



Exploring Junior High School Students' Engagement in Reading Activity By Using Picture Book: A Case Study

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Abstract The study examines the use of picture books in junior high school English reading activities, focusing on how teachers engage students and how students perceive them as a learning medium. The data is collected from a Karawang junior high school was collected through classroom observations, interviews, and thematic analysis. The findings suggest that teachers use picture books with appealing illustrations, relevant content, and group discussions to stimulate interest, improve focus, and promote social interaction and collaborative learning.

Keywords: Picture Book, Student Engagement, Reading Activity, Students' Perception, Teacher Sz

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading plays an essential role in everyday life as it opens opportunities for gaining knowledge, discovering new ideas, and sharing information. People engage with various reading materials such as books, newspapers, and online articles to broaden their understanding of the world. More than just recognizing words, reading involves comprehension—the ability to interpret and respond to what is read. This makes reading a fundamental component of learning, particularly in language education. Iftanti (2012) points out that EFL students who develop consistent reading habits in English tend to show greater motivation and improvement in their language skills. However, despite its importance, reading is often perceived by students as a boring or difficult activity, which poses a challenge for educators to make it more appealing and meaningful.

To address this challenge, integrating appropriate and engaging media into reading lessons becomes necessary. Visual elements, for instance, can enrich the reading experience by supporting understanding through sensory interaction (David & Sulaiman, 2021). One effective medium that combines both text and visuals is the picture book. Picture books provide learners with opportunities to explore language in an enjoyable way. As Wardini et al. (2021) suggest, the combination of images and text helps sustain students' interest and supports their literacy development.

Using picture books in the classroom not only captures students' attention but also encourages deeper engagement with reading materials. Teachers who introduce such media offer a more interactive and enjoyable learning environment, different from traditional textbook methods. Picture books stimulate imagination, maintain focus, and help students

understand content more clearly through visual context. This dual input of words and pictures contributes to vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and critical thinking in a more accessible and enjoyable format.

Numerous studies have recognized the benefits of picture books in reading instruction. Research by Putri Ratna Sari and Dohrah Fitriasia (2022) highlights how picture books enhance reading comprehension from elementary through junior high levels. Roslina (2017) also notes that the presence of illustrations in texts encourages students to focus and understand narrative meaning more effectively.

Scholars have explored picture books from various perspectives. Chen and Huang (2023) examined their role in cognitive development, while Mantiri et al. (2021) investigated the impact of visual materials on reading comprehension. Restanto (2016) focused specifically on the use of picture books for junior high school students, and Rosalina (2017) analyzed their influence on students' engagement with narrative texts. In addition, Nisa (2022) found that using picture books in teaching narrative texts improves students' understanding and interaction with the content.

While previous studies have mainly focused on comprehension outcomes, limited research has addressed how picture books affect student engagement and how students themselves perceive this medium. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring how picture books are used to promote student engagement in English reading activities and how junior high school students respond to their use. Therefore, this research is titled *"Exploring Junior High School Students' Engagement in Reading Activity by Using Picture Book."*

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Picture books are widely recognized for their role in enhancing reading comprehension and engagement, particularly among younger learners. These books blend visuals and text, helping students connect meaning and interpret content more easily. According to Pantaleo (2008), the interplay between images and words promotes literacy by stimulating critical thinking and emotional response. Chen and Huang (2023) emphasized that illustrations strengthen memory and aid in the cognitive development of children. Meanwhile, Mantiri et al. (2021) found that visual-based reading can improve students' understanding of texts while encouraging collaboration and active participation in class discussions. In Indonesia, studies by Rosalina (2017) and Restanto (2016) revealed that picture books offer an effective alternative to traditional textbooks, helping students access narrative texts with greater ease and interest. While many studies highlight comprehension outcomes, this study focuses on the

engagement process itself—how teachers facilitate it through picture books and how students perceive and respond to this media.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative case study design to explore how picture books support junior high school students' engagement in English reading activities. A case study approach was chosen because it allowed the researcher to examine student behavior and perceptions within a real classroom setting. The research was conducted at a junior high school in Karawang, West Java, Indonesia, selected due to the researcher's prior teaching experience at the school and its routine implementation of English reading activities using picture books. The participants consisted of one English teacher and students from Class 8-1, chosen for their active participation in English learning. Data were collected through classroom observations and a semi-structured interview. Observations focused on how students participated, interacted, and responded during reading sessions, using a checklist to record behaviors related to engagement. A semi-structured interview with the English teacher provided additional insights into how picture books were used in teaching and how students responded to them. The interview was guided by key questions and recorded with consent. These methods were chosen to gather both observational and reflective data, providing a well-rounded understanding of how picture books are used to engage students in reading.

Findings and Discussions

This study explored how picture books engage junior high school students' engagement in English reading activities. Based on classroom observations and interviews with both teachers and students, the findings were analysed using thematic analysis and are presented through five major themes. These themes reflect both how teachers use picture books to encourage participation and how students experience and respond to picture book-based reading activities.

