



Enhancing English Vocabulary Skills Through Storybooks at Kartini Elementary School, Medan

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Received 16 July 2025 Revised 23 February 2026 Accepted 20 March 2026 Available online 30 June 2026</p> <p>ISSN: 2986-3848</p> <hr/> <p>How to cite: Mutia, A. N., & Geubrina, M. (2026). Enhancing English vocabulary skills through storybooks at kartini elementary school, Medan. <i>International Journal Linguistics of Sumatra and Malay (IJLSM)</i>, 5(1), 01-09.</p>	<p>This research aims to investigate the use of storybooks to enhance English vocabulary skills among young EFL learners at SD Kartini Medan (Kartini Elementary School, Medan). The research involved three different grade levels: grade 3, grade 4, and grade 5. This research focused on how storybooks support vocabulary recognition, retention, and usage. In examining this study, the researcher employed Krashen's (1982) theory on the use of additional media in learning a foreign language, namely English, and Nation's (2001) theory as a reference for providing repeated exposure to media to increase English language acquisition. The research employed a qualitative descriptive method, combining pre-test and post-test assessments with classroom observations during the treatment process. A total of 25 students participated in both the pre- and post-test phases. The results indicated that storybooks significantly improved students' vocabulary scores and engagement, with percentage increases in class 3 (20.76%), class 4 (7.79%), and class 5 (21.88%). Story illustrations and contextual repetition helped lower-grade students grasp new words effectively, while guided reading and retelling activities supported upper-grade students in applying vocabulary in context. Although challenges such as language limitations and reliance on translation were observed, the overall findings support integrating storybooks into EFL vocabulary instruction at the elementary level.</p> <p>Keywords: Storybook, Vocabulary Skill, EFL Learners, Elementary School</p>



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1. Introduction

In the field of language learning, using various media that appeal to children, especially those that are visually appealing, has become a popular strategy. One example of this type of media is a storybook, which has been recognized as a potential language-learning medium. Krashen (1982) The approach provides a framework for incorporating storybooks into language learning activities.

In the Input Hypothesis (IH), language learning occurs when a child is exposed to fascinating and relevant information without relying on a memorization system, resulting in an input level of $i+1$. The child's current proficiency level determines this level.

Known as "scaffolding," storybook media are used with adult assistance to aid in children's language development. The concept of scaffolding, popularized by Wood et al., (1976) Vygotsky (Febrianto, 2019), enables children to engage in activities beyond their own capabilities. With this method, the student can focus on and complete assignments within their area of expertise.

At the elementary school level, it is imperative for children to acquire and master basic vocabulary to understand various learning materials in an ordinary storybook. As Willkins sees (Thornbury, 2002), "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed." Then, you can say very little with grammar, but you can say almost anything with words.

All children are able to understand the overall meaning of a story with the support of the teachers' storytelling techniques and the accompanying illustrations, which give clues to meaning. Storybooks have become an integral component of English-as-a-foreign-language learning methods in Indonesia, whether for native or foreign language acquisition.

Children's language learning process can be improved by social engagement with classmates, instructors, or adults. Auxiliary aids for social interaction might include storybooks and other media. The difference between a child's actual and potential developmental levels is highlighted by Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) hypothesis (Vygotsky, 1978).

Research that conducted by Maulidia (2023) focused on the impact of short stories to enhance English language learning as one of the most famous media to teach in the world by analyzing and reviewing the ten journal articles on that topic area, and the results of the research indicated that the results of the reviewed journal articles demonstrate the positive effects of including short story into English language learning, especially in intensive reading programs.

The second study, conducted by Hakim (2022), examined the Development of English-based children's storybooks towards the Literacy Culture of third- to fifth-grade students at MI Darul Ikhwan Karang Anyar. The results indicated that English-based children's storybooks were valid in the feasibility test and elicited a high level of enthusiasm among students for literacy learning.

This research focuses on the use of storybooks in English foreign language learning, particularly to examine basic English vocabulary skills, in the context of English education for elementary school children.

