



The effectiveness of storytelling in improving language literacy in children aged 5–6 years to support primary school readiness

Yesi Novitasari   ^{1*}, Sean Marta Efastris  ¹, Suharni  ²

¹ Universitas Lancang Kuning, Pekanbaru, Indonesia, 28265

² Universitas Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia, 43600

Article info	Abstract
Keywords: early childhood, language literacy, primary school readiness, storytelling.	This study examines the effect of storytelling on the language and literacy skills of children aged 5–6 years, as a foundation for school readiness. Language literacy is an essential component of school readiness because it supports children's ability to understand instructions, communicate effectively, participate in classroom interactions, and engage in early learning activities when entering primary school. However, numerous preschool children still experience difficulties with listening, speaking, vocabulary, retelling, early reading, and early writing. Therefore, effective learning strategies are needed to strengthen children's language literacy before transitioning to formal education. This study employs a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent control group design. The participants consisted of 20 children aged 5–6 years from TK Negeri Pembina V Pekanbaru, divided into an experimental group (n = 10) and a control group (n = 10). Data were collected using an observation sheet comprising 18 items covering six language literacy indicators: listening, speaking, vocabulary, retelling, early reading, and early writing. The experimental group received storytelling-based instruction, while the control group participated in conventional learning activities. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and an independent-samples t-test after confirming the assumptions of normality and homogeneity. The results reveal that the experimental group achieved a substantially higher mean score (M = 78.50, SD = 3.37) than the control group (M = 31.00, SD = 5.16). The Independent Samples t-test indicates a statistically significant difference between the two groups (t = -24.349, p < .001), demonstrating that storytelling had a significant positive effect on children's language literacy development. The findings underscore that storytelling is a potentially effective pedagogical strategy for developing language literacy and strengthening school readiness in early childhood education.

* Corresponding Author.

E-mail address: yesinovitasari@unilak.ac.id (Yesi Novitasari)

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1. Introduction

The ages of 5–6 years mark a critical transition from Early Childhood Education to primary school, requiring children to be prepared linguistically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally (Suyadi, 2017; Morrison, 2015). During this phase, early childhood education plays a vital role in shaping children's readiness for formal learning at the primary school level. One essential aspect of school readiness is language and early literacy skills, as these relate to a child's ability to understand instructions, communicate, and engage in early academic activities (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Blair, 2002). Therefore, effective and meaningful learning is necessary to help children develop language literacy as the foundation for readiness to enter primary school.

Literacy is understood not only as the ability to read and write but also to listen, speak, think critically, solve problems, and process information in daily life (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2021). In 21st-century education, literacy is one of the key competencies closely linked to children's language development (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Longitudinal research indicates that oral language skills in early childhood are significantly associated with reading ability and academic achievement throughout schooling (Dickinson, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2010; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). However, children's literacy skills in Indonesia still face various challenges, including limited vocabulary, limited ability to express ideas, and a lack of confidence in communication. These conditions can affect children's readiness to participate in formal learning in primary school, particularly their ability to understand instructions, engage in classroom communication, and participate in early academic activities. Therefore, the development of language literacy from an early age should be achieved through active, meaningful learning that is appropriate to children's characteristics. In this study, storytelling is viewed not only as a teaching method in early childhood education but also as a pedagogical strategy to strengthen language literacy as the foundation for school readiness and to support children's successful transition to primary school. Therefore, learning strategies are needed that not only develop children's language skills but also support their readiness to enter the formal learning environment of primary school. One strategy with the potential to meet these objectives is storytelling, as it integrates listening, speaking, comprehension, and the communication of ideas into a single, holistic learning experience.

