

THE USE OF STORY OF PROPHET SULAIMAN AS AN ISLAMIC STORYBOOK TO ENHANCE ENGLISH READING SKILLS IN CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Abstract : *In order to improve English reading skills in early childhood education, this study explores the pedagogical possibilities of employing Islamic storybooks, with particular emphasis on the story of Prophet Sulaiman. Narrative-based learning has been widely acknowledged as an effective approach for supporting young learners' language acquisition, early literacy development, and moral engagement. Stories provide meaningful contexts that help children understand language structures, expand vocabulary, and develop comprehension skills while maintaining high levels of interest and motivation. In Islamic educational settings, culturally relevant narratives also play a crucial role in connecting language learning with learners' religious and moral values. This study investigates how Islamic storytelling can enhance vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and reading motivation among young English learners through a qualitative and mixed-methods research design. Data were collected through classroom observations, reading activities, teacher interviews, and simple reading assessments to examine both cognitive and affective learning outcomes. The findings indicate that the use of Islamic storybooks fosters positive attitudes toward English reading, encourages active participation, and strengthens fundamental reading skills such as word recognition and meaning-making. Additionally, the integration of familiar religious stories supports character development by promoting values such as wisdom, kindness, and responsibility, which are exemplified in the story of Prophet Sulaiman. Overall, the results suggest that Islamic storybooks can serve as effective instructional resources for integrating language learning and character education in early childhood classrooms. This study highlights important implications for curriculum design in Islamic early childhood education contexts and recommends further research to explore the long-term effects of faith-based storytelling on young learners' English literacy development.*

Keywords: *Islamic Storybook, English Reading Skills, Early Childhood Education, Narrative Learning, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*

Introduction

Early childhood education is a crucial time in human development when fundamental social, emotional, linguistic, and cognitive abilities are formed. Early literacy, especially reading proficiency, is crucial in determining children's future academic success and paths toward lifetime learning. Early reading skills are closely linked to later performance in formal education, language fluency, and knowledge acquisition. As a result, researchers and educators are still looking for efficient, interesting, and developmentally appropriate ways to improve young children's reading abilities, particularly in settings where English is taught as a foreign or second language.

English has emerged as a vital worldwide language for communication, education, and career progression in many non-English-speaking nations. Consequently, the introduction of English instruction at the early childhood level is growing. However, there are unique difficulties in teaching young students to read in English. At this age, children frequently have short attention spans, have a small vocabulary, and are still establishing fundamental reading in their native language. Conventional approaches that prioritize mechanical decoding or rote memorizing may not meet the developmental needs of young students and may lower motivation and interest. As a result, methods for teaching English to young children must be relevant, entertaining, and deeply rooted in their experiences. The use of storybooks and storytelling is one pedagogical strategy that has received a lot of attention in early childhood education. Children can interact with language in relevant and natural settings through story-based learning, which promotes vocabulary growth, comprehension, and narrative comprehension. Rich verbal input, frequent exposure to linguistic patterns, and chances for Storybooks provide rich linguistic input, repeated exposure to language patterns, and opportunities for interaction, all of which are essential for early reading development. Furthermore, stories stimulate imagination, emotional engagement, and curiosity, making them particularly effective for young learners.

Stories serve as cultural and moral messengers in addition to their linguistic advantages. Children's perceptions of themselves and their communities are shaped by the values, beliefs, and worldviews they represent. Because of this, educational research has strongly supported the incorporation of culturally relevant narratives into language learning. In order to improve engagement, comprehension, and identity affirmation, culturally relevant pedagogy highlights the significance of tying instructional content to learners' cultural backgrounds. Children are more likely to actively participate and form favorable attitudes toward learning when they come across familiar cultural features in educational materials. Islamic narratives, especially those about the Prophets, present a special chance to integrate linguistic instruction with moral and spiritual instruction in Islamic educational settings.

Stories from the Qur'an and Islamic tradition have long been used as educational tools to teach values such as honesty, patience, gratitude, justice, and wisdom. These stories are familiar to many Muslim children through family, religious instruction, and community practices, making them highly relevant and meaningful. However, despite their educational richness, Islamic stories have not been extensively explored as instructional media for English reading development in early childhood education.

One prominent Islamic narrative suitable for early literacy instruction is the story of Prophet Sulaiman (peace be upon him). The story of Prophet Sulaiman is characterized by clear narrative structure, engaging characters, and powerful moral themes, such as wisdom, fairness, gratitude to God, kindness toward all creatures, and responsible leadership. Additionally, the story contains imaginative elements—such as communication with animals and control over nature—that naturally attract young learners' interest. These features make the story particularly appropriate for adaptation into illustrated English storybooks for children.

