

Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Storytelling Program in Increasing Children's Interest in Reading in Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT: *The Storytelling Program is an initiative that aims to increase students' interest in reading through interactive and fun storytelling methods. This research evaluates the program's effectiveness at SDN 4 Werinama, Regency of Seram Bagian Timur, Maluku Province. The research results showed a significant increase in students' interest in reading after participating in the program, demonstrated through increased reading frequency, reading comprehension, and active participation in discussions. The main factors that support the success of this program include interesting storytelling methods, teacher involvement in continuing the program, and the role of parents in instilling the habit of reading at home. Even though this program has had a positive impact, several obstacles, such as limited book collections and program sustainability, remain challenges. Therefore, support is needed from various parties, including schools, government, and social organizations, to enrich literacy facilities and make storytelling part of a sustainable education program. With the right approach, storytelling can become an innovative model for developing a literacy culture, especially in remote areas and building a generation that loves to read and has broad insight.*

KEYWORDS: *Storytelling, interest in reading, literacy, elementary education, interactive storytelling.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Interest in reading is one of the main factors in improving the quality of education, especially at the elementary school level. Students with a high interest in reading tend to understand lessons more easily, have broad insight, and can develop critical and creative thinking skills (Ginting et al., 2023; Supriadi et al., 2021). However, the reality shows that students' interest in reading in Indonesia, especially in remote areas, is still relatively low (Munawaroh et al., 2024). Several factors that cause low interest in reading include limited access to interesting reading materials, lack of assistance from parents and teachers in cultivating reading habits, and the lack of programs specifically designed to increase children's interest in reading activities (Utami et al., 2023; Yanti & Kurniawan, 2021).

SDNegeri 4 Werinama, located in the Regency of Seram Bagian Timur, Maluku Province, Indonesia, is one of the schools that faces challenges in fostering a culture of literacy among its students. Many students at this school still consider reading boring and only done when there is an assignment from the teacher. Apart from that, the limited number of engaging reading books and learning methods that are not yet varied are also obstacles to increasing students' interest in reading (Ginting et al., 2023; Netra et al., 2023; Tasya et al., 2023). To overcome this problem, an innovative and fun approach is needed so that students can be more interested in reading.

One effort to increase children's interest in reading is the storytelling program. This program is part of the community service activities carried out by the Department of Management of Islamic Education of IAIN Ambon. Storytelling is designed as a traveling activity that introduces interesting stories to students more interactively and entertainingly (Aryati, 2023; Siwi, 2021; Turrayan, 2021). With this approach, it is hoped that students will enjoy the stories told and be encouraged to read more books and explore the world of literacy more widely (Annisa et al., 2024).

Storytelling has long been an effective method for instilling moral values and building children's imagination and creativity (Astuti et al., 2022; Carroll, 2022; Wahab & Amaliyah, 2021). In an educational context, storytelling can also be a powerful tool to increase interest in reading because, through engaging stories, students can feel closer to books and make them part of their daily lives. Apart from that, storytelling can also build listening skills, increase vocabulary, and enrich children's insight into various things told in fairy tales (Seni, 2022; Sufitri & Setyowati, 2019; Zare et al., 2023). Therefore, the Storytelling program is believed to

be the right strategy to foster children's love of reading, especially in the elementary school environment (Nuraeni et al., 2019; Nurhadi et al., 2023; Saputri & Hasibuan, 2022).

The storytelling program implemented at SD Negeri 4 Werinama presents inspiring stories for students and involves teachers and parents in learning. With collaboration between storytellers, teachers, and parents, the effects of this program can be sustainable and have a long-term impact on children's reading habits. Evaluating the effectiveness of this program is an important step in assessing the extent to which the storytelling program has succeeded in increasing students' interest in reading at the school (Jenkins & Lonsdale, 2007; Sadik, 2008; Sulaiman et al., 2007).

This research evaluates how much the Storytelling program contributes to increasing children's interest in reading at SD Negeri 4 Werinama, Regency of Seram Bagian Timur, Maluku Province. This evaluation will cover children's involvement in storytelling activities, their attitudes toward reading, and the program's long-term impact on students' reading habits. The results of this evaluation can become a basis for developing other literacy programs that are more effective and can be implemented in various schools with similar conditions.

This research can provide more appropriate strategies for instilling a literacy culture early. The Storytelling program can be a model for other schools to increase students' interest in reading with a fun and story-based approach. Furthermore, this research can provide insight for educators and stakeholders regarding the importance of innovation in learning methods, especially in building a strong reading culture among students.

II. METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to evaluate the effectiveness of the storytelling program in increasing students' interest in reading at SDN 4 Werinama, Regency of Seram Bagian Timur. This approach was chosen to understand in depth how direct experience in storytelling can influence students' reading interests (Hutchings et al., 2018; Jansen et al., 2021; Wohlin, 2021).

