

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE READING-WRITING PROGRAM IN IMPROVING EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY SKILLS IN PLAYGROUPS

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Abstract

This research focuses on the effectiveness of a reading and writing program in improving literacy skills in early childhood in play groups. Literacy is an important basic skill in children's cognitive and academic development. Therefore, a well-designed reading and writing program can be a powerful tool in facilitating early childhood literacy development. Through literature studies, this research collects and analyzes various data sources, including academic journals, articles and relevant books to identify various approaches and methodologies in teaching reading and writing for early childhood and evaluate their effectiveness. The research results show that implementing a reading and writing program that involves rich interactions, interesting learning materials, and learning approaches that are appropriate to the child's developmental stage can significantly improve children's literacy skills. This program includes a variety of techniques, such as storytelling, word games, letter and sound recognition, and fun writing activities. The involvement of parents and caregivers in this process was also found to have a significant positive impact. However, challenges in implementing the program were also identified, including the need for adequate resources, comprehensive teacher training, and adaptation of the program to individual children's needs. The conclusion of this literature research shows that an effective reading and writing program requires collaboration between teachers, parents and children, as well as a strong understanding of the principles of effective literacy teaching based on the child's stage of development.

Keywords: Early Childhood Literacy, Effectiveness of Reading and Writing Programs, Play Groups

INTRODUCTION

In the midst of an era that prioritizes information and technology, early literacy is considered an important key in determining a person's success in the future. Literacy skills are not only related to basic reading and writing abilities, but are also related to the ability to understand, process and use the

information obtained for various purposes. Reading and writing programs in play groups are one way to introduce and develop literacy skills in early childhood (Widiasmara, 2023). Programs like this aim to provide fun learning while still instilling a strong foundation for literacy skills.

A number of studies show that introducing literacy skills from an early age can have a significant positive impact on children's future cognitive and academic development. Children who take part in quality literacy programs are expected to have an advantage when entering their formal education (Bigozzi et al., 2023). Therefore, the effectiveness of reading and writing programs in play group settings requires further research to determine what components are most effective in supporting children's development.

In Indonesia, improving the quality of early childhood education has become a special concern for the government. Implementation of effective reading and writing programs in playgroups can be one initiative to achieve this improvement. Although many playgroups have implemented literacy programs, there is still significant variation in the approaches, materials and teaching methods used. Therefore, research on the effectiveness of reading and writing programs is very important to provide recommendations for best practices that can improve children's literacy (Adam, 2024).

By recognizing the importance of the golden age in early childhood in instilling the basics of literacy skills, playgroups are in a strategic position to provide the right stimulation (Tekman & Yeniasır, 2023). Reading and writing programs specifically designed for young children must be able to adapt to their cognitive and psychomotor development stages, including taking advantage of their natural tendencies to play and explore. Fun and interactive approaches, such as role playing, picture stories, and songs, have been proven to increase children's interest in literacy activities (Karaçuha & Çebi, 2024). On the other hand, an environment rich in reading materials and other learning resources also plays an important role in supporting the effectiveness of the program.

The role of teachers or educators in reading and writing programs cannot be ignored. It requires teaching staff who not only have good literacy skills, but also a deep understanding of psychology and early childhood education. Training and ongoing professional development for teachers is a key aspect to ensure that they are ready to implement effective teaching methods and strategies. The teacher's active involvement in designing and adapting learning materials according to the needs and interests of each child is a determining factor in the success of the program (Dorn & Jones, 2023).

Apart from that, the involvement of parents and the community is also very important in supporting reading and writing programs in play groups. Parents who are actively involved in the teaching and learning process of their children at home and provide emotional support and learning motivation, have a significant influence on children's learning outcomes. Collaboration between play groups and parents and other community members in creating an environment conducive to learning can strengthen children's literacy experiences, both at school and at home (Wohlwend, 2022).

By considering all these factors, research on the effectiveness of literacy programs in playgroups will provide valuable insight into how best to develop and implement such programs (Pilongo et al., 2024). The hope is that the findings from this research can be used to guide educational policies, teaching practices, and curriculum development aimed at increasing literacy in early childhood. Thus, the reading and writing program in play groups is not just an academic activity, but also a real effort to prepare future generations who are literate and ready to face future challenges (Siebert-Evenstone, 2024).

Furthermore, this research will likely provide insight into how certain approaches in literacy programs can contribute to literacy skills, such as phonemic awareness, reading comprehension abilities, and vocabulary development. The role of the teacher and a conducive learning environment also act as important variables that influence the effectiveness of this program. Through this background, it is hoped that this research can contribute to creating an effective pathway for increasing literacy in early childhood in Indonesia, especially in the context of play groups.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study in this research is qualitative with literature. The literature study research method is a research approach that involves the analysis and synthesis of information from various literature sources that are relevant to a particular research topic. Documents taken from literature research are journals, books and references related to the discussion you want to research (Earley, M.A. 2014; Snyder, H. 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Theories and Approaches Relating to Teaching Literacy in Early Childhood

Teaching literacy to early childhood is a key component in basic education that paves the way for academic success later in life. Various

theories and approaches have been developed to understand the best processes for teaching children to read and write in the early stages of their lives. Among the most influential theories are the Whole Language Theory which emphasizes language learning in a complete and meaningful context, and the Phonics Theory which focuses on recognizing and using the relationship between letters and their sounds in learning to read (Ridley & Rowe, 2024).

