

## NARRATIVE SKILLS EDUCATION FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN IN VIETNAMESE PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM

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**Abstract.** Narrative skills in preschool children are important because they form the foundation for later reading and writing development. The early childhood education curriculum functions as the main framework guiding teachers' pedagogical practice; therefore, the content it presents provides essential orientation for the design and implementation of classroom activities. This article analyses how narrative skill education is manifested in the current early childhood education curriculum. Using a mixed-method approach, the study finds that narrative skills are only indirectly referenced in the present curriculum in Viet Nam. Their manifestations appear unevenly across developmental domains, with the language development and cognitive development domains showing the highest frequency. Moreover, indicators of narrative production (event presentation) occur more often than those of narrative comprehension. These findings provide a basis for proposing educational measures to develop narrative skills in preschool children within the existing framework, as well as for recommending future curriculum adjustments.

**Keywords:** education, narrative skills, preschool children, preschool curriculum.

## 1. Introduction

Direct and indirect experiences across human development, from birth to adulthood, play a crucial role in understanding the world and solving problems. Since these experiences are often shared in narrative form, narration can be considered a key medium for conveying personal and others' experiences, fostering empathy, promoting learning, and broadening one's knowledge and experience. Narration involves focusing on actions and events in human life, constructing meaning, and integrating elements into a broader context to generate an overall interpretation (Jang, 2014). Particularly for preschool children, narrative skills play an essential role in transmitting information and creating a positive communicative environment that encourages

creative thinking. Furthermore, narration contributes significantly to subsequent learning outcomes and serves as a foundation for literacy development (Feeney et al., 2012).

In Viet Nam's early childhood education, developing narrative skills for children is an essential pedagogical priority. The current early childhood education curriculum has included various activities to support children's language development; however, the specific skill of narration has not been clearly emphasized. While many international studies have examined children's narrative skills, this issue has not yet been comprehensively or systematically explored in Viet Nam. This study aims to explore narrative skills, along with the objectives and content related to teaching them to preschool children in the current national early childhood education curriculum, thereby forming a basis for proposing appropriate educational measures. It analyses the curriculum to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of this issue.

## 2. Content

### 2.1. Narrative skills of preschool children

(1) Narrative skills have been examined from multiple perspectives, and diverse viewpoints remain regarding their scope. They involve the ability to sequence events and produce a coherent text using clear linguistic markers and accurate vocabulary, while expressing ideas independently. They also include understanding cause-and-effect relations and structuring the account to support listener comprehension (Blom et al., 2016). These skills cover the retelling of personal experiences and fictional stories, both of which have attracted considerable attention (Boudreau, 2008). Moreover, narrative skills form a bridge between spoken language and the literacy demands children will later meet in written texts. Narrative competence requires lexical (semantic) and syntactic knowledge, the ability to organise information, and adaptation to the listener's prior knowledge.

In this study, we define narrative skills as the effective use of prior knowledge and personal experience to identify key details, order information chronologically, and present it logically and authentically. Within this framework, narrative comprises two interrelated, concurrent components: narrative comprehension and narrative production. Comprehension develops through cognitive and memory processes—listening, identifying key points, main characters, and significant actions, and structuring them logically. Production develops through the use of vocabulary and grammatical structures to express events with temporal and situational consistency, without loss or distortion of original meaning. Effective use of knowledge and experience refers to applying one's background to select essential elements and convey them appropriately for the communicative context and audience. Capturing key details involves identifying and noting main points, salient characters, and critical events so that core information is retained. Sequencing events means arranging them in logical or chronological order from introduction through development to conclusion—to secure coherence and clarity. A continuous, connected flow of events (temporal and logical continuity) enables the listener to follow the account easily. Authenticity refers to presenting events and details faithfully and accurately, avoiding additions or alterations that would change their original nature.

Narrative skills consist of three components: process, quality, and product. The process of narrative performance includes event coherence and linguistic coherence, referring to how events are connected to each other and to the overall theme. In addition, "Narrative skills are often considered multidimensional and include different components such as vocabulary, syntax, and semantics. They involve a range of abilities, including understanding events and proficient use of pragmatics, syntax, and semantics" (Karlsen et al., 2021, p. 557). In this study, we define narrative skills as comprising two main components: narrative comprehension and narrative production.

