



Counter-Linguistic Strategies through Interactive Storytelling to Reduce Slang Vocabulary Mimicry in Early Childhood

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Abstract

This descriptive qualitative study examines the effectiveness of counter-linguistic strategies implemented through interactive storytelling to address the imitation of age-inappropriate slang among early childhood students driven by massive digital media exposure. Data gathered through observations, interviews, and documentation reveal that creative narratives featuring polite characters effectively motivate children to adopt correct diction naturally. The two-way interaction inherent in storytelling allows children to clarify the meanings of slang terms encountered on social media, while the repetitive use of positive vocabulary within the narrative helps internalize politeness values without being preachy. The results demonstrate that this strategy successfully reduces slang usage by replacing it with more communicative and polite alternatives. The success of this intervention relies heavily on the teacher's creativity in weaving target vocabulary into engaging plots, leading children to voluntarily switch to more respectful language in their daily interactions, thereby fostering better character development and linguistic etiquette.

Keywords: Counter-Linguistic Strategy, Interactive Storytelling, Slang Vocabulary, Early Childhood.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood language development is a complex process encompassing receptive and expressive aspects, where children in the pre-operational stage begin to spontaneously absorb and utter environmental dictions (Husna & Eliza, 2021). During this critical period, a specific linguistic deviation known as slang vocabulary mimicry has extensively emerged, which refers to the immediate observation, internalisation, and verbal replication of non-standard, seasonal, or age-inappropriate expressions by young children (Elza, 2025). Theoretically, this phenomenon aligns with the Social Learning Theory proposed by Albert Bandura, which emphasizes that humans learn through the observation and imitation of model behaviors through four distinct phases: attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation (Pramudiantoro et al., 2025). In this digital era, children pay high attention to unique, modern slang variations—frequently taking the form of abbreviations, word reversals, or foreign adaptations—store them in their memory, and subsequently reproduce them as a form of creative expression or identity exploration (Dewi, 2025).

Although slang serves as a form of peer-group identity, its persistent mimicry yields severe detrimental impacts on early childhood development. Linguistic politeness is an ethical dimension that must be anchored early because exposure to harsh language and unmonitored slang triggers aggressive communication behaviors (Anggraeni et al., 2023). When children habitually replicate informal digital dialects, it disrupts their cognitive representation and directly interferes with the acquisition of standard language (*Bahasa Indonesia baku*) necessary for formal education (Setyaningsih et al., 2022). Furthermore, based on Leech's politeness principles, early slang utilization blunts a child's capacity to apply key interactional maxims, such as the tact and generosity maxims, which ultimately hinders their long-term formal communication skills and future character building (Susandi et al., 2024). The core urgency of this study stems from the massive infiltration of digital slang into early childhood educational institutions, causing a severe phenomenon of "linguistic pollution" (Padang et al., 2025).

Field observations at school reveal that children are experiencing an alarming language shift, where they spontaneously imitate specific impolite trends from the digital content they consume (Theodora, 2025). This situation is highly prevalent among Class B Kindergarten students, who frequently emulate popular song lyrics or age-inappropriate media trends, resulting in the sudden emergence of rude terms like "*njir*," "*anjay*," and even harsh profanities within the school environment (Syifa et al., 2019). This pervasive linguistic pollution is heavily driven by high-intensity exposure to social media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok, and is further accelerated by the dominance of interactions among male students who perceive slang as a "cool" identity (Novianti et al., 2026). Consequently, conventional, repressive disciplinary methods or direct rigid reprimands consistently fail to reach the child's psychological threshold for voluntary diction selection, meaning that an alternative systematic language defense mechanism is urgently required (Arianto et al., 2025). To counteract this digital linguistic pollution, a structured intervention through a counter-linguistic strategy is highly required to fortify children's language habits.