The rationale for selecting the elementary school was the identification of a need among students to enhance their English vocabulary through supplementary instructional materials beyond the scope of the elementary school's presentation book.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 English Foreign Language

The process of language acquisition is characterized as a subconscious, unconscious activity in an individual, who is unaware of their own participation, as described by Krashen (1982). This activity can also be performed through language learning, specifically the term "language learning." The term "word learning" is used to denote children's deliberate efforts to acquire a new language. We will use the term "learning" henceforth to refer to conscious knowledge of a foreign language, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them (1982, p. 10).

The acquisition of language by humans requires a "media" in the brain, which Chomsky refers to as the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). It has been posited that an individual's acquisition of a new language can be facilitated by learning a foreign language (L2). This process, known as foreign language acquisition, has been shown to involve activation of brain regions associated with the individual's first language.

As Krashen (1982) articulated in his seminal work on the Affective Filter Hypothesis (AFH), language acquisition can be facilitated through various media, including visually appealing storybooks. However, children may face challenges in retaining and recalling language. Therefore, the following internal factors have the potential to impact an individual's memory, thereby facilitating the survival of a foreign language. Those internal factors are:

1. Motivation. When a child is intrinsically motivated to learn, their subsequent academic performance consistently improves compared with that of a child lacking such motivation.
2. Self-Confidence. One such example is the notion that a child can master a foreign language after acquiring their first language.
3. Anxiety. The mental state is closely associated with the preceding two factors. This phenomenon can have a significant impact on a child's educational development. In the context of acquiring language skills, for instance, it is crucial that the child not feel pressured by the environment, including the classroom atmosphere.

2.2 Vocabulary

Nation (2001) posits that extensive input is crucial for vocabulary acquisition. Repeated exposure to a rich variety of vocabulary, facilitated by engaging materials such as storybooks, enables learners to acquire words more naturally over time. Nation (2001) posits that vocabulary knowledge extends beyond mere word meanings to encompass collocations, register, and usage. These elements play a fundamental role in facilitating fluent and appropriate communication.

Mastery of fundamental vocabulary is an integral component of the language acquisition process. Basic vocabulary encompasses the fundamental lexis that is frequently encountered in daily interactions and

surroundings. These can be basic nouns or basic verbs. It explains that if learners don't have enough vocabulary, they can't communicate or understand a language well. He says it's important to teach vocabulary in a step-by-step way to improve your language skills (Alqahtani, 2015).

Vocabulary skills are essential for mastering any language. They indicate how well a learner understands and uses language. Therefore, vocabulary skills are strong indicators of language ability and can predict success in language learning (He & Deocampo, 2023).

Vocabulary indicators are the visible signs that show a learner's knowledge and skills in vocabulary. These indicators help teachers evaluate how well learners understand, recognize, and use vocabulary in different language settings. The most recognized vocabulary indicators include:

- a. Meaning, the ability to understand and interpret the meaning of words accurately in different contexts.
- b. Spelling: correct spelling supports a learner's comprehension of word structure and forms, leading to deeper vocabulary processing and improved retention.
- c. Pronunciation enhances a learner's comprehension of word-sound patterns, aids listening and speaking skills, and prevents communication issues (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 2010).
- d. Recognition and recall in listening and reading, the ability to recognize and understand words in spoken or written language, called receptive vocabulary, is essential for understanding language.
- e. Use in speaking and writing, active vocabulary use means being able to produce words correctly in both speech and writing. This reflects not only knowledge but also mental access and fitting context.
- f. Dictation is a task to check a learner's ability to combine listening skills, spelling knowledge, and vocabulary recall. It is seen as an effective diagnostic media for mastering vocabulary.
- g. Contextual usage, understanding how to use words correctly in context, is essential for effective and natural communication.
- h. Grammatical, such as tense and number, could help learners understand and create the right word forms. This connects vocabulary to grammar skills. While grammar is a wider language skill, it overlaps with vocabulary indicators.

These indicators offer a detailed way to evaluate a learner's vocabulary knowledge and skills in both understanding and using language.

