

# Children's Literature as Learning Media to Improve Children's Language Skills

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**Abstract.** This article aims to describe children's literature as a means of learning language skills for children. Children's literature is literature aimed at children. Children's literature is literature that reflects the feelings and experiences of children through children's views on topics that are close to the child's world, including humans, fauna, and flora. Through literature, a child indirectly learns language skills as well. Children's literature is also important because it teaches young learners a variety of lessons. It also gives them opportunities to engage with literature; teaches them an appreciation for their cultural heritage; fosters emotional intelligence and creativity; fosters the growth and development of the children's personality and social skills; and conveys important literature from one generation to the next. Children's literature needs to be developed and taught from an early age so that young learners have good personalities and are knowledgeable. It can be a valuable resource, particularly in language teaching. Learning language skills is applied through the introduction of three literary genres, namely: 1) poetry in the form of children's songlines and children's rhymes; 2) prose in the form of fantasy fairy tales and folk tales; and 3) drama in the form of stories with simple dialogues.

**Keywords:** Children's literature, Language learning, Language skills

## 1. Introduction

Literary works can reveal a human appreciation of life in the context of humans and other living things, including plants and animals. The result of art that knows and enters the experience of the nation, history, and society is literary work. Literary works, in terms of their creation, are the actualization of the author's thoughts and feelings expressed in the work as a picture of real life. Literary readings can be intended for both adult and children's audiences. Children's literature is literary reading with a purpose for children.

Children's literature, according to Rukayah (2012), is a work that uses spoken or written language media in the form of poetry, prose, or drama. These works can be written by adults, teenagers, or children and are specifically intended for children to understand and contain information about the world that children are familiar with. Another definition of children's literature states that it is literature that appeals to children's interests, needs, and reading preferences and captivates children as its primary audience (Hancock, 2000). Nevertheless, adults can sometimes be part of that audience for particular purposes. Meanwhile, Winarni (2012) explains that children's literature is a work that, in terms of language, has aesthetic value and, in terms of, contains moral

educational values that can enrich the soul experience of children. Based on this opinion, it can be concluded that children's literature is a type of literary work intended for children that can be delivered orally or in writing, made by children or adults, describes the world of children or contains a world that is familiar to children and contains the educational and moral value. In simple terms, children's literature refers to literary works that are intended for children, describe the world of children, and are expressed in language that is appropriate for children's development.

Huck (1987) revealed that children's literature describes problems in children's lives that have meaningful values for children. The consequences of children's literature are children's main characters, with typical children's problems understood from the child's perspective, to describe problems related to the world of children. Tarigan refers to Roettger's opinion that children's literature has many advantages for children and their world (Tarigan, 2011), and it also gives important input that a variety of lessons, morals, and ideas are taught through children's literature (Tyra, 2011). Furthermore, because literature lends itself to the teaching of specific moral quandaries and the examination of specific character traits, it can be an effective method of teaching character education (Prestwich, 2004).

Here are some reasons why children's literature is important for children. First, literature provides fun, joy, and enjoyment to children. Values like this will come if literature can broaden children's thinking horizons by presenting new experiences and new insights. Second, literature can develop children's imaginations and help them to consider and think about nature, people, experiences, or ideas in various ways. A good literary work can arouse a child's curiosity about the events that occur in their environment. Third, literature can provide strange experiences that seem to be experienced by children. Fourth, literature can develop children's insight into human behavior. Fifth, literature can present and introduce the universality of experience to children. Literature helps children towards a broader understanding of the bonds and relationships of human beings. Sixth, literature is the main source for the transmission of inheritance from one generation to the next.

Children's literature is not distinguishable from adult literature. Both are works of literature that deal with life and all of its feelings, thoughts, and insights. Children's literature is a type of imaginative creation involving the use of a specific language that describes the fictional world, presents certain understandings and experiences, and contains certain aesthetic values that can be created by adults or children.

