Integrating Interactive Storytelling into Early Childhood Education: A Pedagogical Framework within Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

The Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum offers a new paradigm in the learning process. Principle of the differentiation, its approach to providing learning freedom for students and flexibility for educators in designing learning activities. Learning should be carried out in an interactive, inspiring, enjoyable, and challenging. Interactive storytelling is one of the first approaches to teaching and learning in early childhood education. It combining elements of narrative, visuals, and child interaction. This study aims to describe the concept, benefits, and implementation strategies of interactive storytelling. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through literature studies, teacher interviews, and documentation. The findings show that interactive storytelling can stimulate the imagination of early childhood, improve socialization, experience, and concentration. In addition, interactive storytelling can also increase the motivation and curiosity of early childhood, as well as their social-emotional abilities. Early childhood teachers use interactive storytelling to create engaging learning settings for students. Therefore, the implementation of interactive storytelling serves as an effective pedagogical strategy to create meaningful, enjoyable, character, and learning experiences that align with the Pancasila Student Profile in Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum.

Keywords: early_childhood, interactive_storytelling, merdeka_curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Education has become an important component in the life character education on children. Education is not only aimed at increasing children's intelligence, but also making children good character (Hidayati, 2019). Early childhood education has a crucial part in optimizing aspects of early childhood development (Maranatha et al., 2024). Early childhood learn most effectively through experiences that involve imagination, interaction, and emotion (Lestari & Prima, 2023). Reading stories is a very common activity in early childhood classrooms (Rodríguez et al., 2018). Many ways that can be used to teach character to children, one of them is by storytelling. Storytelling can be interpreted as a way of telling and telling a story or giving an explanation verbally (Hidayati, 2019).

Interactive, multimedia, and flexible learning aids for young children have been introduced thanks to rapid technological advancement. Learning media is an intermediary in delivering educational messages that aim to bring children closer to the actual conditions. One example of using technology-based media as learning media is interactive storytelling (Xie et al., 2025). Interactive learning media have proven effective

in increasing student engagement, providing enjoyable learning experiences, and deepening students' understanding of various subjects (Wahdian & Arifah, 2025).

Interactive storytelling actively involves children in the storytelling process through questions and answers, discussions, and participation in the storyline. The interaction helps children feel valued and heard, thereby boosting their confidence in communicating. (Sari et al., 2025). Interactive dialogue in storytelling are vital for the construction of ethical awareness and knowledge (Gunawardena & Brown, 2021). Interactive storytelling that used book media in early childhood education is a tool to stimulate knowledge of letters and spoken language of children. Reading interactive books with preschoolers appears to be an important initial experience that is significantly engaging in children's reading achievement (Satriana et al., 2022).

The choice in pedagogy used in an early childhood classroom relies on several factors such as the teachers' objective for the activity, the student's interest, and the tools available for use in the classroom. Teachers choose the type of storytelling most effective for supporting student mastery of academic content (Lisenbee & Ford, 2018). Early Childhood Education teachers are required to be able to use teaching methods that meet the needs and interests of children. An enjoyable learning process depends on how teachers use teaching methods. Teachers stimulate children to actively participate in storytelling activities (Sriwahyuni et al., 2016). Teachers can even read the words of a story, students enjoy being able to predict sentences and rhyming words as a type of participatory celebration of their comprehension of the story. Interactions are robust and rewarding for everyone when emotions are a part of the storytelling process (Lisenbee & Ford, 2018).

The urgency of this research is very high, identify interactive storytelling concepts for early childhood, implementation strategies in the classroom in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum, and to provide practical recommendations for early childhood educators.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Interactive Storytelling

The traditional stories read to the children have universal themes that reach across cultures, both in the values they espouse and the development of the plot. From focusing on one episode of the story, children, in their retellings, begin to link events and use some of the language of books in their own narratives (Bruce et al., 2020). Interactive storytelling is a form of storytelling that allows children to participate directly in the narrative process (Lestari & Prima, 2023). Interval of storytelling is a promising solution for the contradiction between immersive and interactive. Experiencing a complete storytelling requires the audience to immerse in the story plot (Mu, 2018). Interactive storytelling and reading were closely linked, if not identical, concepts (Wagner, 2019).

