

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Teaching English to Young Learners (EYL) plays a significant role in early language acquisition, particularly in response to the increasing global use of English. Young learners possess natural language acquisition abilities; however, they also tend to have short attention spans and require engaging, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate activities to sustain their motivation and participation in learning (Wulandari et al., 2020). Therefore, teachers of young learners should employ interactive and supportive approaches that align with their cognitive, emotional, and social characteristics.

One teaching method that has been widely recognized as effective in EYL classrooms is storytelling. Storytelling enables students to experience language in meaningful and enjoyable contexts, supporting the development of listening, speaking, reading, and vocabulary skills simultaneously (Febrianti, 2024). Through storytelling, students are provided with a secure and interactive environment that enhances language learning and engagement (Izzah & Mutiarani, 2015). In addition, storytelling contributes to students' knowledge development by supporting informal and natural learning processes that extend beyond direct instructions (Soleymani et al., 2017).

Storytelling in the classrooms can take various forms, ranging from oral traditions to text-based practices. In academic research, reading aloud is often considered an integral part of storytelling rather than a separate activity, as many studies use the term "storytelling" as a broad concept that includes reading from written texts (Lucarevski, 2016). Beyond merely decoding written words, reading aloud functions as a shared meaning-making process in which the reader uses their voice to bring the story to life, reinforcing its emotional and social dimensions through collective experience (Amatori & Corsi, 2025). Particularly in preschool contexts, teachers play a crucial role in mediating the text and creating a shared narrative experience, allowing students to explore worlds beyond their immediate reality while shaping the tempo and atmosphere of the story (Nambiar & Gade,

2021). Therefore, reading aloud can be considered an important developmental tool within the broader framework of storytelling, especially for young learners. Bence & Ramzy (2026) note that this interactive approach to read aloud, often referred to as dialogic reading involves the teacher asking open-ended questions without expecting predetermined answers, listening to students' diverse perspectives, and engaging in in-depth discussions based on students' ideas. In these extended discussions, teachers explore students' thinking through follow-up questions, asking them to explain, clarify, or connect their thoughts, before integrating some of the students' ideas or developing further questions from their responses. In addition to questions, several practical strategies are also suggested to enhance the read-aloud activities, including wait time after asking a question so students have time to think, asking students to discuss with a peer before sharing with the whole class, reading the book twice in separate sessions for deeper exploration, and focusing discussion opportunities on the text and illustrations to help students make meaningful connections.

Despite its advantages, storytelling in EYL also presents several challenges that need to be addressed. One of the most frequently reported challenges is young learners' short attention span and their tendency to lose interest in lengthy activities (Doan & Quyen, 2022). In addition, teachers—especially novice teachers—may experience a lack of confidence in delivering stories effectively. Limited expressiveness in voice modulation and facial gestures, inadequate preparation time, and reduced instructional hours, and students' low English proficiency can complicate the implementation of storytelling and hinder comprehension (Choo et al., 2018).

Another significant challenge concerns the limited availability of age-appropriate and proficiency-appropriate English storybooks. Teachers often struggle to access suitable materials and may be required to design their own resources due to the lack of ready-made picture books or graded readers. Existing materials are sometimes perceived as too simple, fragmented, or lacking variation, which restricts creativity and holistic language learning (Nilsson, 2024).

Furthermore, vocabulary gaps and comprehension difficulties frequently emerge during storytelling activities. Limited vocabulary knowledge and

insufficient background knowledge may hinder students' ability to understand and actively participate in storytelling sessions. In interactive reading environments, some learners may require additional scaffolding or targeted support to overcome these challenges (Alsutan, 2024).

One possible solution to these challenges is the integration of storytelling with digital media and interactive approaches to enhance student engagement and learning effectiveness. The use of visual media, such as animations and interactive videos, has been shown to improve comprehension and memory retention (Girmen et al., 2019). According to Amin et al. (2024), interactive storytelling particularly through the use of Big Books, has also demonstrated its effectiveness in young learner settings by fostering active participation and meaningful language exposure. Furthermore, Aisha & Kaloeti (2020) argue that digital storytelling, which combines narrative, drama, music, and visual elements, has proven more effective in promoting positive social behavior compared to traditional storytelling methods.

