

## **Enhancing Reading Comprehension Skill Through Retelling Story**

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### **Abstract**

English reading comprehension remains a challenge for many Indonesian students learning English as a foreign language. This study investigates the use of story retelling as a pedagogical strategy to improve students' reading comprehension. Conducted in 2021, the study employed a descriptive quantitative approach with a one-group pre-test and post-test design involving nine Grade XII students from an Islamic private senior high school in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, who followed the 2013 national curriculum. The students read two Aesop's fables, The Boy Who Cried Wolf and The Fox and the Grapes, and retold the stories through written and recorded oral tasks as part of emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students' performances were assessed by three teachers using a scoring rubric covering relevancy, accuracy, fluency, and creativity, with relevancy and accuracy treated as the primary indicators of reading comprehension. Data were analyzed through descriptive comparison of mean pre-test and post-test scores. The results indicate an overall improvement in students' reading comprehension, particularly in terms of relevancy and accuracy in the post-test. These findings suggest that story retelling can serve as an effective instructional strategy to support reading comprehension in English, especially when integrated with written and oral activities. This study highlights the potential of children's literature, such as Aesop's fables, to facilitate comprehension among Indonesian senior high school students.

**Keywords:** *English Proficiency, Retelling Story, Reading Comprehension*

### **Introduction**

English is an unofficial lingua franca for communication around the world since it is the most spoken language in the world (Cong, 2022). In some countries, English is positioned as the first language, whereas in some other countries, it is positioned as the second language. However, not all countries that use English as a second language have a high proficiency in English. Some countries which are colonized by English-speaking countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Brunei, tend to have a high proficiency in English. Therefore, English has retained the exclusive status in those countries (Hasan, 2022). It is a different story for other parts of ASEAN countries which were not colonized either by Britain or the US. In this part of the world, proficiency in English is quite low, for example in Indonesia. That is why it is needed

for Indonesians to learn English properly even though only for communicating on the ASEAN scale.

According to Milania (2022) and Zannah (2023) Many Indonesian students have to struggle to learn English in all skills (listening, reading, speaking, writing). This is a true challenge for the teachers to make them acquire those skills as needed in schools. According to The PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) survey result in 2018, Indonesia ranked 74 or 6<sup>th</sup> from the bottom for literacy (reading skills). Meanwhile, in the 2022 PISA cycle, which was participated by 81 countries, Indonesia ranked 71, indicating that Indonesian students' reading literacy skills are still below the average of participating countries and have not improved significantly. It is evidence that Indonesians are far from understanding and comprehending the English texts (Suparman et al, 2023). For now, some schools are still emphasizing only on reading skills since the national selection for entering the University test uses reading as one of the test's sections.

Students who struggle to understand simple children's literature are likely to face greater challenges when comprehending academic texts in the future (Rashid, 2011). That is why it is needed to start the comprehension section of the lesson from the basic text like children's stories. Some said that this case happens because of their lack of vocabulary mastery, however, in fact, students can easily gain their understanding and also vocabularies by reading a simple text (Handayani, 2013).

Some experts believe that the use of children's short stories enhances students' reading comprehension, with a significant improvement in their understanding and vocabulary (Jeni, 2020). This is particularly important as comprehension problems are not solely due to differences in decoding words or accessing their meanings (Yuill & Oakhill, 1991). However, textbooks, which are often difficult to read, can be made more engaging by incorporating "fictional inducements to attention" (Garner, 1992).

However, most of the researches focused on the reading comprehension result without integrating the retelling activity as a multimodal strategy which combine the reading, writing, and speaking ability. Moreover, empirical study which examining story retelling uses children literature in Indonesian high schooler, especially in the context of 2013 National Curriculum, remains limited. Few studies have explored how written and oral retelling activities using fables such as Aesop's stories contribute to students' overall comprehension and understanding of English text.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the use of story retelling as a pedagogical strategy to improve students' reading comprehension. Conducted in 2021, this study attempts to collect samples from students who use the Indonesian 2013 national curriculum. They are the XII grade students of a private school in Yogyakarta-Indonesia. Nine students read two different stories of Aesop story, entitled as "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" for the pretest and "The Fox and the Grapes" for the posttest, they retold those stories in a written form, and then lastly used their speaking skills to retell the story during their midterm and final exams. This study is done to find out whether retelling a story could improve students' comprehension and understanding of reading English texts.

