



The Use of Storybook to Improve the Grasp and Pronunciation of Action Words in Primary ESL Classroom

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Abstract

The purpose of this action research was to investigate the use of storybooks to enhance the vocabulary and pronunciation skills of Year 4 pupils in primary ESL classroom, while also improving the teaching practices of the researcher. The data collection methods included pre- and post-action tests, semi-structured interviews, and observations, with data revision conducted through the triangulation method. The findings indicated that the implementation of storybooks positively impacted the pupils' vocabulary and their ability to correctly pronounce action words. The researcher was also able to improve her teaching practices to better facilitate her pupils' vocabulary development, particularly in the area of action words.

Keywords: Action words, primary ESL classroom, storybook

A. Introduction

1. Background of the Study

English is the world's third most widely spoken language and is taught in more than 118 countries, serving as the language of international communication. In order to prepare citizens who are proficient in English language, the Malaysian government has taken several initiatives to promote English education among pupils in the primary ESL classrooms nationwide. One of these initiatives is the Highly Immersive Program (HIP), which is

developed under the Upholding the Malay Language and Strengthening Command of English or *Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia dan Memperkukuhkan Bahasa Inggeris* (MBMMBI) policy and has been implemented in approximately 10,000 schools across Malaysia. The HIP aims to increase exposure to the English language through various activities organized by schools, with retired teachers, community partners, and parents involved in creating a fun learning environment for pupils. This program has resulted in significant improvements in pupils' English language proficiency, as evidenced by their ability to converse and exchange opinions in English with minimal assistance from those involved in the program.

Corresponding to the government's efforts to enhance pupils' English proficiency, it is evident that pupils must master the four fundamental aspects of the English language: speaking, writing, listening, and reading. The mastery of these skills enables pupils to improve their fluency and confidence in the language. Additionally, the ability to read and comprehend English, which is commonly used in media like newspapers and social media, allows pupils to expand their knowledge in various fields.

Speaking refers to the act of conveying information or expressing emotions through verbal communication. According to Suminih (2017), speaking is one of the four language skills that allow learners to communicate with others to express their thoughts, opinions, and feelings in order to achieve certain objectives. Proficiency in English language enables us to communicate more effectively with people from different backgrounds, cultures, and lifestyles, facilitating comprehensive conversations with effective input and output of communication. In addition, learning English as a second language can benefit us in terms of cognitive and analytical abilities. Mental exercises developed through the learning of a new language can alter brain structures and increase a person's creativity.

Given the significance of speaking skills in English language acquisition, teachers have a crucial role in intentionally and unintentionally integrating the language into pupils' lives. Consequently, effective and inclusive methods that enhance pupils' vocabulary and proficiency must be implemented to aid their speaking abilities and promote improvement in their overall English language proficiency. This enables pupils to effectively express their thoughts and ideas in the language. Accordingly, the researcher aims to concentrate on developing pupils' vocabulary and pronunciation specifically in the area of action words.

2. Statement of the Problem

During the school-based experience (SBE) and practicum phases, the researcher encountered several issues in terms of pupils' English language proficiency. One of the main issues was that the pupils had limited proficiency in English language, which was mainly due to their study environment. Since English language was not a part of their daily life language, they lacked exposure to the language, resulting in poor vocabulary of action words. Additionally, the pupils were often passive during English lessons because they faced difficulty comprehending instructions and responding to the researcher's questions, thus leading to a lack of two-way communication. Another issue was that the pupils were not motivated to learn due to the uninteresting and traditional teaching methods, which relied heavily on textbooks and lacked project-based learning. Pupils who learned through small cooperative groups scored significantly higher on achievement tests compared to those who learned through traditional methods. To address these issues, the teacher should prioritize vocabulary development since extensive word knowledge can improve success in various areas, including academics.

3. Research Objectives

The research objectives are:

1. to find out if the storybook helps in improving the grasp and pronunciation of action words among the Year 4 pupils.
2. to investigate whether the storybook helps in improving the teaching practice of Year 4 pupils' action words.

4. Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. How does the storybook help in improving the grasp and pronunciation of action words among the Year 4 pupils?
2. How does the storybook help in improving the teaching practice of Year 4 pupils' action words?

