

Storytelling Stimulation Through Wayang Puppets

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the use of wayang puppets as a medium to stimulate storytelling skills among children aged 5–6 years at TKIT As-Salam Akhlakul Karimah Tangerang. The research employed an ethnographic approach involving ten group B children and one teacher serving as a facilitator. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that the use of wayang puppets effectively enhances children's storytelling abilities. Through play-based and narrative activities, the children became more confident, focused, expressive, and capable of delivering stories coherently. The teacher played a role as a cultural facilitator who not only guided the storytelling process but also integrated Islamic moral values through narratives and puppet characters. Beyond improving language and communication skills, these activities fostered creativity, collaboration, intrinsic motivation, and the courage to express ideas. From an ethnographic perspective, the use of wayang puppets functions as both an educational medium and a means of preserving local culture in harmony with Islamic educational values. Therefore, wayang puppet play serves as an effective, engaging, and meaningful learning strategy for developing storytelling competence and character in early childhood.

Keywords: Wayang Puppets, Storytelling Stimulation

1 INTRODUCTION

Early childhood represents a period of the most rapid and fundamental development in human life. This stage is considered a golden age, a critical period that determines the direction of a child's growth and future development. According to Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Article 28 Paragraph 1 states that "Early Childhood Education is organized for children from birth up to six years old and is not a prerequisite for basic education." This means that Early Childhood Education (ECE) serves to provide stimulation that enables children to grow and develop optimally—cognitively, linguistically, socially-emotionally, and morally. Early stimulation is one of the external factors that play a crucial role in determining a child's level of intelligence. Siswanto defines stimulation as an effort to introduce children to new knowledge or skills to enhance their intelligence. Meanwhile, Suherman emphasizes that stimulation can be carried out by parents at any time, adjusted to the child's age and developmental principles (Hasmalena, 2021).

Therefore, stimulation for children aged 5–6 years should be purposeful, enjoyable, and developmentally appropriate so that their potential can grow in a balanced manner. In this regard, teachers and parents play an essential role in creating meaningful learning experiences.

According to Rusmil, stimulation is an effort carried out by parents or families to encourage children to play in a joyful, safe, and loving atmosphere. Through play, children receive positive experiences that support their overall growth and development. These playful activities are essential for stimulating all sensory systems in the child's body. In addition, stimulation helps develop both fine and gross motor skills through active movement and exploration. Communication skills also improve as children interact, express ideas, and respond to their environment. Furthermore, emotional development is supported as children learn to manage feelings and build social relationships. Early stimulation is therefore a crucial external factor in determining a child's intelligence and future developmental potential (Ranita & Nengsih, 2021).

One effective form of stimulation for young children is storytelling. This activity plays a vital role in developing language, thinking, and imagination skills, as well as building character. According to Fauziddin, stories are an excellent medium for delivering learning messages to children, as they allow storytellers to help children visualize and internalize exemplary behaviors demonstrated by story characters (Fauziddin, 2017). Hidayat adds that storytelling involves presenting real or imaginary experiences in an engaging manner, often accompanied by pictures or props, to encourage children's imagination (Anggorokasih et al., 2019). According to Latif, storytelling is a way of telling and conveying a story or providing an explanation orally to listeners, emphasizing spoken language as the main medium for delivering messages and meanings. Storytelling enables information to be shared in a simple and understandable manner. Meanwhile, Fadilah defines storytelling as a method used to relate events or incidents to students. Through this method, learning becomes more meaningful because stories are connected to students' experiences. Therefore, storytelling serves as an effective oral communication method in the learning process (Lestari, 2019).

Fauziddin further asserts that storytelling contributes to developing mental attitudes in accordance with Islamic teachings, building noble character, instilling social values, fostering logical and imaginative thinking, and enhancing self and environmental awareness. In other words, through stories, children learn to distinguish between good and bad behavior, cultivate spirituality, and internalize Islamic values in daily life (Fauziddin, 2017).

One of the media that can be used in storytelling activities is the wayang puppet. The wayang puppet is a modification of Indonesia's traditional art form, rich in cultural values and moral messages. This medium not only captures children's attention but also helps them understand storylines and character roles more concretely. In the context of early childhood education, wayang puppets function as educational play tools that integrate elements of art, language, and Islamic moral values.

According to Timoer, wayang puppets contain deep meanings that reflect cultural, philosophical, and moral values. Wayang is not merely a form of entertainment but also a medium for conveying messages and wisdom. Meanwhile, according to Dr. Th. Piqued, wayang puppets are puppets displayed in performances that contain various pieces of advice. These performances serve as a means of teaching values and guiding behavior. The stories presented through wayang often include moral lessons relevant to daily life. Therefore, wayang puppets function as both cultural heritage and educational media (Makhmudiyah, 2023).

