

The Effect of the Read-Aloud Method on Literacy and Critical Thinking Skills of Children Aged 5–6 Years

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ABSTRACT

Background. Early childhood education plays a significant role in preparing children for future academic achievement, particularly in literacy and cognitive development. Preliminary observations at TK Banjarsari Asri, Cerme, Gresik, revealed that many children aged 5–6 years had not yet developed optimal literacy and critical thinking skills. Difficulties were identified in listening comprehension, retelling stories, using new vocabulary, asking questions, expressing opinions, and relating stories to personal experiences.

Purpose. This study aims to analyze the effect of the read-aloud method on the literacy and critical thinking skills of children aged 5–6 years.

Method. This study employed a quasi-experimental design involving children in Group B at TK Banjarsari Asri. The read-aloud method was implemented through interactive storytelling sessions using picture books entitled “Wake Up Early and Sleep Early” and “Love Learning and Socializing.” During the intervention, teachers encouraged children to listen actively, answer questions, predict story events, express opinions, and connect the stories to their daily experiences.

Results. The findings indicate that the read-aloud method positively affected both literacy and critical thinking skills. Children showed improvement in listening comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, story retelling, oral communication, questioning ability, problem-solving, and expressing logical opinions. The interactive storytelling process also increased children’s participation and confidence during classroom activities.

Conclusion. The read-aloud method can be considered an effective pedagogical strategy for improving literacy and critical thinking skills in early childhood education. Regular implementation of interactive read-aloud activities provides meaningful language experiences and supports children’s cognitive development.

KEYWORDS

Read-aloud Method, Literacy Skills, Early Childhood Education.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is an essential stage in children’s development because it lays the foundation for future academic success, language acquisition, and cognitive growth. During the ages of 5–6 years, children experience rapid progress in language development, communication, and reasoning skills (Sary, 2023). At this stage, children require meaningful learning experiences that are capable of stimulating both literacy and critical thinking skills simultaneously. Literacy in early childhood is not merely defined as the ability to read and write formally, but

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also includes listening, speaking, understanding language, and expressing ideas in meaningful contexts. Similarly, critical thinking in early childhood refers to the ability to observe, ask questions, compare, predict, analyze simple situations, and provide logical explanations (Rahman, 2020).

The importance of literacy development in early childhood has been emphasized by many scholars. Clay argued that emergent literacy begins long before children are able to read and write conventionally, as children gradually develop literacy skills through listening to stories, recognizing symbols, understanding language, and interacting with printed materials. Likewise, Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) stated that early literacy experiences are essential because they influence children's readiness for formal schooling and their later academic performance (Neuman, S. B., & Dickinson, 2011). Children who are exposed to meaningful literacy activities at an early age tend to have stronger vocabulary, better listening skills, and more advanced communication abilities (Rosidah, Supriyadi, & Azzahri, 2023).

Besides literacy, critical thinking is another essential competence that should be developed during early childhood (Masitowati, 2021). Ennis (2015) defined critical thinking as reflective and rational thinking that focuses on deciding what to believe or do. In early childhood settings, critical thinking is reflected in children's ability to ask questions, identify relationships, compare ideas, make predictions, and provide simple reasons for their opinions (Suryani, L., & Angela, 2024). According to Vygotsky (1978), children's cognitive development is highly influenced by social interaction and guided learning experiences. Therefore, learning activities that involve dialogue, questioning, and active participation are necessary to foster critical thinking skills (Setiasih, E., 2023).

Despite the importance of literacy and critical thinking, many early childhood institutions still face challenges in developing these skills effectively. Preliminary observations conducted at TK Banjarsari Asri, Cerme, Gresik, showed that children aged 5–6 years demonstrated limited literacy and critical thinking abilities (Justice, L. M., & Pullen, 2021). Many children had difficulty maintaining attention while listening to stories, understanding story content, retelling stories coherently, and using new vocabulary in daily communication. In addition, children rarely asked questions, expressed opinions, predicted story outcomes, or connected stories with their personal experiences. These findings indicate that children need more interactive and meaningful learning strategies to stimulate their literacy and cognitive development (Latifa, Fitria, 2023).

