

TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN INTRODUCING VOCABULARY USING PICTURE BOOKS TO YOUNG EFL LEARNERS

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of *Sarjana
Pendidikan* in English Education



By:

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**ENGLISH EDUCATIONAL DEPARTEMENT
FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL AND TEACHER TRAINING
UNIVERSITAS K.H ABDURRAHMAN WAHID
PEKALONGAN**

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Dengan ini mohon agar skripsi tersebut dimunaqosahkan.

Demikian nota pembimbing ini dibuat untuk digunakan sebagaimana mestinya. Atas perhatiannya, disampaikan terimakasih.

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MOTTO

"Never feel left behind, everyone has their own process and sustenance."

(Q.S. Maryam: 4)



ABSTRAK

Masih terbatas penelitian yang mengeksplorasi pengalaman guru dalam menggunakan buku bergambar untuk memperkenalkan kosakata kepada pembelajar EFL muda di konteks Indonesia. Sebagian penelitian sebelumnya fokus pada efektivitas buku bergambar atau strategi guru, bukan secara khusus pada pengalaman hidup guru. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menginvestigasi pengalaman guru dalam memperkenalkan kosakata bahasa Inggris menggunakan buku bergambar kepada pembelajar EFL muda. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan narrative inquiry, peneliti mengumpulkan data melalui wawancara mendalam dengan dua guru aktif di Sekolah Dasar Islam di Pekalongan, Indonesia. Partisipan dipilih secara purposif berdasarkan pengalaman minimal dua tahun mengajar kosakata bahasa Inggris melalui buku bergambar. Data dianalisis menggunakan siklus pembelajaran eksperiensial mengikuti 4 tahap Kolb: Pengalaman Konkret, Observasi Reflektif, Konseptualisasi Abstrak, dan Eksperimen Aktif, didukung koding tematik. Penelitian dilakukan di kelas EFL kelas 2 SD menggunakan buku bergambar *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa guru memiliki pengalaman dominan positif, termasuk antusiasme visual dari siswa, fleksibilitas dalam mengadaptasi flashcards dan metode storytelling, serta inovasi kreatif yang meningkatkan keterlibatan kosakata. Namun, guru juga menghadapi tantangan, seperti ketidaksesuaian budaya dengan gambar buku bergambar impor (misalnya apple, caterpillar), ketersediaan media terbatas, dan overload kognitif, yang mereka mengatasi melalui adaptasi lokal (misalnya menggunakan mangga menggantikan apple). Temuan ini memberikan wawasan lebih mendalam mengenai bagaimana guru memperkenalkan kosakata melalui buku bergambar kepada pembelajar EFL muda dengan mengungkap strategi reflektif dan adaptif yang mereka terapkan serta turut mengisi kesenjangan dalam literatur terkait pengalaman nyata guru dalam pengajaran EFL yang kontekstual di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Pengalaman Guru, Buku Bergambar, Pembelajar EFL Muda

ABSTRACT

There is limited research exploring teachers' experiences in using picture books for vocabulary introduction with young EFL learners in Indonesian contexts. Most previous studies focused on the effectiveness of picture books or teachers' strategies, not specifically on teachers' lived experiences. This study aimed to investigate teachers' experiences in introducing English vocabulary using picture books to young EFL learners. Using a qualitative approach with narrative inquiry, the researcher collected data through in-depth interviews with two active teachers at an Islamic elementary school in Pekalongan, Indonesia. The participants were purposively selected based on their minimum two years of experience teaching English vocabulary through picture books. The data were analyzed using experiential learning cycles following Kolb's four stages: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation, supported by thematic coding. The study was conducted in Grade 2 EFL classes using *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* picture book. The findings revealed that the teachers had predominantly positive experiences, including visual enthusiasm from students, flexibility in adapting flashcards and storytelling methods, and creative innovations that enhanced vocabulary engagement. However, the teachers also faced challenges, such as cultural mismatch with imported picture book images (e.g., apple, caterpillar), limited media availability, and cognitive overload, which they addressed through local adaptations (e.g., using mango instead of apple). These findings provide deeper insight into how the teachers introduce vocabulary through picture books to young EFL learners, revealing the reflective and adaptive strategies they employed, and contribute to filling the gap in the literature concerning the teachers' lived experiences within contextual EFL teaching in Indonesia.

Keywords: Teachers' Experiences, Picture Books, Young EFL Learners

PREFACE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental aspect of learning a foreign language, especially for young learners studying English and other foreign languages (Kuziyev, 2021). It forms the building blocks of communication, enabling learners to express ideas, comprehend texts, and engage in meaningful interactions. However, in many primary schools across Indonesia, students still face difficulties in acquiring new vocabulary effectively (Sudarman et al., 2022). This challenge is often linked to the teaching methods and learning media used, which tend to be traditional and less engaging. Consequently, students may lack motivation and struggle to retain new words, affecting their overall language proficiency (Jannah et al., 2023).

