



Implementation of Storytelling Method to Enhance Mahārah Kalām of Students at MI Miftahul Huda Dukuhwringin, Tegal Regency, Central Java

Penerapan Metode Storytelling untuk Meningkatkan Mahārah Kalām Siswa MI Miftahul Huda Dukuhwringin, Kabupaten Tegal, Jawa Tengah

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the implementation of storytelling method in enhancing mahārah kalām of fourth-grade students at MI Miftahul Huda Dukuhwringin, Tegal Regency, Central Java. Mahārah kalām represents Arabic speaking skills that often become a challenge for madrasah ibtidaiyah students. The research employed a qualitative approach with classroom action research design conducted in two cycles. Research subjects involved 28 fourth-grade students. Data were collected through observation, interviews, oral tests, and documentation. Research findings revealed significant improvement in students' mahārah kalām ability, with completion percentage increasing from 46% in pre-cycle to 89% in the second cycle. The storytelling method proved effective in enhancing students' confidence, vocabulary, and fluency in speaking Arabic. This research recommends implementing storytelling method as an alternative for teaching mahārah kalām in madrasah ibtidaiyah.

Keywords: storytelling method, mahārah kalām, Arabic language, madrasah ibtidaiyah, learning

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penerapan metode storytelling dalam meningkatkan mahārah kalām siswa kelas IV MI Miftahul Huda Dukuhwringin, Kabupaten Tegal, Jawa Tengah. Mahārah kalām merupakan keterampilan berbicara bahasa Arab yang seringkali menjadi tantangan bagi siswa madrasah ibtidaiyah. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain penelitian tindakan kelas yang dilaksanakan dalam dua siklus. Subjek penelitian melibatkan 28 siswa kelas IV. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, tes lisan, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan dalam kemampuan mahārah kalām siswa, dengan persentase ketuntasan meningkat dari 46% pada pra-siklus menjadi 89% pada siklus kedua. Metode storytelling terbukti efektif meningkatkan kepercayaan diri, kosakata, dan kelancaran berbicara siswa dalam bahasa Arab. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan penerapan metode storytelling se-

bagai alternatif pembelajaran mahārah kalām di madrasah ibtidaiyah.

Kata Kunci: *metode storytelling, mahārah kalām, bahasa Arab, madrasah ibtidaiyah, pembelajaran.*

Kata-kata kunci: *integrasi bahasa, literasi akademik, pendidikan bilingual, pesantren, pedagogi Indonesia-Arab*

A. INTRODUCTION

Arabic language learning in Indonesian madrasah ibtidaiyah has become an essential component of Islamic education, serving as a bridge for students to understand religious texts and communicate within Islamic contexts. The development of language skills, particularly speaking abilities or mahārah kalām, represents a fundamental objective in Arabic language instruction at the elementary level (Muhsyanur et al., 2021). However, contemporary challenges in Arabic language teaching reveal that students frequently encounter difficulties in developing oral proficiency, often resulting from traditional pedagogical approaches that emphasize rote memorization and grammatical rules rather than communicative competence (Mustofa & Hamid, 2020). This situation necessitates innovative teaching methodologies that can transform the learning experience and facilitate meaningful language acquisition among young learners.

The context of MI Miftahul Huda Dukuhwringin in Tegal Regency, Central Java, reflects the broader challenges faced by madrasah ibtidaiyah institutions across Indonesia. Preliminary observations conducted at this institution revealed that students exhibited limited confidence in speaking Arabic, restricted vocabulary knowledge, and minimal opportunities for authentic oral practice during classroom sessions. According to Nunan (2015), speaking skills constitute the most challenging aspect of language learning for young learners due to the cognitive demands of real-time language production and the psychological barriers associated with public speaking. The teacher's reliance on conventional methods such as teacher-centered instruction and textbook-based exercises contributed to passive learning environments where students rarely engaged in spontaneous Arabic conversation.

