



## Shaping Children's Self-Concept Through Storytelling: An Analysis of Interpersonal Communication Interactions at Bunga Tanjung Kindergarten, Tanjung Morawa Subdistrict, Deli Serdang Regency

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### ABSTRAK

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan bagaimana seni bercerita (storytelling) dapat membentuk konsep diri anak usia dini melalui interaksi interpersonal antara guru dan murid serta orang tua dan anak. Penelitian ini merupakan bagian dari kegiatan penelitian dan pengabdian masyarakat yang dilakukan di TK Bunga Tanjung, Kecamatan Tanjung Morawa, Kabupaten Deli Serdang. Analisis dilakukan menggunakan Teori Komunikasi Interpersonal (Devito, 2019) untuk mengeksplorasi dinamika komunikasi yang terjadi dalam kegiatan storytelling. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa storytelling menjadi media efektif dalam memperkuat kepercayaan diri anak, membangun komunikasi dua arah, serta menumbuhkan ikatan emosional antara guru dan murid serta orang tua dan anak. Kegiatan ini tidak hanya meningkatkan kemampuan berbahasa anak, tetapi juga memperkuat self-image, self-esteem, dan ideal-self anak secara bertahap.

**Kata Kunci:** Storytelling, Konsep Diri, Komunikasi Interpersonal, Anak Usia Dini, Taman Kanak-Kanak

### ABSTRACT

This article aims to explain how storytelling can shape the self-concept of early childhood through interpersonal interactions between teachers and students as well as between parents and children. This study is part of a community service activity conducted at TK Bunga Tanjung, Tanjung Morawa District, Deli Serdang Regency. The analysis uses the Interpersonal Communication Theory (Devito, 2019) to explore the communication dynamics that occur during storytelling activities. The results show that storytelling serves as an effective medium to enhance children's self-confidence, foster two-way communication, and build emotional bonds between teachers and students, and between parents and children. This activity not only improves children's language skills but also gradually strengthens their self-image, self-esteem, and ideal-self.

**Keyword:** Storytelling, Self-Concept, Interpersonal Communication, Early Childhood, Kindergarten

## **1. Introduction**

The term early childhood refers to educational programs that begin immediately after birth and are offered to children for a certain period, allowing them to experience more challenging forms of learning. Various aspects of early childhood development, including cognitive, religious, and moral development, need to be taken into consideration. Dimensions such as language, physical, motor, social, and emotional development must be emphasized on a daily basis. The foundation for every skill a child will later acquire is laid during the golden age, or early childhood years. This is a crucial period when parents and educators can help children explore and maximize their potential. Considering the ongoing educational crisis in Indonesia, which shows little sign of improvement each year, children require special attention at this stage.

Education plays a vital and decisive role in shaping children's future development, as it serves as the foundation for personality formation. Children who receive proper and effective guidance from an early age are more likely to enhance their physical and mental health and well-being. This, in turn, positively influences their academic achievement, work ethic, and productivity, enabling them to become independent and optimize their potential. The objective of early childhood education is "to develop children's various potentials from an early age as preparation for life and to adapt to their environment" (Suyadi, 2009). Therefore, an effective and efficient learning approach is required, with the hope that the learning process becomes enjoyable and not monotonous.

Based on observations and interviews at Bunga Tanjong Kindergarten, it was revealed that many schools have yet to provide optimal stimulation for children's social abilities at an early age. In some schools, activities are still largely individual in nature, such as the distribution of worksheets that children must complete on their own. This issue arises from several factors, including monotonous teaching methods and a lack of practice in helping children separate temporarily from their parents. As a result, children often struggle when faced with situations where their parents cannot wait or must leave them for a while. At Bunga Tanjong Kindergarten, conventional methods are still commonly applied, sometimes leading to boredom, which makes children seek alternative activities such as chatting or disturbing their peers. This condition stands in contrast to the expectations and standards of early childhood education, where children's social abilities remain underdeveloped, particularly during lessons when teachers deliver explanations. To address this issue, the researcher proposes adopting alternative methods such as storytelling, which can stimulate children's social abilities more effectively and foster a positive self-concept.

Self-concept is a crucial foundation in children's psychosocial development, especially during early childhood. The golden age of child development presents an important opportunity to shape a positive self-image through supportive interactions. One engaging and educational approach is storytelling. This method not only develops children's verbal abilities but also strengthens the affective and social dimensions of communication. Children who are accustomed to listening to and narrating stories are better able to express their feelings, build empathy, and develop interpersonal communication skills essential for their future social interactions.

Storytelling plays an important role in teaching, as it enables learners to easily recall what they have learned when explained through narrative. The benefits of storytelling include: (1) stimulating imagination and interest in language skills; (2) developing vocabulary, comprehension, and sequencing; and (3) enhancing listening and oral communication skills. Barzaq (2009) further adds that storytelling provides teachers with opportunities to explore learners' background experiences.

