

The Effectiveness Of English Storytelling In Promoting Reading Habits Among Senior High School Students At MA Al Urwatul Wutsqaa Benteng

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ABSTRACT

Reading habits are essential for developing literacy, vocabulary, comprehension, and independent learning, yet many senior high school students still show limited motivation and interest in reading English texts. This study investigated the effectiveness of English storytelling in promoting students' reading habits at MA Al Urwatul Wutsqaa Benteng. A quantitative quasi-experimental approach with a non-equivalent control group design was employed. Thirty eleventh-grade students were selected through purposive sampling and divided equally into an experimental class and a control class. Students' reading habits were measured using a 20-item Reading Habit Questionnaire covering reading frequency, motivation, interest, engagement, and reading pleasure. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, the Shapiro-Wilk normality test, Levene's homogeneity test, paired sample t-tests, and an independent sample t-test with PSPP. The experimental class mean increased from 68.73 in the pre-test to 85.40 in the post-test, while the control class mean decreased slightly from 62.80 to 61.80. The paired sample t-test for the experimental class produced $p = 0.000$, whereas the control class showed no significant change. The independent sample t-test also showed a significant post-test difference ($t = 10.41$, $df = 28$, $p = 0.000$), with a mean difference of 23.60. These findings indicate that English storytelling is effective in promoting stronger reading habits among senior high school EFL students.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the most fundamental skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because regular interaction with written texts supports comprehension, vocabulary development, critical thinking, and academic achievement. Grabe and Stoller (2019) emphasize that sustained reading contributes to broader language development, while reading habits help learners integrate reading into their academic and personal routines. A strong reading habit is therefore not limited to the ability to decode written language; it involves consistent behavior, motivation, interest, engagement, and enjoyment in reading.

In the Indonesian school context, developing such habits remains challenging. Students often spend more time on digital entertainment and may show limited interest in printed or digital English texts (Amelia & Putri, 2024). When reading is experienced mainly as a compulsory classroom task, students can become less motivated to read independently. Weak reading habits may then contribute to limited vocabulary growth, lower text comprehension, and reduced willingness to engage in self-directed learning. This gap between literacy objectives and actual reading behavior highlights the need for instructional strategies that make reading more meaningful and enjoyable.

English storytelling offers one possible response to this problem. Storytelling presents language through characters, events, conflicts, and resolutions that can attract students' attention and create emotional involvement. In EFL instruction, the teacher can combine oral narration with expressive intonation, facial expressions, gestures, prediction questions, discussion, and follow-up reading. This combination allows students to encounter language in a meaningful context before interacting with the written version of a story. Ellis and Brewster (2014) explain that expressive storytelling supports comprehension and engagement, while Isbell et al. (2020) associate storytelling with literacy development and increased learner motivation.

Previous studies provide support for the use of storytelling in literacy instruction. Aminah and Nasution (2024) reported increased reading interest after storytelling activities, while Nugroho and Rekha (2022) found that storytelling strengthened students' motivation to read English texts. Yuliana (2023) also showed that storytelling supported reading comprehension and classroom participation. In digital contexts, Robin (2023) found that storytelling combined with multimedia could increase reading engagement. These findings suggest that stories can serve as a bridge between listening, interaction, and voluntary reading.

However, much of the previous research has emphasized reading comprehension, motivation, or reading interest as separate outcomes. Fewer studies have experimentally examined reading habits as a broader construct involving reading frequency, motivation, interest, engagement, and reading pleasure, particularly among senior high school students in Sidenreng Rappang. Experimental comparisons between

storytelling instruction and conventional reading instruction are also relatively limited in this specific context.

Accordingly, this study investigated whether English storytelling was effective in promoting students' reading habits at MA Al Urwatul Wutsqaa Benteng. English storytelling was treated as the independent variable, while students' reading habits were treated as the dependent variable. By comparing pre-test and post-test results from an experimental class and a control class, the study sought to provide empirical evidence regarding the use of storytelling as a literacy-promoting strategy in senior high school EFL classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Storytelling in English Language Education

Storytelling can be understood as the oral presentation of events, ideas, and emotions through language supported by vocal expression, gesture, facial expression, and other contextual cues. Wright (2019) describes storytelling in language learning as a communicative process that brings narrative meaning to life, while Ellis and Brewster (2014) emphasize the role of voice and physical expression in helping learners understand stories. In this sense, educational storytelling goes beyond simply reading a text aloud because the storyteller interprets the narrative and actively maintains learners' attention.

In EFL classrooms, storytelling can provide comprehensible and contextualized language input. Stories often contain predictable structures, repeated expressions, and clear relationships between characters and events. These features can help learners infer meaning while listening and prepare them for subsequent reading. Storytelling can also reduce the distance between oral language and written language because students first encounter the content through narration and then read the same or related text. The storytelling process therefore functions as a bridge from listening and interaction to reading.