According to Dhieni, wayang puppets are two-dimensional or three-dimensional figures equipped with a wooden handle. The wooden handle functions as a tool to move and control the puppets during performances. These puppets are played in a manner similar to traditional wayang performances. Through movement and manipulation, the puppets appear lively and expressive. Therefore, wayang puppets serve as an effective medium for play and storytelling activities (Widyanti, 2019).

According to Dhieni (Widyanti et al., n.d.), wayang puppets are two- or three-dimensional dolls equipped with wooden sticks as handles, allowing them to be manipulated like traditional wayang performances. This medium is appealing to children aged 5–6 years because of its colorful and movable forms. The use of wayang puppets encourages children to imitate character voices, construct sentences, and express roles, thereby developing their language skills, fine motor abilities, imagination, and social values such as cooperation, honesty, and affection.

Based on the explanation above, this study aims to describe the stimulation of storytelling through wayang puppets for children aged 5–6 years at TKIT As-Salam Akhlakul Karimah, Tangerang. This research is expected to contribute to the development of creative and contextual learning models in early childhood education while also serving as an effort to preserve local culture in harmony with Islamic educational values.

To achieve this objective, the study employs an ethnographic approach—a qualitative method aimed at understanding behaviors, habits, and cultural practices within their natural contexts. This approach enables the researcher to observe directly the interactions among teachers, children, and wayang puppet media during storytelling activities. Through participatory observation, interviews, and documentation, the researcher gains a holistic understanding of how wayang puppets function as a medium to stimulate storytelling skills while simultaneously preserving cultural and Islamic moral values within the school environment.

2 RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed an ethnographic approach as a qualitative research method aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of behaviors, habits, values, and culture within a community in its natural context. The approach was chosen because it aligns with the purpose of describing and understanding the process of stimulating storytelling skills through wayang puppet media among children aged 5–6 years. The research was conducted at TKIT As-Salam Akhlakul Karimah Tangerang, which consists of Group A and Group B. The research subjects included ten children from Group B and one classroom teacher who acted as a facilitator. The subjects were selected using purposive sampling because they actively participated in wayang-based storytelling activities and were relevant to the study focus.

Meanwhile, Kirk and Miller define qualitative research as a tradition in the social sciences that relies on observing people in their natural settings and engaging with them through their own language and daily activities. In this study, the research data consisted of both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through direct observation of learning activities, interviews with the classroom teacher, and interactions with children during storytelling sessions using wayang puppets. Secondary data were collected from supporting documents such as lesson plans (RPPH), activity photographs, and relevant school records. Data collection methods included observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation to strengthen and validate the research findings.

The data collection techniques used in this study involved several methods to obtain comprehensive and accurate information. Observation was conducted by directly entering the field to examine participants' behaviors and activities during the learning process. Interviews were carried out through face-to-face interactions to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and perspectives related to storytelling activities using wayang puppets. In addition, documentation was used to gather supporting data in the form of written records, photographs, and relevant documents. These methods complemented each other to strengthen the validity of the research findings.

Furthermore, field notes were utilized as written records of what was heard, seen, experienced, and reflected upon during the data collection process. These notes helped the researcher capture important events and impressions in the field. Data analysis in this study followed the model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which is conducted continuously and interactively throughout the research process. The analysis involved data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions and verification, and was carried out until data saturation was achieved (Agus Rofi'i, 2022).

According to Bisjoe (2018), a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is a systematic process of collecting qualitative data and information about a particular issue through group discussions. This method allows participants to share opinions, experiences, and perspectives interactively. FGD encourages the exchange of ideas among group members. Therefore, it is effective for exploring in-depth insights on specific topics (Waluyati, 2020).

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on observations and interviews conducted with teachers at TKIT As-Salam Akhlakul Karimah Tangerang, storytelling activities using wayang puppets are implemented regularly as part of the learning process. These activities are usually carried out weekly and integrated into thematic lessons, particularly those related to moral and Islamic values. For children in Class B aged 5–6 years, storytelling with wayang puppets has become a consistent routine. Over time, this activity has developed into a positive learning culture. The children look forward to the sessions with excitement and curiosity. This regular implementation allows children to become familiar with the characters and storytelling process. As a result, storytelling activities are more effective and meaningful. The consistency also supports gradual development of children's language and social skills.

The storytelling activity begins with the teacher introducing wayang puppets by explaining each character's name and traits to help children recognize them. The teacher then tells a story using expressive movements that attract children's attention and stimulate curiosity. During the process, children show enthusiasm by listening attentively, laughing, and imitating puppet movements. Some children actively participate by raising their hands and taking turns holding the puppets. The teacher acts as a facilitator by presenting stories adapted from simple folk or Islamic moral tales that are meaningful and appropriate to the children's developmental level.

While narrating the story, the teacher uses expressive gestures, varied intonation, and engaging dialogue to bring the characters to life and maintain children's emotional involvement. These techniques help children distinguish between characters and improve their listening and comprehension skills. After the storytelling session, children are given opportunities to interact directly with the wayang puppets by taking turns playing with them. During this activity, children imitate the characters' voices and movements and retell the story in their own words. This hands-on experience encourages creativity, verbal expression, and confidence in a playful learning environment.

