

Building Bonds: Storytelling by Parents Shapes Literacy for Preschool Students

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Abstract

Recognizing the foundational impact of early literacy, this study investigates the impact of parental engagement in early literacy through storytelling, emphasizing how structured socialization sessions can enhance parents' awareness, skills, and practices. The research was conducted during May 2025 at TK Islam Al-Furqan, Minasa Upa, Makassar, South Sulawesi, and involved 15 parents of preschool students, with an average of 12–14 attending each session. Over four consecutive Saturdays, parents participated in 90-minute sessions that introduced the importance of storytelling, demonstrated effective storytelling techniques, explored vocabulary and comprehension strategies, and encouraged collaboration between parents and teachers. Data were collected using FGDs and survey. Attendance data indicated consistently high participation, with an average rate of 83%. Survey results showed that 82% of parents strongly agreed that their understanding of storytelling's role in literacy improved, 73% felt more confident in storytelling, and 64% had begun applying storytelling practices at home. Thematic analysis of FGD transcripts revealed that parents no longer viewed storytelling as merely entertainment but as an educational tool that enriched children's vocabulary and comprehension, fostered emotional connection, and cultivated a love for reading. Parents also highlighted the value of consistent storytelling practices across home and school. The findings suggest that parental storytelling is a powerful strategy for fostering children's literacy development and that structured socialization can empower parents to implement it effectively. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for

collaboration between educators and parents in developing storytelling-based programs that provide sustainable benefits for preschool children's literacy growth.

1. INTRODUCTION

Storytelling in early childhood education is commonly viewed as an entertaining activity, though it is much more than that. As evidenced in multiple studies, storytelling significantly influences preschool students' literacy skills across multiple domains students (Bonds, 2016; Parfitt et al., 2019). Storytelling facilitates children's learning regarding language functioning and narrative composition and supports numerous social and emotional processes; hence, the latter may be classified under various theoretical frameworks that underscore the cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional aspects of storytelling in an educational setting. Over the past few years, what story education has been for children in preschool education has fundamentally changed. Researchers have come to the conclusion through scientific research that storytelling, beyond being wait-and-see education commissioned with children, is a planned and programmed work with many aspects.

The conducted research reveals the beneficial role of the parent story of the preschooler in developing the child's language and communication skills. Family education and the participation of parents in the preschooler's learning process are significant factors in the education and training of the

younger generation. In this regard, the work of parents at home with preschool children is crucial benefits (Grøver et al., 2023). Some parents do not have the necessary information about how to conduct work at home with their preschooler (Quam & Roberts, 2023). Therefore, it's up to the pre-school teachers to teach. Parental care was generally seen as a beneficial variable to include experiences (Beecher & Jones-Diaz, 2014) because a child's education depends on his or her genetic potential and human support. Story education contributes to the preschool child's education by excellent societal assistance (LeBlanc-Haley, 2020; Luwisch, 2006).

Parental involvement in storytelling activities has been shown to have a profound impact on children's literacy outcomes, fostering a range of developmental benefits that extend beyond the classroom environment. Joint storytelling sessions between parents and preschoolers not only strengthen familial bonds but also play a crucial role in supporting children's language development and promoting a positive attitude towards reading.

Firstly, storytelling sessions involving parents create opportunities for meaningful interactions that strengthen the emotional connection between parents and their children. These shared experiences build trust and communication, establishing a supportive

foundation within the family unit. Research indicates that positive parent-child relationships, facilitated through activities like joint storytelling, contribute to children's overall well-being and academic success.

Storytelling sessions involving parents are more than just shared leisure activities; they serve as powerful opportunities for strengthening emotional connections and fostering children's development. Research shows that family storytelling helps children build self-esteem, reduce anxiety, and improve their ability to manage stress, thereby reinforcing family bonds and communication (Vettori et al., 2022). When parents use inclusive and emotionally responsive storytelling styles, children feel validated and connected, which enhances trust and openness in the parent-child relationship (Batini et al., 2021). Beyond emotional benefits, parental storytelling also contributes to academic outcomes: findings from Duke University's *Family Life Project* demonstrate that children whose caregivers used more complex and engaging language during storytelling developed stronger vocabulary and literacy skills that extended into later schooling (Rice, 2022). Moreover, narrative skills gained through these practices have been shown to predict reading comprehension and writing proficiency up to a decade later (Ramamurthy et al., 2024). Additional evidence highlights

that coherent family stories support emotion regulation, identity formation, and resilience, equipping children with tools to navigate challenges effectively (Murphy, 2024). Taken together, these studies underscore that joint storytelling between parents and children is not only emotionally enriching but also foundational for long-term academic and personal well-being.

