

Learning English through Storytelling: Using *Let's Read* Digital Picture Books for First Graders

Hana Ristami¹

¹Sanata Dharma University, Indonesia

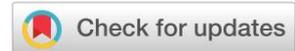
*Correspondence: hanaristami@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Teaching English to first graders in EFL classroom will meet challenges because the students are still in the phase of transition from kindergarten school to elementary school. In a situation where first graders still struggle to read and write in Indonesian language, an English teacher requires an effective way to help the students be interested in learning this language. Since the characteristics of young learners are active, learn through sensory, and focus on concrete things, storytelling can be chosen to teach English for first graders. Let's Read as a digital picture book can be used for storytelling for its beautiful illustration and levels of reading difficulty that can be adjusted based on the ages of the readers. This research aims to investigate the role of Let's Read in helping first graders learn English through storytelling and how it boosts the students' productive skills. The method used was case study. The participants were 18 first graders and the data was collected from classroom observation, documentation during storytelling and making a picture book, and teacher's reflection. The results showed Let's Read as a learning media helped young learners in learning English because of its interesting features and it boosted the students' productive skills through a picture book making.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Published March 27th 2026



KEYWORDS

Storytelling, Let's Read, Picture Book, First Graders.

ARTICLE LICENCE

© 2026 Universitas Hasanuddin
Under the license CC BY-SA
4.0



1. Introduction

There must be significant challenges when first graders have to adapt with their new school. In kindergarten school, one characteristic of the students is they mostly like to play and learn because, in this stage, they learn best while having fun activities (Scott and Ytreberg, 1993, as cited in Aslamiah, 2022). This situation is different from the one in elementary school that needs to be more serious because it has more school subjects. Furthermore, first graders also still struggle in their literacy skills, reading and writing in Indonesian language. On the other hand, English words sometimes have different pronunciation from what they are written. Since English is considered as a foreign language in Indonesia, an English teacher must implement an appropriate approach to bridge the gap.

Storytelling can be chosen to bridge the gap of literacy skills from Indonesian language to English language. Literacy skills could be improved through storytelling in the classroom because it helped students in reading comprehension, oral language, and writing (Miller and Pennycuff, 2008). For young learners, storytelling was suitable to be implemented in EFL classroom because it could raise students' creativity (Catala et al., 2017; Manaf et al., 2024; Junaid et al., 2025; Lanta et al., 2022; Junriati et al., 2021). When a teacher designed a learning activity that involved students' creativity, it could avoid students' boredom in learning and make them more active in achieve learning outcomes (Darmawan and Wuryandani, 2022; Tenrisanna et al., 2024; Junaid et al., 2023).

Since the first graders nowadays are generation that is close to technology, the teacher must concern about the use of digital tool in teaching English, for example using *Let's Read* digital picture books. *Let's Read* is a digital application that provides various kinds of stories which can be freely accessed and purposely made for enhancing children's reading interest through its beautiful illustrations and easy-to-understand narratives (<https://www.letsreadasia.org/about>).

As a digital storytelling application, *Let's Read* helped primary students in their transitional period (Fokides, 2016). The use of storytelling and digital storytelling also showed that there was literacy development to early learners (Maureen et al., 2022; Tenrisanna et al., 2022; Tammasse et al., 2025; Junaid & Andini, 2025). Previous studies showed the use of *Let's Read* digital application improved students' reading skill (Stevani et al., 2023). Another study stated that *Let's Read* helped students develop English literacy skills due to its combination of visual images and text (Pratiwi et al., 2024). *Let's*

Read also enhanced students' interest in reading because it provided both national and international languages, reading level from 0 to 5 and different story categories that could be selected based on the topic learned (Samsudin and Rahmawati, 2023). Not just receptive skills, *Let's Read* could be used as a learning media and boosted students' speaking skill (Siregar et al., 2022). All of these literature reviews will be used to answer the research questions: 1) What role can *Let's Read* play in helping first graders learn English through storytelling? 2) How does *Let's Read* boost the students' productive skills through a picture book making?

Though previous studies showed how *Let's Read* digital application impacted to reading and speaking skills, there was limited research on how this digital application helped first graders improve their productive skills through picture book making.

