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E-ISSN : 2828-318X

Edu Happiness
Jurnal Ilmiah Perkembangan Anak Usia Dini

The Increasing Compassion Through Storytelling Method

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How to cite this article:	Agustin., Qushayyi. S. T., dkk. The Increasing Compassion Through Storytelling Method. *EDUHappiness: Jurnal Ilmiah Perkembangan Anak Usia Dini,* Vol 05, No 2, page 288-299. DOI: **https://doi.org/10.62515/eduhappiness.v5i2.1505**

Edu Happiness:
Jurnal Ilmiah Perkembangan Anak Usia Dini

Vol 05 No 2 July 2026

Page: 288-299

DOI:
https://doi.org/10.62515/eduhappiness.v5i2.1505

Received: 29 May 2026
Accepted: 12 June 2026
Published: 31 July 2026

Publisher: Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat (LPPM), Institut Nasional Nusantara (INN) Al Farabi Pangandaran, stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

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Abstract

This study aims to foster a sense of compassion in young children through storytelling at the Daarul Huda Islamic Kindergarten. The study was motivated by the low levels of empathy and social acceptance shown by children towards their peers, particularly those with special needs. The study employed the Classroom Action Research (CAR) method, conducted over two cycles. The research subjects comprised seven children aged 4–5 years. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. The data were analysed using both qualitative and quantitative descriptive methods. The results of the study indicate that the storytelling method is effective in enhancing children's sense of compassion. In the pre-cycle, 85.71% of the children were in the 'Beginning to Develop' category and 14.29% in the 'Developing as Expected' category. Following the intervention in Cycle I, the proportion in the 'Developing as Expected' category increased to 85.71%. In Cycle II, all children achieved the 'Developing Very Well' category (100%). Improvements were observed in the children's ability to speak politely, help friends, share, understand others' feelings, and demonstrate caring behaviour. Thus, the storytelling method is effective for developing the social-emotional skills of young children.

Keywords: *storytelling method, affection, social-emotional development, early childhood, early childhood education*

INTRODUCTION

Socio-emotional development is one of the essential aspects of early childhood education because it is closely related to children's ability to understand their own feelings and those of others, build social relationships, and demonstrate prosocial behaviors such as empathy, care, and affection. Optimally developed socio-emotional skills help children adapt to their social environment and shape positive character traits

from an early age. Research conducted by Harianja, Sitorus, and Hasibuan (2023) showed that early childhood socio-emotional development needs to be stimulated appropriately because it influences children's ability to establish social relationships, regulate emotions, and interact with their surrounding environment.

One form of socio-emotional development that should be instilled from an early age is affection. Affection refers to attitudes of respect, care, and attention toward others without discriminating against individual differences. Aismalia (2021) stated that affection is an attitude of loving all God's creations regardless of ethnicity, race, social group, or physical condition. Meanwhile, Rahmatullah (2017) explained that affection serves as an important foundation in shaping individuals who are caring, creative, and capable of building positive social relationships.

However, in practice, there are still children who are unable to demonstrate affection and social acceptance toward their peers, especially children with special needs. Based on observations conducted at KB Islam Daarul Huda, most children showed fear, discomfort, and rejection toward a child with special needs who frequently participated in classroom activities. Children also displayed unpleasant verbal and nonverbal behaviors, such as refusing to play together and not allowing the child to use play equipment. This condition indicates the low level of affection and empathy among children toward others.

The issue of low affection in early childhood requires serious attention because it may affect children's ability to socialize and accept diversity within their environment. Melani and Yusri (2024) revealed that children's prosocial behaviors, including affection and social care, are influenced by the lack of personal attention, limited stimulation, and social environments that do not adequately support children's emotional development.

One learning method considered effective in instilling affection values in early childhood is the storytelling method. Storytelling is an activity of delivering moral messages through engaging stories that are appropriate to children's developmental characteristics. Siregar, Meilanie, and Purwanto (2021) explained that storytelling can support children's socio-emotional, language, moral, and imaginative development because stories provide meaningful learning experiences.