Furthermore, parental involvement in storytelling significantly enhances language development in preschoolers: a 2024 quasi-experimental study found that children exposed to storytelling—with engaging props—made measurable gains in listening skills and vocabulary; meanwhile, storytelling techniques were shown to account for over 20% of variance in vocabulary acquisition in early learners, rising to nearly 35% when combined with peer collaboration (Sommer et al., 2013). These findings underscore the importance of exposing preschoolers to rich, varied narrative structures and language contexts to support their emerging literacy.

When parents actively engage in storytelling, they model fluent reading and expressive language, which encourages children to mimic and internalize linguistic patterns. This interactive process not only enhances children's vocabulary acquisition but also strengthens their comprehension skills as

they engage in discussions about story elements, characters, and plot sequences.

In addition to linguistic benefits, joint storytelling sessions foster a positive attitude towards reading among preschoolers (Walker et al., 2022). By participating in storytelling activities with their parents, children develop a sense of enjoyment and curiosity about stories and books. This positive association with reading lays the groundwork for lifelong literacy habits and a continued enthusiasm for learning through literature. Studies have shown that children who experience regular and positive interactions with books and stories at home are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of literacy achievement later in life (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2014).

Moreover, storytelling with parents provides a context for children to explore diverse perspectives, emotions, and moral lessons embedded within narratives. These discussions not only deepen children's understanding of social and ethical concepts but also cultivate empathy and perspective-taking skills. Through storytelling, parents can introduce their children to cultural traditions, values, and historical contexts, thereby promoting cultural awareness and appreciation (Stephens & McCallum, 2013; Trumbull et al., 2001).

Oral language development, especially in the context of parent-child interaction, is

very important for early literacy development in preschooling. It is just as beneficial as reading to children and can enrich their emergent literacy and language development. For example, storytelling within families may promote enduring positive character qualities and values and positively influence early childhood literacy development skills (Hjetland et al., 2019). Decontextualized language, as found in oral storytelling, can scaffold children's language development when utilized by mothers with high literacy skills (Wasik & Wasik, 2012). School-based contributions to oral narrative quality Oral story telling within the preschool classroom, especially when it is tied to cultural heritage practices, provide a relatively high quality of teacher-generated language input and can support talking and narrative skills (Melzi et al., 2020). A strong storytelling program is a successful one in most family literacy programs (Palmer et al., 2001).

In this study, we provide a new insight, that is, the importance of parents' storytelling playing in the early literacy development of preschool children which is still underexplored in existing studies. Moreover, as it involves parents directly through FGD, the study provides fresh perspectives on how storytelling can be integrated optimally in educational standard for young children through parental intervention. Conclusion Parents' participation

in storytelling activities will strongly promote children's literacy outcomes by reinforcing family bonding and enhancing language development, as well as the development of reading interest. Through shared storybook reading, parents support their children's cognitive development and also facilitate emotional and social competencies. Therefore, promoting storytelling practices in families are crucial in order to create comprehensive learning opportunities that enables the development of children in both academic and emotional aspects.

2. METHOD

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design supported by quantitative data on participation and survey responses. The qualitative component explored parents' perceptions and experiences of storytelling through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), while the quantitative component consisted of attendance records and survey results to capture measurable indicators of parental engagement and outcomes. This combination provided both depth and breadth, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of the socialization program.

Participants

The participants were 15 parents of preschool children at TK Islam Al-Furqan

Minasa Upa in which they were formally invited to join the program of socialization stories. Over the 4 weeks of May, between 11 and 14 parents were present, and the average participation rate was 83%. Eleven parents finished the post-program survey at the end of the program. The informants were not homogeneous in their profession and education, but all shared the common role of being a main caregiver for a 4- to 6-year-old child.