2.3 Storybook

A storybook is composed of texts of varying lengths, accompanied by visual representations such as pictures or illustrations. These elements are designed to facilitate the reader's engagement with the narrative world depicted within the story. It has been posited that readers tend to grasp a particular lesson more readily by combining two aspects within a single book: visual (non-verbal) and textual (verbal) elements (Paivio & Clark, 1991).

It has been demonstrated that children can comprehend a story's context and acquire new vocabulary from a storybook provided to them. In the context of learning, children's storybooks, in particular, serve a crucial role by providing new vocabulary through authentic storytelling. Moreover, a storybook contains various expressions and emotions of the characters that readers can perceive.

The implementation of learning activities using a storybook can be accomplished through various methodologies, including storytelling, which has been shown to motivate children at the primary level (Nombeko & Mashiya, 2021).

For the present research, the researcher selected a particular type of storybook, namely the simple dialogue book. The selected storybook features illustrations with sufficient visual appeal to attract elementary school children's attention and motivate them to engage with the text. The absence of narrative dialogue text helps elementary school children stay engaged in reading and makes the content easier to understand since the context applies to their lives.

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, the use of storybooks is of considerable importance for providing students with authentic language exposure.

Storybooks facilitate vocabulary acquisition through repeated exposure to words in context, illustrative visual cues, and natural language patterns commonly encountered in stories.

3. Method

This research employs a qualitative method (Gapur et al., 2024; Tamaño & Lopez, 2026), involving observation and interviews with participants in the real situation, with the objective of providing an in-depth description. The qualitative approach was selected because it enables the researcher to explore students' learning experiences holistically, particularly in the context of vocabulary acquisition in foreign language

learning. Creswell (2014) states that qualitative research is an approach to exploring and understanding the meanings that individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problems. Consequently, this research places significant emphasis on meaning-making, learning processes, and contextual interpretation, rather than on statistical measurement or hypothesis testing.

The population of this research consists of students at SD Kartini Medan, specifically grades three through five, with approximately 25 students. The sample for this research was selected using a random sampling technique. In many experiments, however, only a convenience sample is possible because the investigator must use naturally formed groups (e.g., a classroom, an organization, a family unit) or volunteers (Creswell, 2014, p. 215).

This research utilizes qualitative data to investigate the manner in which English storybooks contribute in enhancing vocabulary skills among elementary students in the context of English foreign language learning. The primary data source is observational data during pre-test, treatment, and post-test. Therefore, the secondary data are the ten students' pre-test and post-test results and interview transcripts.

According to Creswell (2014, p. 245), a methods discussion in a qualitative proposal also needs to specify the steps for analyzing various forms of qualitative data.

1. Organized data, prepared and gathered all the preliminary data from observations, field notes, interview transcripts, and students' pre-posttest answer sheets.
2. Reading through the data, re-reading of all collected data by the researcher in order to obtain the primary significance of the data in this particular research.
3. After coding the data, the researcher analyzed it. The analysis involves the grouping of the data into categories or codes. The code examples include R1, R2, R3, V1, ER-N, ER-V, QUOTES-S, QUOTES-T, and IMP+.
4. Description or grouping: The data codes were organized into a new folder code unit through grouping.
5. To represent the data, the researcher presented it in narrative form, supported by original observation notes, interview responses, and students' pre-test and post-test result sheets. The data were presented alongside the observation checklist for 25 students.

Based on the data, the researcher concludes that the implemented teaching media is correlated with an improvement in students' vocabulary.

4. Result and Discussion

This study examined the role, effectiveness, and challenges of using a printed storybook in enhancing English vocabulary mastery among Grade 3, Grade 4, and Grade 5 EFL students at SD Kartini Medan. The findings were obtained from pre-test and post-test scores, classroom observations, and interviews with students and teachers.

From the pre-test and post-test tables analyzed, it can be seen that the average score for each grade increased, shifting from medium to low to medium to very high. Although some students still have low scores.