Teaching children's literature is also important because introducing children to literature at a young age will instill a love of literature in them. Elementary school children's literature is primarily concerned with the process of providing a literary experience. Students are challenged to identify the form and content of a literary work. Literary creativity recognition and familiarization activities can foster understanding and respect for literary creativity as beautiful and meaningful work. Children's literature can help children improve their language skills.

Morrow (2003) reveals that language development in children cannot be separated from the natural and holistic learning context as the characteristics of children's learning.

Therefore, the development of literacy skills must also be meaningful and concrete and involve children actively and holistically, using functional experiences that include listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities. Thus, the child's language can develop. Wahyuni (2017) explains that children's literature can help to foster language creativity in children. As literary readers, children have been able to connect their world with the fictional world depicted in stories (children's literary works). The initial key to understanding and enjoying reading children's stories is the interactive relationship between experience and linguistic knowledge.

Language development in children includes the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Although each is called separately, all of these skills develop through an integrative process during the development process. Each aspect contributes to the growth of the other. Certain characteristics can be found in the vocabulary used in children's literature, for example. They are rhythmical, simple but inventively constructed, and used in everyday casual interaction. These characteristics can be represented in various linguistic forms commonly found in texts, such as specific registers for children and onomatopoeias – vocabularies derived from the imitation of real-world sounds. As a result, children's literature is a great place to learn new words. Students absorb sophisticated words found in books through language activities, resulting in a significant improvement in their performance.

Language skills for children support how a child expresses thoughts, expresses feelings, expresses wishes and desires, or reports observed facts. Language skills cover four aspects, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Listening and reading are receptive aspects, while speaking and writing are productive aspects. In the speaking activity, the sender of the message sends a message using spoken language. Meanwhile, in listening to the recipient of the message, he tries to give meaning to the spoken language conveyed by the sender. In most writing activities, the sender of the message uses written language. On the other hand, in reading, the recipient of the message tries to give meaning to the written language conveyed by the author.

Interacting with children requires language skills. Learning children's language skills can be accomplished through the use of children's literary media, which includes the poetry, prose, and drama genres. Children's literature-based language development does not teach them literature, but rather uses literary works to stimulate and develop their language skills. The discussion section will describe how and what language skills children can convey through children's literary media.

## **2. Method**

A descriptive qualitative approach was used in this study. It was accomplished in several steps, including reading, identifying, analyzing, and concluding. The research design aided in the conduct of research and made research more systematic. This study requires information about literature from three genres (poetry, prose, and drama) as a medium for teaching children's language skills, which include listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Language skills cover four aspects, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Listening and reading are receptive aspects, while speaking and writing are productive aspects. This discussion is divided into receptive aspects of language skills (listening and reading) and productive aspects of language skills (speaking and writing) for children through children's literary media, explained as follows.

#### 3.1. Listening Skills

Listening is the process of giving close attention, understanding, appreciation, and interpretation to verbal symbols in order to obtain information, capture content or messages, and comprehend the meaning of communication conveyed by the speaker through speech or spoken language.

The basic listening skills of children that need to be considered are as follows: 1) Children will be able to listen well when a story is read aloud; 2) Children will be happy and able to listen well when a speaker tells a true experience; 3) Children can listen to different sounds and tones, especially if the intonation of the speaker's speech is very clear and good; 4) Children can listen and follow verbal instructions that are conveyed; 5) Children can listen to and study the similarities and differences in speech; 6) Children can listen to rhythms and rhymes in a poetry or drama reading; and 7) Children can listen to and capture ideas contained in speech or conversation. Listening learning in children can be done by listening-repeating, listening and imitating techniques, completing stories, summarizing, and paraphrasing.

Literary media, specifically children's literary works of prose, poetry, and drama, can help children improve their listening language skills. The literary media for listening skills will be limited in this discussion to rhymes, puzzles, and lyrics of children's songs. Children can listen to rhymes with puzzles read aloud or song lyrics sung with content or support for children's linguistic knowledge.

