



Enhancing Literacy Skills Among Kindergarten Learners Through Storytelling: An Autoethnographic Inquiry

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Abstract:

This autoethnographic study examines the impact of storytelling on the literacy development of kindergarten learners from the perspective of a teacher-researcher. It explores how storytelling functions as a meaningful bridge between spoken language and emergent literacy skills. Guided by the IMRAD structure, the study documents reflective teaching experiences over a six-week instructional period in which storytelling was intentionally integrated with drama, play, and interactive classroom activities. Data were gathered through systematic observation and reflective narration of classroom interactions. Findings indicate that consistent and interactive storytelling significantly enhances key early literacy skills, including phonological awareness, vocabulary development, and alphabet knowledge. Learners demonstrated increased engagement, improved language use, and stronger participation in literacy-related tasks when storytelling was delivered through dynamic and participatory approaches. The results further highlight that the teacher's enthusiasm, narrative delivery, and ability to facilitate interaction play a crucial role in sustaining learners' interest and comprehension. Overall, the study concludes that storytelling is an effective pedagogical strategy for fostering literacy development and cultivating a positive disposition toward reading among kindergarten learners.

Keywords: storytelling; autoethnography; kindergarten literacy; emergent literacy; vocabulary development

Introduction:

In the kindergarten stage, educators employ a variety of instructional approaches to ensure that learning becomes meaningful, lasting, and supportive of holistic child development. At this level, literacy is not merely about decoding written symbols but involves the gradual development of listening, speaking, and meaning-making skills. Among the many strategies available, storytelling stands out as a powerful pedagogical tool that nurtures language acquisition while simultaneously promoting imagination and social understanding.

Stories play a vital role in transmitting culture, values, and moral lessons while enriching children's linguistic experiences. For young learners, storytelling serves as a bridge between their everyday experiences and the more formal language used in educational contexts. Through repeated exposure to narratives, children begin to internalize vocabulary, sentence structures, and patterns of communication that are essential for early literacy development (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008; Huda et al., 2022).

Despite its recognized importance, storytelling in many kindergarten classrooms is often reduced to a passive "sit-and-listen" activity. This traditional approach limits children's engagement and fails to maximize the full potential of storytelling as an interactive and dynamic learning process. Research suggests that when storytelling is implemented actively—through questioning, dramatization, and participation—it becomes a highly effective method for enhancing literacy skills (Abasi & Soori, 2014; Fono et al., 2024).

Recent studies further highlight that interactive storytelling techniques significantly improve early literacy competencies such as vocabulary development, comprehension, and expressive language skills. For instance, Labrador (2025) emphasizes that the use of varied storytelling materials and learner-centered techniques leads to more meaningful literacy experiences among kindergarten learners. Similarly, Maureen, van der Meij, and de Jong (2018, 2020) demonstrate that both traditional and digital storytelling approaches can effectively support early and digital literacy development when integrated thoughtfully into classroom instruction.



Another critical concern in kindergarten education is the lack of integration between storytelling and other developmental domains. Storytelling is often confined to language-related activities, neglecting its potential to enhance learning in areas such as mathematics, science, and creative arts. However, interdisciplinary approaches to storytelling allow learners to connect concepts across domains, thereby deepening understanding and promoting more holistic learning experiences (Maureen et al., 2020).

Addressing these gaps requires a shift from viewing storytelling as a supplementary activity to recognizing it as a central instructional strategy. When combined with activities such as drama, role-playing, drawing, and problem-solving, storytelling can significantly enhance children's engagement and cognitive development. Moreover, storytelling has been shown to contribute not only to language proficiency but also to character formation and social skills development among young learners (Huda et al., 2022).

In response to these gaps, this study adopts an autoethnographic approach to explore the role of intentional storytelling in enhancing literacy skills among kindergarten learners. By reflecting on personal teaching experiences and classroom interactions, the study provides a contextualized and in-depth understanding of how storytelling influences children's communication skills and literacy readiness. Through this lens, the research aims to highlight the transformative potential of storytelling as both a pedagogical practice and a meaningful learning experience in kindergarten education.

