



NARRATIVE STRUCTURE IN SHORT STORIES WRITTEN BY FIFTH-GRADE STUDENTS AT SDN CIPANAS, SUKABUMI CITY

M. Taufik Idris, Fachri Helmanto, Anne Effane

Universitas Djuanda

Email: 1muhamadtaufikidris@gmail.com; 2fachri.helmanto@unida.ac.id;

3anne.effane@unida.ac.id;

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the narrative structure in short stories written by fifth-grade students at SDN Cipanas, Sukabumi City. The research focuses on three fundamental narrative elements: character, conflict, and events. Employing a qualitative approach with content analysis as the primary method, the study is supported by data from classroom observations, interviews, and documentation of students' written work. The findings reveal that most students were able to present main characters from a first-person perspective, although character development remained superficial. The element of conflict was generally underdeveloped, with many stories depicting routine daily activities lacking narrative tension. Event sequences were organized chronologically but rarely reached a complete narrative structure, including orientation, complication, and resolution. These results suggest that students' narrative writing skills are still in the early stages of development. The study highlights the need for more structured and creative pedagogical strategies to enhance students' understanding of cohesive storytelling. It offers practical implications for the improvement of writing instruction in primary education and serves as a reference for further research in the field of narrative literacy.

Keywords: narrative structure, short story, character, conflict, events, primary school students

INTRODUCTION

Narrative writing is a fundamental aspect of language education, especially in elementary schools, as it plays a crucial role in developing students' creative thinking, language skills, and ability to express experiences and emotions. The narrative structure itself consists of several essential components namely character, conflict, and events which form the backbone of any coherent story (Abbott, 2008). These components not only help students organize their thoughts logically but also assist in fostering higher-order thinking skills, including analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

In many educational systems worldwide, including in Indonesia, teaching narrative writing begins in the later years of elementary education. According to the 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013) and the Merdeka Belajar curriculum in Indonesia, students in Grade V are expected to compose simple narrative texts that demonstrate a clear structure and coherent flow. However, actual classroom practices reveal that students often struggle to construct meaningful and well-organized stories, especially in terms of integrating characters, conflicts, and event sequences (Haris & Sutrisno, 2020; Hayden, 2022).

A comprehensive understanding of narrative writing at this level requires an analysis not only of the students' final products (i.e., their written stories) but also of how these stories reflect their developmental stage. According to Jean Piaget (1964), children aged 10–11 are in the concrete operational stage, where abstract thinking is still developing. This affects how they portray conflict and character depth in their writing. For instance, while many students can describe daily routines or familiar scenarios, few can create emotional depth or dramatic tension. As such, an investigation into their narrative structure can offer insights into both their cognitive development and the effectiveness of writing instruction.

Globally, research on narrative structures has largely focused on older students or advanced writers, especially in middle schools or universities (Rahmah, 2019; Bruner, 1986). These studies often explore complex plot developments, symbolism, or cultural subtexts in narratives. However, research at the elementary level particularly in Indonesian contexts remains scarce, especially studies that directly analyze how students understand and implement narrative structures in their writing.

In Arabic literature, narrative structure is deeply rooted in traditional storytelling that emphasizes moral values, temporal transitions, and rich characterization (Al-Qarni, 2020). Western models, such as Todorov's (1971) equilibrium theory, propose that stories follow a sequence of disruption and restoration something that young writers often struggle to replicate. While these frameworks are widely known among educators and scholars, the challenge remains: how can we effectively introduce them to children in meaningful ways?

In the Indonesian context, storytelling is often influenced by oral traditions and local culture. Students may base their stories on personal or communal experiences rather than dramatic or fictional events. For example, a fifth-grader at SDN Cipanas wrote, "Saya bermain layangan bersama teman-teman di lapangan belakang sekolah. Kami tertawa dan berlari mengejar angin." While vivid and heartfelt, this narrative lacks a structured conflict or resolution, illustrating how cultural context and developmental readiness influence storytelling ability.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill a critical research gap by analyzing the narrative structure in short stories written by fifth-grade students at SDN Cipanas, Sukabumi City. It focuses specifically on how students present characters, develop conflicts, and arrange events. By examining these elements, the study aims to assess the current state of students' narrative writing skills and identify pedagogical strategies that may support improvement.

