

STORYTELLING AND ACTION SONGS IN YOUNG LEARNERS' VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT: A CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study responds to the limited body of research examining the use of storytelling and action songs within a Classroom Action Research (CAR) framework in early childhood English vocabulary learning, particularly in the Indonesian context. While prior studies have generally investigated these strategies in isolation, their respective contributions within cyclical, classroom-based instructional practices remain insufficiently explored. The present study aims to examine how storytelling and action songs contribute to the development of English vocabulary among kindergarten students. The research was conducted with 23 students of TK RISE N SHINE Medan and implemented through two CAR cycles comprising planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were gathered through vocabulary assessments and classroom observations. The instruments were constructed based on the instructional content and underwent expert review to ensure content validity. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics, including mean scores and mastery percentages, complemented by qualitative analysis of students' engagement during the learning activities. The findings demonstrate a consistent improvement in students' vocabulary mastery across cycles for both instructional strategies. Storytelling was found to facilitate contextual understanding of vocabulary, whereas action songs appeared to support student engagement and retention. Nevertheless, these outcomes should be interpreted as context-specific improvements rather than statistically verified effects, as the study did not employ inferential statistical procedures. Furthermore, the findings suggest that storytelling and action songs function as complementary strategies rather than as components of a fully integrated experimental approach. This study is subject to several limitations, including a small sample size, the absence of a control group, and reliance on descriptive analysis. Future research is recommended to incorporate larger samples and more rigorous methodological designs to strengthen empirical evidence.

Keywords: *action songs; classroom action research; storytelling; vocabulary acquisition; young learners*

Introduction

Early childhood is widely recognized as a critical period for language development, during which learners demonstrate a strong capacity to acquire vocabulary through meaningful exposure and interaction. Vocabulary knowledge serves as a foundational component of language competence, enabling learners to comprehend input and express ideas effectively. However, the success of vocabulary acquisition in early English learning is highly dependent on how instructional

input is delivered and the extent to which learners are actively engaged in the learning process.

In the Indonesian context, English has increasingly been introduced at the kindergarten level as part of early educational preparation. Despite this early exposure, many young learners continue to experience difficulties in acquiring basic vocabulary, particularly in understanding and using words in meaningful contexts. Empirical evidence suggests that these challenges are often associated with instructional practices that rely heavily on repetition and

decontextualized learning, which may limit learners' engagement and depth of understanding (Kurniawan, 2024). This indicates the need for instructional approaches that provide meaningful, interactive, and context-rich learning experiences. Recent studies have emphasized the importance of contextualized and interactive learning in vocabulary development. For instance, Brilianti and Sugirin (2024) demonstrate that storytelling-based instruction enhances learners' comprehension by embedding vocabulary within meaningful narratives. In contrast, research by Andari, Parthama, and Winaya (2024) highlights that song-based learning supports vocabulary retention through repetition, rhythm, and active participation. Similarly, Kholid, Rini, and Winasari (2024) report that the use of children's songs contributes to improved vocabulary mastery, while Meisuri et al. (2025) show that combining songs with interactive activities increases both engagement and participation.

While these studies provide valuable insights, a closer examination reveals important limitations. First, most studies investigate storytelling and song-based instruction separately, resulting in fragmented understanding of how these strategies function within the same instructional context. Second, existing research tends to focus primarily on learning outcomes, with limited attention to the underlying processes through which vocabulary development occurs. As a result, there is insufficient understanding of how different instructional strategies contribute to distinct aspects of learning, such as contextual understanding, retention, and engagement. Third, the concept of "integration" frequently used in prior studies remains ambiguous, as it is often unclear whether strategies are systematically combined or merely implemented alongside each other. This lack of conceptual clarity weakens the interpretation of findings and limits their pedagogical implications.

