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Interactive Storytelling as a Strategy for Improving the English Vocabulary of Young Children

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ABSTRACT

Background: *Community service is an integrated program that involves professionals with the community where community empowerment is directly applied from the beginning to the end of the program. This study aims to introduce early childhood to speak English by using story telling. This activity was carried out at TPQ Masjid Baitul Baasyir in Tohudan Village Colomadu Karanganyar.*

Methods: *The activity was held at the TPQ Masjid Baitul Ba'asyir Karanganyar from February to May 2025 and was attended by 15 children and their parents. The implementation is divided into three stages: the preparation stage (story development and creation of supporting materials), the implementation stage (pre-test, introduction of storytelling concepts, storytelling sessions, and post-test), and the evaluation stage (comparison of pre-test and post-test results, as well as observation of children's participation).*

Results: *The results of the community service evaluation showed an increase in children's English language skills by 3.07, from a pre-test score of 7.13 to a post-test score of 10.2. This improvement included fluency in speaking, vocabulary mastery, and understanding of story structure. Children and parents also showed enthusiasm and active involvement during the storytelling sessions.*

Conclusion: *The storytelling method has been proven to improve the English language skills of young children. This activity is recommended for wider implementation in non-formal educational institutions such as TPQ and PAUD, and developed through modules and thematic stories, as well as the involvement of parents to strengthen the English language learning process from an early age.*

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INTRODUCTION

The introduction of English to early childhood is very important to be implemented, especially students in kindergarten or early childhood (1). Kindergarten / PAUD students with an age range of 3-6 years are known as the golden age or critical period where child growth and development are quite rapid (2). At this time is the right moment to shape children's intelligence in language. So, providing the best learning facilities to early childhood in the golden age moment is the right choice because this period is called a

critical period where children can absorb information more easily (3). If in the golden age, early childhood is familiar with English, it will be a strong foundation to make English a soft skill to reach a future full of achievements. Because considering the importance of English for the younger generation, especially early childhood, we held English introduction activities at TPQ Masjid Baitul Ba'asyir. As said by the increasing number of parents who want their children to master the English language, more and more PAs are making many PA institutions (4).

English, more and more PAUD institutions or kindergarten schools include English in learning activities every week. However, the school's efforts to implement this activity are less than optimal because students are sometimes indifferent and do not have a high interest in participating in English lessons, even though teachers have implemented several methods to motivate students to learn English. The process of learning a foreign language, including English, requires interesting and fun learning strategies and methods. Therefore, interesting and interactive methods are needed to stimulate and attract students' attention to learn English in a fun way (5).

As said by Child Psychologists, that children are not miniature adults, therefore learning methods for children must be adapted to their development. Because basically children love to learn as long as it is done in fun ways (6). Interesting methods such as storytelling are one of the methods to attract students' interest in learning English (7). The process of learning a foreign language, including English, requires interesting and fun learning strategies and methods (8).

Story telling or storytelling without books is one of the ways or methods that can be used to introduce English to students, especially 5- and 6-year-old children (9). They mentioned that in introducing English to children, it can be done in various ways, one of which is telling short stories or stories telling in English. Story telling is one of the easiest stories telling methods to remember. This method is used to motivate students to be more interested in learning English (10). This community service activity was carried out at the Baitul Baasyir Mosque on the basis that the children's knowledge was still very low. In addition, initial observations also show that children's understanding is still lacking in knowing vocabulary in English.

METHODS

This community service activity is a form of training to introduce English learning to early childhood through story telling activities using picture media. This activity was attended by children who studied at TPQ Masjid Baitul Ba'asyir and was carried out from February to May 2025. This community service activity was carried out in three main stages as follows:

Preparation Stage

The community service team from the Physiotherapy Department of the Surakarta Ministry of Health Polytechnic coordinated with the TPQ Masjid Baitul Ba'asyiir in Tahudan, Colomadu, Karanganyar to determine the schedule of activities, location, and number of students involved. The team also developed a story titled “The Lion and The Wolf” in the form of a simple narrative tailored to the understanding level of young children. Supporting materials included illustrative images, props, story characters, as well as pre-test and post-test questions.

