

Penggunaan Bercerita dalam Pembelajaran Pemahaman Membaca: Sebuah Studi tentang Persepsi Siswa Kelas 4

The Use of Storytelling in Reading Comprehension Learning: A Study of Fourth-Grade Students' Perceptions

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Abstract

The success of literacy and student learning achievements is supported by the ability to understand reading as an important learning skill. However, for some students in Indonesia, difficulties in relating new material to prior knowledge, as well as a lack of vocabulary, make this a problem. Therefore, this study aims to explore the use of storytelling as a teaching strategy to improve students' reading comprehension and to explore more deeply the perceptions of fourth-grade students regarding its use in the classroom. Using a qualitative descriptive method, seven fourth-grade students from SD Negeri 3 Banjar Jawa, Singaraja, Bali, participated in the study. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. There were six main themes from the research results, which showed that the use of storytelling as a learning strategy could make learning more interesting, encourage active student participation, and enable students to understand the material through the content of the story easily. As a result, the use of storytelling is an effective strategy to be applied in learning.

Keywords: *Storytelling, Reading Comprehension, Student Perception, Merdeka Curriculum, Elementary School.*

Abstract

Keberhasilan literasi serta prestasi belajar siswa didukung oleh kemampuan memahami bacaan sebagai keterampilan penting belajar mereka. Akan tetapi, pada beberapa siswa di Indonesia, kesulitan dalam mengaitkan materi baru ke pengetahuan yang sudah dimiliki sebelumnya, serta kurangnya kosakata yang diketahui menjadikan hal ini sebuah masalah. Oleh sebab itu, penelitian ini memiliki tujuan untuk mengeksplorasi penggunaan storytelling sebagai strategi mengajar untuk meningkatkan pemahaman membaca siswa serta menggali lebih dalam mengenai persepsi kelas empat dalam penggunaannya di kelas. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, tujuh orang siswa kelas empat SD Negeri 3 Banjar Jawa, Singaraja, Bali sebagai partisipan. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan wawancara semi-terstruktur serta dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Terdapat enam tema utama dari hasil penelitian yang menunjukkan jika penggunaan storytelling sebagai strategi belajar dapat membuat pembelajaran lebih menarik, mendorong partisipasi aktif siswa, dan dapat memahami materi melalui isi cerita dengan mudah. Oleh karena itu, penggunaan storytelling merupakan strategi yang efektif untuk diaplikasikan ke dalam pembelajaran.

Keywords: *Storytelling, Pemahaman Membaca, Persepsi Siswa, Kurikulum Merdeka, Sekolah Dasar.*



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INTRODUCTION

Reading skills are fundamental to literacy and contribute significantly to students' success in education and in their daily lives. In the scope of basic education, not only being able to understand a reading text but also being able to develop higher-level thinking skills, communication, and analysis is important in the ability to understand reading by students. Previous research, as stated by Mendoza-Pinargote & Reyes-Meza, (2022), emphasizes that the complex cognitive process that occurs when reading requires focus concentration, interpretation, and processing of information contained in the reading. One of the important highlights in the indicator of student success in literacy is also supported by their good reading skills (Manoharan & Ramachandran, 2023). The disruption of student learning outcomes due to difficulties in one of the aspects, mentioned by (Capin et al., 2021) in their research, that reading comprehension requires integration between decoding and listening skills, if there are difficulties in one aspect, it can interfere with the learning outcomes of students.

In Indonesia, students' reading comprehension are still a challenge, the comparison of Indonesian students' literacy skills compared to other countries is still relatively low. The results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study by the OECD in 2022 stated that the average reading literacy score of students in Indonesia was ranked below average compared to other OECD member countries (OECD, 2023). The difficulties that many students face include understanding the meaning of a text, summarizing a reading, and identifying information that is read (Navarrete, 2019). Limited vocabulary and difficulty in connecting new information with previously owned knowledge are also widely felt by students and are one of the challenges faced by students in reading skills Mendoza-Pinargote & Reyes-Meza, (2022). Serious attention is needed in education in Indonesia because students' literacy skills, especially reading skills, are a crucial basic foundation in supporting learning in all existing subjects.

There is a need for effective learning strategies to overcome the challenges faced by students, which also include the implementation of bottom-up and top-down processes as suggested by Ghafar (2024) in his research. However, many students still struggle to integrate these two processes, especially when they are presented with abstract texts that require critical thinking as well as inference. In this condition, not only does it affect students' reading skills, but it will also greatly impact overall learning outcomes (Cahya et al., 2020). Support for students' needs is applied in the Indonesian education system, which has provided flexibility and efficiency for teachers to adopt innovative and creative student-centered learning methods with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, one of the learning strategies of which is the use of storytelling. Training for teachers is needed in order to implement these strategies innovatively and creatively so as not to create new challenges that hinder learning (Zamista & Deswita, 2023).