One effective strategy for developing children's language literacy is storytelling. Miller and Pennycuff (2008) state that storytelling can enhance children's vocabulary, speaking skills, story comprehension, and early writing skills. Storytelling helps children build language structures through narration, dialogue, and the expression of ideas (Isbell et al., 2004). Through storytelling, children not only hear stories but also learn to express ideas, understand plotlines, and practice oral communication, all of which are essential components of language literacy. Other research indicates that storytelling and story-acting activities have a significant impact on the development of oral language and school readiness in young children (Nicolopoulou et al., 2015). Children who are actively engaged in storytelling activities demonstrate improvements in narrative skills, vocabulary, and early academic participation (Roskos, Christie, & Richgels, 2010). This indicates that storytelling is not merely an entertainment activity but a pedagogical strategy that can develop children's language literacy, supporting their readiness for learning in primary school.

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 shows that Indonesian students' reading literacy skills remain below the OECD average. The OECD (2023) reports that only about 25% of Indonesian students achieve the minimum proficiency level (Level 2) in reading, compared with the OECD average of 74%. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening literacy from an early age as the foundation for academic readiness and learning

success in subsequent levels of education. In line with this situation, observations at TK Negeri Pembina V Pekanbaru among 5–6-year-old children reveal ongoing language and literacy challenges, including an inability to retell story content coherently, hesitation in expressing opinions, limited vocabulary, and low self-confidence in communication. Additionally, the implemented learning methods lack variety and do not optimally utilize approaches that actively engage children in language use. Therefore, a learning strategy is needed to strengthen language literacy and support school readiness, such as storytelling activities that enable 5–6-year-olds to develop listening skills, express ideas, and build meaningful understanding in preparation for entering primary school.

Various studies have shown that storytelling effectively supports children's language development; however, most focus on specific aspects, such as vocabulary acquisition, speaking skills, or story comprehension (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008; Isbell et al., 2004). Meanwhile, research examining the role of storytelling in the comprehensive development of language literacy and its relationship to readiness for primary school remains relatively limited, particularly among 5–6-year-old children in the transition phase from early childhood education to primary school (Nicolopoulou et al., 2015; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Furthermore, storytelling in early childhood education is still generally implemented conventionally and focuses more on listening to stories, thereby limiting children's opportunities to express ideas, build understanding, and reconstruct the story's content. Based on these gaps, this study aims to examine the effectiveness of storytelling in developing language literacy as part of school readiness among 5–6-year-old children at TK Negeri Pembina V in Pekanbaru. The novelty of this study lies in positioning storytelling as a pedagogical strategy to comprehensively develop language literacy and support children's readiness to meet the demands of formal learning in primary school. Thus, this study is expected to provide empirical insights for the development of teaching practices in early childhood education and to strengthen the foundation for children's successful transition to primary school.

2. Literature review

2.1. The concept of storytelling in children's language literacy

Storytelling is a pedagogical strategy that has long been used in early childhood education to stimulate language and literacy development. Storytelling is the practice of conveying messages, ideas, or experiences through oral or visual narratives that include narration, dialogue, and expression (Isbell et al., 2004). In the context of early childhood education, storytelling serves not only as entertainment but also as a meaningful learning tool to develop children's language, cognitive, social, and emotional skills. According to Miller and Pennycuff (2008), storytelling plays a crucial role in enhancing vocabulary, sentence structure, narrative comprehension, and the ability to express ideas verbally. Through stories, children learn to recognize language patterns, event sequences, cause-and-effect relationships, and the use of words in meaningful contexts. This aligns with the view of Nicolopoulou et al. (2015), who state that storytelling and story-acting activities can strengthen children's oral language and literacy readiness by engaging them in actively constructing the story's meaning.

