

EMPOWERING MOTHERS AS FAMILY LITERACY FACILITATORS THROUGH ENGLISH READ-ALoud AND STORYTELLING TRAINING

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Abstract. Children's extensive screen use and limited shared-reading routines present challenges for family literacy. A preliminary needs assessment involving 50 respondents in Jebres, Surakarta, found that 75% reported children using digital devices more frequently than reading books, while only 30% of mothers regularly read with their children and 20% felt confident reading stories in English. This community engagement program sought to strengthen mothers' understanding of family literacy, interactive read-aloud and storytelling techniques, and confidence in using English picture books. Thirty mothers of primary-school-aged children participated in two face-to-face workshops on 20 and 27 June 2026, followed by WhatsApp-based mentoring during July–August. A participatory approach combined demonstrations, guided practice, peer interaction, and feedback. Descriptive pre- and post-training assessments showed increases in mean scores for family literacy knowledge (55 to 82), understanding of storytelling techniques (48 to 78), and confidence in reading English stories (35 to 70). Workshop observations suggested greater willingness to use expressive voice, gestures, facial expressions, and interactive questions. These findings indicate promising short-term improvements in participating mothers' capacities as home literacy facilitators. Limitations include aggregated scores, no comparison group, and no child-level outcomes; causal conclusions about children's reading habits and screen use are therefore not warranted. Future implementation should embed supported reading routines within local women's community activities and systematically monitor home practice.

Keywords: caregiver engagement, dialogic interaction, home literacy environment, parental confidence

Abstrak. Tingginya penggunaan gawai pada anak dan terbatasnya kebiasaan membaca bersama menjadi tantangan bagi literasi keluarga. Asesmen kebutuhan awal terhadap 50 responden di Kelurahan Jebres, Surakarta, menunjukkan bahwa 75% responden melaporkan bahwa anak lebih sering menggunakan perangkat digital daripada membaca buku, hanya 30% ibu yang rutin membaca bersama anak, dan 20% merasa percaya diri membacakan cerita berbahasa Inggris. Kegiatan pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini bertujuan memperkuat pemahaman ibu tentang literasi keluarga, teknik membaca nyaring (read aloud) dan bercerita (storytelling) secara interaktif, serta meningkatkan kepercayaan diri dalam menggunakan buku cerita bergambar berbahasa Inggris. Sebanyak 30 ibu yang memiliki anak usia sekolah dasar mengikuti dua pelatihan tatap muka pada 20 dan 27 Juni 2026, dilanjutkan dengan pendampingan melalui WhatsApp selama Juli–Agustus 2026. Pendekatan partisipatif memadukan demonstrasi, praktik terbimbing, interaksi antarpeserta, dan umpan balik. Evaluasi deskriptif melalui pre-test dan post-test menunjukkan peningkatan rerata skor pengetahuan literasi keluarga (55 menjadi 82), pemahaman teknik storytelling (48 menjadi 78), dan kepercayaan diri membacakan cerita berbahasa Inggris (35 menjadi 70). Observasi selama pelatihan mengindikasikan peningkatan keberanian peserta dalam menggunakan variasi intonasi, gerak tubuh, ekspresi wajah, dan pertanyaan interaktif. Temuan ini menunjukkan perkembangan positif jangka pendek pada kapasitas ibu sebagai fasilitator literasi di rumah. Keterbatasan berupa skor agregat, tanpa kelompok pembandingan, dan tanpa data perkembangan anak membuat kesimpulan kausal tentang kebiasaan membaca dan penggunaan gawai anak belum dapat ditarik. Pelaksanaan berikutnya disarankan untuk mengintegrasikan kegiatan membaca bersama ke dalam aktivitas rutin kelompok perempuan dan memantau praktik literasi keluarga secara sistematis.

Kata kunci: interaksi dialogis, kepercayaan diri orang tua, keterlibatan pengasuh, lingkungan literasi keluarga

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INTRODUCTION

Digital media have reshaped the ways families access information, spend leisure time, and interact with stories. The concern is not simply whether children use screens, but whether adults help them engage meaningfully with language and provide opportunities for sustained shared



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reading. Nicholas and Paatsch (2024) describe the tensions parents experience when navigating digital storybooks and screen use. Huang et al. (2024) likewise highlight parent-child reading as a relevant factor in discussions of screen exposure and child development. Community-based literacy initiatives therefore need to offer practical, enjoyable alternatives to passive media consumption without assuming that all digital engagement is inherently detrimental.

In Jebres, Surakarta, an initial needs assessment involving 50 respondents indicated that 75% of children used digital devices more often than they read books, while approximately 25% read at least three times a week. Only 30% of mothers reported regularly reading books to their children, and 20% expressed confidence in reading stories in English. These figures, reported descriptively from the local assessment, point to two interconnected priorities: establishing shared-reading routines and supporting mothers who wish to facilitate them.