The instruments were survey and Focus Groups Discussion conducted to parent on every Saturday in May 2025 containing open-ended questions emphasized to promote parents to share their reflections on their experiences, changes in practice, and observations of their children's responses.

Procedures

The socialization program took place in May 2025 at TK Islam Al-Furqan Minasa Upa. Sessions were conducted every Saturday morning from 09:30 to 11:00 over a period of four weeks. Each of the four sessions focused on a specific theme:

1. Week 1 (May 3): *The Importance of Storytelling in Early Literacy Development* – introduced parents to the value of storytelling for language growth, comprehension, and emotional connection.

2. Week 2 (May 10): *Effective Storytelling Techniques for Preschool Children* – provided practical training on intonation, facial expressions, gestures, and voice modulation.
3. Week 3 (May 17): *Using Storytelling to Enhance Vocabulary and Comprehension* – emphasized strategies for enriching vocabulary and developing comprehension through questioning and retelling.
4. Week 4 (May 24): *Parent–Teacher Collaboration in Cultivating Storytelling* – highlighted the importance of aligning home and school storytelling practices for consistent literacy support.

Table 1. Timeline of Storytelling Socialization Program

Date	Time	Topic	Key Activities
Saturday, May 3, 2025	09:30 – 11:00	The Importance of Storytelling in Early Literacy Development	Presentation on benefits of storytelling; group discussion on current practices.
Saturday, May 10, 2025	09:30 – 11:00	Effective Storytelling Techniques for Preschool Children	Demonstration of intonation, gestures, and expressions; parents practice role-play.
Saturday, May 17, 2025	09:30 – 11:00	Using Storytelling to Enhance Vocabulary and Comprehension	Guided storytelling with picture books; strategies for asking questions and retelling.
Saturday, May 24, 2025	09:30 – 11:00	Parent–Teacher Collaboration in Cultivating Storytelling	Discussion on home–school partnership; planning collaborative literacy activities.

Each session began with an introduction to the theme, followed by an interactive presentation, small-group activities, and an FGD where parents could share experiences and challenges. Sessions concluded with a summary, resource distribution (e.g., story scripts and guides), and

planning for follow-up support to encourage the continuity of storytelling at home. After four weeks of FGDs, the survey was taken to see how far the impact of FGDs could change the behaviour of parents toward storytelling at home.

Data Analysis

Analysis was structured in two stages. Descriptive statistics were performed on quantitative data from attendance sign-in sheets and survey responses that provided percentages of participation and perceived parent knowledge. In addition, the FGD qualitative data was transcribed and thematically coded. Several recurring themes emerged, including (1) raised awareness of storytelling as a teaching strategy by parents, (2) increased confidence in the use of storytelling techniques, and (3) successful engagement of children with storytelling at home. Some of our extracted quotes from the parents were included for representation of these themes, as well as for 'live' voices from the field.

By combining parent participation data, survey data, and reflections from parents, the study was able to present a comprehensive view of how the program influenced knowledge, confidence, and practices regarding storytelling for early literacy in a parent.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The socialization program *Storytelling by Parents Shapes Literacy for Preschool Students* was conducted during May 2025, consisting of four sessions delivered every Saturday morning

from 09:00 to 10:30. The program was designed to introduce parents to the significance of storytelling for early literacy and to provide practical skills for integrating storytelling into daily routines. Attendance records, survey responses, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were collected to assess the outcomes of the initiative.

Out of 15 invited parents, attendance across the sessions remained consistently strong, ranging from 11 to 14 participants each week. On average, 12.5 parents (83%) attended per session, reflecting a high level of parental commitment to the program.

Form Table 1, the first session was attended by 12 parents and served as an introduction to the broader concept of storytelling as an essential tool in early literacy. The second session, focusing on effective storytelling techniques, attracted 14 parents, the highest turnout across the program. The third session, centered on vocabulary and comprehension, had the lowest attendance with 11 participants, while the final session on parent-teacher collaboration saw 13 parents. This variation highlights differences in parental interest depending on the topic, with more practical or collaborative sessions drawing higher participation.