B. Literature Review

Several studies have highlighted the importance of using storybooks as a tool for enhancing vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation in ESL classrooms. According to Elley (1989), storybook reading has been proven to facilitate vocabulary growth among young learners by providing meaningful contexts for word learning. His study found that children exposed to repeated storybook readings demonstrated a significant increase in their receptive and expressive vocabulary, particularly in action words. Similarly, Beck and McKeown

(2007) emphasize that interactive storybook reading, where teachers engage pupils in discussions about new words, greatly improves vocabulary retention and comprehension. The study concluded that learners who participated in interactive reading sessions developed a deeper understanding of words and were more likely to use them in their own speech.

In addition, Nation (2001) suggests that vocabulary learning is most effective when learners encounter words in various contexts. Storybooks provide this advantage by integrating action words into narratives, making them easier to remember and pronounce. Hargrave and Sénéchal (2000) find that children who were asked to actively participate in storytelling activities, such as predicting events or acting out story elements, showed higher levels of vocabulary acquisition and improved pronunciation compared to those who were only passively listening. This supports the notion that incorporating storybooks into ESL instruction can significantly enhance pupils' speaking abilities by reinforcing both vocabulary knowledge and pronunciation skills.

Recent studies continue to support the effectiveness of storybooks in enhancing vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation among young ESL learners. Hassan and Mamat (2017) examine the impact of storybook-based learning on Saudi Arabian primary school students and notes that learners exposed to interactive storytelling sessions showed significant improvement in both vocabulary retention and pronunciation accuracy. The study has highlighted that contextualized exposure to words, particularly through engaging narratives, enabled pupils to internalize meanings more effectively than rote memorization techniques. Similarly, Mustapha and Yunus (2021) investigate the role of digital storybooks in Malaysian ESL classrooms and found that the use of multimedia-enhanced storytelling led to higher engagement and better pronunciation of newly learned words. Their findings suggest that integrating technology with traditional storybook reading can further enhance the effectiveness of vocabulary learning, especially for action words that require an understanding of movement and context.

C. Methodology

1. Action

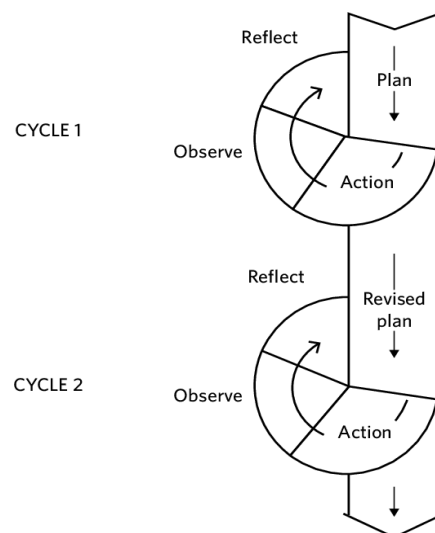
Action research as a research method that is based on practical experience and activity, which aims to develop theory while generating information. These two components support each other. It is also a constructivist approach that involves collaboration, communication, and action among participants in a social context. Therefore, the researcher conducted action research to foster reflective thinking in her teaching practice and gain new knowledge

directly relevant to the classroom. This is because conducting research allows the researcher to identify obstacles and limitations in her study and create a plan to overcome these issues. As a result, the researcher can improve her teaching practice and the learning environment for pupils, ultimately enhancing their English language proficiency, particularly regarding action words.

Action research is a structured and methodical approach to gather information and data for analysis (University of Central Missouri, 2021). In addition, Creswell (2015) defines action research as a procedure whereby a researcher investigates their teaching practices using research methods. Throughout this study, the action research model developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) was utilized in this study. The model comprises four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting as in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Kemmis and McTaggart Action Research Model (1988)



The initial phase of the action research model is planning, which involves identifying problems and devising potential strategies. In this study, a preliminary classroom observation was conducted to uncover the issue of students' deficient action-word vocabulary. This problem became the primary focus of the research and was assessed throughout the study. Prior to conducting the investigation, research objectives and questions were established to guide classroom plans, instrumentation, and participant identification. Additionally, the pupils' vocabulary skills were evaluated using a pre-action test.