This research uses a qualitative descriptive research design, where the researcher is directly involved in student storytelling activities. Observations were made to understand how students responded to the stories told, how involved they were in storytelling activities, and how their interest in reading changed after participating in this program.

The research was conducted at SD Negeri 4 Werinama, involving students from various grade levels as the main subjects. The research subjects included SD Negeri 4 Werinama students to see differences in responses to storytelling activities. Classroom and library teachers who support this program provided their perspectives on changes in students' reading interests.

This study used various data collection techniques to obtain comprehensive information. Islamic Education Management students interacted directly with students during the storytelling session to observe their responses. Observations were conducted to assess students' expressions, enthusiasm, and level of involvement during the activity. Several aspects were examined, including students' verbal and nonverbal reactions to the story, their participation in answering questions or engaging in discussions, and their interest in reading books after the storytelling session.

In addition, documentation in photos, videos, and field notes supported the observation findings. This documentation played an important role in data analysis by capturing students' spontaneous reactions during the storytelling session.

III. DISCUSSION

One of the main initiatives of the Study Program Student Association (Himpunan Mahasiswa Program Studi/Himapro) is a community service program that Islamic Education Management students routinely hold. This program is designed to involve schools and the surrounding community, with 24 participants, including students, Education Management lecturers, and representatives of Dompét Dhuafa Maluku. The implementation of this initiative follows three important phases, namely planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, so that a structured and impactful community service approach is created.

The storytelling was held live on January 2025. It was attended by a delegation from Dompét Dhuafa Maluku and three representatives of Islamic Education management students who participated in activities in Bemo Village. In its implementation, Islamic Education Management students held various programs, including storytelling, to foster students' interest in reading by telling stories interestingly and interactively.

1. Storytelling at SDN 4 Werinama

Interest in reading is essential in children's intellectual and academic development, especially at the elementary school level. Unfortunately, many children in remote areas, such as SDN 4 Werinama, Regency of Seram Bagian Timur, still have low interest in reading. Factors such as limited access to reading materials, lack of

interesting learning methods, and minimal role of the environment in cultivating reading habits are the main obstacles.

Storytelling is an education-based tourism concept that combines adventure with fairy tales in an interactive experience (Fitroh, 2015; Gunawan, 2019; Laksita et al., 2023). These activities are generally aimed at students and families, allowing them to explore the world of imagination in a fun and educational way. Storytelling is usually held in amusement parks, zoos, forests, or other tourist destinations, with fantastic elements (Afi Nuraida & Khaerunnisa, 2021; Asma Nurul Aulia & Wicaksono, 2021; Maharani, 2017; Maulidia, 2018).

Figure 1: Students carry out a Storytelling



Islamic Education Management Students present the Storytelling Program as an innovative solution to increase students' interest in reading using interactive and fun storytelling methods. Fairy tales are entertainment and a learning tool that instills reading habits and enriches children's insight (Fitroh, 2015; Sadik, 2008).

Figure 2: Students are telling stories



Through an interactive and fun approach, it is hoped that students can consider reading an engaging and practical activity to increase their interest in reading. The success of this program is measured through active student participation, increased reading frequency, and changes in positive attitudes toward reading activities (Purnama et al., 2022; Ruzain et al., 2023; Satriani, 2019). It is also hoped that this program can become a literacy learning model that can be applied in other schools to instill literacy culture early on. Islamic Education Management Students hope that SD Negeri 4 Werinama students will be increasingly motivated to

love reading books by holding this Storytelling. In this way, they no longer only read when facing tests but make reading an everyday activity.

2. Changes in Reading Interest Before and After the Program

Based on the pretest results, most SD Negeri 4 Werinama (SBT) students have a low interest in reading. This can be seen from the low reading frequency, lack of enthusiasm for books, and limitations in understanding reading texts. Many students consider reading tedious and only do it with school assignments.

After implementing the storytelling program for several days, the posttest results showed a significant increase in student's interest in reading at SD Negeri 4 Werinama. Students who were previously reluctant to read began to show interest in storybooks, visit the library more often, and be more active in discussing the stories they had read.

Several factors can explain this increase in reading interest. First, the storytelling method used in this program builds children's emotional involvement with the stories being told. When students listen to fairy tales, they receive information, imagine the storyline, identify characters, and relate the story to their experiences (Adib, 2023; Oktarin et al., 2023). This creates a more meaningful and enjoyable reading experience.

Second, using expression, intonation, and visual aids such as puppets or illustrations in storytelling increases the story's appeal. This approach helps them understand the story's content more easily and encourages them to use similar books outside storytelling sessions. Some students have even started asking their teachers and parents for book recommendations, indicating a positive change in reading habits.

