

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the present study on the use of children's short stories in teaching vocabulary to EFL young learners. It provides the context and rationale for conducting the research and outlines the main issues addressed in the study. The chapter consists of the background of the study, research questions, purpose of the study, significance of the study, scope of the study, definition of key terms, and research report organization. The following section begins by discussing the background underlying the present research.

1.1 Background of the Study

English plays an important role in international communication and is widely used in education, technology, and the exchange of information. In the Indonesian educational context, introducing English to young learners can provide early opportunities for them to develop basic language knowledge and skills. At the elementary school level, English learning involves the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Vocabulary is closely connected to these skills because learners need sufficient word knowledge to understand and communicate meaning effectively. Nation (2013) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge is closely related to learners' ability to use language receptively and productively across different language skills.

Vocabulary knowledge involves more than knowing the meanings of individual words. Learners also need to recognize different aspects of a word and understand how it functions in language (Nation, 2013). For young learners,

vocabulary learning may become challenging when instruction depends mainly on memorization and translation. Children tend to benefit from learning experiences in which language is presented through meaningful and engaging contexts. Ellis and Brewster (2014) explain that stories provide an appealing resource for primary English learners because they allow children to experience language within contexts that are meaningful and memorable. Vocabulary instruction for children, therefore, needs to provide opportunities to encounter and understand words within meaningful learning situations rather than treating vocabulary merely as a list of items to memorize.

The researcher's classroom experience as an English teacher at the elementary school level provided the initial motivation for this study. During vocabulary lessons, many students appeared enthusiastic at the beginning of the learning process but gradually lost interest when the activities relied heavily on memorizing words. Some students also had difficulty recalling newly introduced vocabulary and using it in subsequent learning activities. A different classroom response was observed when vocabulary was introduced through children's short stories. During storytelling activities, students appeared more attentive, participated more actively, asked about unfamiliar words, and showed curiosity about the characters and events in the stories. Pictures, gestures, and bilingual explanations were also used to help students understand unfamiliar vocabulary encountered during the activities.

Children's short stories can provide a meaningful context for vocabulary learning because words are presented through characters, actions, settings, and

events rather than as isolated items. Nation (2013) notes that vocabulary can be learned through context when learners encounter words while focusing on the meaning of a text. In a similar way, Ellis and Brewster (2014) highlight the value of story-based learning in primary English classrooms, particularly because stories combine meaningful language exposure with engaging learning experiences. Through stories, young learners can connect unfamiliar words with situations presented in the narrative while participating in classroom interaction.

Previous research has also reported positive findings concerning storytelling and vocabulary learning. Wibowo et al. (2024), for example, found that storytelling created a positive learning environment and supported learners' engagement and motivation during vocabulary learning. Similarly, Maya et al. (2022) reported that young learners perceived digital storytelling as engaging and motivating and considered it supportive of their vocabulary development. These findings suggest that storytelling can provide meaningful opportunities for vocabulary learning among young learners.

Despite these positive findings, previous studies have approached storytelling through different instructional media and research purposes. Maya et al. (2022), for instance, focused specifically on digital storytelling and learners' perceptions, while other studies have incorporated additional visual or technological media into storytelling activities. The present study takes a different focus by examining children's short stories as the primary instructional material and exploring the classroom process itself. Particular attention is given to how the stories are implemented in vocabulary instruction, how they support vocabulary learning,

and how students perceive their use during classroom activities. This focus addresses a research area that has received comparatively less attention in the studies reviewed for the present research.

The topic is also relevant to the current Indonesian educational context. The implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka is intended to support meaningful and effective learning while providing teachers with greater flexibility to design instruction according to students' contexts and learning needs (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi [Kemendikbudristek], 2024). The curriculum also places attention on literacy development and encourages the use of literature as part of efforts to strengthen students' reading literacy. Story-based activities are relevant to these principles because they can combine language exposure, literacy, classroom interaction, and active participation. Children's short stories may therefore offer a practical resource for presenting vocabulary through meaningful learning experiences without necessarily depending on complex instructional facilities.

