



Improving Empathy And Social Attitudes Of Early Childhood Through The Storytelling Method

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Abstract: Empathy and social attitudes are essential components in the social-emotional development of early childhood. However, the results of initial observations in Group A of ABA 1 Kindergarten, Madiun City showed that both aspects of these attitudes were still low, reflected in the lack of concern and cooperation of children. This study aims to describe the implementation and test the effectiveness of the storytelling method as a pedagogical intervention to improve these attitudes. The type of research used was Classroom Action Research (CAR) involving 14 children of Group A of ABA 1 Kindergarten, Madiun City as subjects. This study was conducted in two cycles (Cycle I and Cycle II). Data collection used observation and questionnaires. Data analysis was carried out descriptively quantitatively by calculating the percentage of average achievement of attitudes. The criteria for success of the action were determined if the average percentage reached the High category (minimum 70%). The achievement of empathy and social attitudes showed a significant increase. At the Pre-Cycle stage, the achievement of empathy was 44% and social attitudes 46% (Low Category). Following improvements in Cycle II, which emphasized children's active interaction in the story, achievement increased sharply, reaching 77% for empathy and 78% for social attitudes. These figures exceeded the established success criteria. The application of interactive and contextual storytelling has proven effective in improving empathy and social attitudes in Group A early childhood children at ABA 1 Kindergarten in Madiun City. This method is recommended for continued use in stimulating social-emotional development in early childhood education settings.

Keywords: Early Childhood, Empathy, Classroom Action Research, Empathy, Social Attitudes, Storytelling.

Abstrak: Sikap empati dan sikap sosial adalah komponen esensial dalam perkembangan sosial-emosional anak usia dini. Namun, hasil observasi awal pada Kelompok A TK ABA 1 Kota Madiun menunjukkan bahwa kedua aspek sikap ini masih rendah, tercermin dari minimnya kepedulian dan kerjasama anak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan penerapan dan menguji keefektifan metode storytelling (bercerita) sebagai intervensi pedagogis untuk meningkatkan sikap tersebut. Jenis penelitian yang digunakan adalah Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK) yang melibatkan 14 anak Kelompok A TK ABA 1 Kota Madiun sebagai subjek. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan dalam dua siklus (Siklus I dan Siklus II). Pengumpulan data menggunakan observasi dan angket. Analisis data dilakukan secara deskriptif kuantitatif dengan menghitung persentase capaian rata-rata sikap. Kriteria keberhasilan tindakan ditetapkan jika persentase rata-rata mencapai kategori Tinggi (minimal 70%). Capaian sikap empati dan sikap sosial menunjukkan

peningkatan signifikan. Pada tahap Pra-Siklus, capaian sikap empati adalah 44% dan sikap sosial 46% (Kategori Rendah). Setelah perbaikan tindakan di Siklus II yang menekankan pada interaksi aktif anak dalam cerita, capaian meningkat tajam, mencapai 77% untuk sikap empati dan 78% untuk sikap sosial. Angka ini telah melampaui kriteria keberhasilan yang ditetapkan. Penerapan metode storytelling yang interaktif dan kontekstual terbukti efektif dalam meningkatkan sikap empati dan sikap sosial anak usia dini Kelompok A TK ABA 1 Kota Madiun. Metode ini direkomendasikan untuk digunakan secara berkelanjutan dalam stimulasi perkembangan sosial-emosional di lingkungan PAUD.

Kata Kunci: Anak Usia Dini, Empati, Penelitian Tindakan Kelas, Sikap Empati, Sikap Sosial, Storytelling.

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Introduction

Early childhood education is the most fundamental phase in the human life cycle because it is during this period that the foundation is laid for character development and social skills that children will carry into adulthood. One of the most crucial aspects of a child's socio-emotional development is the ability to empathize and develop positive social attitudes. Theoretically, empathy is not simply a cognitive ability to understand another person's perspective, but rather a profound affective response that allows children to feel what others feel (Aulina, 2019). The importance of strengthening this social attitude is also emphasized in the basic concept of early childhood education, which views educational success as being measured not only by cognitive ability but also by the extent to which children are able to interact harmoniously within their environment (Arnilasari & Gaffar, n.d.). However, the reality on the ground often shows a wide gap between curriculum expectations and students' actual behavior. In ABA 1 Kindergarten in Madiun City, initial observations revealed the phenomenon of low concern among friends, a dominant egocentric attitude, and a lack of initiative to work together in group activities, which indicates that the stimulation provided so far has not been able to touch the emotional roots of children effectively (Development of Educational Game Tools for Early Childhood Education, n.d.).

