



ARTICLE INFORMATION

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Changes in language development following picture-based storytelling among preschool children: A one-group pretest–posttest study

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Abstract

Background: Language development is an important component of early childhood development because it supports children's ability to communicate, understand information, express thoughts and feelings, and interact socially. Children with suboptimal language development require appropriate, structured, and enjoyable stimulation. Picture-based storytelling combines visual and verbal stimulation and may provide opportunities for children to develop vocabulary, comprehension, and verbal expression.

Purpose: To describe changes in language development scores following picture-based storytelling among children aged 4–5 years.

Method: This quantitative study used a pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design. The study was conducted from February 9 to 14, 2026, at Al-Ikhlâs Preschool Tanjung Sari, Natar District, South Lampung Regency, Indonesia. Twelve children aged 4–5 years with suboptimal language development based on Denver II screening were selected using purposive sampling. Picture-based storytelling using fable-themed picture books was conducted for approximately 30 minutes per session over four consecutive days. Language development was assessed before and after the intervention using the language sector of the Denver II. The numerical scoring procedure used for the pretest and posttest. Data were analysed using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test.

Results: The mean language development score increased from 5.00 ± 0.426 before the intervention to 6.67 ± 0.778 after the intervention, with a mean increase of 1.67 points. The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test indicated a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores ($Z = -3.115$, $p = 0.002$).

Conclusion: Language development scores increased following picture-based storytelling, and the pretest–posttest difference was statistically significant. However, because this study used a small purposively selected sample and did not include a control group, the findings should be interpreted as preliminary evidence of change rather than evidence of a causal effect.

Keywords: Early Childhood; Language Development; Picture-Based Storytelling; Preschool Children; Storytelling Method.

INTRODUCTION

Language development is an important aspect of early childhood development because it supports children's ability to communicate, understand information, express thoughts and feelings, and establish social interactions. Early childhood is a

critical developmental period in which children require stimulation that is appropriate to their developmental stage. Appropriate, consistent, and enjoyable stimulation can provide opportunities for children to understand instructions, answer questions, describe

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experiences, and develop vocabulary (Widaningsih & Ramadhena, 2024; Tambunan & Ningsih, 2021; Yanti & Depalina, 2025). Language developmental difficulties remain an important concern in child health and education. Such difficulties may include limited vocabulary, difficulty constructing sentences, and difficulty understanding or expressing information. Language developmental difficulties remain an important concern in child health and education. Such difficulties may include limited vocabulary, difficulty constructing sentences, and difficulty understanding or expressing information. In Indonesia, child growth and development are monitored through structured developmental monitoring and early detection activities, including stimulation, early detection, and intervention for developmental disorders (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023). Early and appropriate stimulation is therefore important to support children's communication abilities and developmental needs.

Storytelling is one activity that can provide language stimulation during early childhood. Storytelling provides opportunities for children to listen, understand, remember, and respond to information, thereby supporting listening skills and vocabulary development (Hartati, Damayanti, Rusdi, Patiung, Piaud, & Alauddin Makassar, 2021). The use of pictures may provide additional visual cues that help children understand characters, objects, and events in a story. Picture-based activities may also support children's attention, vocabulary, imagination, and communication (Maarif, Fajriyah, & Sholichah, 2024). Previous studies have reported changes in children's language abilities following storytelling activities, while interactive storytelling has been associated with increased opportunities for speaking and vocabulary practice (Wiguna, Ariyanti, Antari, Yolandita, Dewi, & Pujiani, 2023).

