

The Effectiveness of Storytelling Methods on the Empathy Skills of Young Children

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Abstract

Empathy is an important aspect of early childhood social and emotional development that needs to be stimulated from an early age. One learning method that is considered effective in fostering empathy is storytelling. This study aims to analyse the effectiveness of the storytelling method on the empathy skills of early childhood. This study uses a quantitative approach with an experimental design, involving early childhood as the research subjects. Data were collected through structured observation and empathy skills assessment instruments, then analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical analysis techniques. The results showed that the application of the storytelling method had a positive and significant effect on improvements in i) the ability to understand other people's feelings, ii) showing concern, iii) responding to social situations more empathetically, iv) the ability to express feelings verbally, and v) the ability to relate the moral values of stories to everyday behaviour. Thus, the storytelling method has been proven to be effective and can be used as an alternative learning strategy in developing empathy skills in early childhood education.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood, spanning the ages of 0 to 6, is universally recognized as a critical period in establishing the foundations of human development (Kristuana et al., 2024). During this phase, cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development occurs rapidly, forming the foundation for an individual's future abilities and characteristics (Lirmaga, 2017; Syukron & Yudha, 2025). Among the various crucial aspects of development, social and emotional skills play a crucial role in determining the quality of an individual's interactions with their environment. One key component of social and emotional skills is empathy, the ability to understand, feel, and respond appropriately to the emotions of others.

Empathy is not just about understanding others' feelings; it also involves the ability to put oneself in another person's shoes, see the world from their perspective, and feel what they feel (Aminah et al., 2025). This ability enables individuals to establish healthy and meaningful relationships, interact positively in groups, resolve conflicts peacefully, and contribute to overall social well-being.

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Children with strong empathy skills tend to adapt more easily to new environments, have more harmonious relationships with peers and adults, and are better able to overcome challenges and difficulties in life (Budiarti et al., 2022; Windira & Loka, 2025). However, empathy is not innate. Children need to learn and develop this ability through various experiences and interactions with their surroundings. Families, schools, and communities play an important role in facilitating the development of empathy in early childhood. Various learning strategies and methods can be used to help children develop empathy skills, one of which is through or telling stories (Syamsuardi et al., 2022; Putri et al., 2025).

Storytelling is the art of telling a story in a way that is interesting and involves the emotions of the listener. Through, children can be exposed to a variety of characters, situations, and emotions they may never have experienced directly (Mahmodi et al., 2024; Apriyanti et al., 2025). They can learn how characters in stories overcome problems, show compassion, or deal with conflict. This process helps children develop a deeper understanding of others' feelings and how to respond appropriately. Furthermore, can also stimulate children's imagination, creativity, and critical thinking skills (Surya & Pratiwi, 2024; Afriani & Retnimar, 2025). Although it has great potential as an effective learning medium to improve empathy skills in early childhood, research on this topic is still limited, especially in Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to further examine the influence of in improving empathy skills in early childhood. This research is expected to provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of as an intervention to improve empathy skills in early childhood, as well as providing practical implications for the development of more effective and relevant learning strategies to help children grow into caring, responsible individuals who are able to interact positively with the world around them (Nugraha, 2017; Fadillah & Fitri, 2025).

In this context, or storytelling has great potential as an effective learning medium. Not only conveying a story, but also involving emotions, imagination, and understanding of different characters and situations (Irma et al., 2022). Through storytelling, children can be exposed to a variety of perspectives and emotions they may never have experienced directly. They can learn how characters in stories overcome problems, show compassion, or navigate conflict. This process helps children develop a deeper understanding of others' feelings and how to respond appropriately (Limarga, 2017; Nurfazrina et al., 2020; Sumiati & Tirtayani, 2021). This study aims to further examine the influence of in improving empathy skills in early childhood. By understanding how can contribute to the development of empathy, we can develop more effective and relevant learning strategies to help children grow into caring, responsible individuals who are able to interact positively with the world around them.

