

Exploring the Use of Storytelling to Enhance Motivation in Early English Education: Evidence from UBLES Teachers

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Storytelling, learner motivation, early English education, young learners, Philippine laboratory school, developmental adaptation, qualitative study, narrative pedagogy, culturally relevant teaching, early childhood education.

Abstract. Storytelling engages young learners, yet its specific role in enhancing motivation in early English education within resource-limited Philippine laboratory schools remains understudied. This qualitative study explored how Nursery–Grade 3 English teachers at the University of Baguio Laboratory Elementary School (UBLES) utilize storytelling to boost learner motivation, identified the challenges encountered, explored opportunities presented, and proposed practical improvements. Data were gathered via semi-structured interviews with six purposively selected teachers, classroom observations during storytelling sessions, and analysis of lesson plans. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) framework was conducted, supported by data triangulation and member checking to ensure credibility. Results showed that teachers employed developmentally adapted storytelling: daily multisensory and prop-based sessions in Nursery–Kindergarten; interactive role-play, prediction, and dramatization in Grades 1–2; and reflective inference with moral discussions in Grade 3 (2–3 times weekly). These strategies generated high motivation levels evidenced by sustained attention, emotional engagement, active participation (including shy learners), increased speaking confidence, and frequent story repetition requests, while delivering rich contextualized language input. Major challenges included limited resources, time constraints, classroom management, learner diversity, and occasional cultural mismatches. Teachers adapted creatively using low-cost props, gestures, repetition, and selective L1 support. Key opportunities encompassed natural vocabulary and comprehension gains, creativity, critical thinking development, empathy building, and culturally relevant intrinsic motivation. The findings offer teacher-derived evidence of storytelling’s effectiveness in the Philippine early English context and contribute to global narrative pedagogy by extending its application to multilingual, low-resource settings. Recommendations focus on targeted teacher training, development of culturally relevant materials, curriculum integration, flexible scheduling, and strengthened school-home connections.

Introduction

In recent years, educational systems worldwide have emphasized the importance of learner motivation, particularly in early childhood education, where foundational language skills are developed. Globally, researchers and educators have explored various methods to improve engagement and learning outcomes among young learners, and storytelling has emerged as a powerful pedagogical tool in this regard (Nassim, 2018). Digital and traditional storytelling methods have gained traction across multiple educational settings for their potential to foster language development, creativity, and motivation. In English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

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contexts, storytelling is especially valuable as it provides learners with contextualized and meaningful exposure to language (Fu et al., 2021).

The global rise of interest in storytelling as a teaching method coincides with developments in early literacy research and growing recognition of the importance of multimodal and learner-centered instruction. As Banoth and Muthyala (2025) argue, storytelling especially when integrated with digital tools can create a rich, interactive environment that caters to the needs of young language learners. Their findings highlight how storytelling not only improves comprehension and oracy skills but also motivates learners by making lessons more relatable and enjoyable.

In the Philippine context, the Department of Education (DepEd) has stressed the importance of nurturing early literacy and English communication skills from the early years of formal schooling. Various programs and teaching strategies have been implemented to improve English proficiency, particularly in private laboratory schools such as the University of Baguio Laboratory Elementary School (UBLES). As part of this effort, storytelling has been widely adopted in classrooms catering to Nursery, Kindergarten, and Grades 1 to 3, forming an integral part of instructional strategies to support motivation and engagement in English language learning.

At UBLES, storytelling is used not only as a reading and listening activity but also as a platform for learners to express themselves, interact with peers, and construct knowledge through narratives. Teachers incorporate storytelling in various forms oral storytelling, picture books, puppetry, and digital storytelling tailored to the developmental stages of young learners. In Nursery and Kindergarten, storytelling focuses on auditory and visual stimulation, laying the foundation for vocabulary acquisition and comprehension. For Grades 1 to 3, storytelling becomes more interactive, often involving role-playing, question-and-answer sessions, and student-created stories, which foster higher-order thinking and collaborative learning.

Despite its recognized benefits, there is limited empirical evidence on how storytelling specifically enhances learner motivation in English education in the early years, especially in the local context of Philippine laboratory schools. While anecdotal reports and classroom observations indicate that storytelling engages students, there is a need to document and analyze its concrete effects on motivation, as perceived by the teachers implementing these strategies. Teacher insights are essential in understanding how storytelling is employed across developmental stages and how it influences learners' enthusiasm and participation in English lessons.

