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## Enhancing Children's Vocabulary Mastery Through Storytelling

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**ABSTRACT:** Significant language development differences occur in preschoolers, resolving these differences is a key objective of preschool education because young children's language abilities at the start of school, particularly their vocabulary abilities, are a strong predictor of later academic ability. Storytelling is one of the methods used to teach English, it makes the learning environment more interesting, energetic, and conversational. This study aims to examine storytelling in increasing children's vocabulary. The research method is a case study that uses observation, interviews, and documentation as data collection tools. The participants are an English teacher and seven children aged 4-5 years. Although, many early childhoods English teachers state that one of the weaknesses of children in learning English is a lack of vocabulary mastery because it can hamper the learning process. The findings show that storytelling is effective in increasing children's vocabulary. Vocabulary is the foundation for improving children's ability to speak English, both orally and in writing. Second language vocabulary is important to learn and develop for the quality of early childhood learners in language education.

**Keywords:** early childhood, vocabulary, storytelling

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The study of vocabulary topics is no longer a new thing in research because the most basic problem in the English learning process is the lack of vocabulary mastery. The most fundamental component of language is vocabulary and increasing children's vocabulary is the key to raising their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills (Zu et al., 2021). From early childhood to adults have problems expanding their understanding and mastery of vocabulary. Teachers usually apply the memorizing technique in schools, as it is known that not all children have the skill of fast memorizing. This occurrence is not only happening in certain areas like Gorontalo, but also it even occurs in Indonesia. That is a reason why this case become a national issue. Its evidence is proved by the number of journals and research that identify a similar problem. Therefore, the stakeholders and researchers in the education field must find out a solution for overcoming this national issue.

The governments have started implementing policies and measures to encourage the use of English because English education has been prioritized as a national priority and is crucial to the nation's economic development. For instance, more schools now offer English or bilingual programs, higher education now offers international study options, and the Roadmap for Education Reforms is being enforced across the board in schools (Kaur et al., 2016). Although the country offers training programs for regional teachers, it has been discovered that the knowledge learned may not be entirely applicable to classroom practice in neighborhood primary schools (Sunyakul & Teo, 2020). Some rural schools in distant areas may struggle to find instructors with strong academic backgrounds in teaching English as a foreign language, which may in some way influence students' ability to use English. While high-quality schoolteachers tend to cluster in urban schools (Noom-ura, 2013).

Storytelling is one of the techniques applied in teaching and learning the English process, and it is believed can increase the classroom atmosphere to be more exciting, active, and interactive. Learning English from an early age gives a huge advantage to build children's confidence to compete nowadays with the development of science and technological advances (Mufida & Abidin, 2021). Egan (1989) developed an interesting and relevant method in teaching early childhood, which is storytelling. It is because storytelling can establish children's comprehension of literacy and teaching in the form of telling stories can increase their imagination. Storytelling can stimulate analytical thinking, story structuring, and academic achievement (Agosto, 2016). Storytelling is an effective teaching and learning method because of the stimulation between teachers and students (Khudhair & Alnoori, 2017).

Thus, storytelling is one of the best techniques for stimulating children to encourage their fundamental abilities to be optimal. It also enables children to respond by using their bodies or senses. One of the responses given is to produce sounds, words, and even sentences. Children must first know several of the vocabularies taught to them in building words and sentences. The study conducted by Rahiem (2021) indicates that the use of

digital technology in storytelling provides enormous benefits such as making activities more interesting, interactive, entertaining, and theatrical. Hence, the researcher suggests to teachers improve their ability to operate technological media so that the learning process will be more qualified. Regarding the background of the research, it can be assumed that storytelling helps children learn by hearing and remembering words, accelerates children's speaking skills, and develops their ability to communicate orally and in writing. This study aims to investigate the vocabulary mastery of young learners through storytelling activities.