Having the same idea as Abdullah (2024), Aesop short stories are chosen because they contain abundant new vocabularies that can be learned using the stories, which is

relatively simple and easy for high school students to understand especially for the Indonesian students.

## **Method**

This study employed a descriptive quantitative approach with a one-group pre-test and post-test design to examine students' reading comprehension through story retelling activities. The design involved a single group of students who received the same treatment and were assessed before and after the intervention. The samples were obtained through three steps. Firstly, the students needed to read the story carefully until they could get the point of the story. After that, the students had to write down the story they had just read on a paper by the use of their mother tongue, which is Indonesian. To do these steps they were helped by the question lists provided by the teachers. Then, the students had to retell the story, record it, and then send the record to the teachers, so the teachers would be able to measure the students' understanding. The recording part was due to the COVID-19 pandemic that pushed the students to have online classes for health reasons. This method is in line with Wiwiek et al (2023) and Saputra & Abdullah (2023) which stated that recording a video is a part of Emergency Remote Teaching during COVID-19 pandemic.

The participants of this study were nine Grade XII students from an Islamic private senior high school in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. All students in the class were included as research participants due to the limited number of enrolled students during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many parents chose homeschooling instead of boarding schools.

The research instrument was a reading comprehension test in the form of story retelling, administered as both a pre-test and a post-test using different Aesop's fables. Students' performances were assessed by three English teachers using a scoring rubric covering fluency and accuracy, while fluency and creativity functioned as supporting aspects to provide additional insights into students' oral performance. Therefore, detailed comparative analysis focused on relevancy and accuracy scores. Each category was scored on a scale of 0–10. To ensure scoring reliability, the final score for each student was calculated by averaging the scores from the three raters.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive comparison of pre-test and post-test scores. The students' improvement in reading comprehension was determined by comparing the mean scores before and after the treatment. The difference between the pre-test and post-test results was used to indicate whether story retelling activities contributed to an improvement in students' reading comprehension.

## **Results and Discussion**

The scores were obtained from the sum of three English teachers of both tests (pre-test and post-test). The factors that have to be considered in scoring the students are Relevancy (How the retold story is relevant to the story given), Fluency (How smoothly the student retold the story), Accuracy (How far the retold story is accurate due to the word choice and grammar usage) and The Creativity (How the students developed the story by using their own words/dictions). The pre-test scores will be shown as follows:

Tabel 1. Pretest Score

No	Name/Initial	Relevancy	Fluency	Accuracy	Creativity	Final Score
		30%	30%	30%	10%	100%
1	Student 1	85	70	80	70	77.5
2	Student 2	90	85	80	95	86
3	Student 3	80	70	70	70	73
4	Student 4	85	80	85	70	82
5	Student 5	90	95	90	80	90.5
6	Student 6	80	70	70	70	73
7	Student 7	90	95	90	90	91.5
8	Student 8	90	80	80	90	84
9	Student 9	80	70	70	70	73

In the obtained score, it can be seen that the range of the score started from 73 to 91,5. The lowest score is gained by three (3) students, and the highest score is gained only by 1 student. It can be seen that the lowest score students find difficulties in fluency, accuracy, and creativity. It is whether they use a lot of interjections when they try to retell the story or try to read their notes several times (lack of fluency). The grammar used was also inaccurate such as the usage of passive voice and verb 1 which impacted the meaning of the sentences (lack of accuracy) and those students also used monotone vocabularies to develop the story (lack of creativity). Whereas for the relevancy score, all of the lowest score students get the average score (80), which means that they understand the story enough. The storyline is mostly the same as the story given, but in some parts, they were a little bit unaware.