Storytelling is also suitable for early childhood education because children naturally enjoy listening to stories, imaginative characters, and interactive activities. Research by Gare, Anggraini, and Muntomimah (2021) showed that storytelling can improve empathy among children aged 5–6 years because children learn to understand the feelings of story characters and imitate positive behaviors presented in the stories. In addition, Windira and Loka (2025) explained that storytelling effectively improves children's emotional intelligence, particularly in the aspects of empathy and social care.

Recent studies have increasingly highlighted the importance of fostering empathy, compassion, and prosocial behaviour during early childhood, as these competencies serve as the foundation for children's future social relationships and psychological well-being. Socio-emotional competencies developed during the preschool years contribute significantly to children's ability to cooperate with peers, regulate emotions, resolve conflicts, and participate positively in diverse social environments (Fuadia, 2022; Harianja et al., 2023). Children who demonstrate strong empathy and compassion are more likely to establish positive peer relationships and exhibit inclusive attitudes toward individuals with different backgrounds and abilities (Hidayati & Khotimah, 2022; Melani & Yusri, 2024).

Within inclusive early childhood education settings, the development of compassion becomes even more important because children encounter peers with

diverse developmental characteristics, including children with special needs. Previous studies have reported that social acceptance remains one of the major challenges in inclusive classrooms, where children may demonstrate reluctance to interact, cooperate, or play with peers who are perceived as different (Nurhayati & Rakhmawati, 2021). Consequently, early childhood educators need effective pedagogical approaches that not only support academic development but also promote empathy, acceptance, and positive social interaction among children.

Storytelling has been widely recognized as an effective strategy for promoting socio-emotional learning in early childhood education. Through stories, children are exposed to various social situations that enable them to understand emotions, recognize moral values, and develop perspective-taking abilities. Pratiwi and Nurhafizah (2023) found that storytelling contributes significantly to children's socio-emotional development because stories provide opportunities for children to reflect on characters' feelings and behaviours. Similarly, Putri (2024) reported that storytelling-based learning experiences enhance empathy by helping children understand social situations from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, storytelling creates meaningful emotional experiences that facilitate the internalization of prosocial values, including kindness, caring, cooperation, and respect for diversity (Nurhayati & Amalia, 2023).

Although previous studies have consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of storytelling in promoting empathy and socio-emotional development, most research has focused on general populations of young children without specifically examining its role in fostering compassion and social acceptance toward peers with special needs. Research addressing storytelling within inclusive early childhood education contexts remains limited, particularly in Indonesian early childhood settings. Therefore, there is a need for further investigation into how storytelling may contribute to developing compassionate attitudes and inclusive behaviours among young children.

This study addresses this gap by examining the implementation of storytelling as a strategy to improve children's compassion within an inclusive early childhood education environment. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on empathy or socio-emotional development in general, the present study specifically explores children's acceptance, caring attitudes, helping behaviour, and positive interactions toward peers, including children with special needs. Therefore, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on inclusive early childhood education by providing empirical evidence regarding the role of storytelling in fostering compassion and social acceptance among young children.

Previous studies have shown that storytelling is effective in improving the moral and socio-emotional development of early childhood children. Research conducted by Purba, Nasution, and Rosita (2021) found that storytelling about prophets' stories was able to improve children's moral development, including helping behavior, patience, and affection. However, studies specifically discussing the improvement of affection toward children with special needs in early childhood education settings are still limited.

Based on the explanation above, there is a research gap regarding the limited studies on the use of storytelling methods to improve children's affection within the context of inclusive early childhood education. Therefore, this study is important as an alternative solution to enhance children's empathy and social acceptance toward peers with special needs through engaging and meaningful storytelling activities. This study aims to examine the improvement of children's affection through the storytelling method at KB Islam Daarul Huda.

METHODS

The selection of Classroom Action Research (PTK) was based on its suitability for improving educational practices through iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. CAR enables teachers to identify classroom problems and implement context-specific interventions while continuously evaluating their effectiveness. In the context of early childhood education, this approach is particularly relevant because socio-emotional development requires ongoing observation and adjustment of learning strategies according to children's responses and developmental needs.