Storytelling is also closely linked to the concept of emergent literacy. Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) explain that emergent literacy encompasses vocabulary development, phonological awareness, story comprehension, and knowledge of print symbols. Storytelling activities stimulate all these aspects through listening to stories, discussing them, asking questions about their content, and attempting to represent them in oral or early written form. Thus, storytelling

serves as a bridge between oral language and reading and writing literacy. In early childhood education, effective storytelling is not one-way but interactive. Isbell et al. (2004) emphasize that children need to be involved in the process of asking questions, predicting the plot, retelling the story, and playing character roles to develop their language skills optimally. This active involvement helps children develop listening, speaking, and comprehension skills, which form the foundation of language literacy. In addition, storytelling contributes to school readiness. Dickinson, Golinkoff, and Hirsh-Pasek (2010) state that the quality of language interactions in early childhood is a key determinant of a child's success in reading and learning in primary school. Children who are accustomed to storytelling activities demonstrate better communication skills, greater self-confidence, and readiness for early academic learning. This is reinforced by Roskos, Christie, and Richgels (2010), who explain that storytelling supports children's narrative development, text comprehension, and motivation to learn.

From a pedagogical perspective, storytelling is also consistent with child-centered learning. Through stories, children not only receive information but also construct knowledge through experience, imagination, and linguistic reflection (Suyadi, 2017). Stories help children connect personal experiences with linguistic symbols, making the literacy process more contextual and meaningful. Thus, storytelling can be understood as a strategic approach to developing early childhood literacy, encompassing listening, speaking, early reading, and early writing skills. Integrating storytelling into early childhood education not only enhances language skills but also supports children's readiness for primary school by strengthening communication, narrative comprehension, and confidence in learning.

2.2. The relationship between children's language literacy and readiness to continue primary school

Language literacy is a key foundation in preparing children to transition to primary school. During the transition from early childhood education to primary school, children are expected not only to recognize letters and words but also to use language as a tool for thinking, communicating, and social interaction in a more formal learning environment. Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) state that receptive and expressive language skills in preschool-age children are strong predictors of a child's success in early school learning. In line with this, Morgan et al. (2015) demonstrate that vocabulary development and story comprehension are directly linked to school readiness, particularly in understanding instructions and early academic tasks.

School readiness in preschoolers is not merely defined as academic readiness; it also encompasses linguistic, cognitive, and social-emotional readiness, as well as the child's ability to self-regulate to meet the demands of learning in primary school. Blair and Raver (2015) emphasize that a school-ready child can communicate effectively, control emotions and behavior, follow classroom rules, and actively engage in learning activities. Thus, school readiness is a multidimensional construct that cannot be separated from a child's language development. Furthermore, Dickinson and Neuman (2006) explain that early literacy encompasses vocabulary mastery, story comprehension, phonological awareness, and oral communication skills. Children with strong language literacy skills will find it easier to understand teachers' instructions, express their opinions, ask questions, and actively participate in classroom activities. This indicates that language literacy not only impacts academic aspects but also contributes to children's social and emotional readiness as they enter the more formal learning environment of primary school. Lonigan, Burgess, and Schatschneider (2018) emphasize that early literacy skills such as listening, speaking, recognizing letter symbols, and early writing are significantly correlated with school readiness and reading achievement in the

early years of primary school. Children who are exposed to a rich literacy environment from an early age tend to have greater self-confidence, adapt more readily to classroom routines, and be better prepared to meet the academic and social demands of school.

Conceptually, storytelling, language literacy, and school readiness are three interrelated components. Through storytelling activities, children have the opportunity to listen, comprehend meaning, expand their vocabulary, express ideas, and reconstruct the story's content. These activities contribute to the development of language literacy, which includes listening, speaking, early reading, and early writing skills (Isbell et al., 2004; Miller & Pennycuff, 2008). Optimally developed language literacy further supports children's ability to understand instructions, communicate effectively, engage in social interactions, and participate in classroom learning activities. These skills are key components of school readiness, particularly in the academic, communication, social, and emotional domains (Blair & Raver, 2015; Mashburn et al., 2008). Thus, storytelling can be understood as a learning strategy that strengthens language literacy, ultimately contributing to children's readiness for primary school. The dimensions of children's school readiness in language literacy include listening, speaking, vocabulary, retelling, early reading, and early writing. It is understood that the literacy and language readiness of 5–6-year-old children reflects a comprehensive readiness, not merely the ability to recognize letters or engage in early writing. Each indicator from listening, speaking, vocabulary mastery, retelling skills, to early reading and writing constitutes a foundational competency that is mutually integrated in supporting a child's successful transition to primary school. Mastery of language literacy enables children to understand instructional guidance, communicate ideas, engage in positive social interactions, and adapt to the more formal learning culture of primary school. Thus, the school-readiness dimension in language literacy serves not only as an academic prerequisite but also as a foundation for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. This framework also serves as an operational basis for systematically measuring and developing preschool children's school readiness through planned, meaningful language and literacy stimulation in early childhood education settings.