## 2 THEORETICAL STUDY

### 2.1 *Methods in Enhancing Children's Vocabulary*

In learning vocabulary, especially in early childhood, there are several methods to increase children's vocabulary mastery of foreign languages. Storytelling methods are some of the best and most effective ways to teach and increase early childhood vocabulary (Pertiwi et al., 2021). Children can learn new vocabulary by paying attention to the teacher's expressions and body movements/gestures in uttering words, then imitating them and interpreting the meaning of those words through the body movements they see (Ekawati, 2022). Likewise, in the game-based method, children can play an active role in vocabulary learning and have more confidence in communicating and interacting with other friends (Ling & Aziz, 2022). Using the storytelling method in teaching vocabulary not only helps them master the language but also can develop their psychological and physical prosperity so that they can socialize well in social environments (Isik, 2016). Based on the explanation of the theory above, each idea has its advantages, especially the storytelling method, which has two benefits for the growth and development of children linguistically, psychologically, and physically.

### 2.2 *Storytelling Significance in Enhancing Children's Vocabulary*

The storytelling method has many benefits in stimulating early childhood. Teaching young children through storytelling is believed to direct students to be involved and active during learning (Dewi et al., 2022). The statistical results of her research that storytelling could improve children's achievement in vocabulary. Storytelling also plays a crucial role in improving English language skills such as listening, speaking, writing, and reading (Kristiawan et al., 2022). Due to learning English at an early age, means that children are given an opportunity starting to recognize different languages from the national to the world language (Malik et al., 2021). Therefore, choosing the storytelling method for the teaching and learning process is beneficial not only for early childhood but also for school-age children and adolescents.

### 2.3 *The Importance of Vocabulary*

The foundation of four English skills are phonetics, grammar, translation, and vocabulary, and they are referred to as the elements of the language (Zu et al., 2021).

However, if someone takes more time to learn grammar, then he will only make a small change. Communication will be built well if we know and produce a lot of vocabulary because we can say everything we want. To succeed in teaching vocabulary, several stages need to be applied by parents and teachers at school. Several stages are elaborated by Thornbury (2002) the first is labeling, labelling is like creating a concept of mapping in each word. Every object, good, person, fruit, and animal have a different name. When parents teach children word recognition, it must be accompanied by the entity and pictures of the object itself. For example, a cat has the name “cat”, when introducing the word “cat”, it should be shown a picture of a cat because not all animals are named “cat”. The second is categorizing. After recognizing the names and forms of objects, categorization is also essential. For example, the word “cat” belongs to the category of animal and the word “orange” belongs to the category of the name of the fruit. The last stage is network building. At this stage, children begin to be taught complex vocabulary such as teaching various colors, family members, and the part of the body.

Moreover, there is an easy way in teaching vocabulary to children, that can be stored in their deep memory so they will remember it for a long time. Unfortunately, memorization is not the best model to apply in teaching vocabulary (Udaya, 2022). One of the learning activities for children designed by McKay and Guse (2007) is the activity of teaching animals' names in the form of singing a song. The name of the activity is “Singing About Animal” which focuses on the song, vocabulary; the name of an animal, the skill building in speaking; pronunciation, teaching approach is “promote accuracy-correct error”, and it can be applied in a large class. There are five steps in the learning process. First, introduce them to the song “Old Macdonald had a farm”. Then ask them to mention the animals from the smallest to the largest size. After that, write the names of the animals that have been mentioned on the whiteboard and sort them according to their size. Afterward, ask the children to identify the sounds of each animal that have been written on the whiteboard. Finally, sing the song “Old Macdonald Had a Farm” by changing the animals' names and sounds that are written on the whiteboard. This method has been applied and proven to be able to improve children speaking skills by producing good and correct pronunciation and to increase their understanding and mastery of what they have learned together because they learn through songs.

### 3 METHOD

The method of this research was a qualitative approach by utilizing three kinds of data collection, such as observation, interview, and documentation (Fadli, 2021). This study involved an English teacher and seven students of Kindergarten A class aged around 4-5 years old at My Liberty kindergarten as the participants of this research. First, to conduct an observation, researchers selected a non-participant observation because the researchers did not directly involved in the classroom activity. Researchers only observed the teaching and learning process in the classroom by filling out the observation sheets. There are six indicators in the observation sheet: greeting, stimulation, apperception, telling a

story, evaluation, and reinforcement. Researchers identified the classroom activities to correlate with those indicators, then gave a score for each indicator.