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (PTK) approach aimed at improving early childhood children's sense of affection through the storytelling method at KB Islam Daarul Huda. Classroom Action Research was chosen because it enables teachers to improve the learning process directly and continuously through the stages of planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection. According to Arikunto, Classroom Action Research is research conducted in the classroom to systematically and reflectively improve the quality of the learning process. This approach is considered appropriate for developing early childhood socio-emotional aspects because teachers can directly observe changes in children's behavior during the learning process.

The research was conducted at KB Islam Daarul Huda, Kalibeji Village, Sempor District, Kebumen Regency, during the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The research subjects were playgroup children at KB Islam Daarul Huda. The study was conducted in two cycles, where each cycle consisted of planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection stages. During the planning stage, the teacher prepared the Daily Learning Implementation Plan (RPPH), story media, and observation sheets for assessing children's affection development. The implementation stage was carried out through storytelling activities using storybooks with themes of affection and caring. Furthermore, the observation stage was conducted to monitor children's behavioral development during the learning process, while the reflection stage was carried out to evaluate the results of the action and determine improvements for the following cycle.

The storytelling method was selected because it is considered effective in instilling social and emotional values in early childhood children. Research conducted by Gare, Anggraini, and Muntomimah (2021) showed that storytelling can improve children's empathy through experiences of understanding story characters and plotlines. In addition, Windira and Loka (2025) explained that storytelling methods can help children develop the ability to understand emotions, increase social awareness, and build prosocial behavior in daily life. Therefore, the storytelling method was considered relevant as an intervention to improve children's sense of affection in early childhood education settings.

The data sources in this study were obtained from teachers, the school principal, and seven children as research subjects. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to monitor the development of children's affection during the learning process. Afifuddin and Saebani, as cited in Ahsanulkhaq (2019), explained that observation is an activity of systematically observing and recording symptoms that appear in the research object. In addition, interviews were conducted with teachers and the school principal to obtain information regarding children's socio-emotional behavior and the implementation of storytelling methods in learning activities. Iskandar, as cited in Amiran (2016), stated that interviews are used to obtain in-depth information regarding the experiences, behaviors, and perspectives of research subjects. Documentation was used to support the research data in the form of

photographs of learning activities, learning instruments, and records of children's development.

The research instrument used an observation sheet on children's affection development based on socio-emotional indicators. The observed indicators included caring attitudes, kindness, compassion, polite speech, helpfulness, understanding others' feelings, expressing gratitude, and concern for the environment and peers. Children's developmental assessment used the categories of Not Yet Developed (BB), Beginning to Develop (MB), Developing as Expected (BSH), and Developing Very Well (BSB). These indicators were used to facilitate teachers in measuring changes in children's affectionate behavior during the implementation of the action. The observation indicators were adapted from socio-emotional development competencies in early childhood education, particularly empathy, caring behaviour, helping behaviour, gratitude, and positive peer interaction.

Data were analysed using both qualitative and quantitative descriptive techniques. Qualitative analysis focused on describing children's behavioural changes, classroom interactions, and responses to storytelling activities throughout the research process. Quantitative analysis was conducted by calculating the percentage of children's developmental achievements in each assessment category. The percentage of achievement was determined by comparing the number of children who achieved each developmental level with the total number of participants. The effectiveness of the intervention was evaluated by comparing the results of the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II observations. The action was considered successful when at least 75% of the children achieved the Developing Very Well (BSB) category, indicating substantial improvement in compassion-related behaviours.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This classroom action research was conducted at KB Islam Daarul Huda with seven Group A children as research subjects, consisting of three boys and four girls aged 4–5 years. The study was carried out in two cycles with the aim of improving children's sense of affection through the storytelling method. Before the intervention was implemented, the researcher conducted a pre-cycle observation to identify the initial condition of children's affection development.