At the end of the rhyme, there is a special character. When the riddle is spoken, the listener will consider the answer. The rhyme's purpose is to entertain and bring people together. Listening to this rhyme has advantages for children, including improved listening and language skills. The riddle at the end of the poem contains questions that the listener must answer. Without paying close attention, the child may not be able to correctly answer the rhyme. The content and the answer may differ at times. As a result, this type of rhyme encourages laughter and entertainment as a medium for children to play and learn. The following are some rhymes that can be used as listening learning media for children.

*Jikalau tuan tajuk cendana  
Ambil gantang jemurkan pala  
Jikalau tuan bijaksana  
Binatang apa ekor di kepala?*

*Burung nuri burung gereja  
Terbang santai di tengah taman  
Cobalah cari wahai saudara  
Makin diisi semakin ringan?*

*Diukur dijangka-jangka  
Burung merak burung angkasa  
Dengar tuan saya menerka  
Layang-layang gagah perkasa*

*Hidup tenang di dalam desa  
Punya pemimpin jumlahnya satu  
Buruh-buruh rajin bekerja  
Askar bertugas setiap waktu?*

If you have sandalwood  
It takes a bushel to dry nutmeg.  
If you are wise,  
What animal's tail is on the head?

Sparrow, parrot  
Flying leisurely in the middle of the garden  
Try to find it, brother.  
The more filled it is, the lighter it is.

Measuring in the  
Sky peacocks of the future  
Listen to my lord's guess.  
The mighty kite

Live in peace in the village.  
Have a single leader  
The workers diligently work.  
Askar is on duty all the time.

From the game of hearing the riddle rhyme above, children's language knowledge will develop. Children will gain linguistic insight about flora and fauna (some animals and plants) through fun learning, namely rhyming together. Thus, this rhyming game can become a fun way for children to learn to listen word for word until they can answer a question contained in the last line of the rhyme they hear.

Children's song lyrics play an important role in their language growth and development. Children can express themselves, play, and learn in a fun way by singing a fun song. The following are some examples of song lyrics that can be used to help children learn language skills. Children's songs can help them learn more about their surroundings.

Furthermore, children's songs can help to expand vocabularies. The following children's songs are not only entertaining; they can also be used to improve children's listening skills.

*Kepala, pundak, lutut, kaki (lutut, kaki)*  
*Kepala, pundak, lutut, kaki (lutut, kaki)*  
*Mata, telinga, mulut, hidung, dan pipi*  
*Kepala, pundak, lutut, kaki (lutut, kaki)*

*Head, shoulders, knees, toes (knees, toes).*  
*Head, shoulders, knees, toes (knees, toes).*  
*Eyes, ears, mouth, nose, and cheeks.*  
*Head, shoulders, knees, toes (knees, toes).*

The song "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" has simple lyrics. One song only consists of four words that are sung repeatedly. Although the lyrics are very simple, the benefits are very big for children, namely teaching children about the names of the parts of the human body. Another children's song, namely the song "Balonku". The lyrics of this song are also very simple and easy to remember and understand by preschool children. Here are the lyrics of the song.

*Balonku ada lima*  
*Rupa-rupa warnanya*  
*Hijau, kuning, kelabu*  
*Merah muda dan biru*  
*Meletus balon hijau. Dor!*  
*Hatiku sangat kacau*  
*Balonku tinggal empat*  
*Kupegang erat-erat*

My balloons have five  
different colors  
Green, yellow, gray  
Pink and blue

Popping a green balloon. Dor!  
My heart is so messed up  
I only have four  
I grip the railing tightly

The song "Balonku Ada Lima" can introduce vocabulary about colors to children when they listen to this song or when they sing it.

