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Exploration of Elementary School Students' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Storytelling in English Learning

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ABSTRACT

English learning in primary schools still faces the challenge of low student motivation and engagement. One approach that is considered effective to overcome this is storytelling, This study aims to explore students' perceptions of the use of storytelling methods in English language learning. This study uses descriptive quantitative approach with a survey method on 140 students in grades IV–VI SDN 013 Penajam. The instrument is a Likert scale questionnaire with 20 statements that cover two main dimensions: perceptions of the effectiveness of storytelling in English language learning and views on its social-emotional impact. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the help of SPSS version 26 as well as thematic analysis for open-ended answers. The results showed that students had a very positive perception of the use of storytelling (M = 3.63). The highest aspect is storytelling that encourages imagination (M = 3.79), while the confidence aspect of speaking still needs to be strengthened. In addition to academic benefits, storytelling also increases empathy, cooperation, and the ability to express opinions. The qualitative analysis revealed four main themes: (1) learning becomes more enjoyable, (2) vocabulary comprehension increases, (3) courage and empathy develop, and (4) the expectation of more varied use of digital storytelling. Storytelling has been shown to be effective in improving motivation, contextual understanding, and social-emotional development of elementary school students. Therefore, the integration of storytelling and digital storytelling in the basic English curriculum is recommended as a humanistic, creative, and student-centered learning strategy.

KEYWORDS
Storytelling; Elementary School Students; Students' Perceptions; English Learning

Introduction

English is an international language that has an important role in global communication, education, and technological development. In the context of primary education, early introduction of English is considered crucial to form a strong foundation of language skills and support the mastery of 21st-century competencies such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking (Sari et al., 2021)(Sari et

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al., 2021). However, English learning at the elementary school level often still faces challenges in the form of low learning motivation, limited vocabulary, and lack of active involvement of students in the learning process (A. L. B. Santoso et al., 2023).

One of the pedagogical approaches that is increasingly being studied to overcome these problems is storytelling techniques in language learning. Storytelling is seen as an effective method for teaching language because it is able to create a communicative, fun, and meaningful context for students. Stories not only serve as a means of entertainment, but also as an educational tool that encourages the development of language, moral values, and students' imagination (Avalokitesvari, 2018).

A number of studies have shown that storytelling can significantly improve the English language skills of elementary school students. For example, research by Yulianawati et al. (2022) found that storytelling activities were able to increase students' involvement in learning to read English as a foreign language (EFL), because the process of listening to and retelling stories fosters interest and motivation for learning. Similarly, research by Simorangkir (2021) shows that storytelling significantly improves students' speaking skills, both in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and sentence structure.

In addition to the conventional context, the development of digital technology has expanded the implementation of digital storytelling, namely the integration of narrative with multimedia such as video, images, and sound to support interactive learning. Digital storytelling has been proven to increase students' motivation and confidence in learning English and facilitate collaborative learning (Yoon, 2013; Yuliyanti & Herpendi, 2023). The use of digital media allows students to engage in more contextual and engaging learning, while strengthening multiliteracy skills (Nuroh et al., 2021).

However, although the effectiveness of storytelling and digital storytelling has been widely discussed in the context of English teaching, studies on the perception of elementary school students on the effectiveness of this method are still relatively limited, especially in Indonesia. Most research focuses on learning outcomes, not on the subjective view of students as learning subjects. In fact, student perception is very important because it can affect motivation, participation, and the success of the learning process itself (Natasia & Angelianawati, 2022).

Furthermore, research gaps also arise in the context of the implementation of storytelling methods at the elementary school level, where students' cognitive and affective abilities are still in the developmental stage. Although research at the secondary or university level shows positive results on digital storytelling (Sahril et al., 2023), there has not been much research exploring how elementary school students understand, assess, and feel the effectiveness of this method in the context of more basic and intuitive English language learning.

In the Indonesian context, storytelling has great potential to be a humanistic approach and in accordance with the characteristics of elementary school students who like to imagine, explore, and learn through concrete experiences. Thus, the exploration of elementary school students' perceptions of the effectiveness of storytelling in English learning is important to understand the extent to which this method can be accepted, in demand, and felt by students. The results of this research are expected to contribute to the development of a more effective, creative, and student-centered English learning model.