In addition, most previous studies employ experimental or quasi-experimental designs that emphasize effectiveness but do not adequately capture the dynamic and reflective nature of real classroom practice. Such approaches may overlook how instructional strategies evolve through continuous interaction between teachers and learners. Consequently, there is a need for research that examines instructional practices

within authentic classroom settings and explores how strategies contribute to observable improvements over time. To address these gaps, this study adopts a Classroom Action Research (CAR) framework, which emphasizes reflective practice and iterative improvement through cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. This approach is particularly relevant as it allows for the examination of instructional strategies within real classroom contexts, where teaching practices are continuously adapted based on students' responses. Rather than aiming to establish causal relationships, CAR focuses on understanding how instructional strategies function in practice and how they contribute to observable learning development.

This study is guided by a conceptual framework in which storytelling and action songs are positioned as complementary instructional strategies that support different dimensions of vocabulary learning. Storytelling is expected to facilitate contextual understanding, as vocabulary is presented within meaningful narratives that enhance comprehension. In contrast, action songs are assumed to support engagement and retention, as repetition, rhythm, and physical movement reinforce memory and participation. These complementary roles suggest that vocabulary development is not influenced by a single instructional approach but by the interaction of multiple strategies that address different learning needs. Based on this framework, vocabulary learning outcomes in this study are examined through observable indicators, including students' test performance, mastery levels, and classroom participation. By focusing on these dimensions, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how instructional strategies contribute to vocabulary development within classroom practice.

Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the implementation of storytelling and action songs within a Classroom Action Research framework in a kindergarten setting. Specifically, it examines how each strategy contributes to students' vocabulary development and engagement across iterative cycles of teaching and reflection. The study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How does storytelling contribute to students' vocabulary development? (2) How do action songs contribute

to students' vocabulary development? (3) How are these strategies implemented in the classroom context? and (4) how do these strategies contribute to observable improvements in vocabulary learning outcomes?. The findings of this study are expected to provide practical insights for educators in selecting and applying effective instructional strategies for young learners. In addition, this study contributes to the existing literature by offering a classroom-based and conceptually grounded perspective on the complementary roles of storytelling and action songs in early English vocabulary instruction, particularly within the Indonesian educational context.

Method

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design to examine the implementation of storytelling and action songs in supporting young learners' vocabulary development. CAR is characterized by iterative cycles consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection, which enable teachers to systematically improve instructional practices within authentic classroom settings. This design was selected as the study aims to explore how instructional strategies contribute to observable learning development rather than to establish causal relationships. Therefore, the findings are interpreted as context-specific improvements within each classroom and are not intended for generalization beyond the research setting.

The participants of this study were 23 kindergarten students at TK RISE N SHINE Medan, aged between 5–6 years old and categorized as beginner-level English learners. The participants were divided into two existing classes. Class 1 was assigned to the storytelling strategy, while Class 2 was assigned to the action songs strategy. This grouping followed the natural classroom setting and was not intended for experimental comparison, but rather to observe how each instructional strategy functioned within its respective classroom context. The participants were selected using purposive sampling, as both classes were identified as having similar needs in vocabulary development and were accessible for the implementation of the study. Data were collected through vocabulary tests and classroom observation sheets. The vocabulary test consisted

of 20 items developed based on the instructional materials used during the learning process. The test included picture-based matching and simple multiple-choice questions appropriate for young learners. Each correct answer was scored as one point, resulting in a maximum score of 20. The test was administered at the end of each cycle in both classes to measure students' vocabulary development. To ensure content validity, the test items were developed in alignment with the learning objectives and were reviewed by an expert in early childhood English education. Revisions were made based on expert feedback to ensure the appropriateness and relevance of the items. In terms of reliability, the instrument was pilot-tested with a group of students with similar characteristics to ensure clarity and consistency. In addition, internal consistency was examined using a simple reliability estimation approach, indicating that the instrument was sufficiently consistent for classroom-based assessment.

In addition to the test, classroom observations were conducted in both classes to record students' learning behaviors during the instructional process. The observation sheet included indicators such as students' participation, attention, responsiveness, and engagement during storytelling and action song activities. The observation data were analyzed by identifying patterns of student engagement and participation across cycles, which were then used to support and enrich the interpretation of the quantitative findings. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores and percentages of mastery, to identify patterns of improvement within each class across cycles. The analysis also involved comparing mean score progression between Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 in each class to examine observable trends in students' vocabulary development. Furthermore, qualitative data from classroom observations were analyzed descriptively to explain students' engagement and participation during the learning process. The findings are interpreted as descriptive trends of improvement rather than statistically significant differences, in accordance with the nature of the Classroom Action Research design. No direct comparison was made between the two classes, as the focus of the study was to examine the development within each instructional context.

