



## Early Literacy Development of 4–5 Year Old Children through the Storytelling Method at SPS Negeri Bale Bermain Gading Kuncup Harmoni

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### Abstract

Literacy is a fundamental foundation for lifelong learning, yet Indonesia continues to face challenges in achieving optimal literacy outcomes, as the 2022 PISA report indicates. Strengthening literacy from an early age is therefore crucial, and storytelling has been recognized as an effective pedagogical method to stimulate imagination, enhance oral language, and introduce children to narrative structures. This study aims to investigate the role of storytelling in fostering early literacy development among children aged 4–5 years at SPS Negeri Bale Bermain Gading Kuncup Harmoni, North Jakarta. A qualitative descriptive design was employed to capture the experiences of teachers, children, and parents. Data were collected through classroom observations, structured interviews, and document analysis, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model of data reduction, display, and verification, with triangulation applied to ensure validity. The findings reveal four key aspects. First, storytelling was systematically implemented in three stages: preparation, delivery, and post-story activities, supported by varied media such as puppets and picture books. Second, children responded positively by showing attentiveness, enjoyment, and active participation, with evidence of emotional and imaginative engagement. Third, early literacy development was evident in children's ability to retell narratives, expand vocabulary, and comprehend story structures, with symbolic representation encouraged through post-story tasks. Fourth, the learning environment—characterized by quietness, comfort, inclusivity, and literacy-rich resources—was essential in supporting storytelling success. This study concludes that storytelling is an entertaining classroom activity and a powerful literacy strategy that enhances multiple dimensions of early literacy. The research highlights the importance of teacher creativity, environmental support, and family involvement in maximizing the potential of storytelling as an effective pedagogical tool in early childhood education.

**Keywords:** Early Literacy, Storytelling Method, Preschool Education, Children Aged 4–5 Years

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INTRODUCTION



Literacy is a fundamental skill in supporting children's lifelong learning. It is the foundation for acquiring knowledge, developing critical and analytical thinking, and preparing individuals to participate in an increasingly globalized and technologically advanced society (Saryono et al., 2020). In Indonesia, literacy is an educational concern and a national priority, as it reflects the overall quality of human resources and influences the nation's competitiveness.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 revealed that Indonesia ranked 68th out of 80 participating countries in literacy (OECD, 2022). Such results underscore the urgency of strengthening literacy education, particularly from the earliest years of life. Early childhood represents a crucial stage of development when the brain is most receptive to stimulation, and therefore literacy skills must be cultivated as part of holistic child development (Nurlina et al., 2024).

Early literacy extends beyond the technical ability to read and write, including oral language, comprehension, narrative ability, and symbolic recognition. According to Hapsari et al. (2017) and Sari (2019), literacy skills at this age involve children's capacity to listen, retell, and interpret meaning through symbols and pictures. Fisher (2005) adds that literacy development begins long before formal schooling, when infants engage with oral language, gestures, and interactions that gradually prepare them for reading and writing.

In Indonesia, the National Literacy Movement highlights six domains of literacy: reading and writing, numeracy, science, financial, digital, and cultural-civic literacy (Nasrullah, 2024). For children in preschool, these broad domains start with fundamental skills such as recognizing sounds, understanding story structures, and engaging in conversations. Thus, early literacy should be nurtured through meaningful exposure to language-rich activities.

One of the most effective approaches to fostering early literacy is storytelling. Storytelling has been widely recognized for stimulating imagination, enhancing listening skills, and introducing children to language structure in engaging contexts (Anggraeni et al., 2019; Iswahyuningsih, 2017). Through storytelling, children learn to follow narratives, comprehend sequences, and connect emotionally with characters, supporting cognitive and linguistic growth.

A growing body of research affirms the value of storytelling in early childhood education. Permatasari (2017) found that storytelling fosters creativity and the ability to construct narratives in young children. Similarly, Aritonang (2021) demonstrated that storytelling enhances preschool children's reading interest and oral communication skills. These findings highlight that storytelling is an enjoyable classroom activity and a powerful pedagogical method.