Motivation in early education is a multifaceted construct, involving intrinsic interest, social interaction, enjoyment, and a sense of competence. Storytelling, by its nature, aligns well with these components. Stories can capture learners' imagination, provide cultural and moral lessons, and serve as a vehicle for language input that feels less didactic and more natural (Fu et al., 2021; Yu & Wang, 2024). However, to make storytelling effective in motivating learners, it must be implemented with intentional strategies that consider learners' developmental levels, interests, and linguistic needs.

This study is grounded in the classroom experiences of English teachers from Nursery to Grade 3 at the University of Baguio Laboratory Elementary School. It explores how these educators use storytelling to cultivate motivation among young learners and what patterns and practices emerge from their pedagogical approaches. Focusing on teachers' perspectives and classroom applications, this study contributes to the growing literature on early English education and storytelling-based instruction.

This study explores the use of storytelling to enhance learner motivation in early English education, specifically in the context of UBLES. It seeks to: (1) describe how English teachers from Nursery to Grade 3 use storytelling to enhance the motivation of learners in English subjects; (2) identify the challenges encountered by teachers when using storytelling to motivate learners in English; (3) determine the opportunities presented by storytelling in enhancing learner motivation in early English education; and (4) suggest ways to strengthen storytelling-based strategies that support motivation in English language teaching among early learners.

Review of Related Literature

Storytelling, as both an art and a pedagogical tool, has received global attention for its potential to enhance young learners' motivation in early English education. Across various contexts, it has proven effective in supporting language development, emotional engagement, and classroom interaction. International studies emphasize the motivational benefits of storytelling in early English classrooms. In Vietnam, for example, storytelling has been integrated as a communicative strategy to enhance learners' interest and confidence in using English (Nguyễn & Phillips, 2022). Avcı and Hol (2023) further found that young learners exposed to digital storytelling showed greater engagement and listening comprehension compared to those in conventional instructional settings.

In China, storytelling was shown to promote intrinsic motivation and learner autonomy in English learning. In addition, engaging children in interactive storytelling nurtures imagination, vocabulary retention, and narrative skills, providing a context-rich environment for language learning. Similarly, Indriani and Suteja (2023) emphasized the positive effect of digital storytelling on both language acquisition and learner motivation in early education classrooms. Nair and Yunus (2022) observed that learners became more expressive, confident, and participative in English-speaking tasks when storytelling was used regularly.

In Southeast Asia, storytelling is likewise gaining momentum. In Indonesia, Belda-Medina and Goddard (2024) demonstrated that storytelling improved attention span, vocabulary retention, and enthusiasm among kindergarten pupils learning English. Wibowo et al. (2024) added that storytelling allowed teachers to engage learners meaningfully, using narratives that were culturally and developmentally appropriate. Their findings suggest that storytelling can bridge learners' home language and English, fostering both comprehension and motivation.

Although no published studies were found specific to the University of Baguio Laboratory Elementary School (UBLES), existing research on early literacy in the Philippines confirms the foundational role of narrative-based instruction. Piasta et al. (2019) emphasized that storytelling strengthens emergent literacy, particularly in vocabulary development, phonological awareness, and expressive language skills aligned with early English education goals. These findings support the integration of storytelling as an effective motivational and instructional tool for young Filipino learners.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The study is grounded in three key theories that strongly support storytelling as an effective strategy in early English education for young learners. Jerome Bruner argued that humans make sense of the world through a narrative mode of thought, where experiences are organized and interpreted through stories, making narrative a powerful tool for structuring knowledge, boosting engagement, memory, and emotional connection. Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis highlights that language is acquired most effectively through comprehensible input slightly above the learner's current level; storytelling provides exactly this context-rich, meaningful, and repetitive language exposure in an enjoyable, low-pressure way that promotes natural acquisition and motivation. Penny McKay's principles for teaching young learners emphasize age-appropriate, interest-driven, and context-based materials; storytelling aligns perfectly by using familiar themes, imagination, interactive delivery, and opportunities for participation, creativity, and oral language development. Together, these theories establish storytelling as far more than entertainment it is a research-supported method that simultaneously enhances motivation, facilitates language acquisition, and fosters meaningful learning in early childhood English education.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to examine the role of storytelling in fostering motivation among early learners in English language education, focusing on its application, challenges, opportunities, and potential enhancements for teachers from Nursery to Grade 3. Specifically, it seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How do English teachers from Nursery to Grade 3 utilize storytelling techniques to enhance learners' motivation in English subjects?
2. What challenges do teachers encounter when implementing storytelling to motivate learners in English language classes?
3. What opportunities does storytelling offer for improving learner motivation in early English education?
4. What strategies can be suggested to strengthen storytelling-based approaches that support motivation in English language teaching for early learners?

