

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERACTIVE STORYTELLING METHOD IN ENHANCING LANGUAGE SKILLS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CHILDREN WITH LANGUAGE DELAYS

Article Information

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Abstract

Background: Language delay affects 12–14% of early childhood children, significantly hindering their academic readiness and social interactions within the learning environment. **Objective:** This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the interactive storytelling method in improving receptive and expressive language skills among young children experiencing language delays. **Method:** Utilizing a quantitative one-group pretest-posttest design, this research involved 20 children aged 5–6 years at RA Azami selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected via structured observations and oral performance tests based on established developmental indicators, and analyzed using paired t-tests and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests alongside Cohen's d effect size analysis. **Results:** The findings revealed a significant increase in language proficiency, with the group's mean score rising from 10.15 in the pre-test to 13.95 in the post-test, representing a 37.44% performance escalation supported by a very large effect size of 4.95. **Novelty:** This research provides an original physical-contextual classroom intervention tailored explicitly for a homogeneous language-delayed cohort, offering a direct dialogic alternative that bypasses the infrastructure demands and screen-time risks associated with digital storytelling. **Conclusion:** The interactive storytelling method is an exceptionally effective, non-clinical pedagogical strategy for mitigating early language barriers, offering vital practical and operational frameworks for inclusive early childhood educators.

Keywords: Interactive Storytelling; Language Delay; Early Childhood Education; Expressive Language; Receptive Language.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood language development is a primary indicator of holistic growth success, particularly during the golden age phase. Field phenomena indicate that not all children experience linguistic capability transitions that run linearly with their biological age progression. Empirical data points to an escalation of language delay cases among young children, ranging between 12% and 14% in several regions (Salsabila et al., 2026). This developmental barrier potentially disrupts academic readiness and children's social interaction patterns if not immediately addressed through structured and measurable pedagogical interventions within the school environment. Language development during early childhood also serves as the foundation for later literacy, cognitive growth, social competence, and emotional regulation. Therefore, identifying effective educational interventions to support children experiencing language delays has become an important priority in early childhood education research and practice.

Referring to emotional and cognitive development concepts, children aged 5–6 years old should ideally be capable of formulating ideas and responding to verbal stimuli using established structures. According to Susanto (2011), children's language competence is divided into two main axes: receptive language skills relating to information comprehension, and expressive language skills focusing on articulation and verbal idea delivery. However, the reality in early childhood education institutions reveals that many Group B children still experience significant difficulties in expressing opinions, answering inferential questions, and communicating orally with low levels of self-confidence (Solikah et al., 2026). This limited vocabulary mastery and syntactic confusion serve as fundamental indicators of language development anomalies requiring tactical handling. From the perspective of Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, language develops through meaningful interaction between children and more capable individuals. Likewise, Bruner's Language Acquisition Support System emphasizes that children's language development is facilitated through guided communication and continuous verbal interaction. These theoretical perspectives suggest that learning activities encouraging active dialogue and reciprocal communication are essential for improving children's receptive and expressive language abilities.

Various intervention efforts have been developed in contemporary literature to address speech and verbal development problems in children, one of which is through the Child-Centered Play Therapy (CCPT) approach, which has proven to have a positive impact on the articulation of children with global developmental delays (Zahira & Affandi, 2025). On the other hand, technological integration has given rise to digital storytelling methods deemed capable of visually stimulating children's expressive language. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this digital variant often encounters structural constraints such as low teacher Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) competence, infrastructure limitations, and psychological concerns regarding the negative impacts of screen time on early childhood (Selfi, 2025). Therefore, a reorientation toward direct, non-digital

interactive storytelling methods is required without neglecting emotional proximity and intensive verbal stimuli. Interactive storytelling provides opportunities for children not only to listen to stories but also to ask questions, respond to prompts, retell events, and express ideas through continuous verbal interaction. Such activities simultaneously stimulate receptive language through listening and comprehension while strengthening expressive language through active communication and immediate feedback.

