The Effectiveness of Role-Play-Based Storytelling Intervention in Enhancing Self-Esteem Among Elementary School Children

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ABSTRACT

Self-esteem plays a crucial role in the socio-emotional development of elementary school children. However, psychoeducational interventions that integrate storytelling and role-play remain limited and underexplored. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of a role-play-based storytelling intervention in improving self-esteem among elementary school students. Using a quasi-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design, 30 children participated in six sessions of a structured intervention combining narrative-based reflection and character enactment. Self-esteem was measured using the adapted Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, which had undergone prior construct validation. Descriptive statistics showed an increase in mean scores from pretest to posttest. Normality assumptions were re-evaluated, and paired-sample statistical testing was applied appropriately. The results indicate a significant improvement in children's self-esteem following the intervention. The discussion integrates theoretical perspectives from positive psychology and experiential learning while acknowledging methodological limitations, including the absence of a control group and potential measurement constraints. This study highlights the potential of combining storytelling and role-play as an engaging, developmentally appropriate psychoeducational method. Future research should explore controlled experimental designs and cultural validation to strengthen generalizability.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem is a fundamental psychological construct that influences children's emotional well-being, social relationships, academic engagement, and long-term developmental trajectories. It reflects the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as capable, valuable, and worthy of respect [1]. During the elementary school years, self-esteem becomes increasingly shaped by interpersonal interactions, school experiences, and sociocultural environments [2], [3]. Numerous studies show that low self-esteem in childhood is associated with anxiety, reduced social participation, decreased motivation, and potential emotional difficulties in adolescence [4]. Considering its profound developmental implications, interventions that effectively promote healthy self-esteem in children remain essential within educational and psychological practice.

Psychoeducation has been widely recognized as a developmentally appropriate approach to strengthen children's socio-emotional competencies by providing accessible explanations, experiential learning, and structured activities [5], [6]. Within this approach, storytelling and role-play represent two methods that support emotional expression, empathy development, and positive self-perception [7], [8]. Storytelling provides symbolic narratives through which children can internalize values and reflect on personal experiences, whereas role-play enables active engagement, behavioral rehearsal, and self-expression through character enactment [9], [10]. Research indicates that both techniques can enhance children's confidence, social competence, and self-understanding [11], [12]. However, despite their potential, systematic integration of storytelling and role-play within a single psychoeducational intervention remains limited, especially in elementary school settings. Despite these documented benefits, there remains limited clarity regarding how these methods can be systematically combined within a single, structured psychoeducational intervention.

Existing studies, such as the multisensory role-play learning approach by Sahlan [13] and self-esteem game interventions by Moein et al. [14], demonstrate improvements in children's self-confidence and emotional engagement. Nevertheless, these interventions do not incorporate narrative-based meaning-making

or guided storytelling, which may strengthen identity reflection and internalization of positive self-concepts. Similarly, Nuraini [15] emphasizes the effectiveness of role-play in promoting self-esteem, yet the intervention was not embedded within a broader reflective framework. Furthermore, previous research often remains descriptive, short-term, or lacking in methodological detail, limiting its contribution to evidence-based psychoeducational practices.

Based on this literature landscape, a clear gap exists: there is a lack of structured psychoeducational interventions that intentionally integrate storytelling with role-play to enhance self-esteem in elementary school children, particularly in the Indonesian educational context, where affective learning components remain underprioritized. In school-based settings, particularly in Indonesia, psychoeducational programs addressing affective development are often constrained by curricular demands and limited instructional time. The present study aims to address this gap by developing and evaluating a role-play-based storytelling intervention designed to nurture positive self-evaluation and emotional resilience.

Despite the growing body of research highlighting the benefits of role-play and storytelling as independent pedagogical tools in promoting children's socio-emotional development, there remains a notable gap in psychoeducational literature regarding the systematic integration of these two approaches within a single, structured intervention aimed at enhancing self-esteem among elementary school children [13], [14], [15]. Previous studies have largely focused on role-play techniques without incorporating narrative-based meaning-making, or have examined storytelling as a passive activity without active behavioral enactment, thereby limiting opportunities for experiential learning and reflective self-concept development.