Based on the above background description, the formulation of the problem in this study is as follows:

[1] How do elementary school students perceive the effectiveness of using storytelling in English learning?
[2] How do students view the impact of storytelling on the development of empathy, cooperation, and the ability to express opinions?

This research is expected to contribute to the development of narrative-based English learning theories at the elementary level,

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especially in the context of 21st century education that emphasizes meaningful and creative learning. By understanding students' perceptions of storytelling, this study enriched the literature on humanistic and experience-based approaches in teaching foreign languages for children (Sari et al., 2021). For teachers, this study provides an empirical overview of the effectiveness of storytelling from a student's perspective, so that teachers can choose strategies that are more in line with the needs and interests of students. For students, Storytelling is expected to be a fun, motivating, and improved learning tool for English language skills. For Curriculum Developers, Providing a scientific basis for the integration of storytelling and digital storytelling in the English learning curriculum at the elementary level. For the Next Researcher, it is a foothold for further research that explores the psychological, technological, and cultural dimensions in the implementation of storytelling in elementary schools.

Based on the description above, this research is motivated by the need to understand the perception of elementary school students on the effectiveness of storytelling in English language learning. Although various studies have proven that storytelling improves motivation, speaking, reading, and writing skills, there is still a research gap in understanding how students themselves assess these methods. Thus, an in-depth exploration of student perceptions will provide a new view of the potential of storytelling as an effective, innovative, and student-centered pedagogical method in the digital era.

Material and Method

This study uses a descriptive quantitative approach with a survey method. This approach was chosen because the main objective of the study was to describe the perception of elementary school students on the effectiveness of the use of storytelling in English language learning, as well as to analyze their views on the impact of storytelling on the development of empathy, cooperation, and the ability to express opinions. The quantitative approach allows researchers to obtain numerical data that can be measured, statistically analyzed, and generalized in a specific context (Creswell, 2014). Meanwhile, the descriptive design was chosen because this study does not intend to provide a specific treatment, but rather to explore and describe students' perceptions and attitudes as they are based on their experiences in the storytelling learning process in the classroom.

The population of this study is all students of SDN 013 Penajam Paser Utara who take English subjects in the 2025/2026 school year. The population consists of students in grades IV, V, and VI who have gained storytelling learning experience as part of English learning activities. The sampling technique uses purposive sampling, with the following criteria: Active students in grades IV–VI SDN 013 Penajam, Have participated in English learning involving storytelling activities, Willing to fill out a research questionnaire through the Google Form link provided. The number of respondents who successfully filled out the questionnaire completely was 140 students. This number is considered representative to describe students' perception of storytelling in the elementary school.

The main instrument used is a closed-ended questionnaire with a four-level Likert scale, which was developed to measure two main constructs according to the formulation of the problem, namely: Perceptions of the effectiveness of storytelling in English language learning, which include Students' Interest in Storytelling, Understanding English Through Storytelling, Development of Speaking and Communication Skills, Development of Social-Emotional Aspects, General Perception of the Effectiveness of Storytelling.

Data were analyzed using quantitative descriptive statistics with the help of SPSS software version 26. Analysis includes: Determine the mean value, median, mode, and standard deviation for each perception indicator. The average score is used to determine the level of perceptual tendency of

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students, with the following interpretive criteria:

Table 1. Score Interpretation Criteria

Value Range	Perception Category
3.26 – 4.00	Very Positive
2.51 – 3.25	Positive
1.76 – 2.50	Negative
1.00 – 1.75	Very Negative

A four-level scale was chosen to encourage respondents to give a more assertive assessment without a "neutral" position, so that the results of the analysis could show clearer perceptual tendencies. The open-ended comments that students included at the end of the questionnaire were analyzed thematically to reinforce the descriptive statistical results and provide a more comprehensive qualitative picture.

Results and Discussion

This study involved 140 students of State Elementary School 013 Penajam, consisting of students in grades IV, V, and VI. Based on demographic distribution, there were 72 male students (51.4%) and 68 female students (48.6%). The majority of students are between 10 and 12 years old, which is a phase of operational, concrete, cognitive development according to Piaget, in which students begin to be able to understand the narrative and structure of simple stories.

