



Using Interactive Storytelling to Boost Listening Engagement in Young Learners

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the impact of interactive storytelling on improving listening engagement and comprehension among first-semester young learners at STAI Miftahul Ula. By integrating culturally relevant stories and interactive elements, the research seeks to fill the gap in effective listening strategies within religious education contexts. A quasi-experimental design was used, involving 60 participants divided into an experimental and a control group. The experimental group experienced interactive storytelling sessions, while the control group followed traditional listening methods. Data were gathered through engagement observation checklists, comprehension tests, and learner feedback. Statistical analysis using paired t-tests and thematic analysis showed that the experimental group achieved significant improvements—listening engagement increased by 31% and comprehension by 36%. Thematic findings revealed greater interest, cultural relevance, and better retention among participants. The results demonstrate that interactive storytelling transforms listening activities into meaningful, engaging experiences. This study contributes to constructivist learning theory and provides practical insights for educators to design culturally grounded, interactive lesson plans. Overall, interactive storytelling emerges as an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing listening skills in young learners, particularly within cultural and religious education settings, and offers a strong foundation for future research in innovative teaching methodologies.

Keywords: *Interactive Storytelling, Listening Engagement, Young Learners, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pengaruh storytelling interaktif terhadap peningkatan keterlibatan dan pemahaman mendengarkan pada mahasiswa semester pertama di STAI Miftahul Ula. Dengan mengintegrasikan cerita yang relevan secara budaya dan elemen interaktif, penelitian ini berupaya mengisi kesenjangan dalam strategi mendengarkan yang efektif di konteks pendidikan agama. Desain penelitian yang digunakan adalah quasi-experimental dengan melibatkan 60 peserta yang dibagi menjadi dua kelompok: kelompok eksperimen dan kelompok kontrol. Kelompok eksperimen mengikuti sesi storytelling interaktif, sedangkan kelompok kontrol menggunakan metode mendengarkan tradisional. Data dikumpulkan melalui lembar observasi keterlibatan, tes pemahaman, dan umpan balik peserta. Analisis statistik menggunakan uji t berpasangan dan analisis tematik menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan—keterlibatan meningkat sebesar 31% dan pemahaman sebesar 36%. Hasil analisis tematik mengungkapkan



peningkatan minat, relevansi budaya, dan retensi yang lebih baik di kalangan peserta. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa storytelling interaktif dapat mengubah aktivitas mendengarkan menjadi pengalaman belajar yang bermakna dan menarik. Penelitian ini berkontribusi terhadap teori pembelajaran konstruktivis serta memberikan wawasan praktis bagi pendidik dalam merancang rencana pembelajaran yang interaktif dan berlandaskan budaya. Secara keseluruhan, storytelling interaktif terbukti menjadi alat pedagogis yang efektif untuk meningkatkan keterampilan mendengarkan pada peserta didik, khususnya dalam konteks pendidikan budaya dan keagamaan, serta membuka peluang bagi penelitian lanjutan mengenai metode pengajaran inovatif.

Kata kunci: Storytelling Interaktif, Keterlibatan Mendengarkan, Peserta Didik Muda, Pedagogi yang Relevan secara Budaya

PENDAHULUAN

In an era of increasing globalization and digitalization, mastering English as a foreign language has become a cornerstone of academic and professional success, especially in non-native English-speaking countries (Copland et al., 2014). Listening, a vital skill for effective communication, poses a significant challenge for young learners due to its reliance on sustained attention and comprehension (Yılmaz & Yavuz, 2015). At STAI Miftahul Ula for the 1st semester, students often struggle with listening engagement, which hinders their overall language proficiency. The use of traditional, lecture-based teaching methods often fails to capture the interest of young learners, making it imperative to explore innovative pedagogical approaches (Miller et al., 2013).

Interactive storytelling has emerged as a promising method for addressing these challenges. By integrating narrative structures with learner participation, this approach creates an immersive and enjoyable learning environment (Calvert & Hume, 2022). However, despite its potential, critical gaps remain in understanding the efficacy of interactive storytelling in specific educational contexts, such as Islamic education institutions, where cultural and linguistic nuances play a significant role.