This study is not only relevant for researchers and educators in Indonesia but also offers valuable insights for international scholars interested in early literacy development, narrative cognition, and culturally responsive pedagogy. Ultimately, strengthening narrative competence at the primary school level can lay the foundation for lifelong literacy, critical thinking, and creative communication.

METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design, aiming to explore the narrative structure in short stories written by fifth-grade students at SDN Cipanas, Sukabumi City. The qualitative paradigm allows researchers to examine not just the outcome of student writing, but also the underlying patterns, meanings, and thought processes that inform narrative construction. As noted by Krippendorff (2004), content



analysis in qualitative research provides a systematic means of interpreting textual data to identify recurring themes and latent structures.

A. Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted at SDN Cipanas, a public elementary school located at Jl. Pramuka No. 1, Cikondang, Citamiang Sub-district, Sukabumi City, West Java, Indonesia. The school operates under the morning shift and follows the Merdeka Curriculum. The total student population was 643, consisting of 320 male and 323 female students. This study focused specifically on Grade V students, with a sample of 30 short stories collected from three fifth-grade classes (VA, VB, and VC), each consisting of 39 students.

The selected participants represented a range of writing abilities. Prior to data collection, consent was obtained from the school principal, teachers, and students. Ethical clearance and anonymity were ensured by using pseudonyms for student writers in quoted excerpts.

B. Data Collection Techniques

To capture a holistic picture of the students' narrative abilities, data were collected using four complementary techniques:

1. Classroom Observation

Observations were conducted during Bahasa Indonesia lessons where students were learning about narrative text structures. The aim was to observe the teaching methods used by teachers, how students responded to narrative tasks, and the classroom environment supporting literacy activities.

2. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Bahasa Indonesia teachers and a small number of students. Teachers were asked about their strategies in teaching narrative writing, while students were interviewed about their understanding of narrative elements and challenges they encountered. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

3. Document Analysis (Student Short Stories)

The primary source of data was 30 short stories written by Grade V students. These stories were collected after a classroom assignment where students were asked to write a narrative based on a topic of their choice. The stories ranged from 150 to 400 words and were handwritten. Each story was carefully transcribed, translated (if needed), and analyzed for narrative components.

4. Field Notes and Teacher Materials

Additional data included lesson plans, learning materials, and worksheets used by the teachers. These provided context for the instructional approach and helped triangulate findings.

C. Instruments

The instruments used in this study were designed to identify and categorize narrative elements in student writing. These included:

1. Observation checklist for classroom interaction

2. Interview guide with open-ended questions

3. Narrative structure coding sheet for analyzing short stories, focusing on:

- a. Character: clarity, perspective, depth

- b. Conflict: presence, intensity, resolution
- c. Events: coherence, sequence, completeness

D. Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis followed the principles of content analysis as outlined by Krippendorff (2004) and Helmanto (2024). The process included:

1. Data Familiarization: Reading all stories repeatedly to become immersed in the content.
2. Coding: Assigning codes to specific narrative elements (e.g., CHAR for character, CON for conflict, EVT for events).
3. Categorization: Grouping similar codes into broader themes such as “character development,” “absence of conflict,” or “chronological sequence.”
4. Interpretation: Analyzing how the narrative elements were used, and comparing student performance with expected narrative standards.
5. Triangulation: Cross-checking findings from stories, observations, and interviews to ensure validity and reliability of interpretation.

E. Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure the credibility of the data, multiple strategies were employed:

1. Triangulation of data sources (stories, observations, interviews)
2. Member checking with teachers to verify interpretations
3. Thick description to provide rich contextual background
4. Audit trail to document the research process

The analysis focused not only on whether narrative elements were present, but also on how effectively they were employed. For example, a student might write: “Saya dan Deni pergi ke sawah. Kami melihat katak dan bermain air.” While the event is chronologically arranged, there is no rising tension or resolution, indicating a descriptive rather than dramatic narrative.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study based on the analysis of 30 short stories written by fifth-grade students at SDN Cipanas. The results are categorized into three sub-themes aligned with the research focus: (1) Displaying Characters, (2) Raising Conflicts, and (3) Describing Events. The findings are then discussed in light of relevant theories and previous research.