A counter-linguistic strategy is defined as both a preventive and curative pedagogical approach designed to provide a systematic linguistic counter-balance by embedding formal and polite vocabulary as direct replacements for slang, rather than merely prohibiting them (Ulfa et al., 2025). When integrated with interactive storytelling utilizing storybooks, hand puppets, and Smart TV facilities, this strategy enters the child's imaginative space, allowing the deconstruction of negative language and the reconstruction of polite diction to occur naturally without making the child feel lectured (Jaya & Puspita, 2019). The primary advantage of this media-assisted interactive storytelling lies in its ability to present narratives dynamically; it captures children's full attention through vocal variations and active role-play, making them highly motivated to use polite language due to the positive environmental appreciation they receive (Tahirbegi, 2023).

The state of the art of this research lies in its specific integration of interactive storytelling techniques as a direct medium for subtle, real-time linguistic correction to systematically reduce slang usage, which sets it apart from previous literature. Prior studies on childhood language intervention predominantly focused on general speech capability development using puppetry without targeting behavioral reduction of slang (Mujahidah et al., 2021). Other researchers heavily relied on conventional classroom language rules or rigid external censorship which tend to be ignored by children (Pasiningsih, 2023). Furthermore, while current literature emphasizes the importance of parental monitoring and positive discipline frameworks to handle language degradation, they rarely provide a concrete, humanistic classroom model that builds the child's internal situational awareness (Rohmah et al., 2025). Therefore, this study establishes its novelty by combining physical puppetry, visual technology (Smart TV), and linguistic response mechanisms—such as gentle reminders, active word replacement, and positive reinforcement—to build a psychological threshold for children in choosing standard dictions (Rofi'ah et al., 2025). Based on these realities, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the counter-linguistic strategy through interactive storytelling in reducing slang vocabulary mimicry at Cordova Kindergarten. The primary focus is directed toward evaluating how teachers utilize creative story narratives to replace slang diction with socially, ethically, and academically appropriate vocabulary, while cultivating positive habits like reciting *istighfar* for linguistic self-reflection (Wiranti, 2025) (Mutmainnah et al., 2025). Ultimately, this research is expected to produce a practical, replicable language intervention model for early childhood educators

facing the challenges of digital-era language degradation, while serving as an empirical reference for literacy-based character curriculum development.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design to systematically investigate the live experiences of educators dealing with language shifts in early childhood. The selection of a descriptive phenomenological approach is justified by its capacity to explore, in-depth, the psychological and practical realities of teachers confronting slang vocabulary mimicry directly in the classroom environment (Florita & Sabud, 2025). By adopting this design, the researchers can capture the genuine, unmanipulated pedagogical efforts, subjective interpretations, and operational challenges encountered by educators at Cordova Kindergarten when implementing counter-linguistic strategies (Sinaga et al., 2025). This approach moves beyond mere quantitative frequency tracking, allowing for a profound, context-rich analysis of how digital media exposure (e.g., TikTok and YouTube) shapes contemporary early childhood linguistic habits and how teachers structurally counteract this "linguistic pollution" through interactive storytelling (Lumbin et al., 2023).

The data collected in this study consist of primary qualitative data capturing the characteristics of children's slang usage and the concrete implementation of teacher intervention strategies. Specifically, the data include: (1) descriptive profiles of slang dictions frequently emulated by Group B students, classified into categories such as mild slang (e.g., "*anjay*"), harsh profanities (e.g., "*njir*," "*babi*") (W. D. Lestari & Isna, 2025), and age-inappropriate digital song lyrics; (2) transcriptions of educators' experiences regarding the origins of children's slang exposure and the practical pedagogical barriers encountered in Class B (24 Student) and (3) systematic records of children's verbal behavioral adjustments, focusing on the emergence of speech self-regulation and the active spontaneous use of polite foundational vocabularies (e.g., "*please*," "*sorry*," "*thank you*") during and after the intervention.

Data collection was executed through a triangulated method comprising semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observations, and documentation, utilizing instruments that were strictly guided by operational indicators (Rahayu et al., 2024). The interview guide targeted classroom teachers with indicators focusing on slang identification, sources of digital exposure, and teacher-perceived pedagogical constraints. The observation technique utilized a structured observation rubric to monitor classroom dynamics during interactive storytelling sessions using hand puppets and Smart TVs. The observation instrument operated under three core indicators: (1) *Storytelling Presentation Quality*, assessing the teacher's vocal variations and dynamic narrative delivery (Susilowati & Sophya, 2021); (2) *Student Active Engagement*, measuring children's focused listening and physical role-play participation; and (3) *Linguistic Response Implementation*, monitoring how teachers applied real-time word replacement, positive reinforcement (praise), and contextual clarification (pausing narratives to correct slang and prompting children to recite *istighfar* as emotional self-reflection) (Rahmi et al., 2025). Meanwhile, the documentation instrument was used to record field notes and checklists tracking the daily frequency shifts of slang versus polite dictions.