The literature identifies several unresolved issues in the application of interactive storytelling for listening engagement. First, there is limited empirical research in religious education settings; most studies focus on general education contexts, overlooking the unique needs of Islamic education institutions (Taub et al., 2017). Second, while interactive storytelling is presumed to enhance engagement, there is limited research on how to measure this impact systematically. Third, few studies examine whether the benefits of interactive storytelling are sustained over time, particularly in young learners (Cheng & Lee, 2022).

This research is crucial for both educational and societal contexts. As English continues to dominate global communication, fostering listening skills in young learners is a pressing priority (Kırkgöz, 2018). For institutions like STAI Miftahul



Ula for the 1st semester, integrating innovative teaching methods aligns with the mission of preparing students for both local and global challenges. Furthermore, interactive storytelling not only enhances listening skills but also nurtures critical thinking, creativity, and cultural understanding values that resonate deeply with Islamic educational principles (Mahmudulhassan, 2024).

Relevant studies highlight both the potential and the limitations of storytelling approaches. Smith et al. (2020) explored digital storytelling's role in improving listening skills but lacked focus on culturally specific contexts. Ahmed (2021) investigated storytelling's impact on student engagement in EFL classrooms, noting increased motivation without delving into listening-specific outcomes. Cheng and Lee (2022) examined storytelling-based strategies for young learners, revealing improved comprehension but challenges in maintaining long-term interest. Rahmawati (2023) focused on interactive storytelling in Indonesian classrooms, showing positive results while emphasizing the need for scalable implementation.

These studies underline the potential of interactive storytelling but reveal gaps in its application to culturally and contextually specific environments, such as Islamic education institutions (Faregh et al., 2019). Despite growing interest in storytelling as a pedagogical tool, its application in Islamic education contexts, particularly for enhancing listening skills, remains underexplored (Rakhimova, 2024). This study bridges this gap by adapting interactive storytelling to the cultural and linguistic needs of young learners at STAI Miftahul Ula for the 1st semester.

The research objectives are twofold: first, to assess the effectiveness of interactive storytelling in boosting listening engagement among young learners at STAI Miftahul Ula for the 1st semester; second, to explore the impact of this method on listening comprehension and language development. This study offers a unique contribution by contextualizing interactive storytelling within Islamic education (Jamil, 2024). By incorporating culturally relevant narratives and a blended teaching approach, it enhances both engagement and language acquisition.

The research also introduces innovative measurement tools, providing a comprehensive evaluation of the method's effectiveness. Two hypotheses guide the inquiry: first, that interactive storytelling significantly improves listening engagement among young learners compared to traditional teaching methods; second, that learners exposed to interactive storytelling demonstrate measurable improvements in listening comprehension.

Unlike previous studies, this research employs a culturally adaptive framework that integrates interactive storytelling with digital tools and Islamic narratives (Elrawi, 2017). It combines quantitative assessments of engagement with qualitative analyses of learner experiences, offering a holistic understanding of the method's impact. As the demand for English proficiency grows globally, young learners face increasing pressure to develop foundational listening skills (Cameron, 2002).



Traditional teaching methods, however, often fall short in capturing their interest, particularly in culturally specific contexts like Islamic education. Interactive storytelling, with its blend of engagement and educational value, represents a transformative approach to language learning. This study investigates its potential at STAI Miftahul Ula for the 1st semester, exploring how culturally relevant narratives can inspire young learners, enhance listening skills, and prepare them to thrive in a globalized world (Fullan & Langworthy, 2013).

METHOD

This study employed a **quasi-experimental mixed-methods design**, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively evaluate the impact of interactive storytelling on listening engagement and comprehension among young learners at STAI Miftahul Ula for the 1st semester. The quantitative component involved administering pre- and post-intervention Listening Comprehension Tests (LCT) and Listening Engagement Scales (LES) to measure changes in learning outcomes, while the qualitative component included structured classroom observations and semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insights into student engagement and experiences (Jewell, 1995; Usman et al., 2025). A purposive sampling method was used to select 30 participants from a population of 60 students aged 14–16, ensuring that selected students had regular attendance and a representative range of baseline listening abilities (Campbell et al., 2020).

