



IMPROVING THE STORYTELLING SKILLS OF CHILDREN AGED 4–5 YEARS THROUGH THE INTERACTIVE STORYTELLING METHOD AT TK AL MAULANA

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Abstract

This study aimed to improve the storytelling ability of children aged 4–5 years through the implementation of the interactive storytelling method at TK Al Maulana, Central Jakarta. Storytelling ability is an important aspect of early childhood language development, as it supports children's confidence in speaking, vocabulary mastery, fluency, and ability to organize stories coherently. This study employed a classroom action research design conducted in two cycles involving 15 children in Class A. Data were collected through observation, documentation, and field notes, and were analyzed descriptively based on the percentage of children achieving the expected level of development. The findings showed a gradual improvement in children's storytelling ability across the research stages. In the pre-cycle, only 33% of children achieved the expected development level. After the implementation of storytelling activities using picture storybooks in Cycle I, the percentage increased to 40%. A more significant improvement was found in Cycle II, in which the use of hand puppets increased the percentage to 86%. These findings indicate that the interactive storytelling method was effective in improving children's storytelling ability. Therefore, this method can be considered an appropriate and engaging learning strategy to support oral language development in early childhood education.

Keywords: *interactive storytelling; storytelling ability; early childhood; language development; hand puppets*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education plays a strategic role in developing children's language skills as a fundamental basis for communication and social interaction. Among various aspects of language development, storytelling ability is considered one of the important indicators because it involves children's confidence to speak, vocabulary mastery, and the ability to organize ideas in a logical and sequential way. Storytelling ability is closely related to children's oral language development because it supports their capacity to express ideas, organize events, and communicate meaningfully in social and learning contexts (Khayati, 2024). In the context of kindergarten learning, language development should be facilitated through engaging and developmentally



appropriate activities so that children can express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences more confidently and meaningfully.

Language development during early childhood is widely recognized as a critical foundation for later academic achievement and social competence. Oral language skills, including storytelling ability, enable children to communicate experiences, construct meaning, and participate actively in social interactions. Research has shown that children who are frequently engaged in storytelling activities tend to demonstrate better expressive language skills, richer vocabulary, and stronger narrative competence compared to children with limited opportunities for oral language practice (Nicolopoulou et al., 2021; Rahiem, 2021). Therefore, providing meaningful opportunities for children to tell stories is an essential component of early childhood language education.

However, in practice, many children aged 4–5 years still experience difficulties in expressing ideas orally. Some children tend to be hesitant when speaking in front of others, have limited vocabulary, and find it difficult to retell events or stories in a coherent sequence. These difficulties often appear when children are asked simple daily questions or invited to share their experiences in class. In some cases, children remain silent, provide unrelated answers, or are unable to respond clearly. Such conditions indicate that children's storytelling ability has not developed optimally and requires more appropriate stimulation through interactive learning strategies.

A similar condition was found in Class A of TK Al Maulana, Central Jakarta. Based on initial classroom observations, several children still had difficulty expressing what they knew, felt, or experienced. When the teacher asked simple questions such as whether they had eaten before coming to school, some children remained silent, gave very short answers, or responded in ways that were not relevant to the questions. In addition, many children were not confident enough to ask questions when they did not understand the teacher's explanation, and some of them tended to stay passive during classroom interaction. This condition was closely related to the teacher-centered learning approach that had been commonly applied, in which communication mostly moved in one direction from teacher to children. As a result, children had limited opportunities to actively speak and practice storytelling in meaningful classroom situations.

Previous studies have shown that storytelling activities can effectively support early childhood language development, particularly in improving speaking skills, vocabulary, and oral expression (Astuti & Yafie, 2025). Storytelling not only helps children enrich their vocabulary, but also stimulates their imagination, listening skills, verbal expression, and confidence in communicating. The use of learning media such as picture storybooks and hand puppets has also been reported to make storytelling activities more interesting and engaging for children. Picture storybooks help children understand story content through visual support and stimulate verbal responses (Zikro et al., 2024), while hand puppets create a more engaging and less intimidating atmosphere for oral interaction (Mujahidah et al., 2021). Through attractive media, children tend to become more focused, enthusiastic, and actively involved in classroom learning activities.