2. Methodology

This research was considered qualitative with case study method. The participants were 18 students from the first grade of SD Bopkri Sidomulyo 1, Godean.

2.1 Research Design

The research required 3 meetings. The first meeting was held on November 13, 2025 and used to teach the materials about numbers and animals by using *Let's Read* digital application. This application was selected because previous studies highlighted the benefits of this digital storytelling application as a tool to teach primary students in their transition period from kindergarten to primary school (Fokides, 2016) and it also assisted students in developing their reading skill (Stevani et al., 2023). Two stories were used for storytelling so students could understand about numbers and animals through the illustration and text displayed on the screen. The first story entitled *Simple Counting by Komar Rien Komar Cheh*

(<https://www.letsreadasia.org/read/7bed4edb-5900-4dde-931a-35d6e72a1f33?bookLang=4846240843956224>).

The second story was about *Let's Count Legs by Komar Rien Komar Cheh* (<https://www.letsreadasia.org/read/10937fd4-86dc-4672-9033-2e8089f4cfe8?bookLang=4846240843956224>). While storytelling, the teacher prepared some questions to check students' comprehension, such as: How many cicadas are there? What is cicada? What is spider? How many legs does a spider have?

The second meeting was on November 21, 2025. Based on their experience learning English through storytelling by using *Let's Read* as the media, students were interested in making their own pictures to tell a story. Therefore, starting this date, students made the concept of their story with the topic: my favorite thing. They had to sketch their picture describing their favorite thing completed with the explanation about shapes and colors. Since the students were still first graders, the teacher helped and guided them make the correct English sentences based on their own ideas.

Finally, the finishing was done on November 23, 2025. All pictures were colored and completed with a simple paragraph explaining about the name of students' favorite thing, shapes, and colors. The teacher compiled all pictures, edited the lay out, and submitted the file to the printing shop to make them into a perfect picture book.

2.2 Research Instruments

Research instruments used to write this paper were field notes, documentation during storytelling using *Let's Read* digital application and picture book making, and teacher's reflection. Through field notes, the teacher could document how the teacher led the process and guided the students, from the moment they listened to the stories, understood what was delivered through the illustrations and simple sentences to the moment they created their own pictures and stories. In every meeting, this instrument assisted the teacher to analyze the real time situation, showed the evidence for later analysis, and ensured the teacher that the designed activities really achieve the educational goals. To check the accuracy of the field notes, the teacher also recorded the whole learning process from the first meeting to the finishing session. When writing the field notes, the teacher could not document every single detail due to shared focus from writing to observing the class situation. The recording could be used to cross-checked what was written on the notes similar to the real situations captured by the recording. Utilizing both instruments strengthened the validity of what took place in the classroom. The last instrument was teacher's reflection. After writing the field notes, cross-checking them with the recording, teacher's reflection was necessary to evaluate the beginning of the process and decide what the teacher would do in the next meetings. As teaching English to the first graders in an EFL classroom context would find challenges in terms of understanding the target language, teacher's reflection was useful to interpret data presented in field notes and

recordings. The teacher could analyze what worked well during the session, what did not work well and the reason why, and finally lead to the insight to design the activities for the next meeting.

Field notes, documentation through recording, and teacher's reflection were selected to be the research instruments for this paper because they complete each other. As field notes provided the immediate documentation that could be analyzed later, recording preserved objective evidences that captured both verbal and non-verbal interaction in the classroom. Finally, teacher's reflection supported the professional development of the teacher to improve the teaching practice for the next meeting.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

Based on the field notes and documentation during storytelling using *Let's Read* digital picture book and students' picture book making, and the teacher's reflection, the results could be explained as follow:

3.1.1 The Role of *Let's Read* in Helping First Graders Learn English through Storytelling

As a learning media that helped teacher in explaining the story through beautiful illustration and simple text, stories in *Let's Read* really captivated the first graders' attention, made them see the symbols or sign clearly so they could understand the vocabulary and how it was written, improving the students' literacy skills (Pratiwi et al., 2024). Through the classroom observation and the documentation, the first graders also could answer the teacher's questions, for instance: What is cicada? How many cicadas do you see? What is spider? How many legs does a spider have?

