



“It’s a teacher’s dream to have something this engaging”: English picture book read-alouds in upper primary school

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English instruction is introduced for increasingly younger learners throughout the world. At the same time, a number of challenges have been identified in relation to early language instruction. In fact, no long-term linguistic advantages have been identified and, moreover, among many young language learners, the initial enthusiasm and motivation decline rather rapidly (e. g., Cadierno et al., 2020). For teachers, the diversity of language proficiency in their groups, the prevalence of language anxiety and lack of motivation present challenges (Copland et al., 2014; Nilsson, 2024). This begs the question of how to develop teaching approaches that maintain the engagement and motivation to learn English, that many learners exhibit outside of school.

Scholars in the field of primary English teaching advocate the use of authentic picture books, for reasons related to language development and more holistic goals of primary education (e.g., Bland, 2023). Picture book read-alouds facilitate joint meaning-making and interactions around interesting content that motivate young learners to learn about themselves and others. Nevertheless, picture books are rarely used in early English instruction.

To address this discrepancy, the current study illuminates the perspectives of three Swedish primary teachers of English and their experiences of picture book read-alouds. The teachers, who were not used to working with authentic multimodal narratives in class, chose two titles each to use with their respective groups in year 5. Interviews were conducted after each read-aloud. A qualitative content analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004) reveals that teachers were positive about the potential of picture book read-aloud. The benefits they perceived revolved around the increase of learner engagement and authentic interaction while increasing target language use among learners of varying abilities. The findings offer valuable insight into the potential and orchestration of picture book read-alouds, and carry implications for the advancement of pedagogy in early language education.

Keywords: English for young learners, Picture books, Communicative language teaching

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