
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploration of Elementary School Students' Imagination Through Children's Stories: Creative Thinking Strategies

Irfan Febriyana¹, Aden Eka Pradana², Abdul Rozak³, Jimat Susilo⁴✉

^{1,2,3,4} Swadaya Gunung Jati University, Cirebon, Jawa Barat, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: Jimat Susilo E-mail: jimat100871@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore how children's stories can influence and improve the creative thinking skills of elementary school students in Indonesia. Imagination as part of the creative thinking process plays a role in developing students' skills. This study uses a case study method with a qualitative approach. Data was collected through open interviews with teachers and students, classroom observations, and analysis of students' creative works after the children's stories were read. The research participants were grade 5 students in one of the elementary schools in Kuningan Regency, West Java, Indonesia. The research activities involved students in rewriting stories with additional imagination, and students' written works were analyzed based on indicators of originality, complexity, and depth of ideas. The results of the study show that writing a retelling based on children's stories can stimulate students' imagination and creativity, which can be seen from the improvement in narrative structure, vocabulary use, and theme development. This research successfully explored how children's stories can influence and improve the creative thinking skills of elementary school students. The findings show that through children's stories, students are not only able to expand their imagination, but also increase the originality, complexity, and depth of ideas in their written work. These results provide an in-depth understanding of the important role of children's stories in stimulating students' creativity, as well as offering valuable insights for curriculum development that support the development of creative thinking skills from an early age.

KEYWORDS

Imagination, Children's Cheer, Creative Thinking

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 01 November 2024

PUBLISHED: 15 November 2024

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2024.7.11.19

1. Introduction

Creativity is one of the important skills that need to be developed from an early age, especially in the era of globalization which is fraught with challenges and rapid changes. In Indonesia, basic education has a very strategic role in instilling creative values in children. One of the approaches that is starting to receive attention is the use of children's stories as a tool to stimulate students' creative thinking skills.

Children's stories not only function as entertainment, but also as a means to convey values, concepts, and knowledge that can shape children's characters and mindsets. Through the narrative and imagination contained in the story, children are invited to think critically, imagine situations, and create new ideas. Previous research has shown that involvement in reading and discussing stories can improve children's cognitive and emotional skills, but few have examined its direct effect on creativity.

This research aims to explore in depth how children's stories can influence and improve the creative thinking skills of elementary school students in Indonesia. Using the case study method, this study analyzes student responses as well as creative works produced after engaging in reading and discussing children's stories. The main purpose of this research is to contribute to the development of curriculum and learning strategies that are more effective in stimulating creativity from an early age (Zhang et al., 2023).

This research is also expected to provide new insights into the role of children's stories in creative education, which can be the basis for the development of innovative learning methods in the future. Thus, the results of this research are not only beneficial for education practitioners in designing more varied and interesting learning approaches, but also for the wider community in preparing the younger generation to be more creative, adaptive, and ready to face the changing times.

This research has elements of novelty in several aspects. First, its specific focus on using children's stories as a tool to increase students' creativity in elementary schools in Indonesia is a new approach that has not been widely explored. Second, the use of a qualitative approach to explore students' creative processes through children's story activities makes an additional contribution to existing literature. Third, this study seeks to fill the gaps in the existing knowledge of how children's stories can effectively stimulate creativity in the context of education in Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Exploration of the Imagination

The exploration of children's imagination is a multifaceted research field that encompasses various dimensions, including creative and reproductive imagination, role-playing, and the impact of technologies such as augmented reality (AR) (Masmuzidin et al., 2022). There are two main dimensions of imagination, especially in children, namely: (1) creative imagination such as intuition, sensitivity, productivity, exploration, and novelty. Creative imagination is essential for fostering innovative thinking and problem-solving skills in children; (2) reproductive imagination focuses on aspects such as effectiveness, transformation, crystallization, and dialectic. This indicator of imagination is the ability of children to reconstruct and reinterpret their experiences and knowledge (Lian et al., 2012; Moriya et al., 2022). An understanding of these dimensions can help educators develop better strategies for nurturing imagination in an educational environment. The process of Teaching and Learning Activities (KBM) in the classroom can be directed by teachers in developing skills and creativity can be assisted by motivating children (Alwi, A., Rozak, A., & Wiradinata, 2021).