The following table presents the recapitulation of children's affection improvement across cycles:

Table 1. Recapitulation Across Cycles

	Cycle	BB (%)	MB (%)	BSH (%)	BSB (%)
Cycle	Pre-	85.71	14.29	0	0
	Cycle I	14.29	0	85.71	0
	Cycle II	0	0	0	100

(Source: KB Islam Daarul Huda Data, 2025).

*Notes: BB=NotYetDeveloped, MB=BeginningtoDevelop, BSH=DevelopingasExpected, BSB = Developing Very Well

Based on the recapitulation table of children's affection improvement across cycles above, the results can also be presented in the following bar chart:

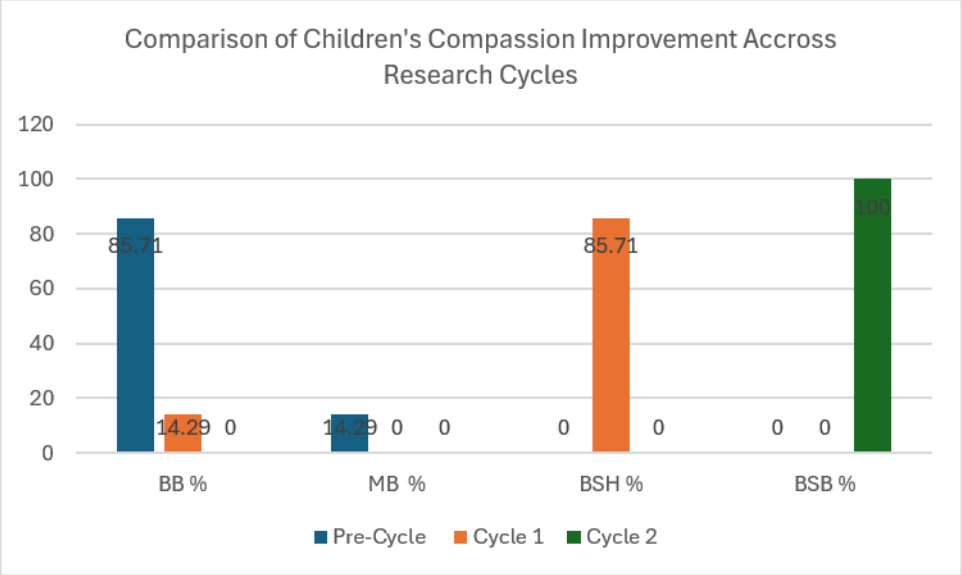


Figure 1. Comparison of Children's Compassion Improvement Across Research Cycles
(Sources: Research Data, 2025)

The results of the pre-cycle observation indicated that children's sense of affection was still low. The majority of children were categorized as Beginning to Develop (MB) at 85.71%, while only 14.29% of children reached the Developing as Expected (BSH) category, and no children reached the Developing Very Well (BSB) category. This condition was reflected in children's behaviors, such as rejecting peers with special needs, lacking the ability to understand their friends' feelings, not being accustomed to praising others, and being careless in using toys.

After the implementation of the action in Cycle I through the storytelling method using the books with tittle "*Aku Peduli Karena Allah* and *Aku Menghormati Orang Lain Karena Allah*", there was an improvement in children's affection development. In the first meeting, most children were still in the Beginning to Develop category at 71.43%, but by the third meeting, the percentage had decreased to 14.29%. Conversely, the Developing as Expected category increased to 85.71%. Improvements were observed in indicators such as children's willingness to praise friends, speak politely, and use toys carefully.

However, the results of Cycle I showed that the developmental achievement had not yet reached the research success indicator, namely 75% in the Developing Very Well category. Reflection results indicated that the storybooks used had not fully represented all indicators of affection, and the language of the stories was still difficult for children to understand. Therefore, improvements were made in Cycle II by using storybooks that were simpler, more communicative, and more suitable for children's affection development indicators.

In Cycle II, the improvement in children's affection development became more significant. Children began to demonstrate caring behaviors, understand their friends' feelings, speak politely, share with others, express gratitude, and help friends independently. In the first meeting, all children were categorized as Developing as Expected, then increased to 71.43% in the Developing Very Well category in the second meeting, and finally reached 100% Developing Very Well in the third meeting. The indicator showing the highest improvement was children's ability to express gratitude when receiving help, which reached 100%.