Although previous studies have examined storytelling as a means of stimulating children's language development, evidence specifically concerning picture-based storytelling among preschool children in early childhood education settings, particularly in Tanjung Sari, South Lampung, remains limited. A preliminary survey at Al-Ikhlas

Preschool Tanjung Sari indicated that picture-based storytelling had been used as a learning medium but had not been specifically evaluated using a pretest–posttest approach. The preliminary assessment also identified several children with limited vocabulary, difficulty constructing sentences, and low confidence in communication. Based on this background, the present study examined changes in language development scores before and after a structured picture-based storytelling activity among preschool children aged 4–5 years at Al-Ikhlas Preschool Tanjung Sari. Because the study used a one-group pretest–posttest design without a comparison group, the findings were interpreted as changes observed following the intervention rather than as evidence of a causal effect.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design. The study was conducted to examine changes in children's language development following picture-based storytelling sessions. The study was conducted at Al-Ikhlas Preschool Tanjung Sari, Natar District, South Lampung Regency, Indonesia, from February 9 to 14, 2026. The study population comprised 118 children aged 4–6 years enrolled at Al-Ikhlas Preschool Tanjung Sari. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on predetermined inclusion criteria. The final sample consisted of 12 children aged 4–5 years who were identified as having delayed or suboptimal language development based on Denver II screening. The inclusion criteria were children enrolled at the study site, aged 4–5 years, of either sex, willing to participate, cooperative during the assessment and intervention, and identified as having delayed or suboptimal language development based on Denver II screening. Children who were absent during the intervention or data collection were excluded.

The intervention consisted of picture-based storytelling using fable-themed picture storybooks. The activity was conducted for approximately 30 minutes per session over four consecutive days. Each session involved observing pictures, listening to the

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story, identifying vocabulary, responding to questions, and communicating based on the story content. The same general storytelling structure was used throughout the intervention period. Language development was assessed immediately before the intervention period and after completion of the four storytelling sessions.

Language development was assessed using the language sector of the Denver II developmental screening instrument. The assessment was administered according to the child's chronological age and the procedures specified in the Denver II manual. The language items appropriate for the child's age were assessed individually, and responses were recorded according to the response categories provided by the Denver II, including Pass, Fail, Refusal, and No Opportunity. The Denver II assessment was used to identify developmental performance in the language sector and to determine children who met the study's eligibility criteria.

For the statistical analysis, the language-development results recorded during the Denver II assessment were operationalized as a numerical score representing the child's performance on the language items assessed in the study. The score was obtained from the recorded item-level responses according to the scoring procedure applied by the researchers during data collection. The same scoring procedure and assessment items were applied at both pretest and posttest. The resulting score was used only as an operational measure of performance on the assessed language items and was not interpreted as an official standardized Denver II developmental quotient or as a diagnostic measure of language ability.

Because the available study documentation did not establish a separate standardized numerical scoring scale for the Denver II, the numerical score was treated as a study-specific operational measure derived from the language-sector assessment rather than as a standardized Denver II total score. The interpretation of the pretest–posttest results was therefore limited to changes in performance on the language tasks assessed during the study. The Denver II manual and established Denver II

methodology were used as the methodological basis for administration, item selection, and interpretation of developmental screening responses. The research materials consisted of a Denver II kit, Denver II assessment sheets, fable-themed picture storybooks, and stationery. Primary data were obtained directly from the children's language-development assessments before and after the intervention. Secondary data were obtained from relevant scientific literature and methodological references concerning developmental screening and the Denver II.

Data collection consisted of three stages. First, a pretest assessment was conducted using the language sector of the Denver II. Second, picture-based storytelling was implemented for approximately 30 minutes per session over four consecutive days. Third, a posttest assessment was conducted after completion of the intervention using the same assessment procedure. The collected data were checked for completeness, coded according to the study's predetermined data-processing procedure, entered into the data-processing system, and rechecked to minimize data-entry errors. Univariate analysis was used to describe participant characteristics, including age and sex, and to summarize language-development scores before and after the intervention. The Shapiro–Wilk test was used to assess the distribution of the numerical scores. Because the pretest and posttest measurements were obtained from the same participants and the numerical scores did not meet the normality assumption, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was used to examine the difference between pretest and posttest scores. Statistical significance was set at $\alpha = 0.05$, with $p < 0.05$ considered statistically significant.

The study received ethical approval from the Health Research Ethics Committee of Universitas Mitra Indonesia before data collection (No. S.25/200/FKES10/2026). The study adhered to the principles of informed consent, beneficence, non-maleficence, confidentiality, and justice. Written informed consent was obtained from the parents or guardians before children's participation. Participants' identities and personal data were kept confidential and were used solely for research purposes.