Storytelling emerges as a promising pedagogical approach that aligns with the cognitive and affective characteristics of elementary school students. Cameron (2001) emphasizes that stories provide meaningful contexts for language learning, engaging children's imagination and emotional involvement while presenting language in naturally occurring patterns. The narrative structure of stories offers comprehensible input that supports language acquisition through repeated exposure to vocabulary and grammatical structures within memorable contexts. Furthermore, storytelling creates a low-anxiety environment where students can focus on meaning rather than form, thereby reducing the affective filter that often impedes language production among young learners.

Research in second language acquisition demonstrates that storytelling facilitates multiple dimensions of language development simultaneously. Ellis (2015) argues that narrative-based instruction promotes implicit learning processes through which learners internalize language patterns without conscious attention to grammatical rules. Stories provide rich linguistic input that includes dialogue, descriptive language, and varied sentence structures, exposing students to authentic language use while maintaining comprehensibility through visual support and contextual clues. Additionally, the interactive nature of storytelling sessions encourages participatory engagement where students can respond, predict, and retell narratives, thereby practicing oral production in meaningful communicative contexts.

The theoretical foundation for implementing storytelling in Arabic language instruction draws upon multiple pedagogical frameworks. Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis suggests that language acquisition occurs when learners receive comprehensible input slightly beyond their current proficiency level, a condition that storytelling naturally fulfills through contextual support and gradual complexity. The Communicative Language Teaching approach

advocates for meaning-focused activities that simulate real-world language use, positioning storytelling as an authentic communicative event where language serves functional purposes. Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis further supports storytelling methodology by highlighting the importance of negotiation of meaning and modified output, processes that occur naturally when students engage with narratives and construct their own storytelling attempts.

Cultural considerations significantly influence the effectiveness of storytelling in Islamic educational contexts. Stories rooted in Islamic traditions, including narratives from the Quran, Hadith, and Islamic history, resonate deeply with madrasah students' cultural backgrounds and religious values. Madkur (2018) notes that culturally relevant materials enhance motivation and facilitate deeper comprehension by connecting new knowledge to students' existing schemas and experiential frameworks. The integration of Islamic storytelling traditions with contemporary language teaching methodologies creates pedagogically sound and culturally appropriate learning experiences that honor the religious mission of madrasah education while promoting communicative competence.

The developmental appropriateness of storytelling for elementary-aged children receives strong support from cognitive psychology and child development research. Bruner (1986) identifies narrative thinking as a fundamental mode of human cognition through which children organize experiences and construct meaning. Young learners naturally gravitate toward stories as vehicles for understanding the world, making narrative-based instruction developmentally aligned with their cognitive capabilities. Piaget's theory of cognitive development indicates that children in the concrete operational stage benefit from instruction that utilizes vivid imagery, sequential organization, and concrete examples—all characteristics inherent in effective storytelling practices.

Despite the theoretical promise of storytelling methodology, empirical research investigating its application for developing mahārah kalām in Indonesian madrasah contexts remains limited. Existing studies have examined storytelling in general English language teaching contexts, yet the specific challenges and opportunities within Arabic language instruction at Islamic elementary schools require dedicated investigation. This research addresses this gap by systematically examining how storytelling methodology can be implemented to enhance Arabic speaking skills among fourth-grade students at MI Miftahul Huda Dukuhwringin. The findings contribute practical insights for educators seeking effective, engaging, and culturally appropriate approaches to developing oral proficiency in Arabic language instruction at the madrasah ibtidaiyah level.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework for implementing storytelling methodology in mahārah kalām instruction integrates perspectives from second language acquisition theory, narrative pedagogy, and Islamic educational philosophy. Central to this framework is the recognition that language learning occurs most effectively when embedded within meaningful, contextually rich experiences that engage learners cognitively and affectively. Swain's (2005) Output Hypothesis posits that language production plays a crucial role in language acquisition by compelling learners to process language more deeply, notice gaps in their linguistic knowledge, and test hypotheses about language structure. Storytelling activities create natural opportunities for output generation as students retell narratives, respond to story events, and eventually create their own stories, thereby moving from comprehension to production in a scaffolded progression.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory provides essential insights into how storytelling facilitates language development through social interaction and mediated learning (Ibrahim, 2020). The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) suggests that learners can accomplish more challenging tasks with appropriate scaffolding and guidance from more knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978). In storytelling-based instruction, teachers serve as