Considering the classroom problem, theoretical relevance, and gap identified in previous research, the researcher is interested in investigating the use of children's short stories in vocabulary instruction for EFL young learners. The present study focuses on how children's short stories are implemented in classroom practice, how they support vocabulary learning, and how students perceive their use during the learning process. Through a qualitative case study, this research is expected to provide a more detailed understanding of the use of children's short stories in vocabulary learning within an elementary school EFL context.

In the context of the present study, enriching vocabulary refers to providing young learners with meaningful and varied opportunities to encounter, understand, pronounce, and practice English words through story-based classroom activities. The term “enrich” is therefore understood in relation to the vocabulary-learning process rather than as statistically measured vocabulary improvement. Through this perspective, the study examines how children’s short stories contribute to vocabulary learning through contextual exposure, visual support, repetition, pronunciation practice, and classroom interaction.

1.2 Research Question

In relation to the issues discussed in the background of the study, this research addresses the following questions:

1. How are children's short stories implemented in teaching vocabulary to EFL young learners?
2. How do children's short stories support vocabulary learning among EFL young learners?
3. What are the students’ perceptions of the use of children’s short stories in vocabulary learning?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

In accordance with the research questions presented above, this study aims to achieve the following purposes:

1. To explore how children’s short stories are implemented in teaching vocabulary to EFL young learners.

2. To investigate how children's short stories support vocabulary learning among EFL young learners.
3. To identify students' perceptions of the use of children's short stories in vocabulary learning.

Together, these purposes are intended to provide an understanding of how children's short stories may enrich vocabulary learning by providing meaningful opportunities for young learners to encounter, understand, pronounce, and practice English vocabulary.

1.4 Significance of the study

This study is expected to contribute to the understanding and practice of vocabulary teaching through children's short stories in EFL young learner contexts. The significance of the study is presented from three perspectives: theoretical, practical, and professional significance.

1.4.1 Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study is expected to provide further insight into the use of children's short stories as instructional materials for vocabulary learning among EFL young learners. By exploring how short stories are implemented in classroom practice, how they support vocabulary learning, and how students perceive their use, the findings may add to the existing discussion on story-based vocabulary instruction in elementary EFL contexts. The study may also provide a reference for future qualitative research concerning children's short stories and vocabulary learning among young learners.

The study also provides a qualitative perspective on vocabulary enrichment by viewing it as a process of meaningful vocabulary exposure, understanding, and classroom practice.

1.4.2 Practical Significance

Practically, the findings of this study are expected to offer useful insights for those involved in English language teaching and learning, particularly teachers, students, and future researchers. The practical contributions are described as follows:

1. For Teachers

The findings may provide English teachers with practical insights into how children's short stories can be incorporated into vocabulary instruction. The classroom experiences explored in this study may also help teachers consider appropriate ways of presenting vocabulary through meaningful and engaging story-based activities that suit the learning characteristics of young learners.

2. For Students

The use of children's short stories may provide students with opportunities to encounter English vocabulary in meaningful contexts. Through the characters, actions, and events presented in stories, students may experience vocabulary learning in a way that encourages participation and helps them connect unfamiliar words with the contexts in which they are used.

3. For Future Researchers

This study may serve as a reference for future researchers interested in children's short stories, vocabulary learning, or English instruction for young learners. The findings may also provide a basis for further studies conducted in different educational settings, with different participants, or through other research approaches.

1.4.3 Professional Significance

Professionally, this study is expected to provide insights that may support English teachers in developing their classroom practices, particularly in vocabulary instruction for young learners. The findings may encourage teachers to consider children's short stories as one of the instructional resources that can be adapted to students' learning needs and classroom contexts. In addition, the study may contribute to teachers' professional reflection on the selection and implementation of meaningful, age-appropriate materials for vocabulary learning.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study is limited to the use of children's short stories in teaching English vocabulary to EFL young learners. The scope is defined in terms of the research focus, participants, setting, and the aspects of vocabulary learning explored in the study.