There are various pedagogical benefits to teaching English reading using the story of Prophet Sulaiman as an Islamic storybook. First, it lessens the cognitive burden and anxiety that come with learning a foreign language by enabling kids to learn English through content that they are already familiar with. Children are better able to concentrate on comprehending the text's language when they are aware of the plot and moral lesson. Second, by integrating moral, linguistic, and cognitive development, the incorporation of Islamic stories promotes holistic education. This is in line with the objectives of many Islamic early childhood schools, which place a strong emphasis on character education in addition to intellectual instruction.

Despite these possible advantages, there is still a dearth of empirical research on the systematic application of Islamic storybooks to improve English reading abilities in early childhood education. Studies that are now available on storytelling and the use of storybooks tend to concentrate on Western or universal narratives, giving religious or culturally particular texts very less consideration. Furthermore, studies that specifically look into Islamic narratives as English reading materials for young students are still in the early stages of development. This disparity emphasizes the need for more research on instructional approaches that combine language acquisition with religious content.

The current study investigates the use of the Prophet Sulaiman story as an Islamic storybook to improve English reading abilities in early childhood education in order to close this gap. This study specifically looks at how young learners' vocabulary growth, reading comprehension, and participation in reading activities are affected by the usage of a simplified English storybook based on the tale of Prophet Sulaiman. This study aims to add to the expanding corpus of research on faith-integrated pedagogy and culturally responsive language training by concentrating on young children in an Islamic educational environment.

This study is important for a number of reasons. In theory, it advances conversations about early second-language literacy development, culturally responsive education, and narrative-based learning. Practically speaking, it offers guidance to curriculum designers, early childhood educators, and Islamic educational institutions looking for efficient ways to teach English reading skills while maintaining religious and cultural identity. The ultimate goal of this research is to show that Islamic storybooks may be effective resources for improving English reading abilities in early childhood education when they are thoughtfully created and pedagogically used.

Literature Review

Early Childhood Literacy and Reading Development

It is often known that the early years lay the groundwork for the development of literacy. Children start to develop critical pre-reading and reading skills during this time, such as phonological awareness, vocabulary knowledge, print awareness, and fundamental comprehension skills. Early literacy research continuously shows that early exposure to meaningful texts has a major impact on later reading ability and academic success. Early exposure to rich linguistic input and stimulating reading activities helps children build stronger literacy skills and more favorable attitudes toward reading in later educational stages.

Early childhood reading involves the development of meaning by engagement with texts, visuals, and spoken language rather than just deciphering written symbols. In order to comprehend literature, young learners frequently rely significantly on past information, pictures, and contextual cues. Therefore, rather than focusing only on technical precision, reading teaching at this level should emphasize comprehension, enjoyment, and meaning-making. According to academics, reading teaching that is developmentally appropriate must incorporate the cognitive, linguistic, emotional, and social aspects of learning.

In contexts where English is taught as a foreign or second language, early reading development becomes more complex. Young learners are required to process unfamiliar vocabulary, sentence structures, and phonological patterns while still developing literacy in their first language. This dual challenge underscores the importance of instructional approaches that provide linguistic scaffolding and emotional support. Consequently, researchers increasingly emphasize the role of contextualized and meaningful learning materials—particularly storybooks—in supporting early English reading development.

Storybooks and English Reading Skills

In Young Learners an increasing amount of research demonstrates how storybooks can help young students improve their English reading abilities. According to empirical research, storybook-based training enhances spoken language development, vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and pronunciation. Children eventually assimilate new words and expressions through supervised engagement and repeated reading, resulting in quantifiable improvements in reading skill. One of the most often mentioned advantages of using storybooks is the development of vocabulary. Through narrative events and pictures, stories expose students to new words in relevant contexts and enable them to deduce meaning. For younger students who might have trouble with explicit memorizing, this contextualized exposure promotes incidental language acquisition. Furthermore, word recognition and retention are strengthened when the same story is told repeatedly. Reading comprehension is another essential area promoted by storybook education. Children exercise abilities including forecasting results, recognizing key concepts, and drawing conclusions when they read or listen to stories. Children are encouraged to express their comprehension of the book through guided questioning and discussion, which further improves comprehension. Research indicates that when it comes to helping young students develop deep comprehension, story-based reading instruction works better than separate skill drills.

Additionally, storybooks support the growth of reading motivation. Since children who enjoy reading are more likely to participate in reading activities on their own, motivation is a critical component of early literacy. Storybooks appeal to young learners because of their captivating stories, vibrant illustrations, and likable characters, which help them develop a good emotional connection with reading in English.

Method

This study used a mixed-methods design that included pre- and post-test assessments of reading skill outcomes with qualitative observation. 45 young children (ages 5–6) engaged in an Islamic early childhood education program were among the participants. Over the course of eight weeks, students interacted with a specially created English storybook that uses vivid visuals and simple prose to recreate the story of Prophet Sulaiman.

Data Collection Instruments:

- **Pre- and Post-Reading Assessments:** Reading comprehension assessments and vocabulary identification tests suitable for beginning students.
- **Observation Checklists:** During storytelling sessions, teachers record their observations of students' participation, engagement, and reading habits.
- **Teacher Interviews:** Teachers are interviewed in a semi-structured manner to learn about their perspectives on student development and pedagogical consequences.