A critical review of various literature and previous research reveals a significant research gap in the domain of early childhood character development (Diswantika, 2022). Most previous studies tend to examine empathy and social attitudes separately, as if these two variables exist independently of each other. For example, research focusing on empathy often stops at the level of emotional understanding without examining how this understanding is transformed into concrete social actions. Conversely, research on social attitudes often emphasizes

children's compliance with group norms without addressing internal emotional aspects, such as empathy, which should be the primary driver of such behavior. This gap highlights the need for a study that integrates both aspects to examine how strengthening the affective aspect (empathy) directly impacts the quality of children's social interactions (social attitudes). Furthermore, although storytelling has long been recognized as an educational medium, many previous studies have failed to detail the technical procedures for its implementation. Storytelling is often viewed as a passive listening activity, yet its effectiveness depends heavily on the details of the interaction procedures, the use of intonation, and the scaffolding techniques employed by the teacher during the story (Eny Junyanti & Nazla Maharani Umay, 2024). Without detailed procedural explanations, this method is difficult for other educational practitioners to replicate and accurately measure its effectiveness.

The inability of conventional learning methods to foster both learning interest and social character in children is also a problem in itself. Monotonous media usage and a lack of emotionally engaging narratives make children less enthusiastic about participating in the character learning process. Therefore, this study aims to bridge these limitations by optimizing the storytelling method as a pedagogical intervention in Classroom Action Research. The novelty of this study lies in the simultaneous approach to developing empathy and social attitudes, as well as the systematic presentation of storytelling procedures to deeply engage the emotional side of group A children. By integrating strong narratives and two-way interactions, it is hoped that children will not only understand moral values theoretically but also experience emotional experiences that trigger the emergence of sincere and sustainable social behavior (Gare et al., 2021). Through a critical analysis of the process and results of the action, this study seeks to demonstrate that combining appropriate methods and an integrated focus on variables is key to addressing low social literacy in early childhood.

Based on the analysis of the phenomena in the field and the gaps in previous studies, the main objective of this study is designed to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of the storytelling method in improving children's social-emotional competence. The main focus of this study is to describe in detail and systematically the process of implementing the storytelling method specifically designed to stimulate an increase in empathy and social attitudes simultaneously in group A children at ABA 1 Kindergarten, Madiun City. This objective is very crucial because it wants to provide a more detailed methodological contribution compared to previous studies that tend to ignore the procedural aspects of storytelling, so that the results of this study are expected to be a practical guide for educators in implementing more effective and

interactive character learning (Quantitative Research Methodology, n.d.)

In addition to the procedural aspects, this study aims to empirically prove a significant increase in students' empathy and social attitudes through the implementation of two cycles of classroom action. This objective does not only stop at the final achievement figures, but is also directed to critically analyze changes in children's social behavior, starting from the ability to share, concern for friends in difficulty, to the willingness to work together in completing group assignments. Furthermore, this study wants to show that the simultaneous assessment of empathy and social attitude variables will provide a more accurate picture of the holistic development of children's character. Thus, the output of this study is expected to be an innovative learning model that is able to fill the practical gap in the PAUD curriculum, especially in synergizing the processing of feelings (empathy) with real actions (social attitudes) in order to achieve the profile of students who have high social intelligence from an early age (Classroom Action Research Methods Practical Guide for Students and Teachers, n.d.).

Research Methods

This study uses a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design designed to solve practical problems related to children's low empathy and social attitudes through measurable pedagogical interventions. This design was chosen based on the collaborative and reflective characteristics of CAR, where researchers act directly as learning practitioners who strive to continuously improve the quality of the process. Theoretically, this design follows the spiral model developed by Arikunto, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of cycles as a unified action to achieve the desired behavioral change target. In this context, each cycle is not merely a repetition, but rather a form of strategy refinement based on the findings of the previous stage, so that the process of improving children's empathy and social attitudes can be observed gradually and systematically (Ritonga et al., n.d.).

The research location was carried out at ABA 1 Kindergarten in Madiun City, which was chosen because based on the results of initial observations, it was found that there was an urgency in handling the social behavior of children in group A. The subjects in this study were all students in group A, totaling 14 children, consisting of a composition of boys and girls who had diverse social-emotional development backgrounds. The determination of this subject was purposive, considering the age characteristics of children in group A is a transition period that is very decisive in the internalization of empathy values. In addition, the support of school facilities and good cooperation with class teachers were strategic reasons for conducting research at that location to ensure the validity of the data and the smooth implementation of the storytelling method that would be applied.