Narrative skills have a significant impact on children's development. First, they support language development by enabling children to share ideas, recount experiences, explain events, create imaginary stories, and engage in conversations with those around them (Akmeşe et al., 2021; Davies et al., 2004; Bowles et al., 2020). Narration is described as a fundamental process of the human mind, helping children to express meaningful actions and events. In addition to conveying information, narrative skills also support children's ability to retain and recall information (Nelson et al., 2019). Furthermore, narrative skills serve as a bridge between oral language and literacy for preschool-aged children (Gardner-Neblett et al., 2012). When children develop narrative skills, they use their expressive abilities, perspectives, and conceptual understanding to interpret both the external and internal features of events. They can then transfer narrative language effectively from oral to written forms.

Therefore, preschool children who lack narrative skills may face difficulties in learning to read and write later on, which can affect their overall academic success. The development of narrative skills is an important milestone, and narrative competence plays a critical role in later educational achievement (Boudreau et al., 2008; Peterson et al., 1994; Silva et al., 2014). Children with stronger narrative skills at the start of preschool often have an educational advantage over peers with weaker abilities. Recognizing this importance, the UK government has included the development of narrative skills in the "Early Learning Goals" of its education system (Morgan, 2006). This highlights the authorities' commitment to fostering narrative skills in children and strengthening early childhood education as a whole. While this reflects an international policy emphasis on narrative development, such models must be considered carefully in relation to Viet Nam's specific cultural and curricular context.

(2) Building on the concept and structure of children's narrative skills outlined above, this study analyzes several key aspects of narrative skills in children, examined from the following perspectives:

***Table 1. Manifestations of narrative skills in children aged 5-6***

<b>Skill</b>	<b>Manifestation</b>		<b>Content of Children's Narrative Skills</b>
Narrative information comprehension skills	Remembering and Reproducing Narrative Information		Listening and understanding narrative content to recall information related to events.
	Organizing Information According to the Event Sequence		Using reasoning to identify key ideas, summarise and predict information about events or activities; logically connecting and arranging information while listening to the event sequence.
Information presentation skills	Overall Narrative Skills (Macrostructure)	Space	Clearly present the context and location of the event or activity.
		Time	Narrating the exact time when events occurred
		Characters	Describing characteristics, psychological changes, goals, efforts, emotional reactions, and outcomes of characters in the narrated events or activities.
		Details and Plot	Narrating an event in chronological order, from start to finish, including all components: beginning → goal → effort → result, reflecting the characters' actions, climax, and resolution.

	Detailed Narration Skills (Micro Structure)	Vocabulary (Vocabulary Complexity)	Reflected in the total number of words, number of different words, type-token ratio (TTR), types of word classes (e.g., nouns, verbs), and classifiers (e.g., “con,” “cái”) used in the event narrated by the child.
		Grammar (Complexity of Narrative)	Measured by the mean length of utterances (MLU), grammatical complexity determined by the subordinate-clause index (SI), and the number and variety of sentence structures used in the narration

## 2.2. The preschool education program in Vietnam

The current early childhood education curriculum of Viet Nam the 2021 Early Childhood Education Curriculum (Ministry of Education and Training, 2021), promulgated under Circular No. 51/2020/TT-BGDĐT—was further developed and updated from previous versions to align with modern educational trends and contemporary social contexts. The Ministry of Education and Training introduced several adjustments to ensure that early childhood education meets the demands of international integration and the holistic development of children during the early years. The 2021 curriculum was built on the synthesis, evaluation, and lessons learned from the implementation of earlier curricula, particularly the 2016 version. Its issuance represents the result of studies and surveys on the developmental needs, skills, and competencies of young children, while aiming to modernize education. From 2019 to 2020, the Ministry conducted research and field trials to revise and supplement necessary content, and by 2021 the curriculum was officially implemented. The curriculum is structured into four parts:

Part I. General Issues (Objectives of early childhood education; Principles for curriculum development; Requirements for content, methods, and assessment of child development; Conditions for implementation)

Part II. Nursery (younger age group) Curriculum (Objectives; Implementation plan; Content; Expected outcomes; Educational activities, organizational forms, and methods; Assessment of child development)

Part III. Kindergarten Curriculum (Objectives; Implementation plan; Content; Expected outcomes; Educational activities, organizational forms, and methods; Assessment of child development)