An examination of previous studies shows that the majority of research focuses on large-scale quasi-experimental designs with control groups to observe children's speaking abilities in general. There is a limitation in literature specifically testing physical-contextual interactive storytelling methods applied directly to a homogeneous single class with language delay disorders. This study fills that academic gap by focusing observations on a group of children experiencing language delays at RA Azami through a one-group pretest-posttest pre-experimental design. The novelty of this research lies in the modification of interactive storytelling techniques that emphasize strengthening Susanto's receptive and expressive aspects through the utilization of instant verbal feedback from children within a limited classroom setting of 20 participants. Unlike previous studies that primarily evaluated conventional or digital storytelling for children with diverse developmental characteristics, this study specifically investigates children identified with language delays using an interactive storytelling model characterized by reciprocal dialogue, immediate verbal feedback, contextual questioning, and active child participation throughout the storytelling session. This approach is expected to provide stronger empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of non-digital interactive storytelling as an accessible intervention in early childhood classrooms.

Preliminary observations conducted at RA Azami also indicated that several children experienced difficulties in responding to open-ended questions, expressing ideas fluently, and maintaining verbal interaction during classroom learning. Teachers reported that storytelling activities had generally been implemented through one-way narration with limited opportunities for children to participate actively. These classroom conditions further reinforce the necessity of implementing a more interactive storytelling approach capable of increasing children's verbal engagement and supporting language development through meaningful classroom interaction.

Based on this situational analysis, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of interactive storytelling methods on improving the language skills of early childhood children experiencing language delays at RA Azami. The focus of this quantitative testing is directed at measuring the significance of differences in children's score acquisition between pre- and post-intervention implementation. The hypothesis proposed in this study is that there is a significant effect of implementing interactive storytelling methods in increasing the receptive and expressive language performance achievements of Group B children in the institution. The findings of this study are

expected to contribute theoretically by enriching the body of knowledge concerning interactive language learning in early childhood education and practically by providing teachers with an evidence-based, non-digital instructional strategy to support children experiencing language delays. Furthermore, the results may serve as a reference for early childhood education institutions in designing language intervention programs that promote active participation, meaningful communication, and children's overall language development.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental research design, specifically the One-Group Pretest–Posttest Design (Paramita et al., 2021; Soesana et al., 2023). This design was selected because it enables researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of an educational intervention by comparing participants' language performance before and after the implementation of the treatment within a single homogeneous group. Although this design does not include a control group and therefore has limited control over external variables, it is considered appropriate for classroom-based intervention studies conducted in authentic early childhood educational settings where random assignment is impractical. The research design is represented as $O_1 \times O_2$, where O_1 denotes the pretest administered before the intervention, X represents the implementation of the interactive storytelling method, and O_2 refers to the posttest administered after the completion of the intervention. The effectiveness of the intervention was determined by comparing the differences between the pretest and posttest scores.

The study was conducted at RA Azami during the 2025/2026 academic year and was implemented over one academic semester. The research process consisted of four sequential stages, including instrument preparation and validation, administration of the pretest, implementation of the interactive storytelling intervention, and administration of the posttest followed by statistical data analysis. The intervention was delivered in eight structured storytelling sessions, each integrated into the regular classroom learning schedule. During each session, the teacher presented stories using expressive narration supported by physical story props and visual media while encouraging active participation through questioning, prediction activities, dialogue imitation, story retelling, and immediate verbal feedback. This interactive learning environment was designed to stimulate children's receptive language through listening comprehension and their expressive language through active verbal communication.

The population comprised all children enrolled at RA Azami, while the research sample consisted of 20 Group B children aged 5–6 years selected through purposive sampling. The sampling technique was chosen because the study specifically targeted children experiencing language delays. Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) being between five and six years of age, (2) being enrolled in Group B, (3) being identified as experiencing language delays based

on teachers' developmental assessments and school records, and (4) participating consistently throughout all intervention sessions. The relatively small and homogeneous sample reflects the characteristics of classroom intervention research in early childhood education.

This study involved two research variables. The independent variable was the interactive storytelling method, defined as a child-centered instructional approach that promotes two-way communication through oral storytelling, interactive questioning, verbal responses, physical story props, immediate feedback, and opportunities for children to retell stories using their own language. The dependent variable was early childhood language proficiency, which refers to children's receptive and expressive language abilities based on the framework proposed by Susanto (2011). Receptive language includes children's ability to understand story content, identify characters, follow verbal instructions, and answer comprehension questions, whereas expressive language encompasses vocabulary acquisition, sentence construction, speaking fluency, articulation, and the ability to express ideas verbally. The operational definitions of both variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Operational Definition of Research Variables