This result aligned with the previous studies stating that using *Let's Read* as a learning media did not just develop students' receptive skills, but also their productive skill (Siregar et al., 2022). The features in this digital application also played important roles in boosting primary students' literacy skills because it was provided with reading levels from 0 to 5 and the categories of the stories could be selected based on the material taught (Samsudin and Rahmawati, 2023).

Since the topic of the first meeting was about animals and numbers, the teacher browsed in *Let's Read* and found a suitable story to be told to the first graders. The first story entitled *Simple Counting* by Komar Rien Komar Cheh (<https://www.letsreadasia.org/read/7bed4edb-5900-4dde-931a-35d6e72a1f33?bookLang=4846240843956224>). The reading level of the first story was 1 and it was appropriate for the first graders because the words were presented in phrases.



Figure 1. The cover of the first story showed the reading level of this story was 1.

The slides in the first story consisted of ten pages and its beautiful images completed with noun phrases facilitated the first graders to understand numbers and animals in English.

8 cicadas



1

Figure 2. A slide taken from *Let's Read* digital application entitled *Simple Counting* by Komar Rien Komar Cheh, used by the teacher in the first meeting to introduce kinds of animals and numbers in English.

In the second meeting, the teacher still selected the story with reading level 1. Since the field notes and recording showed students enthusiasm and they could understand the material at ease, the second story was presented in simple full sentences, not phrases anymore. The second story was taken from <https://www.letsreadasia.org/read/10937fd4-86dc-4672-9033-2e8089f4cfe8?bookLang=4846240843956224>, entitled *Let's Count Legs* by Komar Rien Komar Cheh.

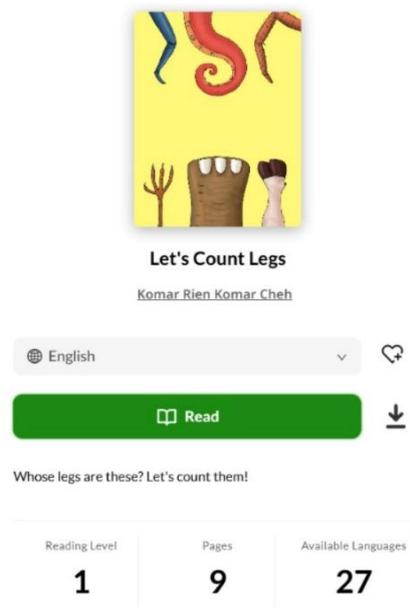
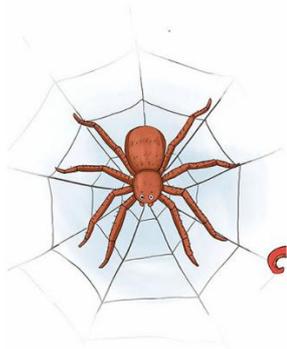


Figure 3. The cover of the second story showed the reading level was 1

If in the first meeting the students were introduced to the English words in form of phrases, there was a slight difference in the second meeting. Though the sentence was simple, it was already in a full sentence. Therefore, students learned step by step how to write English sentence.

Spider has eight legs.



7

Figure 4. A slide from the second story displayed the picture of a spider and its number of legs in a form of a full sentence

Not just writing, *Let's Read* also assisted first graders to speak in English. When the teacher did the storytelling by using this digital application and gave questions to the first graders after that, they could answer them correctly. This aligned with previous studies stating that *Let's Read* as a learning media could boost students' speaking skill by displaying good illustrations and texts (Siregar et al., 2022). The students even directly understood the meaning of the words in their mother tongue because they saw the image of spider on the screen and the alphabets of it. They also understood that eight means 'delapan' by counting them through the illustration showed.