The formal definition of storytelling began to emerge in the 1970s. Pellowski, citing Scheub (1972), described storytelling as "the creation of a dramatic narrative with conflict and resolution, developed from a remembered cliché and shaped into a storyline during performance." Pellowski later defined storytelling as the art or skill of narrating stories, in either poetry or prose, performed by an individual before an audience. Stories can be told orally, shouted, or sung—with or without musical accompaniment, illustrations, or other elements. The sources of stories may come from oral traditions, print, or mechanical media, with one of its purposes being entertainment (Roney, 2008).

Storytelling, or mendongeng, is both an art form and a means of communication. As an art, it involves creativity shared between the storyteller and the audience. The teller constructs the narrative orally, while the audience creates mental images and responds to it. Audience reactions influence the teller's word choices, narrative flow, and delivery style. This dynamic interaction continues throughout the performance, making storytelling a creative, interactive, direct, and highly personal communication process. Its uniqueness lies in the negotiation between storyteller and audience, which occurs in specific times and settings, and can never be

exactly replicated. Due to its interactive nature, storytelling is considered a highly effective teaching method, making it one of the most influential human communication arts (Craig, 1996).

The storytelling method is particularly favored by children. This approach stimulates their ability to absorb information, think critically, and improve concentration. Stories—especially those related to daily life—play an essential role in fostering empathy. According to Kumoro (2015), stories function as media for developing children’s emotional intelligence by portraying real-life models. Through storytelling, children can understand and internalize moral messages contained within stories, which they can then apply in everyday life. The advantages of this method include its ability to instill moral values through characters, while also supporting the development of speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills. Additionally, storytelling helps children cultivate sympathy and empathy, evoke emotions, and provide unique and engaging experiences. To further capture children’s interest, teachers can use techniques such as expressive intonation, supportive media, and appropriate body language. This process allows children to immerse themselves in the story—feeling sad when characters face difficulties or happy when good characters succeed. Such an approach helps children establish deep emotional connections with the stories presented.

According to Bunanta (2009), storytelling consists of three main stages: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. The preparation stage includes selecting story titles that are engaging and easy to remember. Linguistic studies show that titles contribute significantly to memory retention, as audiences rely on prior knowledge to understand stories in a top-down manner. The implementation stage is the core of storytelling. Before beginning, storytellers must ensure the audience is ready to listen. The final stage, evaluation, involves asking the audience to identify the story’s main idea and the values that can be derived from it.

Previous research supports the importance of storytelling in child development. For example, Yuliartati et al. (2023) found that storytelling activities at Al-Ajis Kindergarten, Bulukumpa, significantly improved children’s confidence through active participation in storytelling. Similarly, Hafidhoh et al. (2023) developed multimodal digital storytelling media and demonstrated its effectiveness in enhancing children’s confidence and learning motivation. In another study, Putri Indah Sari (2023) confirmed that the storytelling method improved the courage and communication skills of children aged 4–5 years.

Further research by Ariadi (2014), entitled “The Application of Storytelling Method with Picture Media to Improve Social Skills in Group B Children, Semester II, Academic Year 2013/2014 at Widya Sesana Sangsit Kindergarten,” suggested that picture-assisted storytelling enhances children’s speaking skills. Likewise, Rosari (2014), in her study “The Application of Storytelling Method with Storybook Media for Group B Children, Semester II, Academic Year 2013/2014 at Patas Village Kindergarten,” found that storytelling effectively instilled moral values in children. These findings are reinforced by N.P.A. S et al. (2018), whose study “The Influence of Storytelling Method on Social Skills of Group B Children in Cluster IV Kindergartens” revealed a significant difference in children’s social skills between those taught with storytelling methods and those taught with conventional methods. Together, these studies strengthen the theoretical foundation for this community service project and demonstrate the great potential of storytelling in shaping early childhood self-concept.

Moeslichatoen (2004) highlighted several benefits of the storytelling method: (1) it provides learning experiences that train listening skills; through listening, children acquire knowledge, values, and attitudes to be internalized and applied in daily life; (2) it fosters cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development; and (3) it offers insights into children’s social lives and interactions with people in their environment with various occupations.

## 2. Method

This study employed a group-based participatory approach, enabling the active involvement of all stakeholders—teachers, parents, and children—in the learning process. The implementation consisted of two main stages: (1) a sharing session with parents and teacher training on the theory and practice of storytelling, and (2) the direct application of storytelling with kindergarten students.