Data analysis was conducted interactively and concurrently using the Miles and Huberman qualitative model, which systematically processes data through three distinct, continuous phases. First, in the *Data Reduction* phase, the raw data gathered from interview transcripts and field notes were coded, organized, and stripped of irrelevant information to focus strictly on the types of slang manifested and the technical nuances of the counter-linguistic strategies. Second, in the *Data Display* phase, the reduced data were organized into structured descriptive narratives and systematic matrix tables, such as storytelling indicator achievement charts and interactional response matrices mapping teacher-student linguistic corrections. Third, in the *Conclusion Drawing and Verification* phase, the researchers identified recurring patterns, relationships, and structural shifts in children's verbal habits to formulate valid conclusions regarding the effectiveness of interactive storytelling in building a psychological threshold for language choice, which were subsequently verified through prolonged field engagement and cross-source triangulation.

The systematic execution of this research is structured into a logical, multi-stage procedural workflow as illustrated in Figure 1. The procedure commenced with the Pre-field Stage, which involved the initial screening of the slang phenomenon at Cordova Kindergarten and the formal

validation of the interview and observation instruments. This was followed by the Implementation Stage on January 19 and 21, 2026, where semi-structured interviews were executed with the teachers, immediately followed by the direct deployment of counter-linguistic interactive storytelling sessions utilizing physical storybooks and hand puppets (Habibatullah et al., 2021). Next, the Observation Stage focused on monitoring the field effectiveness of teacher-led linguistic responses—specifically evaluating how immediate word replacement and contextual clarification affected children's real-time speech habits. The process culminated in the Reporting Stage, where the gathered qualitative data were reduced, displayed, triangulated for credibility, and synthesized into the final scientific article.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study describes the phenomenon of slang usage and the effectiveness of the Counter-Linguistic strategy. The findings are presented through problem identification, intervention processes, and observed behavioral impacts.

Identification of Slang Vocabulary Phenomena

Based on in-depth interviews with classroom teachers, it was found that the penetration of slang in early childhood occurs spontaneously, heavily triggered by exposure to digital media. Children tend to imitate these terms during daily peer interactions without comprehending their semantic essence or derogatory contexts (Darihastining et al., 2023). Teachers observed this escalating trend when children began echoing popular song lyrics or terms from video-sharing platforms. To provide a clear categorization of these linguistic deviations, the comprehensive field data regarding the specific variations of terms and their environmental triggers are systematically compiled in Table 1. Teachers observed that the male-student dominance within Sub-group 1 accelerated the frequency of interactions involving the use of coarse language.

Table 1. Slang Typology

Research Participants	Typology of Slang Vocabulary	Primary Sources of Exposure
Class B1	"njir", "anjay", "babi"	Age-inappropriate viewing content
Class B2	Popular song lyrics and social media linguistic trends	YouTube and TikTok trends
Coarse Language	Pejorative expressions/ Profanity	Mimicking speech from siblings and the immediate environment
General Observation	Terminology from 'K-pop Demon Hunters' subculture	Social media and peer influence

Counter-Linguistic Strategy through Interactive Storytelling

To reduce slang usage, teachers implemented a counter-linguistic strategy integrated into storytelling activities. This strategy involves the use of physical media and technology to redirect children's attention from negative language to polite communication.