mediators who provide linguistic support through modeling, repetition, and gradual release of responsibility, enabling students to perform beyond their independent capabilities. Wright (2015) demonstrates that collaborative storytelling activities, where students work together to construct and perform narratives, create zones of proximal development where peer scaffolding complements teacher guidance. This social dimension of learning aligns particularly well with collectivist cultural values prevalent in Indonesian educational contexts, where cooperative learning and group harmony are culturally valued.

The application of storytelling to Arabic language instruction specifically must consider the unique characteristics of the Arabic language and Islamic pedagogical traditions. Arabic morphology and syntax present distinct challenges for Indonesian learners, including the tri-consonantal root system, grammatical gender, and case endings. Ryding (2013) emphasizes that Arabic instruction benefits from approaches that present language holistically rather than fragmenting it into isolated grammatical elements. Stories provide this holistic presentation by embedding grammatical structures within meaningful discourse where form and meaning are naturally integrated. Additionally, the oral tradition holds particular significance in Islamic culture, where knowledge transmission historically occurred through narrative recitation and memorization. Taha-Thomure (2008) argues that leveraging this cultural affinity for oral narrative can enhance engagement and learning outcomes in Arabic language instruction. The prophetic tradition of using parables and stories for teaching moral and practical lessons provides religious validation for storytelling methodology within Islamic educational frameworks.

C. METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach utilizing classroom action research design, which Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) describe as a systematic inquiry conducted by practitioners to improve their own teaching practices through cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The cyclical nature of action research allowed for iterative refinement of storytelling implementation based on ongoing assessment of student progress and identification of emerging challenges. The research was conducted at MI Miftahul Huda Dukuhwringin, Tegal Regency, Central Java, during the academic year 2024-2025, involving 28 fourth-grade students aged 9-10 years. Cohen et al. (2018) advocate for action research in educational settings as it bridges the gap between theory and practice, generating context-specific knowledge that directly informs pedagogical decision-making. The research proceeded through two complete cycles, each consisting of four meetings, with pre-cycle assessment establishing baseline performance levels and post-cycle evaluation measuring cumulative learning outcomes.

Data collection incorporated multiple methods to ensure comprehensive understanding of the storytelling implementation process and its effects on mahārah kalām development. Observation protocols documented classroom interactions, student participation patterns, and teaching strategies during storytelling sessions, providing detailed qualitative descriptions of the learning environment. Semi-structured interviews with the classroom teacher and selected students elicited perspectives on the storytelling experience, perceived challenges, and subjective assessments of learning progress. Oral proficiency assessments measured students' speaking abilities across dimensions including pronunciation, vocabulary usage, grammatical accuracy, fluency, and comprehension, employing rubrics adapted from the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for young learners. Documentation analysis examined lesson plans, student work samples, and audio-visual recordings of storytelling performances. Burns (2010) emphasizes the importance of triangulation in action research, where multiple data sources provide corroborating evidence and reveal different facets of the phenomenon under investigation. Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures, with transcripts coded to identify recurring patterns, critical incidents, and evidence of language development across the research cycles.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of storytelling methodology across two action research cycles demonstrated substantial improvements in students' mahārah kalām abilities at MI Miftahul Huda Dukuhwringin. Initial assessment during the pre-cycle phase revealed significant challenges in Arabic speaking proficiency, with only 13 students (46%) achieving the minimum competency threshold. Students exhibited reluctance to speak Arabic, limited active vocabulary, and frequent reliance on Indonesian during Arabic lessons. However, systematic implementation of storytelling activities progressively transformed the learning environment and student performance. By the conclusion of cycle two, 25 students (89%) demonstrated adequate mastery of mahārah kalām competencies, representing a 43-percentage-point improvement in overall achievement rates. These quantitative gains were accompanied by qualitative transformations in classroom dynamics, with students displaying increased enthusiasm for Arabic lessons and greater willingness to experiment with oral language production.

