



# The Using of Picture Books in Teaching English to Young Learners in Indonesian Early Childhood Education

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**Abstract.** Teaching English to young learners has become increasingly important due to the global role of English in education, science, and communication. This study investigates the implementation of picture books in teaching English to young learners and examines how such media influence language learning in an Indonesian early childhood education setting. The research employs a qualitative approach combining a literature study and a small-scale case study. The literature review analyzes scholarly publications related to picture books and English language teaching for children aged 7–12, while the case study examines classroom practices using the picture book *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* by Rosen and Oxenbury. Data were collected through classroom observation and informal teacher interviews, and were analyzed using content analysis techniques. The findings indicate that picture books significantly support young learners' vocabulary development, listening comprehension, oral participation, and learning motivation. The combination of visual illustrations and narrative text helps learners infer meaning, while repetitive language patterns enhance vocabulary retention. Interactive storytelling also creates a low-anxiety learning environment that encourages student participation. Overall, the study concludes that picture books function as effective multimodal teaching media for young learners and should be integrated into early English language instruction.

**Keywords:** Early Childhood Education; English Language Teaching; Picture Books; Vocabulary Development; Young Learners.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language plays a central role in human communication and learning. It functions not only as a means of expressing ideas but also as a medium through which knowledge is transmitted in educational contexts. In formal education systems around the world, English has become one of the most important subjects because of its status as a global lingua franca in science, technology, and international communication (Aisyah & Haryudin, 2020; Trilestari et al., 2024). Consequently, many educational institutions introduce English at an early age in order to provide students with better opportunities for academic and professional development in the future.

Research in language acquisition suggests that children have greater potential to develop native-like proficiency in foreign languages when learning begins at an early age. According to Suhendan (2013) as cited in Trilestari et al. (2024), children under the age of twelve have higher chances of achieving natural pronunciation and language fluency compared to adult learners. Early childhood is therefore often described as a “golden period” for language acquisition, when cognitive and linguistic development progresses rapidly. However, teaching English to young learners requires special pedagogical approaches because children have unique developmental characteristics.

According to Piaget's cognitive development theory, children aged 7–12 are in the concrete operational stage, meaning that they understand concepts best through concrete experiences rather than abstract explanations. Therefore, language instruction for this age group should involve visual aids, interactive activities, and contextualized learning experiences rather than purely theoretical explanations.

One effective teaching medium for young learners is the picture storybook. Picture books combine text and illustrations to present stories in a visually engaging format that captures children's attention. The visual elements help learners infer the meanings of unfamiliar words and phrases, while the narrative structure provides meaningful linguistic context. Studies have shown that picture books expose children to authentic language patterns, including repetitive sentence structures and contextual vocabulary, which facilitate language acquisition (Malu, 2013; O'Fallon et al., 2020).

Several empirical studies demonstrate the effectiveness of picture books in language learning. O'Fallon et al. (2020) found that repeated exposure to target words during shared storybook reading significantly improved children's receptive vocabulary. Similarly, Sirjon et al. (2025) reported that the use of picture storybooks increased English vocabulary comprehension among early childhood learners in Indonesia. These findings indicate that illustrated storybooks can function as powerful tools for vocabulary development and language comprehension. Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine the role of picture books in teaching English to young learners and to analyze how the use of picture books influences English learning in an Indonesian early childhood education setting.

## **2. THEORY**

Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) refers to the process of introducing English as a foreign language to children aged 3–12 years, where teaching strategies must align with their cognitive, social, and emotional development. Young learners tend to learn more effectively through interactive, meaningful, and contextual activities rather than abstract explanations. They possess unique characteristics such as short attention spans, high curiosity, and strong imagination, which require teachers to create engaging and visually stimulating learning environments. Theories such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis emphasize the importance of comprehensible input slightly above learners' current level, while Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development highlights the role of scaffolding in supporting children's learning. Therefore, effective TEYL practices involve the use of visual aids, games, repetition, and meaningful interaction to facilitate natural language acquisition.

Picture books are considered one of the most effective media in supporting language learning for young learners. They provide a multimodal learning experience by combining visual illustrations with simple texts, allowing children to understand meaning even with limited reading ability. Visual elements in picture books help learners connect language with concrete representations, thus enhancing vocabulary acquisition and comprehension. Additionally, picture books promote interactive learning through activities such as predicting, questioning, and retelling stories. Approaches like dialogic reading further strengthen language development by encouraging active participation and communication between teachers and students. As a result, picture books not only improve vocabulary and listening skills but also stimulate imagination and critical thinking.

