

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PUPPET IN STORYTELLING ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDENTS' ENGLISH LITERACY

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to measure the influence and contribution of storytelling techniques using puppet media in developing English literacy among early childhood students, including improving oral language comprehension, vocabulary enrichment, and moral and social value development. The research employed a true experimental design with two groups: a control group (B1) and an experimental group (B3). Pre-tests and post-tests were administered to both groups in the form of vocabulary tests. However, treatment was only given to the experimental group using hand puppet media in storytelling activities, while the control group used picture media for literacy development. Participants were students from Classes B1 and B3 at TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Lhong Raya, with 24 students each, selected through random sampling. Data analysis was conducted using quantitative (t-test formula) and qualitative approaches (direct observation and simple interviews). The paired sample t-test analysis showed a t-table value (2.0686) greater than the calculated t-value (-9.67), with $-9.67 < 2.068$ and significance $0.000 < 0.05$, indicating H_a acceptance. This can be interpreted as a significant difference in English literacy among kindergarten students at Bustanul Athfal before and after using puppet media in storytelling activities. Meanwhile, observation results and simple student interviews showed positive engagement and improved vocabulary retention through puppet-mediated storytelling activities.

Keywords: *Puppet, storytelling, literacy, early childhood.*

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INTRODCUTION

English has increasingly been regarded as an international language, making its mastery essential from an early age, particularly given that young children are widely believed to acquire new languages more efficiently than adults due to their strong imitation

and memorization abilities (Brilianti & Sugirin, 2024). One of the fundamental components in foreign language learning for young learners is vocabulary acquisition, as vocabulary serves as the foundation for all four language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Amalia, 2018). To introduce English vocabulary to young learners, storytelling has been widely recognized as one of the most developmentally appropriate methods, as it integrates the four language skills within a meaningful and engaging context (Losi et al., 2022). In practice, storytelling activities are frequently supported by visual media in the form of puppets, including hand puppets, rod puppets, and digitally printed puppet pictures, which function to attract children's attention and enhance their engagement throughout the storytelling process (Brilianti & Sugirin, 2024; Losi et al., 2022).

The current body of literature indicates that storytelling is not merely a traditional teaching technique but remains highly relevant as a modern pedagogical tool. Storytelling has been shown to convey grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation within a comprehensible context while simultaneously fostering cultural awareness and moral values among young learners (Losi et al., 2022). The use of puppet media in storytelling activities has also been extensively investigated and has consistently been found to increase children's motivation, participation, and communicative competence, whether through hand puppets, digitally printed puppets, or simple puppet pictures (Brilianti & Yogyakarta, 2024; Losi et al., 2022). Prior studies further report that puppet-assisted storytelling creates a more interactive and enjoyable learning atmosphere, enabling children to absorb and retain new vocabulary more effectively (Kröger & Nupponen, 2019 as cited in Brilianti, 2024).

Despite these promising findings, English language teaching for young learners continues to face considerable challenges. Children often struggle to pronounce words with correct spelling and pronunciation, confuse meanings and synonyms, and demonstrate low interest when learning materials are perceived as overly long or complex (Rohmatillah, 2014, as cited in (Brilianti & Sugirin, 2024). Teachers, on the other hand, frequently encounter difficulties in managing large and noisy classrooms, sustaining students' motivation, and independently designing stories and instructional media appropriate for young learners, particularly given many early childhood educators' limited confidence in using English (Copland et al., 2014, as cited in Brilianti & Sugirin, 2024; Amalia, 2018). Moreover, a review of previous research reveals that studies on storytelling and puppet media remain largely fragmented: some focus solely on vocabulary improvement through pre-test and post-test score comparisons (Brilianti & Sugirin, 2024), others examine language development through qualitative measures such as Mean Length of Utterance (Losi et al., 2022), while others emphasize teachers' perceptions and readiness in implementing storytelling methods (Amalia, 2018). This fragmentation suggests that a comprehensive investigation linking puppet-assisted storytelling to broader outcomes of literacy and vocabulary development in young learners remains limited and has yet to be integrated within a single, cohesive research framework.