Moreover, many prior studies remain descriptive in nature, short-term in implementation, or provide limited methodological detail, which restricts their contribution to evidence-based psychoeducational practices [5], [7]. This limitation is particularly evident in the Indonesian educational context, where school-based socio-emotional interventions are often underprioritized and empirical evaluations remain scarce [13], [15]. Consequently, there is a critical need for empirically grounded intervention models that

are developmentally appropriate, contextually relevant, and practically feasible within elementary school settings.

Addressing this gap, the present study proposes and evaluates a structured role-play-based storytelling intervention designed to enhance self-esteem through active participation, guided reflection, and narrative engagement. By examining changes in self-esteem using a quasi-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design, this study aims to provide preliminary empirical evidence regarding the potential effectiveness of integrating storytelling and role-play within a cohesive psychoeducational framework.

The objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of this intervention using a quasi-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design. This approach allows observation of psychological changes within the same participants when random assignment or control-group formation is not feasible due to school-based ethical and logistical constraints. The intervention integrates narrative reflection, character-based role-play, and guided group discussion, providing children with opportunities to explore strengths, express emotions, and engage in positive identity formation.

The novelty of this research lies in its combined use of two theoretically grounded methods, storytelling and role play, within a cohesive psychoeducational framework, offering an interactive, culturally relevant, and developmentally sensitive approach to fostering self-esteem. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical applications of socio-emotional interventions in elementary school settings.

Based on the research objective, the hypothesis of this study is formulated as follows:

H0: There is no significant difference in self-esteem scores among elementary school children before and after participating in the role-play-based storytelling intervention.

H1: There is a significant increase in self-esteem scores among elementary school children after participating in the role-play-based storytelling intervention.

Therefore, this study responds to a critical gap in psychoeducational research by providing an empirically evaluated, developmentally appropriate, and contextually relevant intervention model for elementary school settings.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design to examine changes in self-esteem among elementary school children following participation in a role-play-based storytelling intervention. This design was selected due to ethical and practical constraints within the school context, which limited the feasibility of random assignment and the use of a control group. Quasi-experimental designs of this nature are commonly applied in school-based psychoeducational research to evaluate preliminary intervention effectiveness while preserving ecological validity [16].

Although this design does not allow for strong causal inference, it is considered appropriate for exploratory intervention studies aimed at assessing feasibility, initial outcomes, and practical relevance in real-world educational settings [16].
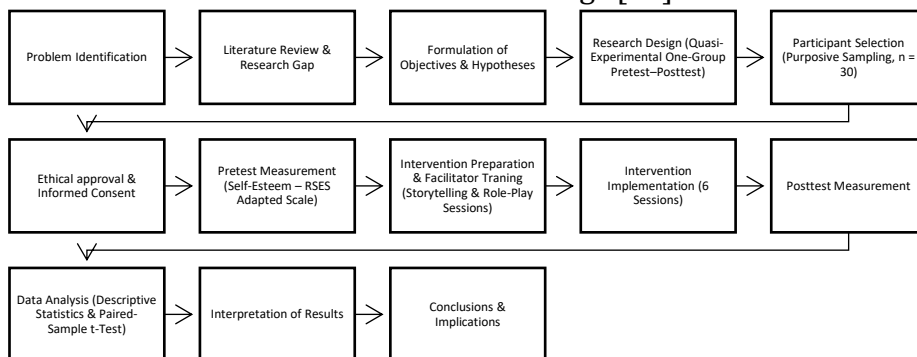

Figure 1. Research Flow Diagram of the Study

Figure 1 illustrates the systematic research procedure, outlining each methodological stage from problem identification to conclusions to enhance methodological transparency.

The research procedure followed a systematic sequence as illustrated in Figure 1. The study began with the identification of research problems related to self-esteem development among elementary school children, followed by a review of relevant literature to establish the research gap. Based on this process, the research objectives and hypotheses were formulated.

Subsequently, a quasi-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design was selected due to ethical and practical constraints

196

within the school setting, as commonly applied in school-based intervention research [16]. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling techniques. Prior to the intervention, baseline self-esteem levels were measured using the adapted Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (pretest). The intervention was then implemented through six structured sessions integrating storytelling, role-play, and guided reflection. After the completion of the intervention, posttest measurements were conducted using the same instrument.