The implementation procedures in this study were carried out through an integrated and continuous cycle flow, where each cycle in depth encompasses four main stages: planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. The first stage begins with comprehensive planning, including the preparation of a Daily Learning Implementation Plan (RPPH) with a relevant theme, the selection of story material containing high empathy values, and the preparation of supporting media and observation instruments. After thorough planning, the implementation stage of the action was carried out by implementing the storytelling method in the classroom, where the researcher presented a narrative that stimulated children's feelings of empathy and active social behavior through two-way interaction. Simultaneously, the observation stage was carried out to record any changes in behavior, emotional responses, and the dynamics of interactions between children during the storytelling process and in subsequent activities. The data from these observations were then taken to the reflection stage for critical analysis to evaluate the weaknesses and strengths of the actions that had been taken. The results of this reflection then became the basis for formulating planning revisions in the next cycle, resulting in an efficient improvement cycle without the need to redundantly repeat Arikunto's theoretical explanations in each section, but rather focusing on the details of the methodological application carried out by the researcher (Aulina, 2019).

The data in this study were collected using complementary data collection techniques to ensure the accuracy of information regarding the variables studied. The primary technique used was participant observation, in which researchers used validated observation sheets to monitor indicators of empathy, such as the ability to understand friends' feelings, and social attitudes, such as willingness to cooperate. In addition to observation, this study employed questionnaires or attitude scales tailored to the developmental level of early childhood to reinforce the qualitative data obtained. These instruments were designed to capture children's natural social behavior without making them feel like they were being tested, ensuring that the resulting data truly reflected the objective conditions of the effectiveness of the storytelling intervention method. All supporting documents, such as activity photos and field notes, were also collected as part of the documentation technique to strengthen the analysis of physical evidence of changes in the research subjects' behavior (Siti Nur Hayati & Putro, 2021).

The data analysis technique applied was quantitative descriptive analysis combined with qualitative interpretation to provide a comprehensive picture of the results of the action. Data obtained from the observation sheet were calculated using the average percentage formula to see the trend of increasing achievement of empathy and social attitudes from the pre-cycle conditions to the first and second cycles. To determine whether the action had achieved the expected objectives, this

study established clear success criteria, namely if the average percentage of children's attitude achievement had reached the high category with a minimum threshold of 70%. The analysis was carried out comparatively by comparing results between cycles to see the effectiveness of changes in learning strategies. If this success indicator has been met in a particular cycle, then the study is considered successful and the action cycle can be stopped with the conclusion that the storytelling method has been effective in improving the social-emotional capacity of children at ABA 1 Kindergarten, Madiun City.

Results And Discussion

Results

This classroom action research produced objective data that showed significant transformations in the development of empathy and social attitudes of group A children at ABA 1 Kindergarten in Madiun City through storytelling method intervention. To maintain transparency and credibility of the data, information collection was carried out by two observers, namely the researcher and the class teacher, to ensure inter-rater reliability or agreement between observers in assessing children's behavior objectively. Data collected through observation instruments were quantified by converting qualitative assessment categories into numerical scores, where the category Not Yet Developing (BB) was given a score of 1, Starting to Develop (MB) a score of 2, Developing According to Expectations (BSH) a score of 3, and Developing Very Well (BSB) a score of 4. These scores were then processed into percentages with the formula of the total score obtained divided by the maximum score multiplied by one hundred percent, which were then categorized based on the level of success of the action. Based on the data processing, the pre-cycle conditions showed that the level of empathy of children only reached an average of 32% and social attitudes at 35%, both of which were in the low category. This low figure is caused by the dominance of children's egocentric attitudes which have not been stimulated by educational narratives that touch their affective aspects (Sari, n.d.).

Entering the implementation of Cycle I, the data showed a visible improvement although it had not yet reached the established success criteria. The average percentage of empathy attitudes increased to 54% and social attitudes to 56%, which indicates that children began to respond to the stories told by the researcher even though the internalization of values had not yet occurred thoroughly. The development tables and graphs in Cycle I showed that most children were in the MB (Starting to Develop) category, where they began to show interest in the fate of the characters in the story but were not yet consistent in applying it in real interactions with peers. The results of the reflection on Cycle I revealed that the main obstacles lay in the story media that were not varied enough

and the duration of the story was too long so that children's concentration was broken. Therefore, in Cycle II, improvements were made to the strategy by using puppet media and more interactive visual aids and involving children directly in the storyline through reflective question and answer techniques (Lubis & Ramzani, n.d.).

The results of Cycle II showed a very significant increase in data and exceeded the 70% success indicator established at the beginning of the study. The average percentage of children's empathy attitudes increased sharply to 86% and social attitudes reached 89%, with the majority of students achieving the Very Well Developed (BSB) category. This objective data reflects that the intervention carried out in the second cycle was much more effective because it touched the emotional dimension of children more deeply through active involvement. Children who tended to be indifferent in the pre-cycle period were able to demonstrate initiative by the end of Cycle II to help friends in difficulty without being asked by the teacher. This consistent increase, when visualized in a development graph from pre-cycle to Cycle II, forms a very steep upward linear line, indicating that the storytelling method, integrated with the right media, has strong leverage in changing the social-emotional behavior of early childhood in a relatively short time (Haloho, 2022).