3. Method

3.1 Research design

This study employs a quasi-experimental, non-equivalent control-group design because the researcher is unable to randomize subjects fully. The study was conducted at TK Negeri Pembina V in Pekanbaru, involving 20 children aged 5–6 years who were selected through purposive sampling based on similar age and developmental-level characteristics. The research subjects were divided into two pre-existing groups: the experimental group ($n = 10$) and the control group ($n = 10$). The experimental group received instruction using the storytelling method, while the control group followed the teacher's standard teaching methods. A quasi-experimental design was selected because it allows the researcher to test the effect of the treatment on existing groups without strictly randomizing the subjects (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, the relatively small sample size and the fact that the participants came from a single educational institution constitute limitations of this study; consequently, the generalizability of the findings is also limited to the study's scope. The research design structure is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research design structure

Groups	Pre-test	Treatment	Post-test
Experiment	O ₁	X (Storytelling)	O ₂
Control	O ₁	– (Conventional learning)	O ₂

Description:

O₁ = Pre-test of Language Literacy

X = Treatment using the storytelling method

O₂ = Post-test of language literacy

Table 2. Research instrument

Dimensions of Readiness	Indicators	Item Numbers	Number of Items	Operational Description Children Aged 5–6 Years	Theoretical Sources
Language & Literacy Readiness	Listening	1–3	3	The child can pay attention to the teacher's story/instructions and understand the message.	Snow et al. (1998); Lonigan et al. (2018)
	Speaking	4–6	3	The child can express ideas, ask questions, and answer verbally with confidence.	Dickinson & Neuman (2006)
	Vocabulary	7–9	3	The child has a sufficient vocabulary for classroom communication.	Morgan et al. (2015)
	Retelling	10–12	3	The child can retell the story's content in logical order.	Nicolopoulou et al. (2015)
	Early Reading	13–15	3	The child recognizes letters, initial sounds, and simple symbols.	Lonigan et al. (2018)
	Early Writing	16–18	3	The child can write their name and simple symbols.	Whitehurst & Lonigan (1998)

This research instrument was developed to measure children's language literacy skills, as one aspect of school readiness. The development of the instrument began with a theoretical review of language and literacy development in early childhood, covering six key indicators: listening skills, speaking skills, vocabulary mastery, retelling, early reading, and early writing. Each indicator was subsequently broken down into several observation items that could be observed during the learning process. The instrument consists of an observation sheet completed by teachers and researchers, based on observations of children's behaviors and abilities during learning activities. The instrument comprises 18 observation items derived from the six language literacy indicators, with each indicator represented by three statements that reflect children's actual classroom behaviors. The research instrument is presented in Table 2. Assessment was conducted using a four-level rating scale based on the Child Development Achievement Standards, namely, (1) Not Yet Developed, (2) Beginning to Develop, (3) Developing as Expected, and (4) Developing Very Well.

3.2 Research procedure

This study was conducted systematically in three main phases: preparation, implementation, and evaluation, as shown in Figure 1.