Further evidence shows that storytelling improves children's motivation to read, oral language development, comprehension, and emergent writing skills (Nurbeti, Mayasari, & Arifudin, 2022). Supriatna (2022) emphasized that storytelling is most effective when presented in simple language and supported with engaging media such as puppets, flannel boards, and role play. These tools transform abstract narratives into concrete experiences that children can grasp.

Despite its potential, storytelling remains underutilized in many Indonesian early childhood institutions. Munajah (2021) noted that storytelling is often reduced to entertainment rather than integrated as a systematic instructional method. This underutilization diminishes the potential of storytelling to function as a foundation for early literacy development, especially in schools where literacy outcomes remain a pressing concern.

SPS Negeri Bale Bermain Gading Kuncup Harmoni in North Jakarta provides an interesting case study because storytelling has consistently been applied as part of its literacy program. The institution is characterized by its child-centered approach and a supportive learning environment emphasizing enjoyment and engagement. Teachers at this

center integrate storytelling into their daily teaching routines to stimulate children's enthusiasm for language and literacy.

The theoretical grounding of this study draws on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which argues that learning is mediated through social interaction and language. Storytelling provides an ideal context for such mediation, as it encourages dialogue between children, teachers, and peers while simultaneously exposing children to society's cultural and linguistic tools (Syafnita et al., 2023). This aligns with the view that language is both a tool for communication and a vehicle for cognitive development.

Storytelling is also closely linked to children's early narrative skills. Novrani (2021) explains that through storytelling, children gradually learn to connect symbols with meanings, comprehend storylines, and develop the building blocks of reading and writing. Zubaedah (2019) supports this argument by noting that children exposed regularly to storytelling demonstrate stronger memory, broader vocabulary, and longer attention spans.

The learning environment plays an equally critical role in literacy development. According to Mastoah et al. (2022), a literacy-rich environment—complete with quiet spaces, storybooks, and visual aids—greatly enhances children's comprehension and engagement. At SPS Negeri Bale Bermain, teachers intentionally design classrooms with reading corners and interactive media, ensuring that the physical environment supports storytelling activities.

Family involvement further strengthens early literacy through storytelling. Zaniniyati (2010) observed that when parents read or tell stories at home, children develop an interest in books and strengthen emotional bonds with their caregivers. This family dimension complements the broader framework of the National Literacy Movement, which emphasizes collaboration between schools, families, and communities (Nasrullah, 2024).

While various studies have examined storytelling in early childhood, limited research has focused on its implementation in public early childhood institutions in urban Indonesia. This contextual gap highlights the novelty of the present study. By situating the research at SPS Negeri Bale Bermain in North Jakarta, this study provides insights into how storytelling can be systematically applied within an urban, public preschool setting to enhance early literacy.

The present study, therefore, seeks to examine how teachers implement storytelling in classroom learning, how children respond and engage with storytelling activities, what forms of early literacy development emerge from these experiences, and how the learning environment supports the process. By addressing these aspects, the research aims to provide theoretical and practical contributions to early childhood education, demonstrating the significance of storytelling as a powerful tool for early literacy development in Indonesia.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to provide in-depth insights into participants' experiences and capture the natural context of early literacy practices. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate when the aim is to explore meanings, processes, and interactions rather than to test hypotheses or measure variables (Creswell, 2014). The descriptive orientation of this design allowed the researchers to focus on how storytelling was implemented, how children responded, and what forms of literacy development emerged. This approach is widely used in early childhood education research because it provides rich and detailed accounts of learning experiences (Sugiyono, 2019; Moleong, 2018).

The research was conducted at SPS Negeri Bale Bermain Gading Kuncup Harmoni, North Jakarta, from June to August 2025. This site was selected because of its consistent integration of storytelling into literacy activities and its position as a public early childhood institution in an urban environment. Context selection is crucial in qualitative research

since it provides the natural setting in which phenomena can be studied holistically (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The participants in this study included one preschool teacher as the primary implementer of storytelling, fifteen children aged 4–5 years as the main subjects, and parents who provided supplementary information regarding children's literacy practices at home.

Data collection employed multiple techniques to ensure comprehensive coverage of the phenomenon. Observations were conducted during classroom storytelling sessions to capture real-time interactions between teachers and children. Structured interviews with teachers and parents were also conducted to gain deeper insights into instructional practices and home support for literacy. In addition, document analysis was used to examine lesson plans, instructional media, and children's work. The combination of these methods aligns with recommendations by Patton (2015), who emphasizes the importance of multiple data sources in qualitative inquiry to strengthen the depth and credibility of findings.

