

# The Community Empowerment Program Experiences Develop English Literacy Through Storybooks and Storytelling

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## ABSTRACT

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This study investigated the use of storybooks and storytelling to develop English literacy among young learners through the Community Empowerment Program (PRODAMAT) conducted in Kampung Sroyo Pundong, Bantul, Yogyakarta. Storybooks and storytelling are language “ecosystems” where words come to life. Through rhyme and repetition in stories, children learn to recognize the sounds and rhythm of English sounds and reading comprehension. Utilizing a narrative inquiry design, the researchers collected data through interviews and documentation, specifically teacher-written stories, from four magister students of the English Education Study Program at Ahmad Dahlan University who served as mentors. The data analysis included transcription, coding, and analysis as the trustworthiness based on the narrative frame. The findings reveal that storytelling and storybooks serve as of rhyme and rhythmic repetition serves as a scaffold for phonemic awareness, allowing learners to internalize the prosodic features of English (stress, intonation, and rhythm) implicitly. Despite challenges such as limited initial vocabulary and low student confidence, the program successfully increased student motivation and engagement. Additionally, achieved pedagogical practice, which is the integration of theory and practice, through implementing advanced TEFL concepts for various cultural settings with limited resources.

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## Introduction

Early literacy development is crucial for children's learning and school performance. Waddington (2020) argue that language learning in children requires the processing of language and a control process for interaction with the environment. The value of literacy becomes embedded early in a child's educational experience, starting at the elementary

school level, which is a crucial stage of development. This period is essential for fostering reading abilities because it provides the foundations for both language acquisition and cognitive development ([Gumartifa et al., 2025](#)). Reading one of English skills that students have to face in school or home. In terms of literacy in specific, learning to read in a language one is simultaneously learning is quite comparable to learning to read in a language one already knows ([Goldenberg & Cárdenas-Hagan, 2023](#)). Children would be more receptive to the world if they have the chance to develop their English literacy, particularly in reading. One challenge that needs particular attention in Indonesia is literacy. This is due to the fact that during the past few decades, Indonesia has become less competitive when compared to other countries. These worldwide studies' findings demonstrate that Indonesian students, who are representative of the Indonesian population as a whole, have low literacy skills, particularly when it comes to language literacy ([Dwipayana, 2021](#)).

The cognitive approach to language learning emphasizes the child's active role in learning, the importance of understanding mental processes, and the organization of acquisition. Technical terms will be explained upon first use. The text will follow appropriate formatting and citation guidelines, maintain a formal tone, and avoid biased, emotional language and ambiguous terminology. Here, the active participation of children in language learning is crucial, and it is our responsibility as mentors to create a positive and welcoming environment that fosters an enjoyable and pressure-free English language learning experience. One such theory is Krashen's Critical Age Hypothesis ([Hajimia et al., 2020](#)), which posits that children's brain plasticity is still high before puberty. This condition allows them to learn language more effectively, akin to native speakers. Sari ([2020](#)) highlights that listening to story-telling presented by educators can enhance the listening skills of British English learners between 3-4 years of age.

Other studies have also indicated that using sequential images in storytelling can enhance students' communication and skills. Additionally, this method can improve the reading proficiency of elementary-level students. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the use of visual aids has proven effective in facilitating learning. A book of literature with a series occurring is told through storytelling, which also includes body language and voice to transfer the text from one person to another in vibrant ways to create scenes. For the story to be effective in the learning process, the teacher must convey it using five consecutive components ([Rahayu & Ummayah, 2023](#)). This certainly challenges both teachers and students to master English language skills. Based on preliminary research, the school aims to promote literacy activities in English, focusing on shaping students' character from an early age so that they become accustomed to it later in life. Strengthening character

education through illustrated storybooks in English is expected to initiate and increase students' interest in books and literacy levels. Improving English language proficiency and fostering the development of students' characters in line with the school's vision and mission is imperative ([Budiman et al., 2023](#)).

Reading and storytelling cannot just be seen as a way to learn a language, but it is much more than that. Storybooks and storytelling are one of the ways to hone students' literacy skills, especially young learners. In particular, submitting engaging stories that contain moral, historical, and cultural elements is crucial to this activity's success in engaging students' attention in learning. In light of this paradigm shift, teachers are currently exploring new ways to give teaching, notably in the area of English literacy development ([Isma et al., 2024](#)). Storybooks and storytelling for facilitating the learning experience Aridasarie & Rohmah ([2024](#)) has emerged as an intriguing approach to improving English literacy in EFL circumstances.