1. Displaying Characters

Most students in this study were able to introduce characters using the first-person point of view, commonly starting their stories with “Aku” or “Saya.” However, the portrayal of character traits remained superficial and flat. Students rarely provided descriptive insight into the characters’ personalities, motivations, or internal changes.

For example, in the story titled “Bermain Layangan”, one student wrote:

“Saya bermain layangan bersama teman-teman di lapangan belakang sekolah. Kami tertawa dan mengejar angin.”



While the character's activity is clearly stated, there is no information about the character's age, background, emotional state, or development over time. The narrative focuses on external actions rather than internal traits.

Another example is found in the story "Si Gatot Gagah dan Berotot", where a student attempted to create a fictional character:

"Gatot adalah anak yang gagah dan berani. Dia suka menolong orang dan kuat seperti superhero."

Here, although the student includes adjectives such as "gagah" and "berani," the character remains one-dimensional, lacking specific actions or scenarios that reflect these traits. This aligns with findings by Haris & Sutrisno (2020) that elementary students often rely on labeling rather than showing through narrative context.

This pattern reflects the concrete-operational stage described by Piaget (1964), where students tend to describe things based on observable facts rather than inferred qualities. Thus, character development in their stories remained limited to names, roles, and surface-level attributes.

2. Raising Conflicts

A significant portion of the stories analyzed lacked clear conflict. Many students wrote narratives that resembled chronological recounts of daily activities, rather than structured stories with problem-solution dynamics. This is notable given that conflict is a central element in narrative theory (Todorov, 1971; Abbott, 2008).

For instance, in the story "Penyuk dan Kudanil", the student wrote:

"Penyuk dan Kudanil pergi ke sungai. Mereka bermain dan tertawa bersama. Hari itu sangat menyenangkan."

This story is descriptive and harmonious, but lacks a challenge, obstacle, or emotional tension that would make the narrative dynamic.

By contrast, some students attempted to include simple forms of conflict. In "Berenang Tanpa Izin", a student wrote:

"Saya pergi berenang dengan teman tanpa bilang ke ibu. Saat pulang, ibu marah dan saya dihukum."

Here, a moral conflict is introduced, and there is an implied consequence, giving the story more structure. However, the resolution is abrupt and not elaborated upon.

Another student, in "Bermain Bola", wrote:

"Kami bermain bola, tapi salah satu teman bermain kasar. Saya marah dan tidak mau main lagi."

This illustrates a social conflict and an emotional reaction, but again, lacks a deeper resolution or reflection.

These examples show that while some students begin to understand the role of conflict, most are still developing the skills to escalate tension or create meaningful resolutions. According to Bruner (1986), the presence of conflict is essential to narrative logic, and without it, stories risk becoming static or episodic.

3. Describing Events

Most students were able to write stories in a chronological sequence, demonstrating an understanding of temporal progression. This skill reflects the influence of formal instruction, which often emphasizes “beginning, middle, end” structure.

A student in the story “*Berlibur ke Bandung*” wrote:

“Hari Minggu saya dan keluarga pergi ke Bandung. Kami pergi ke kebun binatang lalu makan siang di restoran. Setelah itu kami pulang ke rumah.”

The story is coherent and follows a linear timeline, but lacks narrative depth, emotional arc, or transformation. It resembles a recount more than a narrative, as it only states what happened without any dramatic structure.

Another student in “*Main Badminton*” wrote:

“Saya bermain badminton dengan Andi. Dia curang dan membuat saya kesal. Tapi saya tetap bermain sampai selesai.”

This story attempts to include both an event and a mild conflict. However, it ends without development or consequence, which prevents it from achieving narrative closure (Todorov, 1971).