Survey Findings

Survey results collected at the end of the program reinforced the attendance data. Of

the 11 parents who completed the questionnaire:

- 82% (9 parents) strongly agreed that their understanding of storytelling's role in literacy had improved.
- 18% (2 parents) agreed, while none expressed disagreement.
- 73% (8 parents) reported feeling more confident in telling stories to their children after participating.
- 64% (7 parents) indicated that they had already begun incorporating storytelling into daily family routines.

These findings suggest that the program was effective in raising awareness, improving confidence, and fostering the early adoption of storytelling practices in the home.



Figure 1. Interactive session where parents learn and demonstrate storytelling methods to support preschool literacy.

FGDs provided additional qualitative evidence of the program's impact. Parents

offered reflections that aligned with the survey findings, illustrating both attitudinal and behavioral changes:

- Awareness of storytelling's value:

"I used to think storytelling was just entertainment before bedtime, but now I realize it can help my child learn new words and ideas."

(Parent A, April 5, 2025)

- Improved confidence in techniques:

"Learning how to use voice and expression made me feel more confident. My child paid more attention when I used these techniques."

(Parent C, April 12, 2025)

- Vocabulary and comprehension development:

"After the session, I tried storytelling with picture books. My child started asking about new words, and I could explain them better."

(Parent F, April 19, 2025)

- Value of parent-teacher collaboration:

"It is good to know that teachers also use storytelling. If we do it at home too, our children will get the same message from both sides."

(Parent H, April 26, 2025)

Collectively, these results demonstrate that parents not only increased their understanding of storytelling's educational value but also began implementing strategies at home and observing positive responses from their children.

Discussion

The narrative by parents is paramount for the development of language. Children are able to internalize language patterns, vocabulary, and grammar from the spoken language at a young age. Through storytelling, parents create a language-rich environment in which children hear and learn the use of complex sentence structures and wide-ranging vocabulary in context. Studies highlight that children with daily story times at home demonstrate superior language skills in the area of expressive and receptive language as well as early reading skills (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2014).

Additionally, Lothe (2013) added that storytelling fosters cognitive development by stimulating children's imagination and critical thinking skills. As children listen to stories, they are prompted to visualize scenes, predict outcomes, and make connections between the narrative and their own experiences. This cognitive engagement enhances memory retention and problem-solving abilities, laying the groundwork for academic success in later years. Furthermore, storytelling encourages children to explore moral dilemmas, cultural values (Gunawardena & Brown, 2021), and social norms embedded within narratives, thereby promoting ethical reasoning and empathy (Hajisoteriou et al., 2022). Recent findings emphasize storytelling's role in

stimulating cognitive processes critical to literacy acquisition (Lenhart et al., 2020). Through exposure to narratives, preschoolers engage in activities that enhance memory, attention, and comprehension skills. For instance, studies have shown that children who participate in regular storytelling sessions demonstrate improved abilities in sequencing events, predicting outcomes, and understanding story structures (Bus et al., 2020). These cognitive skills are foundational to reading readiness and support the development of literacy-related abilities such as phonological awareness and vocabulary expansion (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Hornburg et al., 2021).

Beyond its cognitive and emotional benefits, storytelling by parents cultivates a positive attitude towards reading and learning. When children associate storytelling with pleasure and meaningful interactions with their caregivers, they develop a lifelong love for literature and a curiosity for new ideas. This positive association encourages children to independently explore books, seek knowledge, and engage in independent reading, which are essential skills for academic achievement and personal growth.

In conclusion, storytelling by parents is a powerful and multifaceted practice that significantly supports children's development. It strengthens emotional connections, fosters

language acquisition, stimulates cognitive growth, and nurtures a love for learning. When integrated into daily routines and family traditions, storytelling not only enriches children's experiences but also lays the groundwork for long-term success and enduring family bonds. While this study underscores the broad value of parental storytelling, it does not extend to providing concrete guidance or practical recommendations for implementation, leaving space for future research to translate these insights into actionable strategies.