The research is conducted in one elementary school where the researcher teaches English and involves fifth-grade students in the classroom learning process.

More specifically, the study focuses on three aspects: how children's short stories are implemented in vocabulary instruction, how they support vocabulary learning among EFL young learners, and how students perceive their use during the

learning process. These aspects are examined through classroom activities involving children's short stories as the primary instructional material.

As a qualitative case study, this research focuses on obtaining an in-depth understanding of the classroom process and the participants' experiences within a particular educational context. Therefore, the study does not aim to statistically measure students' vocabulary improvement or determine the effectiveness of children's short stories through experimental comparison. Instead, it explores the implementation, role, and students' perceptions of children's short stories in vocabulary learning within the context of the study. Accordingly, the term "enrich" in this study refers to enriching the vocabulary-learning process through meaningful contextual exposure, visual support, repeated encounters, pronunciation practice, and classroom interaction, rather than demonstrating measurable vocabulary gains.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

To provide a clear and consistent understanding of the concepts used throughout this study, several key terms related to the research focus are defined below. Each term is explained with reference to relevant literature and then specified according to its use in the present study.

1.6.1 Children's Short Stories

Children's short stories are stories designed for young learners and presented through language and content appropriate to their learning needs. Stories can provide meaningful language input by allowing children to encounter words and expressions within connected events and contexts rather than as isolated language items (Ellis & Brewster, 2014). In the present study, children's short stories refer to

short narrative texts used as the primary instructional material for introducing and teaching English vocabulary to fifth-grade students through classroom storytelling activities.

1.6.2 Vocabulary

Vocabulary knowledge involves knowing words and understanding how they are used in language. It includes not only word meaning but also other aspects of word knowledge that enable learners to recognize and use vocabulary appropriately in different contexts (Nation, 2013). In this study, vocabulary refers specifically to the English words introduced and explored through children's short stories during classroom learning activities. The focus is on how students encounter and understand vocabulary in the context of the stories rather than on statistically measuring vocabulary gains.

1.6.3 EFL Young Learners

Young learners are children who are learning a language while their cognitive, social, and linguistic abilities are still developing. Their learning is influenced by their developmental characteristics and by the learning experiences provided in the classroom (Pinter, 2017). In the context of this study, EFL young learners refer specifically to fifth-grade elementary school students who learn English as a foreign language and participate in vocabulary-learning activities through children's short stories.

1.6.4 Qualitative Case Study

A qualitative case study allows researchers to develop an in-depth understanding of a particular case or phenomenon within its specific context

(Creswell & Poth, 2024). In the present study, the qualitative case study is used to explore the classroom implementation of children's short stories, their role in supporting vocabulary learning, and students' perceptions of their use during the learning process.

1.6.5 Research Report Organization

This section provides an overview of how the research report is organized. The study is presented in five chapters, with each chapter addressing a particular aspect of the research and contributing to the overall discussion of the use of children's short stories in vocabulary learning among EFL young learners.

1. Chapter I presents the introduction to the study. It covers the background of the study, research questions, purpose of the study, significance of the study, scope of the study, definition of key terms, and research report organization.
2. Chapter II reviews the literature relevant to the research. It discusses the theoretical perspectives related to vocabulary learning, EFL young learners, and children's short stories. The chapter also reviews previous studies related to storytelling and vocabulary learning to establish the position of the present study within the existing literature.
3. Chapter III describes the research methodology employed in the study. It explains the research design, research participants, research site, research procedures, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations.
4. Chapter IV presents and discusses the findings obtained from the study. The findings are organized in relation to the research questions,

particularly the implementation of children's short stories in vocabulary instruction, their role in supporting vocabulary learning, and students' perceptions of their use during the learning process.

5. Chapter V concludes the research by presenting the conclusions drawn from the findings and providing suggestions based on the findings and limitations of the study.