For the highest score student, the student retold the story smoothly. This student used almost zero interjection and the story retold was relevant to the story given and the usage of grammar and word choice were mostly accurate. She retold the story coherently and correctly. All of the teachers understood the story that this student retold. Moreover, the story began and ended appropriately, showing that this student understood and comprehended the story given. It is in line with Collie and Slater's opinions (1994, p.84) that retelling a story offers a valuable oral practice, especially one that is related to the practice of a foreign language.

The average total score of the pretest is 81 and we can see that the students passed the average score are six students and three remaining students are under 81. It means that 66% of the students has already showed excellent performance and the rest needed more improvement in all aspects. It means that the treatment by giving the students short stories in order to enhance the ability to comprehend a text is effective. This result is merely the same to the Latiwang et al. (2023) which took the data from SMP N 1 Bolaang.

4 months after the pre-test, the post-test was held with different classic children's

stories from Aesop, entitled “The Fox and the Grapes”. The result showed different scores as the students had the experience of retelling a story before. They demonstrate a high level of commitment and diligence in their endeavors to retell the story. Moreover, the post-test was conducted face to face without requiring video recording, so the students came to school and retold the story in front of the three English teachers. The score obtained used the same factors as the pre-test.

Tabel 2. Post-test Score

No	Name/Initial	Relevancy	Fluency	Accuracy	Creativity	Final Score
		30%	30%	30%	10%	100%
1	Student 1	90	70	85	70	80.5
2	Student 2	95	85	90	95	90.5
3	Student 3	80	70	80	70	76
4	Student 4	85	85	85	70	86.5
5	Student 5	90	95	90	80	90.5
6	Student 6	80	70	80	70	76
7	Student 7	90	90	90	90	91.5
8	Student 8	90	80	90	90	87
9	Student 9	80	70	70	70	73

The above score showed some score enhancement and stagnant. With the lowest score is 73 and the highest is 91,5. However, the other scores were increasing. No student showed a decreasing score. Most of the students found it more fun to retell the story in front of the teachers directly rather than recording the video. However, for the lowest-scored student, it is still difficult for the student to retell the story whether it was directly or by recording the video.

The mean of the final score of the posttest is 83,5. The average score is increasing from 81 to 83,5, means that most of the students give an improvement to the performance they had. Compared to the pretest score, the students passed the average score decreased, it's only 5 students who reach the score more than 83,5. Despite that, the score each of the student mostly increased and the one who got the same score is only one and the score is above the average score. This means that the short stories influence some improvement to the students' performance in all aspects.

Besides, the treatment by giving them short stories which are rich in new vocabulary for them might influence how they can manage to do the post-test better. As Viera (2018, p. 90) said exposure to a variety of vocabulary can help students expand their language skills and improve their understanding of complex texts. This, in turn, can enhance their ability to comprehend and analyze the story better (Rahmah et al, 2023).

Here is the compared relevancy score in the pretest and posttest. Three students showed us the enhancement of the relevance of the vocabulary they used in the story to make their story more understandable for the teachers. Below is the table:

Tabel 3. Relevancy Compared Score

No	Name/Initial	Relevancy Pretest	Relevancy Posttest
1	Student 1	85	90
2	Student 2	90	95
3	Student 3	80	80
4	Student 4	85	85
5	Student 5	90	90
6	Student 6	80	80
7	Student 7	90	95
8	Student 8	90	90
9	Student 9	80	80

As shown in the table, three students' scores increased, especially for the relevancy score. It means that their abilities to understand and comprehend the story have improved, so the teachers found it more enjoyable and clearer to listen to the story retold by those students. For the stagnant score, it means that the students showed the same ability to understand and comprehend the story given.

It can be seen from the table that the average score of the relevancy aspect is increasing from 84 (pretest) to 87 (posttest). It means that each student showed improvement to their performance especially in relevancy or their understanding of the story is getting better. Moreover, they can retell it in a proper way that makes the teachers understand what they tried to deliver. There are only three students that got under the average score in pretest and four students in posttest. The average score is getting better but the student can pass the mean is also increasing. It is because when the average score is increasing, the student which did not show the improvement in their score will be under the average score. This does not indicate a decline in performance, as evidenced by the student's stable score of 85 on both the pretest and posttest.