Pedagogical Approach

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): a theory of development proposed by Lev Vygotsky, whereby a task that is too difficult for a child to complete on their own can be completed with the help of an adult or a more knowledgeable peer (Kawuryan & Raharjo, 2012). The concept of the zone of proximal development explains the difference between the individual performance in a given task and the performance achieved when the same task is carried out with someone more capable (Villarroel et al., 2020). According to Vygotsky, two children with the same actual level of development may have different levels of potential development. Social interaction between children and adults plays an important role in the ZPD (DPT). At

first, children actively engage in problem-solving activities with the presence of others, but then gradually they are able to do it independently. The interaction between children and adults in the classroom is a form of social interaction that is very important for the development of children's cognitive abilities. This interaction is a form of socialization that helps children develop their cognitive abilities (Yohanes, 2010). Vygotsky further argued that children learn with confidence when they are supported by a more knowledgeable person because such positive interactions bring out the specifically human qualities of the mind and lead the child to new developmental levels (Ofori-Attah, 2021).

Meanwhile, according to Gardner, every child has multiple intelligences, meaning that each child can have one or more intelligences. Multiple intelligences include verbal-linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, visual-spatial intelligence, musical intelligence, kinesthetic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, naturalistic intelligence, and moral intelligence (Lukman, 2019). Children who are articulate, enjoy storytelling, and listen intently to stories or read are signs of children with outstanding linguistic intelligence (Ndari & Chandrawaty, 2018).

Merdeka Curriculum

Curriculum in early childhood should not be reduced to outcomes or pre-defined plans for transmitting knowledge but understood as a dynamic (Deguara, 2025). The main principles of the Merdeka Curriculum include academic freedom, relevance to contemporary needs, and a focus on character development, aligned with the values of Pancasila (Wahyuningsih & Küçükoğlü, 2025). The key goals of the Merdeka Curriculum is to foster 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication (Lestari & Prima, 2025). The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in early childhood education in Indonesia represents a significant shift in pedagogical approaches, emphasizing student autonomy and creativity. As a child-centered framework, the Merdeka Curriculum seeks to move away from rigid, teacher-directed instruction, allowing educators to facilitate experiential learning (Kristiyanti et al., 2025). The Merdeka Curriculum structure at the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) level consists of Intracurricular Learning Activities and Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Projects (Jayawardana et al., 2022).

METHOD

The approach chosen was a literature study in which researchers examined and analyzed various theories and regulations related to the concept of storytelling learning models in the independent curriculum. This method not only focuses on understanding and analyzing the substantive content (such as theories and methodologies) from various references but also involves a critical assessment of the validity, relevance, and contribution of each source to the discussion. The literature study method is a research method that involves searching for and analyzing data sourced from previous research or relevant library references and using theoretical foundations as guidelines to ensure that the research is in line with the existing facts (Lestari & Prima, 2025). Literature studies are related to theoretical studies through references related to values, culture, and norms that develop in the social situations being studied (Sugiyono, 2019). Data obtained from text books, scientific journals, periodicals books, literature, and various reports are then analyzed descriptively and qualitatively to answer research questions (Listiani et al., 2025).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Different Types of Interactive Storytelling Activities

The application of interactive storytelling begins with the selection of stories that are relevant and

interesting to children. Next, the teacher tells the story with appropriate expressions and intonation to attract the children's attention. The storytelling process continues with interactive questions that encourage children to think and participate actively (Sari et al., 2025). Interactive activities flow based on knowledge to fulfill the core desires of children to explore (Xing et al., 2024). Discussion, interaction, scaffolding and negotiation of meaning are integral in the social constructivist approach, where knowledge is constructed based on one's culture, society, and experience. Children should be able to connect stories with themselves as the stories illustrate ethical problems in life (Gunawardena & Brown, 2021).

Early childhood can obtain many advantages from storytelling, including helping early childhood stimulate their imagination, support early childhood experience, and enhance their focus. Children who got the digital storytelling intervention had more empathy than children who got the traditional storytelling (Maranatha et al., 2024). Children's literature supports teachers' ability to effectively choose both traditional and digital storytelling activities for students to engage in while they construct academic knowledge during their storytelling experiences in a classroom (Lisenbee & Ford, 2018).

Several types of interactive storytelling activities in early childhood education such us digital storytelling. Digital storytelling in early childhood classrooms is the age of students and their ability to learn how to use technological tools independently (Lisenbee & Ford, 2018). Oral storytelling and folk tales, those stories are passed from storyteller to storyteller, often through generations of the same family. By telling the story of the child's life as it happens with references to the past, the adult is modelling the internal voice of the child, helping to re-present experience in language (Bruce et al., 2020). Storytelling folklore using comic interactive that not only function as an interesting visual medium, but are also able to encourage student involvement in a deeper learning process (Hasibuan et al., 2024).