In addition, previous studies indicate that picture books contribute positively to preschool children's storytelling skills by helping them structure and retell story sequences more clearly (Ratnasari, 2020). Likewise, puppet-assisted storytelling has been found to significantly improve children's language performance by providing repeated opportunities to speak and retell

experiences (Puspita & Kurniawan, 2024). Interactive storytelling supported by puppetry can also foster literacy engagement, communication, and children's willingness to participate during shared learning experiences (Karaolis, 2023). These findings suggest that storytelling activities become more meaningful when supported by concrete and interactive media.

Nevertheless, most previous studies have mainly emphasized the general contribution of storytelling to language development, while limited attention has been given to how different storytelling media can support children's ability to retell stories more coherently and confidently. In the context of this study, classroom learning initially used picture storybooks and was later developed into more interactive storytelling activities using hand puppets. This classroom action process provides important practical insight into how interactive storytelling strategies can gradually improve children's storytelling performance. Therefore, this study does not merely focus on storytelling as a teaching method, but also highlights the importance of interaction and media use in stimulating children's language development more effectively.

Previous studies have demonstrated that storytelling activities play an important role in supporting language development among young children by enriching vocabulary, improving communication skills, and fostering confidence in verbal expression. However, most existing studies primarily focus on the general effectiveness of storytelling without examining how different storytelling media may contribute to children's storytelling performance through a systematic intervention process. Furthermore, studies investigating the progressive use of storytelling media in classroom action research remain limited, particularly in early childhood education settings. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by implementing interactive storytelling through picture storybooks and hand puppets across two action cycles. The novelty of this research lies in examining how different interactive storytelling media can progressively enhance children's storytelling ability in an authentic classroom context.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design using the model developed by Kemmis and McTaggart, which consists of four main stages in each cycle: planning, action, observation, and reflection. This design was selected because it is appropriate for improving classroom learning practices in a gradual and reflective manner, particularly in enhancing children's storytelling skills through the implementation of an interactive storytelling method. The selection of Classroom Action Research (CAR) was based not only on its practical function for addressing classroom problems but also on its methodological suitability for improving instructional practices through a cyclical process of planning, action, observation, and reflection. This approach enables researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions continuously and make necessary improvements based on empirical findings obtained during each cycle. Interactive storytelling has been recognized as an effective language intervention for preschool children because it provides contextualized opportunities for vocabulary growth, oral narrative development, and active verbal participation (Nicolopoulou et al., 2021; Rahiem, 2021). The study was conducted in two cycles, preceded by a pre-cycle stage to identify the children's initial storytelling ability before the intervention was implemented.

The participants of this study were 15 children aged 4–5 years in Class A of TK Al Maulana, Central Jakarta. The selection of participants was based on the classroom context in which several

children were found to have difficulties in expressing ideas orally, retelling experiences, and responding verbally during classroom interaction. The teacher and the researcher collaboratively implemented the learning activities throughout the action research process.

The research procedure began with the pre-cycle stage, which was conducted to observe the children's initial storytelling performance in regular classroom activities. The findings from this stage showed that many children were still hesitant to speak, had limited vocabulary, and were not yet able to retell simple stories in a sequential manner. Based on these initial findings, an intervention was designed and implemented through two classroom action cycles. In Cycle I, the learning activities were carried out using picture storybooks as the main instructional media. The teacher introduced the story, read it aloud to the children, and asked several guiding questions to encourage them to retell the content of the story. In Cycle II, the learning activities were improved by using hand puppets as a more interactive storytelling medium. The use of hand puppets was intended to create a more engaging and emotionally supportive learning atmosphere, allowing children to speak more confidently and participate more actively in storytelling activities. This refinement was based on the reflection results from Cycle I, which indicated that children still needed more interactive stimulation to develop their storytelling ability optimally.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was used as the primary data collection technique to assess children's storytelling development during classroom activities, as it enables researchers to capture children's engagement and performance in authentic learning situations (Wolf et al., 2025). Interviews were conducted to obtain supporting information regarding the children's learning responses and classroom conditions, while documentation was used to record the implementation of the learning activities and the children's participation throughout the research process (Eckhoff, 2026).

