

Storytelling Through Paper Puppets To Enhance Early Childhood Language Development

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Abstrak

This study aims to describe the implementation of the storytelling method using paper puppets to improve the language skills of Group B children at RA An-Nuroh. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach with 23 children aged 5–6 years as subjects in the 2024/2025 academic year. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing techniques. The results showed that the use of paper puppet media was effective in enhancing children's language skills, particularly in enriching vocabulary, constructing sentences, and building speaking confidence. The implementation of the storytelling method with paper puppets consisted of three stages: introduction, main activity, and closing. The main obstacle encountered was a noisy classroom environment. The solution applied was to create a more conducive classroom setting and include an ice-breaking activity before the lesson began. These findings indicate that paper puppets can serve as a creative and enjoyable alternative medium to support the language development of early childhood learners.

Keywords: *storytelling, paper puppets, early childhood language.*

INTRODUCTION

Language development in early childhood is a change in the system of sound symbols that affects children's speaking abilities. Through language, young children can identify themselves, as well as interact and cooperate with others (Wiyani:2014). Language is a social skill that enables children to communicate and engage socially. Mastery of vocabulary serves as a bridge that allows children to communicate effectively with their surroundings, including their peers.

In educational institutions, one of the learning activities used to stimulate children's language development is storytelling. Language ability is one of the most important aspects supporting a child's growth and development because, in every daily activity, children use language as a means of communication.

In addition to communication, language ability also supports other skills such as comprehension, reading, and letter recognition. Language development needs to be nurtured to help children communicate effectively and speak fluently, as stated in the Qur'an that Allah created humankind and taught them how to speak. As mentioned in

the verse of Allah (Q.S. Ar-Rahman: 3–4): “He created man, and taught him to speak.” (Kemenag: 2012)

From Vygotsky’s perspective, language serves several functions, one of which is to transfer abstract concepts and logical reasoning. Another important role of language is to facilitate communication through social interaction, which can be considered a major contributing factor to children’s language development (Datspak:2017). Language ability in early childhood is learned and acquired naturally as a means of adapting to the environment and socializing; it also serves as a way to respond to others.

For children aged 4–5 years, the most common and effective aspect of language development is speaking ability, which aligns with the general characteristics of language skills at that age. Children learn to speak with the help of their parents or nearby adults. Through conversations, they gain experiences, increase their knowledge, and develop their language skills.

Language is a means of communication that reflects social contact, allowing individuals to express ideas, thoughts, and feelings. Therefore, in developing expressive language, a child needs methods that are appropriate to their stage of development.

Through storytelling, children can develop and practice their language skills, as stories encourage them to be more active in using and expanding their language. The storytelling method is indeed very engaging, as it is highly favored by children—especially when supported by simple and easily understandable language. This makes children more likely to develop their language abilities effectively (Tarigan & Guntur: 2019).

Based on observations at RA An-Nuroh Warujayeng in Group B (children aged 5–6 years), several children’s language abilities had not yet developed optimally, particularly in expressing sentences. This was evident from children’s inability to convey sentences coherently and the limited vocabulary that was sometimes difficult to understand. Therefore, the storytelling method using paper puppets was applied to help develop the language skills of Group B children at RA An-Nuroh.

This research is important because there has been limited focus on the use of traditional media such as paper puppets to enhance early childhood language skills. Therefore, the objectives of this study are: (1) to describe the language development of children at RA An-Nuroh, (2) to analyze the implementation of the storytelling method using paper puppets in improving children’s language ability, and (3) to identify the challenges and solutions in its application.

METHOD

In this study, the researcher used a descriptive qualitative method, which involves solving research problems using empirical data with the aim of understanding social phenomena through a holistic description and gaining an in-depth understanding

of meaning (Masyhuri & Zainudin: 2009). The subjects of this study were 23 children from Group B at RA An-Nuroh in the 2024/2025 academic year.

There are two sources of data in this study: human and non-human. Human data sources serve as key informants, while non-human data sources consist of documents relevant to the research focus (Nasution, 2003). The data in this study are in the form of descriptive narrative information obtained through several research procedures.

The data were collected from the following sources: (a) In-depth interviews, conducted with teachers and parents at RA An-Nuroh. (b) Observation, using a participatory approach to observe the teaching and learning process that employs paper puppet media. (c) Documentation, used to support data collection through photos, activity records, and interview recordings.

The data analysis technique used in this research refers to the interactive model of Miles and Huberman. Data analysis was carried out from the beginning of fieldwork, during the observation process, and after the completion of field research. The analysis involved categorizing the collected data, breaking it down into units, analyzing important information, and then organizing or presenting the data (Rohidi, 1992). The validity of the data was tested using extended participation, persistent observation, and triangulation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The language development of early childhood students at RA An-Nuroh before the implementation of the storytelling method using puppet media was not yet optimal. This can be seen from the data on language development, which shows that 43.5% of children had not developed, 34.8% were beginning to develop, 8.7% were developing as expected, and only 13% had developed very well. This condition indicates that most children still had difficulties in constructing complete sentences and had limited vocabulary mastery.

Language development in early childhood includes four main aspects: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Hapsari, Ruhaina & Prastiwi: 2017). In the storytelling activity using paper puppets, it is expected that children will not only listen to the story but also be able to understand its content as delivered by the teacher. The teacher can then use this comprehension to stimulate the children's speaking abilities. Thus, the focus of the learning activity remains aligned with the fundamental aspect of early literacy—developing children's speaking skills.

