

Using Storytelling to Improve Listening Skills in Elementary Indonesian Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the storytelling method in enhancing listening skills in Indonesian language learning among Grade V students at SDN 1154. The background of the research stems from the observation that students often struggle to concentrate and understand verbal information during lessons, especially when traditional methods are used. To address this, the study applied the Classroom Action Research (CAR) method consisting of two cycles, each involving planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. The participants were 30 fifth-grade students. Data were gathered through observation, interviews, and listening tests administered before and after the implementation of storytelling. The findings showed significant improvement in students' listening abilities. In the pre-cycle, only 10 students (33.3%) met the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of ≥ 70 , with a class average of 61. In Cycle I, the number increased to 19 students (63.3%) achieving mastery, and in Cycle II, all students (100%) reached or exceeded the KKM, with an average score of 75. Additionally, students demonstrated greater enthusiasm and participation in class, suggesting that storytelling not only improved comprehension but also made learning more enjoyable and engaging. The results indicate that the storytelling method is an effective strategy to improve listening skills and can be used to create a more interactive and student-centered learning environment. Its visual and narrative elements help students better grasp language structures, vocabulary, and story content. Implications of this study suggest that educators should integrate storytelling into language instruction to foster stronger listening skills and increase student motivation. This method is especially useful in primary schools where imagination and interest play a vital role in language development. It also serves as a low-cost, adaptable strategy suitable for various classroom settings.

Keywords: Storytelling Method, Listening Skills

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesian language instruction, listening comprehension plays a foundational role in developing students' overall language proficiency. Listening is the gateway through which learners acquire oral information, enabling them to follow instructions, engage in discussions, and develop reading and writing competencies (Mulyono, 2011). For elementary students, effective listening not only supports academic learning but also contributes to social interaction and cognitive growth. The Ministry of Education and Culture (2017) emphasizes that language learning at the elementary level must prioritize integrated skill development, including focused attention to listening as a receptive skill.

Despite its importance, listening is often the most underdeveloped language skill among elementary students (Suyanto, 2015). Many teachers still rely on conventional strategies—such as passive storytelling, textbook readings, and one-way lectures—that do not encourage active listening. These methods fail to engage students or help them internalize language structures meaningfully (Utami & Astuti, 2024). Consequently, students become disengaged, inattentive, and struggle to understand spoken content. This problem is especially evident at SDN 115492 Mampang, where Grade V students show limited comprehension during oral lessons. Classroom observations indicate low participation, off-task behavior, and difficulty recalling key information from listening activities. Such indicators reflect an urgent need for innovative strategies that can stimulate students' interest and enhance listening outcomes.

An alternative strategy that has shown promise is the use of storytelling as a pedagogical method. Storytelling—when applied expressively and interactively—can transform listening tasks into enjoyable learning experiences (Rahayu, 2016). It combines narrative structure, visuals, voice modulation, and imagination to draw students into the content, thereby improving comprehension and retention. Several studies affirm the potential of storytelling in fostering listening skills. Research by Fathurahman (2023) and Wahyuni & Rachmawati (2023) demonstrated that storytelling improved elementary students' ability to understand, recall, and retell key story elements. Moreover, storytelling supports the development of empathy, moral understanding, and critical thinking (Putri & Hapsari, 2021), aligning with the goals of holistic language education.

However, despite its promise, storytelling is not widely or effectively implemented in many schools. Zulfahmi (2018) found that in several classrooms, storytelling was conducted in a monotonous manner, lacking post-story interaction or assessment. In such cases, students were passive recipients rather than active listeners. Without proper planning, expression, or student involvement, the impact of storytelling is diminished. Therefore, research is needed to examine how storytelling can be applied more effectively—especially in underperforming contexts like SDN 115492 Mampang—where students struggle with listening and engagement.

This study addresses that gap by investigating how the storytelling method can improve listening comprehension among Grade V students. Unlike prior studies that focused on digital storytelling or relied on technology (Hidayat & Lestari, 2022; Utami & Astuti, 2024), this research applies a low-tech, teacher-led storytelling approach, tailored to the cultural and developmental context of the students. It also integrates follow-up activities such as retelling, discussion, and reflection to encourage active processing of information. The novelty of this study lies in combining expressive oral storytelling with structured student interaction, aiming to create a more inclusive and stimulating listening environment.