Literature Review:

Storytelling has long been recognized as a fundamental pedagogical tool in early childhood education, particularly in kindergarten settings where language acquisition and literacy development are critical. It provides a natural and meaningful context for children to engage with language, fostering both receptive and expressive skills. According to Bunayyah et al. (2025), storytelling activities significantly influence the literacy development of children aged 5–6 by enhancing their ability to comprehend and produce language in meaningful ways.

Several studies emphasize the effectiveness of storytelling in improving children's oral communication skills. Payuyu et al. (2021) found that the implementation of storytelling methods in kindergarten classrooms led to notable improvements in children's speaking abilities, particularly in fluency and confidence. Similarly, As (2016) highlighted that storytelling encourages learners to articulate thoughts more clearly, thereby strengthening their speaking competence.

Interactive storytelling has also been shown to play a crucial role in developing early literacy skills. Nevo and Vaknin-Nusbaum (2018) demonstrated that interactive storybook reading enhances both language development and print awareness among kindergarten learners. This aligns with the findings of Morrow et al. (1990), who reported that structured storytelling programs significantly improved literacy outcomes, especially among at-risk children.

In addition to traditional storytelling, innovative approaches such as Kamishibai storytelling have gained attention for their effectiveness. Simatupang et al. (2025) revealed that the use of Kamishibai—a form of visual storytelling—enhances early literacy by combining visual and auditory stimuli, thereby improving comprehension and engagement. Likewise, Slamet et al. (2024) found that picture-based storytelling significantly enhances children's speech skills by providing visual cues that support language production.

The integration of storytelling with creative and dramatic elements further amplifies its impact on literacy development. Alkilani and Zhang (2025) reported that dramatic storytelling techniques improve emergent literacy skills, particularly in contexts where learners are acquiring a second language. Isbell et al. (2004) also noted that storytelling combined with dramatization increases oral language complexity and story comprehension among young learners.

Digital storytelling has emerged as a contemporary approach that extends traditional practices. Abiola (2014) found that digital storytelling positively influences learners' achievement, particularly in moral and language instruction. Rahiem (2021) further emphasized that integrating digital tools in storytelling aligns with modern educational



demands and enhances learner engagement. Additionally, Adara (2020) highlighted the importance of training parents to use digital storytelling at home to reinforce literacy development.

Storytelling also contributes to broader developmental domains beyond literacy. Amin et al. (2024) pointed out that storytelling fosters socio-emotional learning by helping children understand characters, emotions, and social situations. Hertiki et al. (2025) supported this by demonstrating that physical storytelling activities promote empathy and interpersonal understanding among kindergarten learners.

Moreover, storytelling has been linked to the development of critical thinking and higher-order cognitive skills. Dikta et al. (2025) found that interactive storytelling encourages children to analyze, predict, and evaluate story events, thereby enhancing their critical thinking abilities. This suggests that storytelling is not only a literacy tool but also a means of cognitive development.

Family involvement is another important factor in maximizing the benefits of storytelling. Jordan et al. (2000) demonstrated that family literacy programs significantly improve children's early literacy skills, emphasizing the role of parents in reinforcing learning at home. This is supported by Elangovan (2013), who found that storytelling interventions are particularly beneficial for children from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Furthermore, multimedia storytelling has shown promise in supporting diverse learners. Verhallen et al. (2006) highlighted that multimedia stories provide additional scaffolding for children at risk, helping them better understand and engage with content. Brodin and Renblad (2020) also noted improvements in children's speech and language skills when storytelling is used consistently in structured learning environments.

Finally, storytelling supports the development of writing skills by strengthening narrative competence. Kirby et al. (2021) found that oral narrative instruction significantly improves kindergarten children's writing abilities, as it helps them organize ideas and understand story structures. Similarly, Zheng et al. (2025) emphasized that interactive storytelling enhances reading comprehension, which is closely linked to writing development.

The reviewed literature consistently highlights storytelling as a powerful, multifaceted approach in kindergarten education. It supports not only literacy development but also communication, cognitive growth, socio-emotional learning, and family engagement. These findings provide a strong foundation for the present study, which seeks to further explore the impact of storytelling through an autoethnographic lens.

Methodology:

This study employed a qualitative autoethnographic research design to explore the role of storytelling in a real-world kindergarten classroom setting. Autoethnography allows the researcher to examine personal teaching experiences as a primary source of data, providing rich, reflective insights into instructional practices and learner responses. Unlike traditional experimental approaches that rely on control groups and standardized measurements, this method emphasizes the "researcher-as-subject," enabling a deeper understanding of the lived experiences within the teaching-learning process.