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design to explore how early English teachers at the University of Baguio Laboratory Elementary School (UBLES) apply storytelling to boost student motivation. The design enabled in-depth understanding of teachers' lived experiences, perceptions, and strategies in natural classroom settings, allowing for nuanced exploration of contextual factors influencing motivation through storytelling, with an emphasis on meaning-making and subjective interpretation.

Population and Sampling

The study population comprised 6 teachers from nursery, kindergarten and lower primary teachers from UBLES who regularly integrated storytelling into English instruction. Participants were selected via purposive sampling based on teaching experience, willingness to participate, and active use of storytelling in the classroom, ensuring rich, relevant, and diverse perspectives from those with direct involvement in early English education.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using three primary research instruments tailored to capture rich, multifaceted insights into teachers' use of storytelling. Semi-structured interviews served as the main tool for gathering teachers' personal insights and reflections, featuring open-ended questions designed to explore their perceived strategies for implementing storytelling, the ways it influenced student involvement and motivation, and the resulting learning outcomes observed in the classroom. Complementing the interviews, classroom observations were conducted during selected storytelling sessions to directly examine how teachers applied their techniques in real-time natural settings and to document learners' immediate responses; a structured observation checklist was employed to systematically record both verbal and non-verbal indicators of engagement, participation, and motivational drive. Additionally, document analysis was utilized to review lesson plans and related instructional materials, enabling the identification of how storytelling was intentionally planned, integrated into English lessons, and aligned with specific instructional objectives.

Data Collection Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Baguio Laboratory Elementary School and relevant institutional authorities. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary participation, confidentiality assurances, and their right to withdraw without penalty. Data confidentiality was rigorously maintained through anonymization with pseudonyms, secure storage of audio recordings, observation notes, and documents on encrypted devices, and restricted access to records.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. The process involved: (1) familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts, observation notes, and documents to immerse in the data and note initial ideas; (2) generating initial codes by systematically labeling relevant features (e.g., learner enthusiasm, visual aids, storytelling routines, teacher challenges); (3) searching for themes by collating codes into broader patterns related to motivation enhancement, obstacles, and opportunities; (4) reviewing and refining themes for coherence and fit with the full dataset; (5) defining and naming themes to clearly articulate their essence and link to the research objectives; and (6) producing the report by integrating the themes into a narrative supported by participant quotes and observational evidence illustrating storytelling's role in motivating early English learners. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of the three data sources, member checking (participants reviewed transcripts and emerging themes for accuracy), and reflexive journaling to address potential researcher bias.

Results and Discussion

Utilization of Storytelling Techniques to Enhance Learner Motivation

This section presents the findings from semi-structured interviews (6 teachers, T1–T6), classroom observations (Nursery to Grade 3), and lesson plan analysis. Themes were derived using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis and triangulated across data sources.

How Teachers Utilize Storytelling	Grade Band	Frequency	Key Techniques & Formats Used	Purposes for Motivation & Language Learning
Highly expressive, multisensory, action-based delivery with repetition and concrete props to spark joy and imitation	Nursery – Kindergarten	Daily or almost daily	Expressive oral narration (voice changes, gestures, sound effects), picture books/big books, realia & props (fruits, foods, toys), finger puppets, Choral repetition, miming, echo phrases, Short,	Capture attention & excitement immediately, introduce vocabulary naturally, build listening & emotional engagement, encourage joyful, low-pressure participation

