



EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PICTURE BOOKS IN INTRODUCING ENGLISH TO EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNERS: A CASE STUDY IN SOUTH GARUT

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Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of using picture books as a medium to introduce English to early childhood learners at an Early Childhood Education School in South Garut, West Java, Indonesia. This qualitative research employed a case study approach, involving four sessions conducted over two weeks, with a focus on assessing the impact of picture books on English language acquisition among 20 students aged 5-6 years. The research involved a systematic introduction of English through picture books depicting various fruits. Initial observations indicated limited student engagement, but participation increased significantly in subsequent sessions, with nearly 90% of the children actively involved by the third and fourth meetings. The study highlights that picture books, as a novel and age-appropriate tool, can effectively enhance early language learning by capturing children's interest and facilitating their understanding of new vocabulary. Findings suggest that picture books not only improve language skills but also foster a positive learning environment by aligning with children's preferences for visual stimuli. The successful implementation of this method underscores the potential of picture books in early childhood education, advocating for their use in introducing English and possibly other subjects.

Keywords: *early childhood education, English language learning, picture books, student engagement*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English to young learners can be very challenging, especially for young children, as they are in a rapid brain development phase known as the "Golden Age". What is taught during this phase can impact their lives long-term. Children of this age usually prefer playing over focusing on learning. Therefore, one solution to this challenge is using picture books as teaching media for early childhood. Rothlein and Meinbach (1991) define Picture books as the first books children use to explore and understand the world around them. They consist

of text and images that complement each other, making it easier for children to describe and understand the content. Several studies have been conducted regarding using picture books as learning media and their impact on various aspects of early childhood education, such as increasing students' interest in reading, stimulating language development, introducing cultural concepts, and improving overall learning outcomes.

Various studies have been conducted. Ramadhani (2021), Latifa (2022), and Rohmah (2018) discuss the use of picture books as learning media. Apriliani (2020), Apriliani & Radia (2020) stated that picture books can increase students' interest in reading. Kholisabela (2021) noted that picture books stimulate aspects of early childhood language. Sartika, Amiroh, and Nisrokha (2021) regarding using picture books to introduce Hijaiyah letters to early childhood. Asyikin (2021) stated that picture books are a learning resource in thematic learning. Saraswati (2017) and Mufida (2021) on using picture books to improve learning outcomes. Wahyuni & Bando about using picture books to enhance students' reading skills. Mutmainnah (2019) discusses using picture books to stimulate children to learn about the local culture. Nurkhula & Dewi about using picture books to improve language skills in children.

The majority of these studies, however, have been conducted in urban schools, making it essential to examine the use of picture books in under-resourced schools. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the use of picture books for young learners in under-resourced school contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early Childhood Language Development

Dhieni highlights that language development in early childhood involves using symbols to communicate thoughts and feelings. According to the 2014 Indonesian PAUD National Standards, children's growth includes religious and moral values, physical motor skills, cognitive abilities, art, social-emotional development, and language skills, which develop gradually with age.

Stages of Language Development for Children Aged 5-6 Years:

1. Understanding Language: At this stage, children can follow multiple commands, repeat complex sentences, understand game rules, and enjoy reading through literacy and storytelling activities.
2. Expressing Language: Children can answer complex questions, name objects with similar sounds, communicate verbally, form simple sentences, and continue stories they've heard.
3. Literacy Skills: They learn to recognize letter symbols, initial sounds of objects, and relationships between sounds and letters, eventually reading and writing their names.

Language Characteristics:

- Children aged 5-6 typically have a vocabulary of over 2,500 words.
- They understand concepts like color, size, shape, and more.
- They can listen well, participate in conversations, and respond appropriately.
- Their conversations often include observations and comments on their actions and surroundings.

Picture Book

According to Mitchell (2003), picture books combine interrelated images and text, with both elements necessary to fully convey the story. Rothlein and Meinbach (1991) state that picture

books, usually intended for children, use text and illustrations to aid understanding. Hafid (2002) cites Stewing, who explains that a picture book aligns stories with images, with both elements complementing each other. Stewing further notes that quality picture books with engaging illustrations and simple yet understandable text foster children's love for reading.

Rothlein and Meinbach (1991) classify picture books into five types:

1. **Alphabet Books:** Each letter is paired with an illustration of an object starting with that letter, often following specific themes like animals or transportation. They help children develop vocabulary.
2. **Toy Books:** These use interactive formats such as board cards, dress-ups, and hand droppers to engage children. They promote cognitive development, language skills, and social interaction.
3. **Concept Books:** Focus on teaching concepts through examples, using storylines, repetition, or comparison to enhance understanding.
4. **Wordless Picture Books:** Tell stories through illustrations alone, enhancing comprehension and encouraging written and spoken language skills. They come in various forms, including humorous, serious, informational, or fictional.
5. **Picture Story Books:** Combine text and illustrations to convey messages. These books feature literary elements like plot, character development, and thematic depth, fostering imagination, creativity, language appreciation, and cognitive skills.