Storytelling in this context can be a promising strategy for educators to use. The ability of narration in this strategy is used to transmit the message to be wrapped in a more literary and contextualized way, which is proven to help students to make connections between the reading and their personal experiences. Research by Ratminingsih et al. (2020) showed that culturally relevant stories used by teachers in learning can increase reading comprehension which can also instill moral values in students. Similarly, Ratminingsih & Budasi (2018) found that picture story books involving local culture can effectively support students' reading and speaking skills.

Students' auditory memory will also increase as the storytelling strategy is given to students, and can encourage active student involvement in learning Ghaderi et al. (2017) and La et al. (2023). Then, Bartan (2020) and Fatmawati et al. (2024) emphasized that the creation of a more immersive and interesting learning experience can be done by using digital-based storytelling by combining images and sounds (audio & visual). Recent research conducted by Sudibyo et al. (2018) in their findings that support if the use of storytelling teaching style can significantly improve the ability of elementary school students in reading while increasing active student involvement in the continuity of learning, can visualize the story, and process the context of the story with relevant. In addition, Mayang et al. (2024) in their research showed that the help of interactive digital storytelling can help students in literal comprehension and can stimulate their interest in reading through the integration of multimedia.

Although storytelling has been widely explored, most previous studies have focused on how it fosters students' motivation or speaking skills. Previous studies have also investigated the effectiveness of storytelling in improving students' reading comprehension, literacy skills, and classroom engagement (Ratminingsih et al., 2020; Sudibyo et al., 2018; Mayang et al., 2024). However, these studies mainly emphasized learning outcomes and instructional effectiveness, while students' own perspectives and experiences toward the use of storytelling received less attention. Furthermore, limited research has specifically explored how fourth-grade students perceive storytelling, even though students at this stage are transitioning from learning to read to reading to learn, making their perceptions important for understanding the suitability and effectiveness of the strategy in supporting reading comprehension. There is limited research that specifically investigates how young students perceive the use of storytelling as a strategy for reading comprehension in primary schools especially in Grade Four. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by exploring further the perceptions of fourth grade students towards the use of storytelling in reading comprehension. It is hoped that this research can contribute theoretically and practically by providing insights into how storytelling can be effectively implemented in reading learning, especially in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on students' perceptions of the use of storytelling, especially in four-grade elementary school regarding the use of storytelling in improving their reading comprehension.

RESEARCH METHODS

The use of the descriptive qualitative method in this study aims to explore further the perceptions of grade IV students towards the use of storytelling in reading learning. The participants in this study who had previously experienced storytelling in classroom learning were seven students, selected according to guidelines by Creswell and Creswell (2018) at SD Negeri 3 Banjar Jawa, Singaraja, Bali in grade IV. The students were selected using a lottery system, a random sample technique to provide an equal participant to become a respondent.

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted in one group session for student data collection. The interview questions were designed to explore students' understanding of storytelling, the benefits of storytelling, their learning experience, and their engagement in discussion. Audio devices were used to record the interviews and to ensure data accuracy.

Data were analyzed manually by following the steps of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), namely: (1) verbatim transcription of the recorded interviews, (2) repeated reading of the transcripts to understand the context, (3) manual coding by labeling important relevant statements, (4) grouping the codes into main themes, and (5)

interpretation to gain in-depth understanding of students' perceptions. The qualitative data analysis process in this study is in line with Creswell's which consists of organizing all the data that has been obtained, reading all the data, performing the coding process, from which themes or categories will emerge that must be interpreted, and finally validating the findings. This is a reference in analyzing qualitative data in this study. The analysis resulted in six main themes that describe students' perceptions of the use of storytelling in reading learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the thematic analysis of the students' interview transcripts, six main themes were identified, summarizing the students' perceptions of the use of storytelling in reading instruction. The summary of these themes is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Main Themes from the Analysis of Student Interviews

MAIN THEME	SUB - THEME	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
1. Reading Comprehension	Storytelling helps students understand stories, with the explanation by the teacher or by visual/audio.	7 students
	Storytelling helps students become more confident.	1 student
	Reading independently is more helpful for some students.	2 students (students 6 and 7)
2. Learning Motivation	Storytelling creates a fun, enjoyable, exciting, and increases enthusiasm for learning.	7 students
	Through storytelling, they can prepare for future learning (to the fifth grade).	1 student (student 4)
3. Media Preference	Prefer listening to the teacher rather than reading independently.	7 students
	Likes teachers when retelling the story.	7 students
	Likes the visual that supports the story (the video animation).	7 students
4. Student Engagement	Active participation in discussion (individual or group discussion).	7 students
	Often raise a hand when discussing.	7 students
5. Vocabulary Enriches	Storytelling can help introduce a new vocabulary (especially names of transportation in English).	7 students
6. Storytelling Challenges	Has never retold the story they have heard.	5 students
	Has retold the story they have heard.	2 students (student 6 and 7)

