



Stimulation of Expressive Language Development in Early Childhood through The Storytelling Method at Al Irsyad Kindergarten Lemahabang

Iis Siti Umi Halimatussya'diyah^{1✉}, Fitri Meliani², Suzana Suzana³

^{1,2}Early Childhood Education of Bunga Bangsa Islamic University Cirebon, Indonesia

³Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Keguruan, PG PAUD, Universitas Islam Bandung

Correspondence Email: iissitiumihalimatussya'diyah@gmail.com

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the lack of expressive language skills of children in Group B of Al Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Lemahabang Kindergarten. From the initial observations, many children have difficulty expressing their feelings and thoughts. This indicates the need for a fun learning method. The purpose of this study is to improve children's expressive language skills through the storytelling method. By using illustrated storybooks delivered in an interesting way, children are expected to be able to convey their thoughts and feelings. This study uses the Classroom Action Research (CAR) method of the Kemmis and McTaggart model which is carried out in two cycles. Each cycle consists of planning, action, observation, and reflection stages. Data were collected through observations of children's activities during the learning process. The results of the study showed a significant increase in expressive language skills. In the pre-cycle, the score was 44.44%. The conclusion of this study is that the storytelling method is effective in stimulating the development of expressive language in early childhood. The increase occurs gradually from the pre-cycle to the second cycle.

Keywords: *Espressive Languange; Story Telling; Early Chilhood.*

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INTRODUCTION

Expressive language skills are crucial for early childhood development. However, initial observations at Al Irsyad Al Islamiyyah Kindergarten in Lemahabang revealed fundamental challenges with this skill. Many children still struggle to construct sentences, have limited vocabulary, and lack the confidence to speak in front of peers and teachers. This situation indicates the need for engaging learning interventions that encourage children to be more verbally active.

According to Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, social interaction is key to a child's cognitive development, including the formation of language as an important tool for thinking and communication (Etnawati, 2022). In this context, expressive language, namely a child's ability to verbally express ideas, thoughts, and feelings, is crucial. Children with well-developed expressive language tend to be better able to build social interactions, develop emotional intelligence, and are prepared to face academic challenges. Conversely, delays in expressive language can result in low self-confidence and difficulties in social adaptation (Siregar et al., 2023). Therefore, stimulation of expressive language needs to be carried out in a targeted and enjoyable manner, in accordance with the child's developmental characteristics.

According to the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 137 of 2014, the development of early childhood language aspects includes the ability to understand, express language, and recognize symbols in preparation for reading and writing. In children aged 5–6 years, the ability to construct simple sentences, answer complex questions, and express ideas through vocabulary is an important indicator of their readiness to learn in the next stage (Anita, Hijriati, 2024). The reality in the field shows that many early childhood still have difficulty expressing their thoughts verbally, Based on initial observations at Al Irsyad Lemahabang Kindergarten. This is an important basis for the need for learning interventions that can stimulate children's expressive language effectively and enjoyably.

One potential method to address this is storytelling. According to Echols (in Uzer, 2020), storytelling is the activity of conveying stories orally with the aim of conveying messages, values, or entertainment. In early childhood education, storytelling has been proven to be an approach that can increase children's engagement, enrich their vocabulary, and encourage them to speak in front of others. Furthermore, research by Suryaningsih (2020) states that storytelling using big books successfully improves sentence construction skills, expands vocabulary, and enhances children's understanding of the story's content. However, most previous studies have focused solely on receptive language (listening skills) and have not specifically examined the effects of storytelling on expressive language, especially within the framework of Classroom Action Research (CAR), which actively involves teachers in the reflective process and learning improvement.

