The Effectiveness of Storytelling Methods on Increasing Early Childhood Empathy in RA Alquran Dina Padang Sidempuan

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the effectiveness of storytelling methods in increasing early childhood empathy in RA Al-Qur'an Dina Padang Sidempuan. The research approach uses a quantitative method with a quasi experiment design of the pretest-posttest control group design. The research subjects amounted to 30 children aged 5–6 years who were divided into two groups, namely the experimental group that was given the storytelling method treatment and the control group that followed conventional learning. Data were collected through an early childhood empathy observation scale and analyzed using the ANCOVA test with a pretest score as a covariate. The results showed that there was a significant difference in empathy skills between the two groups ($p < 0.05$), with the contribution of the storytelling method of 68.2% to the improvement of children's empathy. The average gain score in the experimental group was higher (15.20) than in the control group (5.07). These findings show that the storytelling method is effective as a learning strategy that is able to stimulate social-emotional development, especially empathy, through the process of identifying and imitating the prosocial behavior of the story characters. This study recommends the application of storytelling as an educational approach in strengthening the character of early childhood in early childhood institutions.

Keywords: *Storytelling Methods, Empathy, Early Childhood, Character Education, Storytelling*

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Introduction

Early childhood education has a significant role in shaping children's character and morality. Moral literacy is an important foundation that shapes positive attitudes and behaviors in the future (Sari and Rozana, 2024). Early childhood is a child in prenatal, vital and aesthetic stages or from pre-conception to 7 years old, (Nur Uhbiati, 2009:38). At an early age, children have very distinctive, striking learning characteristics and are very different from later age ranges. Or in other words, the characteristics of early childhood learning are characteristics of early childhood learning that are striking with the age range of adolescents, adults and the elderly; both in quality and nature (Rozana et al., 2023).

According to Widyas et al. (2024), early childhood is defined as individuals who are still in the exploration stage, have high curiosity, and are in the process of learning from the surrounding environment. According to Munisa (2020), early childhood is an individual who is undergoing a rapid and fundamental development process in the next life. During this period, there was a process of growth and development in various aspects, one of which was the aspect of social interaction.

Early childhood education has a big role in shaping who they will be. At this age, children grow very fast not only physically, but also emotionally and socially. They are full of curiosity, actively exploring, and learning from the surrounding environment. Therefore, it is very important to instill moral values from an early age, so that they grow into individuals with positive character and behavior in the future. Empathy is one of the important skills that need to be developed from an early age because it is directly related to the social-emotional aspects of children. This ability allows children to understand and feel the feelings of others, which is very important in forming healthy social interactions (Yuliani, 2018). Early life is known as a crucial period in character formation, so the development of empathy at this stage is very significant.

One of the effective approaches in fostering children's empathy is through the storytelling method. Fairy tales not only function as entertainment, but also as educational tools that convey moral messages and emotional values. Stories in fairy tales often present situations that introduce various emotions such as joy, sadness, anger, and fear, so that children can learn to recognize and understand these feelings in themselves and others (Rachmawati & Kurniati, 2017). Thus, fairy tales play a role as a means of social learning through the experiences of the characters in the story (Sari, 2020).

In addition, the storytelling process can create a warm interaction between the educator and the child. According to Parapat et al (2023). By implementing interactive storytelling activities, children are expected to be more directly involved in stories, hone their language skills, and stimulate their imagination and creativity. This approach is expected to create a more vibrant learning environment and stimulate children's intellectual development. Teachers who are able to convey stories with interesting expressions and intonation will find it easier to build emotional closeness, so that the message conveyed in fairy tales can be received more effectively (Sutarto, 2019). Some studies show that children who are routinely involved in storytelling activities show improved empathy skills compared to those who do not receive similar stimulation (Lestari, 2021).

RA Alquran Dina Padang Sidimpuan as one of the Islamic educational institutions for early childhood has great potential in developing children's character, including empathy. However, there have not been many studies that have examined the extent to which storytelling methods are used systematically and effectively in this institution. Therefore, this study aims to determine the effectiveness of the application of storytelling methods in increasing early childhood empathy in RA Alquran Dina Padang Sidempuan.

Research Methodology

This research uses a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design. The design used in this study uses a nonrandom or pretest re-experiment design and a posttest control group design. Quasi-experiment is an experimental method that does not allow researchers to fully control non-experimental variables and the determination of the sample is done non-randomly. This research consists of 2 (Two) variables, namely variable X is the storytelling method and variable Y is Empathy. The operational definition of the variable in this study, namely empathy, is the ability of humans to identify what others think and feel with the right attitude. The sample in this study amounted to 10 children divided into 2 groups, namely 5 children in the control group and 5 children for the experimental class. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling. The data collection technique is in the form of primary data sourced from the empathy scale sheet of pretest and protest results carried out in the control class and the experimental class. Secondary data collection was carried out through observation of block play activities carried out in two groups, both the control class and the experimental class. The research instrument used an empathy scale and storytelling methods. The empathy scale is a "Selfreport" measurement instrument, which means that the research subjects measure their own empathetic attitudes by responding to the items of the measurement sheet. Data processing and analysis techniques using ankova tests between final test results using initial test results as covariables (Latipun, 2015). Porter & Raudenbush (1987), Social scientists use the anatomy test to analyze the results of quasi-experimental research.

The Anakova test provides three important pieces of information, namely: first, a significance value that shows whether the treatment given has a meaningful effect; second, a comparison of the average level of empathy reasoning between the group that received the treatment and the group that did not, by controlling for the pretest variable as a covariate; and third, the percentage of treatment contribution in increasing empathy if the treatment is proven to be effective. Before conducting the covariance analysis test, a prerequisite test was first carried out in the form of a normality test and a homogeneity test.