Storytelling as a Method to Improve Students' Reading Comprehension

From the interview results, the most prominent student perception was that storytelling helps them better understand the content of a story. All students mentioned that storytelling, especially when accompanied by explanations and expressive delivery from the teacher, made it easier for them to grasp the meaning of the story. Students expressed:

"Pada saat diceritakan di depan oleh guru, jadi mudah mengerti dan bisa lebih percaya diri saat menjawab pertanyaan"

"Paham soalnya sambil dijelaskan"

These responses suggest that an interactive storytelling approach, along with appropriate guidance from the teacher, enables students to process information more easily than when they read independently.

This finding supports the idea that storytelling can significantly enhance students' comprehension and reading skills, particularly at the elementary school level, especially when teachers incorporate verbal explanations and expressive, contextual storytelling. This aligns with the findings of Ratminingsih et al. (2020), who emphasized that culturally relevant stories can deepen elementary students' understanding of narrative content. Similarly, La et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of contextualization and how teachers' delivery can support students in better understanding English texts. Moreover, storytelling also plays a role in reinforcing listening skills as a foundation for reading development. As noted by Capin et al. (2021), listening skills are essential for reading comprehension in young learners, and these skills rely heavily on oral language proficiency.

The findings also indicate that storytelling functions as a cognitive scaffold that supports students in constructing meaning from texts. Through storytelling, students are not only exposed to linguistic input but are also guided to activate prior knowledge, predict events, and connect story content with their own experiences. This process aligns with schema theory, which suggests that reading comprehension develops when learners integrate new information with existing cognitive structures (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). In the context of elementary education, storytelling provides a bridge between oral language and written literacy, enabling students to comprehend abstract concepts through concrete narrative experiences. This supports the argument that reading comprehension is not merely a decoding activity but a meaning-making process that requires interaction between text, prior knowledge, and social context (Manoharan & Ramachandran, 2023; Mendoza-Pinargote & Reyes-Meza, 2022). Consequently, storytelling may serve as an effective pedagogical tool for strengthening foundational literacy skills among young learners.

Enthusiasm and Motivation for Learning using Storytelling

In this theme, the interview results show that students feel more enthusiastic and motivated by learning using the storytelling method. Their description of learning experiences that increase enthusiasm in participating in reading activities with interesting storytelling, such as:

"seru"

"asik"

"lebih efektif"

As for one student who mentioned that learning using storytelling made him look forward to and prepare for interesting learning in grade 5.

"senang karena mungkin nanti di kelas 5 bakal diajarin storytelling"

This shows that storytelling, apart from being used as a medium for delivering material, can also be used as a strategy to foster student motivation.

It is known that storytelling with its nature is a tool to present a pleasant learning experience and can activate students' emotions can be associated with increased motivation. As shown by (Bartan, 2020) in his research that storytelling elements of stories that are emotional and deep can foster student interest and attention. Yulianawati et al. (2022) also found that the provision of storytelling in reading learning made students more often actively involved in the classroom, showed enthusiasm, and showed an increase in reading interest. Suwastini & Dewi, (2023) and Lestari et al. (2025) in their research also showed that students' positive perceptions in language learning, especially through engagement and confidence when speaking, are evidence that literary text forms such as poetry that have emotional and aesthetic elements can bring this out. And this is relevant as storytelling in the form of narration can create the same emotional amalgamation. Other research conducted by Fatmawati et al. (2024) reinforces this finding that digital storytelling creates a learning environment that is both fun and interactive, which in turn will have an impact on increasing students' learning motivation.

From a motivational perspective, storytelling creates a learning environment that fulfills students' psychological needs for enjoyment, curiosity, and emotional engagement. The narratives presented through storytelling allow learners to become emotionally connected to characters and events, making the learning process more meaningful and memorable. According to Self-Determination Theory, students tend to demonstrate higher motivation when learning activities are perceived as enjoyable and personally relevant (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The students' responses in this study suggest that storytelling promotes intrinsic motivation because they participate in learning activities out of genuine interest rather than external pressure (Sutrisno, 2021). This condition is particularly important in elementary classrooms where positive emotional experiences can influence long-term attitudes toward reading and literacy development.

Preferences for Media and Delivery in Storytelling

Many of them stated that they liked and enjoyed listening to the story read or told directly by the teacher more than when they read it themselves. The explanation by the teacher when telling the story, the expression shown by the teacher, and the support of visual media such as pictures and videos help them understand the content of the story better and can make it more interesting which they mentioned in the interview results. One student even directly emphasized that the expression shown by the teacher when telling the story made the learning atmosphere funny and enjoyable.