Given the current challenges in student engagement and literacy development, this research is timely and relevant. It offers practical insights for teachers seeking creative, accessible methods to enhance language learning. Ultimately, it seeks to demonstrate that storytelling is not only an entertaining activity but also a powerful tool to build critical language skills in the Indonesian primary education context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Study

One study by Fathurahman (2023) explored the impact of storytelling on improving listening comprehension among students in elementary schools. The research found that students who were exposed to stories in the classroom showed a marked improvement in their listening skills, particularly in understanding the meaning and structure of the narratives. Fathurahman's study highlights that storytelling, when delivered with the right tone, expression, and clarity, can significantly engage students and help them retain and process information more effectively. The study suggests that the narrative style in storytelling naturally captures the students' attention and promotes active listening, making it an effective tool for improving listening comprehension. The results of this study align with the idea that storytelling is not just a method for delivering content but also an effective pedagogical strategy for enhancing students' listening abilities, especially in the context of language learning.

In another study, Zulfahmi (2018) examined the implementation of storytelling as a teaching strategy at SDN 12 Lubuk Alung. The study found that although storytelling had the potential to engage students, its effectiveness was limited due to the lack of active follow-up activities. The research revealed that the teacher simply narrated stories without assessing the students' understanding, nor were students given the opportunity to retell the stories or discuss their key points afterward. This lack of interaction reduced the overall effectiveness of the storytelling method. Zulfahmi emphasized that for storytelling to be effective in improving listening comprehension, it should be coupled with activities that encourage students to reflect on the story's content, such as discussion, analysis, or re-telling. This study underscores the importance of ensuring that storytelling is not

just about narration, but is integrated into an active, student-centered learning process.

A study by Suharti (2020) investigated the use of storytelling to enhance students' listening and speaking skills in a second language learning context. The research demonstrated that students who engaged in storytelling not only improved their listening comprehension but also their speaking abilities, as they were encouraged to repeat, summarize, and discuss the stories. Suharti's study highlights the dual impact of storytelling, as it facilitates not only listening comprehension but also speaking practice. The study also found that students were more motivated and enthusiastic when learning through stories, as it created a more interactive and enjoyable learning environment. Suharti concluded that storytelling provides a holistic approach to language acquisition, as it supports both receptive and productive skills, making it a powerful method for language learners, particularly in the context of Indonesian language instruction. This study further reinforces the effectiveness of storytelling in enhancing students' listening abilities in a meaningful and engaging manner.

Each of these studies contributes valuable insights into the use of storytelling as an educational tool, highlighting its potential to improve listening comprehension when implemented effectively and with proper planning. These findings support the notion that storytelling is an effective pedagogical method that engages students, promotes active listening, and facilitates deeper comprehension of the material.

Understanding Listening

Listening, as one of the receptive language skills, involves the ability to capture, comprehend, interpret, and evaluate orally presented information. According to Tarigan (2008), listening is the process of attentively hearing oral symbols with an understanding, appreciation, and interpretation to acquire information or messages. Listening is considered a foundational skill in language learning as it serves as the basis for other language skills, including speaking, reading, and writing. The ability to listen effectively is crucial in understanding spoken communication and forming connections to broader language competencies.

The Purpose and Benefits of Listening

The primary goal of listening activities is to understand information presented verbally. Mulyono (2011) outlines several benefits of listening in the context of Indonesian language learning, which include: (1) enhancing students' concentration and attention, (2) fostering critical thinking skills, and (3) promoting vocabulary and sentence structure development. However, there are several factors that can contribute to the low listening skills of students. These factors include a lack of student attention, the use of monotonous teaching methods, and insufficient media or strategies to engage students. Therefore, an innovative, interactive approach is

necessary to address these issues and motivate students to improve their listening abilities. One such approach is the use of storytelling.

Storytelling in Language Learning

Storytelling is an instructional strategy that presents learning material in the form of a narrative delivered orally by the teacher. According to Rahayu (2016), storytelling can enhance students' imagination, interest, and concentration in listening as it is delivered with engaging intonation, facial expressions, and body language. Stories can be in the form of fables, legends, folk tales, or everyday life stories, which are tailored to the students' developmental levels. Suyatno (2009) highlights several advantages of storytelling, including: (1) increasing students' interest in the learning material, (2) improving focus and memory, (3) helping students understand the natural context of language usage, and (4) developing active listening skills.

The implementation of storytelling in Indonesian language education provides an engaging auditory stimulus for students, motivating them to listen attentively. By telling stories, teachers create a fun and interactive learning environment, which not only helps students better understand the content of the story but also enhances their ability to identify characters, plot, and moral messages within the narrative. This process indirectly contributes to the improvement of students' listening skills. The dynamic and immersive nature of storytelling makes it an effective method for promoting active listening and engaging students in a more meaningful and enjoyable way.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study used a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design aimed at improving students' listening skills through the storytelling method. According to Sugiyono (2016), CAR is implemented by the teacher within their own classroom to solve instructional problems and improve learning outcomes. The subjects were 30 fifth-grade students from SDN 115492 Mampang, Kotapinang District, South Labuhanbatu Regency, during the 2024/2025 academic year. The research was conducted in the second semester and consisted of two cycles, with each cycle carried out over two sessions. In each session, the researcher performed four steps: (1) Planning, where lesson plans and materials were prepared; (2) Action, where storytelling activities were implemented in class; (3) Observation, where student participation and responses were recorded; and (4) Reflection, where findings were reviewed to improve the next cycle.