In light of these gaps, the present study aims to further examine how the use of storytelling supported by puppet media can enhance English vocabulary acquisition and support literacy development among young learners. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to integrate the interrelated aspects of storytelling, puppet media, learner

engagement, vocabulary acquisition, and literacy outcomes into a more holistic framework an integration that has rarely been addressed simultaneously in prior research. Accordingly, this study is expected to contribute new insights to the development of effective English language teaching strategies for young learners, while enriching the existing body of literature on the relationship between visual instructional media, storytelling, and children's literacy and vocabulary development.

Among the various media used to support storytelling activities, puppets have gained particular attention from early childhood educators and researchers. Puppets function as a concrete, playful mediator between the teacher and the child, lowering children's affective barriers and encouraging them to participate more actively in verbal interaction. Several studies indicate that puppet-assisted storytelling can enhance children's speaking enthusiasm, listening focus, and self-confidence, since the puppet acts as a "safe" communicative partner that makes learning feel like play rather than instruction (Utami, 2026).

Despite the growing recognition of storytelling and puppet-based methods, the current situation of English language teaching for young learners in Indonesia still shows a gap between ideal practice and classroom reality. Learning is still frequently curriculum-centered, with schools placing strong emphasis on completing a heavy curriculum target rather than ensuring that each child has genuinely grasped the concepts being taught; as a result, teachers tend to move on to new material before checking whether students have reached an adequate level of understanding (Dini & Aslamiah, 2020). At the same time, parental demand for early English exposure remains very high, driven by the perception that English proficiency is an important asset for their children's future, yet this enthusiasm is not always matched by the availability of appropriate, engaging teaching methods at the classroom level (Nurjaman et al., 2019).

Comparative studies on English teaching methods in kindergartens further indicate that more communicative and interactive approaches are still underused compared to conventional, teacher-centered techniques such as grammar-translation, even though communicative methods have been shown to be more effective in helping young learners acquire vocabulary naturally (Arumsari et al., 2017). In addition, access to supporting technology and varied instructional media remains uneven, particularly outside major urban areas, which limits teachers' ability to design lessons that are both interactive and developmentally appropriate. This condition points to a persistent need for simple, low-cost, yet pedagogically effective media such as puppets that can be readily adopted by teachers to make English storytelling activities more engaging and to bridge the gap between the high demand for early English education and the limited availability of effective teaching strategies in the field.

These conditions give rise to a concrete problem in the field: young learners' English literacy development is often hampered before it can even take root. Vocabulary introduction is frequently delivered through monotonous, teacher-centered techniques such as rote drilling or reliance on textbooks alone, which fail to accommodate the short attention span and playful learning style of early childhood students (Febriani et al., 2025). This mismatch between teaching method and learners' developmental characteristics tends to lower children's interest and motivation, makes new vocabulary difficult to internalize,

and leaves basic literacy skills such as listening comprehension and word recognition underdeveloped by the time children move to the next level of education (Febriani et al., 2025). If left unaddressed, this problem risks reinforcing the common perception that English is a difficult and unenjoyable subject from a very early stage, which may further discourage children's long-term engagement with the language. It is this specific problem the absence of an engaging, developmentally appropriate medium capable of stimulating early English literacy that the use of puppets in storytelling activities is proposed to address. Beyond oral language development, puppet media has also been linked to broader literacy outcomes. Puppetry activities during storytelling have been found to encompass multiple developmental domains simultaneously language, cognitive, social-emotional, and even moral development positioning puppets as an integrated pedagogical tool rather than a single-purpose prop (Loy et al., 2021). Similarly, research on hand puppet media suggests that this tool supports the development of listening skills, retelling ability, vocabulary recognition, and oral language expression in young learners (Mujahidah et al., 2021).