METHODS

This study used a quantitative approach with an experimental design, which aimed to determine the effectiveness of the storytelling method on the empathy skills of early childhood. The experimental design was chosen because it allowed researchers to objectively measure the effects of the treatment by comparing results before and after the implementation of the storytelling method. The research subjects were early childhood children aged 4-6 years in an Early Childhood Education (PAUD) institution. Subjects were selected using a purposive sampling technique, considering that children are at an active stage of social-emotional development and allow for direct observation of empathy (Rieffe et al., 2010; Spinrad & Gal, 2018; Engkizar et al., 2022; Woolrych et al., 2024). The number of research subjects was adjusted to the class conditions and characteristics of the institution where the research was conducted. The research procedure was carried out in several

stages, namely preparation, implementation, and evaluation. In the preparation stage, researchers developed a storytelling-based learning plan and prepared stories appropriate to the age and developmental context of the children. The implementation phase was carried out by applying the storytelling method in a structured manner in learning activities (Meidina et al., 2018; Astuti et al., 2020; Li et al., 2023). Furthermore, the evaluation phase was carried out by measuring children's empathy skills after the storytelling method was implemented. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical analysis techniques. Descriptive analysis was used to describe the level of children's empathy skills, while inferential analysis was used to test the effectiveness of the storytelling method on early childhood empathy skills. The results of the data analysis were then used as a basis for drawing research conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research results show that the application of the storytelling method has a positive impact on improving empathy skills in early childhood. Based on the results of structured observations and empathy assessments, the following main findings were obtained. A more detailed explanation of forms of empathy in early childhood can be seen in figure 1.

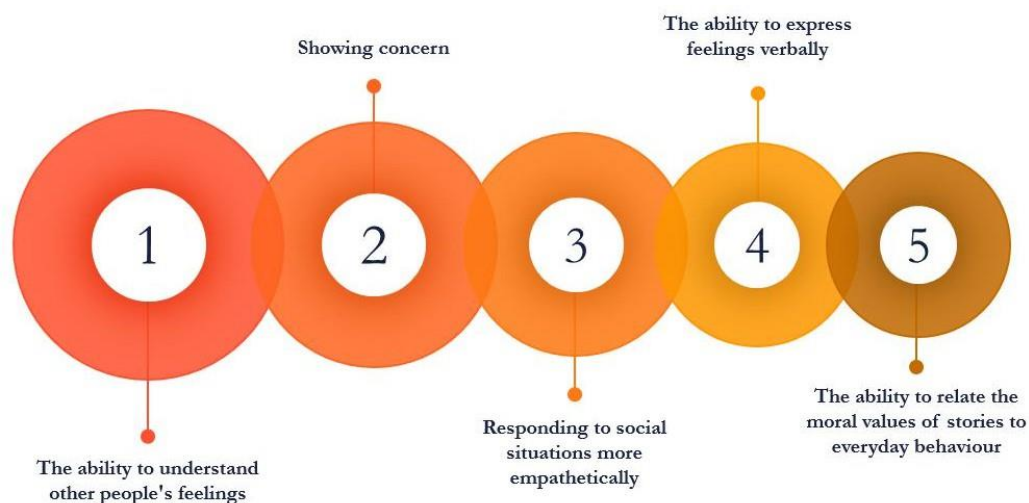


Fig 1. forms of empathy in early childhood

The Ability to Understand Other People's Feelings

The results of the study showed that children experienced an increase in their ability to understand others' feelings after applying the storytelling method. Children were better able to recognize emotions such as happiness, fear, or anger experienced by story characters and relate them to their daily experiences (Bawono et al., 2025). Theoretically, this finding is in line with Catton's (1992) opinion, which emphasizes that awareness of one's own and others' emotions is the foundation of emotional intelligence and empathy. Storytelling allows children to project themselves into story characters, thereby improving their social perspective and emotional understanding. Eisenberg (2006) also emphasized the importance of social interaction and language in children's emotional development. Storytelling activities accompanied by reflective discussions help children name and understand emotions, building deeper empathetic understanding (Harianja & Nurihsan, 2016; Dheasari, 2020). Furthermore, previous research by Kahrman et al., (2016) showed that storytelling is effective in improving children's ability to recognize and understand others' feelings, because children learn through observation, imagination, and reflection on the social situations presented in the story.