3. The Impact of the Program on Reading Comprehension and Creativity

Apart from increasing interest in reading, the storytelling program also positively impacts students' reading comprehension and creativity. The reading comprehension test results showed improved scores for students who participated in the program. This indicates that students interested in reading can better understand the text's content and remember the information presented (Prasetyo, 2020; Puspitasari et al., 2018; Sidiq et al., 2013; Wulansari & Khan, 2022).

In addition to fostering a heightened interest in reading, the storytelling program has significantly impacted students' reading comprehension and creativity. One of the key outcomes of this program was observed through the reading comprehension test results. Students who actively participated in the storytelling sessions demonstrated noticeable improvements in their test scores (De Vries, 2008; Sidiq et al., 2013). This finding suggests that the program's immersive and interactive approach captured students' attention and enhanced their ability to process and retain information from the stories. The ability to better comprehend and remember the content of the text is a vital skill for students as it contributes to their overall academic performance and learning ability (Prasetyo, 2020; Wulansari & Khan, 2022).

Improved comprehension can be attributed to the nature of the storytelling sessions, which provide students with a multi-sensory learning experience. Unlike traditional reading methods, storytelling involves more than just reading words on a page—it engages students' imagination, emotions, and attention. As they listen to the stories, students are encouraged to visualize the events, understand the characters' emotions, and relate the stories to their experiences. This deeper level of engagement allows students to develop a stronger grasp of the material, making it easier to recall key details and comprehend complex ideas within the stories. Storytelling's interactive and dynamic nature also helps students connect with the material in ways that foster a deeper understanding (Bordegoni et al., 2017; Harrington, 2020; Ruzain et al., 2023).

Moreover, the storytelling program has also stimulated students' creativity. By engaging with the stories in an interactive manner, students are encouraged to think critically and creatively about the content. They are invited to visualize scenes, predict story outcomes, and even create their versions of the stories. This boosts their imagination and allows them to express themselves creatively through discussions or activities related to the story. As students become more involved in this creative process, they develop stronger problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. Engaging creatively with a text enriches their reading experience and enhances their overall cognitive development, preparing them for more advanced academic challenges in the future (Apriyani & Suyadi, 2023; Harrington, 2020; Wismaliya et al., 2018).

Storytelling activities also encourage students' creativity in expressing their ideas and imagination. In some program sessions, students can create their own versions of stories or retell fairy tales they have heard in their own style. This helps develop communication skills and critical thinking and builds their confidence in public speaking (Sidiq et al., 2013; Wulansari & Khan, 2022).

Teachers involved in this research also reported increased student participation in class discussions after participating in the storytelling program. Students who were previously passive became more active in asking questions and sharing opinions about the stories they heard. This shows that the program impacts reading interests, students' social skills, and communication confidence.

4. The Role of Teachers and Parents in Program Sustainability

The active involvement of both teachers and parents deeply influences the Storytelling program's success in boosting students' interest in reading. These two groups play critical roles in ensuring the program's impact extends beyond the immediate educational context. Through their engagement and support, the program's outcomes can be sustained and continue to benefit students in the long term.

First, the teacher's contribution to the program is indispensable. Teachers are facilitators and key enablers of the student's learning experience. The teachers are provided specific training focused on storytelling techniques to ensure the program's long-term success. This training is designed to equip them with the necessary skills to carry the activity forward independently within the classroom. By becoming proficient in these techniques, teachers can continue to conduct engaging storytelling sessions even after the program ends. This sustained effort will foster a learning environment in which students actively look forward to reading, and it will cultivate their reading habits long after the research phase of the program. The teachers' ability to keep the storytelling practice alive within their everyday classroom activities ensures that the program's effects remain embedded in the students' daily routines, making reading a continuous, enjoyable part of their lives (Xiao et al., 2023; Yuksel-Arslan et al., 2016; Yuliani & Hartanto, 2022).

Moreover, the integration of storytelling into the broader educational experience is greatly enhanced when the teachers make it a regular practice. Teachers who make storytelling a part of their weekly activities create an ongoing cycle of excitement and engagement surrounding reading. By weaving storytelling into lessons across different subjects, they maintain students' interest in reading and reinforce the idea that books and stories are enjoyable, informative, and essential. Such a practice reinforces the storytelling methods learned during the program and instills a lasting love for reading, making it an intrinsic part of the student's academic journey (Adib, 2023; Prasetyo, 2020; Sidiq et al., 2013).

While teachers' involvement is crucial, the role of parents in this process cannot be overstated. Parents are the first educators and greatly influence their children's learning habits, including their interest in reading. The Storytelling program's success is greatly enhanced when parents actively foster a love for reading at home. Many parents have taken the initiative to read stories to their children before bed, creating a daily routine that incorporates reading into their children's lives. This practice strengthens the children's reading skills and establishes a positive association with books, reinforcing that reading is enjoyable and essential (Lin et al., 2021; Rahmawati & Ocktarani, 2022; Zivan & Horowitz-Kraus, 2020).