Family literacy encompasses the resources, beliefs, relationships, and everyday practices through which literacy is experienced at home. Ginting and Purwanti (2024) describe the home literacy environment in terms of material resources, parent and child practices, interaction, and parental beliefs. Sundqvist et al. (2024) relate the home literacy environment and digital media to preschool children's vocabulary development, and Zhang et al. (2024) examine whether the link between the home literacy environment and children's reading skills holds once familial confounding is taken into account. Accordingly, mothers' roles extend beyond supplying books: they can model curiosity, invite dialogue, and make reading a shared social experience (Nan & Tian, 2025).

Interactive read-aloud activities provide an accessible way to strengthen these exchanges. Rather than merely voicing written words, caregivers can pause, ask questions, connect stories with children's experiences, and respond to their ideas. Pillinger and Vardy (2022) report encouraging findings for dialogic reading across language and literacy outcomes, while Lorio et al. (2022) identify explicit strategy instruction and opportunities for caregiver practice as important features of shared-book-reading interventions. Read et al. (2025) also draw attention to extra-textual talk, the conversation that develops around rather than directly from the printed text. Andersen et al. (2022) re-analyzed evidence from a randomized controlled trial of a home-based shared-reading intervention to examine children's writing skills, and Zulaeha and Setiasih (2025) review read-aloud as a means of supporting early childhood language development. Expressive intonation, gestures, repetition, and responsive questioning were therefore central to the present training.

English-language storytelling was introduced as a supportive extension of family reading, not as a requirement that mothers become formal English teachers. Short, illustrated stories and familiar vocabulary provided opportunities to experiment with pronunciation in a low-pressure setting. Research in early English learning suggests that storytelling and visual supports can facilitate engagement with vocabulary and narrative meaning (Brilianti & Sugirin, 2024; Surya & Pratiwi, 2024; Zulkhaeriyah et al., 2023). The emphasis in this program was on communicative confidence and enjoyable interaction rather than native-like pronunciation.

Previous family literacy initiatives also underscore the value of parents' own learning, confidence, and social support (Clymer et al., 2024). Building on this evidence, the practical contribution of the Jebres initiative was to combine family literacy awareness, interactive reading strategies, and accessible English storytelling within a single mother-focused community program. Its objectives were to improve participants' knowledge of family literacy, their understanding of interactive storytelling techniques (supported by guided practice during the workshops), and their confidence in reading simple English stories, and to establish a mentoring channel that could support continued practice through local PKK women's community networks.

METHOD

The activity adopted a participatory community engagement design integrating needs assessment, training, guided practice, and follow-up mentoring. The community partners were Jebres urban village administration and local PKK representatives. Thirty mothers with primary-

school-aged children, recruited through neighborhood leaders and PKK cadres, attended two in-person workshops at the Jebres Village Hall, Surakarta, on 20 and 27 June 2026. Recruitment considered participants' willingness to attend both sessions and try shared-reading activities at home. A separate preliminary survey of 50 respondents informed the program design; only aggregated percentages were retained, and it was not recorded whether these respondents overlapped with the 30 trainees.

Preparation involved consultations with community partners, participant recruitment, development of the training module "English Storytelling for Mothers," and preparation of pre- and post-training assessments, observation sheets, and follow-up questionnaires. Story selections prioritized accessible language, age-appropriate themes, supportive illustrations, and opportunities for interaction. These considerations are consistent with the facilitators of shared book reading synthesized by Nan and Tian (2025), including access to books, positive experiences, and parental support.

The first workshop, held on 20 June, introduced family literacy and modeled interactive read-aloud techniques. Participants discussed everyday reading barriers and practiced articulation, pacing, intonation, facial expression, body movement, and questions to use before, during, and after a story. The second workshop, on 27 June, focused on English storytelling. After practicing selected words and phrases, mothers rehearsed short stories in small groups and received feedback from facilitators and student assistants on clarity, expression, pronunciation, and listener engagement. The training treated language errors as opportunities for supported practice rather than grounds for negative judgment.

At the end of the second session, a WhatsApp group entitled "Mendongeng Cerita Anak Berbahasa Inggris" was established for mentoring during July and August 2026. It provided a space for pronunciation questions, reminders, reflections, and voluntary sharing of home-reading experiences through notes or short recordings. Consolidated data on participation in the group and on home-reading frequency were not available.

Evaluation addressed three levels. First, pre- and post-training assessments measured family literacy knowledge, understanding of storytelling techniques, and self-reported confidence in reading English stories. Each domain was summarized on a 0–100 scale, and available results consisted of group means. Second, facilitators observed engagement and the use of expressive and interactive techniques during simulations. Third, follow-up monitoring was intended to capture reading frequency, book selection, interaction patterns, and barriers to implementation. Because participant-level scores, instrument reliability evidence, observation frequencies, and aggregated follow-up outcomes were not available, the present analysis is descriptive; no paired significance tests, statistical effect sizes, or child-level impact estimates were calculated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Local Needs and Workshop Participation

The preliminary needs assessment (see Introduction) indicated a mismatch between the potential of shared reading and existing home routines. Limited maternal read-aloud practice and low confidence with English stories justified a program addressing both reading habits and caregiver capacity. These findings are local descriptive indicators rather than population estimates.