Most research still focuses on receptive language development or the use of one-way storytelling methods. This gap may also be caused by learning methods that do not optimally provide children with space for language exploration. One-way activities and a lack of active child involvement slow down expressive language development. Therefore, innovative, enjoyable learning strategies are needed that facilitate children's active speaking, one of which is the storytelling method. Research by (Sofiah Sofiah & Nur Aliyah, 2024) shows that children's active interaction in storytelling has a significant impact on their expressive language skills. Therefore, this research is important and relevant to fill this gap. By using the CAR

design, teachers can be directly involved in implementing the storytelling method, evaluating the results, and reflecting to improve the quality of learning. This research also aligns with a learning approach that places children at the center of learning activities (student-centered learning) and supports the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum in PAUD units.

This research will expand the existing approach by integrating storytelling into classroom action cycle (CAR)-based learning, resulting in a more structured approach to planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. This approach is expected to provide more contextual and in-depth data regarding the effectiveness of storytelling in stimulating expressive language. This research is expected to make a real contribution to improving the quality of early childhood education, particularly in developing children's expressive language in a fun and meaningful way. The focus of this research is how the application of the storytelling method can stimulate the expressive language skills of early childhood at Al Irsyad Kindergarten, Lemahabang.

Language is the most important means of communication in human life. According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), the word "expressive" is defined as "appropriate (capable of) providing (expressing) images, intentions, ideas, feelings." Etymologically, expressive language can be understood as an individual's ability to express or convey thoughts, feelings, and ideas through language that can be understood by others. According to Gordon and Browne in Dhieni, expressive language skills can be seen from the increasing frequency with which children express their desires, needs, thoughts, and feelings verbally to others (Susanti, 2018). This definition is in line with the view of (Rizkiani et al., 2022), who state that expressive language is a child's ability to express what is in their mind through words, sentences, gestures, and other verbal expressions. Language allows a person to convey their thoughts, feelings, and desires to others. Expressive language skills in early childhood are an important aspect that indicates a child's cognitive and socio-emotional development. Children with good expressive language skills will be able to clearly convey their ideas and desires, answer questions, and tell simple stories. These skills begin to develop around one year of age, characterized by the ability to name objects, make requests, and use simple sentences to describe their feelings (Rizkiani et al., 2022).

According to Rhea Paul, expressive language is a child's ability to construct and utter utterances that can be understood by others, including the ability to choose words, construct sentence structures, and convey ideas verbally (Paul & Jennings, 1992). Research shows that storytelling activities are very effective in stimulating this ability because they encourage children to repeat, imitate, and arrange words into a complete story (Husnusyifa & Febrina, 2024). Furthermore, recent longitudinal research shows that children's expressive language development is strongly influenced by rich social interactions, especially verbal interactions triggered by professional mentoring arrangements, which can significantly increase the complexity of children's vocabulary and sentence structure in a relatively short time (Su et al., 2024). Studies show that when parents or teachers provide open dialogue, children show an increased ability to express feelings and healthier social relationships (Narumi & Rizana, 2023).

According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), storytelling is defined as the activity of conveying a story, telling a tale or event orally. In the context of early childhood education, this term has evolved into a learning method known as storytelling, an approach that uses stories as a means to convey messages, build understanding, and stimulate various aspects of child development. According to T. Cremin, R. Flewitt, B. Mardell, and J. Swann in their book

Storytelling in Early Childhood, storytelling and story-acting are powerful pedagogical approaches that can enrich language and literacy development, create an inclusive classroom, and increase student social and cognitive engagement. This strategy provides opportunities for children to explore language structures through play and imagination (Teresa Cremin, Rosie Flewitt, Ben Mardell, 2016). Meanwhile, according to C. Wright, Marissa L. Diener, and J. Kemp, drama-based storytelling (storytelling dramas) is very effective in building a positive classroom community, increasing social interaction between students, and supporting children's social-emotional development. Through storytelling activities followed by role-playing, children can experience social roles directly, learn to manage emotions, understand other people's perspectives, and strengthen self-confidence in a safe and supportive learning environment (Nhase & Dube, 2023).

