

ANALYSIS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH STORYTELLING ACTIVITIES

Maria Fatima Mardina Angkur

Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng, Indonesia

Email: mariafatimamardinaangkur@gmail.com

Abstract

Early childhood language development represents a foundational aspect of cognitive, social, and emotional growth. Storytelling activities are widely recognized as a pedagogical strategy that stimulates linguistic competence by fostering vocabulary acquisition, narrative comprehension, listening skills, and expressive communication. This study aims to analyze the role of storytelling activities in supporting early childhood language development using a literature review approach. Relevant scholarly articles, books, and empirical studies published in the fields of early childhood education, developmental psychology, and language acquisition were systematically examined. The review highlights that storytelling provides rich linguistic input, encourages interaction, enhances imagination, and strengthens children's ability to structure thoughts verbally. Findings from the literature consistently indicate that storytelling contributes positively to both receptive and expressive language skills, including improvements in vocabulary breadth, sentence formation, phonological awareness, and conversational abilities. Furthermore, storytelling is shown to promote socio-emotional engagement, which indirectly supports communication confidence. The study concludes that storytelling activities constitute an effective, developmentally appropriate intervention for optimizing early language growth. Implications emphasize the need for educators and parents to integrate structured, interactive storytelling practices within early childhood learning environments.

Keywords: early childhood, language development, storytelling activities, communication skills

INTRODUCTION

Language development in early childhood is a key foundation for successful communication, social interaction, and academic readiness in subsequent stages of education. Language is not simply a tool for conveying messages, but also a medium for children to build an understanding of the world, express emotions, develop self-identity, and form social relationships. During early childhood, particularly between 0 and 6 years of age, children are in a phase of rapid development, where appropriate stimulation can

significantly impact their linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional capacities (Rafiola et al., 2023). Delays or suboptimal language development during this phase have the potential to impact a child's learning ability, self-confidence, and the quality of social interactions later in life. Therefore, understanding the factors influencing early childhood language development is crucial, both from a theoretical and practical perspective.

Language develops through a complex process, involving interactions between biological, environmental, social, and experiential learning factors (Surya & Pratiwi, 2024). The family environment, parental communication patterns, the quality of interactions with educators, and early literacy experiences play crucial roles. In the context of early childhood education, a learning approach that emphasizes verbal interaction, exploration of meaning, and rich communicative experiences is believed to accelerate children's language development. One widely used and considered effective strategy is storytelling. This activity naturally provides contextual, imaginative, and emotional language experiences, enabling children not only to hear words but also to understand the language structure, vocabulary, narrative flow, and cause-and-effect relationships within the story (Mujahidah et al., 2021).

Storytelling has unique characteristics that distinguish it from other language learning methods. This activity simultaneously integrates verbal, visual, emotional, and social elements. Children involved in storytelling act not only as passive listeners but also as active participants, responding, interpreting, and constructing meaning. Through stories, children are introduced to various language concepts, including vocabulary development, sentence structure, intonation, expression, and the ability to understand social context. Stories also encourage children to think symbolically, connect personal experiences with narratives, and develop imagination and creativity (Maureen et al., 2022). Thus, storytelling is not merely an entertainment activity, but a rich pedagogical tool for language stimulation.

Although storytelling has long been recognized as a beneficial learning strategy, its implementation in early childhood education practices is often suboptimal. In some contexts, storytelling activities are still one-way, lack interactivity, and are not systematically designed to stimulate specific aspects of language development. Educators sometimes focus more on story telling than on facilitating children's participation in dialogue, reflection, and exploration of meaning. Furthermore, the variety of media, storytelling techniques, and the connection of stories to children's experiences are not always adequately addressed. This situation raises questions about the extent

to which storytelling activities truly contribute to children's language development and how the characteristics of their implementation influence the outcomes achieved.

In an educational context that increasingly emphasizes a holistic approach, storytelling is also relevant because it contributes not only to language development but also to cognitive, socio-emotional, and moral aspects. Stories provide an integrative learning experience, enabling children to understand values, emotions, and social perspectives through language (Sitinjak et al., 2025). Therefore, analyzing language development through storytelling is important not only for linguistic outcomes but also for understanding children's learning processes holistically. This research seeks to position storytelling as a multidimensional pedagogical phenomenon.