### Part IV. Guidelines for Implementation

The 2021 curriculum focuses on the comprehensive development of children from 3 months to 6 years of age, including the domains of physical development, cognition, language, socio-emotional competence, social skills, and aesthetics. Its content is designed with vertical alignment to support a smooth transition from early childhood education to primary school. An important feature of the 2021 curriculum is methodological flexibility, allowing teachers to adapt content and pedagogical approaches to the individual characteristics of children and the practical conditions of early childhood institutions. The curriculum promotes “learning through play” and experiential activities to foster creativity and problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, assessment of child development is conducted continuously through observation and monitoring of progress during daily activities. It also provides more detailed implementation guidance and introduces content that familiarizes young children with foreign languages. Overall, the 2021 curriculum is modern, evidence-informed, and well-suited to contemporary developmental needs, providing a solid foundation for the holistic growth of Vietnamese children. It not only inherits the strengths of prior curricula but also emphasizes the personalization of learning processes, creating opportunities for children to develop naturally and comprehensively in the modern educational context.

However, although Viet Nam's current early childhood curriculum has evolved toward greater comprehensiveness, scientific grounding, and flexibility—consistent with children's developmental needs in a context of international integration—narrative skills are not explicitly stated. Instead, only related components are implicitly present. Recognizing the importance of narrative skills in preschool-aged children, this study analyzes and evaluates the current national early childhood curriculum to identify elements relevant to the development of narrative skills, going beyond the mere presence or explicit labeling of the term “narrative skills.”

### **2.3. Research methods**

To analyze and evaluate the current status of the Early Childhood Education curriculum, this study uses the 2021 Early Childhood Education Curriculum officially issued by the Ministry of Education and Training. To assess the curriculum from the perspective of narrative-skill education, the authors employed a qualitative approach based on deductive content analysis, supported by Microsoft Excel. The deductive analytical framework was built on the dimensions, indicators, and observable manifestations of narrative skills presented in Table 1. Using these predefined manifestations, the study systematically reviewed their presence across all sections of the Early Childhood Education curriculum. The qualitative results obtained from the deductive analysis were then entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to analyze the frequency of each narrative-skill manifestation. In addition, an inductive analysis technique was applied to examine whether the manifestations of narrative skills in the current Early Childhood Education curriculum reflect vertical integration (i.e., narrative skills function as explicit, core, directly stated content) or horizontal integration (i.e., narrative skills are referenced indirectly or in a fragmented manner across multiple domains of the curriculum).

### **2.4. Research results**

The synthesis and analysis of the current Early Childhood Education curriculum indicate that narrative skill education for children is an essential component aimed at promoting their holistic development. However, narrative skills are addressed unevenly across different developmental domains, with their manifestations reflecting an intersection between language and cognition. As the current curriculum is a framework curriculum, the methods and forms of narrative skill education for preschool children, as well as the approaches for assessing narrative skills, are not explicitly defined in the current Early Childhood Education curriculum in Viet Nam.

The results of the qualitative analysis are summarized in Table 2 as follows (The qualitative analysis results summarized in Table 2 have been converted to QR code in Figure 1)



*Scan QR code to read Table 2 content*

***Figure 1. The presence of narrative skills in components of the current preschool education program in Vietnam***

#### **2.4.1. Narrative information comprehension skills in the early childhood education curriculum in Viet Nam**

With regard to narrative information comprehension skills, observable indicators appear mainly in the language development domain of the national Early Childhood Education curriculum. In addition, the cognitive development domain is also relevant, particularly concerning indicators of children's ability to recognize and understand relationships among objects and phenomena in daily life. Within the current Early Childhood Education curriculum, the objectives and content associated with narrative information comprehension skills are primarily found in the language development domain. However, their frequency and complexity vary by three age groups: 3–4, 4–5, and 5–6 years. At the age of 3–4, this skill appears at a relatively basic level, with four content items and one expected outcome. It focuses on “understanding words referring to familiar people, objects, and phenomena” and “answering simple questions” such as “who?”, “what?”, “where?”, and “when?” to meet the educational objective of “listening and responding to questions”. In age 4–5 group, the four content items remain, plus one expected outcome but with higher vocabulary requirements. Children are expected to “understand words indicating characteristics, functions, and emotive terms” and to follow two to three consecutive instructions. They are also encouraged to ask and answer additional questions such as “for what purpose?” to fulfill the objective of “exchanging with the interlocutor”. The group 5–6 years has one expected outcome and four content items in the language development domain related to narrative information comprehension. The skill appears more frequently and at a higher level of complexity. Children are required to meet objectives such as “listening” and “commenting on the interlocutor's opinions.” They are expected to “understand general (categorical) words and antonyms,” and to answer more complex questions like “why?”, “what is similar?”, “what is different?”, and “how did it happen?” Compared with the younger age groups, narrative information comprehension at this stage expands considerably to include comparison, analysis, and causal explanation. These progressive changes indicate that the current Early Childhood Education curriculum follows a developmental trajectory that gradually increases the complexity of narrative information comprehension skills across age levels.