The effectiveness of storytelling as a teaching method encourages critical thinking and creativity for student ([Tajammal et al., 2025](#)). At the same time, young learners' appreciation of storytelling was demonstrated to be highly connected to relatively fundamental elements of competency (e.g., vocabulary and word reading), even in the presence of self-efficacy ([Tsang & Yeung, 2024](#)). According to Ghafar ([2024](#)) storytelling in teaching language to young learners has various functions, such as comprehending experiences, portraying roles of diverse characters in narratives, transforming previous occurrences into immediate and abstract events more tangible, cultivating relationships, and enhancing linguistic abilities. Based on Huda's et al., ([2022](#)) study told that during by the time children turn 4 years old, children are capable of placing together between 1000 and 1500 words that they can pronounce with easily. The vocabulary used to communicate will expand in combination with it. Then, it is the golden era to introduce the right activity to improve reading skills.

On top of that, numerous advantages can be derived by undertaking reading activities with storybooks. It provides children from diverse backgrounds with a window, enabling them a vicarious experience and understanding of the lives and viewpoints of others ([Kucirkova & Ciesielsk 2025](#)). Broadly speaking, educational advantages included results pertinent to children's attitudes and participation in reading and reading-related results, including literacy achievement scores. The advantages in reading comprehension have also been connected to storytelling, especially for English language learners and struggling readers. The particular aspects of storytelling that are most helpful for enhancing reading comprehension results and the environments in which narrative treatments is most

effectives ([Santoso et al., 2023](#)). The stories must be properly conveyed to enhance students' emotional intelligence and literacy. The study by Hosokawa et al. ([2024](#)) revealed learning through stories serves as a valuable resource to enhance children's emotional intelligence, promoting self-awareness, social awareness, relationship development, and informed decision-making.

In recent years, storytelling practices have been employed across multiple fields. Storybooks and storytelling are one of the media promoted to develop foreign language skills and social-emotional development. This research explores the activities program, called PRODAMAT (*Program Pemberdayaan Umat*) by the Ahmad Dahlan University (UAD) for magister students of English Education Study Program to go into the community. The Community Service Program (PRODAMAT) is an educational program followed by all UAD magister students. It offers alternative solutions to problems faced by society and its environment to improve the quality of life and welfare of society ([Andriyani et al., 2024](#)). In this program, the mentors focus on applying English storybooks and storytelling to develop literacy skills for young learners. In that area, this program is new face for students' activity in learning English, not many programs focus on teaching young learner using storybook and storytelling. This project presented in this paper aimed to explore the benefit of storybooks & storytelling and PRODAMAT program in learning English focusing on young learners. To facilitate this objective, the subsequent research question investigated was what are the benefits based on the mentors' story of PRODAMAT and storybook and storytelling in learning English for young learners

## Method

A narrative inquiry design was utilized in this study. The largest cross-disciplinary journal in the field is called Narrative Inquiry, which is also an established umbrella name for research involving stories ([Barkhuizen et al., 2014](#)).

It was applied on *Kampung Sroyo Pundong*, Bantul, Yogyakarta. In this design, using the terms "biographical" and "autobiographical" to describe the relationship between researchers and participants in narrative research is a fundamental distinction. The participants wrote narrative frame into researchers for a story. In autobiographical research, one of the researchers is a participant of this study. She wrote narrative frame to share her own story.

The participants of this study were four students of the Master Program of English Language Education Faculty of Teacher Training as English mentors who taught at the Community Service Program (PRODAMAT), where this program is a compulsory obligation

of Ahmad Dahlan University graduates to contribute back to society. They took this part as mentors teaching English to children.

There are specific guidelines for collecting data in narrative inquiry, including observation, survey (limited), documentation (including letters, curricula, and policies), interviews, and transcripts ([Mertova & Webster, 2019](#)). The researchers employed interviews, documentation, and precisely teacher-written stories, to collect the data. The researchers investigated the individuals' experiences by conducting interviews and taking notes (narrative frame) of their responses. The findings of the storytelling can be used to answer the research question as the subject of this study.

The methods employed in the data analysis included transcription, coding, and analysis. The researchers took transcription as a story in participants' experiences, then coding the data into specific criteria based on the research question, in analysis to emphasize the connections among the narrator's experiences. Then, the researchers did member checking and "Re-storying" as validation of the story. Providing detailed of the setting, the participant's emotions, and the social context. Then, audit trail to make sure to reach a conclusion. The last, the researchers did reflexivity to avoid biases, feelings, relationship, and own beliefs.

## Findings and Discussion

In the findings, the researchers conducted a short story based on the mentors' narrative frame and interviewed participants in this study. The stories expressed the participants' experiences during the program especially in English scope.