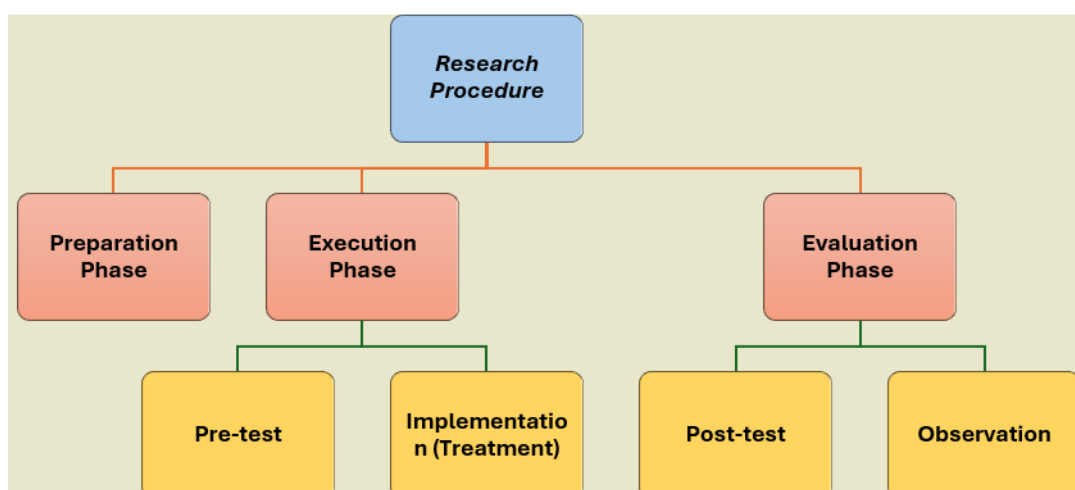


Figure 1. Research procedure

3.2.1 Preparation phase

The researchers conducted several preliminary activities, including observations at TK Negeri Pembina V Pekanbaru to assess the children's initial language literacy skills and the teaching practices typically employed by the teachers. Furthermore, the researchers developed a learning scenario using the storytelling method for the experimental class, while the control class continued to use conventional teaching methods. The researchers also developed a research instrument, a language literacy observation sheet for the children. This instrument was developed based on literacy indicators and early childhood school readiness. Before use, the instrument was validated through expert judgment by early childhood education lecturers and experienced teachers to ensure the clarity of the items and the appropriateness of the instrument's content. Subsequently, the researchers identified the experimental and control groups and established a research implementation schedule, including the timing of the pre-test and post-test.

3.2.2 Execution phase

During the implementation phase, the research activities were conducted in the classroom. The procedure began with administering a pre-test to the experimental and control groups, using an observation sheet to assess the children's early language and literacy skills. After the pre-test, the researcher implemented the treatment. The experimental group received instruction using the storytelling method, while the control group followed the teacher's standard teaching methods without any special intervention. The storytelling sessions were conducted through the following steps:

- Preliminary activities, teachers build motivation and relate children's prior knowledge to the story theme.
- In core storytelling activities, teachers deliver stories expressively, using intonation, movement, visual media, and interactive involvement of children.
- In interactive discussions, children are encouraged to answer questions, predict the storyline, name characters, and express their opinions.
- In the retelling activity, children are guided to retell the story in simple language.
- Literacy follow-up activities, such as recognizing letters, matching words to pictures, drawing, or writing simple symbols based on the story content.

The treatment was delivered over several sessions to ensure consistent, optimal stimulation of children's literacy skills. During the process, the researchers observed the children's involvement and development.

3.2.3 Evaluation phase

After the intervention, the researchers administered a post-test to the experimental and control groups using the same observation sheet as in the pre-test. The purpose of the post-test was to determine changes in the children's language literacy skills following the storytelling instruction. The pre-test and post-test data were subsequently collected and statistically analyzed to identify differences in skills before and after the intervention, as well as differences between the experimental and control groups. The analysis results were used to test the research hypothesis and to draw conclusions about the impact of the storytelling method on language literacy and school readiness in early childhood.