#### **2.4.2. Narrative information production skills in the early childhood education curriculum in Viet Nam**

With regard to narrative information production skills, manifestations appear across the cognitive, language, and emotional–social development domains, with the language development domain addressed most frequently at all three age levels. These skills are embedded in numerous educational objectives, particularly those related to language development, cognitive growth, and social-emotional development.

For children aged of 3 and 4, objectives focus on describing salient features of familiar objects and phenomena. They are expected to state their personal information, including name, age, gender, class, teacher's name, and friends' names, and to describe simple objects or pictures with adult support. Children are also encouraged to retell familiar events they have experienced, such as visiting grandparents, going on outings, or watching a film.

For children aged 4–5 years, expectations become more complex. They are required to present events and objects more clearly, narrating with a beginning and an end, describing the actions of characters in pictures, and describing events of the day in chronological order. They also talk about themselves, their interests, and what they can do. At this stage, the analysis identified seven expected outcomes in the cognitive development domain, three expected outcomes and three content items in the language development domain, and three content items in the social-emotional development domain. Children are required to retell events clearly, in sequence, with sufficient information for listener understanding. They are also expected to describe details about characters' actions, traits, and states; tell stories based on pictures or

personal experiences; and comment on similarities and differences between themselves and peers. In terms of content progression, the 3–4 age group is limited to simple tasks such as describing objects or pictures with adult support and retelling familiar events. By contrast, the 4–5 age group broadens to include retelling events in sequence, describing objects and phenomena, and telling stories with a clear beginning and end. Children at this level are also encouraged to discuss observed characteristics and differences, as well as occupations, family address, school, festivals, and local landmarks.

By the 5–6-year age group, content becomes richer, with expectations such as retelling stories they have heard in sequence and retelling real events coherently. Overall, objectives and content for narrative information production skills appear more frequently than those for narrative information comprehension skills, with a clear increase in complexity across age groups. While children aged 3–4 years express only simple ideas with adult support, children aged 5–6 years can present information logically, sequentially, and with evaluative comments on objects and phenomena. This indicates that the Early Childhood Education curriculum places particular emphasis on developing expressive and narrative abilities to foster language development and logical reasoning. Based on this analysis, the study finds that manifestations of narrative information production skills appear with higher frequency, greater detail, and more explicit requirements than those of narrative information comprehension skills. This imbalance may lead to disproportionate development between the two component skills. Therefore, the Early Childhood Education curriculum should be reviewed and adjusted to ensure balance and consistency, supporting the harmonious, holistic, and sustainable development of narrative competence in children.

Thus, narrative skills in the current Early Childhood Education curriculum in Viet Nam are integrated through a horizontal approach, meaning they are mentioned indirectly and dispersed across multiple domains rather than treated as a distinct core content area.

### **3. Conclusion**

The development of narrative skills is an essential task in the current preschool education program in Vietnam. Although the program includes activities that support language development, narrative skills have not yet received adequate attention or support. These skills are unevenly addressed across different developmental domains, with language and cognitive development being the most emphasized. Furthermore, manifestations of narrative production skills are more prevalent than those of narrative comprehension within the program. Narrative skills are not explicitly named; instead, their manifestations appear across various program areas. Moreover, the educational methods, organizational forms, and assessment strategies for narrative skills are not directly discussed in the current preschool education program. Primarily, the content and objectives related to narrative skills are addressed in the cognitive and language development areas, with a smaller portion in emotional and social development. These findings indicate that narrative skills in the current preschool education program in Vietnam are approached through a horizontal integration model, meaning they are mentioned sporadically or indirectly across multiple areas of the curriculum. To address these limitations, improvements are needed in teaching methods, instructional materials, and teachers' approaches. Encouraging children to create and narrate independently will not only enhance their narrative skills but also strengthen their thinking, imagination, and communication abilities. This, in turn, will lay a solid foundation for their future learning and development.

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