Based on this description, research on analyzing early childhood language development through storytelling activities is highly relevant. This study aims to examine in depth how storytelling activities contribute to children's language development, including vocabulary, speaking ability, language comprehension, and narrative skills. With an analytical approach, this research is expected to provide a clearer empirical picture of the effectiveness of storytelling as a language stimulation strategy. The results are expected to make a significant contribution to the development of early childhood education practices, while also enriching scientific studies on language development in early life. This research is expected to foster a deeper understanding of the importance of meaningful verbal interactions in children's development. Storytelling is seen not just as a learning method, but as a communication experience that can build emotional connections, stimulate imagination, and strengthen children's language skills. Therefore, this research focuses not only on measuring language development but also on understanding children's learning experiences in a more humanistic, contextual, and meaningful way.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in the study, "Analysis of Early Childhood Language Development Through Storytelling Activities," is a literature review. This approach involves collecting, reviewing, and synthesizing various relevant scientific sources, such as journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, and previous research publications that discuss early childhood language development and the role of storytelling. These sources were systematically selected based on topic relevance, publisher credibility, and

recency to ensure a strong theoretical and empirical foundation. The review process involved identifying key concepts, comparing findings across studies, and analyzing patterns, relationships, and gaps in existing research.

Data analysis in this literature review was conducted using content analysis techniques, focusing on interpreting research findings related to the influence of storytelling on aspects of children's language development, including vocabulary, speaking ability, language comprehension, and communication skills. The analysis phase included data reduction, theme categorization, and drawing conclusions based on the consistency and differences in research findings. This approach enabled researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of storytelling activities in supporting early childhood language development, while also providing a conceptual basis for further research and practical implementation in early childhood education contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Teachers and the Learning Environment in Storytelling

The role of teachers and the learning environment in storytelling activities is highly strategic in supporting children's language, cognitive, socio-emotional, and imaginative development, particularly in early childhood education. Storytelling is not simply the act of reading a story, but rather a pedagogical process involving interaction, expression, interpretation of meaning, and the creation of meaningful learning experiences. In this context, the teacher acts as a facilitator, mediator, language model, and director of classroom dynamics, while the learning environment serves as a psychological and physical space that shapes the quality of the storytelling experience. The two are interconnected and inseparable, as storytelling effectiveness is greatly influenced by how the teacher presents the story and how the learning environment supports children's engagement (Student, Faculty of Foreign Philology, Urgench State University, Uzbekistan et al., 2020).

Teachers have the primary responsibility for designing, managing, and delivering storytelling activities effectively. This role begins with selecting stories appropriate to the children's age, developmental needs, cultural background, and level of understanding. Teachers need to consider the complexity of the language, narrative structure, moral values, and the relevance of the theme to the children's daily experiences. Stories that are too complex can cause confusion, while stories that are too simple can potentially reduce cognitive stimulation. Therefore, teachers are required to have

pedagogical sensitivity in selecting story material that balances educational and entertaining aspects.

Beyond story selection, teachers also serve as lively language models. The way teachers use intonation, articulation, facial expressions, gestures, and vocal variations significantly influence the story's appeal and children's attention. Expressive storytelling can improve concentration, spark imagination, and help children understand the emotions of the characters. Teachers who are able to present stories dramatically not only convey the content but also instill emotional experiences that enrich children's understanding of the story's meaning. In this regard, storytelling becomes a multisensory learning tool, as children learn through hearing, seeing, and observing expressions (Linda & Clement, 2023).

The teacher's role is also evident in fostering dialogic interactions during storytelling activities. Teachers do not simply speak one-way but create a space for participation through open-ended questions, invitations to predict the story's plot, discussions about characters, and reflections on moral values. This interaction encourages the development of children's receptive and expressive language, as they are given the opportunity to listen, understand, respond, and express ideas. Dialogic storytelling also strengthens critical thinking and communication skills, as children learn to connect stories to personal experiences and express opinions verbally.

Furthermore, teachers act as mediators of the emotions and social values contained in the story. Stories often contain conflict, feelings, and the dynamics of relationships between characters. Teachers help children understand these emotions through explanations, emphasizing expressions, and simple discussions. This process contributes to children's social-emotional development, as they learn to recognize feelings, empathy, and the consequences of behavior (Hava, 2021). Thus, storytelling is an effective medium for character education and the development of emotional intelligence. Meanwhile, the learning environment plays a crucial role in determining the quality of the storytelling experience. A conducive, comfortable, safe, and visually appealing environment can increase children's focus and engagement. Physical aspects such as lighting, noise, room layout, and the availability of supporting media influence the effectiveness of storytelling activities. A room that is too noisy or poorly organized can distract children, while a room designed with a warm and aesthetic atmosphere can create a pleasant learning experience.