The effectiveness of puppet-based storytelling has also been documented in the Indonesian context, where puppet media such as paper dolls or hand puppets are frequently used to enhance children's language and communication abilities in local kindergarten (TK) settings, showing measurable improvement in children's willingness to speak and comprehend simple narrative (Andriyati, 2020). This growing body of evidence suggests that puppets are not merely entertainment tools but can serve as a pedagogically sound strategy for scaffolding early English literacy, particularly for young learners who are still developing foundational language skills in a second or foreign language.

Storytelling, in particular, has been identified across multiple studies as one of the most effective pedagogical approaches to maximize this developmental potential. Regular and interactive storytelling activities have been shown to enrich children's vocabulary, improve speaking and comprehension skills, and build confidence in language use as children engage with meaningful, contextualized discourse (Fadhillah, 2025). Moreover, studies conducted in early childhood education settings indicate that the storytelling method not only facilitates contextual vocabulary learning but also supports broader aspects of language formation, including expressive language, sentence structure, and communicative interaction. For example, research on vocabulary enhancement through storytelling reveals that both traditional and media-supported storytelling effectively expose children to rich linguistic patterns that they internalize through listening, retelling, and active participation (Putri & Ameliiaa, 2025). In addition, interactive and multimedia storytelling approaches have been shown to create engaging, naturally contextualized learning environments that foster not just linguistic skills but also motivation, emotional engagement, and creativity in young learners, demonstrating that storytelling encourages spontaneous and holistic language development across the curriculum. The technique of storytelling create rich and naturally contextualized learning conditions that enable teaching and language learning to be developed spontaneously and creatively in a whole curriculum approach.

Despite this potential, empirical studies specifically examining the effectiveness of puppet-assisted storytelling for English literacy development among early childhood

students as opposed to first-language or general communication development remain relatively limited. Most existing research focuses on Indonesian-language storytelling or general speaking/listening skills rather than English literacy outcomes such as vocabulary acquisition, phonological awareness, and early reading readiness in a foreign language context. This gap provides the rationale for the present study, which aims to investigate the effectiveness of puppet use in storytelling activities in enhancing early childhood students' English literacy skills.

Given these considerations, conducting this study is necessary for both practical and theoretical reasons. Practically, early childhood teachers need evidence-based, low-cost media that can be readily implemented in the classroom to make English storytelling activities more engaging, without requiring extensive training or expensive technology; findings from this study can offer teachers and school administrators a concrete, replicable strategy for addressing the low motivation and limited vocabulary retention commonly found in EFL classrooms for young learners. Theoretically, this study contributes to the still-limited body of literature that specifically links puppet-assisted storytelling to English literacy outcomes rather than general language or first-language development thereby extending existing research such as that on hand puppets and Wayang Golek puppet shows into the specific context of foreign language literacy acquisition (Mujahidah et al., 2021; Halimah et al., 2020). Moreover, as early exposure to English continues to expand across Indonesian early childhood education settings, it becomes increasingly important to ensure that the methods used are not only popular but also empirically shown to be effective; without such evidence, schools risk adopting media and techniques based on trend or convenience rather than proven pedagogical value. It is this practical urgency, combined with the theoretical gap in the literature, that makes the present study both timely and necessary. Given these considerations, conducting this study is necessary for both practical and theoretical reasons. Practically, early childhood teachers need evidence-based, low-cost media that can be readily implemented in the classroom to make English storytelling activities more engaging, without requiring extensive training or expensive technology; findings from this study can offer teachers and school administrators a concrete, replicable strategy for addressing the low motivation and limited vocabulary retention commonly found in EFL classrooms for young learners. Theoretically, this study contributes to the still-limited body of literature that specifically links puppet-assisted storytelling to English literacy outcomes rather than general language or first-language development thereby extending existing research such as that on hand puppets and Wayang Golek puppet shows into the specific context of foreign language literacy acquisition (Mujahidah et al., 2021; Halimah et al., 2020). Moreover, as early exposure to English continues to expand across Indonesian early childhood education settings, it becomes increasingly important to ensure that the methods used are not only popular but also empirically shown to be effective; without such evidence, schools risk adopting media and techniques based on trend or convenience rather than proven pedagogical value. It is this practical urgency, combined with the theoretical gap in the literature, that makes the present study both timely and necessary.