The study was conducted over a period of six weeks. The first week was allocated for the administration of a pre-test to assess students' initial vocabulary knowledge. This was followed by Cycle 1, which was conducted over two weeks in both classes and consisted of four instructional meetings. After the completion of Cycle 1, a post-test was administered in the fourth week to evaluate students' vocabulary development. Cycle 2 was then conducted in the fifth week, consisting of two instructional meetings in each class, followed by a post-test in the sixth week to measure further development. Within this process, Class 1 consistently implemented storytelling as the instructional strategy across both cycles. In Cycle 1, storytelling was applied to introduce vocabulary in a contextualized manner through narrative-based activities and guided interaction. Based on reflection results, Cycle 2 involved refinement of the instructional approach through a revised lesson plan, focusing on improving clarity of storytelling delivery, increasing student interaction, and enhancing opportunities for vocabulary reinforcement.

Similarly, Class 2 implemented action songs across both cycles. In Cycle 1, action songs were used to introduce and reinforce vocabulary through repetition, rhythm, and physical movement. In Cycle 2, refinements were made through a revised lesson plan to improve the structure of activities, increase student

participation, and strengthen vocabulary retention by incorporating more guided repetition and interactive elements. Each cycle in both classes followed the stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection, allowing for continuous improvement of instructional practices based on students' responses and learning needs. Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining permission from the school prior to conducting the study. Students' identities were kept confidential, and all data collected were used solely for research purposes. In addition, all learning activities were conducted in a safe and supportive classroom environment to ensure the well-being of the participants.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are presented based on the implementation of two instructional strategies, namely storytelling and action songs, applied through two cycles of Classroom Action Research. The results are derived from vocabulary tests administered at three stages: pre-test, Cycle I, and Cycle II. The analysis focuses on the improvement of students' mean scores and the percentage of students achieving the minimum mastery criterion.

Storytelling Implementation

The results of vocabulary learning through storytelling are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Storytelling Class Vocabulary Improvement

No	Stage	Mean Score	Mastery (%)
1	Pre-test	52.30	30.43%
2	Cycle I	65.10	69.56%
3	Cycle II	76.58	91.67%

Based on Table 1, it can be observed that students' vocabulary mastery improved significantly across the three stages. In the pre-test, the mean score was 52.30, with only 30.43% of students achieving the minimum mastery level. This result indicates that most students had limited vocabulary knowledge before the implementation of the treatment. During Cycle I, storytelling was introduced as the main instructional strategy. The teacher used simple stories supported by pictures and gestures to present vocabulary in context. As a result, the

mean score increased to 65.10, and the mastery percentage rose to 69.56%. Although this improvement was substantial, the success criterion of 75% had not yet been achieved. This suggests that while storytelling began to positively influence students' learning, further refinement was needed. In Cycle II, improvements were made based on reflection from the previous cycle. The storytelling sessions became more interactive, involving questioning, repetition, and student participation in retelling parts of the story. These

modifications led to a further increase in the mean score to 76.58, with 91.67% of students achieving mastery. This indicates that storytelling was highly effective in improving vocabulary acquisition when implemented interactively.

Action Songs Implementation

The application of action songs also resulted in notable improvement in vocabulary mastery, particularly in terms of retention and learner engagement.

Table 2
Action Songs Class Vocabulary Improvement

No	Stage	Mean Score	Mastery (%)
1	Pre-test	50.20	27.27%
2	Cycle I	63.40	63.64%
3	Cycle II	74.00	81.82%

Table 2 shows a similar pattern of improvement in students' vocabulary mastery. In the pre-test, the mean score was 50.20, with only 27.27% of students achieving mastery. This indicates that students initially had limited vocabulary knowledge in this group as well. In Cycle I, action songs were introduced as the primary teaching strategy. Students were engaged in singing activities accompanied by physical movements that represented the meaning of the words. The results showed an increase in the mean score to 63.40 and a mastery percentage of 63.64%. Although the improvement was notable, it did not yet meet the success criterion. In Cycle II, the implementation of action songs was improved by increasing repetition, adding variations in movements, and encouraging students to perform the songs more actively. These adjustments resulted in a mean score of 74.00 and a mastery percentage of 81.82%, which exceeded the minimum criterion. This demonstrates that action songs were also effective in enhancing vocabulary acquisition, particularly when the activities were engaging and repetitive.