This finding shows that the experience of retelling the story gives them the readiness when it is needed for them to retell the story. The relevance score in the pre-test shows that the students of grade XII of this Islamic private school have an above-average ability to understand and comprehend a children's story written in English. Then the post-test score shows that some students increase the score as they are more ready than before. As Anaktototy and Lenussa (2022, p 252) said the process of learning and retaining new vocabulary can help students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are essential for performing well on assessments.

There is an example of how student 2 show the improvement of her performance. In pretest she tried to retell the story of "A Boy Who Cried Wolf" just in a basic summary like no emotion and detail description involved. One of the lines she tried to convey:

“..then he lied again after all of his lie then the wolf really came and no one believe him”

From the story she tried to retell, it is clear that she just tried to convey the main story without any detail event to impress the teachers. She tried to give safe-impression by minding her grammar and vocabulary usage.

In the posttest she showed improvement by retell the story of “The Fox and The Grapes” by offering a developed and insightful narration:

*“The fox jumped and jumped and jumped! But he couldn't reach the grapes. Then he said 'Aah! They're sour anyway', but he said that because he just felt embarrassed.”*

This kind of narration excerpt not only includes a clearer sequence of events but also reveals her understanding about the story by giving emotions and deep interpretation. This shows her comprehension and valuable ability to express the story.

The below findings can be seen as convincing evidence that retelling the story can give students the accuracy of using the vocabulary. Through this method, some students gained higher scores significantly and they can retell a clearer story during the test.

Tabel 4. Accuracy Compared Score

No	Name/Initial	Accuracy Pretest	Accuracy Posttest
1	Student 1	80	85
2	Student 2	80	90
3	Student 3	70	80
4	Student 4	85	85
5	Student 5	90	90
6	Student 6	70	80
7	Student 7	90	90
8	Student 8	80	90
9	Student 9	70	70

Based on the above table, it is clear that five students are increasing their accuracy scores in using vocabulary. It indicates that through retelling the story the students can give more accurate vocabulary to enhance their story to become more understandable and more similar to the original story. This finding is in line with Katamadze et al (2022, p 234) opinion that retelling stories is an effective strategy for improving various language skills. Then Yulianawati et al (2022, p 165) also stated that retelling stories led to improvements in vocabulary, story structure, reading comprehension, and confidence. This was further supported by Mansyur et al (2021, p 153), who found that retelling stories improved students' speaking skills in terms of students' accuracy (pronunciation and vocabulary) and students' fluency (effectiveness).

There's a positive trend in the accuracy average score. We can see that the pretest average score is 79 and for the posttest we have 84. It is an indication that the students used more new correct words for retelling the story. There are only 3 students who got under the average pretest and posttest score and the students are the same. From the three students which got under the

average score only one student who had no improvement. He got the same score (70) for pretest and posttest. It means that the treatment of giving them short stories can give significance different outcomes even not for all of the students but most of them can show the improvement in their performance.

There's an example of how student 6 improved his vocabulary usage during the booth tests. In the pretest he told:

*“The boy **used** sheep to call the villagers”*

He was incorrectly used the word “used” which gave the obscure meaning that made the teacher has no engagement what he tried to convey. Instead of using the word “used” it is better for the student 6 use “tricked” or “lied” to make the teachers instantly understand what he tried to convey in his story. In the posttest he showed the better performance by using the correct words to narrate the story:

*“The fox tried to **get** the grapes but he **gave up** and **pretended** that he did not **wat** the grapes anymore”*

Here, the student 6 correctly use the word “get”, “gave up”, and “pretended”, which can portray the true action and emotion of the fox in the story. This development suggested that student 6 becomes more precise and prudent in choosing word choice to convey the intended meaning of the main story. Moreover, the tense used also getting better by using verb 2 in the posttest to show the past events.