Table 2. Strategy Syntax

Stages (Syntax)	Teacher and Student Activities	Expected Outcomes
Identification and Clarification	Teachers identify emerging slang lexicons and provide contextual clarification regarding the inappropriateness of such terms.	Students understand the situational boundaries of language use.
Narrative Intervention	Teachers present interactive stories using hand puppets or Smart TV media, predominantly integrating standard Indonesian vocabulary.	An attentional shift from negative language patterns to polite linguistic models.
Active Role Playing	Students are involved in portraying characters who utilize "magic words" (<i>please, sorry, thank you</i>) within the story's plot.	Concrete experience in applying polite vocabulary in social contexts.
Word Replacement	Teachers provide immediate standard word equivalents whenever a student spontaneously utters slang in class.	Reconstruction of the student's linguistic memory from slang toward standard language.
Positive Reinforcement	Offering appreciation or praise when students successfully use polite language in their daily interactions.	Cultivation of intrinsic motivation to maintain linguistic politeness.

Teachers also utilized the school's Smart TV facilities and storytelling sessions following the delivery of instructional materials as a means to internalize standard Indonesian, aligned with the narratives presented in the stories (Patria et al., 2021).

**Figure1. Utilization Of School Smart TV Facilities****Figure 2. Enthusiasm of Students**

Strategic Teacher Responses in Reducing Slang

Beyond narrative storytelling, teachers implemented direct response mechanisms when children spontaneously uttered slang outside of storytelling sessions. This approach is pedagogical rather than punitive, emphasizing the child's situational awareness.

Table 3. Response Mechanisms

Response Form	Mechanism	Psychological Impact on Children
Gentle Admonition	Reminding students that certain words are inappropriate for use.	Cultivates a sense of linguistic inhibition (reluctance to reuse the term).
Linguistic Substitution	Providing standard word equivalents immediately after slang is uttered.	Enriches the student's repertoire of standard vocabulary.
Reinforcement	Offering appreciation or praise when students communicate politely.	Motivates the habitual repetition of polite language patterns.
Contextual Clarification	Explaining the unsuitability of specific terms within the school environment.	Develops situational awareness in linguistic choices.



Figure 3. Teachers Providing Direct Guidance And Applying Word-Replacement Mechanisms

Obstacles and Contextual Collaboration

Although the counter-linguistic strategy implemented yielded significantly positive outcomes in the classroom, the findings reveal that educators still confront formidable external obstacles. Field data indicates that the school's linguistic ecosystem is constantly challenged by the rapid evolution of social media algorithms and age-inappropriate entertainment trends. A prime example observed during the study is the language and aggressive subcultural aesthetics found in "K-Pop Demon Hunters", which heavily permeates the children's home environments. Because schools cannot completely censor digital consumption outside school hours, the infiltration of this slang remains high. When the frequency of inappropriate language became concerning or when children showed a lack of remorse after mimicking harsh words, teachers deployed a collaborative strategy with parents to ensure consistency in language monitoring. This challenge and the subsequent collaborative response were clearly articulated by the Teacher during the interview session.

"We can control what they say at school using puppets and storybooks, but the biggest hurdle is when they go home. Many students are heavily exposed to trends like 'K-Pop Demon Hunters' on YouTube by their older siblings. When they brought terms like 'babi' or 'njir' to school and didn't even feel sorry about it, we knew we couldn't work alone. We immediately established direct communication with the parents to align our word-replacement strategy at home." (Interview, January 19, 2026).

This finding implies that a counter-linguistic strategy cannot operate in physical isolation; its sustainability depends on ecological synchronization between the school and home environments. When children encounter highly engaging digital content, they experience a conflict of linguistic models between the animated screen and the physical classroom. If the home environment remains passive, the slang vocabulary habits will crystallize and override the school's intervention. This mechanism aligns with contemporary literature which argues that conventional classroom discipline consistently fails against digital pollution unless supported by cross-environment reinforcement. Active communication and consistent language monitoring between teachers and parents are mandatory to structurally block the re-emergence of digital colloquialisms in early childhood (Oktaviani et al., 2023). Furthermore, involving parents when children exhibit a lack of remorse is a critical step in building positive discipline, helping the child internalize emotional awareness and speech self-regulation across different social settings (Rohmah et al., 2025) (Mutmainnah et al., 2025).