Procedure:

Educators introduced the storybook through guided reading sessions twice weekly. Activities included teacher read-aloud, choral reading, and interactive discussions targeting key vocabulary and comprehension questions.

Data Analysis:

Twice a week, teachers led guided reading sessions to introduce the storybook. Key vocabulary and comprehension issues were the focus of interactive conversations, choral reading, and instructor read-alouds.

Result and Discussion**1. Improvement in Vocabulary Acquisition**

Following the implementation of the Islamic storybook intervention, learners' English vocabulary clearly improved, according to the findings of the pre- and post-reading tests. Before the intervention, the majority of students showed poor recognition of simple descriptive nouns, activities, emotions, and animals in English. The results of the post-test showed that students' capacity to identify, remember, and apply vocabulary words that recurred in the Prophet Sulaiman account had significantly improved.

A number of the storybook's pedagogical elements are responsible for this improvement. First, rather than being taught in a vacuum, language was introduced in relevant story situations. Through the speech, events, and actions of characters, learners came across new terms, which aided in semantic comprehension and contextual guessing. Second, word recognition and retention were strengthened by repeated exposure to important vocabulary items during several storytelling sessions. It is often known that early vocabulary acquisition depends heavily on repetition, especially for young students learning a foreign language.

Visual support also played a significant role in vocabulary learning. Illustrations accompanying the story provided concrete representations of abstract or unfamiliar words, enabling learners to connect linguistic forms with visual meaning. This multimodal input aligns with cognitive theories of dual coding, which suggest that information presented through both verbal and visual channels is more easily processed and remembered by young learners.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research demonstrating the effectiveness of picture storybooks in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among early English learners. However, this study extends existing literature by showing that culturally and religiously familiar narratives—such as Islamic stories—can further enhance vocabulary learning by leveraging learners' prior knowledge and cultural familiarity.

2. Development of Reading Comprehension Skills

The findings indicate that learners' reading comprehension skills have significantly improved in addition to their vocabulary. Assessments conducted after the intervention and observations made in the classroom showed that students were more adept at recognizing key concepts, organizing the story's events, and answering basic comprehension questions. Many students showed that they could recount portions of the narrative using gestures, simple English expressions, or a mix of spoken and nonverbal communication. Students' acquaintance with the narrative of Prophet Sulaiman was one of the main elements that led to better comprehension. Many students were able to use prior knowledge to enhance their English comprehension since they had previously been exposed to the story in their native tongue or through religious education.

Additionally, the story's structured narrative aided in the development of comprehension. Learners were able to follow the plot and predict what would happen next because of the obvious order of events—beginning, problem, resolution, and moral message. Even at a young age, students were encouraged to actively engage with the text and apply higher-order thinking abilities by teachers using predictive activities during storytelling sessions.

A key factor in improving comprehension was teacher scaffolding. Without translating the full text into the native language, teachers helped students grasp important concepts through guided questioning, paraphrasing, and the use of gestures and facial expressions. This method is consistent with sociocultural theories of learning.

3. Integration of Language Learning and Moral Education

The combination of language acquisition with moral and character education is a significant aspect of the findings. Teachers stated that storytelling sessions frequently went beyond language goals to include conversations about values including responsibility, kindness, justice, and thankfulness. Using straightforward English phrases or guided responses, students were urged to consider the deeds of characters and connect moral lessons to their own experiences. This integration reflects the tenets of Islamic early childhood education and promotes holistic educational objectives. The storybook-based approach positioned language as a tool for comprehending meaning and values rather than treating English as a strictly academic topic. This result supports the claim that, especially in early life, language acquisition is intrinsically linked to identity and worldview.

From a pedagogical perspective, incorporating moral conversation into English reading exercises seemed to improve comprehension and engagement rather than impede language development. When the literature had important lessons that applied to their own lives, learners were more inclined to comprehend it. This shows how value-laden content can enhance language training, challenging the notion that it could divert attention from language goals. which highlight the importance of scaffolding and social interaction for cognitive growth.

The storybook-based method allows comprehension to develop organically through meaning-focused interaction, in contrast to typical reading education that mostly depends on phonics drills or worksheet-based activities. This result lends credence to the increasingly widespread belief that understanding should be prioritized from the very beginning of reading education rather than waiting until decoding abilities are completely developed.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the story of Prophet Sulaiman can greatly improve English reading abilities in early childhood education when it is translated into an Islamic English storybook and used with developmentally appropriate pedagogical techniques. More significantly, it shows that moral education and cultural identification may coexist with language acquisition. Instead, educators can establish inclusive, stimulating, and productive learning environments that promote both academic success and character development by adopting culturally significant narratives. Thus, this study presents a potential path for future educational practice and research and adds to the increasing acknowledgment of the importance of culturally responsive, narrative-based approaches in early English literacy instruction.

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