In early childhood education, imagination is very important, especially in learning the Indonesian language and literature (Caughey et al., 2024). In this study, the imaginative process improves creative thinking skills, which is the ability to produce works. Children's participation in imaginative scenarios improves their understanding of scientific concepts. For example, research shows that children use their imagination to learn complex scientific concepts through the activity of rewriting stories, which helps them learn more. Additionally, imagination allows children to express unrealized desires and navigate social dynamics, which are essential for their emotional and social development (Grindheim, 2020).

The exploration of children's imagination provides more knowledge in education, especially at the elementary level, and has an important role in encouraging creative thinking. Creative thinking is the ability to generate new and original ideas and see problems from a variety of different perspectives. At the basic level of education, creative thinking is very important because it can help children develop a variety of cognitive and noncognitive skills that will be useful throughout their lives. By understanding the dimensions of imagination and utilizing tools like AR, educators can create environments that nurture imaginative thinking, ultimately preparing children for the challenges of the future (Lian et al., 2012).

2.2 Children's Stories

Children's stories are typically defined as narrative texts designed for young readers, often characterized by simple plots, relatable characters, and moral lessons. Children's stories often include illustrations that complement the text, increasing children's understanding and engagement. In addition, children's stories are very important for the development of language and literacy skills. Studies show that storybooks expose children to vocabulary and grammar that are not commonly used in everyday conversation, thus enriching their language skills. Children's stories also serve as an effective tool for character education, instilling values such as tolerance and sharing through engaging narratives (Shanahan, 2021).

Effective children's stories encourage active participation from children and adults during reading sessions. This joint interaction increases comprehension and retention of material. The use of illustrations in children's stories plays an important role in attracting attention and clarifying ideas. Visual elements help children relate to the content, making complex themes more accessible. Many studies emphasize the importance of culturally relevant content in children's literature. Stories that reflect local culture can improve reading skills while increasing cultural awareness among young learners (Morisson & Smith, 2020).

2.3 Creative Thinking

Thinking is part of the development of thinking in children (Solovieva et al., 2023). Creative thinking is a high-level thinking skill that is essential for effective learning and adaptation in the 21st century, which includes processes such as brainstorming, problem-solving, and the discovery of new ideas (Fahmi & Jumadi, 2023; Nguyen, 2021). The characteristics of creative thinking include several aspects, including (1) Fluidity (the ability to generate many ideas), (2) flexibility (the ability to approach problems from different angles), (3) originality (able to generate unique and new ideas), and (4) elaboration (the ability to expand ideas and develop them further) (Prabaningtyas et al., 2022; Sigit et al., 2024). This characteristic is especially important for students because it improves problem-solving abilities and fosters a positive attitude toward learning and exploration (Musdi et al., 2024; Suciati et al., 2023).

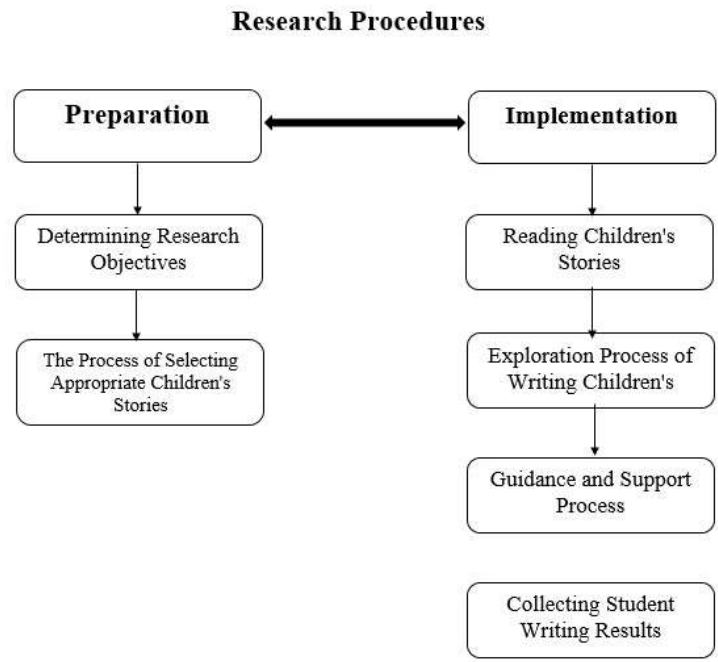
Creative thinking skills not only support academic success but are also essential in developing adaptability and innovation (Ferdiani & Harianto, 2024; Musdi et al., 2024; Smith et al., 2022). In this context, children's stories are a potential medium to stimulate imagination and creativity (Karunarathne & Calma, 2024; (McLure et al., 2024). Previous research has shown that children's stories can enrich children's learning process by stimulating divergent thinking, which is a key component of creativity (Issn et al., 2024; Smith et al., 2022). However, in Indonesia, the application of children's stories as an educational strategy to increase the creativity of elementary school students is still limited and has not been optimized (Smeda et al., 2014).