The observation instrument was developed based on indicators of storytelling ability for children aged 4–5 years derived from early childhood language development standards. Prior to implementation, the instrument was reviewed by experts in early childhood education to ensure the relevance and appropriateness of the assessment indicators. Expert judgment is commonly used to establish content validity and determine the suitability of observational instruments in early childhood research (Esen et al., 2021; Anggoro et al., 2021). To maintain consistency in data collection, observation guidelines and scoring criteria were applied uniformly throughout the research process. Consistent scoring procedures are important for improving the reliability of observational assessments and ensuring the accuracy of children's developmental evaluations (Bulat et al., 2021). The main research instrument was an observation sheet developed based on four indicators of storytelling ability: (1) confidence in speaking, (2) vocabulary mastery, (3) speaking fluency, and (4) story sequence organization. These indicators were used to assess the children's storytelling performance in each stage of the study. Children's development was categorized into four levels, namely *Belum Berkembang (BB)*, *Mulai Berkembang (MB)*, *Berkembang Sesuai Harapan (BSH)*, and *Berkembang Sangat Baik (BSB)*. The percentage of children's achievement was calculated using the formula $P = (f/N) \times 100\%$, where P represents the percentage of achievement, f represents the number of children who achieved the expected criteria, and N represents the total number of participants. The action was considered successful when at least 75% of the children reached the categories of *Berkembang Sesuai Harapan (BSH)*

and Berkembang Sangat Baik (BSB), indicating that the intervention had achieved the predetermined success criteria.

The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis, which involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The quantitative descriptive data in the form of percentages were used to show the improvement of children's storytelling ability across the research cycles, while qualitative findings from classroom observations and interviews were used to support the interpretation of the results. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied data triangulation through the use of multiple techniques and sources, which is frequently used in educational research to improve credibility by integrating evidence from different methods and perspectives (Restivo & Apostolidis, 2019). In addition, ethical considerations were maintained by obtaining permission from the school, ensuring parental consent, and protecting the confidentiality of the children's identities throughout the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the interactive storytelling method contributed positively to the improvement of children's storytelling skills in Class A of TK Al Maulana, Central Jakarta. The improvement was identified gradually from the pre-cycle stage to Cycle I and Cycle II, based on four indicators of storytelling ability: confidence in speaking, vocabulary mastery, speaking fluency, and story sequence organization.

Table 1. Indicators of Children's Storytelling Ability

| No | Indicator | Operational Description |
|----|-----------------------------|--|
| 1 | Confidence in Speaking | The child demonstrates confidence when speaking during storytelling activities in front of the teacher and classmates. |
| 2 | Vocabulary Mastery | The child uses relevant and varied vocabulary in retelling the content of the story. |
| 3 | Speaking Fluency | The child retells the story fluently with appropriate pacing and limited hesitation. |
| 4 | Story Sequence Organization | The child retells the story in a coherent and sequential manner from beginning to end. |

Based on Table 1, children's storytelling ability was assessed through four main aspects of oral language performance, namely confidence in speaking, vocabulary mastery, speaking fluency, and story sequence organization. These indicators were used to observe the children's storytelling development throughout the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II stages

Table 2. Development of Children's Storytelling Ability

| Assessment Aspect | Pre-cycle | Cycle I | Cycle II |
|---|------------|------------|-------------|
| Percentage of Children Achieving the Expected Development Level | 33% | 40% | 86% |
| Number of Children Achieving the Expected Development Level | 5 children | 6 children | 13 children |

| Development Category | Beginning to Develop | Beginning to Develop | Developing as Expected |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|

Based on Table 2, children’s storytelling ability improved gradually across the research stages, with the highest improvement observed in Cycle II.

