting, 2021). It is characterized by focused attention, genuine interest, and a sense of connection or relevance to the subject matter. Engaged individuals willingly participate, interact, and put forth effort, often displaying curiosity, motivation, and a desire to learn, achieve, or contribute. In educational contexts, student engagement is often associated with active learning, meaningful interactions, and a positive classroom environment that promotes curiosity, critical thinking, and deeper understanding.

This study has revealed that students' engagement is demonstrated through various interactions, such as actively asking questions about the material or vocabulary and engaging in discussions with their peers while learning from the material being taught. For instance, one student, referred to as A, encountered difficulty in pronouncing the word "herself" and sought the teacher's guidance. Despite initial unsuccessful attempts to train A, the student's friends eventually came to their aid, collaborating with the teacher to help A pronounce the word correctly. Remarkably, after one week and a subsequent test, A exhibited significant improvement and was able to pronounce the word "herself" proficiently.

A gave her testimony as follows:

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"My teacher and classmates teamed up and practiced with me to help me say the word "herself" better. The teacher taught about the "r" sound, and the classmates gave lots of help and advice. After practicing for a whole week, I got much better and could say "herself" perfectly!"

The students' interest in the storytelling method stems from the captivating nature of the stories themselves. From A's testimony, we conclude that the students feel encouraged to practice. Thus, they demonstrate a desire to read the stories in their entirety and employ the storytelling approach to enhance their memorization. In this context, the utilization of reading materials as structured learning resources plays a vital role. It enables them to concentrate on their studies, fostering a desire to revisit and repeat their learning efforts, ultimately leading to effective memorization of both vocabulary and storylines.

Contextualization

Contextualization refers to the process of connecting the narrative or story to the learners' prior knowledge, experiences, and the broader context in which they exist (Dewey, 1916; Wajnryb, 2003). It involves making the story relevant and meaningful by incorporating elements that resonate with the learners' existing understanding and cultural background. In the context of storytelling, contextualization helps to enhance comprehension and engagement by bridging the gap between the story and the learners' existing knowledge (Joffe et al. 2019). It allows learners to make connections, draw parallels, and relate the story to their own lives, experiences, and cultural references.

The utilization of storytelling as an instructional approach greatly facilitates students in contextualizing the reading text. This is evident through the students' responses, which demonstrate their comprehension of the story's context and their prior exposure to the "Mary and Martha" narrative in a church setting. As a result, when the writer begins teaching, the students already possess a solid understanding of the storyline. Moreover, when encountering unfamiliar English vocabulary, the writer provides direct instruction to assist students in pronouncing and interpreting the words accurately.

The students' ability to grasp the context of the story is consistently reflected in their high scores, ranging from 8 to 10, both during the learning process and in examinations. This achievement can be attributed to their comprehensive understanding of the story's context, which is reinforced through regular weekly lessons conducted in collaboration between the writer and the students. By continuously connecting the learning material to their prior knowledge, students develop contextual rules that facilitate a deeper comprehension of the text.

This study has found that the students gain a holistic understanding of the reading text by incorporating their prior experiences, knowledge, and cultural contexts through the storytelling approach. For example, the familiarity with the "Mary and Martha" story, acquired from their previous exposure in a church setting, serves as a foundation upon which the writer builds the teaching process. This contextualization not only aids in understanding the storyline but also allows students to make meaningful connections between the text and their own lives, experiences, and beliefs.

In this case, B expresses her experience.

"Oh, even though I don't understand all the words in the reading, I can try to understand the main idea of the text because I'm quite familiar with the story of Mary and Martha. I often hear that story from Sunday school".

By embedding the learning material within a familiar and relevant context, students like the one who said, *"Oh, even though I don't understand all the words in the reading, I can try to understand the main idea of the text because I'm quite familiar with the story of Mary and Martha. I often hear that story from Sunday school,"* develop a deeper

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appreciation for the story and are more motivated to engage with the text. This approach allows them to connect their prior knowledge and experiences with the content, enabling a better understanding of the events, characters, and themes within the broader social and cultural contexts. It also promotes the development of critical thinking skills as they analyze and interpret the story's elements (Dan & Kate, 2013).

In short, storytelling serves as a powerful tool for enabling students to contextualize the reading text. By leveraging their prior knowledge, understanding of the story's context, and direct instruction on vocabulary, students can connect their learning experiences to their existing knowledge and cultural backgrounds (Amy & Elleman, 2019). This approach fosters a deeper comprehension of the text, encourages critical thinking, and nurtures a sense of cultural relevance and personal connection to the material being studied.

Visualization

Visualization, in the context of storytelling, refers to the process of creating mental images or scenes in one's mind while engaging with a narrative or text. It involves using the power of imagination to vividly picture the events, characters, settings, and details described in the story. Visualization enables readers to go beyond the words on the page and immerse themselves in the story, bringing it to life in their minds.

Through storytelling, students are encouraged to engage in visualization as they read or listen to a story. They are prompted to imagine the scenes, characters, and events described in the narrative, allowing them to form a visual representation of the story within their minds. (Wilhelm, 2008). This active mental imagery enhances their comprehension and interpretation of the text by tapping into the brain's visual nature.