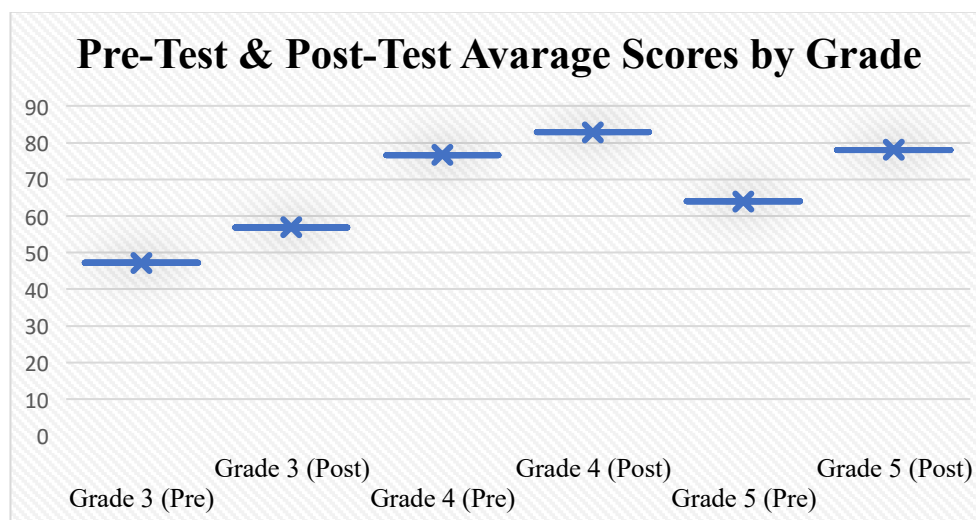


Figure1. Pre-Test & Post-Test Average Scores by Grade

As shown in Figures 4.31 and 4.32, the average score in grade 3 was 47 before the test (pre) and 57 after the test (post), an increase of 20.76%. In grade 4, the (pre) value has an average value of 77 and increased to 83 (post) with a total increase of 7.79%. In grade 5, the average (pre) score was 64. It increased to 78 on the (post) test, an increase of 21.88%.

During the pre-test for waves 1 to 3, the researcher found that in grades 3 to 5, many students had not yet mastered basic vocabulary, such as nouns, pronouns, verbs/adjectives. Many of them looked confused and often asked questions about unfamiliar vocabulary.

When entering the treatment phase, with each class receiving different treatments, the researcher noted that the grade 3 students were quite interactive and willing to learn more, as evidenced by their ability to answer questions about basic vocabulary correctly, which they were not familiar with during the pre-test.

Furthermore, the researcher found that students in class 4 showed greater enthusiasm for cooperating in the implementation of the treatment. Some students had greater ability than their friends, so they stood out. Also, almost all Grade 4 students could answer the questions correctly.

Lastly, the researcher found that Grade 5 students were still unable to master basic vocabulary by the retelling stage. When their retelling task occurred, the researcher helped guide them using Indonesian (L1). Providing assistance in Indonesian is one scaffolding method for EFL students who have not fully mastered the English language (L2) and still rely on their mother tongue to help them learn L2.

Then, during the last session, the post-test, the researcher found that many students had higher grades after following the treatment well. They could master many important vocabulary words that became the foundation of the storybook storyline.

This shows that the hypothesis input (i+1) works well. Krashen's theory works well and is also supported by Piaget's cognitive theory, which holds that children aged 7-11 (concrete operational) can already understand certain things, such as the plot of a storybook with a simple, relevant structure that makes it easier for them to understand. Also, in cognitive psychology, Chomsky argues that children can learn new English vocabulary through the influence of the surrounding environment and exposure to relevant teaching methods. Also, in Nation's (2001) study on repeated exposure to students in vocabulary teaching through storybooks, an improvement in final results was observed.

In addition to the challenges, the researcher also felt the experience while implementing research on elementary school children in grades three to five. Such as knowing how to learn to adapt to a new environment and teach directly. Also, being able to see that there are many differences in the abilities of students from grades 3, 4, and 5.