In addition to technological integration, effective storytelling in EYL requires pedagogical strategies that sustain students' attention and support comprehension. Teachers are encouraged to employ creative teacher talk, including expressive voice modulation, rhythm variation, gestures, facial expressions, and sustained eye contact to maintain students' engagement. The use of questioning techniques, repetition, and age-appropriate vocabulary further strengthens understanding and interaction. Audio-visual aids such as pictures, puppets, and sound effects can also enrich storytelling sessions and enhance students' involvement (Kabesh, 2023).

Moreover, scaffolding plays a crucial role in read-aloud practices. Teachers can provide analytical and open-ended questions to deepen comprehension, gradually reduce support as students gain confidence, and encourage connections between the text and students' personal experiences, other texts, and real-world contexts (Agnello & Yengle, 2015). Through these strategies, storytelling can become a more inclusive, engaging and developmentally appropriate practice in EYL classrooms.

Young learners possess distinctive characteristics that influence how they

acquire a foreign language. They tend to have short attention spans, high curiosity, and a strong need for teacher guidance and meaningful engagement (Martin et al., 2020). Due to these characteristics, instructional approaches for young learners must be interactive, contextualized, and emotionally engaging. Storytelling aligns closely with these developmental traits, as it provides meaningful contexts, stimulates imagination, and fosters active participation in the learning process. A growing body of research highlights storytelling as an effective pedagogical approach in early language education. Storytelling enables children to construct meaning actively while engaging with narrative context that support vocabulary and language development (Izzah & Mutiarani, 2015). Similarly, Leong et al. (2019) explain that stories facilitate indirect vocabulary acquisition by embedding new words in meaningful and memorable situations, allowing learners to recall and apply them in real life. Ghafar (2024) further argues that storytelling makes language learning more contextualized and motivating, encouraging children to speak, read, and respond to stories more confidently. In line with this, Krishnan & Shah (2020) note that storytelling not only enhances participation and interest but also supports creativity, imagination, and overall language development. Collectively, these studies suggest that storytelling is a developmentally appropriate and effective method for fostering language acquisition among young learners.

Several types of storytelling can be applied in teaching English for Young Learners (EYL), ranging from traditional to digital approaches. Pujiani et al. (2022) highlight the potential of digital storytelling, particularly through e-storybooks, which integrate animations, read-aloud features, and interactive elements to enhance engagement and provide multimodal learning experiences. These features allow young learners to interact actively with the text, enriching both comprehension and motivation. In contrast, traditional storytelling remains widely practiced in EYL classrooms. Bartan (2020) notes that teachers may employ printed storybooks, flannel board materials, puppets, or purely oral storytelling without additional media. Such approaches enable teachers to adjust stories according to students' developmental levels, interest, and learning needs. Centeno et al. (2021) emphasize regardless of the format, effective storytelling requires careful selection of stories that are developmentally appropriate. That stories for young learners should be concise, contain a limited number of characters, and use vocabulary

suitable for students' English proficiency levels. Collectively, these approaches demonstrate that storytelling in EYL can be implemented through various modalities, provided that the content and delivery align with students' developmental characteristics.

As cited in Amin et al. (2024), Vygotsky's Social Development Theory highlights the importance of social interaction in children's cognitive growth. According to Vygotsky, children learn through interaction with more knowledgeable others, such as teachers and peers. In context, storytelling functions as a social and interactive learning activity that engages children cognitively and emotionally. Through storytelling, learners are exposed to language, emotions, and problem-solving situations in meaningful contexts, which strengthens their understanding and supports language development (Amin et al., 2024). Therefore, storytelling aligns with the view that learning occurs through guided interaction and scaffolding within social environments.