Finally, the collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and paired-sample statistical testing to examine changes in self-esteem scores. The results were then interpreted to draw conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the intervention and to formulate practical and theoretical implications.

2.2 Participants

Participants consisted of 30 fifth-grade students (18 girls and 12 boys) aged 9–11 years (M = 10.2, SD = 0.57) recruited from SD Muhammadiyah 2 Koto Baru. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that participants met the inclusion criteria, including active enrollment at the school, willingness to participate in all intervention sessions, and the provision of written parental consent. Purposive sampling is a non-probability method in which participants are deliberately selected based on characteristics relevant to the research objectives and most likely to yield useful information [17], [18] .

Sample size determination followed an a priori power analysis using G*Power with parameters set at α = .05, power = .80, and a moderate effect size (d = .50). The analysis indicated a minimum required sample of approximately 27 participants; therefore, the final sample of 30 students was considered sufficient for detecting pre–post changes within the study design.

2.3 Measurement

Self-esteem was measured using an adapted version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). Prior construct validation using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in an Indonesian sample supported a one-factor structure with 7 of the original 10 items retained. In that validation, items were excluded because they showed non-significant loadings (t < 1.96) and/or negative factor loadings, indicating inadequate representation of the intended construct. Therefore, the present study used the seven retained

items based on the published validation evidence, rather than re-estimating the CFA model within the current sample [19]. Given the small sample size and intervention-focused design, re-estimating CFA within the current sample was methodologically inappropriate; therefore, the study relied on previously published CFA evidence.

The resulting seven-item scale used a 4-point Likert response format ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree), yielding total scores between 7 and 28, where higher scores indicate higher self-esteem. Previous studies using the RSES in Indonesian samples have reported acceptable internal consistency [20].

2.4 Intervention Procedure

The intervention consisted of six structured sessions integrating storytelling, role-play, and guided reflection. Each session lasted approximately 40–60 minutes and was designed to promote emotional engagement, self-expression, and the development of positive self-concepts.

Sessions typically began with a brief opening activity, such as a mood check or warm-up game, to foster engagement. This was followed by storytelling activities presenting narratives featuring relatable characters confronting challenges related to confidence, competence, and self-worth. Role-play activities then allowed participants to reenact story scenes, explore alternative outcomes, and embody the perspectives of story characters. Guided group reflection was subsequently conducted using structured prompts to encourage emotional expression, values clarification, and self-recognition. Each session concluded with a brief closing activity involving affirmations to reinforce the internalization of personal strengths.

This intervention structure aligns with psychoeducational and experiential learning approaches, indicating that storytelling facilitates emotional understanding and meaning-making, while role-play and guided reflection provide opportunities for self-expression, behavioral rehearsal, and the development of positive self-concepts in children [7], [10], [11], [15]

2.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection followed a pretest–posttest procedure. Prior to the intervention, participants completed the self-esteem scale under the supervision of the research team in a classroom setting to establish baseline self-esteem levels. Following the completion of all

intervention sessions, the same self-esteem scale was re-administered as a posttest to assess changes in participants' self-esteem. Both assessments were conducted under comparable conditions to minimize measurement bias. Standardized instructions were provided, and clarification was offered when necessary to ensure item comprehension.

2.6 Facilitator Training and Intervention Fidelity

To ensure consistency in intervention delivery, facilitators received prior training focused on conducting supportive storytelling activities, guiding role-play exercises, and facilitating reflective group discussions. Intervention fidelity was maintained through adherence to standardized session outlines and consistent facilitation across all sessions.

2.7 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize participants' self-esteem scores. Prior to hypothesis testing, the assumption of normality was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test. Given that the data met normality assumptions, a paired-sample t-test was conducted to examine differences between pretest and posttest self-esteem scores. Effect size was calculated using Cohen's d to assess the magnitude of change.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Institutional permission was obtained from the school administration prior to data collection. Written informed consent was obtained from parents or guardians, and verbal assent was obtained from all participating children. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their data. All data were anonymized using coded identifiers and securely stored to protect participant privacy.