A learning environment rich in visual stimulation, such as a reading corner, picture displays, story puppets, or props, can strengthen children's understanding of stories. Visual media helps children associate words with concrete representations, thereby enriching vocabulary and conceptual understanding. The use of simple props such as hand puppets or pictures of characters also enhances storytelling's appeal and helps children understand the plot and characters. A creative environment allows storytelling to develop into interactive activities involving role-playing, drawing, or small group discussions. In addition to physical aspects, the psychological environment is also crucial for storytelling success. Children need a safe emotional atmosphere where they feel comfortable listening, asking questions, and expressing themselves. A supportive environment encourages children to speak up and actively participate. Teachers play a crucial role in fostering this climate through warm, responsive, and non-judgmental attitudes. When children feel valued, they are more open to communication and engagement in the story (Segundo Marcos et al., 2020).

The social environment in the classroom also contributes to the dynamics of storytelling. Interaction between children, cooperation, and positive communication norms create a richer learning experience. Storytelling conducted in a collaborative setting allows children to learn to listen to their peers, share opinions, and appreciate others' perspectives. This process strengthens social skills, such as empathy, patience, and the ability to take turns speaking. The relationship between the teacher's role and the learning environment is synergistic. A creative teacher supported by a less conducive environment may face limitations in maintaining children's attention. Conversely, an engaging environment without effective teacher management does not guarantee successful storytelling. The integration of the two results in an optimal learning experience, where the story comes alive, children are emotionally and cognitively engaged, and learning objectives are achieved naturally.

Thus, effective storytelling depends not only on the content of the story but also on the quality of the teacher's role and the design of the learning environment. A competent teacher is able to bring the story to life through expression, interaction, and meaning, while a conducive learning environment strengthens children's engagement and comfort. This combination makes storytelling a powerful learning strategy for stimulating the holistic development of children's language, imagination, and character.

Design and Implementation of Storytelling Activities in Early Childhood Education Classrooms

The design and implementation of storytelling activities in Early Childhood Education classrooms requires careful pedagogical planning, as these activities are not merely entertainment but also learning strategies that play a crucial role in children's language, cognitive, social-emotional, and imaginative development. During the design phase, teachers need to consider children's developmental characteristics, learning objectives, cultural context, and a supportive learning environment. Well-designed storytelling begins with selecting stories that are relevant to the child's age, experiences, and developmental needs. Stories should have a simple plot, clear characters, mild conflict, and an easily understood message. The language used should be communicative, rich in vocabulary, but still appropriate to the child's level of understanding. In the PAUD context, stories that relate to children's daily lives, such as those about family, friendship, nature, or positive habits, tend to be more effective in building emotional engagement and attention (Rahiem, 2021).

In addition to selecting story material, storytelling activity design also includes delivery strategies. Teachers need to design how the story will be presented, whether through direct narration, picture books, hand puppets, flannel boards, or interactive digital media. A variety of media can increase children's interest while enriching their sensory experiences. The use of voice intonation, facial expressions, gestures, and eye contact are integral to the design because these elements help children understand the emotions, meaning, and dynamics of the story. Effective storytelling is not monotonous but dynamic and expressive, encouraging children to imagine, respond, and actively participate (Yanti et al., 2023). In designing activities, teachers also need to determine the structure of the activity, starting with an opening stage to build focus and curiosity, through the main stage of story telling, and ending with a closing stage that allows for reflection or further interaction.

Implementing storytelling in early childhood education classrooms requires pedagogical skills and teacher sensitivity to children's responses. During the activity, the teacher acts as a facilitator, creating a comfortable, safe, and inclusive atmosphere. Children need to feel free to express their opinions, emotions, or questions throughout the story. Teachers can encourage interaction by asking open-ended questions, inviting children to guess the next plot point, imitating characters' voices, or expressing feelings about events in the story (Halimah et al., 2020). This participatory approach strengthens children's engagement while stimulating critical thinking skills and expressive

language. Interactive storytelling allows children to become not only passive listeners but also active participants who construct meaning together.

