

Narratives, Emotions, and Social Interaction: The Role of Storytelling in Developing Social Communication among Early Childhood Learners

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ABSTRAK

Komunikasi sosial merupakan salah satu kemampuan penting bagi anak usia dini karena berkaitan dengan kemampuan anak dalam menyampaikan gagasan, memahami emosi, dan membangun hubungan dengan lingkungan sosialnya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran storytelling dalam mengembangkan komunikasi sosial anak usia dini melalui aspek narasi, emosi, dan interaksi sosial. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif yang dilaksanakan di POS PAUD Melati Bulakpacing Kabupaten Tegal. Data penelitian diperoleh melalui observasi kegiatan pembelajaran, dokumentasi aktivitas storytelling, dan catatan lapangan. Analisis data dilakukan melalui tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan

bahwa storytelling tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai media pengembangan bahasa, tetapi juga menjadi ruang interaksi sosial yang mendorong anak untuk menyimak, merespons, mengungkapkan pendapat, serta memahami emosi melalui cerita. Penggunaan buku cerita bergambar dan strategi komunikasi guru melalui pertanyaan pemantik mampu menciptakan pembelajaran yang dialogis. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa storytelling merupakan praktik komunikasi pendidikan yang berkontribusi dalam membangun kemampuan komunikasi sosial, empati, dan keterlibatan sosial anak usia dini.

ABSTRACT

Social communication is an essential ability in early childhood as it supports children's capacity to express ideas, understand emotions, and establish relationships with their social environment. This study aims to analyze the role of storytelling in developing young children's social communication through the dimensions of narratives, emotions, and social interactions. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach conducted at POS PAUD Melati Bulakpacing, Tegal Regency, Indonesia. Data were collected through classroom observations, documentation of storytelling activities, and field notes. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that storytelling functions not only as a medium for language development but also as a social interaction space that encourages children to listen, respond, express opinions, and understand emotions through narratives. The use of picture storybooks and teachers' interactive communication strategies through stimulating questions created a dialogical learning environment. This study highlights that storytelling serves as an educational communication practice

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that contributes to developing children's social communication skills, empathy, and social engagement in early childhood education.

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is an educational stage that plays a strategic role in developing children's fundamental abilities, including communication skills, social interaction, and understanding of their social environment. During early childhood, children's development does not only involve cognitive aspects but also includes social-emotional abilities that are shaped through experiences of interacting with their surrounding environment (Syahrul & Nurhafizah, 2022; Saptandari et al., 2022). Children learn to recognize their identity and emotions through daily interactions, both within family and school environments (Sofia & Irzalinda, 2021; Siswanti & Daud, 2024). The ability to express ideas and establish social relationships develops gradually through communication processes occurring in these two environments. Therefore, learning in ECE settings should not only focus on developing early academic abilities but also provide opportunities for children to experience meaningful social processes.

Communication is one of the fundamental aspects of early childhood development. Communication ability does not merely refer to the ability to pronounce words or construct sentences, but also includes the use of language as a means to establish social relationships, express needs, and communicate feelings (Tanjung et al., 2023). Language functions not only as a tool for expression but also as a representation of children's identity within their social groups (Kurniawan et al., 2023; Halimatuzzuhrotulaini et al., 2023).

Early childhood language development is closely associated with children's social abilities. Children who possess better grammatical understanding and listening skills tend to demonstrate stronger social competence because adequate communication skills facilitate their acceptance and participation within social environments (Wulandari & Purwanta, 2020). Language serves as a medium for communicating with the surrounding environment, developing intellectual capacity, and expressing thoughts and emotions to others (Shaleh et al., 2022; Henny, 2022).

Social interaction plays a crucial role in children's language acquisition. Children acquire language through social interactions and use language for social purposes (Weldiani et al., 2022). Family, school, and community environments have significant roles in stimulating children's language development (Haryati, 2024; Fajarrini & Diana, 2024). Parents who actively communicate with their children have been shown to contribute significantly to children's expressive and receptive language development (Nirmala & Hartono, 2023; Alfira & Siregar, 2024; Lestari & Handayani, 2023). Thus, language and communication development in early childhood cannot be separated from the social

contexts in which children grow and learn.