Findings demonstrate that slang imitation in early childhood is not merely a common linguistic phenomenon but a consequence of an unfiltered digital ecosystem (Sebayang et al., 2024). This discussion dissects how the Counter-Linguistic strategy works as an instrument for negative language reduction. Analysis of Slang Imitation as a Digital Media Impact the imitation of slang such as "*njir*" and "*anjay*" by Group B children constitutes a form of digital mimicry that transcends spontaneous behavioral observation. Psycholinguistically, this indicates that massive exposure via platforms like YouTube and TikTok intervenes in the language acquisition process during the pre-operational stage (Narti et al., 2024). During this "golden age," children possess high imitative capacity, absorbing verbal symbols without adequate cognitive filters regarding semantic meaning (Panggabean et al., 2025).

This "linguistic pollution" is exacerbated by age-inappropriate trends, such as *K-Pop Demon Hunters*, which influence speech styles and imitation behaviors. The use of harsh terms like "*babi*" indicates that the school environment is vulnerable to external contamination. Consequently, the teacher's role as a primary filter is crucial. Through the Counter-Linguistic strategy, teachers build a systematic defense mechanism, providing a linguistic "counter-weight" through formal vocabulary.



Figure 4. Group Discussion Activities

The Use Of Interactive Storytelling As a Counter-Linguistic Instrument

From a sociolinguistic perspective, slang usage is an attempt by children to construct a social identity aligned with "cool" digital trends. The Counter-Linguistic strategy works by deconstructing positive associations with slang and replacing them with polite language models that carry stronger emotional reinforcement through story characters. This prevents the distortion of standard language skills which are vital for future academic communication. This strategy is highly effective because it is persuasive rather than repressive (Khoirunisa, 2022)

In its practical implementation, the teacher structures the interactive storytelling into a systematic pedagogical framework that gradually refines and elevates the children's language capabilities through three deeply interconnected dimensions. First, the optimization of children's language skills begins with acoustic and phonological stimulation, where the teacher utilizes physical media such as hand puppets and storybooks delivered with dynamic vocal variations, expressive intonations, and structural onomatopoeia. This rich auditory input successfully shifts the children's primary focus away from informal digital dictions toward formal, standard Indonesian phonemes. By

actively listening to these structured narratives, children naturally absorb correct pronunciation, articulation, and sentence structures, which in turn enhances their receptive language capacity.

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Furthermore, this linguistic refinement advances toward interactive semantic clarification. Rather than delivering a rigid, one-way monologue, the teacher establishes a highly interactive dialogue throughout the storytelling session. When children encounter or spontaneously bring up slang terms derived from social media, the teacher immediately leverages the ongoing story plot to provide real-time, contextual clarification regarding the inappropriateness and derogatory meanings of those words. Through this gentle linguistic deconstruction, children do not merely memorize passive classroom rules; instead, they actively construct situational and semantic awareness, allowing them to independently differentiate which vocabularies are ethically, socially, and academically appropriate to use.

Finally, the internalization of language habits is realized through expressive role-playing and memory reconstruction. The teacher actively involves the children in the narrative by prompting them to role-play specific polite characters or repeat "magic words" (such as please, sorry, and thank you) within the story's conflict resolution. This hands-on interactivity provides concrete, live learning experiences for the Group B students. When children choose to mimic the polite characters instead of the digital screen, a cognitive shift occurs wherein the negative slang in their linguistic memory is systematically replaced and reconstructed with polite, communicative standard alternatives. This continuous reinforcement effectively habituates speech self-regulation, prompting children to voluntarily utilize respectful language in their daily peer interactions.

Table 4. Strategy Analysis

Discussion Element	Empirical Findings at TK Cordova	Theoretical Analysis & Relevant Research
Acquisition Mechanism	Students spontaneously mimic slang derived from YouTube, TikTok, and their immediate family environment.	Intensive digital media exposure triggers "digital mimicry" in children, occurring without a cognitive filter.
Narrative Intervention	Teachers utilize storytelling with hand puppets and Smart TV media to integrate polite language.	Interactive storytelling enhances emotional engagement, which facilitates the internalization of moral values and linguistic norms.
Corrective Response	Implementation of gentle admonitions, word replacement, and positive discipline (e.g., the use of <i>Istighfar</i>).	A positive discipline approach is more effective in shaping long-term behavior compared to punitive measures (punishment).
Behavioral Impact	Students begin to monitor their speech, use "magic words" (<i>please, sorry, thank you</i>), and remind peers to stay polite.	A dual process occurs: the deconstruction of negative language and the reconstruction of polite language within the child's memory.

