

# Enhancing Children's English Vocabulary Acquisition through Digital Storytelling at Happy Kids Kindergarten, Palembang, Indonesia

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**Abstract**—Enhancing English vocabulary in early childhood is the main problem often faced by teachers. Thus, the purpose of this study was to determine the enhancement of children's English vocabulary acquisition by using digital storytelling. This type of research was an action research. It consisted of a series of four activities done in repeated cycles: planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. The subject of the study consisted of 30 students of B group (5-6 years old) attending Happy Kids Kindergarten Palembang, Indonesia. This research was conducted in three cycles. The methods used for data collection were observation and documentation. Descriptive qualitative and quantitative methods were also used to analyse the data. The research showed that the digital storytelling learning activities could enhance the children's English vocabulary acquisition. It is based on the data in which the enhancement in pre-cycle was 37% and 51% in Cycle I. In Cycle II it was 71% and in Cycle III it was 89.3%. The results showed an enhancement of about 14% from the pre-cycle to Cycle I, 20% from Cycle I to Cycle II, and enhancement of about 18.3% from Cycle II to Cycle III. The conclusion of this study suggests that digital storytelling learning method could enhance the English vocabulary acquisition of B group children at the Happy Kids Kindergarten Palembang. Therefore, digital storytelling can be considered as an alternative to improve English language learning in the classroom.

**Keywords**—Acquisition, enhancing, digital storytelling, English vocabulary.

## I. INTRODUCTION

LANGUAGE could not be separated from human life. Language is one of the aspects that is essential to be stimulated from an early age and gives major contribution to the development of a child. Learning at an early age is very crucial to the children's growth and development. Therefore, educators are required to understand the ability of the child, including the children's language ability during their early childhood education. Language could be divided into two categories, namely: receptive and expressive. The receptive relates to understanding; whereas, expressive is the expression or speech. There are four skills in English language: listening and reading, which are receptive skills; and speaking and writing, which are productive skills [7].

Early childhood English language acquisition could not be considered the same as with teenagers and adults. Early childhood English language acquisition is usually only limited to vocabulary of the things/stuff they encounter in their daily environment. Language acquisition is the process in which the

children will acquire their first and second languages. It requires interaction and meaningful communication between speaker and listener in the target language. It is intended that the message could be understood [6].

In the last 10 years, Indonesia's early childhood education institutions or kindergarten schools have been competing to develop better programs of Foreign Language (English, Arabic, Mandarin) as one of the subjects to be mastered by the children. Institution owners believe that the value and popularity of their kindergarten is largely determined by the quality of the foreign language program that is taught to the children [9].

One of the most important benefits of early bilingualism is that bilingual children could know multiple languages, which is important for traveling, work and career, communicating with strangers, interacting with people of different cultural backgrounds, and making friends with people from other countries. Moreover, bilingual children will also get non-linguistic benefit [1]. Some studies have suggested that when taught early, bilinguals gain certain benefits in terms of social understanding. This is a reasonable assumption as they are able to socialize with people in different languages [5].

Various methods have been applied by kindergarten English teachers in enhancing English vocabulary, but it is still not optimal. This is mainly due to lack of creativity from the teacher in the classroom. One method that can be used to develop the speaking skills of young children is storytelling. Researchers suggested that suitable technology integration in the classroom is a critical requirement for the learning process to be successful. The important things in digital story telling are the design, storyline and animation creation, as they relate to information technology in order to support a successful learning process [10]. Along with the advances in information and communications technology, storytelling evolves in digital form and becomes known as digital storytelling. Digital storytelling is a form of performance art that combines various types of multimedia, and includes moving images, speech, sound, narration, and music so that the display of short stories about a particular topic or theme can be more interesting [3]. Those multimedia elements are mixed together using computer software, in order to tell a story which is usually based on specific theme or certain topic [13].

There is a close relationship between storytelling and learning, because the process of preparing the story is also a process of meaning-making. Integrating the opportunity for students to tell a story will also strengthen students' learning

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process. From the story, the students are asked to reflect on what they know in order to assess their assumptions and to record their cognitive development thinking process. Teachers can also use it in assessing the progress of the students achieving their learning objectives [4].

Various methods have been applied in introducing English vocabulary to early childhood, but the results have not been optimal. Based on observations of children aged 5-6 years old of B Group at Happy Kids Kindergarten in Palembang, it shows that teachers often have difficulties in introducing English vocabulary to early childhood. Results of the Pre-cycle that was conducted in September 2016, in which in one theme a vocabulary of 20 English words are delivered to students, shows that from a total of 30 students aged 5-6 years, only nine children mastered the 14 (70%) words, three children knew 10 (50%) words, 12 children knew five (25%) vocabularies, and six children did not know anything at all (0%). Thus, on average, the children acquired only about 36% of English vocabulary.