However, in ECE learning practices, language development is often still directed toward basic linguistic abilities, such as vocabulary recognition, naming objects, memorizing words, or answering simple questions. Although these approaches are important foundations for language development, they do not always provide sufficient opportunities for children to use language as a tool for social communication. Children need meaningful communication experiences that allow them to engage in dialogue, express opinions, understand others' perspectives, and appropriately express emotions. Therefore, learning strategies are needed to position language as an active and meaningful social interaction process.

One relevant learning strategy for developing children's social communication skills is storytelling. Storytelling is a communication activity involving the oral delivery of messages through narratives by utilizing language, expressions, intonation, and supporting media (Tohamba & Ukbayana, 2024). In the context of ECE, storytelling is considered an appropriate learning approach because it provides learning experiences that correspond to children's characteristics by incorporating imagination, characters, conflicts, emotions, and experiences that are closely connected to children's lives (Amalia et al., 2023).

Through storytelling activities, children do not merely acquire new information but also learn to understand events, recognize characters, and respond to messages embedded within stories. This activity has been proven effective in developing children's language abilities, including listening skills, speaking abilities, and the ability to retell stories (Novianti & Syafwandi, 2023; Sahadatunnisa et al., 2023).

Storytelling has significant potential as a medium for developing social communication because it essentially involves reciprocal relationships between the storyteller and the listener (Gusmayanti & Dimyati, 2021; Lasmini et al., 2022). In learning contexts, teachers act as storytellers who facilitate communication processes, while children become active listeners who participate in meaning-making processes (Fauziyyah et al., 2023; Subyantoro, 2015). Such interactions create communication environments where children learn to listen to others, take turns speaking, express opinions, and appreciate their peers' responses (Subanindro, 2022; Sriwartini & Radjagukguk, 2021). Therefore, storytelling functions not only as a literacy activity but also as a social space where children learn to establish relationships with others.

Beyond communication aspects, storytelling is also closely related to children's social-emotional development. Stories commonly present characters with various emotional experiences, such as happiness, sadness, fear, disappointment, and concern for others. When children follow storylines, they have opportunities to recognize characters' emotions and relate them to their own experiences (Putri et al., 2024; Solichah et al., 2023; Nurjanah &

Wakhudin, 2023). This process supports empathy development because children learn that others may have different feelings and perspectives (Putri et al., 2024; Shofiyyah et al., 2024). Through this understanding, storytelling can support children's ability to develop empathy, understand others' perspectives, and express emotions through communication.

Although numerous studies have examined storytelling in early childhood education, most previous research has primarily focused on the effects of storytelling on language skills, listening abilities, vocabulary development, or children's literacy development. Studies that examine storytelling as a social communication practice connecting narrative, emotion, and social interaction remain relatively limited. In fact, storytelling has a strong social dimension because it involves the process of constructing shared meanings between teachers and children through communication.

This study aims to analyze the role of storytelling in developing social communication among young children at POS PAUD Melati Bulakpacing, Tegal Regency. The study focuses on how storytelling activities provide opportunities for children to interact, express emotions, respond to communication, and construct social understanding through narrative experiences. The originality of this research lies in examining storytelling as a social communication phenomenon within early childhood education, thereby contributing to ECE studies that view children's development not only from an individual perspective but also through the lens of social relationships and human interaction.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the learning process through storytelling activities in developing young children's social communication skills. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focused on the processes of interaction, children's learning experiences, communication responses, and social behaviors that emerged during storytelling activities rather than on quantitatively measuring children's developmental outcomes.

The research was conducted at POS PAUD Melati Bulakpacing, Tegal Regency, Indonesia. The research subjects were young children who participated in storytelling-based learning activities, along with the teacher who acted as the facilitator of the activities. The research site was selected based on the implementation of storytelling practices using picture storybooks, which provided opportunities for children to engage in two-way communication activities.

Data were collected through observation, documentation, and field notes. Observation was conducted to identify forms of teacher-child interaction during storytelling activities, including children's ability to listen to stories, provide responses, answer questions, express opinions, and demonstrate emotional expressions toward the story content. Documentation

in the form of photographs of learning activities was used as empirical evidence to support the research findings. Field notes were used to record important behaviors and events that occurred throughout the learning process.

Data analysis was conducted interactively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Zulfirman, 2022). Observation and documentation data were analyzed to identify patterns regarding the role of storytelling in developing children's social communication, particularly in terms of verbal interaction, emotional expression, social engagement, and response abilities during learning activities. Data validity was ensured through technical triangulation by comparing findings obtained from observations and documentation of the learning activities.