Participants

The primary participant in this study is the teacher-researcher, who systematically reflected on classroom interactions with a group of kindergarten learners aged 61 to 66 months. The learners served as the contextual focus of the observations, particularly in relation to their responses, engagement, and emerging literacy behaviors during storytelling activities.

The Storytelling Program

The storytelling intervention was implemented over a six-week period. Sessions were conducted for one hour per day, four days per week, resulting in a total of 30 instructional hours. The program was designed to provide consistent and structured exposure to storytelling while allowing flexibility for interactive and creative engagement.

Program Structure and Activities



The storytelling program was organized into three progressive phases, moving from basic narrative exposure to more complex story construction. This scaffolded approach allowed learners to gradually build their comprehension and expressive skills. A variety of interactive techniques were employed, including:

- Story completion, where learners were encouraged to predict and finish parts of a narrative
- Story illustration, allowing learners to visually represent story elements and characters
- Story-based creative drama, involving role-playing and the use of simple costumes to bring stories to life

These activities were intentionally designed to promote active participation, enhance engagement, and support the development of early literacy skills through meaningful and experiential learning.

Findings and Discussion:

Storytelling as a Catalyst for Holistic Literacy Development in Kindergarten Learners

The teacher-researcher's reflections, supported by recorded classroom observations, revealed significant qualitative improvements across five key literacy domains among the kindergarten learners. These developments were evident through observable behavioral changes during and after the storytelling sessions, indicating that consistent exposure to interactive narratives contributed meaningfully to early literacy growth.

One of the most noticeable improvements was in alphabet knowledge. Learners demonstrated an increased ability to recognize letters and associate them with familiar words encountered in storybooks. Over time, children began pointing out letters during storytelling sessions and linking them to character names and objects within the narrative. This finding aligns with Farahsani et al. (2025), who emphasized that interactive storytelling strengthens foundational literacy skills such as letter recognition through repeated and meaningful exposure.

In terms of phonological awareness, learners showed progress in identifying rhythms, sounds, and syllables embedded within stories. Repetitive refrains and patterned language enabled children to clap syllables, mimic sounds, and anticipate recurring phrases. These improvements suggest that storytelling supports auditory discrimination and sound awareness, which are critical components of early reading development.

The findings also revealed substantial growth in vocabulary development. Learners began to use new words acquired from stories in their daily classroom interactions. More complex nouns, descriptive words, and action verbs emerged in their speech, demonstrating an expansion of expressive language. This supports the study of Nurhidayati and Yasmin (2024), which found that storytelling enhances both literacy and social communication skills by exposing children to rich and varied language contexts.

Another area of improvement was pronunciation. Through repeated listening and active participation, learners demonstrated clearer articulation of words, particularly those frequently encountered in stories. Children imitated the teacher's pronunciation and gradually developed confidence in speaking aloud. These findings reinforce the idea that storytelling provides a natural and engaging context for practicing oral language skills.

In relation to writing skills, early signs of emergent writing were observed. Learners engaged in "writing-like" behaviors such as drawing symbols, sketching characters, and attempting to form letter shapes associated with the stories. These behaviors indicate that storytelling not only supports oral language but also contributes to early writing readiness by encouraging children to represent ideas symbolically.

The integration of storytelling with creative activities, particularly story-based drama, yielded the highest levels of engagement. Learners actively participated in role-playing, used simple costumes, and reenacted scenes from stories. This immersive experience appeared to strengthen comprehension and memory retention. Vretudaki and Tafa (2022) similarly found that narrative-based interventions enhance children's ability to construct and retell both personal and fictional stories.

The use of interactive storytelling techniques also fostered greater participation and enthusiasm among learners. Asking predictive and open-ended questions encouraged children to think critically and engage more deeply with the



narrative. This supports Santoso et al. (2023), who highlighted that storytelling teaching styles significantly improve comprehension and learner involvement.

In addition, the incorporation of digital and multimedia elements in some sessions enhanced learners' interest and attention. Visual aids and storytelling tools provided additional context, making stories more accessible and engaging. Preradovic et al. (2016) noted that digital storytelling can enrich early literacy experiences by combining visual, auditory, and interactive elements.