According to interviews with students, it was found that they were able to imagine the storyline while reading due to the use of flashcards as a learning method. They learned new vocabulary using flashcards. The existence of using flashcards as a visualization media can help students' long-term memory to facilitate comprehension of reading material and can imagine storylines easily. On the other words, the flashcards help the students create their mental scenes or images as they read. By transforming the text into a "movie version" in their minds, students find it easier to comprehend the story or text, improving their overall comprehension.

A, in this case, has shared her testimony:

"I really like using flashcards when I read! They help me imagine the story in my head. We learn new words with the flashcards, and it makes it easier to remember them. When I see the pictures on the flashcards, it's like watching a movie in my mind! It helps me understand the story better and makes reading more fun! "

By using flashcards, students like A are encouraged to engage in visualization while reading. The pictures on the flashcards prompt them to imagine the scenes, characters, and events described in the story. This active mental imagery taps into the brain's visual nature, enhancing their comprehension and interpretation of the text. The flashcards serve as a visual aid that helps students create their own mental scenes or "movie versions" of the story, making reading more enjoyable and improving their overall understanding. In conclusion, visualization plays a crucial role in improving reading comprehension. It

helps students make connections between the words on the page and their own imaginative interpretations, facilitating a more immersive and meaningful reading experience.

Practices

Reading practice is training designed to maximize one's reading potential in understanding a passage. Reading practice is carried out jointly by the brain and eyes. The brain is the main element of reading, while the eyes are a tool for delivering images to the brain, and then the brain interprets what the eyes are aiming at. (Dalman, 2014). Interpretation is obtained at the time, whether instantly, delayed, accurately, incorrectly, easily, or with difficulty. Interpretation also does not depend on visual acuity but on the clarity and richness of our understanding and perception of the reading.

From the results of the interviews, the students were very motivated to practice reading and wanted to learn using the storytelling method because previously the teacher had not taught it at school. The students are greatly helped by the reading practice every week because it helps them to memorize the contents of the story and ask questions to the writer if there are difficulties.

B has shared her testimony:

"I found out that my friends and I really like practicing reading, especially when we use storytelling. Our teacher didn't teach us this method before, but now we enjoy it a lot! Reading practice every week helps us remember the story better, and if we have any questions or difficulties, we can ask the writer. It's a big help for us to improve and understand the stories we read."

Engaging in reading practice through the incorporation of storytelling offers a potent means to optimize one's reading aptitude. This approach fosters the development of comprehensive understanding and perceptual acuity pertaining to narrative structures. The students express their contentment in discovering this method, which has augmented their reading experience. Enhanced recollection of stories and the availability of authorial guidance in response to queries or challenges significantly contribute to their progress in reading proficiency and comprehension.

Based on B's testimony, we learn that the student expressed a positive inclination towards engaging in reading practice, particularly when accompanied by storytelling. The introduction of this method by their teacher brought about newfound enjoyment and enthusiasm among the students. They found that regular reading practice aided their retention of story content and provided them with a means to seek clarification or assistance from the author when encountering difficulties.

In conclusion, the success in improving students' reading comprehension skills can be attributed to the effective utilization of the storytelling method. As such, the researchers meticulously planned their teaching activities, used comprehensive teaching materials, incorporated engaging warm-up questions, emphasized repeated reading and memorization techniques, and conducted assessments that required critical thinking. These factors contributed to enhanced engagement, contextualization, visualization, and practice, all of which played a significant role in improving students' reading comprehension abilities.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings and discussions revealed that the storytelling method effectively improved students' reading comprehension. A test was conducted, measuring students' reading comprehension using various English vocabulary, and the results indicated a significant improvement. Students achieved an average success scale of 9.3, demonstrating enhanced proficiency in English reading.

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The success of the students' reading improvement can be attributed to several factors. First, engagement played a vital role. Students actively participated in discussions, asked questions, and collaborated with their peers. Their interest in the captivating stories and the utilization of structured learning resources helped foster engagement. Contextualization also played a crucial role in enhancing comprehension. The students' prior exposure to the "Mary and Martha" narrative in a church setting allowed them to grasp the context of the story. The teacher leveraged this prior knowledge, connecting the learning material to their existing knowledge and cultural backgrounds, which facilitated a deeper comprehension of the text. Visualization further enhanced students' reading comprehension. The use of flashcards as visualization tools allowed students to create mental images while reading, making it easier for them to comprehend and imagine the storylines. Additionally, regular reading practice contributed to students' improvement. By practicing reading the stories and seeking clarification from the teacher, students were able to memorize the contents and enhance their understanding. Additionally, regular reading practice contributed to students' improvement. By practicing reading the stories and seeking clarification from the teacher, students were able to memorize the contents and enhance their understanding.

The study's limitations include its single-school and limited participant scope, which may limit generalizability. Future research could involve multiple schools or a more diverse sample for greater validity. Additionally, they should include follow-up assessments after an extended period to determine long-term effects to provide valuable insights. Exploring variations in the implementation of the storytelling-based teaching strategy would also be beneficial.

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