

Utilization of Picture Story Books of *Sister and Kitten* by Wulanita Kuswotanti As A Stimulation of Early Childhood Empathy Skills

Siti Ma'rifah Mualim

Corresponding author. Email: marifahmualim11@gmail.com

State Islamic University Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto

Abstract

Storybooks are one of the media and also a learning tool that can improve various abilities of early childhood, such as developing children's thinking and imagination, developing children's speaking skills, developing children's socialization power and means of communication between children and their environment. The ability of empathy can be grown and developed in children through various approaches including exemplary, stories or stories, stories related to empathy, namely stories that can foster children's empathetic attitudes towards the characters or events that occur in the story. As in the contents of the picture story book *Adik and Kitten* by Wulanita Kuswotanti can provide stimulation of early childhood empathy skills, so that children have good empathy skills. This research uses descriptive qualitative research methods with the type of *literature* study (literature) with data collection techniques using storybook documentation and other journals as secondary data sources and descriptive content analysis by reading, noting important things, and analyzing various quotes and fragments of paragraphs that are considered to contain empathy values.

Keywords: picture storybooks, empathy, early childhood

1. Introduction

Early childhood is an individual who is in a very rapid development process with different potentials. At this time also with an age range of 0-8 years it can also be said to be a sensitive period which, if it gets optimal stimulation or stimulus, the child's brain and mental growth will reach perfection, so that it can be one of the determinants of the child's success in the future. Providing stimulation to children's potential must pay attention to the child's sensitive period. Montessori (in Sujiono, 2013, p. 54) says that this period is a sensitive period, at this time the child easily receives stimulus from his environment. However, the aspects of child development have sensitive periods that differ from one another. If children get the right stimuli early on, then the development of intelligence, emotions, social and spiritual children can also develop optimally (Nugraha et al., 2017).

One of the aspects of child development that must be developed early is the aspect of social emotional development. In social development there are several indicators, one of which is empathy. Children who have good empathy are able to establish social relationships. Children who have empathy will be able to feel other people's feelings well. This is because empathy is the basis of moral and emotional intelligence (Hafiyah & Arifin, 2024).

Empathy, as a multidimensional construct consisting of emotional, cognitive, and motivational components (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004; Cuff et al., 2014), is based on the ability to recognize, understand, and share feelings with others (Davis, 1980; De Waal, 2008; Preston & De Wall, 2002). More specifically, while cognitive empathy reflects the way we understand others, their experiences and emotions, emotional empathy involves an emotional response to the experiences of others and actually sharing certain emotional states with others (Gómez-Leal et al., 2021).

This ability has been thought to be a fundamental aspect of how humans form connections with each other, with those connections serving as a kind of "social glue" (Hoffman, 2000, p. 3). Empathy is understood to have both cognitive and affective components. The cognitive component of empathy involves the ability to understand the experiences and emotional states of others by taking their perspective. In contrast, the affective component of empathy is concerned with how one responds emotionally to understanding another's experience (Wice et al., 2020).

In research conducted by Mashar (2017) empathy can be fostered through the provision of stories presented in metaphorical counseling techniques. Stories presented in metaphorical empathy counseling techniques are also effective for increasing children's social responsibility, which is part of moral development. Stories have a stronger understanding than objective things in children's consciousness. Moral values presented in stories are more acceptable to children than the reality conveyed by others. Muhtadi (2015) also argues that empathy can be fostered and developed in children through various approaches including exemplary, stories or stories, the use of verbal words, direct experience, play togetherness, and habituation. One of the approaches written by Muhtadi is stories or stories related to empathy, namely stories that can foster children's empathetic attitudes towards the characters or events that occur in the story.

Storybooks are one of the media and also a learning tool that can improve various abilities of early childhood. Stories have many benefits, such as developing children's thinking and imagination, developing children's speaking skills, developing children's socialization power and means of communicating with their environment. In addition, of the various ways to educate children, stories are the most effective way to provide a human touch for children.

The development of picture storybook media in its application aims to increase students' understanding of the social values in the book. Packaged more interestingly so that parents or teachers are easier to convey material well using storybooks that students like.