The subsequent phase of the action research model is the action stage, in which the researcher executed the research to gain additional insight into the issue. She identified the research participants by using a diagnostic test to identify pupils with moderate to low

language proficiency. Accurate data and information were critical, and only pupils with moderate to low language proficiency were considered since the action words employed were more appropriate for this level of language proficiency. She put the action plan into practice by using a storybook entitled “The Little Red Riding Hood”. The purpose of this action was to assist pupils in overcoming their lack of action words in their vocabulary bank, which would help them communicate more effectively in English language. In this action stage, the researcher resolved her research questions and accomplished the research objectives by executing the action plan. The third phase of the action research model involves observation. During this stage, the objective was to observe the extent of pupils’ interest and involvement in using the action. Additionally, the researcher aimed to determine the appropriacy of the action by evaluating the pupils’ ability to learn the 10 action words that were taught through the action. To accomplish this, she sought the assistance of the English teacher in observing the pupils.

The final stage of the action research model involved reflecting on the teaching experience and finding new ways to implement the action and deliver the teaching of the action words. During this stage, the researcher also reflected on the obstacles she faced throughout the action and made adjustments to ensure the collection of ideal data and information. According to the Kemmis and McTaggart action research model, an additional cycle was required to be carried out, which involved implementing the updated version of the action. This allowed for a clear direction throughout the action and minimized obstacles. This study reported the first cycle, and the following cycle was kept for future research due to time constraints.

2. Research Participants

The research participants were identified based on the researcher’s objective rather than random selection in order to suit the issue and the focus of the study (Klar & Leeper, 2019). The research participants of the study came from diverse social backgrounds and genders. The school was situated in a rural area called Layang-Layang Kanan, Parit, Perak, Malaysia where English language was not frequently used. The Year 4 target group’s proficiency level varied from intermediate to low, and they seldom communicated in English language with either their peers or teachers. The class comprised 19 pupils, 8 of whom were male, and 11 were female. They did not perform well on their previous examinations, and only about 5 of the 19 were considered high achievers, while the others struggled with all four language skills, particularly speaking. They were passive in class, except when engaged in interactive and enjoyable activities, during which most of them demonstrated a high level of interest and

participated in the lessons actively. However, even during English language classes, they preferred to speak in their mother tongue, which is Malay language. After conducting a preliminary investigation, the researcher discovered that 12 of the pupils had moderate to low English proficiency. These 12 pupils were identified as participants and were all Malay and from the Year 4 class, which the researcher was teaching. The participants' data are presented as in Table 1.

Table 1
Data of the Research Participants

Research Participant	Gender	Age	Race	Native Language	Level
RP 1	Male	10	Malay	Malay Language	Low
RP 2	Male	10	Malay	Malay Language	Low
RP 3	Male	10	Malay	Malay Language	Intermediate
RP 4	Male	10	Malay	Malay Language	Low
RP 5	Male	10	Malay	Malay Language	Low
RP 6	Female	10	Malay	Malay Language	Intermediate
RP 7	Female	10	Malay	Malay Language	Intermediate
RP 8	Female	10	Malay	Malay Language	Intermediate
RP 9	Female	10	Malay	Malay Language	Intermediate
RP 10	Male	10	Malay	Malay Language	Low
RP 11	Female	10	Malay	Malay Language	Intermediate
RP 12	Male	10	Malay	Malay Language	intermediate

3. *Research Implementation*

The pre-action test conducted before the action involved the 10 action words that were introduced during the action stage. On the initial day of teaching, the pupils were required to orally pronounce the 10 action words and tell the meanings. This allowed the researcher to gauge their English language proficiency, particularly in terms of vocabulary and speaking skills. The outcome of the pre-action test revealed that 12 of the 19 pupils had limited to moderate vocabulary knowledge of action words. Most of them struggled to produce the correct pronunciation of the action words and provide meanings to them.

During the implementation of action, the researcher selected the storybook “Little Red Riding Hood” because it catered to various learning styles of the participants. Based on the storybook, 10 action words were selected, and the pupils were required to master them. These action words were highlighted in red to make them more noticeable. The book included illustrations to assist visual learners, and the participants also drew the actions depicted in the story. Aural learners read the action verbs aloud or spell them out, while reading and writing learners created lists or definitions of the action verbs. Finally, kinaesthetic learners learned the action verbs by physically acting them out. These were done during the implementation of the action, which lasted for two weeks.

Subsequently, the researcher sought the assistance of a Year 4 English language teacher to assist her with the observation of the participants. The researcher provided her with an observation checklist to assess the participants’ conduct during the action execution. The checklist contained five basic criteria of conduct in the classroom during the implementation of action, and the teacher was instructed to mark the corresponding boxes if the participants met the specified requirements.