The results highlight the potential of parental socialization programs to enhance early literacy through storytelling. The consistently high attendance rate (83%) indicates that parents viewed the sessions as both relevant and beneficial. This level of participation is significant, as parental involvement has long been recognized as a critical predictor of children's literacy achievement (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). Findings suggest that when provided with structured opportunities, parents are willing to commit to activities that directly support their children's learning.

The greatest turnout was at the second session, a testament to the popularity of hands-on, skill-focused learning. Parents were especially eager to learn expressive behaviors—such as melody, gesture, and facial

expression—that they could use right away to improve their storytelling. As Parent C mentioned, these methods equipped children to be more focused and participatory. This outcome supports Wasik and Hindman's (2023) argument that interactive story telling becomes an active, participatory activity for children which would otherwise be a passive activity. This is perhaps why the group you were part of was so widely attended, and future programs would do well to try and include more practical, hands-on activities to keep people engaged.

In contrast, the third session which addressed vocabulary and comprehension attracted fewer participants, despite the fact that these skills are foundational for literacy. Parents may view those things as more theoretical or less accessible than performance methods. Nevertheless, the reflection from Parent F indicates that the session was effective in at least one aspect (children becoming more active in asking for new words, and parents feel more confident in explaining them). This observation resonates with Dickinson and Tabors (2001), who have found that rich parental-child interactions predict later reading comprehension. The results indicate that parents believe that expressive capabilities are important; however, there needs to be a clearer focus on how to incorporate vocabulary and

comprehension strategies into story-telling in a manner that is both interesting and practical.

The strong turnout in the final session demonstrates parents' recognition of the importance of home-school collaboration. Parent H's testimony illustrates the value parents place on consistency across educational contexts. This finding aligns with Epstein's (2018) theory of overlapping spheres of influence theory that focused on families and schools working together. Parents clearly recognized that home and classroom storytelling practices can be reciprocal in nature, and that they can reinforce the emergent literacy skills of their children in a variety of contexts.

The survey findings support what participants showed up for and reported in the numbers and qualitative information. The high proportion of parents (82%) who strongly agreed or agreed that their appreciation as to the importance attached to storytelling has been enhanced indicates that the aims of the program were achieved. Also, seeing an reported increase in confidence up 73% and in the use of storytelling at home by 64% suggests a behavioral change, not just a shift in attitudes. Reese, Sparks and Leyva (2010) found evidence that also narratives were hardly affected in the short-term again by parent story-based interventions. These similarities indicate that a relatively brief intervention may

stimulate considerable change in the parents' practices.

Nevertheless, caution is needed in the interpretation of the findings. Although attendance, survey, and quote data are informative, they do not measure sustained viability or literacy at the child level. Phrases like "parents highly involved" were also substantiated by participation data and qualitative feedback, though they were still unaccompanied by any empirical estimates of children's vocabulary or comprehension improvement. Moreover, although post-training support was referred to, information about its duration and intensity was not consistently recorded. Parental storytelling after one month of the intervention was unknown to lack a longitudinal follow-up. Therefore, future work on this topic should use a mixed-methods approach, triangulating attendance data, surveys, and FGDs with pre- and post-tests of children's literacy skills.

4. CONCLUSION

Parental storytelling is a powerful approach, which contributes to the literacy development of preschoolers by promoting language, cognitive and social-emotional skills (Emmitt et al., 2006, ten Berge, 2001). Children are learning so much more complex language including being exp[osed to

sophisticated language structures which will stand them in good stead when they are asked to read and write with confidence and the ability to communicate effectively. This article emphasizes the importance of parents in early literacy and shows how being involved in storytelling activities can positively impact their children's vocabulary, comprehension, and overall language school readiness.

Of equal significance is the partnership of parents and teachers in the design of storying-based programs to support early literacy. These types of approaches can build home-school cooperation and establish systematic support for children's learning. This study, however, does not offer implementation guidance or assess the success of such programs. We need to do more research now on designing, trialing and perfecting interventions that are based on story-telling to ensure they have impact, are scalable and address the differentiated needs of the youngest learners.

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