One promising medium for vocabulary teaching is the use of picture books, which integrate visual and textual elements to support language learning. Picture books provide contextual clues through illustrations, making it easier for young learners to understand and remember new vocabulary. According to Dabbous and Sjödin (2023), interaction with picture books in EFL classrooms significantly facilitates vocabulary acquisition, especially when teacher-led activities accompany the reading process. This approach helps clarify word meanings and encourages active student participation (Kastendick, 2024).

Research by Slashinsky (2022) highlights that picture books are effective tools for both implicit and explicit vocabulary teaching. Unlike traditional memorization, picture books present words in meaningful contexts, enhancing comprehension and application. This dual approach supports literacy development and critical thinking, which are essential for young learners' language growth. However, despite these advantages, many teachers lack sufficient training to maximize the potential of picture books in vocabulary instruction (Sun, 2022).

Recent research conducted in Sweden by Dabbous and Sjödin (2023) found that teacher-led interactions with picture books yielded higher vocabulary acquisition gains compared to pupil-led activities. The study suggests that teacher scaffolding during read-aloud sessions, including stopping to explain new words and encouraging student participation, is essential for effective vocabulary learning (Baker et al., 2020). These findings underscore the importance of adapting teaching methods to the unique needs of young EFL learners, who thrive on multisensory and engaging activities in non-native language environments (Ramirez, 2024).

The educational context in Indonesia, characterized by large class sizes and limited instructional time, further complicates the effective use of picture books in teaching English to young EFL learners (Yan, 2023). Teachers often struggle to balance curriculum demands with the need for engaging, student-centered activities. Consequently, picture books may be underutilized or used superficially, reducing their potential impact on vocabulary development.

Tailoring English instruction to young EFL learners in this setting requires culturally sensitive, interactive approaches that account for diverse proficiency levels and limited exposure to the target language (Mislina, 2023).

Despite the proven benefits, many teachers in Indonesia report a lack of training and resources to effectively use picture books in vocabulary instruction (Sumartini, 2023). This gap limits their ability to implement interactive and scaffolded reading sessions that maximize student engagement and learning outcomes. Additionally, the diversity of student backgrounds and language proficiency levels requires differentiated instructional approaches, which many teachers feel unprepared to deliver (Huck, 2024).

Teachers play a pivotal role in facilitating vocabulary learning, yet many still rely on rote memorization and repetitive drills that do not contextualize new words (Arslan, 2024). Such methods are less effective for young learners who benefit more from interactive and meaningful learning experiences. Research indicates that engaging teaching strategies combined with appropriate media can significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition (Permana, 2020). Therefore, there is a pressing need for teachers to adopt innovative approaches that stimulate students' interest and aid retention. Effective vocabulary instruction not only improves word knowledge but also supports broader language skills, such as reading comprehension and oral fluency (Cervetti et al., 2023).

The pedagogical strategies employed by teachers in using picture books vary widely, particularly in the context of teaching English to young EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. Some studies, such as those by Wasik, Bond, and Hindman (2006), emphasize the effectiveness of teacher-led read-aloud sessions combined with interactive discussions to scaffold vocabulary learning. These strategies help students infer meanings and use prior knowledge, which enhances retention. Conversely, pupil-led interactions, while promoting autonomy, may not provide sufficient guidance for vocabulary acquisition in young learners, who often require structured support due to their developmental stage (Hidayatullah et al., 2025).

From these studies, it is evident that research in Indonesia has concentrated more on students' learning outcomes rather than on teachers' experiences in using picture books (Wardini et al., 2021). This represents a significant research gap because understanding teachers' perspectives and strategies is crucial for developing effective professional development programs and instructional materials. Exploring teachers' experiences can reveal practical insights to improve vocabulary teaching practices, such as challenges in classroom implementation, successes in student motivation, and barriers related to resource access (Handiq et al., 2023).

This research needs to be conducted because vocabulary acquisition is a critical determinant of language proficiency and academic success. Effective vocabulary teaching methods can enhance students' communicative competence and confidence (Ameeruddin, 2025). Picture books, when used

appropriately, offer a powerful tool to support these outcomes, especially for young learners who require engaging and meaningful learning experiences. By delving into teachers' experiences, the study highlights real-world applications and adaptations in EFL contexts (Achieng, 2023).