Benefits and Functions of Picture Books

According to Mitchell, the benefits and functions of picture books as learning tools are:

1. **Emotional Development:** Picture books with engaging images can evoke various emotions in children, such as joy, sadness, fear, or anger.
2. **Learning About the World:** Picture books teach children about the world, including Earth and its features like oceans, mountains, and islands.
3. **Understanding People and Relationships:** Picture books help children learn about other people, relationships, and family dynamics, fostering emotional connections.
4. **Enjoyment:** The attractive images and colors in picture books make them enjoyable, sparking children's interest in reading and serving as a fun activity.

METHODOLOGY

This research evaluates the effectiveness of picture books in introducing English to early childhood learners. A qualitative research approach focuses on in-depth observation to gather descriptive data and emphasize analysis and meaning. According to Sugiyono (2018), qualitative research is based on philosophical foundations and is utilized to investigate natural settings, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument. Creswell (2016) describes qualitative research as a method for exploring and understanding the meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to social or humanistic issues, using narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study approaches. This study adopts a case study approach, a qualitative method aimed at developing a comprehensive understanding of a specific process, program, event, or activity (Wholey et al., 1994). This approach aligns with the study's objective of identifying effective methods for introducing English to early childhood learners.

The research was conducted at an early childhood education school in the South Garut region, and it was selected due to the students' lack of prior exposure to English. The study

involved 20 students aged 5-6 years. The research was carried out over four sessions, spanning two weeks, with two meetings per week. The primary research instrument was an observation sheet designed to measure improvements in English vocabulary acquisition. Indicators were established to track advancements in language development, mainly focusing on acquiring English vocabulary.

FINDINGS

The research, conducted in June 2023, employed a case study approach to evaluate the effectiveness of picture books in introducing English to early childhood learners. The study involved four sessions over two weeks, with English instruction occurring twice weekly.

Planning Stage: The researcher prepared observation sheets and selected picture books to facilitate English language activities.

Execution Stage: Each session followed a structured format:

- Meeting 1: The teacher introduced fruit names in English using pictures of apples, grapes, bananas, oranges, and mangoes. Students practiced naming and writing these fruits in English and Indonesian. The session concluded with a review to assess retention, revealing that only a few children were fully engaged while others were distracted.



Picture 1. Day-one activity

- Meeting 2: Similar to the first meeting, the teacher used pictures of avocado, coconut, strawberry, pineapple, and watermelon. Students were engaged, though some relied on peers for correct pronunciation.



Picture 2. Day-two Activity

- Meeting 3: The focus was melons, starfruit, lemons, cherries, and papayas. By this session, students showed increased focus and participation, with some children able to recall fruit names independently.



Picture 3. Day-three activity

- Meeting 4: The final session introduced rambutan, mangosteen, guava, dragon fruit, and tomatoes. Most students could name the fruits in English by the end of the session, although a few still required assistance.



Picture 4. Day-four activity

Overall, the findings indicate that while picture books attract children's attention and facilitate learning, consistent and repetitive exposure is crucial due to student engagement and focus variations.

DISCUSSION

Early Childhood Education aims to prepare children for subsequent levels of schooling by developing foundational skills. Bromely's theory emphasizes the role of both visual and verbal symbols in language learning, suggesting that visual aids like picture books can enhance memory and understanding. Susanto supports this view, noting that language acquisition begins with listening and comprehension, progressing to verbal responses.

Introducing a second language, such as English, during early childhood aligns with Hurlock's assertion that this developmental stage is optimal for language acquisition. Picture books are an effective medium for this purpose by engaging children visually and cognitively, facilitating vocabulary acquisition and conceptual understanding.

The study highlights that while picture books are a valuable tool for introducing English, their effectiveness is maximized when used in a structured, repetitive manner. This approach helps maintain student focus and reinforces learning, addressing the observed

variability in engagement levels among the children. The results underscore the importance of consistent and interactive methods in early language education.

Hurlock's assertion that early childhood is an optimal period for learning new languages is validated by this study, demonstrating that picture books can significantly aid in introducing English. The study concludes that while picture books are a valuable tool for early language education, their impact is enhanced by a structured and repetitive approach. This method helps maintain student engagement and reinforce learning, addressing variations in focus and participation among young learners

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, picture book media is a good tool for introducing English to early childhood learners. The study observed a significant improvement in the children's English language abilities throughout four sessions. Initially, student participation was limited, but by the second meeting, engagement increased markedly, with nearly 90% of the children actively participating by the third and fourth sessions. This improvement highlights the effectiveness of using picture books, a novel approach for the children at the Early Childhood Education School, in fostering enthusiasm and facilitating English language learning. The positive response suggests that age-appropriate, visually engaging learning media, such as picture books, significantly enhances the introduction of English to young learners, making it a successful method for early language education.

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