How Teachers Utilize Storytelling	Grade Band	Frequency	Key Techniques & Formats Used	Purposes for Motivation & Language Learning
			interactive sessions with prediction pauses	
Structured, dramatic retelling with prediction, discussion, role-play, and sequencing to build suspense, empathy, and speaking confidence	Grades 1-3	2-3 times/week	Dramatic oral retelling (varied voices, pacing), picture sequence cards / illustrated books, Stick puppets, masks, realia, occasional digital slides/videos, prediction & why/how questions, choral chants, think-pair-share, peer talk, small-group role-playing/dramatization, physical miming & target phrase repetition	Hook lessons (grammar, vocab, morals, conversation), develop comprehension & critical thinking, boost speaking & confidence via retelling & acting, sustain motivation through relatability, creativity & play-like learning

Table 1. Storytelling Formats and Frequency Reported by Teachers

Table 1 provides an overview of how storytelling is employed across early grade bands, highlighting its frequency (daily or almost daily in Nursery-Kindergarten, 2-3 times per week in Grades 1-3) and diverse formats (e.g., oral narration and puppets for younger learners, progressing to sequence cards and role-playing in older bands). The table illustrates storytelling's role as a foundational instructional element, often serving as a "springboard" for vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension activities rather than an isolated exercise. All six teachers (100%) reported using storytelling at least 2-3 times per week in Grades 1-3, with daily (or near-daily) integration consistently reported by the four teachers responsible for Nursery and Kindergarten levels.

This integration reflects a deliberate pedagogical choice to embed narratives within the curriculum, fostering a learner-centered environment. For instance, T2 emphasized its motivational foundation: "I use storytelling almost daily in my English classes for the motivation of my lessons," while T5 focused on its practical application: "I use storytelling almost every week, especially 2-3 times, to introduce new topics or reinforce vocabulary and grammar." The progression from basic oral and visual formats in younger bands to more structured tools in older ones suggests an adaptation to increasing cognitive demands, aligning with McKay's (2005) principles of age-appropriate, meaningful learning. Theoretically, this supports Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, as the contextualized exposure through varied formats provides comprehensible, engaging language input that lowers affective filters and enhances acquisition.

This pattern is corroborated by recent EFL studies emphasizing frequent, multimodal storytelling for young learners. For example, Macalister and Thao (2025) demonstrated that regular storytelling adaptations in Vietnamese primary EFL classrooms significantly boosted oral production and motivation when integrated as course book springboards, mirroring UBLES practices. Similarly, Khamsuk and Whanchit (2021) found that daily family-integrated storytelling enhanced preschool engagement and literacy motivation, supporting the high frequency observed here. In comparison to international studies, such as Fu et al. (2021) and Banoth and Muthyala (2025), which highlight multimodal storytelling's role in boosting speaking and vocabulary in EFL settings, the UBLES context shows a heavier reliance on low-tech options due to resource limitations typical in Philippine schools (Department of Education, 2015). This pattern implies that while digital integration is limited, hands-on formats like props and puppets still yield high engagement, making storytelling accessible in under-resourced environments. Practically, this underscores the need for teacher training in versatile formats to maximize motivation, particularly in laboratory schools where innovative practices can model broader DepEd implementation.

Developmental Adaptations and Observed Engagement

Grade Band	Key Adaptations (Interview & Observation Evidence)	Primary Observed Motivation Indicators	Representative Teacher Quote (on Adaptation)
Nursery – Kindergarten	Multisensory focus: visuals, props, puppets, exaggerated	Gasps, laughter, miming actions, empathy statements ("Poor!"),	"With younger learners, I focus more on visuals, sounds, repetition, and rhythm, actions,

Grade Band	Key Adaptations (Interview & Observation Evidence)	Primary Observed Motivation Indicators	Representative Teacher Quote (on Adaptation)
Grades 1–2	voice/gestures, repetition, choral actions, simple predictions	frequent “Again po!”, sustained 20–25 min attention	facial expressions, and song-like intonation”
	Interactive & emerging cognitive: action words, sequencing, role-playing, predictions, cause-effect discussion, character traits, think-pair-share, dramatization	Cheers, emotional investment (justice/morals), empathy, alternate ending suggestions, sustained 30–35 min, increased volunteering (including shy learners)	“I add role-playing where kids act out parts, predict what happens next, create ending variations, retell parts in pairs or draw their favorite scene”
Grade 3	Higher-order & reflective: inference of traits/feelings, cause-effect reasoning, moral debates, personal application, retelling in own words	Sympathy/regret responses, thoughtful debates, reflective writing/drawings, sustained 40+ min, deep personal connections	“Asking prediction questions, infer: How did the boy feel, creating their own simple stories, discuss the moral”