In Indonesia, the availability and quality of picture books suitable for young learners remain limited, especially in rural and under-resourced schools. Many existing books are imported and culturally distant from students' experiences, which can hinder comprehension and engagement (Darmawan & Santosa, 2022). This contextual mismatch highlights the need for locally relevant picture books that reflect students' cultural backgrounds while supporting language acquisition. Addressing this gap is crucial for equitable and effective language education (Ma, 2023).

In conclusion, this research is timely and relevant, addressing critical gaps in the literature and practice of vocabulary instruction in Indonesia. By focusing on teachers' experiences with picture books, it contributes to a more holistic understanding of effective language teaching strategies for young learners (Sun, 2022). Ultimately, the study aims to support the improvement of English and foreign language education in Indonesia by providing evidence-based recommendations for teacher training, curriculum development, and resource provision. This will help ensure that young learners receive high-quality, engaging, and culturally relevant vocabulary instruction (Agazzi, 2022).

1.2 Formulation of Problems

Based on the background of the study, the writer formulated the problem as follows: How are teachers experiences in introducing English vocabulary using picture books to young EFL learners?

1.3 Operational Definitions

1. Vocabulary: Vocabulary is defined as the body of words known to an individual, encompassing both the receptive understanding and productive use of word forms, meanings, and contexts in language communication (Nation, 2021).
2. Picture Books: Picture books are multimodal texts in which visual images and written text interact synergistically to create meaning, requiring the reader to navigate both semiotic systems simultaneously (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2013).
3. Young EFL Learners: Young EFL learners are children, typically between the ages of six and twelve, who are acquiring English as a foreign language in formal educational settings characterized by specific cognitive and linguistic developmental stages (Pinter, 2017).
4. Teachers' Experiences: Teachers' experiences refer to the cumulative professional knowledge, practical reflections, and pedagogical actions that educators construct and continuously reshape through their active, ongoing engagement in classroom practice (Farrell, 2015).

1.4 Aims of the Study

Based on the problems described, this study aims to explore teachers' experiences in introducing English vocabulary using picture books to young EFL learners.

1.5 Significance of Study

1. Theoretical use: This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of how Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory applies to EFL teachers' use of picture books in young learners' English vocabulary instruction in the Indonesian context.
2. Empirical use: This study provides empirical data on teachers' experiences, strategies, and challenges in applying picture books for English vocabulary teaching to young EFL learners, particularly regarding the cultural mismatch of imported picture book content in the Indonesian Islamic primary school context.
3. Practical use: The findings offer useful guidance for teachers in improving English vocabulary instruction using picture books, for curriculum designers in developing culturally relevant teaching materials for young EFL learners, and for school administrators in designing professional development programs that support reflective and creative teaching practices.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of the Findings

This study concludes that the experiences of both EFL teachers in introducing English vocabulary to young learners through picture books as theorized by Kolb (1984). At the Concrete Experience stage, both teachers demonstrated that structured, three-stage instructional procedures encompassing visual introduction, kinesthetic reinforcement through TPR and contextual application effectively scaffold young learners' progression from receptive to productive vocabulary knowledge. At the Reflective Observation stage, critical self-evaluation revealed that picture-book-based instruction significantly reduced learners' affective filter, transformed passive learners into confident and spontaneous language users, and produced superior long-term vocabulary retention attributable to the dual encoding of verbal and visual information.

At the Abstract Conceptualization stage, both teachers independently formulated scientifically coherent pedagogical principles grounded developmental theory, sociocultural framework, and the shared "image before word" principle thereby extending concept of pedagogical content knowledge into the Indonesian early childhood EFL context. Finally, at the Active Experimentation stage, the integration of realia, game-based activities, and comparative reading approaches confirmed that the pedagogical effectiveness

of picture books is not an inherent property of the medium itself, but is contingent upon the teacher's instructional creativity and adaptive responsiveness, and that picture books, when employed through principled and reflective instructional practices, constitute a powerful and contextually appropriate medium for English vocabulary instruction in young EFL learners. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of EFL vocabulary teaching by bringing teachers' lived experiences to the foreground, offering practical insights that can guide professional development programs, curriculum design, and the selection of culturally relevant picture books for young EFL learners in Indonesian primary school contexts.

5.2 Recommendations

In this section, the researcher wants to provide several recommendations: For EFL teachers are advised to implement a structured three-stage approach when using picture books with young learners starting with visual introduction, followed by interactive reinforcement, and concluding with contextual application. The use of real objects and simple games can help learners connect English vocabulary to their daily experiences. For curriculum designers and school administrators, these findings underscore the importance of providing ongoing opportunities for teacher reflection and professional development, given that the quality of vocabulary instruction relies heavily on how teachers utilize picture books. For future researchers, this study opens avenues to examine how picture book-based vocabulary instruction affects learners' long-term retention and to expand the scope of research to include more diverse school settings across Indonesia.

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