Teacher's role in Interactive Storytelling Activities

The main characteristics of the Merdeka curriculum in early childhood education units include: strengthening meaningful play activities as a learning process, strengthening the relevance of early childhood education as a foundational phase, strengthening a love of literacy and numeracy from an early age, the existence of projects to strengthen the Pancasila student profile, and a more flexible learning and assessment process. The advantages of the Merdeka curriculum compared to the previous curriculum are that its content and structure are simpler and more in-depth, more independent, and more relevant and interactive (Retnaningsih & Khairiyah, 2022). The project to strengthen the Pancasila student profile, which is part of the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, will always be linked to the three elements of Early Childhood Education Development Achievement, namely Religious Values and Morals, Identity, and the Basics of Literacy, Mathematics, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Arts. This Merdeka curriculum is in line with the concept of independent play in Early Childhood Education. The Merdeka Curriculum provides opportunities for teachers and children to develop their imagination and creativity (Meuthia & Suyadi, 2021).

The efficiency of using particular teaching strategies such as classroom discussion, collaborative learning, discussion approaches. The role of teachers to choose the strategy that encourages students to understand and apply such skills and encourage them to discuss their understanding with their classmates. The dynamics and continued nature of a practical discussion allow for the flow of ideas and the development of the thinking of all learners (Ouhiba, 2022). Teachers prioritize essential learning processes and adapt to children's interests and talents. Teachers need to understand children's characteristics when teaching. Differentiated learning provides flexibility and the ability to accommodate children's needs to improve their

potential in accordance with their learning readiness. Teachers should be facilitators who are oriented towards fulfilling learning that is appropriate to the needs of students (Purnawanto, 2022). Teachers identify children's learning characteristics by preparing various activities according to each child's character and abilities (Nafisa & Fitri, 2023).

Impact of Interactive Storytelling on Early Childhood Development

Reading interactive books can improve reading fluency and children's reading comprehension. Storytelling using interactive book-mediated collective reading tasks to nurture early childhood learners' language, cognitive, and motor development (Satriana et al., 2022). Experiencing emerged as a foundational knowledge process across the majority of scenarios, highlighting the centrality of connecting children's personal experiences (Katsampoxaki-hodgetts et al., 2025). According to Hasibuan (2024) 90% of student feel helped in understanding folklore through digital storytelling. In addition, validation by education, language, and culture experts ensures that comics are in accordance with the local curriculum and culture, while evaluations show an increase in students' active participation in learning and discussions. When children are in a group setting, ways of continuing to work with and value the role parents have in children's developing language and narrative skills need further investigation (Bruce et al., 2020).

The storytelling ability of Group A children showed an average increase in student learning activity of 65% in Cycle I, increasing to 76.46% at the end of Cycle II (Wondal, 2015). Through the application of storytelling, children's language skills improved because storytelling also teaches them to practice letter symbols and shows them the stages that must be passed (Lestari & Prima, 2023). Furthermore, research conducted by Puspasari et al. (2016) found an increase in the results of listening skills in fairy tales using puppets as media. The results in cycle I were 52.6%, increasing in cycle II to 84.2% with an average score of 70.3, increasing to 81.8. Student activity and teacher performance also increased with the use of puppets as media in teaching fairy tale listening material.

CONCLUSION

Interactive storytelling is one of the most effective learning approaches in early childhood education. Interactive storytelling activities support early childhood development in areas such as character, literacy, language, cognitive abilities, and social-emotional skills. Interactive storytelling creates meaningful learning experiences by actively involving children in the storytelling process through dialogue, active participation, and reflection on moral values. Children are not just passive listeners but actively participate in interactive storytelling activities.

Interactive storytelling is in line with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. It emphasizes literacy activities and supports child-centered, flexible, contextual, and experience-based learning. This provides opportunities for children to express ideas, use their imagination, and develop 21st-century skills. Interactive storytelling can also increase the motivation and curiosity of early childhood, as well as their social-emotional abilities. Early childhood teachers use interactive storytelling to create engaging learning settings for students. Therefore, the implementation of interactive storytelling serves as an effective pedagogical strategy to create meaningful, enjoyable, character, and learning experiences that align with the Pancasila Student Profile in Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum.

Findings show that the use of interactive media, both book-based and digital, increases children's learning engagement, story comprehension, empathy, and early literacy skills. Therefore, interactive storytelling can be recommended as a relevant and practical instructional strategy for implementing the

Merdeka Curriculum in early childhood education, as well as an effective means of strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile from an early age.

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