3.1.2 *Let's Read* Boosted Students' Productive Skills through a Picture Book Making

After storytelling by using *Let's Read* digital application, students were interested in learning English more and enthusiastic when the teacher offered them to make their own picture book. Picture book making was selected as the activity to improve students' productive skills because first graders were in a transition period from kindergarten to primary school and one of the characteristics was they learned best while practicing fun activities (Scott and Ytreberg, 1993, as cited in Aslamiah, 2022). Catala et al. (2017) also emphasized that storytelling was a suitable activity for young learners, especially in EFL classroom context, to boost their creativity. Moreover, involving students' creativity in learning process could raise their enthusiasm and helped the teacher achieve the learning outcomes (Darmawan and Wuryandani, 2022).

In the picture book making, the concept was about '*My Favorite Thing*' as it would be the next material for English lesson. Students had to choose one of their favorite things and described it in simple sentences explaining the name of the thing, shape, and color. The teacher let students pour their ideas by listening to their story, guided them in making the drawing, and helped them arrange the sentences to explain their picture. As first graders, it was still challenging for the students to read and write in English. Nevertheless, making a picture book could be a fun way to overcome that challenge. From the teacher's reflections, students enjoyed the activities and process, from digital storytelling to picture book making. These are some pictures showing students' activity in drawing their favorite things.



Figure 5. The first graders are making the sketches of their own pictures and starting to color them



Figure 6. Students are drawing their favorite thing with their imagination and creativity

Finally, when all pictures had been finished, they were compiled and printed into a picture book. The examples of the results were like this:

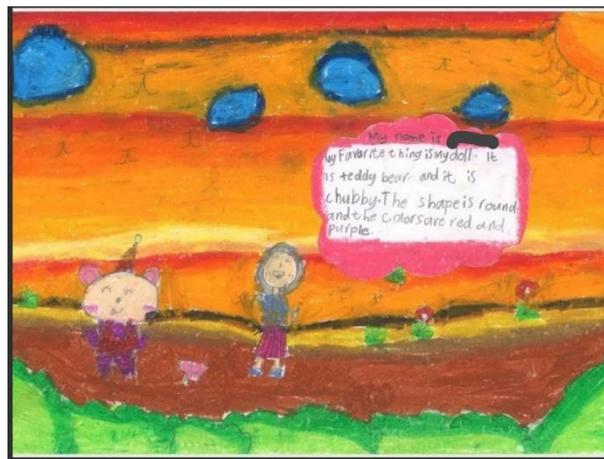


Figure 5. An example of pictures made by the first grader displaying a doll as her favorite thing. The picture is completed with English sentences explaining the kind of thing, its shape, and color



Figure 6. A picture made by the first grader showing a rocket as his favorite thing and simple explanation about the shape and color of the object

Let's Read facilitated the first graders to learn English and boost their literacy skills through pictures and text that motivated students to learn more about English and storytelling. Through a picture book making, students could tell their story and develop their oral language and writing (Miller and Pennycuff, 2008).

3.2. Discussion

This paper aimed to investigate and analyse the learning strategy used to teach the first graders in learning English. As Indonesia is still considered as an EFL country, teaching English for primary students can be challenging not just because they still struggle in developing literacy skills in their mother tongue, but also, at the same time, they have to be familiar with English as one of school subjects. How primary students could learn English in fun ways, kept enthusiastic in the learning process without getting bored, and achieved the learning outcomes became the focus of this study.

The participants of the research were 18 students of the first grade of SD BOPKRI Sidomulyo 1, Godean. As they were still in a transition phase from kindergarten to primary school, walking around the class and playing with their classmates during the learning process are unavoidable. Designing an appropriate activity that combined creativity and learning was necessary, and storytelling was selected as it was suitable for young learners to develop their literacy skills (Maureen et al., 2022).

In storytelling, students can use their creativity to share what they have in their mind. To relate storytelling and learning English, the teacher designed a picture book making as the activity to learn English in a fun way. Since the first graders were the generation who is close to technology, a digital application was utilized to support the activity of storytelling. *Let's Read* as a digital storytelling application provided various kinds of stories that could enhance students literacy skills and raise reading interest due to its user-friendly features (<https://www.letsreadasia.org/about>).

The teacher could search the stories needed by typing the keyword in search bar and the stories would be presented and could be selected based on the students' need. Moreover, this application was completed with the levels of reading from 0 to 5 that supported the teacher to find suitable stories for the students (Samsudin and Rahmawati, 2023). Based on these facilities, the teacher decided to implement storytelling with *Let's Read* digital application to teach the first graders.