"suka saat mengekspresikan cerita"

"soalnya lucu mukanya"

"nyambung dengan ceritanya"

Storytelling becomes interesting and easy to understand with the support of interesting visuals.

In the context of English language learning for young children, the use of methods that involve visualization and communicative approaches are popular with elementary school students because it can increase their active participation in learning (Listyariani et al., 2018). Students' need for multisensory learning is reflected in their preference for storytelling that is direct and expressive, which is learning that can use or involve the senses of hearing and vision simultaneously. In line with the research results revealed by Simorangkir (2021) who found that increased student engagement in the learning process can be achieved through visual elements and teacher expression when delivering stories. Other support is also conveyed in research conducted by Ratminingsih et al. (2024) which emphasizes that increasing students' understanding and interest in learning in the learning process can be achieved through the provision of storybooks

which are very effective because they are contextual and close to students' daily experiences.

The preference for teacher-led storytelling supported by visual media highlights the importance of multimodal learning experiences in elementary education. Young learners generally process information more effectively when verbal explanations are combined with visual representations (Suttriso, 2025). Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning explains that students learn better when information is delivered through multiple channels because it reduces cognitive load and enhances comprehension (Mayer, 2021). In this study, students repeatedly referred to teachers' facial expressions, gestures, and supporting visuals as factors that facilitated understanding. These findings suggest that storytelling becomes more effective when teachers strategically integrate verbal narration with visual and emotional cues, creating richer learning experiences that accommodate diverse learning preferences.

Student Engagement and Active Participation in Storytelling

The use of the storytelling method during learning can make students feel more active in participating in the classroom. According to the results of interviews that have been conducted previously, they admit that they often raise their hands to answer questions and can collaborate with their friends, although there are some who mention the obstacles if their partners are not cooperative in discussions. Many of them were actively involved because the story was summarized to be interesting and easy to understand, so that students did not hesitate or feel more confident when speaking and answering. Creating a new learning atmosphere that encourages students to be more directly involved can be achieved through storytelling which can not only improve students' understanding of a story or reading.

La et al. (2023) in their study stated that students can encourage themselves to increase active participation in the learning process such as listening, responding, and even expressing opinions through storytelling. Other research that supports this is the increase in students' enthusiasm to be more active in interacting in class with communicative and fun teaching strategies such as providing narrative or story-based activities Luh et al. (2020). Two-way interaction between teachers and students can be built through an approach that uses storytelling as a teaching medium. In their research, Yani et al. (2021) focused on the importance of active participation in improving literacy skills, and the use of storytelling is one of the effective approaches. Ghaderi et al. (2017) also explained that storytelling supports students' listening and memory skills which are closely related to their courage to speak and engage in class discussions.

Another significant implication of the findings is the role of storytelling in promoting active learning. The students' willingness to answer questions, participate in discussions, and express opinions indicates that storytelling encourages a learner-centered classroom environment. Active participation is considered a critical indicator of successful learning because students who engage cognitively and socially are more likely to retain information and develop deeper understanding (Fredricks et al., 2019). Through storytelling activities, students are not positioned as passive recipients of information but as active participants who interact with story content and classroom discussions. Such engagement is consistent with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasize student agency, collaboration, and meaningful learning experiences.

Storytelling and the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

The findings of this study also demonstrate that storytelling is highly compatible with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. The curriculum encourages teachers to create contextual, student-centered, and enjoyable learning experiences that support both academic and character development. Storytelling provides opportunities for

students to engage with meaningful narratives, develop critical thinking skills, enrich vocabulary, and strengthen communication abilities simultaneously. Moreover, storytelling allows teachers to integrate moral values, cultural elements, and real-life experiences into classroom instruction. This integration reflects the broader goals of the Merdeka Curriculum, which seeks to develop students holistically through meaningful learning experiences rather than solely focusing on academic achievement. Therefore, storytelling can be viewed not only as a literacy strategy but also as a pedagogical approach that supports curriculum implementation in Indonesian elementary schools.

CONCLUSION AND ADVICE

Thus, storytelling can be considered an effective strategy in learning activities to improve students' reading comprehension, especially for fourth-grade elementary school students. Storytelling not only helps students overcome their reading challenges but also increases their motivation and engagement and enriches their vocabulary. Storytelling delivered expressively through narrative and supported by visual media, such as animation, provides students with a new experience of learning to read and understand material easily, thereby creating meaningful learning for students. This study was only conducted in one elementary school with a limited number of subjects in the fourth grade, so the results cannot be generalized to different schools or grade levels. Exploration of the use of storytelling on student perception is still rare and is one of the main contributions of this study. The results of the study show that storytelling can be an effective and innovative solution for students, in line with the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes creativity, enjoyment, and active student participation in the learning process.

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