Early childhood/kindergarten children are not yet able to read stories well. However, when children are given a picture story display, they will respond with their thoughts and emotions. However, pictures in picture stories are not the core aspect of a story, but rather support the story. When teachers or parents tell stories by exploiting or utilizing story characters, children will show their emotional attitudes, such as expressions of joy, empathy, fear, sadness, and so on.

From here, it can be understood that the use of picture stories is one of the activities or methods that aim to stimulate early childhood empathy skills. Picture storybooks can encourage and develop children to have good empathy skills from an early age. Bunanta (via Endraswara, 2005: 211) states that stories can give meaning to values and life. In the story there are demonstrations of characters interacting with their environment, how the characters work together, help each other, do activities together, help overcome other people's difficulties, and so on. The character of the story character will be able to blend with the child's personality and behavior. Story characters are "role models" for children. Children will imitate what the characters do. Because for children, the events, attitudes, and behavior of story characters are not fictional, but real events (Dwi Aqiella Fadilla Hayya & Setiawaty, 2023).

Thus, one of the media that can develop early childhood empathy skills is through the book *Adik and Kitten* by Wulanita Kuswotanti published by the Language Development and Development Agency, Ministry of Education, Research and Technology in 2022. This book tells the behavior of the character Adik and the Kittens who convey the value of empathy from the character of an Adik who gives food to kittens. Adik saw kittens who looked hungry. Then Adik counted the cats, one, two, and three, there were three kittens. Adik then went into the house and took cat food and gave it to the kittens. The three kittens happily welcomed Adik's arrival. The kittens ate it with great gusto. Adik was also happy and laughed together with the kittens.

She made sure all the kittens were eating well, but then she noticed that there was one kitten who hadn't eaten. The kitten's face looked grim and sad. She went into the house, past the living room, looked around for something, went into the room, opened the cupboard door, opened the door under the kitchen and finally found what she was looking for: cat food and gave it to the kitten and the other kittens. All the kittens were full and happy.

This story, can provide an example for early childhood how a human should also have the ability to empathize not only with others but also with animals. A story about a sister and kitten that can be used as a stimulus for empathy skills to be taught to young children. With the ability of empathy can encourage children to

consciously move their hearts, minds and bodies to participate in feeling what other creatures feel, in this book, namely cat animals. From here, this research will focus on discussing how the use of Adik and Kitten storybooks can be a stimulus for early childhood empathy skills.

2. Research Methods

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach that aims to describe in detail the utilization of picture storybooks as one of the stimulations of early childhood empathy skills. Qualitative research is research that contains data expressed in the form of words, sentences, and images. This research uses descriptive qualitative methods because the goal is to describe one research result. This type of research has the aim of providing a description, as well as an explanation and reinforcement or validation of the phenomenon being studied (Muhammad Ramdhan, 2021: 7).

The type of descriptive research used in this writing is included in the type of literature study (literature) as an initial foothold for preliminary studies conducted in the development research stage. Researchers collect the entire bibliography, references, read a lot of research studies and also conduct a needs analysis, especially about the use of picture storybooks for early childhood empathy skills. As for the data sources, this research uses the main book as the primary data source, namely the Adik and Kitten storybook, and other books, articles and journals about the use of storybooks as a stimulation of early childhood empathy skills as a secondary data source.

This research uses data collection techniques with documents as references such as articles, journals. The analysis technique is through reading, noting important things, and analyzing various quotes and paragraph fragments that are considered to contain personal and educational values by including the reasons or opinions of researchers (Dwi Aqiella Fadilla Hayya & Setiawaty, 2023).

3. Results and Discussion

In this section, data will be presented about singers or music groups who often perform popular Javanese songs. The data is presented in the table (table 1) in this paper. In the next section, the data will be discussed especially in their correlation with related studies that are relevant to the context of this study. Furthermore, the data in this study in the form of the singer's name, region of origin, and the Javanese dialect used, will be analyzed in the context of Vuca as well as in terms of the representation of the Javanese dialect used. The presentation of the data in this study is presented in the following table.

Picture story is a series of stories in the form of story text or text with pictures that act as a unit of story illustration. Illustration is a visual text that makes the picture look more attractive so that it can foster children's interest. The storytelling method is very effective and highly favored by children because of its ability to captivate the attention of the audience and facilitate the memory of all the events that occur in a story. By using storytelling techniques, it is possible to convey constructive messages that contribute to children's character development and broaden their understanding of the moral principles of society that affect the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. (Ponglimbong & Talo, 2024).