Technology-enhanced storytelling, such as the use of interactive games and virtual storytelling tools, also contributed to learners' engagement. Garcia (2020) emphasized that educational digital tools can serve as effective platforms for knowledge enhancement, while Ryokai et al. (2003) highlighted the role of virtual peers in supporting collaborative storytelling and literacy learning.

The findings indicate that storytelling is a highly effective strategy for promoting multiple dimensions of literacy development in kindergarten learners. The observed improvements in alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, vocabulary, pronunciation, and writing skills demonstrate the multifaceted impact of storytelling. These findings are further supported by the growing body of literature, which underscores the importance of interactive and integrated storytelling approaches in early childhood education.

Improvements in vocabulary development among kindergarten learners

Through repeated exposure to storytelling, children began to use more complex nouns, descriptive words, and adverbs derived from story texts. Their expressive language became more evident during class discussions, role-playing, and spontaneous conversations. This supports Miller and Pennycuff (2008), who emphasized that storytelling provides meaningful linguistic input that enhances children's ability to use language effectively.

The observed vocabulary growth can be attributed to the rich and contextualized language embedded in stories. Learners were not merely memorizing words but understanding their meanings through narrative contexts. This aligns with Abasi and Soori (2014), who found that storytelling significantly improves vocabulary acquisition by presenting words in engaging and meaningful situations. Similarly, Bunayyah et al. (2025) highlighted that storytelling activities promote deeper language comprehension among children aged 5–6.

Interactive storytelling techniques further strengthened vocabulary development. The use of questioning, repetition, and discussion encouraged learners to actively engage with new words and apply them in various contexts. Labrador (2025) noted that interactive storytelling materials and strategies are highly effective in improving early literacy skills, particularly vocabulary and comprehension. In the same way, Yanti et al. (2023) found that storytelling enhances children's overall language abilities through active participation.

In terms of pronunciation, learners demonstrated noticeable progress in articulating frequently used words found in narratives. Through repeated listening and imitation, children developed clearer and more accurate speech patterns. This improvement was especially evident during storytelling reenactments and oral participation activities.

The enhancement in pronunciation skills supports the findings of Payuyu et al. (2021), who reported that storytelling significantly improves children's speaking abilities, including clarity and fluency. Likewise, As (2016) emphasized that storytelling creates opportunities for learners to practice pronunciation in a natural and engaging manner. Slamet et al. (2024) further noted that visual and narrative supports, such as picture stories, contribute to better speech production among kindergarten learners.

The study also revealed the emergence of early writing skills. Learners engaged in "writing-like" behaviors, including sketching, drawing symbols, and attempting to form letters associated with story characters. These activities indicate that storytelling can stimulate children's interest in written expression, even at an early stage of literacy development.

This finding is consistent with Nevo and Vaknin-Nusbaum (2018), who highlighted that interactive storytelling supports print awareness and early writing development. Similarly, Maureen, van der Meij, and de Jong (2018, 2020)



emphasized that storytelling—both traditional and digital—provides opportunities for children to connect spoken language with written symbols, thereby strengthening early literacy skills.

The integration of storytelling with creative drama activities significantly enhanced learner engagement and concept retention. Sessions that included role-playing, movement, and the use of simple props resulted in more active participation and deeper understanding of the narratives. Learners were more motivated to recall story details and express their ideas creatively.

This observation is supported by Alkilani and Zhang (2025), who found that dramatic storytelling techniques improve emergent literacy by increasing engagement and comprehension. Simatupang et al. (2025) also demonstrated that interactive storytelling approaches, such as visual and performance-based methods, enhance literacy outcomes. Furthermore, Fono et al. (2024) and Huda et al. (2022) emphasized that storytelling integrated with active learning strategies leads to improved language skills and holistic development.

Storytelling, particularly when combined with interactive and creative approaches, plays a crucial role in enhancing vocabulary, pronunciation, and early writing skills among kindergarten learners. These results reinforce the importance of using storytelling as a dynamic and integrative teaching strategy to support comprehensive literacy development.

The Power of Integration

A key finding of this study is that storytelling becomes significantly more effective when it is not treated as an isolated activity. Rather than existing in a vacuum, storytelling gains instructional power when integrated with other learning domains such as science, mathematics, and creative arts. This integrated approach allows children to connect ideas across disciplines, resulting in deeper understanding and more meaningful learning experiences.