After the implementation of the action, the participants were interviewed. The aim of the interview was to gather the participants’ opinions on the use of the storybook as a tool for teaching action words in the classroom. The interview was also useful for the researcher to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the action implementation. This allowed her to make adjustments to the action in order to better meet the needs and interests of the participants. A total of five questions were asked during the interview.

In order to evaluate the progress made by the participants throughout the learning sessions, they were asked to once again pronounce and give meanings to the 10 action words

they had learned for the post-action test. This step was deemed crucial in order to track the learners' level of knowledge, as suggested by Shivaraju et al. (2017). The researcher then evaluated the research participants' performance and recorded their scores for each of them. After that, she compared the scores obtained from the pre-action test and the post-action test, in order to assess the differences in their performance.

4. Data Collection Methods

Kabir (2016) defines data collection as the systematic process of obtaining and measuring information about variables of interest in order to answer research questions and estimate outcomes. In this study, the researcher utilized three methods for data collection, which included pre-action and post-action tests, semi-structured interview, and observation.

Firstly, one of the data collection methods she employed in her research was pre-action and post-action tests to assess the participants' progress after the implementation of the action. The pre-action test was conducted before the action was implemented to gauge the pupils' level of vocabulary and pronunciation, particularly of action words. On the other hand, the post-action test was administered after two weeks of implementing the action to measure the pupils' progress in their grasp of action words. Both tests contained identical questions, which enabled the researcher to observe the pupils' development accurately.

At the end of the action implementation, a semi-structured interview was carried out with the 12 participants. The purpose of this method was to obtain a detailed analysis of the action, with a focus on the participants' perspectives. Through this method, the participants were able to express their own opinions about the instrument and provide suggestions on how to improve it and the action to make the teaching and learning process more effective. Consequently, the researcher gained a clear understanding of the pupils' perception toward the action.

The researcher developed an observation checklist to monitor the pupils' actions during the action implementation. The observation was conducted by the English teacher, following the schedule she created. This was to ensure that the data collected from the observation was unbiased. The use of the observation checklist was considered a reliable method, as it provided a detailed record of specific behaviors. The observation checklist was considered as a positive method when the research findings were strong in validity (Goh, 2012). It allowed the researcher to identify which pupils required additional guidance, enabling her to take appropriate action. The English teacher wrote observational notes to further enhance the observation done.

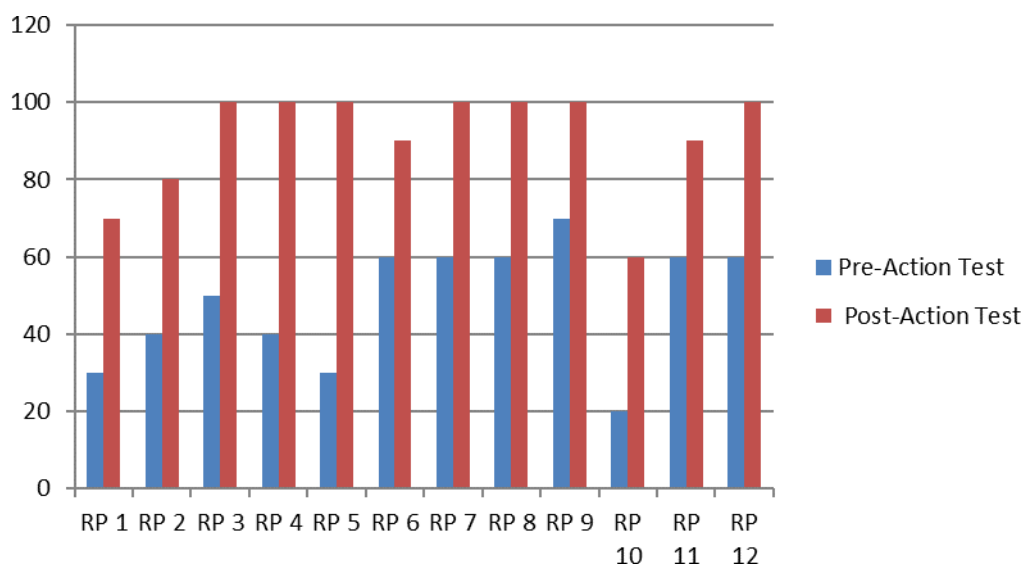
D. RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. Pre-Action and Post-Action Tests

According to the column graph presented below, there was a significant improvement in all participants' scores in grasping the action-word vocabulary. Seven of the participants scored 100% in the post-action test, and the lowest score was obtained by RP10 with a score of 60%. However, this was still considered an improvement as the score had increased by 40% compared to the initial score of pre-action test. The most notable improvement was seen in RP5, whose score increased from 30% to 100%, indicating a difference of 70% between the pre-action test and post-action test result. As an initial impression, the action implementation was successful, as the participants demonstrated improvement in pronouncing and identifying the action words correctly.