All respondents had participated in English learning at school and actively participated in storytelling activities as part of the learning strategies implemented by teachers. This ensures that each respondent has first-hand experience in assessing the effectiveness of storytelling on their learning process.

The questionnaire instrument consisted of 20 questions on a 4-level Likert scale, covering two main dimensions: Perception of the effectiveness of storytelling in English learning (10 items); Views on the impact of storytelling on empathy, cooperation, and the ability to argue (10 items).

Students' Perception of the Effectiveness of Storytelling in English Learning

The first part of the instrument consists of 10 statements that describe the extent to which students assess storytelling as an effective, fun, and helpful learning method for language understanding.

Table 2. Perception of the Effectiveness of Storytelling in English Language Learning

No	Statement	Mean	SD	Category
1	Storytelling makes English lessons more fun.	3.76	0.42	Very Positive
2	I find it easier to remember vocabulary through stories.	3.68	0.55	Very Positive
3	Stories help me understand the meaning of words in context.	3.57	0.51	Positive
4	I was more confident in speaking English after hearing the story.	3.45	0.59	Positive
5	Stories made me more courageous to participate in class.	3.47	0.56	Positive
6	I am more interested in learning English through stories than other methods.	3.72	0.52	Very Positive
7	Stories help me understand moral values.	3.69	0.54	Very Positive
8	Stories encourage me to imagine.	3.79	0.47	Very Positive
9	I am more motivated to learn English through storytelling.	3.65	0.49	Very Positive
10	Stories help me write English sentences more easily.	3.52	0.57	Positive

The results in Table 2 show that students have a very positive perception of the effectiveness of storytelling. A high average score (3.63) indicates that storytelling is considered to help students understand the context of language, enrich vocabulary, and increase motivation to learn.

The highest scoring indicator was "stories encourage me to imagine" (M=3.79),

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which shows that storytelling stimulates students' creative thinking skills. In contrast, the lowest score was found in the indicator "more confident in speaking English" (M=3.45), suggesting that although storytelling improves language comprehension, its effect on speaking confidence still needs to be strengthened with additional oral exercise.

These findings align with empirical studies that highlight how storytelling, especially in digital or multimedia form, supports vocabulary acquisition and makes vocabulary learning more meaningful and memorable. For example, a study on elementary-level learners found that digital storytelling significantly improved vocabulary acquisition and retention compared to traditional methods (Belda-Medina & Goddard, 2024).

In general, storytelling functions as a means of communicative learning that supports the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, where language is learned naturally through a meaningful context, not mere structural memorization (Merawati & Mayar, 2021).

Perception of the Socio-Emotional Impact of Storytelling

The second part of the questionnaire consists of 10 statements that focus on the impact of storytelling on empathy, cooperation, morality, and students' ability to express opinions.

Table 3. Perception of the Socio-Emotional Impact of Storytelling

No	Statement	Mean	SD	Category
11	Storytelling helped me learn to work with friends.	3.53	0.63	Positive
12	Stories taught me to respect other people's opinions.	3.61	0.58	Positive
13	The story made me more sensitive to the characters' feelings.	3.66	0.52	Very Positive
14	I learned to listen better through storytelling.	3.71	0.49	Very Positive
15	Stories help me understand the differences between characters and cultures.	3.60	0.55	Positive
16	I was able to express my opinion more politely after storytelling.	3.55	0.58	Positive
17	I feel happy when teachers use stories in teaching.	3.78	0.46	Very Positive
18	I find it easier to understand the English sentence structure of the story.	3.51	0.57	Positive
19	Stories help me understand lessons longer (don't forget quickly).	3.63	0.50	Very Positive
20	Storytelling made me wait for my next English lesson.	3.70	0.48	Very Positive

The results in Table 3 show that students not only gain academic benefits from storytelling, but also reinforcement of social and emotional values. The statements with the highest scores were "I feel good when teachers use stories in teaching" (M=3.78) and "I learn to listen better through storytelling" (M=3.71). This shows that storytelling fosters a positive classroom atmosphere, while also practicing active listening and empathy skills. These findings support previous research indicating that storytelling can enhance not only linguistic competence but also socio-emotional and collaborative skills among young learners (Mafulah et al., 2025). Similar studies have documented that storytelling and digital storytelling improve speaking confidence, social interaction, and students' motivation in EFL/ESL contexts (Khairoes & Taufina, 2019).