In the context of this study, integrating storytelling with mathematics—such as counting characters, identifying patterns, or sequencing events—enhanced learners' cognitive engagement. Children were not only listening to stories but also actively applying numerical concepts within meaningful contexts. This supports Morrow et al. (1990), who found that structured story-based programs significantly improve literacy and related cognitive skills among kindergarten learners.

Similarly, the integration of storytelling with science concepts, such as exploring the environment or discussing natural elements within a story, enriched children's comprehension. By connecting narratives to real-world phenomena, learners developed a more concrete understanding of abstract ideas. Ambarini (2012) emphasized that learning in real-life contexts enhances children's ability to internalize and apply knowledge effectively.

The use of integrated storytelling also contributed to the development of oral language and comprehension skills. Isbell et al. (2004) noted that storytelling combined with interactive discussions increases oral language complexity and improves children's ability to understand and retell stories. This suggests that integration not only deepens content understanding but also strengthens communication skills.

Moreover, storytelling integration fosters socio-emotional development. When stories are linked to real-life situations and discussions, children begin to relate to characters, understand emotions, and develop empathy. Amin et al. (2024) highlighted that storytelling elements such as characters and plotlines play a crucial role in shaping children's socio-emotional learning.

Another important dimension of integration is the inclusion of family and home-based learning. Extending storytelling activities beyond the classroom allows parents to reinforce literacy skills in meaningful ways. Jordan et al. (2000) demonstrated that family literacy programs significantly enhance early literacy outcomes, while Adara (2020) emphasized the value of involving parents in digital storytelling practices.

The integration of digital and multimedia tools further expands the potential of storytelling. Digital storytelling platforms provide visual and auditory stimuli that make narratives more engaging and accessible. Studies by Abiola



(2014) and Rahiem (2021) indicate that technology-enhanced storytelling improves both motivation and learning outcomes among young learners.

In addition, multimedia storytelling and interactive tools support diverse learners, particularly those at risk. Verhallen et al. (2006) found that multimedia stories provide scaffolding that enhances comprehension, while Preradovic et al. (2016) highlighted the effectiveness of digital storytelling in early education settings. Tools such as educational games and virtual storytelling environments (Garcia, 2020; Ryokai et al., 2003) further enrich the learning experience.

The integration of storytelling with interactive and inquiry-based approaches also promotes higher-order thinking skills. Dikta et al. (2025) found that storytelling encourages children to analyze, predict, and evaluate events, thereby fostering critical thinking. Similarly, Zheng et al. (2025) emphasized that interactive storytelling enhances reading comprehension through active learner engagement.

Furthermore, storytelling integrated with physical and creative activities, such as role-playing and dramatization, enhances empathy and engagement. Hertiki et al. (2025) demonstrated that physical storytelling helps children internalize values and develop interpersonal understanding. These experiences also contribute to narrative development and creativity (Vretudaki & Tafa, 2022).

Hence, when integrated across disciplines and learning contexts, becomes a powerful and transformative educational tool. It supports not only literacy development but also cognitive, social, emotional, and critical thinking skills. This comprehensive approach addresses the limitations of traditional storytelling practices and aligns with contemporary views on holistic and learner-centered education (Farahsani et al., 2025; Nurhidayati & Yasmin, 2024; Santoso et al., 2023; Kirby et al., 2021).

The Role of the Teacher

Through an autoethnographic lens, this study highlights the central role of the teacher in shaping the effectiveness of storytelling activities in kindergarten literacy development. Beyond the selection of stories, the teacher's presence, delivery style, and instructional decisions significantly influence how learners engage with and interpret narratives. This aligns with Bunayyah et al. (2025), who emphasized that teacher-mediated storytelling activities are crucial in enhancing early literacy outcomes among young children.

One of the most important realizations in this study was the impact of teacher enthusiasm during storytelling sessions. When the teacher demonstrates energy, emotional expression, and engagement, children are more likely to respond actively and participate meaningfully in the learning process. This supports Payuyu et al. (2021), who found that storytelling effectiveness is strongly influenced by the teacher's ability to create an engaging and supportive classroom environment that encourages speaking and participation.