Observations were carried out systematically using field notes and observation sheets, focusing on children's attentiveness, participation, and narrative skills. This method allowed the researchers to see how the storytelling process unfolded in practice, complementing the interview perspectives (Anggraeni et al., 2019). Interviews with teachers explored pedagogical rationales, challenges, and perceived impacts of storytelling, while interviews with parents sought to identify the continuity of literacy activities at home. Document analysis further enriched the data by providing evidence of planning and learning outcomes, ensuring that both processes and products of learning were examined (Bowen, 2009).

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data was reduced by selecting and coding relevant information from observations, interviews, and documents. Data were then displayed in matrices and thematic charts to facilitate pattern recognition and thematic development. Finally, conclusions were drawn through iterative verification, in which findings were continuously compared and refined against the raw data until a coherent interpretation emerged (Moleong, 2018; Sugiyono, 2019).

Triangulation of techniques and sources was applied to enhance the validity of findings. Triangulation of techniques was achieved by combining observation, interviews, and documentation, while triangulation of sources was achieved by involving teachers, children, and parents. This strategy aligns with Denzin's (1978) assertion that triangulation increases the trustworthiness of qualitative research by cross-checking evidence from multiple angles. In addition, prolonged engagement in the field and member checking with participants were employed to strengthen further the results' credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Storytelling Implementation**

Teachers systematically implemented storytelling in three phases: preparation, delivery, and post-story activities. In the preparation stage, teachers carefully selected stories appropriate to the children's age and developmental level. The stories chosen contained simple vocabulary, moral values, and relatable situations, ensuring that children could follow the narrative easily. Preparation also included setting up the physical classroom environment to minimize distractions and create a conducive atmosphere for listening.



**Figure 1. Teacher Implementing the Storytelling Method**

Another critical aspect of preparation was the use of storytelling media. Teachers employed a variety of tools such as picture books, puppets, and flannel boards to bring stories to life. These visual and tactile supports were crucial for engaging young learners, who often rely on concrete representations to understand abstract ideas. Research shows that using varied media increases children's attention span and deepens comprehension (Iswahyuningsih, 2017; Anggraeni et al., 2019).

The delivery stage was marked by expressive narration. Teachers used intonation, gestures, facial expressions, and pauses to capture children's attention and sustain engagement. The performance element of storytelling enabled children to listen and imagine characters and events vividly. According to Fisher (2005), expressive narration is central to helping children internalize story structures and narrative sequencing.

Post-story activities were designed to reinforce comprehension and encourage active participation. Children were asked to retell stories in their own words, answer questions, or draw scenes from the narrative. Such activities allowed children to process information, practice oral language, and demonstrate understanding. These practices align with Iswahyuningsih's (2017) model, emphasizing post-story reflection as a key component of compelling storytelling.

Overall, the structured approach to storytelling ensured that children benefited from listening and engaging with narratives at multiple levels. This systematic implementation reflects best practices in early childhood education and demonstrates how storytelling can be integrated into daily classroom routines to promote literacy development.

### **Children's Responses**

Children responded positively to storytelling sessions, showing visible enthusiasm and enjoyment. During observations, many children leaned forward, maintained eye contact with the teacher, and reacted emotionally to characters and events. These behavioral indicators reflect attentiveness and engagement, which are crucial for learning (Supriatna, 2022). Positive responses also demonstrated that children viewed storytelling as an enjoyable learning activity rather than a formal lesson.

The sessions also encouraged active participation. Children often raised their hands to answer questions, repeated key phrases, and imitated gestures used by the teacher. Such participation shows that storytelling fosters interactive learning environments. As Nurbeti et al. (2022) highlight, children are more likely to absorb language and literacy skills when actively involved rather than passively receiving information.



**Figure 2. Children's Responses During Storytelling Activities**

Another form of response was imaginative involvement. Children were observed pretending to be characters, creating sound effects, or suggesting alternative endings. These behaviors indicate that storytelling stimulated creativity and critical thinking. This aligns with Permatasari (2017), who found that storytelling encourages children to construct their own narratives and develop divergent thinking skills.