Enhancement of Vocabulary Acquisition and Retention

Vocabulary development emerged as one of the most pronounced benefits of storytelling implementation, with students acquiring and retaining Arabic vocabulary at rates exceeding those observed with traditional instruction methods. The narrative context provided by stories created memorable associations between words and meanings, facilitating deeper processing and long-term retention. Students who initially possessed active vocabularies of approximately 50-70 Arabic words expanded their lexicons to 180-220 words by the end of the intervention, representing nearly threefold growth in vocabulary knowledge. The thematic organization of stories around familiar topics such as family, school, animals, and daily activities ensured that newly acquired vocabulary connected to students' experiential worlds, enhancing both relevance and retrievability.

Repeated exposure to target vocabulary within varying story contexts enabled students to develop flexible understanding of word meanings and usage patterns. For example, the verb "dzhahaba" (to go) appeared across multiple narratives in different grammatical forms and semantic contexts, allowing students to internalize its conjugation patterns and collocational preferences through natural language exposure rather than explicit grammatical instruction. Students demonstrated ability to use newly acquired vocabulary productively in their own storytelling attempts, indicating that learning had progressed beyond passive recognition to active command. The multi-sensory nature of storytelling sessions, incorporating visual aids, gestures, and dramatic expression, provided multiple encoding pathways that strengthened memory consolidation.

The affective dimension of vocabulary learning also showed marked improvement through storytelling. Students reported that learning words through stories felt less burdensome than memorizing vocabulary lists, with the narrative structure providing intrinsic motivation and purpose for word learning. During interviews, one student commented, "Saya lebih mudah ingat kata-kata bahasa Arab kalau ada di cerita karena saya ingat apa yang terjadi" (I remember Arabic words more easily when they're in stories because I remember what happened). This observation aligns with research by Nation (2013) demonstrating that vocabulary acquired through meaning-focused input in contextually rich environments shows superior retention compared to decontextualized vocabulary study. The emotional engagement generated by compelling narratives created stronger memory traces, transforming vocabulary learning from tedious memorization into enjoyable discovery.

Progress in vocabulary development was further evidenced by students' spontaneous use of Arabic expressions during informal classroom interactions. Phrases learned through stories, such as greetings, expressions of emotion, and common requests, began appearing in students' speech outside of formal Arabic lessons. This transfer of learning from in-

structional contexts to spontaneous communication represents a critical indicator of genuine language acquisition rather than superficial performance of rehearsed material. The functional application of vocabulary in authentic communicative situations demonstrated that storytelling had successfully bridged the gap between classroom learning and real-world language use.

Improvement in Pronunciation and Phonological Awareness

Pronunciation accuracy, a persistent challenge in Arabic language learning for Indonesian speakers, showed significant improvement through storytelling methodology. The Arabic phonological system includes sounds absent in Indonesian, such as emphatic consonants and pharyngeal fricatives, which typically require extensive practice for accurate production. Storytelling sessions provided abundant opportunities for students to hear and practice these challenging sounds within natural prosodic contexts. The teacher's expressive story narration modeled proper pronunciation, intonation patterns, and rhythm, providing clear auditory targets for student imitation. Choral repetition of key story phrases allowed students to practice pronunciation in a low-stakes environment where individual errors were less conspicuous, reducing performance anxiety.