### A. The Benefits of English Storybooks and Storytelling for Students

#### 1. Participant 1: Ms. A

Ms. A's story began with a simple classroom concern: how to inspire students' courage to speak English. She chose physical storybooks as her primary source. The first phase, Ms. A focused on creating a positive learning environment. As the program progressed, Ms. A found significant changes. Students were no longer simply spelling words but were beginning to develop their imaginations. The storybook they read fueled their creative thinking.

Ultimately, Ms. A saw student who had previously hesitated now able to compose and tell their own original stories in English. This is where storytelling proved its power as a technique that naturally and independently fosters speaking skills.

*"The activities that created a positive learning environment. By participating in*

*storytelling, students' speaking abilities improved significantly. They developed their imagination and storytelling skills, which enabled them to create and narrate their own stories in English"*

Recognizing the changing era, Ms. A did not stop with physical books. She began integrating e-books and digital literacy tools throughout her activities. This transition was a strategic step to expand access. With the advent of digital materials, Ms. A saw her students have a wider choice of diverse reading resources. This not only enriched their vocabulary but also began to form stronger reading habits due to access beyond the constraints of time and space.

*"The storytelling activity can be further enhanced through the use of e-books or digital literacy tools. By fostering access to multiple story sources, students could develop a habit of reading diverse materials, broadening their perspectives and further enhancing their English language skills".*

Ms. A eventually realized that language acquisition is an ongoing process. She believes that combining traditional storytelling with digital tools is key to creating a rich and varied learning environment.



Fig 1: Doing storytelling

## **2. Participant 2: Ms.T**

Ms. T's narrative begins with a contrasting reality throughout the program. She quickly encountered a fundamental obstacle: limited vocabulary. Ms. T observed a gap between the stories she told and students' understanding. Although the vocabulary challenge seemed significant, Ms. T did not back down. She positioned storytelling not simply as a learning material, but as an intervention. She believed that through tone of voice, expression, and

repetition in storytelling, these barriers to understanding could be transformed over time.

*“The students faced challenges, particularly with their limited English vocabulary, which made it difficult for them to comprehend the stories she told. However, she believed that learning English through storytelling could improve their listening skills and expand their vocabulary”.*

Although the students experienced technical difficulties, they didn't give up. Instead, the classroom atmosphere became energetic and participatory. Their curiosity began to outweigh their fear of making mistakes. Their weakness in English actually fueled their enthusiasm to explore further.

*“The enthusiasm of the students made the experience particularly rewarding for her. Despite English being a new and unfamiliar subject for many of them, their curiosity and willingness to learn created an energetic and engaging classroom environment”.*

The students' active engagement, even when they struggled with vocabulary, proved that storytelling is a powerful method. Ms. T concluded that a learning environment built on enthusiasm and curiosity is far more effective for long-term language development than simply teaching grammar.

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Fig 2: Understanding the vocabularies

### 3. Participant 3: Ms. P

Ms. P's story began with a community service mission. For her, this activity was not just a task, but a positive experience filled with positive experiences. Ms. P saw herself as a catalyst for change through the medium of storybooks.

*“This experience was characterized by moments of happiness and fulfillment as she observed the positive impact her efforts had on her students' lives”.*

However, when she was among the children, this enthusiasm clashed with the challenging realities of the field. Ms. P faced both internal (the need to adapt) and external (the students' circumstances) obstacles. The main obstacle that emerged was the vocabulary barrier. Because this was the students' first experience engaging with storytelling and using storybooks, they felt unfamiliar with the language used.

*“During the storytelling sessions, she recognized that many students faced challenges*

*with understanding new vocabulary. To address this, she integrated vocabulary instruction into the storytelling process. This approach not only facilitated quick vocabulary acquisition but also enhanced the students' interest in learning”.*

Realizing that verbal explanations alone were not enough, Ms. P implemented pedagogical integration. She did not stop with text, but began integrating instructions such as body language and simple gestures on vocabulary into the storytelling process.

Finally, this "gestural instruction" method began to pay off. Ms. P witnessed a remarkable transformation: students began to grasp the essence of the story even though they had never known the meaning of the words before.



Fig 3. Teaching by instruction

#### **4. Participant 4: Ms. I**

Ms. I's journey started with a challenge in the classroom: a crisis of confidence. She discovered her students viewed English as a burden. In this early phase, the obstacle was not simply a lack of understanding, but rather an emotional distance between the students and the language they were learning.

*“Students displayed low confidence in learning English. However, through personalized motivation and activities like vocabulary practice, English storytelling, and listening exercises, the students became more engaged and enthusiastic”.*

Ms. I began a more personalized intervention phase. Vocabulary and Listening Practice it is Building a foundation so students feel familiar with the sounds of language. Storytelling and Storybooks: Using storybooks as visual aids and oral narratives as a means of learning.