Implementation Stages

The implementation stage includes: (1) Pre-test, which begins with a pre-test to measure the children's level of understanding of vocabulary in 'The Lion and The Wolf,' such as animal names and other vocabulary; (2) Storytelling concept delivery, which involves presenting the material or lecture after the pre-test to provide an overview of the extent to which the children understand the story and some of the vocabulary in 'The Lion and The Wolf'; (3) Storytelling, where participants are presented with the story 'The Lion and The Wolf'. In addition to pictures, teaching aids with pictures of characters in the story are also provided to increase children's curiosity in listening to the story; (4) Post-test, which is an activity that ends with a post-test in the form of questions and answers by mentioning the English words for the pictures shown. This is done to determine the extent of the students' understanding of English, particularly the vocabulary of animal names, as well as some vocabulary found in the story using the storytelling method with visual aids.

Evaluation Stage

This stage involves comparing the results of the pre-test and post-test to assess improvements in participants' understanding of English vocabulary. Evaluation is also based on observations of children's enthusiasm and active participation during the activity. The community service team conducts a brief discussion with TPQ teachers to gather feedback on participants' responses and possibilities for developing or continuing similar activities in the future.

RESULTS

Community service activities carried out at TPQ Masjid Baitul Ba'asyir are carried out to provide English language learning to early childhood, especially to increase vocabulary in English. This community service activity was carried out with the aim of introducing one of the methods that can be used to better attract children's attention and be able to absorb the English learning provided such as the method of telling stories about "*The Lion and The Wolf*" using picture media. his community service activity was attended by 15 children along with their parents, creating a supportive and interactive learning environment.



Figure 1. Parent and Children Participating in a Pre-Test Using a Question-and-Answer Method

The activity begins by conducting a pre-test to measure students' understanding and knowledge in knowing English vocabulary. After the pre-test, students are given material and direction about the core activities that will be carried out, namely story telling using picture media. But before that, the concept of story telling is first explained to participants so that they can clearly understand what will be done during story telling activities.

In the storytelling session, interesting and colorful pictures in accordance with the story being told, namely "*The Lion and The Wolf*" using a projector. So, the children watched the scenes while listening to the story told by the lecturer. Children are very enthusiastic listening to the story while trying to re-mention the English words mentioned such as animal names such as Lion, Wolf, colors, such as forest and evening, adjectives, such as spirit, larger, huge, verbs, such as live, make, take and others.

At the end of the session, Pengabdi made questions from several words that had been mentioned during the storytelling activity and invited the children to answer the questions in English from the word that was asked. To children who can answer correctly are given appreciation by giving applause and souvenirs in the form of beautiful pencils or snackboxes. This is one way to motivate other children to participate in answering other questions asked. This story telling activity was able to improve the understanding of vocabulary of the children of Baitul Ba'asyiir Mosque. In addition, by using storytelling media, children can easily understand the opposite word of some vocabulary in English. Not only that, learning media using the storytelling method is also able to increase children's motivation in learning English.

Table 1. Pre-Test Results of Early Childhood English Introduction at TPQ Masjid Baitul Ba'asyir Karanganyar (n = 15)

Participant Code	Fluency of Speech	Vocabulary	Story Structure	Total Score
TPQ-01	2	2	2	6
TPQ-02	3	3	2	8
TPQ-03	3	2	2	7
TPQ-04	2	2	2	6
TPQ-05	3	2	2	7
TPQ-06	2	3	2	7
TPQ-07	2	2	2	6
TPQ-08	3	3	2	8
TPQ-09	3	3	2	8
TPQ-10	2	2	2	6
TPQ-11	3	2	2	7
TPQ-12	2	3	2	7
TPQ-13	3	2	2	7
TPQ-14	3	3	3	9
TPQ-15	3	3	2	8
Average				**7.13**

Table 1 presents the pre-test results of 15 early childhood students at TPQ Masjid Baitul Ba'asyir Karanganyar. The assessment was conducted on three aspects, namely fluency in speaking, vocabulary mastery, and understanding of story structure. The average total score obtained by participants in the pre-test was 7.13, which indicates a moderate level of initial English language proficiency.