From observing the problems of English vocabulary acquisition for young children, as mentioned above, it was determined that some solutions are needed in order to provide optimal results in the process of learning English. One such way is by applying the method of digital storytelling. Digital storytelling plays an important role in students' learning that it could help to make learning more relevant for students. In addition, it could also encourage creativity and give students a chance to speak because they can use their stories to share ideas and feelings with others [13]. California State University formed a comprehensive five-part definition of digital stories, as indicated by which, for assessment use [2]. They said that interesting digital story is characterized by: presenting compelling narrative, providing a meaningful context, presenting the image to expand the audience emotionally, complementing the music and other sound effects to reinforce the ideas, and inviting thoughtful reflection from the audience. Therefore, through digital storytelling, it is expected in early childhood that children could play an active role in helping themselves in their English vocabulary acquisition.

## II. METHOD

### A. Participants

The method used is Action Research. This action research was conducted at Happy Kids Kindergarten in Palembang, Indonesia. The subjects were children in B group with a total of 20 children (5-6 years old).

### B. Assessments and Measures

Before carrying out this research, the researcher formulated and established a research procedure that consists of four stages: planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. The implementation of this research was conducted collaboratively with classroom teachers. Data analysis performed in this study is a qualitative descriptive by using an interactive model, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions. To determine the success and effectiveness

of the research, performance indicators are defined.

## III. RESULT

### A. Pre-Cycle

Researchers looked at children who did not really focus on learning English. Teachers did not use props or teaching media. Researchers discussed with the teachers about the steps that need to be taken for further learning. The result of the vocabulary test showed that from a total of 30 students aged 5-6 years, six children did not acquire any word at all (0%). 12 children acquired 8 (16%) words, nine children acquired 10 (15%) words, and three children acquired 12 (6%) words. Thus, on average the children gained only about 37% of the English vocabulary taught about vegetables, fruits and flowers. Based on discussions and interviews afterwards, researchers and teachers then took some steps to improve the quality of the English language learning and the children's English vocabulary acquisition.

### B. Cycle I

The results of the analysis show that: (1) Most children were interested, enthusiastic, and eagerly participating in learning activities by using digital storytelling. (2) Teachers were less able to divide their attention to the children who continued to demand attention. (3) The result of the vocabulary test showed that from a total of 30 students age 5-6 years, six children acquired 4 (6%) words, 12 children acquired 10 (20%) words, nine children acquired 13 (19.5%) words, and three children acquired 15 (7.5%) words. Thus, the average of the children acquired only 51% of the English vocabulary about vegetables. From the analysis, the researchers and teachers feel that the results of these studies had not been maximized. Therefore, researchers and teachers made plans for action in the next cycle.

### C. Cycle II

Based on observations conducted by researcher and teachers, the following data were obtained: (1) Most children were interested and enthusiastic about participating in learning activities by using digital storytelling. (2) There were some children who attended the learning but needed to be motivated by teachers first because they wanted attention. (3) The result of the vocabulary test showed that from a total of 30 students age 5-6 years, six children acquired 10 (10%), 12 children acquired 14 (28%) words, nine children acquired 16 (24%) words, and three children acquired 18 (9%). Thus, the average of the children acquired only about 71% of the English vocabulary about fruits. The results also showed that there were four children who attained high scores, while only three children had lower scores.

### D. Cycle III

In Cycle III, which was held in six meetings, the researchers were only focusing on repeating the studies that had been carried out, especially the acquisition of English vocabulary with digital storytelling activities. At the first meeting, the researcher and teachers repeated the activities of the first,

second, and third stages of Cycle II, which were focused on the use of the English vocabulary in simple sentences. Meanwhile, on the fourth, fifth, and sixth in Cycle III, the researcher and teachers repeated the story they had delivered from Cycle I and carried out a recapping as a way to memory booster the children's memory. The result of the vocabulary showed that from the total of 30 students aged 5-6 years, two children acquired 10 (3.3%), six children acquired 16 (16%) word, 10 children acquired 18 (30%) words and 12 children acquired 20 (40%) words, Thus the average of the children acquired only 89.3% of the English vocabulary about flowers. The observation results showed that: (1) Most of the children enthusiastically watched the digital storytelling repeated. (2) Most children could give the teachers the spoken vocabulary. (3) Most of children could answer the teacher's question about the vocabulary related to flowers and fruits. (4) Most of the children could identify the images of flowers and fruit on the screen. (5) The results of the observations showed that the children acquired 86.5% of the English vocabulary presented. The results are presented in Table I.

TABLE I  
CHILDREN'S ENGLISH VOCABULARY ACQUISITION OF B GROUP OF TK HAPPY KIDS IN PALEMBANG

Aspect	Percentage of Children's Average Acquisition			
	Pre-Cycle	Cycle I	Cycle II	Cycle III
The Children's Vocabulary Acquisition Indicator	37%	51%	71%	89.3%
Enhancement	≥ 85%	≥ 85%	≥ 85%	≥ 85%
	-	14%	20%	18.3%

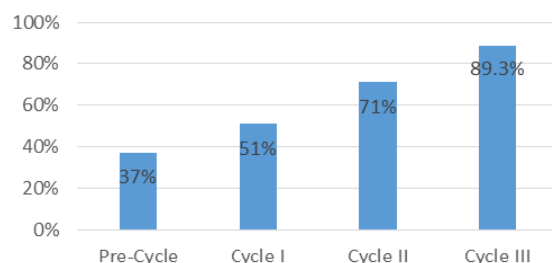


Fig. 1 Enhancement of Children's English Vocabulary Acquisition Through Digital Storytelling