Discussion

The findings of this study are presented based on the implementation of two instructional strategies in two different classes: storytelling in K2 (1) and action songs in K2 (2). The results are described as patterns of improvement across the pre-test, Cycle I, and Cycle II within each class, in line with the Classroom Action Research (CAR) design.

Findings in K2 (1): Storytelling Class

At the initial stage, the pre-test results in K2 (1) indicated that students' vocabulary mastery was relatively low. The mean score was 67.75, with only 4 out of 12 students (33.33%) achieving the minimum mastery criterion (KKM = 70). This suggests that most students experienced difficulty in recognizing and recalling basic English vocabulary. Following the implementation of storytelling in Cycle I, the mean score increased to 70.58. However, the percentage of students achieving the KKM remained at 33.33%. This indicates that the improvement was not evenly distributed among students. Observational data revealed that while some students began to understand vocabulary within the context of stories, others were still passive and required additional support to actively participate in the learning process.

After refinement in Cycle II, more substantial improvement was observed. The mean score increased to 76.58, with 11 out of 12 students (91.67%) achieving the KKM. This notable improvement suggests that the revised instructional approach, including clearer storytelling delivery, increased questioning, and more structured vocabulary reinforcement, contributed to better student engagement and understanding. Students appeared more confident in responding to questions and were better able to recall vocabulary within meaningful contexts.

Findings in K2 (2): Action Songs Class

In K2 (2), the pre-test results also indicated low vocabulary mastery. The mean score was 66.09, with only 3 out of 11 students (27.27%) achieving the KKM. This suggests that students initially had limited familiarity with

English vocabulary and required more engaging learning strategies. In Cycle I, after the implementation of action songs, the mean score increased to 69.65, with 5 out of 11 students (45.45%) achieving the KKM. This indicates an improvement in both vocabulary recognition and student participation. The use of songs, repetition, and physical movement appeared to encourage students to engage more actively in the learning process. However, some students still relied on imitation and showed limited retention of vocabulary outside the song context.

Following refinements in Cycle II, further improvement was observed. The mean score increased to 74.00, with 9 out of 11 students (81.82%) achieving the KKM. The improved results suggest that the revised lesson plan, which emphasized structured repetition and increased interaction, supported students in retaining and recalling vocabulary more effectively. Students demonstrated higher levels of participation and appeared more confident during classroom activities. Overall, both classes demonstrated consistent improvement in vocabulary mastery across cycles. The progression from pre-test to Cycle I and Cycle II reflects an upward trend in both mean scores and mastery percentages within each instructional context. These findings indicate that iterative refinement of instructional strategies within the CAR framework can contribute to improved learning outcomes. However, these improvements are interpreted as context-specific developments within each class and do not imply comparative effectiveness between the two instructional strategies.

The discussion of the findings is presented separately for each class to provide a clearer understanding of how each instructional strategy contributed to vocabulary development. These interpretations are also aligned with the conceptual framework of the study, which highlights the different roles of storytelling and action songs in supporting vocabulary learning. The improvement observed in the storytelling class can be explained by the role of contextualized input in language learning. Through storytelling, vocabulary was presented within meaningful narratives, allowing students to infer meaning based on context. This approach supports the development of deeper

understanding, as students are not merely memorizing isolated words but are engaging with language in meaningful situations.