Showing Concern

Research findings also show an increase in children's ability to demonstrate concern for their peers, for example, by helping friends in difficulty, sharing toys, and providing verbal and nonverbal support. This behavior reflects the internalization of empathy values learned from stories. Theoretically, Bandura's (1977) social learning theory emphasizes that children learn through observing and imitating behavioral models. Story characters who demonstrate caring behavior and help others become models that children internalize. Research by Geer et al. (2000) also found that exposure to fictional stories can increase prosocial behavior because children learn to understand others' feelings and imitate the positive actions displayed by the characters. Storytelling is an effective means of instilling caring values because children not only hear stories but are also invited to discuss and reflect on the characters' actions, so that caring behavior begins to emerge in everyday social interactions (Finlay et al., 2006; Suryani et al., 2020; Yanti & Tirtayani, 2023; Bunayyah et al., 2025).

Responding to Social Situations More Empathetically

Research results show that children are able to respond to situations more empathetically, for example, in resolving simple conflicts, sharing, or waiting their turn with a more positive attitude. This suggests that storytelling not only improves cognitive understanding of emotions but also significantly changes children's social behavior. Barliner & Masterson (2015) explain that the ability to respond empathetically is an indicator of mature social skills in early childhood. Through stories that include conflict and resolution, children learn to recognize others' feelings, predict the consequences of actions, and adjust their social responses (Koiyula et al., 2020; Bagherian & Golmohommadian, 2022). These findings are also consistent with research by Feshbach (2009), which shows that storytelling improves children's ability to navigate social situations empathetically and adaptively.

The Ability to Express Feelings Verbally

Research shows that children who participate in storytelling activities are better able to verbally express their feelings, both related to the characters and their personal experiences. Post-story discussions provide a space for children to name emotions and express opinions, which in turn improves emotional awareness and communication skills (Maranatha et al., 2024; Odumegwu et al., 2022; Tetrawan et al., 2024). Tonks et al., (2009) emphasize that language is a key tool in children's cognitive and socio-emotional development. By expressing feelings verbally, children learn to articulate emotions, develop social skills, and strengthen empathy. Strelkova's (2021) assessment shows that storytelling activities accompanied by discussions encourage children to express emotions, thereby improving empathic understanding and emotion regulation.

The Ability to Relate the Moral Values of Stories to Everyday Behaviour

Recent research shows that children begin to associate moral values from stories with everyday behavior, such as imitating honesty, helping, and caring for others. This suggests that storytelling not only enhances cognitive and emotional understanding but also influences decision-making and real-life actions in children's social lives (Huda et al., 2022; Surya & Pratiwi, 2024; Ciesielska et al., 2025). According to Aksoy & Baran (2021), internalizing moral values through stories is an effective strategy for character development in early childhood. Another study by Kayili & Erdal (2021) also found that storytelling facilitates the learning of social values that can be applied in everyday life, enabling children to connect knowledge with real-life social practices.

Thus, the consistent application of the storytelling method has been proven to increase the empathy skills of early childhood through five indicators, namely

understanding other people's feelings, caring, empathetic social responses, verbal expression of feelings, and internalization of moral values.

CONCLUSION

Based on the literature review and previous discussion, it can be concluded that the use of the method has a positive influence on early childhood empathy. Through the moral values contained in stories, children can understand and learn from the stories, then apply them to their daily lives. This process transforms negative behavior into positive behavior that reflects empathy, thus proven effective as a method to improve empathy skills in early childhood.

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