One of the main strengths of storytelling is its ability to stimulate children's imagination and creativity. When children listen to stories, they not only receive information but also actively imagine the characters, settings, and events conveyed. This directly stimulates their cognitive development, particularly in terms of reasoning, understanding logical flow, and symbolic thinking skills. According to research by Syamsiyah and Hardiyana, the use of storytelling methods in children aged 4-6 years has been shown to improve language skills, particularly in early literacy and more expressive oral language (Syamsiyah & Hardiyana, 2021). A key characteristic of the storytelling method is its interactive nature. The educator is not only the narrator but also a facilitator, creating space for children to react, ask questions, answer, and even retell. This interactivity is crucial in Classroom Action Research (CAR), as it allows teachers to directly observe children's engagement and development in real-life learning situations.

Children who actively engage in storytelling sessions tend to show enthusiasm, expand their vocabulary, and gain more confidence in expressing their ideas. According to Zukiswa Nhase and B. Dube, integrating storytelling with an inquiry approach can naturally develop children's scientific and cognitive skills. They explain that this approach can create a fun and non-threatening learning environment, enabling children to learn to think critically, ask questions, and actively explore (Nhase & Dube, 2023). Furthermore, storytelling uses simplified language appropriate to the cognitive developmental level of early childhood. The use of short sentences, repetition, and dramatic dialogue helps children understand the story's message while simultaneously absorbing proper language structure. This ability is crucial for supporting expressive language development, as children learn to construct sentences and express their thoughts based on the models they hear in stories.

Storytelling is also highly effective in developing children's character. Through stories containing moral values, such as honesty, mutual assistance, responsibility, and empathy, children not only understand the meaning of these values but also internalize them through the characters who serve as behavioral models. This aligns with the principles of values-based learning in the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, where character building is a key pillar. Equally important, the storytelling method can be adapted to the child's local or cultural context. Folktales or local fairy tales embodying noble Indonesian cultural values can be highly effective storytelling materials due to their proximity to children's daily lives. In Classroom Action Research (CAR), selecting local stories can be a relevant strategy for adapting learning materials to the needs and characteristics of students. With all these advantages, the storytelling

method is highly relevant for application in the CAR approach. Teachers can plan appropriate stories, observe children's engagement and responses during storytelling sessions, reflect on their effectiveness, and develop follow-up strategies to improve the quality of learning. Through this process, storytelling is not merely a medium for entertainment, but a structured, reflective learning strategy that can develop children's expressive language skills comprehensively.

One effective medium for storytelling is picture books. Books with attractive illustrations can help children understand the plot, recognize characters, and connect images to the text. The use of picture books has been shown to improve listening and speaking skills in young children compared to conventional learning methods (Pertiwi, 2020). The use of series of pictures in storytelling can improve children's ability to convey ideas, collaborate, and interact with peers (Khairun Nissa, 2024). Wayang beber fables are a traditional medium that can be used in storytelling for young children. Wayang beber, with its fable stories, teaches moral values through animal characters, which are easy for children to understand and enjoy. The use of wayang beber as a storytelling medium helps visualize the story and reinforces the moral message conveyed (Noegroho, 2022). In the digital era, digital storytelling has become an attractive alternative medium for young children. The use of digital media in storytelling can increase children's interest in reading and help them understand and emulate community wisdom through interactive stories (Pratiwi, 2019). For effective storytelling techniques, educators need to master voice intonation, facial expressions, and body movements that align with the storyline. This technique helps children understand the characters' emotions, recognize the names of emotions, and relate those emotions to themselves (Kristsuana et al., 2024).

Furthermore, two-way interaction during storytelling is crucial for increasing children's engagement. Asking questions, having children guess what will happen next, or encouraging them to retell parts of the story can improve children's critical thinking skills, prosocial behavior, and expressive and receptive language skills. Today's Most Popular News. By selecting appropriate media and implementing effective storytelling techniques, educators can create enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences for young children, supporting their holistic development. According to the Nativism theory developed by Noam Chomsky, children are born with an innate language acquisition device called the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). This device allows children to naturally grasp language structures through everyday interactions and experiences. However, this potential will only develop optimally if children receive sufficient language stimulation from their environment, especially in social contexts such as at home and school.