Variable	Theoretical Basis	Indicators	Instrument	Scale
Interactive Storytelling Method (X)	Pedagogical Practice Framework	Oral storytelling using physical props; interactive questioning; immediate verbal feedback; children's active participation; opportunities for story retelling	Storytelling implementation checklist, lesson plans, weekly learning plans	Nominal (Implemented / Not Implemented)
Early Childhood Language Proficiency (Y)	Susanto (2011)	Receptive language: understanding stories, identifying characters, following instructions, answering cause–effect questions. Expressive language: vocabulary mastery, sentence construction, speaking fluency, articulation, verbal expression	Structured observation sheet and oral performance assessment	Ordinal (1 = BB; 2 = MB; 3 = BSH; 4 = BSB)

Data were collected through structured classroom observations and individual oral performance assessments administered during both the pretest and posttest. The assessment rubric was developed based on Susanto's (2011) theoretical indicators of receptive and expressive language development and employed the four-level developmental scale commonly used in Indonesian early childhood education: Not Yet Developed (BB), Beginning to Develop (MB), Developing as Expected (BSH), and Very Well Developed (BSB). Prior to implementation, the instrument underwent content validity evaluation through expert judgment involving specialists in early childhood education and child language development to ensure that the indicators adequately represented the constructs being measured. Revisions were made based on expert recommendations before the instrument was administered in the field. Instrument reliability was subsequently examined through a pilot administration to ensure consistency among the observation items.

The quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics were first employed to summarize children's language performance, including the mean, median, standard deviation, minimum score, and maximum score for both pretest and posttest results. Before testing the research hypothesis, the assumption of normality was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test, which is recommended for studies involving fewer than fifty participants. Depending on the distribution of the data, the effectiveness of the intervention was analyzed using either the Paired Samples t-test for normally distributed data or the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for non-normally distributed data. All statistical analyses were conducted at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, with $p < 0.05$ indicating that the interactive storytelling method produced a statistically significant improvement in children's receptive and expressive language skills following the intervention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The empirical data collected in this study were intended to examine changes in the language proficiency of children aged 5–6 years before and after the implementation of the interactive storytelling method. The findings are presented systematically, beginning with the quality of the research instrument, followed by descriptive statistics, indicator-based analysis, assumption testing, hypothesis testing, and effect size estimation. This organization enables readers to clearly distinguish empirical findings from their interpretation.

1. Instrument Validity and Reliability

Before testing the research hypothesis, the quality of the observation instrument was examined through validity and reliability analyses. The instrument consisted of five observation items representing receptive and expressive language competencies.

The Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis demonstrated that all observation items were statistically valid. During the pre-test, the corrected item correlation coefficients ranged from 0.613 to

0.875, while during the post-test they ranged from 0.731 to 0.876. All coefficients exceeded the critical value ($r = 0.444$, $\alpha = 0.05$), indicating satisfactory construct validity.

Instrument reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The pre-test instrument obtained an Alpha value of 0.850, whereas the post-test instrument achieved 0.877. Both coefficients exceeded the recommended minimum value of 0.70, indicating high internal consistency and confirming that the instrument was appropriate for measuring children's language proficiency.

2. Descriptive Statistics of Children's Language Proficiency

The descriptive analysis compared children's language proficiency before and after the implementation of the interactive storytelling method.

Table 2. Children's Language Proficiency Before and After the Intervention

Variable	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Improvement (%)
Language Proficiency	10.15	13.95	37.44

Source: SPSS Version 26 (2026).

As presented in Table 2, the mean score increased from 10.15 during the pre-test to 13.95 during the post-test, representing an absolute increase of 3.80 points or 37.44%. These findings indicate substantial improvement in children's overall language performance following the intervention. Furthermore, all 20 participating children (100%) demonstrated higher post-test scores than their respective pre-test scores. The average Normalized Gain (N-Gain) score was 0.428, indicating a moderate level of instructional effectiveness.

3. Language Achievement Based on Individual Indicators

To provide a more comprehensive understanding of children's language development, descriptive statistics were calculated for each language indicator.

Table 3. Mean Scores of Language Proficiency Indicators

Code	Language Indicator	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Gain
B1	Understanding Plot and Characters	2.10	2.85	0.75
B2	Processing Complex Questions	1.85	2.60	0.75
B3	New Vocabulary Mastery	2.10	2.85	0.75
B4	Sentence Structure and Construction	1.85	2.65	0.80
B5	Speaking Fluency and Articulation	2.25	3.00	0.75

Source: SPSS Version 26 (2026).