3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. A case study is defined as an empirical investigation that investigates contemporary phenomena in depth and in real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and contexts are unclear (Yin, 2009). The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of student's creative thinking processes through reading and discussing children's stories. Case studies are used to focus on a small group of purposively selected students, which allows researchers to explore the phenomenon in a more specific and detailed context. The research design in this study uses an integrated design, which is the focus of analysis on students when exploring the dynamics and variations in the creative thinking process.

Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, interviews, and written tests. The research instruments used are observation sheets, interview guides, and written tests. The analysis of data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation of student works was analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis techniques. The main data is a test in the form of students' writing in retelling based on the exploration of their imagination. The test was conducted three times with a different title for each student's writing. The test is used to determine the improvement of students' ability to explore their imagination through children's stories. The procedure for this research will be as follows.

Figure 1. Research Procedure



Assessment Criteria

Creativity assessment criteria such as fluidity, flexibility, and originality in the context of creative thinking refer to the J.P. Guilford (1950) model which emphasizes the importance of creative thinking skills in producing various solutions and ideas. In Guilford's theory, the three main components of creative thinking are (1) fluidity, which is the ability to generate many ideas quickly and easily, (2) flexibility, which is the ability to move from one type of idea or approach to another, and see things from a different perspective, and (3) originality that is, the ability to produce unique, new, or unusual ideas. Here is a table describing the creativity assessment scores based on the criteria of fluidity, flexibility, and originality.

Table 1. Assessment Rubric

Score	Indicator		
	Fluency	Flexibility	Originality
5	Generate a lot of ideas quickly and clearly.	Easily switch between different categories of ideas.	Ideas are very unique, rarely appearing in a common pattern.
4	Generate some ideas quite smoothly.	Displays a variety of viewing angles, albeit limited.	The idea is relatively unique, but still within reasonable limits.
3	Generate ideas but with some difficulty.	There are several variations, but the majority follow the same pattern.	The idea is quite common with few modifications.
2	Difficulty generating ideas or ideas is limited.	There is almost no variation in the point of view.	The general idea, without new or different elements.
1	Failed to generate significant ideas.	No flexibility; Just one point of view.	There are no new ideas; follow the pattern completely.

4. Results and Discussion

Research Results

This research was carried out in elementary schools in Kuningan Regency, West Java. The purpose of this research is to explore imagination through children's stories, especially children's stories entitled "Visiting Grandma's House", "Frogs Who Want to Fly", and "The Legend of Nyi Roro Kidul". This study explores how using children's stories in learning the Indonesian language and literature can stimulate students' creativity in thinking and improve their ability to retell stories with the addition of their imagination. There are three activities in this study, and students are given a story title for each activity. The following are the results of the learning activities carried out.