As result, it is supported to increase children's comprehension and memory. As early as possible, literacy development should be carried out in an ideal manner to ensure

that children do not experience difficulties in absorbing knowledge that enables them to develop more complex literacy. In connection with some researches above, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of puppet media in storytelling activities for enhancing English literacy among early childhood students, specifically examining vocabulary development, oral comprehension improvement, and engagement enhancement through comparative experimental design. The research questions of this study are in the following:

1. Is there any effectiveness of using *Puppet* as media in storytelling activities in enhancing vocabulary of students' literacy in B3 class of TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Lhong Raya?
2. How are students' responds toward the use of Puppet media in storytelling activities?

METHOD

This study uses an experimental approach with the True Experiments design, there are two classes contains experiment and control group. Experimental research is a condition in which a person observes the relationship between two variables (Brown, 2001). Meanwhile, according to Sugiyono (2018), he defined Experimentel study as a situation in which a person examines the relationship between two variables with the intention of determining whether a change in one variable results on a change in the other variable. In light of this states that experimental research is a type of research that is used to find the effects of a certain investigation on other conditions. (Sugiyono, 2018). Here are some illustrations of the True Experiments design.

Table 1. True Experiments Post-test Design

Sample	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
Experimental Group	O_1	X	O_2
Control Group	O_1		O_2

Where :

- O_1 = Pre-test
 O_2 = Post-test
X = Treatment (Sugiyono, 2018)

According to the table above, there are two groups, namely the Experimental Group and the Control Group, which correspond to the two existing classes at TK Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Lhong Raya (Class A and Class B). Assignment of the two intact classes to the experimental and control conditions was carried out using simple random sampling, in which the two classes were randomly allocated through a lottery procedure, so that neither the researcher nor the participants could determine in advance which class would receive the treatment. Both groups received a pre-test and a post-test in the form of a vocabulary test, but only the Experimental Group received the treatment (X). The treatment was administered over 12 meetings, with each meeting lasting approximately 30–45 minutes and conducted once or twice a week during regular class hours. Three storytelling themes containing moral messages were used across the sessions, namely The Crying Stone, The Ant and the Grasshopper, and The Ant and the Dove. In each meeting, the puppets were used to physically represent the characters in the story: the researcher and teacher moved and voiced the puppets to act out the characters' dialogue, actions, and emotional

expressions while narrating the story, thereby allowing the students to see, hear, and interact with the characters directly. The Control Group received the same three story themes over the same number of meetings, but the stories were delivered using picture media instead of puppets, so that the only difference between the two groups was the storytelling medium used. The influence of the treatment was examined using t-test statistical analysis. If there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups, then the treatment administered can be considered to have a significant effect (Candika Pakaya et al., 2023). In this study, the Experimental Group's results indicated that the use of puppets as a medium for delivering a story is a useful technique for enhancing early English literacy.

The study was conducted at TK Aisiyiah Bustanul Athfal Lhong Raya, Banda Aceh City. The total population of the research was 121 students, divided into two classes (Class A and Class B). In determining the sample of the research, the researcher used total sampling of the two intact classes as the sample frame, with the assignment of each class to the experimental or control condition determined through simple random sampling.

Subject or Participant (take one term)

The subject of the study is the students of Class B1 (24 students) as The Control Group and the students of Class B3 (24 students) as the Experimental Group.

Data Collection

The data of this research is collected by distributed Pre-test and Post-test Vocabulary tests consisting of 20 items which are measuring English word recognition, comprehension, and usage. Tests included picture-word matching, simple sentence completion, and basic vocabulary identification tasks. On the other hands, the reseracher also used observation sheet contains structured observation during storytelling sessions using observation sheets to record student engagement, participation levels, and behavioural responses. Next, interviews is used to gather information of qualitative insights about their learning experiences and preferences.

Data Collecting Technique

The data of research is collected by using three instruments, that are test (pre-test and post-test), Interview (list of questions related student's respond to the use of Puppet in storytelling activities) and observation sheets.