#### IV. DISCUSSION

This research was conducted in three cycles, namely Cycle I, Cycle II and Cycle III. Cycle I was executed based on evaluation of the pre-cycle, survey, and observation conducted at Happy Kids Kindergarten, Palembang. The problem was that the children's English vocabulary acquisition and retention rate was too low. To find solutions to these problems, the researcher and teachers selected and implemented digital storytelling to enhance the children's English vocabulary acquisition. In the context of language education, [11] points out that "deep language acquisition and meaningful practice" is embedded in the digital storytelling process.

In the early stages of the implementation of Cycle I, the researcher and teachers introduced English vocabulary

through simple digital storytelling, merely as an introduction to the children's learning in order to be more uplifting. The children felt happy and accustomed to the digital storytelling given and had adapted to the theme of learning, although the language used was still merged with Bahasa. The teacher also began using body movements when telling the story in the digital storytelling, as a way reinforcing the meaning to be conveyed to the children. Most children already showed enthusiasm for the activities conducted and were delighted with the display of digital storytelling using the English language, an activity that was rarely done before. It is reasonable to assume that the digital devices have allowed teachers to create a multidimensional story that could be displayed through a combination of animated images (movies), voice, text, and sound effects [4]. The simple technique of digital storytelling could be used effectively in the classroom setting to motivate oral production.

The children were also able to achieve the targeted average percentage, although there were eight children who continually failed to reach the target of  $\geq 60\%$ . These children had different inhibiting factors and were unfamiliar with digital storytelling in English learning activities. Moreover, when adjusted for a certain theme, the children are required to master the set of vocabulary in the story told. To optimize the children's ability, the researcher continued to Cycle II. Based on the weaknesses and deficiencies in Cycle I, the researcher reviewed the method. The results shown in Cycle II were enhanced; however, there were eight children who failed to reach the average percentage targeted. In Cycle II, the number of children who had not reached the targeted percentage was more than in Cycle I; this is because the children must reach a target in Cycle II.

The ability of the children and their proficiency in English vocabulary acquisition improves significantly in Cycle II. Therefore, to optimize the abilities of the children, the use of English vocabulary into simple sentences will be developed and continued in Cycle III. In Cycle III, the researcher and the teachers focused on repeating the exercises already carried out, especially the introduction of English vocabulary with digital storytelling activities. The repeat showing of the digital storytelling was accompanied by more varied activities, and thus, in terms of early childhood learning they did not just memorize, but also understood what was said. It was verified that digital storytelling development encourages interaction between students and the teacher as well [8].

Learning using digital storytelling increased the children's interest in learning. The children enjoyed the story and at the same time acquired new English vocabulary related to flowers and fruits. The digital storytelling that contained new vocabulary related to flowers and fruits allowed the children to remember them more easily. These findings are also consistent with an earlier discovery that digital storytelling can develop children's verbal skills better, and can be used as an attractive means of learning and teaching foreign languages [12]. The student's enhancement of new English vocabulary acquisition is seen not only in Cycle I, but also in Cycle II and Cycle III as well.

From the observation and analysis of the entire action, it could be stated that the acquisition of English vocabulary of the children increased. The evidence is taken from the percentage prior to any action being taken or the pre-Cycle which shows a language retention rate of 37%. In Cycle I this rate was 51%, while in Cycle II it was 71%, and in cycle III it was 89.3%. The results from pre-Cycle to Cycle I showed an increase of 14%, while, from Cycle I to Cycle II an increase of 20% in English vocabulary learning was recorded, and for Cycle II to Cycle III the rate was 18.3%. These findings are also consistent with an earlier discovery that digital storytelling can improve the acquisition of vocabulary items. In other words, the use of digital storytelling in language learning can improve the children's vocabulary acquisition [14].

#### V. CONCLUSION

Conclusions can be drawn from the research conducted for the three cycles, namely an enhancement of the children's English vocabulary acquisition in B group at the Happy Kids Kindergarten in Palembang, Indonesia. The enhancement of children's English vocabulary acquisition after the implementation of the digital storytelling learning method is as follows:

1. The children's English vocabulary acquisition was enhanced after the implementation of learning activities with digital storytelling methods.
2. The children's English vocabulary acquisition, shown in the table percentage, is enhanced at each cycle. In the pre-cycle stage, where the digital storytelling method was not applied, the English vocabulary acquisition rate for the children was 37%. In Cycle I, the children's English vocabulary acquisition enhanced into 51%. This improvement continued in Cycle II with a percentage of 71% and by Cycle III this rate was 89.3%.
3. Digital storytelling learning activities can enhance English vocabulary acquisition in early childhood learning.

From the above findings, it could be concluded that the application of digital storytelling learning methods can enhance English vocabulary acquisition in early childhood learning. Thus, kindergartens teachers might consider the use of digital storytelling for English language learning in the classroom.

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