One learning strategy that is considered appropriate for early childhood education is the read-aloud method. Read-aloud is an instructional activity in which teachers read storybooks aloud using expressive intonation, gestures, and interactive questioning. Trelease explained that read-aloud activities enrich children's vocabulary, improve listening comprehension, and increase children's interest in reading. Furthermore, Lane and Wright stated that read-aloud activities expose children to richer language structures and more complex vocabulary than they usually encounter in everyday conversation. Through this process, children are not only passive listeners but also active participants who engage with the content of the story (Masitowati, 2022).

Several previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of the read-aloud method in improving children's literacy development. Masitowati found that regular read-aloud activities significantly improved children's vocabulary, speaking fluency, and story comprehension. Sary and Ismaya also reported that interactive read-aloud activities improved children's listening skills, confidence in expressing opinions, and ability to retell stories. In addition, Rosidah, Supriyadi, and Azzahri (2023) revealed that children who participated in consistent read-aloud sessions showed better performance in recognizing letters, understanding stories, and communicating ideas.

In relation to critical thinking, Suryani and Angela (2024) found that read-aloud activities encouraged children to ask questions, compare characters, predict events, and provide reasons for

their opinions. Ruqoyyah et al. also highlighted that storytelling through read-aloud methods helped children develop analytical thinking, particularly when teachers asked reflective questions and encouraged discussion during and after storytelling sessions. These findings suggest that read-aloud is not only beneficial for literacy development but also for promoting higher-order thinking skills in young children.

However, although many studies have examined the impact of read-aloud activities on literacy or language development, fewer studies have investigated the simultaneous effect of the read-aloud method on both literacy and critical thinking skills among children aged 5–6 years. Most previous studies focused only on vocabulary, reading readiness, or speaking ability without exploring how read-aloud activities can also stimulate children's reasoning, questioning, and reflective thinking. Therefore, this study fills an important gap in the literature by examining the dual contribution of the read-aloud method to literacy and critical thinking development (Aeni., 2024).

The novelty of this study lies in its integrated focus on two important developmental domains, namely literacy and critical thinking, within the same intervention. In addition, this study uses storybooks related to the “Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children” program, specifically “Wake Up Early and Sleep Early” and “Love Learning and Socializing.” These storybooks were selected because they are closely related to children's daily experiences and provide opportunities for children to listen, ask questions, compare events, and connect stories with their own lives (Novianti, 2021).

Based on the issues described above, the purpose of this study is to analyze the effect of the read-aloud method on the literacy and critical thinking skills of children aged 5–6 years. This study hypothesizes that the implementation of the read-aloud method positively affects children's literacy skills, including listening comprehension, vocabulary, and story retelling, as well as their critical thinking skills, including questioning, predicting, comparing, and expressing logical opinions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental design to examine the effect of the read-aloud method on the literacy and critical thinking skills of children aged 5–6 years. A quasi-experimental approach was selected because the researcher could not randomly assign participants into groups due to the existing classroom structure. The study used a pretest-posttest design in which children's literacy and critical thinking abilities were measured before and after the intervention.

The population of this study consisted of all children aged 5–6 years enrolled in Group B at TK Banjarsari Asri, Cerme, Gresik, during the 2025/2026 academic year. The sample included 25 children selected through total sampling because the number of participants in the target class was relatively small and all children met the criteria for participation. The participants consisted of boys and girls aged between 5 and 6 years who regularly attended classroom activities.

The primary instruments used in this study were observation sheets and assessment rubrics designed to measure literacy and critical thinking skills. The literacy instrument assessed children's ability to listen attentively to stories, understand story content, use new vocabulary, retell stories coherently, and show interest in reading activities. Meanwhile, the critical thinking instrument assessed children's ability to ask questions, express opinions, predict story events, compare characters, and relate story content to personal experiences. Each indicator was measured using a four-point rating scale ranging from “not yet developed” to “developed very well.”

Before the instruments were used in the study, they were validated through expert judgment involving specialists in early childhood education. The experts evaluated the relevance, clarity, and appropriateness of each indicator for children aged 5–6 years. Instrument reliability was established

through consistency in observation procedures and the use of clear scoring rubrics. To increase reliability, classroom observations were conducted repeatedly during the intervention period.

The intervention was conducted during regular classroom sessions over several meetings. The read-aloud method was implemented using two picture storybooks entitled “Wake Up Early and Sleep Early” and “Love Learning and Socializing.” These books were selected because they matched children’s developmental characteristics, contained simple language and clear illustrations, and related closely to children’s daily experiences.