The research instruments included a validated Listening Engagement Scale (LES) using a 5-point Likert scale, a 20-item Listening Comprehension Test (LCT) validated by language experts, an observation checklist to document behavioral indicators of engagement, and a semi-structured interview guide for qualitative data collection. Participants were randomly assigned to either an experimental group, which received interactive storytelling sessions twice weekly over six weeks, or a control group, which continued with traditional listening exercises. The storytelling materials were specifically developed to reflect culturally and religiously relevant narratives appropriate for an Islamic educational context (Erina & Nurwahidin, 2025; Houston et al., 2011).

Data analysis involved paired sample t-tests and independent sample t-tests to compare within-group and between-group performance, respectively, using SPSS Version 27. Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed thematically with NVivo to identify recurring patterns related to engagement and perception. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly adhered to, and measures such as random assignment, standardized procedures, and trained observers were implemented to minimize bias and enhance the validity of the findings (Mattheoudakis et al., 2007; Rieger et al., 2018).



HASIL

The research conducted at STAI Miftahul Ula for the 1st semester revealed that interactive storytelling significantly enhanced listening engagement and comprehension among young learners. Quantitative analysis demonstrated substantial improvements in the experimental group compared to the control group (Jewell, 1995), while qualitative insights highlighted the role of culturally relevant narratives in fostering emotional and cognitive engagement (Usman et al., 2025).

The quantitative analysis showed a marked increase in listening engagement scores for the experimental group. Pre-test mean scores of $M = 65.4$, $SD = 8.9$ rose significantly to $M = 85.7$, $SD = 7.3$ in the post-test. This improvement was confirmed through a paired t-test, which yielded a statistically significant result, $t(14) = 9.23$, $p < 0.001$, with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.8$). In contrast, the control group exhibited minimal change, moving from $M = 66.1$, $SD = 8.3$ to $M = 67.3$, $SD = 8.0$, a difference that was not statistically significant. This demonstrates that the intervention specifically contributed to the improvement observed in the experimental group rather than resulting from general factors affecting both groups.

Similarly, listening comprehension scores showed substantial gains in the experimental group. The pre-test mean of $M = 60.8$, $SD = 7.6$ increased to $M = 82.5$, $SD = 6.4$ following the intervention. An independent t-test comparing the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups revealed a significant difference, $t(28) = 8.67$, $p < 0.001$, with a very large effect size (Cohen's $d = 2.3$). The control group recorded only a modest improvement, from $M = 61.4$, $SD = 6.9$ to $M = 63.2$, $SD = 7.1$. These results indicate that interactive storytelling not only enhances learners' engagement but also substantially improves their ability to comprehend spoken English, supporting the study's hypotheses.

Qualitative findings from interviews and observations provided deeper insights into the mechanisms behind these quantitative improvements. Three main themes emerged from the data. First, enhanced emotional engagement was consistently reported, with students expressing enthusiasm for the storytelling sessions, particularly appreciating narratives that resonated with their cultural and religious backgrounds. Second, teachers observed improved listening focus during the interactive sessions compared to traditional methods, noting higher levels of attentiveness and participation. Third, the interactive elements, such as open-ended questions and group discussions, encouraged critical thinking development, prompting students to reflect on and engage more deeply with the content. An unexpected finding was that approximately 10% of the experimental group reported initial difficulty adjusting to the interactive format, citing unfamiliarity with such participatory learning. However, their engagement and comfort levels improved notably after two sessions, suggesting a short adaptation period (Jewell, 1995).



To visually summarize these outcomes, a comparison of pre- and post-test scores for both engagement and comprehension clearly illustrates the differential impact of the intervention. The experimental group's consistent upward trend across all metrics underscores the efficacy of interactive storytelling, while the control group's stagnant performance highlights the limitations of traditional, non-interactive approaches. These combined quantitative and qualitative results affirm that interactive storytelling serves as a transformative pedagogical tool, effectively bridging cultural relevance with active learning to foster both engagement and comprehension in young learners.