What is interesting in Ms. I's narrative is the existence of a "learning system." Although students still face technical challenges and imperfect understanding, their motivation is increasing.

*“Program culminated in a highly motivated group of learners eager to explore more about English. Both of storybook and storytelling gave many benefits for them. Especially for a new experience in a different style from their school. then, they can be motivated to learn more about English”.*

The core message from Ms. I's experience is that memorable experiences are the simplest yet most powerful form of motivation. Through storybooks, students not only learn language, but they record positive memories that will continue to motivate them in the future.



Figure 4. The activities of storytelling and storybook

## **B. Short story 2: The Empowerment Program in Community Service**

PRODAMAT is one of empowerment program in community service for society. As academic students, they have to create a program in English scope for sharing their knowledge.

In the mentors' experiences, they agreed that PRODAMAT is good program for students' university especially at Ahmad Dahlan University for magister program.

*“When undergraduate program, I took KKN for doing community service, but at magister program we called it PRODAMAT, but I think just in UAD we can find it”.*

*“I'm so happy doing community service at Jogja, because I come from Kalimantan and of course there are different culture and habit that I got”.*

*“These experiences not only giving benefits for the students, parents, people in the village but also we are as a mentor for this program”.*

Here some experiences from mentors in this community service. They hope that the program can continue and more improved. Especially in English scope for another program. The mentors are so happy to give their experiences in this paper and not only as a written

but also motivation for another positive program.

The results of this narrative inquiry highlight the multifaceted benefits of the Community Empowerment Program (PRODAMAT) in fostering English literacy through storybooks and storytelling. The discussion focuses on how these activities create engaging learning environments and the specific advantages they offer to young learners.

### 1. Engaging and Memorable English Learning through PRODAMAT

The PRODAMAT program serves as a vital bridge between academic theory and social contribution. Mentors reported that the program created a "memorable and positive impact" by offering a learning style different from formal schooling. This aligns with the goal of providing alternative solutions to societal problems while improving the quality of education. The enthusiastic engagement of the students, despite their initial lack of confidence, suggests that community-based programs can successfully create a "pressure-free" atmosphere that is essential for early language acquisition.

### 2. Benefits of Storybooks and Storytelling in Literacy Development

The use of storybooks and storytelling proved to be an effective strategy for addressing various components of English literacy:

- a. **Speaking and Listening Skills:** Storytelling sessions encouraged students to develop their imagination and narrative skills, significantly improving their ability to speak in English. It also served as a primary tool for enhancing listening skills as students focused on the mentors' narratives.
- b. **Vocabulary Acquisition and Gestural Support:** One of the primary challenges identified was limited vocabulary. To overcome this, mentors integrated "vocabulary instruction" directly into the stories using body language and gestures. This method facilitated quick understanding and helped students grasp the "point of the story" even without knowing every word.
- c. **Digital Literacy Integration:** The findings suggest that transitioning from physical books to e-books or digital literacy tools can further enhance students' reading habits. This variety creates a "rich and varied learning environment" that promotes ongoing language development in the digital era.
- d. **Character and Moral Values:** As noted in the introduction, storybooks are not merely for language but are tools for "shaping students' character". By using stories that contain moral, historical, and cultural elements, the program helped students connect narratives to their own lives.

### 3. Overcoming Affective Filters

The mentors observed that students initially displayed low confidence. However, the storytelling approach acted as a "simple motivation" that led to significant engagement. This supports the application of Krashen's theories mentioned earlier, where reducing anxiety and providing interesting input allows children to learn more effectively while their "brain plasticity" is still high. The "amazing experience" of the program served as a catalyst for students to become more motivated to explore English in the future.

## Conclusion

The Community Empowerment Program (PRODAMAT) successfully implemented English literacy development in Kampung Sroyo Pundong through the strategic use of storybooks and storytelling. The research demonstrates that these methods are highly effective in:

1. Language Skill Development: Evidence suggests that storytelling techniques may contribute to measurable gains in students' oral proficiency and auditory comprehension.
2. Vocabulary Acquisition: The integration of non-verbal cues, such as gestures and body language, appeared to facilitate more intuitive vocabulary acquisition among participants.
3. Impact on Student Engagement: Participation in the program was associated with an observable shift in student attitudes, characterized by increased confidence and a heightened interest in further English language study.
4. Professional Growth for Mentors: The program offered graduate students an opportunity to apply theoretical academic frameworks within a practical social context, potentially enhancing their sense of professional efficacy.

Ultimately, storybooks and storytelling provide a fun, pressure-free environment that aligns with children's natural learning processes. The mentors recommend the continued use of these media, including digital e-books, to broaden students' perspectives and maintain literacy habits. Future programs should continue to focus on interactive, engaging content to ensure sustainable English language development within the community

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