### **3.2. Reading Skills**

Reading skills are another receptive aspect, in addition to listening skills. Reading is one of the most advanced cognitive functions of the human brain. Reading, in theory, is a complex process involving auditory (hearing) and visual (vision) activities to derive meaning from symbols in the form of letters or words. Reading is an activity or process in which several skills are used to process reading texts in order to comprehend the content of the reading. As a result, reading can be defined as an activity that involves

obtaining information or messages conveyed by the author through written language. Reading entails comprehending the reading text interpretively, critically, and creatively. Reading and understanding the content of prose can help children learn to read. It can be in the form of fables, folk tales, or fantasy stories that are packaged as necessities for children's reading. The choice of reading must be based on material that the child can understand and which is written in simple language so that it can be read and understood by the child, taking into account the simplicity (or complexity) of vocabulary and structure, but, at the same time, it also serves to increase the richness of the child's language and language skills (Nurgiyantoro, 2005). One way children's reading skills can be practiced is by reading a fragment of a children's story entitled *The Golden Crab in the Boat*.

*Musim apa ini sehingga ikan-ikan bersembunyi?" gumamnya dalam hati. Ia mendayung perahu kayunya pelan-pelan menuju ke tepian. Ia ingin pulang sebelum hari gelap dan hujan turun. Ketika ia hendak mengikatkan perahunya pada sebatang pohon, ia mendengar isak tangis. Suara tangisan itu terdengar makin lama makin keras. "Siapa yang menangis?" tanya Kakek sambil melihat sekeliling. "Aku, Kek," jawab kepiting itu sesenggukan. "Siapa?!" ucap Kakek sambil melihat sekelilingnya, tapi tak ditemukan siapa pun di situ selain dirinya (Setyami, 2021)*

In what season is it that the fish are hiding? He rowed his wooden boat slowly toward the shore. He wanted to go home before it got dark and started to rain. As he was about to tie his boat to a tree, he heard sobs. The cries were getting louder and louder. "Who is crying?" Grandpa asked, looking around. "Me, Grandpa," replied the crab, sobbing. "Who?!" Grandpa said while looking around, but found no one there except for himself,"

The story above is just an example of the many children's stories that can be selected and presented as reading media for learning language skills, especially the reading aspect. By reading stories, children can learn words, phrases, sentences (direct and indirect sentences), tones, and expressions while reading stories.

### **3.3. Speaking Skills**

Speaking is a language skill that develops in a child's life, following only listening skills and continuing with learning speaking skills. Children's vocabulary development is closely linked to their ability to speak. The ability to pronounce articulation sounds or words in order to express, express, or convey thoughts, ideas, and feelings is referred to as speaking. Learning to speak can be applied to children through 1) storytelling activities for children; 2) activities for children to read poetry aloud; and 3) activities for children to express dialogues from drama scripts or role-playing. However, the scope of this article will be limited to discussing drama as a medium for language skills that can help children improve their speaking abilities. Why is this the case? because children can discuss expression, intonation, tone, direct sentences, indirect sentences, command sentences, and so on in a drama script. Children will be given a stimulus to capture what they hear and respond to it.

A drama is a type of art play in which the characters' actions and conversations tell the story. Wiyanto (2007) explains that drama is a spectacle that highlights dialogue and

player movements. Furthermore, Wood and Adffield (1996) reveal that there are dramas with conversations between characters in monologues and dialogues.

Children's dramas are similar to children's stories in terms of simple dialogue and scenes that aren't too long or complicated. Consider the characters of human life, flora, and fauna, or a mix of the three. The following is a portion of a drama script that can be used to teach language skills, particularly speaking skills, to children. The following is an example of a play that can be used to teach children's speaking skills.

*Pada suatu pagi, kancil pergi ke hutan untuk mencari makan, di tengah perjalanan kancil bertemu seekor burung pipit, burung pipit itu sedang hinggap di ranting pohon.*

*Burung Pipit : Hai kancil apa yang sedang kamu lakukan disini?*

*Kancil : Hai burung pipit, aku sedang mencari makanan*

*Burung pipit : Apakah kamu akan mencari makan di hutan?*

*Kancil : Benar sekali*

*Burung pipit : Kancil, kamu hati hati ya!*

*Kancil : Memang ada apa? Apakah ada pemburu disitu?*

*Burung pipit : Bukan kancil. Jika ke hutan kan harus melewati sungai, dan kamu harus berhati hati karena disungai itu ada 10 ekor buaya galak. Dia dapat memangsamu.*

One morning, the deer went to the forest to look for food. On the way, the deer met a sparrow. The sparrow was perched on a tree branch.