3. RESULTS

Table 1 presents the descriptive analysis of students' self-esteem scores before and after the intervention.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis of Self-Esteem Scores

Measure	Pretest	Posttest
N	30	30
Mean	18.000	25.000

SD	2.625	1.682
Min–Max	14–24	22–28

The mean pretest score was 18.00 (SD = 2.625), while the mean posttest score increased to 25.00 (SD = 1.682). This substantial difference suggests a positive change in students' self-esteem following participation in the role-play-based storytelling sessions. In addition to the increase in mean scores, the reduced variance observed in posttest scores indicates greater consistency in students' self-esteem levels after the intervention. This descriptive improvement provides an initial indication of positive change, which should be interpreted in conjunction with the inferential analyses presented below.

Prior to conducting inferential statistical analysis, the assumption of normality was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test. The results indicated that pretest self-esteem scores (p = .330) and posttest scores (p = .120) did not significantly deviate from normality, thereby supporting the use of parametric statistical procedures. Given the relatively small sample size, normality assessment was interpreted cautiously and complemented by visual inspection of score distributions to ensure the appropriateness of subsequent analyses.

Following confirmation of the normality assumption, a paired-sample t-test was conducted to examine differences in self-esteem scores before and after the intervention. The analysis revealed a statistically significant increase in self-esteem scores from pretest to posttest, t(29) = −13.734, p < .001, indicating that posttest self-esteem scores were significantly higher than pretest scores. This finding demonstrates a meaningful improvement in children's self-esteem levels over the course of the intervention. To further assess the magnitude of this change, effect size analysis was performed using Cohen's d, which yielded a very large effect (d = 2.98). This result indicates that the observed improvement was not only statistically significant but also substantial in magnitude, reflecting a great within-group change in participants' self-esteem.

Nevertheless, this very large effect size should be interpreted with caution. Within-group pretest–posttest designs without a control group are known to be susceptible to inflation of effect size estimates due to factors such as testing effects, maturation, or heightened participant engagement during intervention activities.

Accordingly, the effect size reported in this study should be understood as an indicator of within-group change rather than as definitive evidence of intervention superiority. Despite these considerations, the results provide preliminary empirical support for the effectiveness of the role-play-based storytelling intervention in enhancing self-esteem among elementary school children.

4. DISCUSSION

The significant increase in posttest self-esteem scores suggests that the role-play-based storytelling intervention was effective in enhancing children's self-esteem. The observed improvement reflects not only statistical significance but also a meaningful change in participants' psychological outcomes. However, given the within-group pretest–posttest design without a control group, the magnitude of the effect should be interpreted cautiously. Such designs may be susceptible to inflation of effect size estimates due to testing effects, maturation, or heightened engagement during intervention activities. Nevertheless, the findings provide initial empirical support for the potential effectiveness of structured storytelling and role-play interventions in promoting socio-emotional development among elementary school children.

To further clarify the underlying psychological processes identified in the findings, a conceptual pathway is presented in Figure 2.
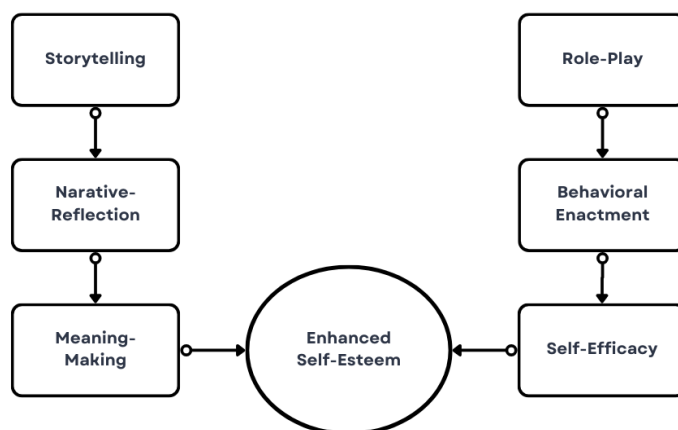

Figure 2. Conceptual Pathway of Self-Esteem Improvement through Role-Play-Based Storytelling