The challenges and experiences during the implementation of this research were also felt by the students and teachers involved. Some of the students' and teachers' responses can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. Summary of Respondents' Interview and Test Results

Coding's	Respondent(s)	Challenges	Experiences	Suggestions
QUOTES-S	St. 1	<p><i>“Kurang suka saat giliran membaca karena lama dan belum bisa mengeja tulisannya.”</i> (“doesn't like it when it's his turn to read because it takes a long time and he can't spell the words yet.”)</p>	<p><i>“lebih suka listening karena lebih seru dibacakan.”</i> (“We prefer listening because it's more fun to read.”)</p>	-

St. 2	<p>“<i>saat menjelaskan dan menjawab.</i>” (“while explaining and answering questions.”)</p>	<p>became more aware of some new vocabulary: woodcutter, wolf, forest, basket, girl, flower, bread, milk, scared, opened the door, surprised, immediately.</p>	
St. 3	-	<p>“<i>lebih suka sesi treatment karena seru, ceria, gambarnya menarik.</i>” (“I like the treatment session more because it's fun, cheerful, and the pictures are interesting.”)</p>	
Tc. 1	<p>“<i>tingkah laku para murid yang selayaknya anak sd pada umumnya.</i>” (“the behavior of students who are like elementary school children in general.”)</p>	<p>“<i>terdapat perbedaan yang ketara yakni dari yang banyak diam dan kurang aktif menjadi lebih mau aktif dan semangat karena diikuti sehingga bisa mengeksplor diri dan menjawab dengan benar.</i>” (“there is a significant difference, namely from being silent and less active to being more willing to be active and enthusiastic because they are included so that they can explore themselves and answer correctly.”)</p>	<p>suggestions to try to focus more on students and rely more on listening media (audio) because hearing is more observant</p>
QUOTES-T	<p>“<i>spelling dan vocabulary serta pronunciation para murid.</i>” (“the student’s spelling, vocabulary itself, also the pronunciation”</p>	<p>“<i>menambah vocabulary para murid terutama yang ada pada storybook dikarenakan ketertarikan juga akan gambar yang ada di storybook.</i>” (“increase students' vocabulary especially those in the storybook due to the interest in the pictures in the storybook.”)</p>	<p>Increase the number of storybook to be more varied in terms of story genres such as folklore, fantasy, realistic stories, non-fiction, and others in order to add more vocabulary.</p>
Tc. 2			

	Rspd	Pre-Test	Post-Test
IMP+	St	During the pre-test, many students already knew basic English vocabulary, although there were still many who did not, particularly in grades 3 and 5.	After the test, many students from the three classes showed improvement in vocabulary recognition and meaning, spelling, and dictation skills.

As shown in the table above, the responses from students (st) and teachers (tc) indicated positive results in the study conducted by the researcher. This also indicates to the researcher that the research has gone very well.

Additionally, the IMP+ column illustrates students' performance before the test, after the treatment, and after the post-test, showing a significant improvement.

Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges were identified. Some Grade 3 students required repeated explanation to fully understand the story context. In Grade 5, several students struggled when asked to retell parts of the story due to limited prior vocabulary knowledge.

Another challenge was students' reliance on Bahasa Indonesia for clarification. Although this helped comprehension, it indicated that students had not yet achieved full independence in using English vocabulary.

5. Conclusion

The effectiveness of using a printed storybook to improve English vocabulary mastery among EFL students in Grades 3, 4, and 5 at SD Kartini Medan was investigated in this study. The results show that vocabulary development is positively supported by storybook-based instruction. The comparison of pre-test and post-test scores revealed that students had improved in vocabulary recall, spelling accuracy, comprehension of meaning, and word recognition. Additionally, during story-based activities, learners' confidence and classroom participation increased, according to qualitative data. Students were able to comprehend vocabulary in meaningful ways thanks to the narrative context and visual aids. The overall findings demonstrate that printed storybooks serve as useful teaching tools for enhancing vocabulary acquisition in primary EFL classrooms, even though some students still relied on first-language assistance.

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