Through storytelling with wayang puppets, children are actively engaged both verbally and socially in a warm and supportive learning environment. They learn to listen to one another, take turns, and respect their peers' roles, which helps develop cooperation and empathy. This finding supports Dhieni's view that wayang puppets effectively stimulate children's expression, language development, and creativity, as their movable and animated features attract children's interest (Widyanti, 2019). Furthermore, this activity reflects the learning-by-playing principle in early childhood education, allowing children to express ideas, manage emotions, and internalize moral values naturally. Therefore, the use of wayang puppets makes storytelling more enjoyable, meaningful, and effective in supporting holistic child development.

3.1 Sub Result

Observations over several learning sessions showed clear improvement in children's storytelling skills during wayang-based activities. Initially, many children were hesitant and relied on teacher guidance, but repeated practice helped them become more confident and expressive. A significant improvement was seen in their ability to structure stories logically with clear beginnings, middles, and endings. Children began connecting events more coherently and adding simple cause-and-effect details. These findings indicate that wayang puppets are an effective medium for enhancing children's narrative and cognitive development.

Improvements were evident in children's language, self-confidence, and creativity during wayang-based storytelling activities. Children expanded their vocabulary, used expressive intonation, and began forming simple dialogues and conjunctions in their stories. Initially shy children became more confident in speaking and performing with the puppets, supported by positive feedback from peers. Their imagination also developed as they created new storylines and included experiences from daily life. These developments show that wayang-based storytelling effectively enhances children's oral language, confidence, and creative thinking.

Furthermore, children's understanding of moral and social values improved through storytelling activities using wayang puppets, as they learned to distinguish between positive and negative behaviors. Children imitated values such as honesty, diligence, helpfulness, and affection while also developing cooperation and respect for others. Moral messages were internalized naturally through play, making character education more meaningful. In addition, the results align with (Sujiono's. 2013) theory that meaningful play enhances holistic development in children .

Teachers play a central role in the learning process by designing activities that align story themes with the curriculum and Islamic values such as honesty and helping others. They provide engaging wayang puppets and model expressive storytelling through varied voices and movements. Teachers also facilitate children's participation by allowing them to create and develop their own storylines freely. After the activity, teachers guide reflection by discussing moral messages and linking them to real-life behavior.

This role aligns with Suherman's view Hasmalena that stimulation for young children should be carried out in enjoyable and age-appropriate ways. By acting as creative and empathetic facilitators, teachers can create learning experiences that not only enhance language skills but also build children's character and self-confidence (Hasmalena, 2021).

3.2 Sub Discussion

The ethnographic approach offers a rich perspective for understanding the social and cultural context of storytelling activities using wayang puppets at TKIT As-Salam Akhlakul Karimah. Through participatory observation and in-depth interviews, the researcher gained a holistic understanding of interactions among teachers, children, and learning media. From this perspective, storytelling functions not only as a pedagogical activity but also as a living cultural practice in the classroom. Wayang puppets act as cultural symbols and communication tools that help internalize moral, religious, and local values through everyday interactions.

Field findings indicate that wayang puppets have become an integral part of classroom culture, creating a joyful and participatory learning atmosphere. Children learn through social interaction, in line with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, by observing, imitating, and actively engaging with teachers and peers. Islamic moral values are conveyed naturally through stories, making moral learning meaningful without coercion. Thus, storytelling with wayang puppets represents a culturally grounded learning system that supports collaboration, value internalization, and the preservation of local culture in early childhood education.

4 CONCLUSION

Based on the research conducted at Mgr. Gabriel Manek Kindergarten and TKIT As-Salam Akhlakul Karimah Tangerang, the use of wayang puppets proved effective in stimulating the storytelling abilities of children aged 5–6 years. Wayang puppets created an enjoyable, interactive, and meaningful learning atmosphere that encouraged active participation. The findings showed improvements in children's language skills, story structure, confidence, creativity, and imagination. Cultural elements within wayang stories also made learning more contextual and engaging for early childhood learners.

In addition, storytelling through wayang puppets enhanced children's understanding of moral and social values such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and affection. The ethnographic findings showed that wayang-based storytelling strengthened language skills while fostering a learning culture rooted in Islamic values and character education. Teachers played an essential role as creative facilitators by preparing materials, guiding activities, and adapting content to children's developmental levels despite minor challenges. Therefore, wayang puppets can be considered an effective culturally based learning medium for supporting language, moral, and character development in early childhood education.

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Finally, it is hoped that the results of this research will make a meaningful contribution to the development of early childhood education. This study is expected to enrich educational practices through the use of culturally based learning media and serve as a reference for educators in stimulating storytelling skills. The integration of cultural values is also expected to support character development from an early age. Furthermore, this research is hoped to inspire educators and future researchers to continue exploring innovative and culturally relevant learning approaches.

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