Table 2. Recapitulation of Creativity Results and Evaluation of Student Learning

Subjek	Learning Activity I (Visiting Grandma's House)	Learning Activity II (Frogs Who Want to Fly)	Learning Activity III (Legend of Nyi Roro Kidul)
1	Student Creative Results: The story begins with Ani who is looking forward to a vacation to her grandmother's house in Yogyakarta, Sleman. After preparing her belongings, Ani and her parents departed. On the way, they experienced a flat car tire, but after being assisted by a mechanic, they finally arrived safely at their grandmother's house. The story is quite realistic with a simple travel flow and everyday problems such as flat tires.	Student Creative Result: A frog has a dream of being able to fly even though his friends think it is impossible. One day a fairy comes and offers help. The fairy gave a spell that made the frog fly but only for five minutes. During such a short time, the frog flew with the bird and even helped an injured bird. After the spell wears off, the frog returns to the mainland but he remains grateful for his experience. The story emphasizes themes of dreams, gratitude, and magical help from fairies.	Student Creative Results: The story focuses on Dewi, a village girl who is called by Nyi Roro Kidul to be her successor. The warrior Nyi Roro Kidul took her to the bottom of the sea where Dewi was warmly welcomed and given the power to become the next Queen of the South. This story depicts the transformation of the Goddess into a leader under the sea.
	Fluidity: Good enough, the narrative is crumbling but the plot is incomplete.	Fluidity: There are improvements with more detail.	Fluidity: Significant improvement, smoother narrative.
	Flexibility: Monotonous point of view.	Flexibility: The addition of other characters' points of view, although not yet significant.	Flexibility: Start adding dialogue and interaction elements.
	Originality: Simple and common stories.	Originality: Still follows the original story, limited modifications.	Orisinalitas: Penambahan sentuhan pribadi lebih kreatif.
2	Student Creative Results: Ani went to her grandmother's house excitedly. But on the way, his father falls asleep	Student Creative Results: Frogs are eager to fly like birds. He tried hard to achieve his goal by buying artificial	Student Creative Results: Princess Kadita suffers after being cursed and expelled from her kingdom. After

	and they wake up in a strange dream. In the dream, Ani meets a fairy who gives her three wishes, one of which is a unicorn. When she arrives at her grandmother's house, Ani is surprised that she doesn't find her unicorn, but finally realizes that it's just a dream. The story is more imaginative with a mix of reality and fantasy.	wings but continued to fail. He is supported by a rabbit who believes in frog dreams. But after seeing the bird injured by being shot by a poacher, the frog realized that even a creature that can fly has its challenges. Finally, the frog learned to be grateful for its condition as a frog that could not fly. This story gives a message about self-acceptance and the importance of being grateful.	soaking in the South Sea, Kadita transforms into the beautiful and powerful Nyi Roro Kidul leading a magnificent underwater kingdom. He has great power and punishes anyone who breaks the rules on the South Coast. This story shows Kadita's transformation journey into the lord of the sea.
	Fluidity: Clear and structured.	Fluidity: There is an increase with smoother grooves.	Fluidity: Grooves are clearer and more structured.
	Flexibility: A bit of exploration of the imaginary ideas of the Unicorn character.	Flexibility: Addition of other points of view and imaginary characters.	Flexibility: Addition of more detailed story elements, and additional characters.
	Originality: There are new but less unique elements.	Originality: Creativity is more developed, and some new characters appear.	Originality: Addition of new elements with different points of view.
3	Student Creative Results: Ani started the long holiday excited because she was going to go to her grandmother's house. On the way, the atmosphere changes strangely and the city seems quiet and scary. Suddenly a monster appears and Ani's father tries to save his family. Ani gains superpowers to fight monsters and finally manages to save her parents before arriving safely at her grandmother's house. This story features elements of adventure and fantasy with the character Ani as the hero.	Student Creative Results: Frogs always dream of being able to fly and practice every day in the company of their best friend's rabbit. The frog tries different ways to fly, including using leaves tied to its hands. But every time he tried, he fell and was injured. Finally, the frog realizes that flying is not his ability and he should be grateful for what he has. This story emphasizes persistence in trying and finally accepting reality.	Student Creative Results: Nyi Roro Kidul noticed a village girl named Dewi using her magic glass. He ordered his soldiers to take the Goddess to the bottom of the sea. There, Dewi was appointed as the successor of Nyi Roro Kidul gained new power and named Ratu Kidul. This story emphasizes the spiritual connection between Nyi Roro Kidul and Dewi.
	Fluidity: Smooth, some additional details.	Fluidity: Smoother even with long sections.	Fluidity: Increased, smoother narrative.
	Flexibility: Different points of view (Dad as a hero) even though limited.	Flexibility: Have started exploring a few different points of view.	Flexibility: Flexibility increases and different viewpoints are explored more.
	Originality: Moderation, some creative but cliché elements.	Originality: Creative ideas are starting to emerge even if they are limited.	Originality: A personal touch and creativity are more visible.
4	Student Creative Results: Ani is looking forward to a vacation to her grandmother's house in Sleman. Before leaving, he dreamed about the engrossing atmosphere in his grandmother's house which was full of orchards. When she arrived at her grandmother's house, Ani played with her friend Rani and enjoyed her time at her grandmother's house. This story is simple and depicts Ani's happiness while on vacation with her	Student Creative Results: A frog prince named Jen0 tries hard to fly like a bird. He finds a magic book that contains a way for frogs to fly and embarks on an adventure to find magical materials. With the help of a fairy, Prince Jen0 is finally able to fly but he also takes advantage of the opportunity to meet Princess Giselle. Finally, Jen0 and Giselle got married after the adventure. The story has a strong fantasy plot with elements of magic and romance.	Student Creative Output: The story focuses on the description of the underwater kingdom of Nyi Roro Kidul which is full of treasures such as pearls and gold. The palace is very luxurious and guarded by sea creatures such as dragons and jellyfish. Each floor of the palace has its specialty, especially the Nyi Roro Kidul room which is entirely made of gold and pearls. This story emphasizes the luxury and power of Nyi Roro Kidul.