Figure 2

Research Participants' Results for Pre-Action Test and Post-Action Test



In addition, results of the quantitative data indicated that the participants' grasp of action words was better after they were introduced to the use of storybook. The comparison of means and standard deviation presented in Table 2 shows that there is a difference between the pre-action test and post-action test scores.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of Pre-Action Test and Post-Action Test

	N	M	SD
Pre-Action Test	12	48.33	15.86
Post-Action Test	12	90.83	13.79

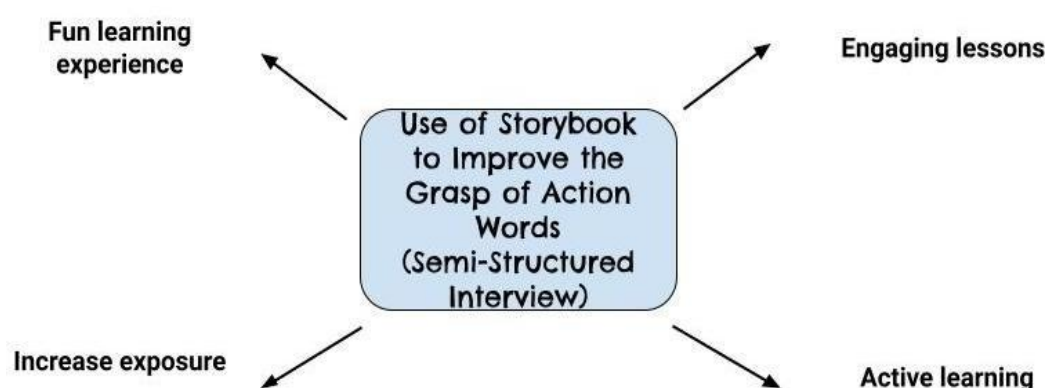
The scores of the pre-action test and the post-action test show that there are differences in the mean. The mean value for the post-action test is higher ($M=90.83$, $SD=13.79$) compared to the pre-action test ($M=48.33$, $SD=15.86$). The higher mean value from the post-action test illustrated that the participants performed better in the post-action test. The standard deviation value also showed that participants' scores in the post-action test were less spread compared to the pre-action test. The findings indicated that the participants improved in their grasp of action words after they had been exposed to the implementation of action using storybook and more pupils obtained the higher scores.

2. Semi-Structured Interview

The first question asked about the participants' enjoyment of using the storybook and their reasons for liking it. All 12 participants responded affirmatively and explained that they enjoyed learning with visuals and stories because it was fun. Some also mentioned that the classroom became livelier when the storybook was used for teaching and learning sessions. The second question asked the participants to discuss the strengths of using the storybook in the class. All participants had the same opinion, which was that learning with the storybook helped them understand the lesson better since the story was both wonderful and easy to comprehend. They also stated that the storybook was colorful, which increased their interest in learning with it. Finally, the researcher asked for their opinion on whether they learned more action words by using the storybook or the textbook. All participants agreed that they learned more action words by using the storybook than by using the textbook. This was because the storybook contained action, which allowed them to be more exposed to the action words used in it. In essence, the use of storybook on the participants' grasp of action words based on four developed themes is summarized in a thematic map (see Figure 3) as follows:

Figure 3

The Use of Storybook on the Participants' Grasp of Action Words Based on Four Developed Themes from Semi-Structured Interview