Table 2. Developmental Adaptations in Storytelling and Key Observed Motivation Indicators by Early Grade Band

Table 2 thematically organizes storytelling adaptations by grade band, revealing a clear developmental trajectory: multisensory and repetitive techniques dominate in Nursery–Kindergarten (e.g., visuals, props, choral actions), giving way to interactive and emerging cognitive elements in Grades 1–2 (e.g., role-playing, predictions, cause-effect), and culminating in higher-order, reflective practices in Grade 3 (e.g., trait inference, moral debates, personal retelling). The table also captures primary motivation indicators, progressing from immediate affective responses (e.g., gasps, “Again po!”) to deeper cognitive-emotional involvement (e.g., thoughtful debates, reflective outputs), demonstrating how adaptations directly influence learner engagement. Multisensory adaptations (visuals, props, repetition) were universally employed by both Nursery and Kindergarten teachers (2/2), interactive and emerging cognitive elements (e.g., role-playing, predictions) were reported by all Grades 1–2 teachers (3/3), and higher-order elements such as moral debates and personal application were consistently described by the Grade 3 teacher interviewed (1/1). This structured progression ensures storytelling aligns with children’s evolving cognitive and linguistic capacities, as evidenced by teacher insights. T1 described the sensory emphasis for younger learners: “With younger learners I focus more on visuals, sounds, repetition, and rhythm, actions, facial expressions, and song-like intonation.” For middle bands, T5 elaborated on interactivity: “I add role-playing where kids act out parts, predict what happens next, create ending variations, retell parts in pairs or draw their favorite scene.” T1 further illustrated Grade 3 adaptations: “Asking prediction questions, infer: How did the boy feel, creating their own simple stories, discuss the moral.” These accounts highlight how adaptations scaffold language development, supporting Bruner’s (1991) Narrative Construction Theory, where stories serve as a mode for organizing experiences and building higher-order thinking. McKay’s (2005) principles are evident in the focus on relatable, active participation that matches attention spans and interests.

This developmental staging is strongly corroborated by recent research. Macalister and Thao (2025) reported similar progressions in Vietnamese young EFL learners, where age-tailored storytelling (from sensory to reflective) enhanced oral production and motivation. Lena & Nikolov (2025) found culturally relevant narrative interventions optimized behavioral and cognitive engagement in early learners, paralleling the shift from affective to inferential responses here. Literature connections, such as Nguyễn and Phillips (2022) and Belda-Medina and Goddard (2024), affirm that such tailored interactivity boosts confidence and comprehension in young EFL learners. In the Philippine context, the reliance on low-cost, culturally familiar narratives (e.g., local fables) enhances accessibility, addressing challenges like mixed proficiency levels in diverse classrooms. The observed shift in motivation indicators from surface-level excitement to profound reflection suggests storytelling reduces barriers to participation, particularly for shy learners, and promotes sustained interest. Practically, this implies educators should assess and adjust adaptations based on ongoing observations, while schools could provide grade-specific resource kits to support this progression.

Challenges Encountered in Implementing Storytelling

Challenge Category	Specific Issues Reported	Teachers Reporting	Coping Strategies Observed / Reported
Resource Limitations	“Lack of appropriate story resources, limited classroom materials”; personal funding for props/materials	6/6 (100%)	Low-cost props, printed pictures, realia (plastic fruits, cardboard)

Challenge Category	Specific Issues Reported	Teachers Reporting	Coping Strategies Observed / Reported
Time Constraints	"Time is always tight with the packed curriculum"; storytelling takes longer than drills	5/6 (83%)	Short sessions (10–15 min), break into parts, use as springboard
Classroom Management	Children overly excited/noisy; side chatter during activities	6/6 (100%)	Class signals, assign roles, positive redirection, quick songs
Learner Diversity / Proficiency	Varying reading/writing skills, short attention spans, mixed comprehension	4/6 (67%)	Simplify vocabulary, gestures/repetition, occasional L1 support, pairing
Cultural / Contextual	Stories not always reflecting local culture/religious beliefs	3/6 (50%)	Use local folktales/family themes, unlock cultural background first

Table 3. Major Challenges and Teacher Coping Strategies

Table 3 categorizes key challenges such as resource limitations, time constraints, classroom management, learner diversity, and cultural/contextual factors while outlining corresponding coping strategies, drawing from teacher reports and observations. The table reveals interconnected barriers, such as personal funding for materials exacerbating time pressures, and diverse proficiency levels complicating management during interactive sessions.