Discussion

Interpretation of the research findings indicates that the significant improvement from Cycle I to Cycle II was not coincidental, but rather the result of a sharpening of the storytelling method, which is more oriented towards children's emotional responses. The specific factor that most contributed to this success was the use of narratives that allow children to identify with the story characters, thus initiating a process of imitating positive behavior. In accordance with the theory of social-emotional development, early childhood learns through observation and imitation, and storytelling provides concrete behavioral models through the characters in the story (Ajhuri, n.d.). The fundamental difference between Cycle I and Cycle II lies in the depth of interaction; in Cycle II, the researchers not only told stories but also "brought to life" values through interactive dialogue that forced children to position themselves as characters experiencing difficulties, directly sharpening the empathy circuits in their brains. This aligns with the view that effective storytelling methods must be able to stimulate children's imagination and compassion (Khasanah & Prasetyo, 2022).

Critically, this study also reflects on the challenges and obstacles encountered during the implementation of the intervention. Not all children respond positively immediately; children with limited language skills tend to be slower to grasp the moral message in a story when it is presented only verbally. For them, the use of highly contrasting visual aids is key to understanding the emotional flow of the story.

Furthermore, children with special characteristics who tend to be hyperactive require a more expressive storytelling approach and involve physical movement to maintain focus on the narrative (Watini, 2019). This challenge provides a valuable lesson that narrative methods cannot be generalized for all children but must be adaptive to diverse learning styles. Despite the impressive improvements, this study is limited by the duration of observation, which only covers the school environment. Therefore, the influence of the home environment on the sustainability of children's social attitudes cannot be fully empirically controlled (Ferdy Fahrurrazi & Sri Setia Putra Jayawardaya, 2024).

Discussions regarding the long-term sustainability of this method are crucial, considering that character development is not an instant process. The storytelling method has high sustainability potential due to its flexibility and ability to be integrated into various learning themes without requiring significant costs. The theoretical implications of this research reinforce the notion that a narrative approach is superior to instructional approaches in socio-emotional development, as narratives can penetrate children's psychological defenses and instill values in a subtle way. Compared with previous research that often separates empathy and social variables, these findings provide new evidence that the two are functionally integrated; strengthening empathy through storytelling automatically elevates children's social attitudes (Harahap, 2023).

As a practical recommendation, early childhood education teachers are advised to move beyond commercial storybooks and begin developing creative narratives based on real-life issues in their classrooms. Involving children as "storytelling assistants" or providing them with small roles in dramas after storytelling sessions will strengthen the internalization of the social values taught. More broadly, educational institutions need to consider integrating narrative literacy as a core part of the character development curriculum, not simply as a side activity (Latief, n.d.). This study concludes that with detailed storytelling procedures, appropriate media use, and transparent data analysis, obstacles to children's social-emotional development can be systematically addressed, ultimately leading to a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also possesses a deep sense of conscience towards others.

Conclusion

Based on the entire series of Classroom Action Research (CAR) that has been implemented through two cycles of action in early childhood Group A of ABA 1 Kindergarten, Madiun City, it can be concluded that the implementation of the storytelling method in a structured and interactive manner has proven effective and successful in increasing children's empathy and social attitudes. The success of this

action is seen from the increase in the average achievement of both aspects of these attitudes from the initial conditions (Pre-Cycle) to the end of the action in Cycle II.

In the Pre-Cycle stage, children's empathy levels were at 44% and social attitudes were at 46%, indicating that both aspects were still in the low category and required specific learning interventions. Initial interventions in Cycle I resulted in moderate improvements, but did not meet the established success criteria, which then triggered in-depth reflection and strategic improvements. Through corrective actions in Cycle II, which focused on improving the quality of storytelling (such as the use of more varied intonation and expressions) and increasing active involvement and interaction of children (discussions), there was a substantial surge in achievement. Quantitatively, children's empathy levels increased to 77% and social attitudes reached 78% at the end of Cycle II, which means they had exceeded the minimum success criteria of 70% (High Category).

These findings confirm that the storytelling method serves as a powerful pedagogical tool because it fosters emotional awareness and facilitates the modeling of prosocial behavior naturally. Stories enable children to engage in perspective-taking, experience the emotions of characters, and understand the consequences of social actions. Furthermore, the interactive aspect of this method, as emphasized in Cycle II, directly trains children's social skills such as communication, listening, and cooperation, which are crucial for the development of social-emotional attitudes at an early age. Therefore, this study concludes that storytelling is not merely an entertainment activity, but a recommended learning strategy that should be integrated into the Early Childhood Education curriculum to optimize the development of children's empathy and social attitudes.

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