At the age of 5-6, children not only experience an increase in their vocabulary but also the ability to use language in complex and contextual ways. They begin to understand how to speak appropriately to the situation, are able to construct longer sentences, and adjust facial expressions and intonation when speaking. All of these abilities are part of expressive language development, which must be recognized through clear indicators. One of the main indicators of expressive language development is the ability to answer complex questions. Children no longer just give simple answers like "yes" or "no," but can now answer with explanations. For example, when asked "Why aren't you playing?" a child might answer, "I'm tired from running around." This ability indicates that children are beginning to connect language with logic and personal experiences (Setiawati et al., 2023). The next indicator is the ability to construct complete and structured sentences. According to Fernandes and Lima, another important indicator is the ability to construct complete and structured sentences. Children aged 5–6 years

old should ideally be able to construct simple sentences containing a subject, predicate, and object. For example, a sentence like "Yesterday, my mother and I went to the market to buy mangoes" shows that children already have a basic understanding of syntactic structures in language, including the ability to organize events chronologically (Fernandes & Lima, 2024). The third indicator is the child's ability to retell experiences or stories they hear. Wright, Diener, and Kemp added that a child's ability to retell stories or personal experiences is a very important form of narrative language development.

Children are not only required to remember the storyline but also to convey the information coherently and in a way that is understandable to others. For example, a child who says, "The teacher told a story about a mouse deer that stole a cucumber and was then caught by a farmer," shows that he is able to capture and convey information with a good story structure. The fourth indicator is the child's ability to express feelings and desires through spoken language. According to Vahab et al., a child's ability to express feelings and desires verbally is another important indicator. A child who says, "I'm sad because my friend doesn't want to play," shows that he is not only able to convey basic needs, but also understands and expresses emotions verbally. This is closely related to the development of emotional intelligence and self-regulation skills from an early age (Vahab et al., 2012). Finally, according to Clegg et al., an equally important indicator is a child's ability to engage in two-way communication or take turns in conversation. Ideally, children aged 5–6 should be able to respond to questions, listen to others, provide comments, and even ask questions back. These abilities demonstrate development in the pragmatic aspects of language, which are crucial for building healthy and effective social relationships (Clegg et al., 2015).

Educational environments such as early childhood education (PAUD) or kindergarten (TK) play a significant role in encouraging the achievement of these indicators. Teachers need to design activities that provide space for children to speak, express opinions, and respond to others. Activities such as storytelling in front of the class, group Q&A sessions, and small dramas have been shown to be effective in improving children's expressive language skills (Setiawati et al., 2023). Furthermore, the role of the family is equally important. It is important to understand that not all children will achieve these indicators at the same time. Some children may be quicker at constructing sentences but slower at telling stories. Therefore, evaluation of expressive language development should be conducted holistically, not based on a single aspect. Teachers and parents need to work together in observing and providing stimulation. By understanding these indicators, early childhood education (PAUD) teachers can develop more targeted learning strategies, while parents can be more actively involved in creating a communicative and supportive home environment. This shared understanding will create optimal expressive language development in early childhood.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) with a collaborative approach. The research design adopted the Kemmis and McTaggart spiral model, implemented in iterative cycles. Each cycle consisted of four main stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The research was conducted in two cycles, with each cycle ending when success indicators were achieved. The study was conducted at Al Irsyad Kindergarten, Lemahabang, Cirebon Regency, with 14 early childhood students in Group B1 as subjects. The study lasted

approximately three months, from December 2, 2024, to April 28, 2025. The focus of the intervention was the application of storytelling using picture books (one of which was titled "Ollie Wants to Go to the Moon") to stimulate children's expressive language development.