A key instructional strategy observed was the use of open-ended questioning, particularly prompts that encouraged prediction, such as asking learners "What do you think will happen next?" These questions transformed storytelling from passive listening into an interactive cognitive activity. According to Simatupang et al. (2025), such interactive storytelling techniques significantly enhance early literacy by encouraging children to think, predict, and construct meaning from narratives.

The use of questioning also supported the development of creative thinking and language expression. When children were encouraged to predict outcomes or explain character actions, they engaged in higher-order thinking processes. This reflects findings from Alkilani and Zhang (2025), who noted that dramatic and interactive storytelling approaches strengthen emergent literacy by promoting imagination and critical engagement with story content.

Furthermore, teacher guidance during storytelling contributed to improvements in oral language development and communication skills. Through consistent modeling of language, pronunciation, and expressive reading, learners gradually improved their speaking abilities and confidence. As (2016) and Yanti et al. (2023) both emphasized, storytelling is most effective in developing early language skills when teachers actively facilitate dialogue and verbal interaction.



The teacher also plays a crucial role in scaffolding comprehension through interactive storytelling strategies, such as repetition, clarification, and guided discussion. These techniques help learners process and retain narrative content more effectively. Nevo and Vaknin-Nusbaum (2018) and Morrow et al. (1990) highlighted that interactive story reading significantly enhances comprehension and print awareness when supported by skilled teacher facilitation.

Thus, the teacher's role extends beyond literacy instruction to include the development of socio-emotional understanding and holistic growth. By guiding discussions about characters' feelings, decisions, and consequences, the teacher helps children build empathy and social awareness. This is supported by Amin et al. (2024), who emphasized that storytelling, when properly facilitated by teachers, contributes not only to literacy development but also to socio-emotional learning and character formation in early childhood education.

Conclusion:

This autoethnographic study demonstrates that story-based activities play a significant role in enhancing kindergarten learners' early literacy development, particularly in terms of reading and writing readiness, alphabet knowledge, vocabulary growth, and overall language development. Through reflective analysis of classroom practice, it became evident that storytelling is not merely an instructional tool but a dynamic learning experience that actively engages children in meaning-making processes. The findings consistently show that when stories are delivered in an interactive and purposeful manner, learners respond with greater enthusiasm, participation, and comprehension.

A key insight from this study is that the effectiveness of storytelling does not depend solely on the content of the story, but on how it is delivered and experienced within the classroom. The autoethnographic reflection highlights that children learn best when they are not passive listeners but active participants in the storytelling process. Activities that encouraged learners to respond, predict, dramatize, and interact with story elements contributed significantly to deeper understanding and retention of concepts.

Another important conclusion is that the integration of storytelling with other learning domains—particularly art, drama, and play-based activities—greatly enhances literacy outcomes. When children were allowed to illustrate stories, perform roles, and engage in creative expression, they demonstrated improved comprehension and stronger connections to vocabulary and narrative structure. This interdisciplinary approach supports holistic development and aligns with the natural learning tendencies of kindergarten learners, who thrive in experiential and multisensory environments.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that story-based activities be formally integrated into the standard kindergarten curriculum rather than treated as supplementary or “extra” activities. Storytelling should be positioned as a core instructional strategy across learning areas due to its proven ability to support language development and foundational literacy skills. Institutionalizing storytelling within the curriculum will ensure that all learners consistently benefit from its educational value.

In addition, strengthening parental involvement is essential in sustaining and reinforcing literacy development beyond the classroom. Educators should provide structured home-based engagement strategies, such as storytelling activity sheets or guided reading prompts, to encourage parents to participate actively in their children's literacy growth. This collaboration between school and home creates a more consistent and supportive learning environment for young learners.

Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to adopt diverse storytelling techniques that go beyond traditional reading aloud. Story retelling, story creation, dramatization, and interactive questioning should be incorporated regularly to promote higher-order thinking skills such as prediction, analysis, and creativity. These approaches not only strengthen literacy skills but also enhance learners' confidence and communication abilities.

This study affirms that storytelling, when implemented as an interactive, integrated, and intentional pedagogical strategy, has a powerful impact on early childhood literacy development. It supports not only academic readiness but also creativity, communication, and socio-emotional growth, making it an essential component of effective kindergarten education.



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