4. Results

This study aims to analyze the effect of the storytelling method on the language literacy skills of 5–6-year-old children at TK Negeri Pembina V Pekanbaru. The research design was quasi-experimental with a non-equivalent control group. Data were collected through pre-tests and post-tests using language literacy observation sheets for both the experimental and control groups.

4.1 Description of children's language literacy skills data

The results of the descriptive statistical analysis indicate a difference in children's language literacy skills between the control and experimental groups following the instruction. The control group had a mean score of 31.00 and a standard deviation of 5.16, while the experimental group had a mean score of 78.50 and a standard deviation of 3.37. These data indicate that the children's language literacy skills in the experimental group were higher than those in the control group.

Table 3 shows a difference in language literacy skills between the experimental and control groups. Descriptively, the group that receives instruction using the storytelling method reveals better results than the group that receives conventional instruction. These findings are further tested through inferential analysis to determine the significance of the observed differences.

Table 3. Statistical description of children's language literacy

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Control	10	31.00	5.16
Experimental	10	78.50	3.37

4.2 Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted to determine the effect of the storytelling method on early childhood literacy in supporting children's readiness for primary school. Data analysis used an Independent Samples t-test to assess differences in means between the experimental group, which received instruction using the storytelling method, and the control group, which received conventional instruction. Through this analysis, it can be determined whether the storytelling method has a significant effect on children's language literacy skills. Before conducting the hypothesis test, prerequisite tests were performed, including normality and homogeneity tests,

to ensure that the data met the assumptions for parametric statistics. The normality test results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Normality test results

		Tests of Normality					
Classes		Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Results	1.00	.181	10	.200*	.895	10	.191
	2.00	.272	10	.305	.802	10	.105

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Based on the Shapiro-Wilk normality test, the significance values are 0.191 and 0.105 for Group 1 and Group 2, respectively. Both values are greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$), indicating that the data in each group are normally distributed. The normality assessment in this study is based on the Shapiro-Wilk test, given the relatively small sample size in each group ($n = 10$). The Shapiro-Wilk test is recommended for small samples because it is more accurate at detecting normality than other normality tests. Thus, the test results indicate that the research data meet the assumption of normality, a prerequisite for using parametric statistics. The homogeneity test results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Homogeneity test results

Test of Homogeneity of Variances			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
2.011	1	18	.173

Table 6. Results of the Independent Samples t-Test

		Independent Samples Test							
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
Results	Equal variances assumed	2.011	.173	-24.349	18	.000	-47.50000	1.95078	-51.59844 -43.40156
	Equal variances not assumed			-24.349	15.502	.000	-47.50000	1.95078	-51.64631 -43.35369

A homogeneity test is conducted using Levene's Test to determine whether the variances of the data in the experimental and control groups are equal. Based on the test results, a Levene's Statistic value of 2.011 yields a significance level (Sig.) of 0.173. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$), the variances of the data in both groups are homogeneous. These results indicate that there is no significant difference in variance between the experimental and control groups. Thus, the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance have been met, allowing the parametric Independent Samples t-test to proceed to test for differences in language literacy ability between the two groups. The results of the Independent Samples t-test are presented in Table 6.

The results of the independent samples t-test demonstrate a t-value of -24.349 with 18 degrees of freedom (df) and a two-tailed significance level (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.000. A significance level smaller than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in children's language literacy skills between the experimental and control groups after the intervention is administered. Thus, the observed difference is not due to chance but rather the result of the intervention provided during the learning process. The Mean Difference value of -47.500 indicates a difference of 47.50 points in average scores between the two groups. Meanwhile, the Std. The error difference of 1.951 indicates that the estimated difference in means between groups has a relatively small margin of error; thus, the test results are considered sufficiently accurate.