Overall, the results of the study demonstrated an improvement in children's sense of affection from the pre-cycle to Cycle II. In the pre-cycle, most children were categorized

as Beginning to Develop, then improved to Developing as Expected in Cycle I, and finally reached the Developing Very Well category in Cycle II. These findings indicate that the storytelling method is effective in improving early childhood children's sense of affection at KB Islam Daarul Huda.

Discussion

The results of the study showed that the storytelling method was able to improve early childhood children's sense of affection gradually and significantly. The improvement could be seen from changes in children's behavior, as they began to understand their friends' feelings, speak politely, share with others, help friends, and accept the presence of peers with special needs in the school environment. These behavioral changes indicate that storytelling not only provides enjoyable learning experiences but also helps children understand social and emotional values concretely through story characters and plotlines.

The findings of this study demonstrate that storytelling significantly improved children's compassion, as reflected in their increased willingness to help friends, share learning materials, express gratitude, and communicate politely. These findings support the view that compassion is not an innate characteristic but a socio-emotional competence that can be nurtured through meaningful learning experiences. According to Hidayati and Khotimah (2022), prosocial behaviours such as caring, helping, and sharing develop when children are provided with learning experiences that encourage social interaction and emotional engagement. In the present study, storytelling created opportunities for children to observe positive behaviours through story characters and subsequently apply these behaviours in real-life interactions.

Another important finding is the improvement in children's empathy toward their peers. Empathy is considered one of the fundamental components of socio-emotional development because it enables children to recognize, understand, and respond appropriately to the emotions of others. The increase in children's ability to understand their friends' feelings observed in this study is consistent with the findings of Gare et al. (2021), who reported that storytelling effectively promotes empathy among young children by encouraging them to identify with story characters and reflect on emotional experiences. Similarly, Pratiwi and Nurhafizah (2023) found that storytelling contributes significantly to socio-emotional development because children learn to interpret emotions and social situations through narrative experiences.

A particularly noteworthy finding of this study is the increased acceptance of peers with special needs following the implementation of storytelling activities. Prior to the intervention, several children demonstrated reluctance to interact, play, and cooperate with a classmate who had special needs. However, after participating in storytelling sessions emphasizing caring, respect, and kindness, children became more willing to engage in positive social interactions regardless of individual differences. This finding extends previous studies on storytelling and empathy by demonstrating its potential to promote inclusive attitudes in early childhood education settings. Therefore, the contribution of this study lies not only in improving children's compassion and empathy but also in fostering social acceptance and inclusion among young children.

The improvement in children's affection in this study is in line with socio-emotional development theory, which states that early childhood children learn to understand social behavior through direct experiences and environmental stimulation. According to Fuadia (2022), children's socio-emotional development is influenced by the school environment, social interactions, and learning experiences provided by teachers. In this study, storytelling activities provided emotional experiences for children through

stories about caring, sharing, and respecting others, making it easier for children to understand affectionate behavior in daily life.

The findings of this study also support the opinion of Siregar, Meilanie, and Purwanto (2021), who explained that storytelling can support children's socio-emotional development because stories provide meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences. When teachers delivered stories expressively and interactively, children became more focused, enthusiastic, and able to understand the moral messages contained in the stories. This was evident in Cycle II, where the use of simpler and more communicative stories improved children's understanding of affectionate behavior more optimally. Research by Pratiwi and Nurhafizah (2023) also showed that storytelling can increase children's emotional engagement in the learning process, making moral values easier to understand and apply.

Furthermore, the improvement in children's ability to understand their friends' feelings and demonstrate caring behavior is consistent with the findings of Gare, Anggraini, and Muntomimah (2021), who found that storytelling effectively enhances empathy in early childhood children. In this study, children began to understand their friends' conditions, share play equipment, help friends who faced difficulties, and express gratitude after listening to stories and participating in role-playing activities. This indicates that stories help children build social perspectives and understand others' emotions through the experiences of story characters. These findings are also relevant to research published in Eduhappiness Journal by Nurhayati and Amalia (2023), which explained that storytelling activities can improve early childhood emotional development through interactive and enjoyable storytelling. In addition, Fauziah and Rahmawati (2024) in Eduhappiness Journal stated that storytelling learning is effective in improving empathy and social acceptance among early childhood children because stories help children understand others' perspectives more concretely.