Instrument and Procedures

Several data collection instruments were used in this study. To measure students' listening abilities before and after the intervention, pre-tests and post-tests were conducted, providing quantitative data. Observations were made during each session to monitor teacher performance and student engagement, using structured observation sheets. Field notes were written to document classroom dynamics and capture spontaneous events or challenges during storytelling activities. Interviews with selected students were conducted after each cycle to explore their experiences and perceptions. The interview data were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically by identifying recurring ideas, keywords, and student expressions related to motivation, understanding, and enjoyment of the storytelling process.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative analysis involved calculating the average scores of pre-tests and post-tests to evaluate improvement in listening skills. Qualitative analysis was conducted by reviewing observation notes, field notes, and interview transcripts. Recurring themes such as increased participation, enjoyment, comprehension, and feedback on storytelling were identified and coded. The combined analysis helped evaluate the effectiveness of the storytelling method and informed revisions for Cycle II to maximize student engagement and learning outcomes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Pre-Cycle Results

Before the intervention, a pre-test was conducted to assess the students' listening skills. The results of the pre-cycle test are shown in the table below:

Table 1. Pre-Cycle Results

No	Student Name	Score	Mastery Status
1	Alda	58	Not Mastered
2	Alfi	60	Not Mastered
3	Afsah	65	Not Mastered
4	Basuki	78	Mastered
5	Bakri	62	Not Mastered
6	Cica	70	Mastered
7	Cika	64	Not Mastered
8	Desry	74	Mastered
9	Devi	76	Mastered

10	Desvan	59	Not Mastered
11	Deva	61	Not Mastered
12	Ika	70	Mastered
13	Siska	63	Not Mastered
14	Aulia	75	Mastered
15	Rita	56	Not Mastered
16	Furkon	59	Not Mastered
17	Ihsan	62	Not Mastered
18	Faith	65	Not Mastered
19	Anggina	66	Not Mastered
20	Syahdini	58	Not Mastered
21	Ikram	60	Not Mastered
22	Ulfa	61	Not Mastered
23	Tengku	70	Mastered
24	Dinda	63	Not Mastered
25	Wulan	67	Not Mastered
26	Erzan	64	Not Mastered
27	Fikri	55	Not Mastered
28	Annida	66	Not Mastered
29	Fuji	73	Mastered
30	Purti	71	Mastered

Based on the table, it can be concluded that in the pre-cycle, 10 students (33.3%) achieved mastery (score ≥ 70), while 20 students (66.7%) did not. These results indicate that the students' listening abilities were still relatively low, and improvements were needed through instructional interventions.

Cycle I Results

In the first cycle, the implementation of the storytelling method showed an improvement in students' listening skills compared to the pre-cycle. The results from Cycle I are as follows:

Table 2. Cycle I Results

No	Student Name	Score	Mastery Status
1	Alda	66	Not Mastered
2	Alfi	68	Not Mastered
3	Afsah	72	Mastered
4	Basuki	64	Not Mastered

5	Bakri	70	Mastered
6	Cica	73	Mastered
7	Cika	71	Mastered
8	Desry	74	Mastered
9	Devi	66	Not Mastered
10	Desvan	63	Not Mastered
11	Deva	70	Mastered
12	Ika	75	Mastered
13	Siska	69	Not Mastered
14	Aulia	72	Mastered
15	Rita	60	Not Mastered
16	Furkon	66	Not Mastered
17	Ihsan	70	Mastered
18	Faith	72	Mastered
19	Anggina	73	Mastered
20	Syahdini	67	Not Mastered
21	Ikram	68	Not Mastered
22	Ulfa	70	Mastered
23	Tengku	75	Mastered
24	Dinda	69	Not Mastered
25	Wulan	71	Mastered
26	Erzan	70	Mastered
27	Fikri	61	Not Mastered
28	Annida	70	Mastered
29	Fuji	73	Mastered
30	Purti	76	Mastered

In Cycle I, the storytelling method led to a significant improvement in students' listening abilities. Out of 30 students, 19 students (63.3%) achieved the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 70. The highest score in this cycle was 76, while the lowest score was 60. The class average improved from 61 in the pre-cycle to 71 in Cycle I. This indicates that the storytelling method effectively increased students' focus and attention, helping them better understand and retain the material. However, not all students achieved mastery, and further improvements were needed in Cycle II, such as providing more structured listening exercises, incorporating guiding questions before and after storytelling, and increasing teacher-student interaction during the listening process.