Resource limitations and classroom management emerged as near-universal challenges, reported by all six teachers (100%). Time constraints were also highly prevalent (5/6 teachers, 83%), while issues related to cultural relevance appeared less frequently (3/6 teachers, 50%). Teachers provided vivid accounts of these issues. T1 articulated resource and time hurdles: "One main challenge is the lack of appropriate story resources, especially locally relevant English stories. Time constraints are another issue; storytelling takes more time than regular drills." T5 highlighted management in large classes: "Time is always tight with the packed curriculum. Classroom management can be hard with 38 energetic kids; some get too excited and noisy." For coping, T1 shared inclusive tactics: "I occasionally translate key words into Filipino to maintain comprehension. Cultural familiarity also helps using local tales or common family situations helps them connect emotionally." These strategies demonstrate proactive adaptation, aligning with Krashen's (1982) emphasis on comprehensible input through low-anxiety, scaffolded methods like gestures and repetition.

These challenges are corroborated in Philippine and regional contexts. For instance, a recent review on digital storytelling for Filipino early learners noted persistent resource gaps and comprehension struggles despite cultural storytelling traditions. Similarly, Macalister and Thao (2025) identified time and large-class management as barriers in Vietnamese EFL primary settings, where teachers adapted through low-tech innovations paralleling UBLES coping mechanisms. Compared to Philippine-specific literature (Piasta et al., 2019; Department of Education, 2015), the table underscores systemic issues like limited bilingual materials in DepEd-affiliated schools, where cultural mismatches (e.g., religious sensitivities) can disengage learners. However, the coping mechanisms such as pairing students or using signals reveal teacher resilience, extending global findings on narrative pedagogy in diverse EFL contexts (Banoth & Muthyala, 2025). This pattern implies that while challenges hinder full implementation, they also drive innovation, such as hybrid language use to bridge home and school contexts. Practically, professional development should emphasize these strategies, and policymakers could allocate budgets for culturally relevant resources to mitigate barriers and enhance storytelling's motivational potential.

Opportunities Presented by Storytelling

Opportunity	Teacher Examples / Quotes	Observed Evidence	Alignment with Literature
Natural vocabulary & comprehension	"Vocabulary enrichment in context"; "They remember words better"	Repeated target words with scaffolding	Fu et al. (2021); Krashen (1982)
Increased participation & confidence	Shy learners volunteer; "Even shy ones participate more"	Increased hand-raising, acting, proud sharing	Nguyễn & Phillips (2022)
Creativity & critical thinking	"Promotes creative thinking through story endings"; invent endings	Alternate endings, debating sequences/morals	Indriani & Suteja (2023)
Social-emotional learning	Empathy, cooperation, expressing feelings	"Poor...!" statements, moral discussions	Banoth & Muthyala (2025)

Opportunity	Teacher Examples / Quotes	Observed Evidence	Alignment with Literature
Cultural relevance & intrinsic motivation	Local folktales increase pride; "Learning feels like play"	Emotional investment, repeat requests	Yu & Wang (2024)

Table 4. Key Opportunities and Supporting Evidence

Table 4 enumerates storytelling's core opportunities, focusing specifically on language related and cognitive skill benefits: natural vocabulary acquisition and comprehension, increased participation and speaking confidence, creativity and critical thinking, social-emotional learning (empathy, cooperation), and cultural relevance leading to intrinsic motivation.

The table highlights how storytelling creates meaningful, context rich language exposure rather than isolated drills. T1 emphasized confidence gains: "When stories are used, the children show genuine excitement. Many learners who are usually shy start to volunteer lines or actions from the story. Storytelling has helped build their confidence in speaking English and made learning time feel joyful and meaningful." T5 reinforced the motivational aspect: "The learners get really excited, eyes wide open, leaning forward, laughing at funny parts... even shy ones participate more. It makes English feel fun, not like a subject with drills." T1 further connected cultural relevance to identity: "When I use local folktales or adapt Filipino values-based stories in English, learners see cultural relevance, which increases their sense of identity and pride." Increased participation and confidence especially among shy learners was the most consistently reported opportunity, noted by all six teachers (100%). Natural vocabulary and comprehension gains were mentioned by 5/6 teachers (83%), while creativity/critical thinking and social-emotional benefits appeared in 4/6 (67%) and 3/6 (50%) accounts, respectively. These patterns indicate strong teacher consensus on the motivational power of storytelling, particularly in building learner agency and emotional engagement.