Data collection techniques included observation and documentation. Observations were conducted using observation sheets to assess children's learning activities and teacher activities during the learning process. The observed expressive language ability indicators included the ability to construct complete and structured sentences, the ability to retell stories, and the ability to engage in two-way communication or take turns. Data analysis was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative descriptive methods. Quantitative data were obtained by calculating the percentage of learning implementation and the children's ability scores using the learning completion percentage formula. The results were then converted into categories of completion interpretation (Very Low to Very Good). Data validity was tested using source and technical triangulation techniques to ensure the validity of the research findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted in two cycles to improve the expressive language skills of early childhood children through the storytelling method at Al Irsyad Kindergarten, Lemahabang. The study subjects consisted of 14 children in Group B. Initial data (Pre-Cycle) indicated that the children's expressive language skills were still relatively low, with an average achievement score of only 37.5%. At this stage, the children appeared to have difficulty constructing complete sentences, answering complex questions, and lacked confidence when asked to speak in front of the class.

In Cycle I, the researcher implemented the storytelling method using a picture book titled "Ollie Wants to Go to the Moon." The teacher told the story expressively to capture the children's attention. Observations in Cycle I showed an increase in the children's expressive language skills to 73.2%. Although there was improvement, this result did not reach the established success indicator (80%). Reflection on this cycle indicated that the teacher had not maximized apperception and motivation, resulting in some children remaining passive and shy.

Based on this reflection, improvements were made in Cycle II. The teacher refined the strategy by reinforcing apperception activities (the "Guess the Character" game), using more varied intonation and expressions, and engaging the children more actively in retellings and simple role-plays. The results were significant, with the children's expressive language skills improving significantly to 98.21%, categorized as "Very High."

The increase in children's expressive language skills from the Pre-Cycle stage to Cycle II can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Increase in Children's Expressive Language Skills in Each Cycle

Stage	Average Percentage(%)	Category
Pre-Cycle	37,50%	Poor
Cycle I	73,20%	Fair
Cycle II	98,21%	Excellent

The data above shows a consistent positive trend. In Cycle II, indicators such as the ability to construct complete sentences, retell stories, and engage in two-way communication were almost completely achieved by all children.⁸ Given that the success indicators had been exceeded, the study was discontinued in Cycle II.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that the application of the storytelling method using picture storybooks is effective in stimulating the development of expressive language in early childhood. The increase in the average score from 37.5% (Pre-Cycle) to 98.21% (Cycle II) demonstrates that the intervention had a real impact.

This success aligns with Vygotsky's theory, which states that children's language development occurs through social interactions and meaningful experiences. In storytelling activities, children are not merely passive listeners but are encouraged to interact, answer questions, and retell what they hear. This process trains children to organize their thoughts into verbal forms (sentences) that others can understand.

These findings also support research by Husna & Eliza (2021), which states that storytelling can stimulate language development in a fun way. The use of picture storybooks helps children visualize the storyline, making it easier for them to choose appropriate vocabulary when retelling. Furthermore, the improvement in strategies in Cycle II—where teachers are more expressive and interactive—proved crucial in building children's self-confidence. When children feel comfortable and engaged, they are more confident in expressing their ideas and feelings, which is the core of expressive language skills.

Overall, the storytelling method not only improves the cognitive aspects of language (vocabulary and sentence structure) but also the socio-emotional aspects (courage and confidence) of children in communicating.

CONCLUSION

This method successfully encouraged children to gain confidence, enrich their vocabulary, and improve their ability to construct sentences and retell stories orally. Success in Cycle II was greatly influenced by improvements in teacher strategies, such as selecting stories that were more relevant to children's lives and using more expressive and interactive delivery techniques. As a recommendation, educators are advised to shift from monotonous learning methods to more stimulating methods such as storytelling. Teachers are expected to continue innovating in selecting engaging storytelling media and developing varied delivery techniques to optimally develop children's enthusiasm for speaking and expressing themselves.

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