The observation data were analyzed using percentages on the observation sheet instrument, indicated as the frequency of each student accumulation score divided by the maximum score multiplied by 100%. Second, in the interview instrument, researchers provided four main points as the categories or indicators of the questions asked to the interviewee: teaching and learning four skills, learning media in teaching four skills, students' vocabulary lack, and challenges in teaching vocabulary. Each code developed into a question for the English teacher as the interviewee of this study. In addition, the results of the interview data were analyzed using the coding method. Each answer consistent with the purpose of the question would be given a code, described, and evidenced by the participants' statements. The last instrument is documentation, and the classroom activity would be documented through the evaluation process. The evaluation was formed through the oral test between the teacher and students one by one. The result of the student's evaluation would be the documentation data of this study.

## 4 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 *Result*

#### 4.1.1 *Observation Result*

The observation sheet provides six aspects that are needed in research data. These all aspects are implemented in the teaching and learning process held on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2022, when the theme of learning is "Homeland". That is the reason why the teacher gives children story about "The Picnic" because they share about some places that children ever visit after listening to the teacher says that story. Telling a story becomes a habitual action that should be implemented in English subjects, and it has been settled on the RPP (teacher's lesson plan). The percentage of these six aspects that are applied in the learning process is 96 %, which means that almost all aspects achieve the target of this research. For example, in aspect number 4 "children gain a lot of new vocabularies from the story told by the teacher", in one meeting children learn five new vocabularies from adjectives such as "grassy, noisy, muddy, busy, and messy". The way of teacher tells the meaning of each word by explaining them through action, and style, then showing the pictures. On the other hand, the weakness appears in aspect number 5 where this aspect gets a score of 3. In number 5 "teacher gives children the assignment about the content of story", the model of assignments given to children is oral. The teacher tests their vocabulary mastery by asking them to choose the right picture or the right action of the word. For instance, the teacher shows the pictures or actions of noise and mess, then the teacher asks, "which one is noisy?" and a child will point to the right picture. They are not given an assignment in writing because there are still in the phase of learning how to write every letter through tracing activity. Children will get a star as a reward when they can state a correct answer to each question, and every child is given a different oral question from their teacher.

The result of observation; (1) The teacher greets the children, leads them to pray, and sings a song together before starting the learning process. (2) The teacher stimulates children with the related theme of learning. (3) The teacher starts the topic of material which relate to the learning theme by applying the storytelling method. (4) Children gain a lot of new vocabulary from the story told by the teacher. (5) The teacher gives the children the assignment about the content of the story. (6) And the teacher assists the children's answers by giving them rewards.

#### 4.1.2 Interview Result

The results of the interview are displayed in table 2. The main point that related to all information of storytelling's importance in enhancing vocabulary are described clearly in the column of description, and those are proved by the teacher or interviewee's statements. Vocabulary is crucial because it is the basic knowledge for students, but it also becomes a big problem for many English teachers who teaches early childhood, elementary, junior even senior high school students (Row 3 in table 2). To anticipate this problem, the teacher can select and utilize one of the lots of strategies, techniques, and methods in overcoming the problem (Row 4 in table 2). One of several strategies or techniques is storytelling. Storytelling is not only can stimulate children's cognitive abilities such as sight, speech, hearing, and touch; but also, it can help them to remember longer what they have learned through observing, watching, and listening.

Table 2. Summary of Data Analysis

Aspect	Data Description
Teaching and Learning 4 skills of English	The teacher teaches four skills of English by integrating them into every topic of material. For example, the topic of "Homeland" will be taught through listening to songs, reading, writing, and speaking a simple word and phrase which related to the topic.
Learning media in teaching 4 skill	There are several interactive media utilized in teaching 4 English skills.
Students' lack of vocabulary	Many teachers of English stated that one of the weaknesses of students in learning English is the lack of vocabulary mastery, which can obstruct the learning process.
Vocabulary is one of the challenges that should be overcome	Vocabulary becomes the foundation to bolster students' performance in English, whether it was orally or written. Additionally, it is crucial to be learned and developed for the sake of young learners' quality in language education.