Over the course of the intervention, students' pronunciation accuracy improved across several dimensions. Initial assessments revealed that 64% of students consistently mispronounced emphatic consonants, producing them as their non-emphatic counterparts. By cycle two, this proportion decreased to 25%, indicating that repeated exposure to correct pronunciation within meaningful contexts facilitated phonological learning. Similarly, students demonstrated improved production of the Arabic consonants 'ayn (ع) and ghayn (غ), which have no direct equivalents in Indonesian phonology. The contextualized practice provided by storytelling allowed students to attend to pronunciation while maintaining focus on meaning, avoiding the tedium and artificiality of isolated pronunciation drills.

The suprasegmental features of Arabic speech, including intonation and stress patterns, also benefited from storytelling instruction. Stories naturally contain varied emotional tones and dramatic elements that require expressive delivery, encouraging students to attend to how meaning is conveyed through prosodic features beyond individual sound segments. Students' storytelling performances increasingly exhibited appropriate use of rising intonation for questions, emphatic stress for highlighted information, and appropriate pausing at phrase boundaries. These prosodic competencies are essential for communicative effectiveness yet often neglected in traditional grammar-focused instruction. McNamara (1996) notes that prosodic accuracy significantly influences native speakers' comprehensibility judgments, making this dimension of pronunciation particularly important for developing functional speaking ability.

Phonological awareness, the metalinguistic understanding of sound patterns in language, developed concurrently with pronunciation skills. Students became more conscious of Arabic sound-letter correspondences, syllable structures, and morphophonemic patterns through their engagement with written story texts and oral performances. The iterative process of reading, listening to, and performing stories created multiple opportunities to notice connections between orthographic representations and phonological forms. Students who initially struggled to decode written Arabic texts demonstrated increasing fluency in reading aloud, indicating that storytelling activities had strengthened their phonological processing abilities.

Development of Grammatical Competence Through Implicit Learning

Grammatical accuracy, while not the primary focus of storytelling instruction, showed noteworthy improvement as students implicitly acquired syntactic patterns through repeated exposure to well-formed language input. The natural language use within stories provided

models of grammatical structures in functional communicative contexts, allowing students to internalize patterns without explicit metalinguistic instruction. This implicit learning process aligns with usage-based theories of language acquisition, which propose that grammatical knowledge emerges from the abstraction of patterns across multiple exemplars encountered in comprehensible input (Tomasello, 2003). Students demonstrated increasing accuracy in fundamental Arabic grammatical features including subject-verb agreement, noun-adjective concord, and basic sentence word order.

The verb system, central to Arabic grammar, posed initial challenges for students unfamiliar with the distinction between perfective and imperfective aspects and the subject marking through conjugational suffixes and prefixes. Stories naturally contained varied verb forms as narrators described completed actions, ongoing states, and anticipated events, exposing students to the full range of verbal morphology in context. Students began producing correctly conjugated verbs in their own storytelling attempts, particularly high-frequency verbs that appeared regularly across multiple narratives. While systematic accuracy remained inconsistent, the developmental progression was evident, with students moving from complete reliance on unconjugated citation forms toward increasingly sophisticated verb usage.

The gender agreement system, another complex feature of Arabic grammar, showed gradual improvement through storytelling exposure. Arabic requires agreement between nouns and their modifying adjectives as well as between subjects and predicates, with grammatical gender sometimes corresponding to natural gender and other times being purely conventional. Story characters provided concrete referents for practicing gendered language, with students learning to associate masculine and feminine forms with specific individuals in narratives. The contextualized nature of this learning proved more effective than decontextualized grammar exercises, as students developed intuitive understanding of gender agreement patterns through meaningful language use rather than conscious rule application.

The development of grammatical competence through storytelling exemplifies the efficacy of focus-on-form approaches that draw learners' attention to linguistic features within meaning-focused activities. Long and Robinson (1998) argue that such approaches achieve superior learning outcomes compared to either purely explicit grammar instruction or entirely implicit meaning-focused instruction. The storytelling methodology implemented in this research incorporated occasional explicit attention to grammatical patterns when students demonstrated readiness, such as highlighting verb conjugations or discussing gender agreement in post-storytelling discussions. This balanced approach honored the primacy of meaningful communication while providing strategic grammatical guidance that accelerated acquisition processes.