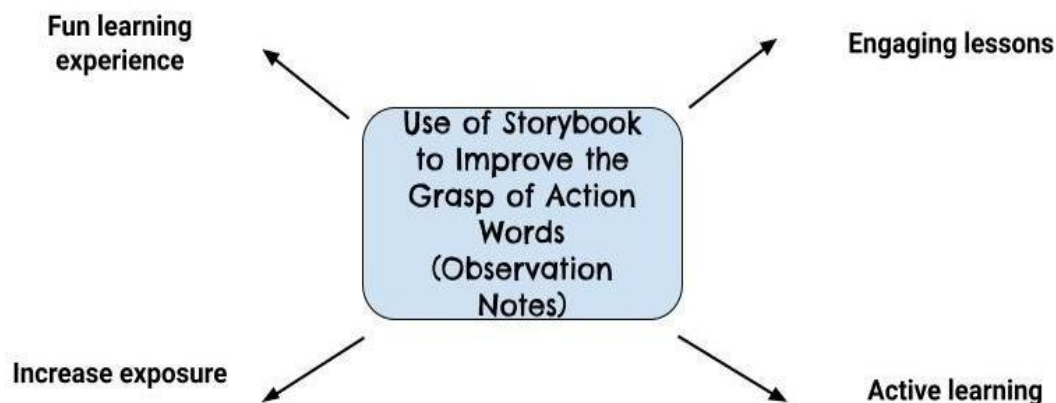


3. Observation Notes

The observation focused on several aspects to evaluate the participants' learning progress. The first aspect was to determine their interest in learning action words. All participants actively participated in the lesson, even the passive ones. The second aspect was to assess their use of English language when conversing with peers. Some participants still spoke in Malay language, except when aided by their peers or teacher. The third aspect was to evaluate their focus on tasks given. The participants were attentive and sometimes worked in pairs or groups to finish tasks. The fourth aspect was to assess their level of boredom with the action implemented. A few participants felt bored due to repetitive use of the action words. Lastly, their confidence in using English language and action words was evaluated. Some participants hesitated to speak English language and felt they lacked action words to converse in English language when they talked about actions. In essence, the use of storybook on the participants' grasp of action words based on four developed themes is summarized in a thematic map (see Figure 4) as follows:

Figure 4

The Use of Storybook on the Participants' Grasp of Action Words Based on Four Developed Themes from Observation Notes



E. DISCUSSION

1. *Research Question 1: How does the storybook help in improving the grasp and pronunciation of action words among the Year 4 pupils?*

The mean scores of post-action test showed an improvement in the pupils' performance when compared to mean score of pre-action test. Even the pupil who initially scored the lowest at 20% was able to improve his score by 40% to reach 60%. The storybook played a significant role in increasing the pupils' participation. It allowed pupils to understand the context and meaning of the story, making it easier for them to comprehend the words used regardless of their proficiency level in English language. This, in turn, increased their interest in learning the action words. The colorful illustrations and action words captured pupils' attention, as evidenced by their increased engagement and interest in the lesson.

Furthermore, the storybook aided pupils in identifying and pronouncing the action words correctly. Pupils could understand the meaning of the action words through the plot of the story and its environment. The pupils' ability to pronounce the action words improved significantly after the implementation of the action. In conclusion, the use of the storybook helped to improve Year 4 pupils' grasp and pronunciation of action words.

2. Research Question 2: How does the storybook help in improving the teaching practice of Year 4 pupils' action words?

To begin with, the researcher had to be inventive when using storybooks to teach as pupils tend to lose interest in repetitive teaching methods. Therefore, she employed creative techniques, such as visual and auditory aids, to encourage imaginative thinking and visualization. At first, the lessons were one-sided, and the pupils were not actively participating, so she added interactive activities, such as using action words to converse with their peers. These activities were not only enjoyable but also helped pupils understand the concepts of the action words, such as their meanings and pronunciation. As a result, pupils' comprehension skills improved, and they engaged actively in learning sessions.

Furthermore, the interactive activities developed using storybook helped the researcher become a better facilitator. By making the learning process pupil-centered, she allowed the pupils to lead their activities and only assisted them when they needed. This approach improved their focus and helped her facilitate the learning process more effectively. As a result, she could identify their strengths and weaknesses. Lastly, the researcher used the feedback from the pupils to reflect on her teaching methods and improve the action used. Through interviews with pupils and pre- and post-action tests, she evaluated her teaching techniques and adapted them accordingly. This reflection and adaptation improved her teaching methods, and pupils enjoyed the lesson while learning action words.