3.1. Early Childhood Empathy Skills

Empathy in English comes from the Greek "*empathia*" which means to feel. Empathy is the ability to understand other people's feelings and problems, think from their point of view, and appreciate differences in other people's feelings about various things and behaviors. So that someone cannot be said to be empathetic without social action, because the ability to empathize is closely related to the process of social interaction. Given that empathy is one of the important factors in the process of social interaction, it needs to be taught as early as possible so that it becomes a habit in everyday life and does not change easily (Nugraha et al., 2017).

One way that teachers can use to improve early childhood empathy skills is through the use of picture storybooks. Through the use of picture storybooks, children are able to absorb the values of the story read by the teacher and apply them in everyday life. Through the use of picture storybooks it also allows children to express themselves according to the emotions they feel when listening to stories. The ability of empathy in early childhood can be seen from the attitude of socialization of children with their friends, with the environment and also the surrounding nature (Nugraha et al., 2017).

Denham explains that there are nine general factors that can encourage the ability to empathize as follows:

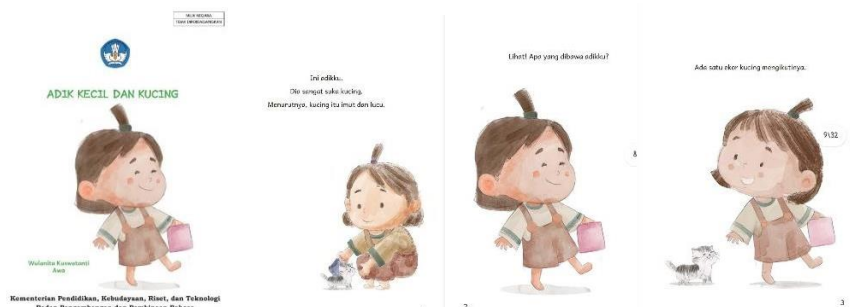
- 1) Age, maturity from the age aspect will affect children's empathy abilities, so that the ability to understand other people's perspectives will increase in line with the increasing age of the child.
- 2) Gender, a person will usually empathize more with friends who have the same gender because they feel they have more in common.
- 3) Intelligence, more intelligent children are usually more able to calm others because they are more able to understand the needs of others and try to find ways to help solve their problems.
- 4) Emotional issues, someone who freely expresses emotions is usually better able to understand other people's feelings appropriately.
- 5) Parents who are empathetic, children imitate their parents' behavior so that empathetic parents will make children more empathetic to others.
- 6) Emotional security, someone who is well-adjusted tends to be helpful to others.
- 7) Temperament, someone who is cheerful and sociable is more likely to empathize with a child under stress.
- 8) When it comes to conditions, it's usually easier to empathize with people who are experiencing the same conditions or experiences.
- 9) Bonding, a person will more easily empathize with people or friends who are closer to them than those who are not as close.

Steven and Howard (Utami, 2014) said that empathy will be very useful if everyone is able to capture what other people feel and think, even if they have different points of view and are spoken verbally, the person will feel that they are understood. Empathy can also relieve tensions that occur and create close cooperation, making it easier for us to achieve goals, namely solving problems and creating successful interpersonal relationships. Empathy is useful for encouraging awareness of the feelings, needs and interests of others; understanding each other, providing services to the needy in the form of help, comforting the sad and others. Another benefit of empathy is to overcome existing diversity, relieve tensions that occur, and solve problems without violence so that they can live in harmony and peace. At least by having empathy, every human being thinks that they can benefit others, not act badly towards others. People who have the ability to empathize can be known based on their behavior or actions, that children who have empathy will show tolerance, compassion, understand the needs of others, want to help people who are in trouble, and empathy is shown not only to other humans, but also to other creatures of God, namely nature and animals.

3.2. Utilization of Adik and Kitten Storybook by Wulanita Kuswotanti as a Stimulation of Empathy Ability for Early Childhood

In teaching stories to students, educators must be more selective in choosing the type of story to tell. The stories used are inspirational stories from various picture story books that have been selected to be told to children. This can be an example for children and applied in everyday life. Stories are a great educational tool because they contain moral principles that are straightforward and easy to understand.