Cycle II Results

The results of Cycle II, shown in the table below, demonstrate a marked improvement compared to both Cycle I and the pre-cycle:

Table 3. Cycle II Results

No	Student Name	Score	Mastery Status
1	Alda	72	Mastered
2	Alfi	74	Mastered
3	Afsah	76	Mastered
4	Basuki	70	Mastered
5	Bakri	75	Mastered
6	Cica	78	Mastered
7	Cika	75	Mastered
8	Desry	77	Mastered
9	Devi	73	Mastered
10	Desvan	72	Mastered
11	Deva	74	Mastered
12	Ika	78	Mastered
13	Siska	73	Mastered
14	Aulia	76	Mastered
15	Rita	70	Mastered
16	Furkon	71	Mastered
17	Ihsan	75	Mastered
18	Faith	78	Mastered
19	Anggina	76	Mastered
20	Syahdini	72	Mastered
21	Ikram	74	Mastered
22	Ulfa	77	Mastered
23	Tengku	80	Mastered
24	Dinda	75	Mastered
25	Wulan	76	Mastered
26	Erzan	74	Mastered
27	Fikri	72	Mastered
28	Annida	75	Mastered
29	Fuji	78	Mastered
30	Purti	80	Mastered

In Cycle II, all 30 students achieved scores above the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) of 70, resulting in a 100% mastery rate. The highest score was 80, and the lowest score was 70, with the class average rising to 75. These results indicate a significant improvement in students' listening abilities compared to both the pre-cycle and Cycle I. The changes implemented in Cycle II, including more focused listening exercises, guiding questions, and increased teacher-student interaction, led to highly positive outcomes. With the achievement of full mastery, there was no need for further cycles, concluding that the storytelling method was effective in enhancing the listening abilities of Grade V students at SDN 115492.

The graph below illustrates the increase in the number of students who achieved mastery (score ≥ 70) over the course of the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II. It shows that by Cycle II, all students had reached mastery.

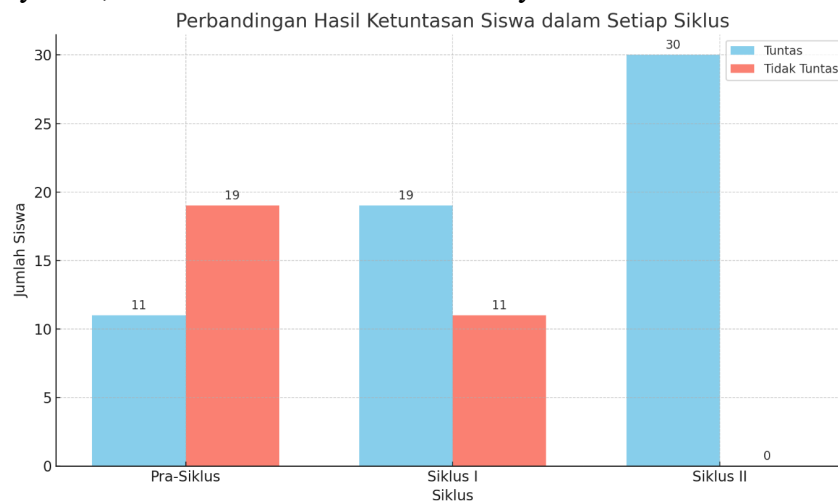


Figure 2. Comparison Chart of Student Mastery Results in Each Cycle

The findings of this classroom action research reveal a significant and sustained improvement in the listening skills of Grade V students through the use of the storytelling method in Indonesian language learning. In the pre-cycle, only 10 out of 30 students (33.3%) reached the Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) with an average score of 61. This number increased to 19 students (63.3%) in Cycle I, and by Cycle II, all 30 students (100%) successfully met the KKM with an average score of 75. These results indicate not only a quantitative increase in test scores but also a qualitative shift in student engagement, attention, and enthusiasm during the learning process. The step-by-step improvement across the two cycles illustrates that the method is not only effective but also sustainable when properly implemented. This reinforces the argument that storytelling, when integrated thoughtfully and systematically into classroom instruction, offers a reliable strategy to address the persistent problem of low listening comprehension at the elementary level.