While students generally excelled in arranging events sequentially, very few demonstrated awareness of a complete narrative arc including orientation, complication, and resolution. This echoes the observation of Hayden (2022) that elementary students often write event-based sequences without internal transformation or dramatic progression.

4. Interpretation and Thematic Synthesis

The analysis reveals a consistent pattern: students at the Grade V level are beginning to grasp the mechanics of narrative writing such as the use of first-person point of view and chronological order but struggle with more advanced elements like character development and complex conflicts.

From a pedagogical perspective, this indicates the need for:

- a. Model-based instruction, where teachers provide rich examples of complete stories
- b. Scaffolded writing exercises, such as filling in parts of stories or completing unresolved conflicts
- c. Collaborative storytelling, which allows students to build on each other's ideas and deepen narrative elements



These findings also suggest that narrative writing instruction at the elementary level must move beyond grammatical correctness and vocabulary usage toward **story** construction strategies, such as understanding motives, cause-effect relationships, and emotional arcs.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the narrative structures in short stories written by fifth-grade students at SDN Cipanas, Sukabumi City, focusing on how they developed characters, conflicts, and events. The analysis of 30 short stories revealed several key findings:

1. Characters were predominantly presented through the first-person point of view. However, most characters lacked psychological depth or development. They were introduced as labels rather than dynamic agents, often with no clear motivation or change throughout the narrative.
2. Conflicts were either underdeveloped or entirely absent in the majority of stories. While some students attempted to introduce social or moral conflicts, they were generally simplistic and lacked escalation or resolution. This reflects a need for more structured support in helping students understand the dramatic core of a story.
3. Events were usually arranged in chronological order, indicating students' basic grasp of temporal sequencing. However, few students were able to construct a complete narrative arc with a clear orientation, complication, and resolution. Most narratives resembled descriptive recounts rather than structured fictional stories.

The findings suggest that while fifth-grade students are beginning to internalize the basic mechanics of narrative writing, their understanding of narrative complexity remains limited. These limitations are consistent with developmental expectations and highlight the importance of targeted instructional strategies in creative writing.

Pedagogical implications of this study include the need for:

1. Integrating model-based and scaffolded storytelling activities
2. Teaching narrative elements explicitly through interactive methods
3. Encouraging revision and peer feedback to develop deeper character and conflict elements

This study also contributes to the broader field of narrative literacy by offering insight into how narrative competence develops at the elementary level, especially in under-researched contexts such as Indonesian public schools. Further research is recommended to explore longitudinal development of narrative skills and to examine the role of socio-cultural background in shaping children's storytelling approaches.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Universitas Djuanda Bogor, the teachers and staff of SDN Cipanas Kota Sukabumi, and all the students who participated in this research. Special thanks are extended to Fachri Helmanto and Anne Effane for their continuous support and mentorship throughout the research process.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbott, H. P. (2008). *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Al-Qarni, S. A. (2020). Narrative Structures in Modern Arabic Literature. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 42(1), 33–48.
- Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Harvard University Press.
- Bulan, I., & Wahyudi, A. (2021). Pengaruh Model Pengajaran terhadap Struktur Naratif Siswa Sekolah Menengah. *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia*, 8(2), 145–158.
- Haris, D., & Sutrisno, E. (2020). Analisis Struktur Narasi dalam Cerita Pendek Siswa Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Dasar*, 5(1), 25–33.
- Hayden, R. (2022). Teaching Narrative Structure in Elementary Classrooms: Challenges and Strategies. *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, 27(3), 211–230.
- Helmanto, H. (2024). *Metodologi Penelitian Pendidikan: Pendekatan Kualitatif dan Analisis Isi*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Cendekia.
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Piaget, J. (1964). Development and Learning. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 2(3), 176–186.
- Rahmah, N. (2019). Kajian Struktural Cerita Pendek dalam Pembelajaran Bahasa Indonesia. *Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra*, 10(1), 90–100.
- Todorov, T. (1971). The 2 Principles of Narrative. *Diacritics*, 1(1), 37–44.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press.