The Whole Language approach supports the idea that children learn literacy best when they understand that writing is a form of communication. In this approach, literacy is taught through the comprehensive and concrete use of texts, such as storybooks, notes, and signs, rather than through rote drills or phoneme isolation. This approach argues that children will learn reading and writing skills more effectively if they see them as part of enjoyable and meaningful daily activities, not as tasks separate from social contexts (Caetano-Silva et al., 2024).

In contrast, Phonics Theory emphasizes the importance of a systematic understanding of phonemes (sound units of language) and their relationship to graphemes (letters or groups of letters). Systematic phonics teaching is seen as a critical way to support children in developing efficient decoding skills, which are a basic step in the reading process. In this approach, children learn through a structured sequence of skills, from letter-sound recognition, sound combining, to reading words, phrases, and complete texts (Norling, 2024). This approach emphasizes that a solid understanding of the relationship between letters and their sounds is a necessary foundation for developing effective literacy.

Each of these theories and approaches has its own values and limitations, so many early childhood education practitioners argue that the most effective approach may be a combination of both methodologies (Pantaleo, 2023). A balanced approach, which pays attention to systematic phonics teaching along with rich engagement with literature and texts in fun and meaningful situations, can provide the most complete support for a child's literacy development. Thus, integrating best practices from various theories and approaches allows children to experience a holistic and meaningful learning process that not only develops their reading and writing skills, but also a love of literacy that will last a lifetime (Page, 2022).

The integration of Whole Language and Phonics theories in literacy teaching offers young children a rich and varied experience in learning language. One effective approach that emerged from this synergy is the

Balanced Literacy approach. This approach includes systematic phonics instruction combined with meaningful reading and writing activities. Children are invited to explore texts from various genres, participate in writing-rich environments, and practice literacy skills in real and relevant contexts (Kim & Jang, 2023). In this context, literacy education is no longer a linear process, but becomes a dynamic learning ecosystem where children develop language skills, critical thinking, and a love of learning.

Effective literacy teaching in early childhood also relies heavily on understanding child development. Constructivism theory, as proposed by Piaget, highlights the importance of active learning in which children construct knowledge through interaction with the world around them. In a literacy context, this means that children must be given opportunities to interact with texts in meaningful ways; they learn from doing, experiencing, and reflecting on their experiences. Educators who use a constructivist approach will provide various types of reading materials and writing activities that promote exploration and inquiry, recognizing that each child is unique and learns in different ways (No & Kim, 2023).

Meanwhile, Vygotsky's Social Cognitive theory also provides valuable insights into literacy teaching. This theory emphasizes the importance of the social environment and interaction in learning. Vygotsky introduced the concept of the zone of proximal development, which is the distance between what children can achieve on their own and what they can achieve with the help of others (Dunham et al., 2024). In a literacy context, this could mean assistance from a teacher or other adult when a child solves words, understands text, or when writing. The active involvement of these more competent adults can guide children through learning challenges and motivate them to reach their full potential.

By integrating principles from Whole Language, Phonics, Constructivism and Social Cognitive theories, literacy education in early childhood can be directed to achieve optimal results. Every child should be given the opportunity to explore language and literacy in an encouraging and relevant way, while gradually building the foundational skills necessary to become a competent reader and writer. Paying attention to the uniqueness of each child and providing appropriate support is key to building a strong foundation in literacy that will support the child's future academic and personal success (Williamson et al., 2023).

Best Strategies and Methods in Implementing Reading-Writing Programs in Playgroups

In implementing reading and writing programs in play groups, it is important to choose strategies and methods that are appropriate to the children's age and developmental stage. Key strategies include a game-based approach, a literacy-rich environment, and learning differentiation.

First, a game-based approach is very effective for teaching young children. Games that give children the opportunity to investigate letters, sounds, and words through fun activities can increase their interest and motivation to learn to read and write. For example, letter puzzles, memory games involving letters or words, and board games that incorporate literacy skills can strengthen letter recognition and phonemic awareness. It is important to choose games that stimulate children's active involvement, allowing them to learn in a meaningful and enjoyable context (Winberg et al., 2023).

Second, creating a literacy-rich environment can positively influence the development of children's reading and writing skills. The room is filled with a variety of reading materials, from storybooks, labels, posters, to children's magazines, encouraging children to explore and interact with texts in various forms. This kind of environment gives children the opportunity to engage with written language in their daily lives. In addition, giving children access to writing tools such as pencils, crayons, and paper encourages them to try writing, be it drawing, writing letters, or even trying to write simple words (Peungcharoenkun & Waluyo, 2024).