The data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation indicate that improving children's language skills using paper puppet media is highly effective for enhancing their language abilities. Paper puppet media can be used for both play and learning to develop students' language skills. The improvement in children's language

can be seen from their vocabulary growth and their ability to express sentences, often without them even realizing it.

In teaching vocabulary to children at RA An-Nuroh, new words are introduced to help expand the children's vocabulary. The teacher's teaching method through storytelling begins with preparing a story text that aligns with the learning theme. The teacher can then include new vocabulary to be introduced to the children, while ensuring that the words remain within a context that is easy for them to understand. The teacher may also explain the meaning of the words if the children do not yet understand them.

Storytelling is an interesting, enjoyable, and well-liked activity for children. Children love stories because they offer many benefits for their development and character formation (Putri *et al.*: 2023). Through storytelling using paper puppet media, children become more enthusiastic and engaged in paying attention and listening to the story, as the learning media—paper puppets—make it seem as if the puppets are alive and can talk. This way, children can more easily remember what the teacher conveys during storytelling because the learning experience is fun and engaging.

Interviews with parents revealed that their children's vocabulary has increased. When they return home, the children tell stories about the paper puppets introduced by their teacher at school. They share these stories not only with their mothers but also with other family members, and they even discuss or talk about them while playing with their friends at home.

After using paper puppet media, the language development of young children improved significantly, showing notable progress in their confidence to speak, ability to ask questions, and use of new vocabulary.

In implementing the storytelling method using paper puppets, the first stage is the introduction. The teacher begins by creating a positive classroom atmosphere, warmly greeting the children and inviting them to sit in a circle. Next, the teacher conducts an ice-breaking activity by singing and clapping hands to help focus the children's attention and make the learning process engaging. The teacher also invites the children to pray to Allah, not only to develop their language skills but also to instill faith in Allah from an early age, teaching them that everything should begin in the name of Allah. Then, the teacher shows a box containing the puppets and asks the children to guess what's inside. Afterward, the teacher reveals the paper puppets and explains that they will enjoy an exciting storytelling session using the "paper puppet" media. The children appear very enthusiastic, welcoming it with cheers and excitement.

The next stage is the core activity. The teacher prepares the theme and introduces each character in the paper puppet story. The first character is a female puppet representing a doctor, and the second is a child named Dika. At this stage, the teacher trains the children to mention the characters and their professions. Then, the

teacher begins telling the story about Dika, who has a stomachache, and how his mother takes him to see the doctor. The doctor gives him medicine and advises him to eat nutritious food and wash his hands before eating. Dika then says thank you. In this stage, the teacher teaches polite behavior and health-related vocabulary. The children appear engaged and enthusiastic as they listen to the story.

In the closing and reflection stage, the teacher reviews the vocabulary that has been learned, such as stomach, sick, healthy, and thank you. The teacher also invites the children to repeat some short dialogues and asks a few questions related to the story that was told. The children eagerly compete to answer.

The learning steps carried out by the teacher are in accordance with the proper storytelling procedure. According to Nur Laila, the steps of storytelling learning include the introduction stage, which involves praying and showing the paper puppets; the core activity, where the teacher introduces the puppet characters and begins the story; and the closing stage, where the teacher reviews the vocabulary presented in the story (Nurlaela et al: 2018).

The constructivist theory views that when children learn a language, there are many influencing factors, including the child's active role in interacting with their environment, how they process information, and how they draw conclusions about language structure. Through interaction with others, a child's knowledge, values, and attitudes will develop (Asrori: 2020). This aligns with the process of early childhood language learning using paper puppet media, where children's vocabulary skills increase because they interact and are motivated to respond to questions, express ideas confidently, and actively participate in conversations, leading to significant language development.

The obstacle encountered in developing young children's language through paper puppet media is, first, the limited attention span and endurance of the children in following the story presented using the paper puppets. The solution to this challenge is for the teacher to begin the lesson with an ice-breaking activity and to use simple stories while gradually introducing new vocabulary. This approach helps the children understand the language used in the story as intended.

The second obstacle is the limited time and energy of teachers in preparing and conducting activities using paper puppet media. The solution to this challenge is to adjust the duration of the activity to prevent students from becoming easily bored (by shortening or reducing the session time) and to select interesting stories that align with the students' interests, so they can stay focused on the storytelling activity.

The third obstacle is the limited availability of materials and the lack of specific skills in creating and using paper puppet media. The solution to this obstacle is to seek support from relevant parties or involve communities, organizations, or parents who have experience in using paper puppet media to serve as guides or mentors.

The findings of this study are in line with Vygotsky's theory, which states that language develops through social interaction (Etnawati: 2021). These results are also consistent with previous research conducted by Ramadani and Harjanti, which demonstrated the effectiveness of the storytelling method in developing children's language skills (Ramadani & Harjati: 2023).

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the storytelling method using paper puppets has proven effective in improving the language skills of young children at RA An-Nuroh. Before the storytelling method with paper puppets was applied, the children's language abilities were still limited, as shown by their difficulty in forming sentences and their limited vocabulary. After its implementation, there was a significant improvement in their confidence to speak, ability to ask questions, and use of new vocabulary.

The steps taken by the teacher in conducting the storytelling learning method include: first, the introduction and classroom conditioning; second, the core activity—storytelling using paper puppets; and finally, the closing and question-and-answer session. Although some challenges were encountered, the solutions implemented by the teacher successfully created a conducive and enjoyable learning environment. Therefore, paper puppet media is considered a suitable alternative strategy for developing early childhood language skills.

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