The emotional connection children developed with stories was also evident. Some children laughed at humorous events, expressed sadness during conflicts, or showed excitement during resolutions. Emotional engagement enhances memory retention, as children are more likely to remember narratives that resonate with their feelings (Zubaedah, 2019).

In sum, the children's responses validated the effectiveness of storytelling as a pedagogical method. Their attentiveness, participation, creativity, and emotional involvement demonstrate that storytelling is enjoyable and an effective strategy for literacy development in early childhood.

### **Early Literacy Development**

The most significant literacy gains observed were in narrative skills. Children could retell simple stories using their own words, demonstrating comprehension of storylines and sequencing of events. This ability reflects the development of narrative competence, foundational to later reading and writing skills (Novrani, 2021). Vocabulary expansion was another notable improvement. Storytelling sessions exposed children to new words in meaningful contexts, enabling them to understand and use vocabulary beyond their everyday speech. Teachers observed that children began incorporating these words into

conversations and play activities, showing transfer of learning. This finding supports Nurbeti et al. (2022), who argued that storytelling enriches children's oral language repertoire.

Comprehension skills also advanced as children learned to infer meaning, predict outcomes, and connect story elements with personal experiences. For instance, some children related the characters' actions to their daily lives, demonstrating a deeper understanding. According to Hapsari et al. (2017), such comprehension is an essential component of emergent literacy, bridging oral and written forms of language.

Emergent writing skills were indirectly fostered through post-story activities such as drawing and labeling pictures. These activities encouraged children to represent ideas symbolically, a precursor to formal writing. Literacy scholars emphasize that combining oral storytelling with symbolic representation gives children a holistic foundation for literacy (Sari, 2019).

Altogether, storytelling contributed to multiple dimensions of early literacy: narrative competence, vocabulary growth, comprehension, and symbolic representation. These improvements suggest that storytelling is a powerful strategy for nurturing well-rounded literacy development in preschool-aged children.

### **Role of the Learning Environment**

The learning environment played a decisive role in the success of storytelling activities. Classrooms were arranged to minimize distractions, with children seated in semi-circles to promote visibility and interaction. Such arrangements facilitated focus and created a communal atmosphere where children felt part of the story. Research confirms that classroom design significantly influences engagement in early literacy activities (Mastoah et al., 2022).

Quiet and comfortable settings enabled children to concentrate fully on stories. No noise and interruptions ensured that children could listen attentively, process language, and follow narratives. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), creating a conducive environment is essential to qualitative educational practices, as it shapes the quality of interactions and learning outcomes.

Teachers also provided individualized attention, which enhanced comprehension and participation. For example, children struggling to follow stories were gently guided with prompts or explanations. This personalized support reflects Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development, where learning occurs most effectively when scaffolding is provided (Syafnita et al., 2023).

Literacy-rich resources such as storybooks, puppets, and visual aids reinforced the storytelling process. These materials provided multiple entry points for children to connect with narratives through listening, seeing, or touching. Studies highlight that access to diverse literacy materials increases children's motivation and depth of learning (Mastoah et al., 2022).

### **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that storytelling is a practical pedagogical approach to foster early literacy development among children aged 4–5. Through systematic implementation of preparation, delivery, and post-story activities, storytelling enhanced children's attentiveness, participation, and emotional engagement. The findings further revealed significant improvements in children's ability to retell narratives, expand vocabulary, and comprehend story structures, supported by a learning environment that was quiet, comfortable, inclusive, and enriched with literacy resources. These results affirm that storytelling entertains and provides meaningful opportunities for children to acquire foundational literacy skills essential for their future academic success.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made. Teachers are encouraged to develop creativity in storytelling by utilizing diverse media such as puppets, picture books, flannel boards, and digital tools to maintain children's engagement. Schools should strengthen literacy-rich environments by providing teachers with dedicated reading corners, adequate story materials, and professional development programs to enhance their storytelling competence. Parents are also advised to support storytelling at home as a complementary activity to reinforce children's literacy growth and strengthen parent-child bonds. Future research may explore the integration of storytelling with other literacy strategies or digital innovations to broaden its applicability in early childhood education.

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