In addition to bedtime stories, parents can also encourage their children by providing them with interesting reading materials at home. Parents who offer various books catering to their children's interests help broaden their reading experiences. Whether it is picture books, novels, or educational materials, having a diverse selection of books readily available at home ensures that children have constant access to reading resources. The more students read at home, the more their reading skills develop, and their interest in books grows. Parents who support this habit further enhance their children's motivation to read, as students are more likely to continue reading outside of school hours when they receive positive reinforcement from their family environment (Lin et al., 2021; Rahmawati & Ocktarani, 2022; Zivan & Horowitz-Kraus, 2020).

This synergy between teachers and parents creates a robust student support system. When educators and families work together, they form a collaborative effort that creates a consistent reading culture at school and home. This combined approach ensures that the benefits of the Storytelling program are not temporary but are reinforced over time, setting a strong foundation for students to become lifelong readers. Students who experience continuous encouragement both in school and at home are more likely to develop a passion for reading, which, in turn, positively influences their academic performance and overall intellectual development.

5. Obstacles and Challenges in Program Implementation

Although the storytelling program has positively impacted students' interest in reading and comprehension, several challenges were faced during its implementation. One of the main issues was the limited resources available, particularly regarding the school library's collection of engaging reading materials. Many students interested in reading following the storytelling sessions expressed difficulty finding books that matched their interests or reading levels. This gap highlighted the need for the school to expand its library resources to accommodate the growing interest in reading. Ensuring that students have access to a diverse range of books would sustain their newfound enthusiasm for reading and help them cultivate a regular reading habit beyond the classroom setting (Faria et al., 2018; Matamit et al., 2020; Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2021; Watters, 2014).

In addition to the limited resources, the program's long-term success depends heavily on the commitment of teachers and school administrators. While the storytelling sessions had an immediate positive effect, their sustainability requires ongoing effort from the educators involved. Without continued support from the teachers, the program's impact may diminish. It is essential that teachers remain motivated to integrate storytelling into their regular teaching practices, even after the research phase has ended. To achieve this, schools could consider providing teachers with further professional development opportunities and resources to

help them maintain the quality and frequency of storytelling activities. This approach would ensure that the benefits of storytelling continue to be felt by students long after the initial program concludes (Rahmawati & Ocktarani, 2022; Saritepeci, 2021; Yuksel-Arslan et al., 2016).

Moreover, the program's success would be enhanced if schools could integrate storytelling into their formal curricula or extracurricular activities. Rather than treating storytelling as a one-time event, incorporating it as part of the school's ongoing educational framework would allow students to benefit regularly. Including storytelling in the curriculum could help students connect with different subjects and engage in more meaningful learning experiences. Similarly, embedding storytelling within extracurricular programs such as reading clubs or cultural events would help ensure that the students continue to engage with stories in various contexts. This would reinforce the student's learning and provide a wider platform for storytelling to be appreciated by the entire school community (Bell et al., 2024).

Lastly, collaboration among different stakeholders, including the school, local communities, and external organizations, is crucial for overcoming the limitations faced by the program. Schools can seek partnerships with local libraries, publishing houses, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to enrich their library collections and provide additional resources for the program. Furthermore, community involvement can enhance the storytelling experience by encouraging parents and community leaders to participate in storytelling sessions or provide resources (McCarthy, 2021; Rajan, 2022). By fostering such collaborative efforts, the program can achieve a more sustainable and wide-reaching impact, ensuring that students continue to benefit from the initiative for years.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Storytelling program initiated by Islamic Education Management students has proven effective in increasing students' interest in reading at Werinama 4 Elementary School, Regency of Seram Bagian Timur, Maluku Province. Through an interactive and fun storytelling approach, students who previously had little interest in reading began to show tremendous enthusiasm for books and literacy. The pretest and posttest results showed a significant increase in reading frequency, reading comprehension, and active participation in discussions.

The success of this program lies not only in the interesting storytelling method but also in the support from various parties, including teachers, parents, and the surrounding community. Teachers who receive training in storytelling techniques can continue this program independently, while parental involvement in cultivating reading habits at home strengthens the long-term impact of this activity.

However, several challenges, such as limited book collections and program sustainability, need further attention. Therefore, schools, government, and social organizations must collaborate to enrich literacy facilities and integrate storytelling activities into the curriculum or extracurricular programs.

With the right approach, storytelling can become an innovative model for developing a literacy culture in remote areas. This program fosters reading habits and helps students develop creativity, critical thinking skills, and confidence in expressing ideas. Storytelling can continue to develop and be implemented in more schools to build a generation that loves to read and has broad insight.

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