PEMBAHASAN

The findings of this study confirm that interactive storytelling is a highly effective pedagogical tool for boosting both listening engagement and comprehension in young learners within an Islamic educational context. The significant improvements—31% in engagement and 36% in comprehension—align with and extend previous research by integrating cultural relevance into the storytelling framework (Bridge et al., 2023; Houston et al., 2011). These results not only meet the research objectives but also provide compelling evidence for the transformative potential of narrative-based, culturally adaptive teaching methods in second language acquisition.

Compared to related studies, this research addresses notable gaps in the existing literature. For instance, while Smith and Thompson (2021) reported limited engagement due to the use of generic, non-contextual content, this study's strategic incorporation of culturally and religiously tailored narratives resulted in significantly higher emotional and cognitive involvement. Similarly, Johnson et al. (2020) identified a lack of meaningful interaction as a major constraint in multimedia storytelling applications; our study actively integrated participatory elements such as open-ended questions, role-playing, and group reflections, which fostered active learning and critical thinking (Darsih, 2018). Furthermore, while Ahmed and Patel (2019) highlighted challenges related to cultural dissonance in EFL contexts, our findings demonstrate that culturally resonant storytelling can effectively bridge the gap between learners' identities and academic content, thereby enhancing both motivation and comprehension.

The study makes significant theoretical contributions by reinforcing and extending constructivist and narrative learning theories. It illustrates how culturally relevant storytelling can serve as a conduit between learners' lived experiences and academic content, facilitating deeper cognitive processing and more sustainable knowledge construction (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Moreover, by embedding interactive elements within storytelling, the approach promotes a learner-centered environment where students transition from passive recipients to active co-constructors of meaning. This aligns closely with Islamic educational principles that



emphasize critical reflection, ethical reasoning, and holistic development (Mahmudulhassan, 2024).

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. The relatively small sample size (N=30) and the specific cultural context of an Islamic boarding school may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational settings. Additionally, the short intervention period of six weeks does not allow for conclusions regarding the long-term sustainability of the observed improvements. There is also a potential for researcher bias, given the involvement in developing and delivering the storytelling content. Future research should address these limitations by conducting longitudinal studies to examine the durability of benefits, expanding the sample to include diverse cultural and institutional contexts, and exploring the integration of digital storytelling tools to enhance scalability and engagement (Rizvic et al., 2019; Fullan & Langworthy, 2013).

In conclusion, this study provides strong empirical and pedagogical support for the use of interactive storytelling as a transformative strategy in language education, particularly in culturally and religiously oriented settings. The findings offer actionable insights for educators seeking to enhance listening skills through engaging, context-sensitive methods. By aligning instructional design with learners' cultural frameworks and promoting active participation, interactive storytelling not only improves language proficiency but also fosters the broader cognitive and affective competencies necessary for success in an increasingly globalized world.

KESIMPULAN

This study concludes that interactive storytelling significantly enhances both listening engagement and comprehension among young learners at STAI Miftahul Ula. The experimental group demonstrated a 31% increase in engagement and a 36% improvement in comprehension compared to the control group, confirming the effectiveness of this culturally adaptive pedagogical approach. These findings not only validate the research hypotheses but also underscore the potential of integrating culturally relevant narratives with interactive teaching strategies to transform traditional language instruction.

The research bridges an important gap in the literature by contextualizing interactive storytelling within Islamic education—a setting previously underexplored in language pedagogy. By aligning storytelling content with learners' cultural and religious identities, the study supports a learner-centered model that fosters both linguistic development and critical thinking. This approach not only enhances English proficiency but also resonates with the holistic educational values emphasized in Islamic teaching frameworks.

Despite limitations such as sample size and intervention duration, the study provides a strong foundation for practical application and further research.



Educators are encouraged to adopt interactive storytelling in similar contexts, while future studies should explore its long-term impact, digital adaptations, and scalability across diverse educational environments. Ultimately, this research affirms interactive storytelling as a transformative, culturally responsive strategy that prepares young learners to engage effectively in a globalized world.

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