During the intervention, the teacher read the stories aloud using expressive intonation, gestures, and facial expressions. Children were encouraged to participate actively by answering questions, predicting the next events in the story, discussing the characters’ actions, and connecting the story with their own experiences. The implementation of the read-aloud method followed three stages: pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading activities. In the pre-reading stage, the teacher introduced the title, cover, and theme of the story. During the reading stage, the teacher paused to ask questions, explain new vocabulary, and encourage predictions. In the post-reading stage, children were asked to retell the story, express opinions, and discuss the moral values contained in the story.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the children’s literacy and critical thinking scores before and after the intervention, including the mean, percentage, and score distribution. Inferential statistics were used to determine whether there was a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores. A paired-sample t-test was used because the same group of children was measured before and after the intervention. The level of significance was set at 0.05.

Although this study provides valuable findings regarding the effectiveness of the read-aloud method, several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study involved only one class with a relatively small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Second, the study relied primarily on observational assessments, which may involve some degree of subjectivity despite the use of scoring rubrics. Third, the intervention was conducted within a limited time frame, so the long-term effects of the read-aloud method on children’s literacy and critical thinking skills could not be fully examined.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of the read-aloud method positively influenced both literacy and critical thinking skills among children aged 5–6 years. Prior to the intervention, children’s literacy abilities were still relatively low. Many children were unable to maintain attention throughout storytelling sessions, had difficulty understanding the content of stories, and struggled to retell stories in a coherent manner. Only around 40% of the children had reached a good level of literacy development, while approximately 60% were still in the developing category and had not yet shown optimal performance. In terms of critical thinking, children rarely asked questions, provided opinions, predicted story events, compared characters, or connected the stories with their own experiences. These conditions indicated that children needed more meaningful and interactive stimulation.

Table 1. Effects of Read-Aloud Method on Children's Literacy Indicators

Literacy Indicator	Before Read-Aloud	After Read-Aloud
Attention during storytelling	Often distracted	More attentive
Listening to story details	Poor recall of details	Better recall of details
Engagement level	Low	High

Ability to follow story	Could not follow fully	Can follow from start to finish
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After the implementation of the read-aloud method, children demonstrated substantial improvement in several literacy indicators. First, children became more attentive during storytelling activities. The use of expressive intonation, gestures, and attractive picture books encouraged children to maintain focus for a longer period. Previously, many children were easily distracted by their surroundings and could not follow the story from beginning to end. After the intervention, however, children were more capable of listening carefully and paying attention to important details in the stories. This improvement suggests that the read-aloud method can create a more engaging learning environment for young children.

Second, children’s comprehension of story content also improved. Before the intervention, many children had difficulty answering simple questions about the stories they heard. They often failed to identify the main characters, explain important events, or understand the message of the story. After participating in repeated read-aloud sessions, children became more capable of explaining what happened in the story, identifying characters, and recognizing simple cause-and-effect relationships. This result is important because story comprehension is one of the fundamental indicators of literacy development in early childhood.

Third, the read-aloud method significantly improved children’s vocabulary acquisition and oral language use. During the storytelling process, teachers introduced unfamiliar words and explained their meanings in context. Children gradually began to use these new words during classroom discussions and everyday conversations. This finding supports Trelease’s argument that read-aloud activities expose children to richer vocabulary and more complex language structures than they typically encounter in daily communication. It also confirms the view of Snow, Burns, and Griffin that early literacy experiences help children expand their vocabulary and improve their language comprehension.