This pathway illustrates how storytelling facilitates narrative reflection and meaning-making, while role-play promotes behavioral enactment and self-efficacy, both of which contribute to enhanced self-esteem. From a positive psychology perspective, storytelling allows children to explore personal strengths, internalize positive values, and construct a meaningful sense of identity. Role-play complements this process by enabling children to actively enact empowering social roles, rehearse adaptive behaviors, and experience a sense of agency. Together, these elements form an experiential learning cycle that fosters self-reflection, emotional engagement, and strengthened self-concept. This pathway represents a conceptual pathway of the findings rather than a causal model and aligns with experiential learning theory, which emphasizes active involvement, reflection, and reconstruction of meaning as essential components of psychological growth.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research demonstrating the effectiveness of role-play and interactive interventions in enhancing children's self-esteem and socio-emotional competencies. Sahlan [13] Reported that role-play integrated with multisensory learning significantly enhanced students' confidence and communication skills. Similarly, Moein et al. [14] Found that group-based self-esteem games contributed to improved emotional outcomes among elementary school students, while Nuraini [15] Highlighted the effectiveness of role-play techniques in strengthening students' self-esteem. Unlike these studies, however, the present research integrates storytelling and role-play within a cohesive psychoeducational framework that emphasizes guided reflection and narrative meaning-making. This integration may explain the strong improvement observed in self-esteem, as children were not only exposed to positive role models but were also encouraged to reflect on personal strengths and enact adaptive roles in a supportive group context.

Beyond statistical improvement, the intervention demonstrated practical significance by creating a psychologically safe learning environment that encouraged self-expression, emotional exploration, and peer interaction. Through storytelling, children were able to reinterpret personal experiences symbolically, while role-play activities allowed them to embody

characters representing courage, competence, and resilience. Guided reflection and positive feedback from peers and facilitators further reinforced children's sense of self-worth and emotional competence. These experiential elements suggest that role-play-based storytelling is not merely an entertaining classroom activity but also a developmentally appropriate psychoeducational approach with meaningful implications for children's socio-emotional development.

The cultural and educational context of Indonesian elementary schools further underscores the relevance of these findings. In many school settings, affective and socio-emotional learning components tend to be overshadowed by academic demands. The present intervention demonstrates a culturally adaptable and classroom-friendly method that aligns with character education goals and national curriculum priorities. The storytelling narratives and role-play scenarios were designed to reflect everyday school situations commonly experienced by Indonesian elementary school children, thereby enhancing relevance and engagement. Nevertheless, formal cultural validation of the narrative content was not conducted; therefore, further cultural validation is necessary to ensure that the narratives and character roles resonate across diverse local school environments.

Despite the promising findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. The absence of a control group restricts the ability to draw strong causal conclusions regarding intervention effectiveness. In addition, reliance on an adapted self-esteem measurement scale may influence measurement precision, and the relatively small sample size and single-site setting limit the generalizability of the results. These methodological constraints highlight the exploratory nature of the study and underscore the need for cautious interpretation of the findings.

Future research should prioritize the use of controlled experimental designs to strengthen causal inference, incorporate longitudinal follow-up to assess the durability of intervention effects, and extend validation across diverse cultural and multi-school contexts. Comparative studies examining storytelling–role-play interventions alongside other psychoeducational approaches are also recommended to further clarify the unique contribution and practical relevance of this intervention model.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provides preliminary evidence that a structured role-play-based storytelling intervention can improve self-esteem among elementary school children. The integration of narrative exploration and character enactment offers an engaging and developmentally appropriate psychoeducational experience that supports positive self-perception and emotional growth. By combining storytelling and role-play within a cohesive framework, the intervention demonstrates potential value as a culturally relevant approach that may complement existing school-based socio-emotional learning programs.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study must be interpreted cautiously due to several methodological limitations, including the absence of a control group, reliance on an adapted self-esteem measurement scale, and restricted generalizability resulting from a single-site sample. Despite these constraints, the study contributes to the growing literature on school-based psychoeducational interventions by offering an interactive model that is contextually relevant to elementary education settings.

Future research should prioritize the use of controlled experimental designs to strengthen causal inference, incorporate longitudinal follow-up to assess the durability of intervention effects, extend validation across diverse cultural and multi-school contexts, and conduct comparative studies contrasting storytelling–role-play interventions with other psychoeducational approaches. Therefore, the findings of this study should be considered preliminary and exploratory, serving as a foundation for more rigorous, controlled, and longitudinal investigations.

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