Cultivation of Communicative Confidence and Willingness to Communicate

Perhaps the most transformative impact of storytelling methodology involved affective and motivational dimensions of language learning, particularly students' confidence in using Arabic for oral communication. Initial observations revealed a classroom climate characterized by reticence and anxiety regarding Arabic speaking tasks, with students expressing fear of making mistakes and reluctance to volunteer for speaking activities. The storytelling approach directly addressed these affective barriers by creating a supportive, low-anxiety environment where risk-taking was encouraged and errors were treated as natural aspects of the learning process. MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) construct of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) provides a useful framework for understanding these affective changes, as storytelling activities enhanced students' confidence, reduced communication anxiety, and increased perceived communicative competence.

Student participation patterns shifted dramatically across the research cycles. During the pre-cycle phase, only 7 students consistently volunteered to speak Arabic, with the majority remaining passive during oral activities. By cycle two, voluntary participation had increased to 23 students, with even previously reticent learners initiating Arabic utterances and requesting opportunities to perform stories. Interview data revealed that students attributed their increased confidence to several factors related to the storytelling approach. The familiar narrative content reduced cognitive load, allowing students to focus attention on language production rather than struggling to generate ideas. The repetitive structure of storytelling activities provided predictable routines within which students felt secure experimenting with language (Muhsyanur, 2025) and (Muhsyanur et al., 2022). The collaborative and performative nature of storytelling transformed Arabic speaking from an individually intimidating task into an enjoyable social activity.

The table below illustrates the progression of student performance across assessment cycles, demonstrating the substantial improvements achieved through storytelling implementation:

Assessment Cycle	Mean Speaking Score	Students Achieving Mastery (%)	Vocabulary Range	Pronunciation Accuracy (%)	Fluency Rating
Pre-Cycle	62.4	46%	50-70 words	54%	2.1/5.0
Cycle 1	71.8	68%	110-150 words	69%	3.2/5.0
Cycle 2	81.5	89%	180-220 words	82%	4.1/5.0

The cultivation of communicative confidence extended beyond immediate classroom performance to influence students' broader attitudes toward Arabic language learning and Islamic education. Students expressed greater appreciation for the communicative value of Arabic, moving beyond viewing it merely as a religious obligation or academic requirement. Several students reported attempting to use Arabic at home with family members or during religious activities, indicating that the storytelling experience had fostered intrinsic motivation for continued language development. This attitudinal shift represents a crucial foundation for sustained language learning beyond the immediate intervention period.

E. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that storytelling methodology effectively enhances mahārah kalām among elementary-level madrasah students, yielding substantial improvements in vocabulary knowledge, pronunciation accuracy, grammatical competence, and communicative confidence. The implementation at MI Miftahul Huda Dukuhwringin resulted in 89% of students achieving speaking competency standards, compared to 46% before the intervention. These outcomes validate storytelling as a pedagogically sound, developmentally appropriate, and culturally congruent approach for Arabic language instruction in Indonesian madrasah contexts. The success of this methodology derives from its alignment with children's cognitive preferences for narrative thinking, its creation of meaningful contexts for language use, and its capacity to reduce affective barriers to oral production. Future research should investigate storytelling's long-term effects on language retention and examine how digital storytelling technologies might further enhance engagement and learning outcomes. For practitioners, these findings recommend integrating storytelling as a core instructional strategy in madrasah ibtidaiyah Arabic curricula, accompanied by professional development supporting teachers in narrative-based pedagogy. The evidence suggests that moving beyond traditional grammar-translation approaches toward communicative, narra-

tive-centered instruction can transform Arabic language learning experiences and outcomes for young madrasah students.

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