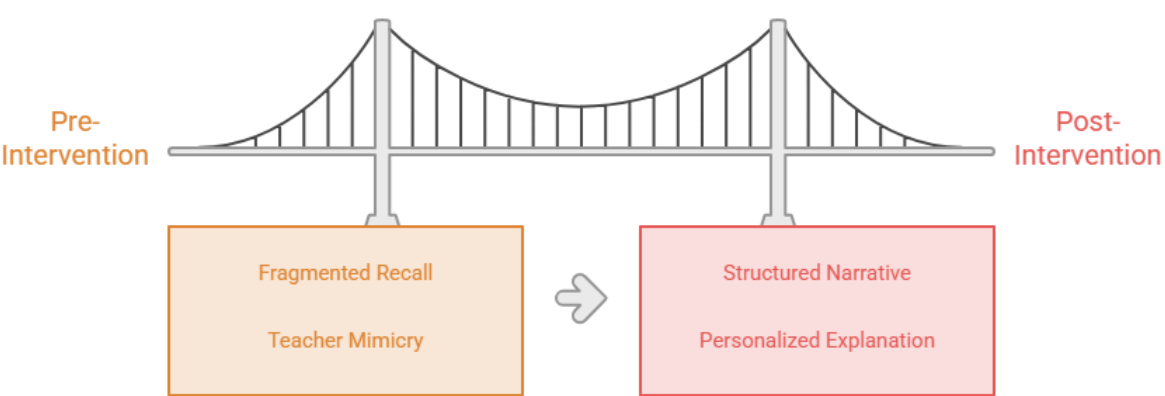


Figure 1. Impact of Read-Aloud Intervention on Storytelling

Another major literacy outcome was the improvement in children’s ability to retell stories. Before the intervention, most children could only repeat short phrases from the teacher or provide fragmented descriptions of the story. Their retelling was often disorganized and lacked sequence. After the implementation of the read-aloud method, children were better able to retell stories in a more structured and logical order. They could mention the beginning, middle, and ending of the story, identify important events, and explain them using their own words. This suggests that repeated exposure to storytelling activities supports children’s narrative skills and oral communication abilities.

In addition to literacy development, the findings also show that the read-aloud method contributed positively to children’s critical thinking skills. One of the clearest improvements was seen in children’s willingness to ask questions. Prior to the intervention, most children tended to remain silent during classroom discussions and rarely asked questions about the stories they heard. After participating in interactive read-aloud sessions, children became more curious and started to ask simple questions such as why a character acted in a certain way, what would happen next, or why an event occurred. These questions reflect the emergence of analytical thinking and curiosity, which are key components of critical thinking in early childhood.

The study also found that children became more confident in expressing their opinions. During the storytelling sessions, teachers asked children to comment on the characters’ behavior, explain which character they liked best, and provide reasons for their preferences. As a result, children became more willing to share their thoughts and participate in discussions. They were able to explain simple reasons for their choices and compare different characters or situations in the story. This finding is consistent with the view of Ennis that critical thinking involves reflective and rational thinking directed toward decision-making and problem-solving.

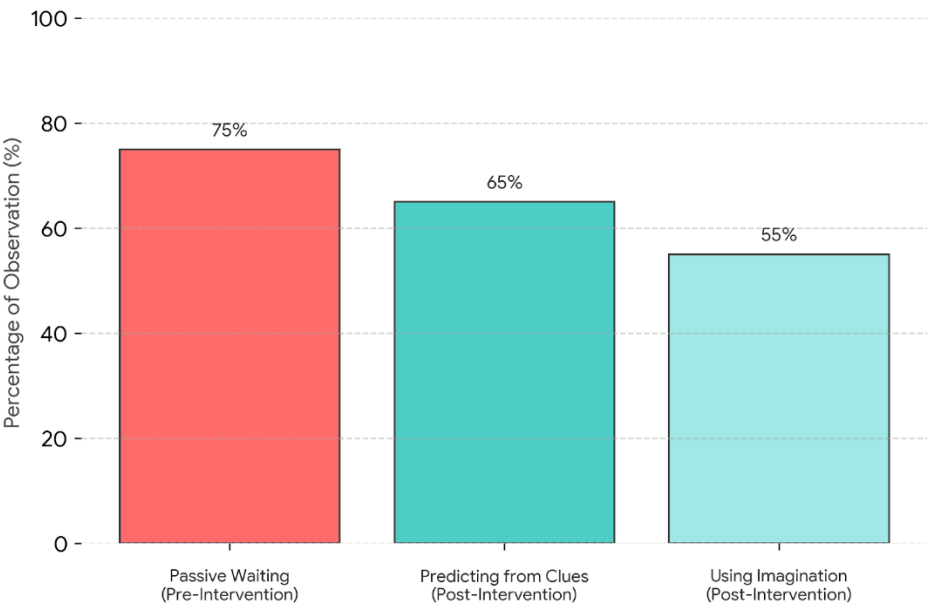


Figure 2. Improvement in Children’s Story Prediction Ability

Another important improvement was observed in children’s ability to predict story events. Before the intervention, children found it difficult to imagine what would happen next in a story. They often waited passively for the teacher to provide the answer. However, after repeated read-aloud sessions, children became more capable of making predictions based on clues from the story and illustrations. They began to use their imagination and prior experiences to anticipate future events in the story. This ability is important because it reflects children’s growing capacity to connect information, infer meaning, and think beyond what is explicitly presented.