First meeting was conducted on November 13, 2025. The teacher provided one simple story about animals and number. Recording and field notes were prepared to collect the data. Based on the recording, at first the students were busy with themselves and did not pay attention to the teacher. However, the situation changed when the screen displayed beautiful illustrations from *Let's Read* and the first graders listened to the teacher attentively. The teacher did storytelling by using the slides on the digital application while explaining about animals and numbers. The images on the screen were really helpful for the first graders to convey the meaning of English words. When the teacher threw questions to the students about animals and numbers in English, they could give correct answers. Miller and Pennycuff (2008) noted in their studies that oral language could be improved through storytelling.

The activity of storytelling continued to the second meeting on November 21, 2025. The students were presented another story from *Let's Read* and this time, the text was already in a full sentence. In this case, the teacher prepared the students to get familiar with English sentences so they would be able to share their own story later in picture book making. The selection of the story was based on the analysis of field notes, recording, and teacher's reflection in the first meeting showing that students could understand the material at ease. After finishing the storytelling in the second meeting, the teacher started to demonstrate how to tell story from a drawing. The students looked enthusiastic and they could hardly wait to draw their own pictures and tell the story about it.

The last meeting was conducted on November 23, 2025. The first graders drew one of their favorite things as the next topic of their English class. They had to describe their favorite things, completed with the text about the things, shape and color. They finalized their sketches and coloring. Although the sentences were made together with the teacher, the idea genuinely came from the students. Finally, all drawings were scanned and printed into a book. The students looked so proud and they read not just their own stories, but also their friends'.

Let's Read as a digital storytelling application played important roles in helping the first graders learn English. The illustration and the text were useful to develop their literacy skills. Though their skill of reading and writing in Indonesian language were still developing, *Let's Read* could motivate them to learn English in pleasant activity. Not just taking part in assisting the first graders to learn English by storytelling, *Let's Read* also contributed in improving the first graders' productive skills through picture book making. They learned eagerly how to tell their stories in English. The first graders were also excited in sharing their idea why they selected a particular object as their favorite thing. For the teacher, utilizing *Let's Read* as a digital application enhanced personal development to be more creative in teaching English to the early learners.

For further discussion, it could be investigated how all beneficial features in *Let's Read* digital storytelling application could support the English teacher in developing their students' literacy skills and raising reading interest, especially

students in developing EFL countries. Teacher's belief in utilizing this application is also essential since a digital tool still needs human resources to operate it.

4. Conclusion

This research showed that teaching and learning English for the first graders in the era of technology really needed creativity to result in good development of early learners' literacy skills. Teacher needed to explore what kind of learning strategies would meet the students' need, especially the early learners who like to learn and play. The use of digital application could be selected to support the teaching practice to achieve the educational goals.

Based on the results presented in this study, *Let's Read* as a learning media could assist the teacher in teaching English to the first graders. The feature of reading levels and various kinds of stories provided in this application facilitated the teacher in presenting pleasant storytelling as the way to help young learners learn English and develop their literacy skills in target language.

Furthermore, combined with students' creativity, storytelling could improve their productive skills. Students were encouraged to answer the teacher's questions because the illustration and the text shown in *Let's Read* helped them in understanding the topic. The input the students obtained during digital storytelling also equipped them in picture book making. They understood how to tell their stories in simple sentences and presented it with their genuine drawing and colouring. In conclusion, *Let's Read* digital storytelling application was effective to teach English for primary learners and boost their literacy skills.