The results presented in Table 3 demonstrate improvements across all observed language indicators. The greatest increase occurred in sentence structure and construction (B4), with a gain score of 0.80, while the remaining indicators each improved by 0.75 points. These findings suggest that the intervention contributed consistently to both receptive language abilities (understanding

stories and processing questions) and expressive language abilities (vocabulary, sentence construction, fluency, and articulation).

4. Normality Test

Prior to hypothesis testing, the distribution of the data was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk normality test, considering the relatively small sample size.

Table 4. Shapiro–Wilk Normality Test

Variable	p-value	Interpretation
Pre-Test	0.531	Normal
Post-Test	0.148	Normal
Gain Score	0.001	Not Normal

Source: SPSS Version 26 (2026).

The results indicate that both the pre-test and post-test scores followed a normal distribution ($p > 0.05$), whereas the gain scores were not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, both parametric and non-parametric statistical procedures were conducted to ensure the robustness of the findings

5. Hypothesis Testing

The effectiveness of the interactive storytelling method was evaluated using both the Paired Sample t-test and the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test.

Table 5. Results of Hypothesis Testing

Statistical Test	Test Statistic	Df	p-value
Paired Sample t-test	22.134	19	<0.001
Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test	-3.982	–	<0.001

Source: SPSS Version 26 (2026).

The results in Table 5 demonstrate statistically significant differences between the pre-test and post-test scores. Both statistical procedures produced significance values below the established alpha level ($p < 0.001$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. These findings indicate that children's language proficiency significantly improved following the implementation of the interactive storytelling method.

6. Effect Size

Beyond statistical significance, the magnitude of the intervention was estimated using Cohen's dz.

Table 6. Effect Size of the Interactive Storytelling Method

Effect Size	Value	Interpretation
Cohen's dz	4.95	Large Effect

Source: SPSS Version 26 (2026).

The calculated Cohen's d_z value of 4.95 indicates a large effect size, suggesting that the interactive storytelling method produced a substantial improvement in children's language proficiency. This finding complements the hypothesis-testing results by demonstrating that the intervention was not only statistically significant but also educationally meaningful.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of the interactive storytelling method positively improved the language proficiency of children with language delays at RA Azami. The significant increase in children's language performance after the intervention indicates that interactive storytelling provides meaningful verbal stimulation through active participation, immediate feedback, and continuous communication between teachers and children. Rather than functioning as passive listeners, children were actively engaged in answering questions, retelling story events, imitating vocabulary, and expressing ideas throughout the storytelling sessions. These learning experiences appear to have facilitated both receptive and expressive language development by creating opportunities for repeated language exposure and active verbal production.

The improvement observed in this study supports previous research highlighting the effectiveness of storytelling as a language intervention in early childhood education. Consistent with the findings of Solikah et al. (2026), interactive storytelling creates contextual learning experiences that enhance vocabulary acquisition, speaking fluency, and children's confidence in oral communication. Likewise, Marsiana et al. (2025) reported that storytelling activities, whether delivered conventionally or supported by visual media, significantly improve children's speaking competence by encouraging active interaction during learning. However, the present study extends previous findings by focusing specifically on children experiencing language delays rather than typically developing children. This indicates that interactive storytelling is beneficial not only as a general literacy activity but also as a practical classroom intervention for children requiring additional language support.

An important finding of this study is that the greatest improvement occurred in the indicator of sentence structure and construction. This suggests that the effectiveness of the intervention was not limited to increasing children's vocabulary but also contributed to the development of grammatical organization and sentence production. During the storytelling sessions, children were encouraged to answer open-ended questions, describe story events, predict subsequent actions, and explain characters' behaviors. These activities required children to organize vocabulary into meaningful sentence structures while simultaneously processing information received from the teacher. Such repeated verbal interactions likely strengthened children's syntactic competence through continuous practice in authentic communication contexts. This finding emphasizes that language development is facilitated not merely through listening activities but through reciprocal verbal interaction that requires children to actively construct meaning.