The read-aloud method also helped children compare characters and relate stories to their personal experiences. Children were encouraged to identify similarities and differences between characters, evaluate whether a character’s actions were good or bad, and connect the story with situations from their own lives. For example, when listening to the story “Wake Up Early and Sleep Early,” children discussed their own morning routines and explained why waking up early was important. Similarly, in the story “Love Learning and Socializing,” children related the characters’

experiences to their own interactions with friends and family. These activities helped children develop reflective thinking and understand the relevance of the stories to their everyday lives.

The effectiveness of the read-aloud method in this study can also be explained by the selection of appropriate storybooks. The books used in the intervention, “Wake Up Early and Sleep Early” and “Love Learning and Socializing,” were closely related to children’s daily experiences and developmental needs. The stories contained simple language, clear illustrations, and familiar situations, making it easier for children to understand the content and participate actively in the discussion. The use of meaningful and relatable stories appears to have strengthened both literacy and critical thinking outcomes because children were able to connect the stories with their own lives and experiences.

These findings are consistent with previous studies on the effectiveness of read-aloud activities. Masitowati found that regular read-aloud activities improved vocabulary, speaking fluency, and story comprehension among young children. Sary and Ismaya reported that interactive read-aloud activities increased children’s listening skills, confidence, and ability to retell stories. Similarly, Suryani and Angela concluded that read-aloud activities encouraged children to ask questions, compare characters, and provide reasons for their opinions. Therefore, the results of the present study strengthen previous evidence that the read-aloud method is an effective strategy for enhancing both literacy and critical thinking in early childhood education.

However, the findings should be interpreted carefully. The observed improvements may not have been caused solely by the read-aloud method itself. Other factors, such as teacher support, children’s motivation, classroom atmosphere, and the novelty of the storybooks, may also have contributed to the positive outcomes. In addition, the study was conducted within a limited time frame and involved only one group of children, which limits the generalizability of the findings.

Despite these limitations, this study has important implications for early childhood education. Teachers should consider integrating read-aloud activities into daily classroom practice because they provide opportunities for children to develop literacy and critical thinking skills simultaneously. Schools should also provide appropriate picture books and encourage teachers to use interactive questioning techniques during storytelling activities. Future studies are recommended to involve larger samples, longer intervention periods, and different educational settings in order to examine the long-term impact of the read-aloud method more comprehensively.

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that the read-aloud method is an effective instructional strategy for improving both literacy and critical thinking skills among children aged 5–6 years. Through interactive storytelling, children became more attentive listeners, developed stronger vocabulary, improved their ability to understand and retell stories, and showed greater interest in reading activities. At the same time, children became more capable of asking questions, expressing opinions, predicting events, comparing characters, and relating stories to their own experiences. These improvements indicate that read-aloud activities do not only strengthen children’s language development but also support the growth of reflective and analytical thinking at an early age.

The significance of this study lies in its demonstration that literacy and critical thinking can be developed simultaneously through a single instructional approach that is appropriate for young children. By using picture books that are closely related to children’s daily experiences, the read-aloud method creates meaningful learning opportunities that encourage active participation and dialogue. This finding reinforces previous research highlighting the importance of interactive

storytelling in early childhood education while also contributing new evidence that read-aloud activities can support multiple developmental domains at the same time.

Therefore, the read-aloud method should be considered an important component of classroom practice in early childhood education. Teachers and schools need to provide regular opportunities for children to engage in interactive storytelling activities because these experiences can help establish a strong foundation for later academic success, language competence, and higher-order thinking skills.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work, the author used ChatGPT by OpenAI in order to assist with language editing, translation, and manuscript organization. After using this tool, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation; Formal analysis; Writing - original draft.

Author 2: Methodology; Validation; Supervision; Writing - review and editing.

Author 3: Project administration; Resources; Visualization; Writing - review and editing.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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