RESULTS

This study aims to identify the role of storytelling activities in developing young children's social communication skills at POS PAUD Melati Bulakpacing, Tegal Regency, Indonesia. Based on observations of learning activities and documentation of children's activities, the findings indicate that storytelling is not merely an activity for delivering information but has developed into a social interaction space involving processes of listening, responding, asking questions, expressing opinions, and understanding emotions embedded within the story.

The storytelling activity was conducted using a picture storybook with a butterfly theme as the learning medium. The teacher delivered the story through a combination of verbal language, facial expressions, voice intonation, and stimulating questions to encourage children's engagement. During the activity, children demonstrated attention to the story through listening activities, observing the pictures, following the storyline, and responding to questions posed by the teacher.

Figure 1. Storytelling Activity Using a Picture Storybook about Butterflies



Source: Researcher's Documentation

Based on Figure 1, the storytelling activity created an interactive learning situation. The teacher acted as a communication facilitator by presenting the story expressively, while children became active participants involved in the process of listening to and understanding the narrative. The use of picture storybooks supported children's comprehension of the story through visual representations, enabling them to connect the information they heard with the objects they observed.

Children's involvement in the activity demonstrates that stories can serve as stimuli for social communication development. Children did not merely receive information passively but began constructing understanding through observing, listening, and responding. Through the butterfly-themed story, children had opportunities to recognize characteristics of living things while developing their ability to express their understanding based on their own experiences. Observations of the storytelling activities revealed several main findings related to children's social communication development. These findings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Findings on the Role of Storytelling in Developing Young Children's Social Communication

Social Communication Aspect	Observation Findings	Children's Behavioral Indicators
Listening ability	Children participated in storytelling activities by paying attention to the teacher and story media	Children looked at the storybook, listened to the narrative, and followed the storyline

Communication responses	Children responded to questions given by the teacher	Children answered questions and expressed their understanding of the story
Emotional expression	Children showed interest in the content of the story	Children demonstrated curiosity, attention, and enthusiasm during the activity
Social interaction	Two-way communication occurred between teacher and children	Children participated in conversations and simple discussions
Communication confidence	Children were given opportunities to express their opinions	Children attempted to speak and provide answers in front of the group

Based on Table 1, storytelling activities contributed to children's social communication development through various communication experiences. Children learned to use language not only for naming objects or answering questions but also for establishing communication relationships with teachers and peers. This process indicates that language development occurs through meaningful social contexts.

After the storytelling activity, the teacher conducted discussions and question-and-answer sessions to assess children's understanding of the story. This activity became an important stage because it provided opportunities for children to process the information they received and express their understanding through language.

Figure 2. Teacher–Children Question-and-Answer Interaction After Storytelling



Source: Researcher's documentation

Based on Figure 2, communication processes between teachers and children occurred through question-and-answer activities. The teacher asked questions related to the butterfly

story, while children responded based on their understanding and personal experiences. This interaction demonstrates that storytelling can develop into a social dialogue that helps children learn to express ideas and listen to others' opinions. The findings indicate that storytelling involves three main processes in developing children's social communication: (1) understanding messages through narratives, (2) expressing emotional responses toward stories, and (3) building interactions through conversations with teachers. These three processes demonstrate that storytelling has a broader function than merely supporting language development.

Overall, the findings show that storytelling serves as a learning medium capable of providing social communication experiences for young children. Through storytelling activities, children learn to connect narratives with personal experiences, recognize emotions, and use language as a means of interacting with their social environment.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that storytelling functions as a social communication practice that supports children's development in interacting, expressing emotions, and establishing relationships with others. These findings indicate that storytelling activities in the context of early childhood education should not be viewed merely as a method for delivering learning materials, but rather as a social process that enables children to construct meaning through interaction.

Theoretically, early childhood communication development is strongly influenced by the social environment in which children interact. Through the perspective of social constructivism, Vygotsky emphasizes that children's cognitive and language development does not occur in isolation but emerges through social interactions with more competent individuals (Habsy et al., 2023; Hidayati et al., 2023). According to Vygotsky, children acquire knowledge through social interactions between individuals or groups within a particular environment (Hidayati et al., 2023), and language develops through interaction with other people (Saputra & Suryandi, 2021). In the context of this study, the teacher acts as a mediator who provides communication support through narratives, questions, and dialogues. When the teacher tells a story and provides opportunities for children to respond, a scaffolding process occurs that supports children's language and cognitive development.