Results

1. **Description of Research Data**

This research aims to increase empathy in children aged 5-6 years. This research was carried out at RA Al Qur'an Dina Padang Sidimpuan with equivalent characteristics. The study used a quasi-experiment design with a non-equivalent control group design, which involved 2 (two) groups, namely:

a. Experimental Group

It is an early childhood who receives treatment in the form of a storytelling method for 4 weeks, 3 meetings per week

b. Control group

It is early childhood who follows conventional learning (not given structured storytelling.

The number of subjects in each group was 15 children (30 children in total). The measurement of empathy ability was carried out using an empathy observation scale for early childhood which included indicators, namely:

a. Ability to recognize the feelings of others
b. Verbal responses to other people's feelings
c. Your panic response is helpful or soothing

To be clearer for the results of the statistical test calculation, you can see the following, namely:

a. Pre Test Results

The results of the pretest and posttest can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Pre Test Results

Group	Average	SD	Min	Max
Eksperimen	47,20	4,31	40	54
Control	46,87	4,15	39	53

The results of the independent samples t-test in the pretest showed a value $\rho = 0.732$ (> 0.05) $\rightarrow$ there was no significant difference in the level of initial empathy between the two groups, meaning that from the table it can be seen that the average score of the child's initial empathy ability in both groups is relatively the same.
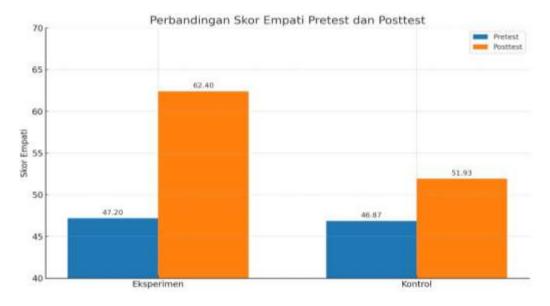
b. Post Test Results

The results of the Post Test can be seen as follows:

Table 2. Post Test Results

Group	Average	SD	Min	Max
Eksperimen	62,40	3,85	55	68
Control	51,93	4,27	45	59

The independent sample t-test in the post test showed a value $\rho = 0.000$ (<0.05) $\rightarrow$ There was a significant difference in the level of empathy between the experimental and control groups after the treatment. From the table, it can be concluded that there was an increase in empathy scores in both groups, but the increase in the experimental group was higher.

The following graph of pretest and post test results can be seen below:

c. Gain *Score*

Table 3. N Gain Score Result

Group	Average	SD
Eksperimen	62,40	3,85
Control	51,93	4,27

For the Anacova test (with a pretest score as a covariate) produces a value, as follows the value $F = 58.341$ with $\rho = 0.000$ (< 0.05) with an effect size value (n^2) $= 0.682 \rightarrow$ there is a contribution of the storytelling method to empathy ability of 68.2%. Therefore, it can be

concluded that the storytelling method contributes 68.2% to the improvement of early childhood empathy skills, especially at the age of 5-6 years.

d. Analysis Prerequisites Test

Analysis prerequisites test is carried out to see if the data obtained is normally distributed.

- Normality Test

The Shapiro-Wilk test showed a $\rho > 0.05$ in all groups, so the data could be declared to be normally distributed so that it could be moved on to the next test.

- Homogeneity Test

Furthermore, the homogeneity test that has been carried out through the Levene test results in $\rho => 0.05$, so that the variance between homogeneous groups.

2. Discussion

The results of the study show that the storytelling method has a significant effect on increasing early childhood empathy. Children who received treatment using the storytelling method experienced a higher increase in empathy ability than children who participated in conventional learning. For more clarity, the following is a discussion of the results of the research, namely:

1. Significant increase in empathy

This difference in significant increase in empathy can be explained by the nature of the storytelling method that provides emotional experience through the characters, storylines, and conflicts presented. This process of course facilitates the child to identify and understand problems about the characters' feelings, which ultimately trains early childhood empathy skills, especially 5-6 years old.

2. Psychological Mechanisms

According to the learning theory put forward by Bandura, it states that children learn behavior through observation and imitation. The characters in the story provide examples of prosocial behaviors such as helping, various, and calming, which are then imitated by the child (Bandura, 1986).

3. Previous Research Support

These findings are in line with the results of research conducted by (Isbell et al., 2004) which found that storytelling can improve the social skills and emotional awareness of preschoolers. Another study also explained that exposure to fictional narratives strengthens the theory of mind, which is closely related to empathy (Mar et al., 2011).

Conclusion

The storytelling method has been shown to be effective in improving early childhood empathy skills. Data analysis showed a significant difference in empathy scores between the experimental group that was given learning with the storytelling method and the control group that followed conventional learning. The value of $\rho < 0.05$ on the t-test and Anacova confirms the effectiveness of this method. The increase in empathy in the experimental group was substantially higher. The average gain score of the experimental group was 15.20, almost three times that of the control group (5.07). This shows that children's involvement in stories, characters, and storytelling flows provides emotional stimulation that encourages the development of empathy skills. Anacova's results show that the storytelling method contributes 68.2% to the increase in children's empathy. This strengthens the view that narrative and story media can be an effective means of character education in Early Childhood Education units. Furthermore, the findings support social learning theory and previous research in which

children learn empathy through the process of observation and imitation of the prosocial behavior of story characters, in line with Bandura's theory and various international studies that affirm the benefits of storytelling in the development of social-emotional skills.

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