Previous research on storytelling in EYL has been conducted in various educational contexts using different methodological approaches. For example, Otoluwa et al. (2022) examined the implementations of storytelling in an Indonesian preschool setting involving one English teacher and seven students aged 4-5 years. Using observation, interviews, and documentation, the study found that storytelling effectively supported vocabulary development through visuals, gestures, and verbal interactions. However, the study also identified practical challenges, including limited teaching materials and differences in students' learning pace. While the research highlighted the benefits of storytelling and suggested integrating digital storytelling and teacher training as potential solutions, it primarily focused on vocabulary improvement rather than providing a comprehensive exploration of the broader classroom challenges and instructional strategies.

Similarly, Surya and Aprilia (2024) investigated the comparative effectiveness of traditional and digital storytelling in enhancing vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and storytelling skills among students aged 4-6 years. Employing a mixed-method approach through pre- and post-test, interviews, focus group discussions across three Indonesian preschools, the study revealed that both

storytelling modes significantly supported students' English development. In addition to linguistic gains, the findings highlighted improvements in critical thinking, imagination, empathy, and social understanding. However, the study mainly emphasized learning outcomes and pedagogical integration rather than examining in depth the practical difficulties teachers encounter during implementation.

In Vietnam, Hoa & Minh, (2022) conducted a survey involving 228 kindergarten teachers from both urban and rural areas to examine perceptions of digital storytelling in early childhood education. The findings indicated that teachers believed digital storytelling enhanced student creativity and engagement. Nevertheless, significant constraints were reported, including limited access to technology and insufficient professional development opportunities. Likewise, Maureen et al. (2018) found that while storytelling contributed to students' cognitive and socio-emotional literacy development in Indonesia, inadequate teacher training remained a persistent challenge. Although the studies acknowledge institutional and professional constraints, they provide limited qualitative insight into how teachers navigate everyday classroom challenges and what specific strategies they employ to manage storytelling practices effectively.

Storytelling has been widely recognized as an effective approach in second language learning for young learners. Pennington (2009) argues that storytelling creates meaningful interactions and supports students' cognitive and emotional development. Both traditional storytelling, such as expressive reading aloud (Bartan, 2020), and digital storytelling (Kallinikou & Nicolaidou, 2019) have been shown to improve students' listening, speaking, and vocabulary development (Otoluwa et al., 2022).

Although many previous studies have examined the effectiveness of storytelling and its benefits for language development, limited research has explored in depth how teachers plan storytelling activities and address the practical challenges encountered in real classroom contexts. Most studies focus on learning outcomes rather than on teachers' strategies and adaptive practices in early childhood EYL settings (Choo et al., 2018; Warmansyah & Nirwana, 2023). Therefore, further investigation is needed to understand the challenges teachers face

and the strategies they employ to implement storytelling effectively.

1.2 Research Problems

Based on the background, previous studies, and the identified research gaps, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What challenges do teachers face when implementing storytelling in the EYL classroom?
2. What strategies do teachers use to overcome challenges in using storytelling during teaching EYL?

1.3 Research Objectives

This study aims to identify the challenges faced by teachers in implementing storytelling activities in EYL classrooms and to examine the strategies they use to overcome these challenges. By highlighting teachers' experiences and classroom practices, this study seeks to provide deeper insight into how storytelling activities are planned and implemented in real educational settings.

1.1 Research Significance

Conceptually, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on storytelling in young learners by shifting the focus from learning outcomes to the challenges teachers encounter and the strategic approaches they adopt. It broadens the discussion on storytelling implementation by offering insights into classroom realities that have received limited attention in previous research.

Practically, this study assists teachers by documenting the real challenges they face and the specific adaptive strategies they employ in EYL storytelling contexts. These insights provide practical guidance for developing more structured and responsive storytelling practices tailored to students' proficiency levels and learning characteristics.

In the following section, the methodology used to achieve these research objectives will be discussed.