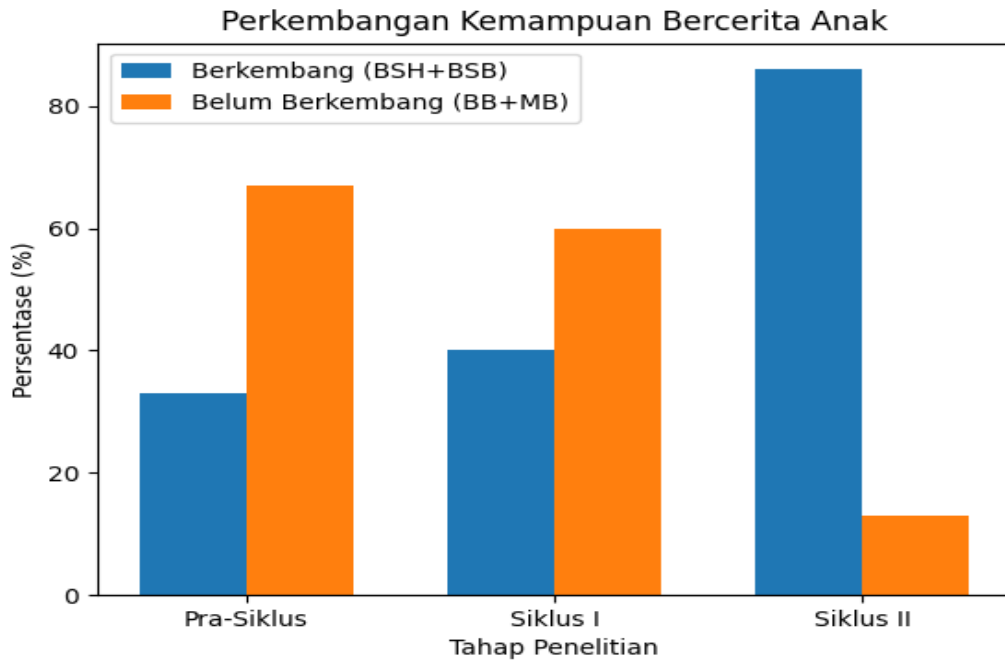


Figure 1. Percentage Improvement in Children’s Storytelling Ability Across Research Cycles

As shown in Figure 1, the percentage of children who achieved the expected level of storytelling development increased significantly from 33% in the pre-cycle, to 40% in Cycle I, and finally 86% in Cycle II. This result indicates that the implementation of the interactive storytelling method had a positive impact on children’s storytelling skills.

In the pre-cycle stage, only 5 out of 15 children (33%) reached the expected level of development. This result indicates that most children still experienced difficulties in expressing ideas orally, speaking confidently, and retelling simple stories in a logical order. Several children tended to remain silent when invited to speak, while others responded with very short or unrelated answers. This initial condition showed that children still required meaningful stimulation and more interactive classroom experiences to develop their oral language skills optimally.

After the implementation of the action in Cycle I, the number of children who achieved the expected level of development increased slightly to 6 children (40%). Although the increase was not yet substantial, this stage showed an initial positive response to the use of picture storybooks as storytelling media. The visual support provided by the storybooks helped children become more attentive and more willing to participate in oral storytelling activities. However, some children still needed considerable guidance in organizing story sequences and speaking more fluently.

A more significant improvement was found in Cycle II, in which 13 out of 15 children (86%) achieved the expected level of development. This increase indicates that the refinement of the learning process through the use of hand puppets as a more interactive storytelling medium had a stronger impact on children's storytelling performance. Compared to the previous stages, children in Cycle II demonstrated better confidence, richer vocabulary use, improved fluency, and more coherent sequencing when retelling stories. These results suggest that more engaging and participatory storytelling activities can stimulate children's oral language development more effectively.