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RESEARCH RESULTS

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents (N=12)

Variable	Results
Age (n/%) (Mean±SD) (Range) (Year)	(4.6±0.5) (4-5)
4	5/41.7
5	7/58.3
Gender (n/%)	
Male	4/33.3
Female	8/66.7

Table 1 shows that the mean age of the respondents was 4.58 ± 0.51 years, with an age range of 4–5 years. Most respondents were 5 years old (7/58.3%), while 5 respondents (41.7%) were 4 years old. Female respondents accounted for 8 (66.7%), while male respondents accounted for 4 (33.3%). These distributions describe the characteristics of the purposively selected study sample.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Children's Language Development Before and After the Intervention

Variable	Range	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	SD
Before	2	5.00	4	6	60	.426
After	2	6.67	6	8	80	0.778

Table 2 shows that the mean language development score increased from 5.00 ± 0.426 before the intervention to 6.67 ± 0.778 after the intervention. The minimum score increased from 4 to 6, while the maximum score increased from 6 to 8. The observed mean increase was 1.67 points. These findings describe an increase in language development scores following the picture-based storytelling sessions.

Table 3. Shapiro–Wilk Normality Test for Children's Language Development Scores

Measurement	Shapiro–Wilk Statistic	df	P-Value
Before	.599	12	<.001
After	.777	12	<.005

Table 3 shows that the language development scores did not meet the normality assumption at either measurement point. The Shapiro–Wilk test produced a statistic of 0.599 with $p < 0.001$ for the pretest and 0.777 with $p = <.005$ for the posttest. Because both distributions had p-values below 0.05, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was used to compare the paired pretest and posttest scores.

Table 4. Comparison of Language Development Scores Before and After Picture-Based Storytelling

Measurement	Mean	Mean Difference	Min-Max	SD	Z	P-Value
Before	5.00	+1.67	4-6	0.426	-3.115	0.002
After	6.67		6-8	0.778		

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Table 4 shows that the mean language development score increased from 5.00 (SD = 0.426) before the intervention to 6.67 (SD = 0.778) after the intervention. The mean increase was 1.67 points. The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test indicated a statistically significant difference between the paired pretest and posttest scores ($Z = -3.115$, $p = 0.002$). These results indicate that language development scores were higher after the picture-based storytelling sessions than before the sessions. However, the observed difference cannot be attributed solely to the intervention because the study did not include a control group.

DISCUSSION

The respondents were predominantly 5 years old and female. These characteristics describe the composition of the purposively selected sample and should be considered when interpreting the findings. During the preschool period, language development continues to progress through cognitive maturation, social interaction, vocabulary exposure, and opportunities for communication. However, chronological age alone does not determine language development because children require stimulation that is appropriate to their developmental needs (Yusnita, Fauziah, & Fatimah, 2025). The higher proportion of female respondents reflects the characteristics of the selected sample and should not be interpreted as evidence that sex determines children's language development. Previous research has identified sex as one of several factors potentially associated with speech and language development, together with birth history, parenting practices, gadget use, and stimulation (Pratiwi, Yanuarini, & Yani, 2022). Therefore, the age and sex distributions in this study primarily provide contextual information about the participants.

Before the intervention, the participants had relatively low language development scores based on the numerical scoring procedure applied to the language sector of the Denver II. These baseline findings indicate that the participating children required stimulation appropriate to their developmental needs. Language development

includes receptive and expressive abilities, such as understanding information, following instructions, acquiring vocabulary, answering questions, and expressing thoughts verbally (Sururin & Umkabu, 2023). Preschool children require opportunities to listen, imitate, ask questions, respond, and communicate through meaningful activities. Consistent stimulation may provide opportunities for children to practice these skills during an important period of language development (Darmawan & Ananta, 2024).