These findings are strongly supported by previous studies that explored similar instructional interventions. For example, Fathurahman (2023) demonstrated that the

storytelling method improved listening comprehension by helping students visualize story elements and follow narrative structures more easily. Similarly, Wahyuni and Rachmawati (2023) found that storytelling helped learners remember details, understand character motives, and draw meaning from spoken language. The present study builds on this prior research by not only confirming the cognitive benefits of storytelling but also adding the insight that the method works effectively even in low-resource, non-digital environments. In contrast to digital storytelling approaches, which require access to multimedia tools and internet connectivity, this study validates a teacher-led, oral storytelling method that is accessible to most schools regardless of infrastructure.

The effectiveness of the method was further amplified by the interactive strategies used in the storytelling sessions. Students were not merely passive listeners; instead, they were encouraged to retell stories, identify key events, and reflect on moral messages. This is an important distinction compared to studies such as Zulfahmi (2018), where storytelling was applied without sufficient interaction or follow-up. In that context, students did not engage deeply with the material, resulting in limited gains in comprehension. In this study, by integrating structured post-story discussions and reflection tasks, students became more involved and were able to process information more critically. This supports the views of Suharti (2020), who emphasized that storytelling has the potential to simultaneously build listening and speaking skills, enhance critical thinking, and promote student participation when executed with proper instructional planning.

In addition to student performance, the cultural and emotional relevance of the stories also played a significant role. The narratives used in the classroom were drawn from familiar themes and local contexts, which made them relatable and meaningful to the learners. This approach is aligned with the recommendation of Setiawan and Fitriani (2021), who argue for the incorporation of culturally embedded pedagogical tools to create more resonant and effective learning experiences. In settings where students may feel disconnected from formal textbook content, storytelling rooted in local wisdom and values can build emotional engagement and encourage deeper learning. Unlike storytelling that relies on digital animation or foreign stories, culturally grounded oral narratives also serve to preserve linguistic identity and reinforce traditional values, making them a valuable asset in national language instruction.

The educational implications of this study are far-reaching. First, storytelling can be adopted not just as an occasional classroom activity, but as an integral part of language instruction aimed at developing listening comprehension. When used consistently, it can enhance students' ability to interpret spoken information, follow sequential ideas, and remember key details. Second, because the method is low-cost and does not depend on advanced technology, it can be widely implemented in rural and underfunded schools, thereby promoting equity in learning opportunities (Yuliana et al., 2021). Third, the storytelling method supports 21st-century education goals such as fostering creativity, empathy, critical thinking, and

communication—all of which are emphasized in recent Indonesian curriculum reforms (Astuti & Priyana, 2022). Teachers, therefore, should be trained in expressive storytelling techniques, including voice modulation, gesture, and pacing, to maximize the method's effectiveness. Schools and teacher education institutions may consider including storytelling modules in their training programs to help educators develop both technical and narrative competence.

Despite its contributions, this study has certain limitations that should be addressed in future research. The sample size was relatively small, consisting of only 30 students in one school, which limits the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, the intervention period was short—only two cycles—and may not fully capture the long-term impact of the method. The study also did not compare storytelling with other potentially effective techniques, such as multimedia-based listening instruction, dictation exercises, or language games. Future research could explore comparative studies to determine the relative effectiveness of different listening strategies across varied contexts. Additionally, researchers could examine the impact of storytelling on other language domains such as speaking fluency, vocabulary development, and emotional intelligence to provide a more comprehensive view of its pedagogical potential.

In conclusion, this study strengthens the case for using storytelling as a practical, adaptable, and culturally sensitive method to improve listening skills in Indonesian elementary education. The success of this method in raising comprehension levels, increasing student motivation, and fostering active classroom participation shows that oral storytelling remains a powerful instructional tool—even in modern education settings. Its simplicity, accessibility, and ability to connect emotionally with learners make it an ideal solution for schools seeking meaningful and engaging approaches to language learning. These findings are especially important for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers who aim to promote inclusive and effective teaching practices in diverse educational settings across Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the storytelling method is effective in improving the listening skills of fifth-grade students in Indonesian language learning. The findings showed a clear increase in students' comprehension, participation, and ability to retell stories, with mastery levels rising from 33.3% in the pre-cycle to 100% in Cycle II. Storytelling also created a more engaging and enjoyable learning environment, which motivated students to focus and actively participate in listening activities. Based on these results, teachers are encouraged to adopt storytelling as a regular teaching strategy, especially when teaching listening comprehension. Schools should support this by providing training on storytelling techniques and helping teachers select or develop age-appropriate and culturally relevant stories. Storytelling is not only practical and cost-effective, but also promotes creativity, critical thinking, and deeper language understanding—making it a valuable addition to Indonesian language instruction.

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