Sparrow : Hi deer, what are you doing here?

Mouse Deer : Hi sparrows, I'm looking for food.

Sparrows : Are you going to look for food in the forest?

Mouse Deer : That's right.

Sparrows : Mouse Deer, be careful!

Kancil : What is it? Are there hunters there?

Sparrows : Not deer? If you go to the forest, you have to cross a river, and you have to

be careful because in the river there are 10 fierce crocodiles. He can eat you.

### 3.4. Writing Skills

Writing skills are active and productive abilities. Among other language skills, this one is thought to be the most complicated and complex. Writing is more than just copying words and sentences. It is also about organizing and developing thoughts, ideas, and concepts in an organized, logical, systematic writing structure that the reader can easily grasp. Writing is widely regarded as the most difficult language skill. Writing skills or abilities come last in the order of acquisition, after the ability to listen to and speak. Writing is closely related to thinking activities as part of language activities. Children should not be required to write before they have had adequate opportunities to develop their listening, speaking, and reading language skills. Writing language skills include three components: 1) mastery of written language, which will serve as a writing medium, including vocabulary, sentence structure, paragraphs, and spelling; 2) mastery of the content of the essay following the topic to be written; and 3) mastery of the types of

writing, namely how to compose the content of writing using written language to form the desired composition.

According to Bromsley (1992), the development of speaking contributes greatly to the development of writing in children. After honing speaking skills in children, they need to be introduced to the world of writing as a medium for learning writing skills. Children's writing skills can be started by writing paragraphs about everyday stories or simple poems. This undoubtedly aids children in compiling simple words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs based on their observations of the world around them. The following is an example of poetry as a medium for learning to write for children.

*Buku*

*Engkau sumber ilmu  
Banyak hal yang dapat kuperoleh darimu  
Kau menawarkan wawasan dan pengetahuan  
Namun aku kasihan padamu  
Kemarin kulihat kau lesu di bawah bangku  
Dan kini terlempar sendu di sudut pintu*

*Semut*

*Kulihat semut berarakan di bawah pintu  
Bersama mengangkat bangkai kupu-kupu  
Menuju lubang kecil rumah mereka  
Semut memang makhluk bertubuh kecil  
Namun, kuat dan penuh semangat  
Aku ingin menjadi seperti nya  
Berusaha tak mengenal putus asa*

*Books*

You are a source of knowledge.  
There are many things I can learn from you.  
You offer insight and knowledge.  
But I feel sorry for you.  
Yesterday I saw you languid under the bench.  
And now you are thrown sadly into the corner of the door.

*Ants*

I saw ants crawling under the door.  
Together, they lift the carcass of a butterfly.  
To their tiny hole in their home  
Ants are indeed small creatures.  
But, strong and full of enthusiasm,  
I want to be like him.  
Trying not to give up.

#### 4. Conclusion

Each skill is in some way related to the other three skills. We typically acquire language skills in a sequential manner, beginning with learning to listen to the language, then speaking, then reading, and finally writing skills. Reading and writing can be learned

before entering school, but listening and speaking cannot. The four language skills are closely linked to the thought processes that underpin language.

The development of language skills for children is an attempt to lay the groundwork for later success in children's language development. The use of literary works as a means of language development is a good strategy, given the benefits of children's literature. It contains moral messages and values, as well as develops imagination, in addition to developing linguistic aspects. Reading stories and storytelling techniques; giving children the opportunity to retell the stories that have been read; giving children the opportunity to express the stories read in the form of pictures or doodles; and role-playing or drama based on the content of the story can all be used to develop language skills in an integrated manner. Read to children and expose them to various types of literature. Through these activities, children's listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills will develop naturally, and it will foster an enjoyment of literary works.

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