These findings are strongly corroborated by recent EFL studies. Usmani et.al (2025) found digital storytelling significantly increased speaking confidence and reduced anxiety in young EFL learners, aligning with the participation and confidence gains observed. Indriani and Suteja (2023) reported that digital storytelling fostered reading interest and vocabulary retention in early childhood, supporting the natural language acquisition noted here. In the Philippine context, recent literature highlights that culturally grounded storytelling improves comprehension and motivation even in resource-limited settings. These opportunities address early literacy gaps (Piasta et al., 2019) and demonstrate storytelling's value in multilingual environments where it bridges English with local languages and values. Practically, educators can maximize these benefits by incorporating follow-up activities such as dramatization, drawing, and retelling, while future research could quantify long-term gains in vocabulary, speaking fluency, and intrinsic motivation.

Grade Band	Primary Motivation Indicators (from Observations)	Teacher-Reported Examples (from Interviews)	Developmental Pattern
Nursery Kindergarten	Leaning in, smiles/giggles, miming, gasps, "Again po!", sustained short sessions	Genuine excitement, shy learners volunteer actions	Affective/sensory: joy through visuals, repetition, props
Grades 1-2	Cheers, empathy, emotional investment in justice/morals, sustained longer sessions	Eyes wide, volunteering, begging for repeats	Emerging cognitive: cause-effect, traits, sequencing
Grade 3	Sympathy/regret, thoughtful debates, reflective outputs, sustained longest sessions	Confidence in speaking, reflection on lessons	Higher-order: inferences, consequence, personal application

Table 5. Comparison of Key Motivation Indicators Across Early Grade Bands (Observed and Reported)

Table 5 complements Table 4 by comparing key motivation indicators across grade bands, revealing a clear developmental progression: from primarily affective and sensory responses in Nursery-Kindergarten (e.g., leaning in, smiles/giggles, miming actions, gasps, frequent "Again po!", sustained short sessions) to emerging cognitive-emotional engagement in Grades 1-2 (e.g., cheers, empathy, emotional investment in justice/morals, sustained longer sessions, increased volunteering) and finally to higher-order, reflective engagement in Grade 3 (e.g., sympathy/regret responses, thoughtful debates, reflective writing/drawings, sustained longest sessions, deep personal connections).

This progression demonstrates how storytelling evolves from eliciting immediate emotional joy and physical participation in younger learners to fostering deeper cognitive processing, moral reasoning, and personal reflection in older early-grade

students. The shift from surface-level excitement (e.g., laughter and repeat requests) to more complex responses (e.g., moral debates and reflective outputs) indicates that storytelling supports increasingly sophisticated forms of motivation and engagement as learners mature cognitively and linguistically. This pattern strongly aligns with Bruner’s (1991) Narrative Construction Theory, which posits that narratives serve as a primary mode for organizing experience and building higher-order thinking, and with McKay’s (2005) emphasis on age-appropriate, meaningful participation.

The developmental trajectory is further corroborated by recent systematic reviews and empirical studies. Lena and Nikolov (2025) found that young EFL learners exhibited a similar progression in task engagement from affective to cognitive involvement when exposed to narrative-based activities. Macalister and Thao (2025) reported analogous shifts in Vietnamese young learners, where storytelling moved from sensory enjoyment to reflective oral production as learners advanced.

These findings reinforce the idea that carefully scaffolded storytelling nurtures intrinsic motivation across developmental stages. In the Philippine context, the use of culturally relevant fables and local themes likely amplifies this progression by increasing emotional investment and personal relevance. Practically, this suggests that teachers should intentionally design storytelling activities to match learners’ developmental readiness, gradually increasing cognitive demands while maintaining emotional engagement. Schools could support this progression by providing age-banded storytelling resources and professional development focused on scaffolding techniques.