	grandmother with a description of a warm and pleasant atmosphere.		
	Fluidity: Good, clear flow but without variation of ideas.	Fluidity: Stays fluid but follows the original story.	Fluidity: Smooth and clear.
	Flexibility: Very limited, similar to the original story.	Flexibility: The addition of imaginary elements such as the character of the Jin but the plot remains limited.	Flexibility: Addition of character elements and interactions even though not yet innovative.
	Originality: There are almost no unique modifications.	Originality: More original but still many elements of the original story.	Orisinalitas: Ada elemen baru namun masih terikat dengan alur asli.
5	Student Creative Results: Ani is very happy to visit her grandmother in Yogyakarta. He enjoys traveling through the forest and experiencing the beauty of nature. At her grandmother's house, Ani plays with her friend Runi and hears a story about a water dragon that lives in the river near her grandmother's house. When Ani went to the river, she almost drowned but was saved by the water dragon. The story combines elements of adventure with fantasy where the dragon becomes Ani's savior figure.	Student Creative Result: A frog in a fantasy world dreams of being able to fly like the eagle he sees. Despite repeatedly failing and falling, he continued to try to fly by jumping from a high place. His friend Rabbit asks him why and the frog explains that he wants to feel the freedom of flying. The story combines fantasy elements with a message about the spirit of never giving up even though the results are not as expected.	Student Creative Results: Nyi Roro Kidul ruled the South Seas with great strength accompanied by an army of sea animals. It guards the ocean tightly and punishes anyone who breaks the rules. In this story, Princess Kadita transforms into Nyi Roro Kidul after experiencing suffering and finally building a magnificent underwater kingdom. This story emphasizes the power of Nyi Roro Kidul and its relationship with the laws of nature.
	Fluidity: Good, flowing grooves but too long in some parts.	Fluidity: The flow is smooth, and the dialogue enriches the story.	Fluidity: Significant improvement, more dynamic dialogue.
	Flexibility: There is an exploration of dialogue between characters while keeping it simple.	Flexibility: Addition of imaginary elements, more diverse interactions.	Flexibility: Storylines are more complex and creative.
	Originality: There is the addition of unique elements such as dialogue but a little repetitive.	Originality: Addition of new elements, creativity develops.	Originality: Increased originality with fresher story elements.

From these three learning activities, it can be seen that each student is able to explore their imagination in a different way when retelling the story that has been read. Some students stick to realistic elements by depicting everyday situations, while others opt for a fantasy approach by adding elements of magic, monsters, and superpowers. This activity encourages students to develop their creativity in both real-life and imaginative experiences, as well as learn to construct a coherent storyline by combining narrative elements such as setting, characters, and conflicts. In one of the stories about a frog that wants to fly, students' creativity is tested with various approaches, such as fairy help, repeated experiments, to moral lessons about gratitude and self-acceptance. This activity teaches the importance of persistence and self-reflection in the face of failure, while also incorporating moral messages that enrich the narrative.

In addition, students also demonstrate their ability to develop stories from legends that are rich in cultural and mythological elements, modifying myths with their imagination, both through character transformations, descriptions of underwater kingdoms, and conflicts between ocean lords. In general, the results of students' creativity showed an increase in fluidity, where narratives become smoother and more structured as the activity progresses. Flexibility in viewpoints and exploration of ideas also increases, although at first, it tends to be monotonous or limited. Meanwhile, the originality of the story has also evolved, from a simple story that follows the original plot to the addition of new elements such as dialogue, additional characters, and more creative story modifications. In conclusion, this evaluation process reflects students' progress in writing creativity, especially in enriching storylines, developing points of view, and increasing originality through the exploration of fantasy elements and interactions between characters.