Storytelling is another essential strategy in language learning for young learners, as it provides meaningful and engaging contexts for language use. Through storytelling, learners are exposed to authentic language patterns, including vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, in a natural and integrated way. Storytelling also supports the development of listening and speaking skills, as students actively participate through responding, predicting, and retelling narratives. Emotional engagement plays a significant role in this process, as stories capture learners' interest and help them retain language more effectively. Furthermore, storytelling can be integrated with visual media such as picture books to enhance comprehension and engagement. Overall, storytelling not only improves language skills but also fosters creativity, imagination, and active participation in the learning process.

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

Study employed a qualitative research design combining a literature study and a case study approach. The literature study was conducted to examine and synthesize academic publications related to the use of picture books in English language teaching for young learners. Literature review research involves systematically collecting, analyzing, and interpreting scholarly sources to identify theoretical perspectives and research trends (Snyder, 2019).

The selected literature consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles and academic books published between 2019 and 2024. The sources were obtained from academic databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, and Scopus. Keywords used in the search process included picture books in ELT, young learners English education, interactive learning media, and storybooks and vocabulary development.

Only sources relevant to English language teaching for children aged 7–12 were included in the analysis. In addition to the literature review, a qualitative case study was conducted in an Indonesian early childhood education classroom to observe how picture books were implemented in real teaching practice.

A case study allows researchers to investigate a phenomenon in its natural context and provides in-depth insight into classroom processes (Yin, 2018). The teaching material used in the classroom observation was the illustrated storybook *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* by Rosen and Oxenbury (1989). The book was selected because it contains repetitive sentence patterns, clear visual illustrations, and an engaging adventure narrative suitable for young learners.

Data collection methods included classroom observation and informal teacher interviews. Observations focused on teaching strategies, student participation, and language exposure during storytelling activities. Interviews with the teacher were conducted to understand instructional objectives and perceptions regarding the effectiveness of picture books as teaching media.

The collected data were analyzed using content analysis techniques. This method involves organizing textual data into categories and identifying patterns related to the research objectives.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study indicate that picture books play a significant role in supporting English language learning among young learners. The use of illustrated storybooks creates a multimodal learning environment in which children simultaneously process visual and verbal information. This combination helps learners understand and remember new vocabulary more effectively.

One of the most notable impacts observed in the classroom was vocabulary development. Because young learners often have limited exposure to English outside school, they require learning materials that connect unfamiliar words with clear meanings. Picture books provide such connections by linking vocabulary with concrete visual representations.

During storytelling sessions using *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, students were able to recognize and repeat key vocabulary items such as grass, river, mud, and cave. The repetitive structure of the narrative allowed children to encounter these words multiple times, reinforcing vocabulary retention. These findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating that repeated exposure to target words during storybook reading enhances vocabulary acquisition (O'Fallon et al., 2020; Sirjon et al., 2025).

In addition to vocabulary development, picture books also supported listening comprehension. Because young learners rely heavily on oral input, listening activities are essential in early language learning. The illustrations in picture books provide contextual clues that help children interpret the meaning of spoken language. During the observed storytelling sessions, students frequently responded to story events by mimicking actions such as walking through grass or entering a cave. These responses indicated that students understood the narrative even when they did not fully comprehend every word.

Another important influence was increased student participation. Storytelling activities created an interactive and enjoyable learning atmosphere that encouraged children to speak and participate. Students enthusiastically repeated refrains from the story and volunteered to act out scenes. Such activities reduce anxiety and increase confidence in language learning. According to Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, learners acquire language more effectively when they feel relaxed and motivated.

The use of picture books also contributed to higher levels of motivation and engagement. Young learners typically have short attention spans and require stimulating learning materials. The colorful illustrations and adventure narrative captured students' interest and maintained their attention throughout the lesson. The teacher reported that storytelling sessions were the most enjoyable part of the English class, and students often requested repeated readings of the same book.

Furthermore, picture books provide opportunities for social interaction and collaborative learning. Students discussed story events, answered questions, and participated in role-play activities related to the narrative. These interactions allowed learners to practice speaking skills while reinforcing vocabulary and comprehension.

Overall, the findings suggest that picture books serve as effective instructional media for young learners because they integrate visual support, narrative context, and interactive learning activities.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study explored the use of picture books in teaching English to young learners through a combination of literature review and classroom case study. The findings demonstrate that picture books are highly effective teaching media for early English language education.

The use of illustrated storybooks contributes to several aspects of language development, including vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, oral participation, and learning motivation. The integration of images and text allows learners to understand new vocabulary through contextual clues, while repetitive narrative patterns reinforce language exposure.

Interactive storytelling activities also create a positive learning environment that encourages student participation and reduces anxiety. As a result, picture books help transform English learning into an enjoyable and meaningful experience for young learners.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that teachers integrate picture books regularly into English language instruction for children. Educators should also apply interactive reading strategies such as questioning, prediction activities, and role-playing to maximize the pedagogical benefits of storybooks.

Future research may examine the long-term effects of picture book-based instruction on language proficiency and explore how different types of storybooks influence various aspects of language learning.

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