The findings can also be interpreted from the perspective of language acquisition theory proposed by Susanto (2011), who distinguishes language development into receptive and expressive dimensions. The improvement observed in receptive language indicators demonstrates that interactive storytelling successfully stimulated children's ability to understand stories, identify characters, and process increasingly complex questions. Simultaneously, improvements in expressive language indicators—including vocabulary mastery, sentence construction, speaking fluency, and articulation—suggest that frequent opportunities for verbal expression gradually strengthened children's confidence and communicative competence. The integration of listening, questioning, responding, and retelling activities created an interconnected learning process in which receptive language supported expressive language development, thereby facilitating more comprehensive linguistic growth.

From a practical perspective, this study demonstrates that interactive storytelling offers an accessible and feasible instructional strategy for early childhood teachers, particularly in classrooms serving children with mild language delays. Compared with clinical interventions such as Child-Centered Play Therapy, which generally require specialized therapists and individualized treatment settings (Zahira & Affandi, 2025), interactive storytelling can be implemented as part of regular classroom instruction without requiring sophisticated facilities or specialized therapeutic equipment. Moreover, unlike digital storytelling approaches that may depend on technological infrastructure and teacher digital competence (Selfi, 2025), the interactive storytelling method emphasizes direct teacher–child communication, emotional engagement, and immediate verbal feedback. Consequently, this approach represents a practical, low-cost, and developmentally appropriate alternative that can be integrated into daily early childhood learning activities.

Another important contribution of this study lies in its empirical evidence regarding language intervention within an authentic classroom setting. Previous studies have predominantly employed quasi-experimental designs involving heterogeneous groups of children, whereas this study specifically examined a homogeneous group of children identified as experiencing language delays using a one-group pretest–posttest pre-experimental design. Furthermore, the observation instrument was specifically developed based on Susanto's receptive and expressive language framework, allowing a more detailed evaluation of language development across multiple dimensions. This methodological approach provides additional evidence that classroom-based interactive storytelling can function not only as a literacy activity but also as an educational intervention for improving language competence among children experiencing developmental language difficulties.

Despite these encouraging findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study employed a One-Group Pretest–Posttest design without a control group, limiting the ability to attribute improvements exclusively to the intervention because other developmental factors may also have influenced children's language growth. Second, the relatively small sample consisting of only twenty children from a single early childhood education institution limits the generalizability of the

findings to broader educational contexts. Third, the intervention was conducted over a relatively short period and therefore did not examine the long-term retention of children's language development after the completion of the storytelling sessions.

Future studies are therefore recommended to employ true experimental or quasi-experimental designs involving larger and more diverse samples from multiple early childhood education institutions. Further research should also investigate additional variables that may influence children's language development, including parental involvement, teacher instructional competence, classroom language environment, socioeconomic background, and children's learning motivation. Longitudinal studies examining the sustainability of language improvements following interactive storytelling interventions would also provide valuable evidence regarding the long-term effectiveness of this instructional approach. Such investigations would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of effective pedagogical strategies for supporting language development among young children, particularly those experiencing language delays.

CONCLUSION

Main Findings: This study found that the implementation of the interactive storytelling method significantly improved the language proficiency of children aged 5–6 years experiencing language delays at RA Azami by strengthening both receptive and expressive language skills through meaningful verbal interaction, active participation, vocabulary development, sentence construction, and increased confidence in oral communication. **Research Contribution:** This study provides empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of interactive storytelling as a non-clinical, classroom-based language intervention implemented through a pre-experimental design in an authentic early childhood education setting. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on typically developing children, this research specifically examined children with language delays and demonstrated that structured teacher–child verbal interaction can effectively enhance language development during regular classroom learning. **Theoretical and Practical Implications:** The findings reinforce Susanto's (2011) language development framework by showing that receptive and expressive language develop simultaneously through meaningful social interaction and continuous verbal stimulation. Practically, the study offers early childhood educators an accessible instructional strategy that transforms conventional storytelling into interactive dialogue without requiring sophisticated technology or specialized therapeutic services. **Research Limitations:** This study involved only 20 children from a single early childhood education institution and employed a One-Group Pretest–Posttest design without a control group, limiting the generalizability of the findings. **Future Research Directions:** Future studies should employ true experimental or quasi-experimental designs with larger and more diverse samples while examining additional variables, including parental involvement, teacher competence, classroom language environment, learning motivation, and socioeconomic background,

to provide a more comprehensive understanding of factors influencing early childhood language development.

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