Data Analysis Technique

Quantitative analysis employed paired sample t-tests to compare pre-test and post-test scores within groups and independent t-tests for between-group comparisons. Qualitative analysis involved thematic analysis of observation notes and interview transcripts.

Hypotheses:

- H_0 : No significant difference in English literacy before and after using puppet media in storytelling activities

- H_a : Significant difference exists in English literacy before and after using puppet media in storytelling activities

Statistical significance was set at $\alpha = 0.05$, with t-table value 2.0686 (df = 23).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Quantitative Findings

The paired sample t-test analysis revealed significant improvements in the experimental group's English literacy scores. Pre-test results showed a mean score of 43.33 (SD = 12.74), while post-test results demonstrated a mean score of 64.58 (SD = 7.79). The calculated t-value of -9.676 exceeded the critical t-table value of 2.0686, with significance level $p = 0.000 < 0.05$, leading to H_a acceptance. The following table categorizes the specific AI tools integrated into the curriculum and their pedagogical functions.

Table 2. Paired Sample T-Test Results

Measure	Pre-test	Post-test	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value
Experimental Group	43.33 ± 12.74	64.58 ± 7.79	-21.25	-9.676	0.000*

*Significant at $p < 0.05$

The effect size calculation (Cohen's $d = -1.975$) indicated a large practical significance, suggesting that puppet media implementation in storytelling activities substantially improved students' English literacy performance. Control group analysis showed minimal improvement from pre-test ($M = 41.20$, $SD = 11.30$) to post-test ($M = 43.85$, $SD = 12.10$), with no statistically significant difference ($t = -1.234$, $p = 0.231$).

Qualitative Findings

Based on observation results indicates that Students in the experimental group demonstrated increased attention span during storytelling sessions (average 15-20 minutes vs. 8-12 minutes in control group). Puppet media facilitated interactive participation, with 85% of students actively responding to puppet character questions compared to 45% in picture-based sessions. The following are student's engagement indicators:

- Spontaneous vocabulary usage during free play
- Increased willingness to repeat English words
- Enhanced emotional connection to story content
- Improved retention of story sequences

Meanwhile result of interview shown that students expressed preference for puppet-mediated stories, describing them as "more alive" and "easier to remember." Many students began incorporating English vocabulary learned through puppet stories into daily conversations.

Discussion

The significant improvement in English literacy scores supports the effectiveness of puppet media in storytelling activities for early childhood English language learning. The 21.25-point mean increase represents substantial vocabulary acquisition and comprehension enhancement within the intervention period. These findings align with previous research demonstrating storytelling's effectiveness in vocabulary development

(Abasi & Soori, 2014). The puppet medium's three-dimensional, interactive nature likely contributed to enhanced engagement and retention through multi-sensory learning experiences. The large effect size (Cohen's $d = -1.975$) indicates practical significance beyond statistical significance, suggesting real-world educational impact.

The qualitative findings support quantitative results, revealing increased engagement, attention span, and spontaneous vocabulary usage. Puppet media's ability to create emotional connections between learners and content likely facilitated deeper processing and better retention, consistent with research on emotional engagement in learning (Xiao et al., 2023). The minimal improvement in the control group suggests that traditional picture-based instruction, while maintaining some effectiveness, lacks the interactive and engaging qualities that puppets provide. This supports the theoretical framework emphasizing multi-sensory, interactive learning approaches for early childhood education.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study demonstrates the significant effectiveness of puppet media in storytelling activities for enhancing early childhood students' English literacy. The experimental group showed substantial improvement in vocabulary acquisition and comprehension compared to the control group using traditional picture-based instruction. Both quantitative analysis (21.25-point mean increase, $p < 0.001$) and qualitative observations (increased engagement, attention span, and spontaneous vocabulary usage) support puppet media's superiority in facilitating English language learning among kindergarten students. The large effect size and high statistical significance indicate both practical and theoretical importance for early childhood English education. Puppet-mediated storytelling creates engaging, interactive learning environments that promote vocabulary retention, comprehension development, and positive attitudes toward English language learning.

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