There is an anomaly from the data that show a subtle stagnancy in student 9. When his friends can show the improvement in the posttest score, he remained stable for his score like in his relevancy and accuracy score that had stable score for pretest and posttest and he got 70 for accuracy and 80 for relevancy. A brief note from the researcher indicates that this student has indeed been slightly behind from the other students since the freshmen of senior high school. This phenomenon is not only found in English lesson but also in other subjects. Despite this anomaly, the findings are strongly stated that the treatment by giving them the short story to retell can enhance their ability to comprehend the meaning of a story. This is in line with Vretudaki (2022) and Jeni (2020) which stated that Indonesian students performed improved reading comprehension by using short stories.

Although fluency and creativity were included in the scoring rubric, they were not analyzed in the same depth as relevancy and accuracy. As stated in Handley, Andringa and Wang (2024), fluency is often influenced by individual learner characteristics, such as confidence and speaking habits, which are not directly related to reading comprehension. Similarly, in Karunaratne and Calma (2023) stated that creativity reflects students' expressive abilities, including gestures, facial expressions, and presentation style, rather than their comprehension of the text. Therefore, these aspects were reported descriptively and used to support interpretation, while comparative analysis focused on aspects more directly linked to reading comprehension.

Of course, the ability to understand and comprehend the literature text depends on several factors like socioeconomic background (the facility they have at home, and the courses they attended in the past) (Blanchard, 2023). This statement is in line with Eccius-Wellman & Santana (2020) and Sheikh, Khan and Gul (2020) which stated that socio-economic is one of variables that influence language proficiency. Moreover, this private school where the samples are taken is

famous for the pricey tuition fee. Thus, the students are more likely to have wider access to various reading texts and they are accustomed to use technology to help them out during their reading activities, for example, they can easily use the internet to access an online dictionary when they find difficult words and also the check the correct pronunciation. (Ghorbani & Golparfar, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

From this study, the results of this study indicate a general improvement in students' ability to comprehend literary texts. The score increase was due to the readiness of the students as they had experienced the pre-test before they took the post-test. Moreover, the students said that they were happier with the offline classes they had even though they had to take the test directly in front of the teachers (they had online classes for almost two years).

For the relevancy score, the increasing scores only happened to three students and the other showed a stagnant score (but still in the above-average score for understanding and comprehending). There is no decreasing score which means that the students successfully maintain (even increase) their ability in understanding and comprehending the literary text. However, it needed further research to find out their socioeconomic background, the facilities they have at home, and the courses they attended in the past to see the relevance of those factors to the scores they have gained.

The conclusion of the study highlights several key findings and implications derived from the research:

1. Increased Comprehension Abilities: The study demonstrates that students' comprehension and understanding of literary texts, particularly in English, experienced notable improvement. This enhancement was evidenced by the overall increase in scores from the pre-test to the post-test phase of the study.
2. Effectiveness of Story Retelling: Story telling emerged as an effective pedagogical method for improving students' comprehension skills. The experience of retelling stories contributed significantly to students' readiness and capacity to comprehend English texts.
3. Preference for Offline Classes: Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to online learning, students expressed a preference for offline classes. The opportunity to retell stories directly in front of teachers during post-tests was perceived as more enjoyable and beneficial compared to recording videos for assessment.
4. Maintained or Enhanced Scores: Notably, while some students showed stagnant scores in relevancy, the majority either maintained or improved their comprehension abilities. This suggests that students successfully retained or enhanced their understanding and comprehension of literary texts over time.
5. Need for Further Research: The conclusion acknowledges the need for further research to explore additional factors influencing students' comprehension abilities. Specifically, investigating socioeconomic backgrounds, home facilities, and past educational experiences could provide valuable insights into the relationship between these factors and students' academic performance.

In summary, the conclusion underscores the efficacy of story retelling as a means to enhance English literacy among Indonesian students. It also highlights the importance of

considering various factors that may influence students' comprehension abilities, paving the way for future research endeavors in the field of English language education.

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