The sharing session was conducted to provide both theoretical and practical understanding of children’s self-concept and how storytelling can contribute to its development. Teachers received training on storytelling techniques, including facial expressions, voice modulation, body movements, and the use of supporting media such as pictures and puppets. Following the training, teachers practiced storytelling with

students through the “picture and story” method, in which children were asked to draw freely and then narrate their drawings in front of their peers.

Observation was carried out to examine communication interactions that emerged during the activities, both between teachers and students as well as parents and children. Additionally, informal interviews were conducted with teachers and parents to explore their impressions and perceptions of the activities.

Data analysis was systematically performed in three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was conducted by categorizing information into major themes (children’s participation, teacher responses, parental involvement). The reduced data were then presented in descriptive narratives and further analyzed using Devito’s (2019) interpersonal communication framework to identify interaction patterns, communication meanings, and their impact on the development of children’s self-concept.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

The findings revealed that while children demonstrated strong imaginative abilities in drawing, their oral storytelling skills remained underdeveloped. Storytelling provided a medium for children to practice courage, construct simple narratives, and expand their vocabulary. Teacher–student interactions reflected two-way communication that supported empathy and feedback, consistent with Devito’s transactional model of communication. Teachers acted as sensitive communicators, responding to children with verbal and nonverbal encouragement, and promoting exploration of self-expression.

According to Devito, interpersonal communication encompasses five key aspects: openness, empathy, supportiveness, positivity, and equality. In the storytelling activities, these aspects were evident in teacher–student interactions. Teachers demonstrated openness and support by accepting every child’s story without negative correction. Feedback in the form of praise or gentle encouragement reflected positivity, which in turn fostered children’s self-confidence.

These findings align with recent studies. Yulartati et al. (2023) reported that children who regularly engaged in storytelling activities exhibited significant improvements in public speaking confidence. Similar trends were observed in the community service program at Bunga Tanjung Kindergarten, where initially shy children began to show initiative in speaking and narrating stories. Furthermore, Hafidhoh et al. (2023) demonstrated the effectiveness of multimodal digital storytelling in boosting children’s motivation and self-expression. Although this activity did not employ digital media, the use of simple pictures and props already produced positive outcomes.

Sari (2023) also highlighted a correlation between storytelling and increased courage among early childhood learners, particularly within preschool education (PAUD). This suggests that storytelling not only enhances linguistic skills but also fosters self-confidence and a healthy self-concept. Within this context, the activities at Bunga Tanjung Kindergarten succeeded in nurturing children’s enthusiasm for storytelling while strengthening their emotional bonds with teachers and peers.

One of the challenges encountered in implementing storytelling was the limited availability of time and parental involvement both at school and at home. Many parents were unable to participate consistently due to work commitments. To address this issue, the parental involvement framework proposed by Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) was considered. This theory highlights that parental engagement is shaped by two main factors: parents’ beliefs regarding their role in their children’s education and their self-perceived competence. Accordingly, several practical strategies can be applied: (1) clear and personal communication from teachers to parents regarding the importance of participation in storytelling; (2) providing simple storytelling modules for home use within short timeframes; and (3) offering virtual sessions or short video recordings of children’s storytelling, enabling parents to observe and respond even when not physically present. These strategies aim to strengthen parents’ perception that their involvement remains important and feasible despite time constraints.

Additionally, according to the theory of emergent literacy (Williams, 2004), narrative skills cultivated in early childhood positively contribute to children's foundational literacy in later years. Thus, storytelling functions not only as a medium of communication but also as an early foundation for literacy and social skill development. Implementing storytelling as a teaching method impacts not only children's cognitive growth but also the creation of a communicative, open, and supportive environment for holistic psychological development.

Through these activities, both teachers and parents gained awareness of the importance of fostering consistent and positive communication. Healthy interactions through storytelling can serve as an essential foundation for developing children with strong interpersonal skills, confidence, and readiness to face future social challenges.

#### 4. Conclusion

Storytelling has proven to be an effective method in shaping the self-concept of early childhood learners. The interpersonal interactions established between teachers and students, as well as between parents and children, reinforce dimensions of self-image, self-esteem, and the ideal self. Drawing on Devito's theory of interpersonal communication, it is evident that empathetic, transactional, and supportive communication plays a pivotal role in fostering children's identity development. This community service activity highlights the importance of collaboration among teachers, parents, and children in creating a joyful and meaningful learning environment.

It is recommended that storytelling activities should not be conducted occasionally, but rather integrated into daily routines both at school and at home. Teachers and parents need to work together in establishing environments that encourage children's narrative exploration. Furthermore, advanced training should be provided to enhance teachers' storytelling skills and deepen parents' understanding of children's psychological development. Systematic efforts to strengthen parental involvement—such as those suggested by Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997)—should also be incorporated as part of long-term sustainability strategies.

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