Effective classroom storytelling includes clear narrative structure, expressive delivery, interaction, appropriate language level, and opportunities for follow-up reading. Visual aids or other multimodal supports may also be used when available. In the present study, stories were selected to match students' English proficiency and were delivered with expressive intonation, facial expressions, gestures, questions, predictions, and discussion. Students were then encouraged to read the written version of the story and reflect on its characters, events, and moral values.

Reading Habits in EFL Learning

Reading habit refers to a repeated and relatively stable tendency to engage with written texts over time. Sangkaeo (1999) describes reading habit as consistent behavior

related to reading for information or pleasure. In this study, reading habits were viewed as a multidimensional construct rather than a single measure of how often students read. The dimensions included reading frequency, reading motivation, reading interest, reading engagement, and reading pleasure.

Reading frequency concerns how regularly students engage in English reading activities. Reading motivation refers to the internal or external drive that encourages students to read, while reading interest reflects preference and enthusiasm for particular reading materials. Reading engagement describes students' attention, effort, and cognitive involvement while interacting with a text. Reading pleasure refers to the enjoyment and positive feelings experienced during reading. These dimensions are related because interest and enjoyment can strengthen motivation, which may in turn encourage more frequent and engaged reading.

Positive reading habits are important because they support continued exposure to language and create opportunities for independent learning. Clark and Rumbold (2006) link reading for pleasure with sustained reading behavior, while Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) emphasize the central role of motivation and engagement in reading. Consequently, teaching approaches that increase enjoyment, curiosity, and active participation may contribute to more sustainable reading habits.

Theoretical Relationship between Storytelling and Reading Habits

The potential effect of storytelling can be interpreted through several theoretical perspectives used in the thesis. Slavin's QAIT Model (1995) proposes that effective instruction depends on the quality of instruction, the appropriateness of the instructional level, incentives for learning, and sufficient time. Storytelling can address these components when stories are presented expressively, selected according to students' abilities, designed to stimulate intrinsic motivation, and implemented consistently with time for listening, discussion, reading, and reflection.

The process can also be understood in relation to the affective conditions of language learning. When students first encounter a story through enjoyable oral narration, they may feel less anxious about unfamiliar English texts and become more confident before reading. Social interaction further supports the process. Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist perspective highlights the role of collaboration and interaction in learning, which are reflected in prediction tasks, question-and-answer activities, discussion, and story retelling.

Narrative itself may also facilitate learning. Bruner (1986, 1990) explains that people naturally organize experience through stories, making narrative sequences a meaningful way to understand events and ideas. When reading is connected to a coherent story and enjoyable classroom experience, students may perceive it as more than an academic obligation. Day and Bamford (1998) similarly emphasize the

importance of enjoyable reading experiences for the development of long-term reading behavior.

Previous Studies and Research Gap

Aminah and Nasution (2024) found that storytelling increased children's reading interest by creating emotional engagement and curiosity. Nugroho and Rekha (2022), using a quasi-experimental approach, reported higher motivation to read English texts among students exposed to storytelling than among those receiving traditional instruction. Yuliana (2023) showed that storytelling improved senior high school students' comprehension of narrative texts and increased their interest in reading written versions of stories used in class.

Other studies highlight the affective and engagement-related benefits of storytelling. Shen (2022) reported that storytelling could reduce reading anxiety and increase willingness to engage with English materials, while Robin (2023) found that digital storytelling strengthened interest and engagement in EFL reading contexts. Sari and Wahyuni (2021) also argued that pleasure-based literacy activities are more likely to support reading culture than conventional textbook-centered instruction.

Although these findings establish a strong basis for using storytelling, the present study differs by focusing specifically on reading habits as an overall construct and by comparing an experimental class with a control class. The study therefore addresses the need for quantitative evidence on whether English storytelling can promote sustained reading-related behavior, motivation, interest, engagement, and pleasure among senior high school EFL learners in the local context of MA Al Urwatul Wutsqaa Benteng.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative quasi-experimental design, specifically a non-equivalent control group design. This design was selected because the school classes had already been formed and random assignment of individual students was not feasible. Campbell and Stanley (1963) identify quasi-experimental designs as appropriate for educational settings in which full randomization cannot be implemented. The experimental group received English storytelling instruction, whereas the control group received conventional reading instruction. Both groups completed a pre-test before instruction and a post-test after the treatment period.

Participants

The study was conducted at MA Al Urwatul Wutsqaa Benteng in Sidenreng Rappang Regency, South Sulawesi, during the 2026/2027 academic year. The sample was

selected through purposive sampling. Thirty eleventh-grade students from two intact classes participated in the research. The experimental class consisted of 15 students (7 male and 8 female), while the control class consisted of 15 students (5 male and 10 female).