Suggestions to Strengthen Storytelling-Based Strategies

Category	Key Recommendations	Rationale / Purpose
Professional Development	Regular workshops on techniques Peer observation & best-practice sharing Training on integration with songs, games, art	Build teacher skills & confidence; ensure consistent, creative use
Resource Provision	Dedicated storytelling corners Budget for big books, bilingual books, puppets, flashcards Shared school library of age-appropriate narratives	Overcome material scarcity; reduce personal teacher expense
Curriculum & Scheduling	Explicit integration into early English curriculum Develop & distribute lesson exemplars Flexible time allocation for meaningful sessions Include in in-service training & Early Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program	Institutionalize as core method; align with national literacy goals
Community & Home Links	Parent workshops on home storytelling Take-home activities (retelling cards, simple books) Community storytelling events	Extend motivation beyond classroom; reinforce home-school connection

Table 6. Teacher Recommendations for Improvement

Table 6 presents teachers’ concise recommendations across four categories: professional development, resource provision, curriculum integration, and community links. Key calls include workshops on storytelling techniques (T1: “regular workshops on voice modulation, puppetry, and digital story integration”), school-provided resources and corners (T2), explicit DepEd curriculum embedding with exemplars (T2), and parent/community involvement (T6). These address resource and training gaps (Table 3) while amplifying opportunities (Tables 4 & 5). It aligns with DepEd Early Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (ELLN) priorities (Department of Education, 2015) and are corroborated by Macalister and Thao (2025) and Lena and Nikolov (2025), who advocate similar training and policy support in EFL contexts. This multi-level approach starting with teacher training and low-cost kits offers a scalable path to sustainable, joyful early English motivation. Practically, these recommendations suggest a phased rollout: begin with school-based workshops and resource kits in laboratory schools like UBLES, then advocate for DepEd policy changes (e.g., storytelling modules in teacher training) and community programs (e.g., parent storytelling nights). Such steps could transform storytelling from a teacher-dependent innovation into a sustainable, system-wide strategy for early English motivation.

Conclusion and Implications

This qualitative study at the University of Baguio Laboratory Elementary School demonstrates that storytelling is a highly effective and developmentally responsive pedagogical tool in early English education from Nursery to Grade 3. It

simultaneously strengthens foundational language skills such as vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, oracy, and speaking confidence while cultivating intrinsic motivation, emotional engagement, and social-emotional development including empathy and cooperation, and overall learner agency. Teachers skillfully adapt storytelling from multisensory and playful formats in the younger years to more interactive and reflective practices in the upper grades creating joyful, low-anxiety classroom environments that sustain attention, reduce affective barriers, and actively involve even shy learners. In resource-constrained yet linguistically diverse Philippine contexts, storytelling proves to be a culturally responsive and low-cost strategy that links local folktales and values to English learning, thereby fostering identity, pride, and sustained enthusiasm for the language. Although teachers face ongoing challenges including limited materials, time pressures, classroom management issues, and learner diversity, their resourceful adaptations such as low-tech props, gestures, repetition, and occasional use of the first language enable storytelling to remain powerfully impactful.

To sustain and scale these benefits, instructional leaders and school administrators should deliver regular professional development workshops on storytelling techniques, facilitate peer observation, and provide dedicated resource kits and storytelling corners to reduce teachers' personal expenses. Teachers, as key curriculum implementers, should intentionally embed storytelling as a core springboard for language and critical thinking activities while collaboratively sharing effective adaptations. School administrators and curriculum developers, in collaboration with DepEd regional offices, should advocate for explicit integration of storytelling into the Early Language, Literacy and Numeracy framework, develop grade-specific lesson exemplars, supply bilingual and culturally relevant materials, and allow flexible scheduling for meaningful sessions. DepEd policymakers should allocate targeted budgets for age-appropriate resources and formally recognize storytelling as an evidence-based approach within national teacher training programs. Parents and community stakeholders, supported by school-led workshops and take-home activities, should reinforce storytelling practices at home to extend motivation and bridge school-home literacy connections. With coordinated multi-level support from the school to the national level, storytelling can evolve into a sustainable, joyful foundation for early English education, equipping young Filipino learners with the linguistic confidence, creativity, and intrinsic drive essential for lifelong learning in a multilingual world. Future quantitative and longitudinal research could further evaluate its long-term impact on language proficiency, reading motivation, and academic persistence.

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Competing Interests Statement

The author declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study; all data used were obtained from previously published sources as cited in the reference list.

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Appendices

No appendices are included in this article.