##### 4.1.2.1 The learning model of 4 English skills in kindergarten class A

*“Reading model: because they are 4-5 years old, they learn to read starting from the introduction of the first letter sounds of each word.*

*Listening model: listen to them English children's songs on YouTube and the audio from textbooks. After that show them flashcards that contain related words to the audio played.*

*The speaking model: speaking is already one way with listening because at that time students are asked to repeat or say the words or phrases that are appropriate with the pictures on the flashcard. In this activity, they also get new vocabulary.*

*Writing model: they will do the trace activity in, after that, I invite them to play a game by rearranging the scrambled words and phrases”*

#### 4.1.2.2 The media are used to teach these 4 skills

*“Listening: speakers, audio from the textbook, and songs from YouTube. Reading: textbooks and flashcards. Writing: textbooks and additional worksheets made by me. Speaking: flashcards”*

#### 4.1.2.3 The obstacles did you find during the process of teaching English

*“The lack of vocabulary mastery in children because the ability of each child is different, there are children who can learn fast and there are also children who need special treatment. They should be separated into two classes so that the learning process runs smoothly”*

#### 4.1.2.4 The solution do they take to overcome the lack of vocabulary mastery in children

*“Applying various ways, methods, or strategies to improve children's vocabulary mastery, for example giving them games using flashcards by sticking them on the classroom's wall, hiding them and asking children to look for them, and usually they like guessing picture games. In addition, the children liked the storytelling activities that I did. Because storytelling has become a habit before we start the lesson. What's interesting about storytelling is that I usually ask children to express new vocabulary and phrases, for example, there is the word "cry" I ask them to act like someone crying while saying the word "cry". So, the word will be remembered for a long time.*

*And vocab is essential to be learned. By mastering a lot of vocabulary, children will be easier to build up communication with others by using English. Also, teachers and students are required to communicate in English in the classroom while in the learning process. Moreover, they can easily understand the words or sentences in the reading text, as well as the sentences they hear”*

Four categories are discussed in the interview data analysis: teaching and learning English skills, learning media in teaching four skills, students' lack of vocabulary, and challenges to overcome students' lack of vocabulary. The first code is the teacher combining four English skills on each learning theme. For example, the theme "Homeland" begins with speaking and listening skills through the storytelling method with the interaction between teacher and children. Then the children are asked to write down each word from the new vocabulary in the story using the dotted line writing technique. After that, they are invited to read the first letter of each word that has been written before. In the second code, the teacher provides various media to help children hone their English skills, such as audio, video, flashcards, colored textbooks, worksheets, etc. The third code discusses the teacher's challenges in teaching English. The lack of children's mastery of vocabulary influences the teachers' challenges because each child's memory power is different. Some children can remember new vocabulary faster, and some are slow. To overcome this issue, the teacher provides a "make-up class" for children who need special treatment in vocabulary mastery. The last code discusses the

teacher's solution to overcome the problem in the third code. Storytelling activity becomes a teacher's habit before starting learning because it is one of the best methods, he has ever applied to arouse children's enthusiasm and overcome problems in acquiring new English vocabulary.

#### 4.1.3 Documentation Result

There are seven children consisting of two boys and five girls in kindergarten A class, and their ages are about 4-5 years old. They learn English subject once a week for 60 minutes. Table 3 shows the young learners' achievement in answering orally several questions which relate to the storytelling about "The Picnic" from their English teacher. The teacher asks about the meaning of all new vocabulary in "The Picnic" story after telling that story to the children. One of seven children (P6) gets 100% score because there are five questions given to each child, and this child can answer all questions. The average score that achieved by children of kindergarten A class in storytelling topics is 82.8. It means that they can get and master new vocabularies that contain in the story of "The Picnic". The results of table 3 show that storytelling can help children to enhance their vocabulary mastery.