Table 2. Post-Test Results of Early Childhood English Introduction at TPQ Masjid Baitul Ba'asyir Karanganyar (n = 15)

Participant Code	Fluency of Speech	Vocabulary	Story Structure	Total Score
TPQ-01	4	4	2	10
TPQ-02	4	4	3	11
TPQ-03	4	3	3	10
TPQ-04	3	4	3	10
TPQ-05	3	3	2	8
TPQ-06	3	3	3	9
TPQ-07	3	4	2	9
TPQ-08	4	3	4	11
TPQ-09	4	4	4	12
TPQ-10	3	3	4	10
TPQ-11	4	3	3	10
TPQ-12	3	4	3	10
TPQ-13	4	4	3	11
TPQ-14	3	4	4	11
TPQ-15	4	3	4	11
Average				**10.2**

Table 2 shows a significant increase, with an average total score of 10.2, reflecting an improvement in the children's English language skills after the learning activities. Based on the results in Tables 1 and 2, there was a significant improvement in the English language skills of early childhood students at TPQ Masjid Baitul Ba'asyir Karanganyar. The average pre-test score obtained by the participants was 7.13, while the average post-test score increased to 10.2, indicating an increase of 3.07 points.

DISCUSSION

This community service activity demonstrates that storytelling is an effective approach in introducing English vocabulary to young children, particularly in non-formal educational settings such as TPQ (Al-Qur'an Education Park). Based on the results of pre-tests and post-tests, there was an improvement in participants' understanding of basic vocabulary such as animal names, colours, adjectives, and simple verbs. This aligns with previous research emphasising the importance of contextual and enjoyable approaches in second language instruction for children (11).

The use of storytelling enhances children's attention and motivation to learn, which are important components in early childhood education. Storytelling provides a multisensory experience, combining audio (listening to stories), visual (pictures or illustrative media), and kinesthetic (direct interaction) stimuli, thereby supporting various learning styles in children. This process contributes to natural vocabulary acquisition, as children tend to remember words more easily when they are presented in meaningful and emotionally enjoyable contexts. Direct interaction during the storytelling process encourages active participation from children, so that they are not just passive listeners, but also engage in responding, repeating vocabulary, and imitating the expressions or actions described (12).

This approach is in line with sociocultural theory, which emphasises the importance of social interaction in cognitive development. The opportunity to imitate

pronunciation and use vocabulary in real contexts also supports a communicative approach to language learning, which focuses on the meaning and active use of words (13). The storytelling method also creates a positive and enjoyable learning atmosphere, which is very important during the golden age (0–8 years), when children's brains are highly receptive to new information. Learning through a playful and positive emotional approach has been proven to increase material absorption and retention, especially in foreign language acquisition (14).

The results of this activity show that English language education in non-formal settings such as TPQ can be carried out effectively through creative and enjoyable approaches. Storytelling can be an initial means of introducing English to children without academic pressure, but rather through a natural and interactive process. This activity also strengthens the role of parents in accompanying their children during the learning process, which has been proven to increase children's enthusiasm and involvement (15).

This activity can be developed through the creation of thematic story modules appropriate for children's ages, teacher training in interactive storytelling techniques, and active parental involvement in supporting children's learning processes. The use of visual and digital media is also recommended to enhance the appeal and effectiveness of learning. The sustained implementation of this approach has the potential to strengthen children's English language skills from an early age in a fun and meaningful way.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Community Service Activities (PKM) carried out at TPQ Masjid Baitul Ba'asyiir went well by introducing short stories as a medium that can facilitate early childhood in learning English and make this activity more interesting and interactive. The introduced learning media can increase motivation so that early childhood enthusiasm and enthusiasm in learning English. By using the right method, it can be concluded that the understanding and vocabulary of the English language can be improved. This activity can be developed through thematic story modules, interactive storytelling training, active parental involvement, and the use of visual and digital media to strengthen children's English skills from an early age in an effective and enjoyable manner.

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DECLARATION OF USE OF AI IN SCIENTIFIC WRITING

AI tools were used solely for grammar and language editing. The authors take full responsibility for the content and integrity of the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author states that there are no conflicts of interest.

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