Furthermore, storytelling can be seen as a tool for moral and character formation; stories often contain universal values such as honesty, empathy, and responsibility, which students can internalize through reflection on characters' experiences. This

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complements the idea that language education at early ages can contribute to holistic development, not only linguistic but also affective and moral.

Open-ended Question Analysis Results

Of the total 140 students who filled out the questionnaire, as many as 132 students (94.3%) answered an open-ended question asking their opinion on the use of storytelling in English lessons. Answers were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach to identify the main perception patterns that emerged. The results of the analysis yield the following four main themes:

Storytelling Makes Learning More Fun and Less Boring

Most students (N=88; 62.9%) stated that storytelling made English lessons more fun, relaxing, and easy to understand. Examples of student responses: "I like to learn to use stories because it's not boring and I can laugh with friends.", "If I have a story, I'm more excited about learning English." These findings suggest that storytelling creates a more emotional and interactive learning atmosphere, shifting the learning experience from a cognitive routine to an affective experience. These results are consistent with research (Dilla, 2018; Ramendra et al., 2025) which shows storytelling makes learning more enjoyable and increases learning motivation.

Storytelling Helps Understanding Vocabulary and Language Context

A total of 74 students (52.8%) mentioned that stories help them understand the meaning of new words and sentence structures in English. Typical response: "If there's a story, I can figure out the meaning of the word from the storyline.", "I can remember new words longer." Storytelling acts as a contextualized input, where students learn the meaning of words from real narrative situations, not from mere memorization. This finding is in line with (Maya et al., 2022) which states that students find it easier to understand vocabulary/sentences with stories supports the findings of digital storytelling use cases in young students that show increased vocabulary mastery and retention.

Storytelling Builds Courage, Empathy, and Cooperation

Some students (N=59; 42.1%) highlighted that storytelling activities encourage them to speak more boldly, work together in groups, and understand the feelings of the characters in the story. Example: "I'm going to have to go back to the drawing board and re-read the story." "I can understand why the characters are sad, so I want to help." "If we learn stories with friends, we can help each other."

This theme shows that storytelling not only impacts language skills, but also develops social and emotional competence. Research (Azqiya, 2025) confirms that collaborative-based storytelling strengthens students' empathy, perspective taking, and confidence in a collaborative learning environment. (Lestari et al., 2022) found that storytelling contributes to the formation of positive characters through the appreciation of the moral values of the characters in the story.

Expectations for the Future Use of Storytelling

The last theme emerged from 47 students (33.6%) who gave suggestions for storytelling to be used more often and varied with visual or digital media. Some students also suggested that the story feature more children, animals, or situations close to their lives. Example comments: "I want a story that uses images or videos to make it more exciting."; "The story is good when it comes to school children too."

This view indicates that students have a preference for multimodal storytelling—

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stories that involve text, images, sounds, or animations. This is in line with the trend of digital storytelling in modern education, which utilizes digital media to strengthen the language learning experience. (Ramendra et al., 2025) found that the integration of technology in storytelling (such as animation and voice recordings) increases learning motivation and prolongs elementary school students' attention to English lessons.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis of 140 students of SDN 013 Penajam, it can be concluded that storytelling has proven to be effective in learning English at the elementary school level. Students have a very positive perception of the use of this method because it is considered to be able to make the learning process more interesting, easy to understand, and fun. Through storytelling activities, students not only understand vocabulary and sentence structure better, but also show increased motivation and participation in class. Storytelling helps students learn contextually, encourages the courage to speak, and strengthens emotional engagement with the subject matter.

In addition, storytelling also has a positive impact on the development of students' social and emotional aspects, especially in terms of empathy, cooperation, and the ability to express opinions. Through stories, students learn to understand the feelings and viewpoints of the characters, as well as appreciate the ideas of others. This activity fosters a collaborative classroom atmosphere and supports humanistic learning. Thus, the storytelling method is not only effective in improving students' linguistic skills, but also contributes to the formation of positive character and social-emotional competencies that are important for children's development at the primary education level.

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