The story of Adik and Kitten by Wulanita Kuswotanti has the value of forming human traits (social growth value): love, tolerance, empathy, and sympathy. The story of Adik and Kitten gives children an understanding that in this life there are other creatures (cats) outside of themselves, and that every creature of God needs each other; not only fellow humans, but also towards nature and animals. Humans must be together and cannot live alone. This can be shown through the behavior of the character, Adik. In the book Adik and the Kitten by Wulanita Kuswotanti on pages 1-2, there is evidence of the affection of the younger brother who is petting the cat, then in the text of the book on page 2 "look what my brother brought" Adik took the initiative to take cat food to give to the kittens. Sister brought food and there was one kitten following her.



Bunanta (Anafiah, 2022) states that stories can give meaning to values and life. In the story there are demonstrations of characters interacting with their environment, how the characters help each other, do activities together, help overcome the difficulties of other creatures of God in this case the kittens, and so on. Children will be able to realize that in the narrative of Wulanita Kuswotanti's Adik and Kitten Stories, life must be shared. How the character behaves, gets along, interacts with kittens, and helps kittens by giving them food. The aspects that stand out in a story related to the ability of empathy are mostly grown through the behavior of the characters. On pages 6-9, the character Adik distributes food to the kittens and seems to feel the happiness of interacting directly with cats who want to eat.



Continued on pages 12-14, the story Adik and the Kittens by Wulanita Kuswotanti can also provide examples for children to have a sense of empathy. The character Adik looks around to make sure all the kittens have eaten.



Then on pages 19-22 the character Adik sees a cat that has not eaten, the character Adik takes the initiative to find food for the cat, after finding and giving it to the cat, the happiness of Adik and the cats can be seen. Many children's stories show events interacting with the environment. In connection with this, the story Adik and the Kitten by Wulanita Kuswotanti can be used as a good stimulus, especially for early childhood, so that children's social growth and development are optimally achieved.



From the results of research on picture storybooks entitled Adik and Kitten, supported by the delivery of varied stories, expressions, voice intonation, the use of storybooks as a stimulus for children's empathy abilities that can be instilled and well understood by early childhood. Other supporting research results are previous research from Rika Setiani (2021) entitled The Effectiveness of Fable Story Media on Children's Empathy. The results of this study prove that fable story media can develop empathy in children. Other research that is in line with this research is research from (Subur et al., 2022) which is entitled Development of Understanding Social Values of Early Childhood through Reading aloud the Fairy Tale Book Toki the Rabbit with a Hat by Tere Liye. The results of the study prove that reading aloud activities must be carried out with a focus on utilizing voice variations that focus on the following: pronunciation and pronunciation that is loud and precise in reading sentences that contain social values for early childhood; emphasizing the proper pronunciation of sentences in sentences that directly contain social values for early childhood; using the right and varied intonation when pronouncing sentences that contain social values for early childhood; reading aloud with a clear and varied

voice when reading sentences that contain social values for early childhood; reading aloud is done expressively when reading sentences that contain social values.

These results also affect the use of picture storybooks as a stimulation of early childhood empathy skills. Storybook media with lots of pictures, which are in accordance with the development of early childhood who are just in the early stages of recognizing letters, and reading becomes one of the visual stimulation of children, audio children by reading a story and also affective elements as part of the application of the essence of a story in children's daily lives. The presentation of storybooks also needs to be supported by varied techniques and methods, facial expressions and voice intonation also affect the effectiveness of conveying the content of stories that contain aspects of empathy.

4. Conclusion

Based on the discussion of the research results above, it can be concluded that picture storybooks are one of the effective learning tools or media in fostering positive moral attitudes through messages conveyed by educators. Picture storybooks can be read to children by educators or parents. Therefore, the utilization of picture storybooks can be used as a main learning activity both at home and at school. Through picture storybooks, children are able to understand the meanings of the messages implied by the stories conveyed related to moral or social values, especially the value of empathy. Of course, the delivery of the story also needs to be supported by the right techniques to make it interesting for children and make children more focused on listening. With creative, fun, expressive and strong storytelling techniques and methods, children can also enjoy it and understand its meaning. Empathy is a manifestation of freedom of conscience. With an empathetic attitude, a person has honed his conscience in judging good and bad. To have a conscience, one must hone their social-emotional skills, their empathetic ability to be sensitive to others and the surrounding environment.

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