The findings further reveal that children do not only learn to understand story content but also learn how to use language within social contexts. When children respond to teachers' questions, they learn to organize their thoughts, select appropriate words, and communicate their ideas to others. This demonstrates that social communication develops through meaningful interaction experiences rather than merely through individual language practice.

These findings are consistent with previous studies showing that storytelling can serve as an effective strategy for supporting children's language and social-emotional development (Nicolopoulou et al., 2015; Mustonen et al., 2024; Nurjanah & Wakhudin, 2023). Previous research also indicates that storytelling activities provide opportunities for children to develop language abilities through listening, understanding, and interpreting stories (Sabila & Wahyudi, 2023; Pebriana, 2017; Rahim, 2022). Furthermore, interaction during storytelling activities can increase children's involvement in communication processes (Fitriani & Aziz, 2021; Yansyah et al., 2023).

From a social-emotional perspective, stories provide symbolic experiences that enable children to understand various emotional conditions. Through characters and storylines, children learn to recognize emotions such as happiness, sadness, fear, and care for others. In the storytelling activity about butterflies at POS PAUD Melati Bulakpacing, Tegal Regency, children demonstrated interest and curiosity toward the objects presented in the story. These responses indicate that stories can function as a medium connecting cognitive, linguistic, and emotional aspects simultaneously.

This finding is consistent with the view that children's social-emotional development includes the ability to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions within social relationships (Siswanti & Daud, 2024; Batubara et al., 2023). Through stories, children gain opportunities to understand emotional experiences from the perspectives of characters, thereby supporting the development of empathy and social understanding.

Furthermore, this study reinforces previous findings that storytelling serves as a communication medium for strengthening social relationships between teachers and children. According to Morrow (2015), interactive reading and storytelling activities can improve the quality of teacher-child interactions because children are not merely listeners but actively participate in meaningful conversations.

An important finding of this study is the role of the teacher as a communication facilitator. The teacher does not only deliver stories but also creates a dialogical atmosphere through open-ended questions and responses to children's answers. This strategy enables children to feel valued and provides opportunities for active participation. Therefore, storytelling becomes a democratic space where children can express ideas and develop confidence in communicating with others.

The findings also indicate that picture storybooks play an important role in supporting children's communication processes. Visual representations help children understand concepts presented in stories and become stimuli that enable children to connect visual experiences with language. This finding corresponds with the characteristics of young children, who require concrete experiences to understand information effectively.

From the perspective of social education, storytelling activities in early childhood education represent a process of individual formation within a social environment. Through storytelling, children learn to become members of a group by practicing speaking, listening, responding, and understanding others. Storytelling allows children to recognize and regulate emotions, understand other people's feelings, and develop behaviors that align with social norms (Siswanti & Daud, 2024). Therefore, developing social communication through storytelling has important implications for supporting children's ability to adapt and participate in social life.

Overall, this study demonstrates that storytelling is not merely a literacy activity but a social practice that integrates narratives, emotions, and interactions. Through carefully designed interactive storytelling activities, children gain meaningful learning experiences that help them understand their social world, develop empathy, and build communication skills that serve as the foundation for future social relationships.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that storytelling plays an important role in developing young children's social communication through interaction processes involving narratives, emotions, and social relationships. Storytelling activities function not only as a medium for delivering information or developing language skills but also as a social learning space that enables children to understand messages, express feelings, and build communication with teachers and peers. Through listening to stories, answering questions, and engaging in discussions, children gain experiences in using language functionally within meaningful social situations.

The findings reveal that the effectiveness of storytelling in supporting social communication is influenced by the teacher's role in creating dialogical interactions through the use of expressions, intonation, picture storybook media, and stimulating questions. Therefore, storytelling can be understood as an educational communication practice that helps children develop confidence in speaking, response abilities, emotional understanding, and social relationship skills.

Based on the findings, early childhood educators are encouraged to develop more interactive storytelling activities by selecting stories that are closely related to children's experiences and providing opportunities for discussion and reflection after storytelling sessions. Early childhood education institutions may also implement storytelling as a regular learning strategy to support children's integrated language and social-emotional development. Future research may expand this study by involving more diverse educational contexts or exploring how different types of narratives, digital media, and local cultural elements can strengthen young children's social communication development.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

This study was conducted in accordance with research ethics principles, with participants' voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality of personal information duly respected.

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