F. REFLECTION

Through the researcher's experience and knowledge gained from implementing the action, she was able to improve her skills as a teacher in several areas. Firstly, it was her understanding of using storybooks in the classroom to enhance the pupils' grasp and pronunciation of action words. She discovered that storybooks were a useful tool to teach pupils about action words, which was evident in the pupils' test results. All of the pupils showed improvement in their grasp of action words and were able to pronounce them correctly with minimal assistance. Storybooks are an excellent way to introduce action words as they contain numerous stories that feature action words, thus increasing the exposure to them. Additionally, the researcher's efforts in selecting appropriate materials to complement the use of storybook also played a role in enhancing the pupils' understanding of action words. She received guidance from the English teacher and her supervisor on selecting suitable materials for the pupils and improving them. As a result, she was able to identify the appropriate methods and materials required for the successful implementation of the action.

The researcher's second strength was creating a fun and enjoyable learning environment for the pupils by using various materials. For example, she incorporated images of story characters and related audio during storytelling to enhance the mood of learning. Khafidhoh and Carolina (2019) have shown that including images in teaching vocabulary can improve the pupils' performance, attention, and participation. By using colorful action words from the storybook, students were able to easily identify and relate the 10 action words taught to them. This experience allowed the researcher to increase her creativity, which would be valuable for her future teaching career.

Moreover, the researcher enhanced her skills as a facilitator by guiding the pupils during their activities. A facilitator is responsible for providing support and encouragement to the pupils while monitoring their progress (Andriyanti et al., 2020). The activities used a student-centered approach to increase the pupils' engagement and interest in learning. Hence, she acted as a facilitator and provided necessary assistance to the pupils whenever they required it. Whenever they encountered any challenges, they approached her for guidance. For instance, during one activity, the pupils were required to identify the correct action words based on the pictures given. Some of them found it challenging to understand a picture of a girl nodding her head, even after discussing it with their peers. As a result, the researcher helped them by demonstrating the action of nodding her head as a hint. Eventually, they

managed to identify the correct action words required to describe the picture. This experience helped the researcher improve her skills as a facilitator, and she considered it a success because she restrained herself from providing them with the answer, but a hint was given instead. In conclusion, this practice was significant because a teacher should assist his or her pupils in resolving their issues while enabling them to achieve the learning objectives.

Finally, the researcher developed her expertise in teaching methods by implementing the action. Through identifying the problems, she collaborated with the Year 4 English teacher and her supervisor to create drafts on how to address the issues. To ensure effective solutions, she researched various teaching strategies and methods by analyzing the teaching and learning situation and discussing them with teachers. She also engaged in further reading and studying to expand her knowledge of the topic. According to Patiung (2016), reading is an important way to acquire information and knowledge, and it can enhance critical and creative thinking skills by processing information. By increasing her reading and processing the information she obtained, the researcher extended her knowledge and developed her critical thinking skills.

In summary, based on the data analysis, it could be concluded that using a suitable storybook was effective in improving the pupils' grasp and pronunciation of action words. However, there was still room for improvement in enhancing the pupils' vocabulary and pronunciation of action words in an effective and easy manner. As a teacher, it was important to continuously seek and expand knowledge on teaching and learning approaches beyond the scope of this study. This would enable the researcher to develop more effective methods to improve the pupils' grasp and pronunciation of action words in the future.

G. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Throughout the implementation of her study, the researcher identified some suggestions and plans that could be incorporated into future research. Firstly, the storybook that was created during the study was in a medium size, which made it difficult for some pupils to see. This issue was further compounded by the social distancing protocols which mandated that pupils maintain a minimum of one meter distance between them due to COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, for future research, a larger and wider storybook should be used to ensure pupils could see the content of the story clearly. Secondly, in future research, real-life stories with moral values should be used, apart from fairy tales. This approach would enable pupils to relate the stories to their own lives, making them more valuable to the pupils. It would also allow for the integration of moral values which were essential for developing positive

attitudes among pupils. A study by Thambu (2017) indicated that storybooks are capable of instilling moral values such as helping, loving, and good behavior. Additionally, the pupils could practice the code of ethics and social ethics they learned in real life situations. Therefore, it was important to foster moral values at a young age to build the morality of pupils. In conclusion, to enhance the impact of using storybooks in increasing pupils' grasp and pronunciation of action words, a few improvements needed to be made. It was the researcher's hope that these suggestions could be applied in future research to produce individuals who were capable of thinking and feeling morally and effectively, as well as improving their English language skills, since both of these qualities impacted the pupils' behavior and learning.

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