Research Instrument

The main instrument was a Reading Habit Questionnaire administered as both the pre-test and post-test. The questionnaire contained 20 statements measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The items represented five dimensions of reading habits: reading frequency, reading motivation, reading interest, reading engagement, and reading pleasure. Total possible scores ranged from 20 to 100, with higher scores indicating stronger reading habits. Content validity was supported by alignment with the theoretical framework and review by an English education expert.

Research Procedure

Data collection began with administration of the Reading Habit Questionnaire to both groups to identify their initial reading habits. The experimental class then received English storytelling treatment, while the control class continued with conventional reading instruction. During storytelling sessions, the teacher introduced the topic, activated prior knowledge, presented key vocabulary, and narrated the story using expressive intonation, facial expressions, gestures, and body movements. Students participated in prediction activities, question-and-answer sessions, discussion, and reflection, and they subsequently read the written version of the story individually or in pairs. The control class used the same type of narrative text through conventional silent reading, reading aloud, teacher explanation, and discussion without the storytelling treatment. After the treatment period, both groups completed the same questionnaire as the post-test.

Data Analysis

Questionnaire responses were summed to obtain total reading habit scores. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores for each group. Before hypothesis testing, the Shapiro-Wilk test was used to examine normality and Levene's test was used to examine homogeneity of variance. A paired sample t-test compared pre-test and post-test scores within each group, while an independent sample t-test compared the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups. Statistical analysis was performed using PSPP with a significance level of 0.05. A p-value below 0.05 was interpreted as statistically significant (Field, 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings showed a clear difference between the experimental and control groups after the instructional period. In the experimental class, all 15 students obtained higher post-test scores than their pre-test scores. Pre-test scores ranged from 62 to 81, while post-test scores ranged from 75 to 92. Students who initially fell within the moderate reading-habit category generally moved into the high or very high categories after participating in English storytelling activities.

The descriptive statistics confirm this improvement. The experimental class obtained a mean pre-test score of 68.73 (SD = 5.99), with scores ranging from 62 to 81. After the treatment, the mean increased to 85.40 (SD = 5.10), with scores ranging from 75 to 92. The increase of 16.67 points indicates a substantial improvement in the overall reading habit scores of students who received English storytelling instruction.

The pattern in the control class was different. The control class obtained a mean pre-test score of 62.80 (SD = 7.00), with a minimum score of 47 and a maximum score of 74. After conventional reading instruction, the post-test mean was 61.80 (SD = 7.15), with scores ranging from 51 to 76. The mean therefore decreased slightly by 1.00 point. Although several individual students improved, the overall pattern did not indicate a meaningful increase in reading habits.

The assumptions for parametric analysis were met. Shapiro-Wilk significance values were above 0.05 for the control pre-test ($p = 0.65$), control post-test ($p = 0.17$), experimental pre-test ($p = 0.17$), and experimental post-test ($p = 0.09$), indicating normally distributed data. Levene's test also indicated homogeneous variances for the pre-test ($p = 0.592$) and post-test ($p = 0.311$). These results supported the use of paired and independent sample t-tests.

The paired sample t-test showed that the experimental class improved significantly. The mean difference between the pre-test and post-test was -16.67, with $t = -11.60$, $df = 14$, and $p = 0.000$. Because the significance value was below 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected for the experimental group. By contrast, the control class produced a mean difference of 1.00, $t = 0.82$, $df = 14$, and $p = 0.426$, indicating no statistically significant difference between its pre-test and post-test scores.

The independent sample t-test provided further evidence of the effectiveness of the treatment. The post-test comparison yielded $t = 10.41$ with $df = 28$ and $p = 0.000$. The mean difference between the experimental and control post-test scores was 23.60 points. Thus, students who received English storytelling achieved significantly higher reading-habit scores than students who received conventional reading instruction.

DISCUSSION

The results demonstrate that English storytelling had a significant positive effect on students' reading habits. The experimental class increased from a mean of 68.73 to 85.40, while the control class showed no significant improvement. The statistically

significant paired and independent sample t-test results reinforce the descriptive pattern and indicate that the improvement was associated with the storytelling treatment rather than with ordinary classroom instruction alone.

The effect can first be interpreted through reading motivation. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) emphasize that motivation is central to the development of reading behavior. During storytelling activities, students encountered narratives through expressive delivery, prediction questions, and discussion before reading the written version. These activities stimulated curiosity about characters and events and gave students a reason to continue interacting with the text. As their interest in the narrative increased, students became more willing to read English materials and participate in reading-related activities.