The findings of this study are further supported by research conducted by Ihlas, Muslimin, and Roshandel (2025), which showed that storytelling methods can improve children's ability to understand emotions, demonstrate social care, and build positive interactions with peers. Maranatha (2024) also explained that communicative and contextual storytelling can enhance children's emotional involvement in the learning process, making moral values easier to understand and apply in everyday life.

This study also strengthens the findings of Windira and Loka (2025), who explained that storytelling methods can improve children's emotional intelligence, particularly in the aspects of empathy, social care, and the ability to understand others' emotions. In Cycle II, the use of storybooks that matched the indicators of affection and used simple language made it easier for children to internalize the moral values contained in the stories. Children did not merely listen to stories passively but were actively involved through discussions, reflections, and role-playing activities, making the learning process more meaningful.

The significant improvement in the indicators of expressing gratitude, speaking politely, and taking care of toys shows that storytelling methods can establish positive behavioral habits in early childhood children. According to Wahyuni (2017), storytelling activities can support children's moral, socio-emotional, and prosocial development because stories provide examples of behaviors that children can imitate in everyday life. In this study, children gradually became accustomed to using polite language, helping friends, and showing concern for their environment after repeatedly receiving stimulation through storytelling activities.

The success of storytelling in improving children's affection was also influenced by the selection of story media appropriate to early childhood developmental characteristics. In Cycle I, the stories used were not fully understood by the children, resulting in less optimal improvement. However, in Cycle II, the use of simpler, more engaging, and more relatable stories made the learning process more effective. This finding indicates that the success of storytelling depends not only on storytelling activities themselves but also on the teacher's ability to select suitable media, language, and delivery strategies according to children's developmental levels.

Based on the results and discussion above, it can be concluded that the storytelling method is effective in improving early childhood children's sense of affection. This method helps children understand the values of empathy, caring, and social acceptance through enjoyable, interactive, and meaningful learning experiences. Therefore, storytelling can serve as an effective alternative learning strategy for developing early childhood socio-emotional aspects, particularly in fostering affection toward others.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the classroom action research conducted at KB Islam Daarul Huda, it can be concluded that the storytelling method is effective in improving early childhood children's sense of affection. The improvement was reflected in changes in children's behavior in aspects such as caring, empathy, helping others, speaking politely, understanding friends' feelings, expressing gratitude, and the ability to accept and interact positively with peers.

In the initial condition (pre-cycle), the majority of children were still categorized as Beginning to Develop (MB) at 85.71%, while only 14.29% reached the Developing as Expected (BSH) category, and no children reached the Developing Very Well (BSB) category. After the implementation of the storytelling method in Cycle I, there was an improvement in children's affection development, where most children reached the Developing as Expected category at 85.71%. Furthermore, in Cycle II, the improvement became more significant, with all children reaching the Developing Very Well category at 100%.

These improvements indicate that the storytelling method is able to provide enjoyable, concrete, and meaningful learning experiences for early childhood children. The use of stories that are closely related to children's daily lives helps them understand the values of affection, empathy, and social care through the characters and plotlines presented by the teacher. In addition, discussion, reflection, and role-playing activities after storytelling further strengthened children's understanding of positive behaviors that can be applied in everyday life. Therefore, the storytelling method can be used as an effective alternative learning strategy in developing early childhood socio-emotional aspects, particularly in improving affection and social acceptance toward others within an inclusive education environment.

The findings also suggest that storytelling can serve as an inclusive pedagogical strategy for promoting social acceptance toward peers with special needs. Therefore, storytelling may be considered not only as a language-learning activity but also as an effective approach to fostering empathy, compassion, and inclusive values in early childhood education settings.

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