Discussion

The exploration of students' imagination is indispensable for developing students' cognitive, social, emotional, and creative. There are several benefits obtained in fostering students' imagination exploration, including (1) helping students' cognitive development and creativity, (2) helping to develop narrative writing skills, (3) playing a role in scientific creativity, and (4)

improving learning outcomes (Mun et al., 2015). Imaginative play can help students develop problem-solving skills, and the ability to navigate various social situations. Apart from games, it can also be done through story texts. Students' involvement in understanding the story text can contribute to fostering creativity in the plot, creating characters, or illuminating new stories (Liang et al., 2018). The parameters of students' ability to explore the imagination of creative thinking are based on three criteria, namely fluidity, flexibility, and originality (Guilford, 1950). Fluidity (fluency) is the ability to generate many ideas quickly and easily. Flexibility is the ability to move from one type of idea or approach to another, as well as see things from different perspectives. Originality is the ability to produce unique, new, or unusual ideas.

Based on the results of the research that has been carried out, it can be known that the exploration of imagination can foster the development of creative thinking students. Exploration of imagination assisted by children's story texts can foster students' creativity in creative thinking. Students' creativity is manifested in the form of reconstructing or rewriting children's stories that have been read during learning. In exploring students' imagination, several stages are needed to get the results of student creativity. This research requires three stages to be able to create students' creativity through the exploration of their imagination.

In the first stage, students are still limited in producing a smooth narrative. They are capable of stringing stories with a basic structure, but many follow the original plot without development. The point of view used is mostly linear and monotonous. The story focuses more on the main character's activities without much exploration from other perspectives. Most stories still tend to be generic and do not show completely new ideas. Creativity in the form of unique characters or plots has not been seen much. At this stage, most students demonstrate the ability to retell a story in sequence, but innovation and variety in new perspectives and ideas are still minimal.

In the second stage, there is already a development. Improvements are noticeable in a smoother, more detail-rich narrative. Students can add more descriptions even though they are still limited to the original flow. Flexibility began to develop with the emergence of new points of view and the addition of imaginary characters. However, some students are still tied to linear patterns. Original ideas began to emerge, such as the imaginary character "Unicorn" and modifications of the original story, but further development was still needed. In general, this stage shows a significant improvement, especially in terms of flexibility and originality. Students begin to introduce new elements in the story and utilize different perspectives to enrich the narrative.

In the third stage, most students can produce a smooth narrative with a complex storyline. They demonstrate the ability to structure sentences better and more organized. Flexibility is developing rapidly, as seen from the exploration of different characters and situations. Students begin to add richer dialogue and character interactions. In addition, the increase in originality is obvious, with the addition of new characters, as well as a more creative and different storyline from the original story. Students begin to develop completely new and unique ideas. The last stage shows excellent results in Guilford's three criteria. Students show a clear improvement in Fluidity, flexibility, and originality. They are increasingly able to produce stories that are not only more coherent but also more creative and full of new ideas.

Thus, the use of creative methods in learning can further increase students' imagination. Creative learning techniques carried out by teachers can foster students' creativity. Systematic development of creativity can help students collect and explore their imagination effectively. In general, it can be said that exploring students' imaginations through various forms of play, storytelling, artistic expression, and creative learning approaches is essential for students' academic development and success. This is in line with what Dominey (2021) stated that the exploration of imagination can improve their cognitive, social, and emotional skills, as well as their creative and problem-solving abilities.

5. Conclusion

This research explores how children's stories can stimulate the thinking creativity of elementary school students through the process of imagination. The activity of retelling children's stories accompanied by imagination exploration has proven to be effective in improving students' creative thinking skills. At each stage of learning, significant development was seen. In the early stages, students tend to follow the original storyline with few modifications, but as time goes on, they are able to add new, more complex, and unique elements, enriching the narrative with different points of view. The final stage shows a rapid increase in creativity, with students increasingly able to come up with new, more innovative, and creative ideas in their retellings.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of using children's stories as a tool to develop creativity and divergent thinking in students. These findings make an important contribution to the development of the educational curriculum in Indonesia, especially in the use of children's stories as a medium to stimulate creativity and improve students' creative thinking skills from an early age.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ORCID iD : 0009-0009-7644-8753

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