Based on the results of this analysis, the research hypothesis is accepted. These findings indicate that the storytelling method has a significant impact on young children's language literacy skills. Children who learned through storytelling demonstrated better language literacy skills than those who participated in conventional instruction. These results indicate that the storytelling method is effective in developing various aspects of language literacy, such as listening, speaking, vocabulary mastery, retelling, early reading, and early writing. This improvement in literacy skills also contributes to children's readiness to enter primary school, particularly in communication, language comprehension, and pre-reading and pre-writing skills, which serve as a crucial foundation for academic success.

5. Discussion

The research findings highlight the significant implications of language literacy development for school readiness. In early childhood education, school readiness is not limited to recognizing letters or engaging in early writing; it also includes the capacity to comprehend instructions, express ideas clearly, communicate effectively, and use language as a cognitive tool for learning. These competencies are essential for successful adaptation to formal schooling environments. Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) emphasize that school readiness is closely linked to language readiness, as language is the primary medium through which children access and engage in formal learning. Relevant empirical studies further strengthen this view by demonstrating that early oral language competence is a robust predictor of later academic achievement and school adjustment. Hjetland et al. (2020) found that children with stronger vocabulary and narrative skills in preschool demonstrate significantly higher reading comprehension and academic performance in the early years of primary education. Similarly, Piasta et al. (2012) show that increased children's contact with print during shared reading supports literacy achievement and prepares children for formal schooling. In addition, Fitton, McIlraith, and Wood (2018) emphasize that shared book-reading interventions strengthen language and literacy skills through interactive, scaffolded experiences, both of which are essential for successful classroom participation. These findings collectively indicate that language literacy functions not only as a developmental milestone but also as a foundational predictor of school readiness and long-term educational success.

In addition, language literacy plays a fundamental role in supporting children's readiness to enter primary school. Children with well-developed language literacy skills are better prepared to meet the cognitive, linguistic, and social demands of formal education. Language literacy enables children not only to understand instructional language in the classroom but also to actively participate in learning activities that require listening, speaking, reading, and early writing. When children can comprehend instructions, express their ideas clearly, and

communicate effectively with teachers and peers, they are more likely to adapt successfully to the structured learning environment of primary school. Moreover, strong language literacy skills contribute to children's confidence, independence, and active engagement in classroom interactions. Therefore, the development of language literacy in early childhood is a critical foundation for a smooth and successful transition from early childhood education to primary school. This argument is strongly supported by previous empirical studies, which consistently demonstrate that early language and literacy skills are key predictors of school readiness and later academic success. Snow (2010) emphasizes that academic language is central to children's ability to access classroom learning and instructional content. Similarly, Dickinson, Golinkoff, and Hirsh-Pasek (2010) highlight that high-quality early language experiences significantly influence children's later reading achievement and academic performance.

Longitudinal evidence from Hjetland et al. (2020) further confirms that vocabulary knowledge and narrative skills in preschool are strong predictors of reading comprehension and overall academic success in the early years of primary education. In addition, Piasta et al. (2012) demonstrate that increasing children's attention to print during shared reading significantly supports early literacy achievement, which is directly associated with improved school readiness outcomes. Furthermore, Fitton, McIlraith, and Wood (2018) show that shared book-reading interventions can strengthen children's language and literacy outcomes, both of which are essential for classroom participation. Nicolopoulou et al. (2015) also emphasize that narrative and symbolic play activities enhance children's oral language development and vocabulary acquisition. Additional empirical studies strengthen this evidence base: Lever and Sénéchal (2011) found that dialogic reading improves children's oral narrative construction, while Morgan et al. (2015) highlight that early oral vocabulary is associated with stronger academic and behavioral functioning at kindergarten entry. Fitton, McIlraith, and Wood (2018) further demonstrate that guided shared reading supports language and literacy skills, and Hjetland et al. (2020) confirm the long-term predictive role of early oral language in later academic achievement. Collectively, these findings reinforce the idea that language literacy is not only a developmental skill but also a critical determinant of children's readiness to transition to formal schooling.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings can be explained through Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, particularly the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) posits that children's learning is optimally developed through social interaction and scaffolding provided by more knowledgeable others, such as teachers or peers. In the context of language literacy development, storytelling activities serve as a form of guided participation, exposing children to language input slightly above their independent level. Through interactive dialogue, questioning, and retelling activities, teachers provide scaffolding that enables children to gradually internalize new vocabulary, narrative structures, and communicative strategies. This process aligns with the notion that cognitive and language development are socially mediated, and that learning occurs most effectively when children are actively engaged in meaningful social interactions within their ZPD. In this context, children with well-developed listening skills are better able to understand teacher instructions, follow classroom routines, and respond appropriately to learning tasks. Similarly, strong speaking skills and a sufficient vocabulary enable children to express ideas, ask questions, respond to prompts, and interact effectively with teachers and peers.