During the first workshop, participants discussed limited time, uncertainty about choosing books, and anxiety about reading English aloud. Demonstrations reframed read-aloud practice as an exchange with children rather than a test of fluent oral reading (Han & Vriend Van Duinen, 2026). In the second workshop, small-group rehearsal provided opportunities to experiment with voice, expression, gestures, and questions. Facilitator observations described participants as increasingly willing to perform these techniques, although no standardized observational counts were reported. This emphasis on interaction is consistent with evidence on dialogic reading and extra-textual conversation (Pillinger & Vardy, 2022; Read et al., 2025).

Figures 1 show the question-and-answer session with participants, Figure 2 shows small-group practice of storytelling using pictures, and Figure 3 shows the closing of the program.



Figure 1. Question-and-answer session with participants

Changes in Assessed Knowledge, Understanding and Confidence

Table 1. Summarizes the pre- and post-training group means for the three assessed domains

Assessment domain	Pre-training Mean	Post-training Mean	Change
Family literacy knowledge	55	82	+27 points (49.1%)
Understanding of storytelling techniques	48	78	+30 points (62.5%)
Confidence in reading English stories	35	70	+35 points (100%)

Source: participant pre- and post-training assessment summaries, 2026. Relative changes use the pre-training mean as the denominator; they are not statistical effect sizes.

All three group means increased following the workshops (Table 1). The largest absolute change was observed in confidence in reading English stories (+35 points), followed by understanding of storytelling techniques (+30) and family literacy knowledge (+27). The percentages describe score changes only; without individual observations, their variability and statistical significance cannot be assessed.



Figure 2. Practising storytelling using pictures

The improvement in family literacy knowledge is compatible with an approach that connects new concepts to mothers' existing household experiences. Clymer et al. (2024) show that family literacy programs can support parents' educational, personal, and social learning alongside caregiving practices. In Jebres, discussing everyday routines appeared to make the concept of family literacy more tangible. Similarly, the higher storytelling score is consistent with the use of modeling followed by repeated practice, a feature commonly incorporated into parent-focused shared-reading interventions (Lorio et al., 2022).

The particularly large change in confidence warrants careful interpretation. Participants initially described concerns about making pronunciation mistakes, and the program responded with short vocabulary exercises, small-group rehearsal, and constructive feedback. These features may have reduced perceived barriers to attempting English stories. Because confidence was self-reported, social desirability or a response-shift effect may also have contributed to the higher post-training scores. Nevertheless, confidence is not equivalent to independently assessed language proficiency, and the available data do not establish whether participants subsequently used English more often with their children. Storytelling research in early English education provides a rationale for the approach but should not be treated as direct evidence of vocabulary gains among children in this program (Brilianti & Sugirin, 2024; Surya & Pratiwi, 2024; Zulkhaeriyah et al., 2023).



Figure 3. *Closing of the community service activity*

Mentoring, Sustainability, and Limits of Interpretation

The WhatsApp group (Figure 4) extended opportunities for peer support beyond the two workshops. Participants could seek clarification about pronunciation, exchange experiences, and discuss practical obstacles to reading at home. Such ongoing social support is consistent with the broader benefits identified in family literacy programs (Clymer et al., 2024) and with the facilitators discussed by Nan and Tian (2025). However, the current documentation supports establishing this mechanism, not a quantified claim that it changed family reading behavior.



Figure 4. *WhatsApp group for English-language storytelling mentoring (29 members at the time of capture)*

Importantly, the program did not directly demonstrate a reduction in children's screen time or a sustained increase in their reading frequency. Digital media and literacy are not necessarily opposed; parental mediation and interaction quality matter (Nicholas & Paatsch,

2024). Future initiatives should therefore prioritize meaningful shared-reading routines and balanced digital engagement rather than framing every use of a device as a failure.

This evaluation has six principal limitations. Only aggregated pre- and post-training means were available, preventing paired statistical analysis and accurate effect-size estimation. No comparison group was available, so the observed changes cannot be attributed exclusively to the workshops. Longitudinal measures of children's reading, screen exposure, vocabulary, and parent-child interaction were unavailable. Participants were recruited through neighbourhood leaders and PKK cadres, which may introduce selection bias, and confidence was self-reported. Finally, the program involved 30 mothers from one urban village, limiting transferability to other settings. Future cycles should retain participant-level assessments, document the scoring instruments and observation rubric, and collect feasible home-reading diaries with consent and appropriate privacy safeguards.

CONCLUSION

This community engagement program addressed its objectives within the limits of a short-term, descriptive evaluation. Group-mean scores rose for family literacy knowledge, understanding of interactive storytelling techniques, and confidence in reading English stories, and workshop observations suggested growing willingness to use expressive voice, gestures, and responsive questions. A WhatsApp group was established as a mentoring channel, although consolidated data on its use were not available. By combining locally grounded discussion, demonstration, guided practice, and online mentoring, the program offered a feasible approach to strengthening mothers' roles as facilitators of shared reading at home. Claims about sustained changes in children's behavior remain premature. As follow-up, the community service team, together with PKK cadres and the village administration, could integrate regular reading sessions into PKK programming, develop a small lending collection or book-sharing system, and collect participant-level and longitudinal indicators of family reading practices and children's engagement.

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