In practice, storytelling implementation must also consider classroom management. Teachers need to arrange children's seating so that everyone can see and hear clearly. A conducive physical environment, such as adequate lighting, minimal distractions, and a comfortable layout, will increase the effectiveness of the activity. Teachers also need to be sensitive to children's relatively short attention spans, so the duration of the story must be adjusted accordingly. Stories that are too long can decrease concentration, while stories that are too short may not provide an optimal learning experience. Flexibility is key in implementation, as teachers need to adjust the pace, style, and even the flow of the interaction based on children's spontaneous responses.

Storytelling in early childhood education (PAUD) doesn't stop at telling the story, but continues with reinforcement activities. Follow-up activities, such as light discussions, drawing characters, role-playing, or reimagining the storyline, can deepen children's understanding. These activities help children integrate listening experiences with creative and reflective expression. Through this process, children learn to connect the story to personal experiences, develop empathy for the characters, and express ideas through various forms of communication. Storytelling integrated with follow-up activities contributes to holistic and meaningful learning (Maureen et al., 2020).

Furthermore, storytelling design and implementation need to consider children's diversity. Each child has a different learning style, background, and developmental level. Teachers need to ensure that the story, language, and approach used are inclusive and sensitive to these differences. Shy children may need gentle encouragement to participate, while highly active children may need guidance to maintain focus. Differentiation in interactions, questions, and follow-up activities is an important strategy to accommodate children's individual needs.

Pedagogically, effectively designed and implemented storytelling can be a powerful tool in stimulating children's language development. Children gain exposure to new vocabulary, sentence structures, and expressive communication models. Furthermore, storytelling enhances their ability to listen, understand, and rephrase information. From a socio-emotional perspective, stories help children recognize emotions, moral values, and the dynamics of social relationships. Children learn about empathy, courage, honesty, and cooperation through enjoyable narrative experiences (Maureen, 2021).

Therefore, the design and implementation of storytelling activities in early childhood education classrooms are not spontaneous, directionless activities, but rather a planned, reflective, and adaptive pedagogical process. Teachers play a crucial role in ensuring that storytelling is an engaging, interactive, and meaningful learning experience. When stories are appropriately selected, delivered expressively, and supported by interactions and follow-up activities, storytelling can be an effective bridge between children's imaginary worlds and the desired learning objectives.

The Influence of Storytelling on Children's Receptive Skills

Storytelling is a pedagogical approach that holds strong appeal in the context of early childhood education because it combines elements of language, emotion, imagination, and social interaction into a cohesive learning experience. Within the framework of language development, storytelling serves not only as an entertainment activity but also as a rich cognitive-linguistic stimulus, particularly in enhancing children's receptive skills. Receptive skills refer to a child's capacity to receive, process, and understand language heard or read, including vocabulary comprehension, sentence structure, narrative meaning, and interpretation of the social-emotional context of the message received. When children engage in storytelling, they are in an active listening situation that demands attention, interpretation of meaning, and simultaneous integration of information. This makes storytelling an effective medium for stimulating the development of language comprehension in a natural and contextual manner (Sadaruddin et al., 2025).

Theoretically, the influence of storytelling on children's receptive skills can be explained through cognitive development and sociocultural perspectives. From a cognitive perspective, the process of listening to stories involves complex mental activities, including recognizing language sounds, mapping sounds to meaning, predicting story plots, and understanding cause-and-effect relationships within narratives. Children learn to understand how words form sentences and how sentences construct the overall meaning of the story. The repetition of language patterns in stories, such as recurring phrases or consistent sentence structures, helps children recognize linguistic forms and strengthens syntactic understanding. Furthermore, stories provide a rich context for meaning, making new vocabulary easier to grasp because they are tied to specific situations, characters, and events. From a sociocultural perspective, storytelling fosters interaction between educators and children, or between children, enabling linguistic scaffolding. Children receive support

through explanations, prompting questions, nonverbal expressions, and clarification of meaning, helping them gradually build language understanding (Sukmakarti, 2024).