References

- Aslamiah, S. (2022). Characteristic English learning style for young learner in new normal era. *Intensive Journal*, 5(2), 104-116.
- Catala, A., Theune, M., Gijlers, H., & Heylen, D. (2017, June). Storytelling as a creative activity in the classroom. In *Proceedings of the 2017 ACM SIGCHI Conference on Creativity and Cognition* (pp. 237-242).
- Darmawan, L. A., & Wuryandani, W. (2022). How Picture Storybook Improve Creative Thinking Skills and Learning Outcomes of Elementary School Students?. *Journal of Education Research and Evaluation*, 6(3), 529-537.
- Fokides, E. (2016). Using digital storytelling to help first-grade students' adjustment to school. *Contemporary Educational Technology*, 7(3), 190-205.
- <https://www.letsreadasia.org/about>
- <https://www.letsreadasia.org/read/7bed4edb-5900-4dde-931a-35d6e72a1f33?bookLang=4846240843956224>
- <https://www.letsreadasia.org/read/10937fd4-86dc-4672-9033-2e8089f4cfe8?bookLang=4846240843956224>
- Jumriati, Rahman, F., & Lewa, I. (2021, November). The Potential of Children's Literature in Education and Environmental Ethics: Linguistic and Literary Approaches. In *The 1st International Conference on Research in Social Sciences and Humanities (ICoRSH 2020)* (pp. 1054-1058). Atlantis Press.
- Junaid, S., Muzzammil, A., Mujizat, A., & Andini, C. (2023). Onomatopoeia Variation Among Cultures: An Exploration in Selected Children's Story Books. *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 6(4), 658-664.
- Junaid, S., & Andini, C. (2025). Symbolism of Victorian society in the anthropomorphism of the Peter Rabbit picture book (1901). *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 8(1), 278-288.
- Junaid, S., Andini, C., & Junaid, K. U. (2025). The Role of Illustrations in the Fictional Picture Book The Little Red Hen for Developing Visual Literacy in Early Childhood. *Dialectica Online Publishing Journal*, 1(1), 64-71.
- Lanta, J., Rahman, F., Lewa, I., & Akhmar, A. M. (2022). Respect for nature in Indonesian children's fiction: Ecocriticism

perspective. *Webology*, 19(1), 6010-6021.

- Manaf, A., Rahman, F., & Amir, M. P. (2024). Ecocritical Study: Dwelling Aspect Portrayed in Richard Powers's *The Overstory*. *International Journal of Religion*, 5(11), 4919-4925.
- Maureen, I. Y., van der Meij, H., & de Jong, T. (2022). Evaluating storytelling activities for early literacy development. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 30(4), 679-696.
- Miller, S., & Pennycuff, L. (2008). The power of story: Using storytelling to improve literacy learning. *Journal of Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives in Education*, 1(1), 36-43.
- Pratiwi, N. N. S., Padmadewi, N. N., & Dewi, N. K. S. (2024). The Implementation of Let's Read Application toward Students Literacy. *Lingua Scientia*, 74-83. <https://doi.org/10.23887/ls.v3i1i1.82143>
- Samsudin, D. F. A., & Rahmawati, F. P. (2023, August). Digital Literacy Through Let's Read App to Improve the Reading Interest of Elementary School Students. In *International Conference on Learning and Advanced Education (ICOLAE 2022)* (pp. 421-435). Atlantis Press. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-086-2_36
- Siregar, R. A., Nasution, I., & Pardi, P. (2022). Utilization of Hand Puppets from Used Socks and Let's Read Application as Learning Media to Improve Students' Story-Telling Skills. *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 14(4), 6071-6080.
- Stevani, A. M., Ambarini, R., & Setyorini, A. (2023). Enhancing students' reading comprehension using Let's Read application in visualization strategy. *CENDEKIA: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial, Bahasa dan Pendidikan*, 3(4), 01-08. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55606/cendekia.v3i4.1673>
- Tammasse, Jumraini, & Rahman, F. (2025). The Influence of Neurolinguistic Intervention on the Development of Reading Ability in Children With Dyslexia: A Case Study Approach. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies (TPLS)*, 15(7).
- Tennisanna, R., Rahman, F., Abbas, H., & Pattu, A. (2024). Digital Story of Woman Character in Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*. *International Journal of Religion*, 5(7), 1-14.
- Tennisanna, R., Rahman, F., Abbas, H., Pattu, A., & Simamora, B. (2022). Digital Illustration-Defense Mechanisms in Poe's Short Story *The Tell-Tale Heart*. In *Unibos: Proceeding of the 1st Multidisciplines Bosowa International Conference* (p. 294).