Slavin's QAIT Model (1995) also helps explain the result. Quality of instruction was reflected in expressive narration, gesture, facial expression, and interactive questioning. The appropriate level of instruction was addressed by selecting stories with vocabulary, themes, and language structures suited to the students' proficiency. Incentive was created mainly through intrinsic interest in the narrative and opportunities to predict, discuss, and retell story content. Time was provided through repeated opportunities to listen, discuss, read, and reflect. The combination of these instructional conditions created a learning environment that supported the growth of reading habits.

Storytelling also created a more approachable entry point into English reading. Students first became familiar with the content through listening and interaction, reducing the difficulty of encountering the written text without preparation. This process is consistent with the affective interpretation described in the thesis through Krashen's perspective: enjoyable and less threatening classroom experiences can increase confidence and willingness to engage with language. When students approached the written story after oral narration, unfamiliar vocabulary and narrative events were easier to contextualize.

The narrative structure itself may have contributed to students' engagement. Bruner (1986, 1990) argues that people construct meaning through stories. Characters, conflicts, sequences of events, and resolutions provide a coherent framework that students can follow before and during reading. In this study, the narrative context made English texts more meaningful than isolated reading exercises. Students were therefore not only asked to process written language but also to understand a sequence of events that had already captured their attention.

Social interaction was another important element. Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist perspective stresses the role of interaction and collaboration in learning. Storytelling sessions included questions, predictions, discussion, opinion sharing, and story retelling. These activities required students to respond to the teacher and to one another, turning reading-related learning into an active process. The interactive environment likely strengthened reading engagement because students had

opportunities to construct meaning collaboratively rather than remaining passive recipients of a text.

The improvement can also be considered across the five dimensions of reading habits measured in the study. First, repeated exposure to oral and written stories encouraged more frequent interaction with English reading materials. Second, interesting narratives and expressive delivery strengthened reading motivation. Third, characters, conflicts, and story endings increased students' interest and curiosity. Fourth, prediction, discussion, and retelling encouraged active engagement with the content. Finally, the enjoyable nature of storytelling supported reading pleasure, helping students experience reading as a meaningful activity rather than only an academic requirement.

These results are consistent with previous empirical studies. Isbell et al. (2020) reported that storytelling can support literacy development by increasing motivation and engagement. Nugroho and Rekha (2022) found that storytelling improved students' motivation to read English texts, and Yuliana (2023) showed positive effects on reading comprehension and classroom participation. The present study extends those findings by demonstrating an improvement in reading habits as an overall construct rather than focusing only on comprehension or a single motivational outcome.

The contrast with the control group is also important. Conventional reading instruction did not produce a statistically significant change, even though students still read and discussed narrative texts. This suggests that access to a text alone may not be sufficient to change reading behavior. The added features of storytelling - emotional involvement, expressive delivery, anticipation, interaction, and transition from listening to written reading - appear to have created a more motivating literacy experience.

Overall, English storytelling functioned as more than an alternative way of presenting a narrative text. It connected oral language, classroom interaction, and written reading in a sequence that encouraged students to understand, discuss, and revisit stories. This integrated experience helps explain why the experimental group developed stronger reading-habit scores. Within the context of MA Al Urwatul Wutsqaa Benteng, English storytelling can therefore be considered an effective instructional strategy for promoting reading habits among senior high school EFL learners.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that English storytelling was effective in promoting students' reading habits at MA Al Urwatul Wutsqaa Benteng. The experimental class mean increased from 68.73 in the pre-test to 85.40 in the post-test, whereas the control class mean decreased slightly from 62.80 to 61.80. The paired sample t-test showed a significant improvement in the experimental class ($p = 0.000$), while the control class showed no significant change ($p = 0.426$). The independent sample t-test also confirmed a significant post-test difference between the two groups ($t = 10.41$, $df = 28$, $p = 0.000$), with a mean difference of 23.60 points.

The findings indicate that storytelling created a more engaging and enjoyable learning

environment that supported reading frequency, motivation, interest, engagement, and reading pleasure. Expressive narration, appropriate story selection, prediction, discussion, retelling, and follow-up reading helped students interact with English texts in a meaningful way. Thus, English storytelling can be used as an alternative instructional strategy for teachers who aim to strengthen reading habits in senior high school EFL classrooms.

English teachers are encouraged to select stories that match students' language proficiency and interests and to integrate oral storytelling with follow-up reading and interactive activities. Schools can support the approach by providing English storybooks, literacy activities, reading clubs, and appropriate library resources. Future research may involve larger samples, different educational levels, or comparisons between traditional and digital storytelling, and may also examine related outcomes such as reading comprehension, vocabulary, speaking, writing, critical thinking, or learning motivation.

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