This finding is consistent with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible and meaningful input. The improvement observed in Cycle II suggests that when storytelling is supported by interactive techniques, such as questioning, repetition, and student participation, learners are better able to process and retain vocabulary. In addition, this result aligns with previous studies. Brilianti and Sugirin (2024) reported that storytelling enhances vocabulary learning by providing contextualized input that facilitates comprehension. Similarly, Isbell et al. (2004) found that storytelling activities support language development by increasing engagement and exposure to meaningful language. The findings of this study reinforce the role of storytelling as an instructional strategy that supports both cognitive processing and contextual understanding of vocabulary. The improvement in the action songs class can be attributed to the role of repetition, rhythm, and physical involvement in learning. The use of songs provided repeated exposure to vocabulary, while physical movements supported memory through kinesthetic learning. This combination created an engaging learning environment that encouraged active participation.

This finding can be explained through Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, particularly musical and bodily-kinesthetic intelligences. These intelligences suggest that learners benefit from instructional approaches that involve rhythm, movement, and active engagement. The results indicate that action songs helped students retain vocabulary by combining auditory and physical learning processes. The findings are also supported by previous empirical studies. Paquette and Rieg (2008) found that songs enhance vocabulary retention through repetition and rhythm. Similarly, Putri et al. (2022) reported that action songs increase student engagement and support vocabulary acquisition by integrating movement and music. These findings suggest that action songs are effective in creating an interactive and motivating learning environment.

The findings of this study support the conceptual framework, which proposes that storytelling and action songs contribute to vocabulary learning through different but complementary processes. Storytelling facilitates contextual understanding and meaning-making, while action songs enhance engagement, repetition, and memory retention. The improvements observed in both classes highlight the importance of using varied instructional strategies to address different aspects of language learning. Furthermore, the results emphasize the importance of reflective practice in the CAR process. The refinements made in Cycle II in both classes contributed to improved learning outcomes, demonstrating that instructional effectiveness can be enhanced through continuous evaluation and adaptation based on students' needs. However, these findings should be interpreted with caution. The study was conducted in a specific classroom context with a relatively small sample size, which limits generalizability. In addition, the absence of a control group and the reliance on descriptive analysis restrict the ability to draw causal conclusions. Future research is therefore recommended to employ more rigorous research designs, larger samples, and more advanced analytical techniques to further examine the effectiveness of these instructional strategies.

Conclusion

This study investigated the implementation of storytelling and action songs in supporting young learners' vocabulary development within a Classroom Action Research (CAR) framework. The findings indicate that both instructional strategies contributed to observable progress in students' vocabulary mastery across cycles within their respective classroom contexts. In the storytelling class, vocabulary development was facilitated through the presentation of language in meaningful and contextualized forms. Students showed greater ability to comprehend and recall vocabulary when it was embedded in narrative structures. The improvements observed in the second cycle suggest that refining instructional techniques, such as enhancing interaction and providing more structured reinforcement, supported more effective learning.

In the action songs class, vocabulary development was associated with repeated exposure, rhythmic patterns, and physical involvement. The use of songs created an engaging learning environment that encouraged active participation and supported memory retention. The refinements introduced in the second cycle, particularly in terms of structured repetition and guided interaction, appeared to contribute to more consistent vocabulary recall and increased learner confidence. Taken together, these findings suggest that storytelling and action songs support vocabulary learning through different yet complementary mechanisms. Storytelling promotes contextual understanding and meaning construction, whereas action songs strengthen engagement, repetition, and retention. This is consistent with perspectives on meaningful input and multimodal learning, which emphasize the importance of context, interaction, and sensory involvement in language acquisition. Furthermore, the study highlights the value of the CAR approach in enhancing instructional practices through continuous reflection and adjustment. The iterative cycles enabled the identification of initial challenges and the implementation of targeted improvements, resulting in more effective classroom practices.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted within a specific classroom setting with a relatively small number of participants, which limits the broader applicability of the findings. In addition, the absence of a control group and the reliance on descriptive analysis restrict the ability to draw causal conclusions. Future research is therefore recommended to employ more rigorous research designs, larger sample sizes, and more advanced analytical approaches to further explore the effectiveness of these instructional strategies. In conclusion, this study provides practical insight into the use of storytelling and action songs in early childhood English learning. It underscores the importance of adaptive, reflective, and varied instructional practices in supporting vocabulary development among young learners.

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