Storytelling also significantly contributes to the development of attention and concentration, two important components of receptive skills. Listening to stories requires children to maintain focus for a certain period of time, follow the narrative flow, and capture relevant details (Fajriyah et al., 2025). Over time, this activity trains children's ability to filter out distractions and manage their cognitive resources. This increased attention span directly impacts the quality of language comprehension, as children who can focus better are more effective at processing verbal messages. Furthermore, dramatic elements in storytelling, such as changes in intonation, facial expressions, gestures, and the use of visual media, help maintain children's interest while enriching their understanding of meaning. Children not only hear the words but also capture the emotional and social nuances contained in the story, which deepens their interpretation of language.

From a linguistic perspective, storytelling plays a role in expanding children's receptive vocabulary. Stories generally feature a richer variety of words than everyday conversation, including descriptive adjectives, action verbs, and simple idiomatic expressions. Exposure to this diverse vocabulary enriches children's word bank and improves their ability to understand verbal messages in various contexts. Beyond vocabulary, storytelling also helps children understand language structure, including grammar, sentence order, and semantic relationships. Children learn to recognize how sentences are structured to convey information, emotions, and actions. They also begin to understand the concepts of cohesion and coherence, namely how the parts of a story connect to form a logical meaning. Thus, storytelling not only improves word comprehension, but also understanding of the language system as a whole (Ismawati et al., 2024).

The influence of storytelling on receptive skills is also evident in children's improved narrative comprehension. Stories have a distinctive structure that includes an introduction, conflict, climax, and resolution. As children become accustomed to listening to stories, they begin to understand these patterns and use them as a mental framework for processing information. They learn to predict future events, understand character motivations, and connect events in a cause-and-effect sequence. This narrative understanding strengthens children's ability to interpret spoken and written texts, which is an essential foundation for reading readiness. Furthermore, stories often contain moral

messages, social values, and emotional expressions, allowing children to understand implicit and symbolic meanings. This process expands children's interpretive capacity, which is integral to advanced receptive skills.

The emotional aspect of storytelling also strengthens its impact on language comprehension. Emotionally engaging stories tend to be more memorable and understandable because they engage children's affective engagement. When children feel empathy for the characters or are drawn to the story's conflict, they are more motivated to listen to and understand the narrative. Positive emotions that arise during storytelling, such as curiosity, joy, or warmth, create a psychological environment conducive to learning. A safe and enjoyable emotional environment helps children process language without pressure, allowing comprehension to develop optimally. This emotional interaction also enhances pragmatic understanding, namely the ability to understand language in a social context, including intonation, speaker intent, and nonverbal expressions.

The effectiveness of storytelling in improving receptive skills is influenced by the quality of the activity's implementation. Factors such as selecting stories appropriate to the child's age and interests, using varied vocal expressions, dialogic interactions, and utilizing supporting media play a crucial role in determining the results achieved. Interactive storytelling, for example through reflective questions or invitations to predict the plot, encourages children to think actively and deepens understanding. Conversely, monotonous storytelling that lacks child engagement can reduce attention and the effectiveness of language comprehension (Tabieh et al., 2021). Therefore, educators' competence in presenting stories is a crucial element in maximizing the positive impact of storytelling.

In the context of early childhood education, storytelling has broad practical implications. This activity can be integrated into various learning themes, addressing language, social-emotional, and cognitive development. Storytelling can also be an inclusive tool that bridges differences in language ability between children, as it provides a rich context of meaning and visual-auditory support. Furthermore, storytelling helps build a culture of literacy from an early age by fostering children's interest in books, stories, and language. When children enjoy the experience of listening to stories, they develop positive associations with reading and language learning.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study indicates that storytelling is an effective pedagogical strategy for stimulating early childhood language development. Through exposure to a richer vocabulary, more varied sentence structures, and the communicative interactions that occur during the storytelling process, children demonstrate improvements in receptive and expressive skills. Children are not only better able to understand the plot, meaning, and context of the story, but also demonstrate developments in articulation, fluency, and the courage to express ideas and feelings. Storytelling has also been shown to encourage cognitive engagement, imagination, and socio-emotional responses, which indirectly strengthen children's verbal communication.

These findings confirm that the integration of storytelling in early childhood learning should be viewed as an essential component, not simply a supporting activity. Educators who design structured, interactive, and contextual storytelling activities can create a rich and meaningful language environment. Furthermore, consistent implementation, the selection of developmentally appropriate stories, and active child involvement are important factors in maximizing the impact of language stimulation. Thus, storytelling can be recommended as a relevant and applicable approach to supporting optimal language development in early childhood education.

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