In addition, narrative and retelling abilities developed through storytelling activities play a central role in helping children organize and reconstruct story content in a coherent and meaningful sequence. These competencies are directly fostered through storytelling-based

learning, which provides children with repeated opportunities to listen, speak, and retell narratives in an interactive and supportive environment. Thus, storytelling not only strengthens children's language literacy but also systematically supports their readiness for primary school by building the linguistic, cognitive, and communicative foundations required for successful transition from early childhood education to primary education.

6. Conclusion and Implications

This study concludes that storytelling is an effective pedagogical strategy for improving children aged 5–6 years' language literacy and supporting their readiness for primary school. The findings show that children who participated in storytelling-based learning achieved substantially higher language literacy scores than those who received conventional instruction, indicating that interactive storytelling strengthens listening, speaking, vocabulary, retelling, early reading, and early writing as integrated foundations of school readiness. In relation to the research purpose and the formulated concern regarding the need for meaningful literacy stimulation before the transition to primary education, this study contributes to early childhood education by providing empirical evidence that storytelling can be positioned not merely as a recreational activity but as a structured, child-centered, and language-rich instructional strategy. Scientifically, this study expands the evidence base on emergent literacy and school readiness by connecting storytelling practices with multidimensional language literacy indicators in the context of Indonesian early childhood education. At the same time, in practice, this implies that teachers should design expressive, interactive, and scaffolded storytelling activities to strengthen children's communication, narrative comprehension, and early academic readiness.

7. Limitation

This study has several limitations. The participants were limited to 20 children from one kindergarten in Pekanbaru and were selected through purposive sampling, so the generalizability of the findings to broader early childhood populations should be interpreted cautiously. The quasi-experimental design used pre-existing groups rather than full random assignment, which may leave uncontrolled differences between groups. The observation-based instrument also depended on teacher and researcher ratings, although expert judgment was used to support content validity. Future studies are encouraged to involve larger and more diverse samples, longer intervention periods, randomized assignment where feasible, and additional data sources such as classroom interaction records, parental reports, or longitudinal follow-up to examine whether gains in language literacy are sustained after children enter primary school.

Credit authorship contribution statement

Yesi Novitasari: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Visualization, Writing – original draft. **Sean Marta Efastri:** Supervision, Validation, Conceptualization. **Suharni:** Data curation, Formal analysis, writing – review & editing.

Declaration of competing interest

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and active involvement, as well as to their parents or guardians for their trust, cooperation, and consent to support their children's participation in the research.

Ethical Declaration

This research was conducted in accordance with ethical research principles. Informed consent was obtained from the parents or guardians of all participating children prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, confidentiality was maintained, and all data were collected and reported honestly without plagiarism or fabrication. The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this research.

Statement of Transfer of Responsibility

The preparer/editor did not receive the necessary data or information required to complete and verify the following sections: data availability statement, acknowledgments, and AI disclosure statement. Accordingly, full academic and legal responsibility for the content and accuracy of these statements is hereby transferred to the authors, including any consequences arising from non-compliance with the target journal's policies and applicable ethical standards.

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