The improvement in children's storytelling skills was also reflected in each of the observed indicators. In terms of confidence in speaking, children became more willing to answer questions and speak in front of the class. In terms of vocabulary mastery, they were better able to use relevant words to describe story events. Regarding speaking fluency, children gradually showed fewer pauses and less hesitation while speaking. Meanwhile, in terms of story sequence organization, children became more capable of retelling stories in a more logical and structured order. Overall, the findings indicate that the implementation of the interactive storytelling method contributed not only to increasing children's willingness to speak, but also to improving the quality of their oral storytelling performance.

The results of this study demonstrate that the interactive storytelling method can improve the storytelling skills of children aged 4–5 years. The increase from 33% in the pre-cycle, to 40% in Cycle I, and finally 86% in Cycle II indicates that storytelling ability can be developed effectively through repeated, meaningful, and engaging learning experiences. This finding supports the view that oral language development in early childhood is more likely to improve when children are actively involved in communication-rich activities rather than being positioned solely as passive listeners (Rahiem, 2021; Vaahtoranta et al., 2019).

The modest improvement found in Cycle I suggests that the use of picture storybooks was effective as an initial stimulus for children's storytelling development. The illustrations in the storybooks helped children understand the content of the story more easily and provided visual cues that supported verbal expression. However, the increase at this stage remained limited, which indicates that visual support alone was not yet sufficient for all children to speak more confidently and organize stories independently. This finding is consistent with previous studies reporting that picture books can support children's ability to comprehend and retell stories more clearly (Lestari, 2018; Reed et al., 2015).

A substantial improvement occurred in Cycle II, indicating that the use of hand puppets created a more effective learning environment for storytelling development. Hand puppets appeared to provide children with a more concrete, playful, and emotionally engaging context for communication. As a result, children became more enthusiastic, less hesitant, and more expressive during storytelling activities. This finding suggests that when children feel comfortable and emotionally engaged, they are more likely to participate actively and use language more confidently. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies showing that puppet-assisted storytelling can improve children's classroom participation and oral language skills (Rini & Mahabbati, 2025; Lizhardy, 2021).

The improvement across the four indicators confidence in speaking, vocabulary mastery, speaking fluency, and story sequence organization also highlights the multidimensional contribution of interactive storytelling activities to early childhood language development. Storytelling in this study did not merely train children to repeat words, but also encouraged them to think, organize ideas, and communicate meaningfully. This supports the argument that storytelling should be viewed as an interactive pedagogical process that promotes both linguistic and cognitive development in early childhood settings (Okay & Kandir, 2021; Vaahtoranta et al., 2019).

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study imply that early childhood teachers should consider storytelling not only as a literacy activity, but also as an effective strategy for stimulating oral language development. By using engaging instructional media and creating supportive speaking opportunities, teachers can help children become more confident, expressive, and capable of narrating events in a coherent way. Therefore, the interactive storytelling method can be considered a relevant and applicable classroom strategy for improving storytelling ability in early childhood education.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of interactive storytelling activities can effectively improve the storytelling abilities of children aged 4–5 years. Through the use of engaging storytelling media, children were provided with meaningful opportunities to express ideas, retell events, enrich their vocabulary, and communicate more confidently. The findings indicate that interactive storytelling creates a supportive learning environment that encourages active participation and promotes language development in early childhood.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the understanding that storytelling is not merely a language activity but also a pedagogical strategy that facilitates children's expressive communication skills through active interaction and meaningful learning experiences. Practically, the findings provide guidance for early childhood educators in selecting and utilizing interactive storytelling media to support children's language development in classroom settings.

Nevertheless, this study was conducted in a single classroom with a limited number of participants, which may restrict the broader generalization of the findings. Therefore, future studies are recommended to involve larger samples, different educational contexts, and a wider variety of storytelling media to further explore the effectiveness of interactive storytelling in enhancing children's language development.

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