Picture Books as an Engagement Tool

One of the main findings shows that teachers often use picture books at the beginning of reading lessons to attract attention and improve student focus. When faced with dense, text-heavy materials, many students struggle to stay interested. However, the use of colourful and illustrated picture books sparked curiosity and made students more engaged from the start.

This supports the view presented by Wardini et al. (2021) and David & Sulaiman (2021), who explained that visual materials help stimulate learners' senses and capture attention, especially for students in the early stages of English language learning. The findings

also align with Pantaleo (2008), who emphasized the importance of multimodal texts—where text and illustration work together to build understanding and engagement. The emotional readiness promoted through picture books further reflects Fredricks et al. (2005), who identified emotional engagement as a crucial factor for classroom participation. In this study, picture books created a more relaxed environment, allowing students to feel more comfortable and willing to participate in reading.

Group Reading for Social Interaction

Group reading using picture books was found to be highly effective in increasing student interaction. Teachers organized students into small groups, which allowed them to read collaboratively, ask questions, share opinions, and discuss the stories together. Students expressed that this method made reading more fun and meaningful.

This result connects with the ideas of Pagani et al. (2009) and Fredricks et al. (2005), who describe behavioral engagement as students' active participation in learning tasks, including peer interactions. The collaborative reading approach used in this study supports Roslina's (2017) claim that picture-based texts promote social engagement and shared understanding. In junior high settings, where social relationships play a central role in development, reading together using picture books not only improved language skills but also strengthened peer connections and classroom community.

Visual Support Enhancing Comprehension

The most frequently mentioned benefit by students was how the illustrations in picture books helped them understand the text. When they came across unfamiliar vocabulary or grammar, they used the images as visual clues. This allowed them to understand the story without always needing help from the teacher or a dictionary.

These findings directly support Chen & Huang (2023), who found that pictures in children's books aid comprehension by reinforcing meaning and activating imagination. Similarly, Pantaleo (2008) highlighted how visual elements support meaning-making, especially in early literacy development. In this study, students relied heavily on images to form mental representations of the story, characters, and setting, which made the stories easier to remember and retell. This shows that visual literacy is essential in helping students become more confident and independent readers.

Simple and Accessible Content

Students consistently mentioned that they preferred picture books over traditional textbooks due to the simplicity of language, shorter length, and relatable topics. Regular

English textbooks often overwhelmed them, while picture books felt easier to handle and more enjoyable to read.

This reflects findings by Nisa (2022) and Mantiri et al. (2021), who showed that picture books improve comprehension by lowering the difficulty of the reading task. Additionally, Junaid (as cited in Hermin, 2017) highlighted that picture books are designed to match children's cognitive and language development, with accessible vocabulary and clear illustrations. In this study, students were more willing to read and complete picture books because the content felt achievable, which also contributed to building reading habits and increasing motivation.

Emotional Engagement and Motivation

Students described reading picture books as an enjoyable experience. They felt happier, more relaxed, and more confident during picture book reading activities than when reading from standard textbooks. Many students said that the fun characters, colorful illustrations, and short stories made them more interested in English reading overall.

This finding confirms Fredricks et al.'s (2005) concept of emotional engagement, which refers to students' positive feelings toward learning. It also echoes the results of Mantiri et al. (2021), who stated that visual materials reduce stress and increase learner comfort. While Kochiyama (2016) focused on picture books' role in motivating students to learn grammar and vocabulary, the current study found that students were more influenced by the emotional benefits—feeling enjoyment and success during reading. These emotional responses played a critical role in building long-term interest and confidence in English language learning.

This emotional connection to reading is important for building long-term motivation. When students enjoy the reading process, they are more likely to keep trying, even when the material becomes more difficult. In this way, picture books not only help students read better but also encourage them to develop a more positive attitude toward learning English overall.

4. CONCLUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The study concludes that picture books are effective in fostering student engagement in English reading. Teachers benefit from using visually appealing and age-appropriate texts to boost interest and comprehension. Students, in turn, respond positively to the combination of images and simple narratives, especially in collaborative settings. Future work can explore digital versions or broader implementation across school types.

Teachers engaged students by choosing books with colorful illustrations, relatable topics, and language suited to their English level. They also made the lessons more interactive

by using group discussions, vocabulary activities, and pair or group reading. These approaches helped students feel more comfortable, understand the content more easily, and become more involved in the learning process.

Students gave mostly positive feedback about picture book activities. They said the books were more enjoyable and easier to understand than regular textbooks. The pictures supported their understanding of the story, and the shorter texts made reading feel less overwhelming. Overall, the students became more confident and motivated to read in English when picture books were used in class.

Based on the findings, it is suggested that students take an active part in picture book reading activities by asking questions, sharing opinions, and relating stories to their own experiences, as this can help improve their vocabulary, confidence, and reading skills. Teachers are encouraged to use picture books more often in reading lessons, especially for students who struggle with standard textbooks. Choosing books that match students' language level, age, and interests, and combining them with interactive tasks like group discussions or creative responses, can enhance engagement and learning. Future researchers are advised to conduct similar studies in different school settings with more participants and consider exploring the long-term effects of picture book use, including the potential of digital picture books in modern classrooms.

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