Table 3. Students' Achievements

No	Participant	Achievement
1	P1	★★★
2	P2	★★
3	P3	★★★
4	P4	★★★★
5	P5	★★★★
6	P6	★★★★★
7	P7	★★

P1 obtained three stars or 60% master new English vocabulary. P2 and P7 obtained two stars or 40% of vocabulary mastery, they got special treatment in "make-up class" to pursue the learning target. P3 got three stars means that 60% of his achievement is in mastering vocabulary. P4 and P5 got four stars or 80% that they could attain many vocabularies. P6 got the perfect stars or 100% means that she was skillful in gaining lots of vocabulary.

#### 4.2 Discussion

The analysis of the observational data shows that the storytelling method has become a patented method as an opening for teaching and learning activities at My Liberty Kindergarten. The storytelling method has been agreed upon in the curriculum system at the kindergarten because it is believed to motivate children to learn and push them to communicate a lot. As explained in Agosto (2016) learning through the storytelling method helps sharpen children's critical thinking, increases children's understanding of storylines, and can improve children's learning achievements. The study's results from Stargatt et al., (2022) proved that learning through the storytelling method can recall the

information stored in long-term memory. Therefore, storytelling can stimulate previously forgotten memories.

Aspects of language skill development include the development of vocabulary. When a child has a strong command of their language, speaking clearly and fluently comes naturally to them. Children's capacity to communicate both verbally and in writing is significantly impacted by their language proficiency. The child is more likely to communicate his thoughts, ideas, and feelings to others if he has a sufficient vocabulary. Early vocabulary instruction will prepare children for related language because the child's brain has already been wired with a variety of words. The number of vocabulary they have mastered and the language they speak is inextricably linked.

Children who have a large vocabulary will typically have no problems forming their words or speaking and delivering sentences. Furthering this idea, vocabulary mastery is one of the key factors affecting an individual's success in their language abilities. According to Tarigan (1986), a person's linguistic abilities are based on the breadth and depth of his vocabulary. The likelihood that a man will be an effective speaker increases with his vocabulary. A language's vocabulary must be learned. It implies that a language's vocabulary is its most crucial component. The vocabulary of a language contributes to its meaning. The capacity of one's language is crucial for this reason. It may have an impact on a child's capacity for thought and learning.

In the code interview results, it was detected that the teacher had used several methods to increase children's vocabulary, including using flashcards, guessing picture games, and storytelling. Those methods are appropriate to the statement of (Pertiwi et al., 2022) about various methods in escalating children's vocabulary by applying games and storytelling. From the several methods above, children in TK A class at My Liberty Kindergarten are ecstatic with the application of the storytelling method because after telling a story, the teacher asks per child to express each new vocabulary. Storytelling is a way to build relationships with other people, and the existence of these relationships is crucial for mental peace, education, and enjoyment (Chubb et al., 2022). These aspects are a positive impact on the storytelling method because it does not only have an impact on children's intellectual qualities but also their emotional qualities.

Several theories above have tested and claimed that storytelling is a highly effective learning technique for increasing vocabulary mastery, particularly in early childhood. The statement is proven and reliable because it can be evidenced through this study. All the data collected through three instruments strongly pointed to the statements of the theory. The observation data provides a positive percentage, and interview data explain and prove that the lack of vocabulary for children can be overcome by the technique or method of storytelling. Moreover, the results of both instruments were supported by the children's achievements when they are tested orally about their mastery of new vocabulary contained in the stories given by their teachers. Personally, the fundamental reason why storytelling has a big role in helping children improve vocabulary mastery is that the way the teacher tells a story is different from the storytelling performances we have

encountered so far. When teachers tell a story, sometimes in the middle of the story they interact with children and even invite them to guess what will happen next. In addition, teachers' expressions and actions when telling stories can make children feel what is happening in the story.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Based on the result of this study, proves that storytelling can enhance children's vocabulary mastery. The implication of the storytelling method is shown when children have more confidence in expressing their idea because they have achieved and comprehended a lot of English vocabulary. To face the development era nowadays which has been based on technology, teachers should be concerned about sophisticated learning media in the teaching and learning process. Considering early childhood now are recognized as the Alpha generation who were born and familiar with digital technology. Hence, to adjust early childhood growth and development to the digital era, the storytelling method can be formulated into digital storytelling media in escalating and enriching children's vocabulary.

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