Following the four-day picture-based storytelling sessions, the mean language development score increased from 5.00 to 6.67, representing a mean increase of 1.67 points. The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test also demonstrated a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores ($Z = -3.115$, $p = 0.002$). The finding indicates that the children's language development scores were higher after the storytelling sessions. However, because the study used a one-group pretest–posttest design without a control group, the observed change cannot be interpreted as definitive evidence that picture-based storytelling caused the improvement. Several characteristics of the intervention may have contributed to the observed change. Storytelling provides opportunities for children to listen to language in a meaningful context, encounter new vocabulary and sentence structures, answer questions, and communicate about story content. These activities may provide practice in both receptive and expressive language skills (Heryanti, Yahman, Hermawati, & Putri, 2024). Interactive storytelling has also been reported to provide opportunities for children to speak and expand their vocabulary (Ulfa, Hatala, Septiana, Naulia, Yulianti, Rahayu, & Arini, 2024). The use of pictures may have provided additional visual cues during the storytelling activities. Children could observe characters, objects, and events while listening to the narrative, which may have helped them associate verbal information with concrete visual representations. Picture-based activities have been reported to support attention, vocabulary, imagination, and communication (Anwar

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& Nugroho, 2023; Kuswandi, Puspita, & Ismail, 2022). In the present study, the combination of visual material and verbal storytelling provided repeated opportunities to observe pictures, listen to vocabulary, answer questions, and communicate about the story.

The findings are broadly consistent with previous studies reporting positive changes in children's language abilities following storytelling or picture-based activities. A previous study involving children aged 5–6 years reported changes in language ability following picture-story activities, while interactive storytelling has been associated with increased speaking opportunities and vocabulary practice (Tarigan & Harahap, 2024). The present findings therefore provide additional preliminary evidence that structured picture-based storytelling can be used as a language-stimulation activity in an early childhood education setting. The repeated nature of the intervention may also be relevant. The children participated in storytelling activities for four consecutive days, allowing repeated exposure to similar language-learning processes. During the sessions, children observed pictures, listened to stories, identified vocabulary, responded to questions, and communicated about the story content. Such repeated opportunities may have supported practice and familiarity with the language tasks. Nevertheless, this interpretation should remain cautious because the study design cannot determine whether the observed changes resulted specifically from the storytelling intervention. The study also has practical implications for early childhood education. Picture-based storytelling uses relatively accessible materials and can be integrated into classroom activities. Teachers and parents may use picture books to provide opportunities for children to listen, identify objects, answer questions, and retell stories. However, these activities should be viewed as language-stimulation strategies rather than as a substitute for formal developmental assessment or professional intervention when developmental concerns persist.

This study has several limitations. First, the sample consisted of only 12 children, which limits the precision and generalizability of the findings. Second, purposive sampling may have introduced selection

bias because participants were selected based on predetermined characteristics rather than randomly. Third, the one-group pretest–posttest design did not include a control group; therefore, maturation, repeated testing, familiarity with the assessment, classroom activities, or other external factors may have contributed to the observed changes. Fourth, the intervention was conducted over only four consecutive days, so the study could not determine whether the observed changes were sustained over a longer period. Finally, the use of the Denver II language sector requires clear documentation of the scoring procedure used to generate the numerical scores analysed in this study. Future research should use larger samples, include a comparison or control group, apply a clearly documented and validated scoring procedure, and conduct longer follow-up assessments. Overall, the present study found higher language development scores after four days of picture-based storytelling, with a statistically significant pretest–posttest difference. These findings should be interpreted as preliminary evidence of change among the participating children rather than as evidence of a causal effect. Further research using controlled designs and larger samples is needed to clarify the contribution of picture-based storytelling to preschool children's language development.

CONCLUSION

Language development scores increased from 5.00 ± 0.426 before the intervention to 6.67 ± 0.778 after four consecutive days of picture-based storytelling, with a mean increase of 1.67 points. The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test indicated a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores ($Z = -3.115$, $p = 0.002$). These findings indicate that the participating children had higher language development scores following the picture-based storytelling sessions. However, because this study used a small purposively selected sample and a one-group pretest–posttest design without a control group, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence of a causal effect.

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