Behavioral Transformation through Strategic Responses

A key finding is the "Word Replacement" technique, where teachers immediately provide formal equivalents when children utter slang. This enriches the child's vocabulary without suppressing their confidence to speak. Psycholinguistically, this immediate, non-punitive correction is highly effective in interrupting the habituation of inappropriate expressions before they become internalized into the child's long-term memory. Psycholinguistically, the instant provision of standard equivalents serves as a positive linguistic stimulus that guides children to understand the precise

functionality of formal language during daily social interactions (Sitepu et al., 2023). Furthermore, positive reinforcement motivates children to repeat polite behaviors. Consistent verbal appreciation and positive reinforcement within the classroom create an emotionally safe environment for children, which triggers intrinsic motivation to selectively choose polite dictions in order to gain positive social validation from their surroundings (Mufarrohah & Suyadi, 2025).

The application of positive discipline through reciting *istighfar* adds a spiritual dimension to character education, fostering awareness rather than fear. This spiritual-based habituation builds early childhood self-regulation and emotional intelligence. When children are guided to reflect upon their speech through the utterance of *kalimat thayyibah* (*istighfar*), they do not feel judged or cornered; instead, they are encouraged to construct an internal locus of control over their communication habits (Nurhalim, 2017). This integrated responsive strategy proves to be significantly more effective in reducing verbal deviations in early childhood compared to conventional repressive methods or rigid punishments, which frequently trigger communicative resistance or defensive reactions in young children (Tanjung & Utami, 2025).

Challenges and the Necessity of Parental Synergy

The greatest obstacle remains the rapid pace of social media influence. Synergy between school and home is the key to success. The primary hurdle in mitigating digital linguistic pollution today is the massive and unmonitored screen time at home, where digital media algorithms constantly supply children with popular, inappropriate colloquialisms. A permissive domestic environment that lacks strict boundaries on gadget usage significantly accelerates the imitation of aggressive slang that is unsafe for early childhood development (Mardiyah, 2023). Without parental support in monitoring digital consumption at home, school-based efforts will face significant hurdles due to inconsistent linguistic environments. This misalignment of language models between the educational institution and the home environment leads to cognitive distortions, causing children to experience situational confusion regarding proper ethical communication standards (Fajariyah et al., 2018). Consequently, the sustainability of this counter-linguistic strategy heavily demands strong ecological synchronization. Symbiotic collaboration between teachers and parents—facilitated by periodic updates and the synchronization of word-replacement techniques at home—establishes a consistent linguistic fortress for the child (M. Lestari & Widjayatri, 2025). Through the active involvement of parents as the primary gatekeepers of digital consumption at home, the habituation of standard and respectful language initiated at school can be structurally reinforced, thereby preventing the permanent crystallization of negative digital dialects during the critical golden age of development (Anggraini, 2021).

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the Counter-Linguistic strategy through interactive storytelling is an effective method for reducing slang imitation in early childhood at Cordova Kindergarten. The phenomenon of slang usage—ranging from terms such as "*njir*" and "*anjay*" to harsh profanities like "*babi*"—is identified as being rooted in massive exposure to digital media (YouTube and TikTok) (Novianti et al., 2026). and external influences outside the school environment. Through a storytelling approach utilizing creative media such as hand puppets and Smart TVs, educators successfully redirected children's attention from negative language toward the use of formal and polite vocabulary.

The success of this strategy is driven by pedagogical response mechanisms, including gentle reminders, word replacement, and positive reinforcement. The implementation of positive discipline such as habituating the acts of apologizing, seeking permission, and reciting *istighfar* as a form of reflection has proven effective in developing children's situational awareness. The observable impact is a positive behavioral shift, where children have begun to regulate their speech, remind peers to avoid harsh language, and consistently utilize polite dictions such as "please," "sorry," and "thank you" in their daily classroom interactions.

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