Third, implementing learning differentiation in reading and writing programs is very important because each child develops at a different pace. Paying attention to individual differences between children and adapting teaching methods to meet their specific needs can improve learning effectiveness. This may include using a variety of learning materials, adjusting the difficulty level of activities, or providing more one-on-one help for children who need additional support. Educators must be observational and responsive to children's interests and learning needs, using ongoing observation and assessment to inform their teaching practices (Mokgadi & Hove, 2024).

Apart from the strategies already mentioned, it is also important to involve the family in the child's learning to read and write process. Collaborating with parents and providing them with resources and strategies to support learning at home is essential. Educators can provide guidance and

activities that can be done with children at home, such as reading stories, playing word games, and inviting children to write greeting cards or shopping lists (Hugo & Bachisi, 2024). In this way, children will have consistent learning opportunities not only in playgroups but also at home, strengthening the concepts and skills learned.

Additionally, using technology as a learning tool can also be very beneficial. Educational apps, interactive games, and e-books can be a great way to make the reading and writing learning experience more interesting for children. Educators must select and supervise the use of these technologies to ensure appropriate content and maintain a balance between learning with and without screens (Postalli et al., 2023).

Successful implementation of literacy programs also depends on a routine and structured approach. Establishing a daily routine that includes dedicated time for reading and writing will give children the certainty and structure they need to practice and develop new skills. These scheduled activities also help children understand the importance of literacy in their daily lives (Malova et al., 2022).

By integrating play, a literacy-rich environment, personalization of learning, parental involvement, as well as wise use of technology and establishing regular routines, reading and writing programs in playgroups can provide a holistic and enjoyable learning experience for pre-school children. Successful implementation of this program will be an important step in supporting children's literacy development in their first years of education (Collett, 2022).

Program Outcomes Related to Increasing Literacy

Well-designed literacy education programs have the potential to make a significant impact on students' reading and writing abilities. One common outcome of such programs is improvement in text comprehension and processing skills. Students who engage in structured literacy activities often demonstrate better abilities in comprehending reading, being able to follow and analyze narratives, and think critically about the information they receive (Uleanya, 2024). This not only helps them in language subjects but also across the curriculum, enabling them to succeed in other academic areas.

In addition to these qualitative improvements, there are often quantitative improvements in literacy skills, reflected in standardized test scores and assessments. Effective programs are often characterized by measurable progress in specific skills such as word knowledge, spelling ability,

sentence comprehension, and writing ability. Learning focused on literacy can also provide students with a strong foundation in skills that are important for long-term academic success, such as the ability to read quickly and efficiently, which is key to accessing various areas of knowledge (Morse et al., 2024).

However, the most sustainable outcome of a literacy program may be the development of a lifelong reading habit and a positive attitude toward learning. When children are encouraged to enjoy literature and find joy in literacy, they often become more avid readers and continue to hone their literacy skills far beyond the formal classroom setting. This includes intellectual curiosity, interest in a variety of genres and topics, and independence in pursuing their own learning process. When literacy education programs successfully instill these values, they provide students with the tools necessary not only to succeed in today's schools but also to become competent and knowledgeable participants in society at large (Zhou, 2023).

The effects of literacy improvement programs are not limited to the academic environment alone but also influence aspects of students' social and emotional lives. Strong literacy skills increase self-confidence and social interaction skills, because students who are able to transfer their thoughts and feelings into words more effectively tend to be better at expressing themselves and understanding others. This facilitates more active participation in group discussions and other social activities, strengthening communication skills that are important in all phases of life, from school to the professional realm (Sibanda, 2022).

On a broader scale, successful literacy programs also contribute to reducing educational and social inequalities. By providing more equitable access to quality educational resources, students from various backgrounds can have equal opportunities to develop literacy skills. This is important in increasingly complex and globalized societies, where strong reading and writing skills are becoming a prerequisite for accessing broader opportunities and for full participation in the knowledge economy (Strong & Anderson, 2023).

Finally, literacy improvement programs open the door to innovation and creativity. Students who develop a love of reading and writing are often more open to new and different ideas, ready to explore and welcome change. They are also better at problem solving and lateral thinking, which are needed in almost all types of jobs in the future (Yılmaz & Melekoğlu, 2023). By ensuring that today's children are equipped with solid literacy skills, we pave

the way for a generation of critical thinkers, innovators, and leaders who will lead society towards progress.

CONCLUSION

Conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the reading and writing program in improving early childhood literacy skills in play groups show that the program has a significant and positive role in building a strong literacy foundation in children. This program not only helps in developing basic reading and writing skills, but also broadly contributes to the child's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Through structured and fun reading and writing activities, young children are able to acquire essential language skills and increase their confidence in using language to communicate.

The program also plays an important role in narrowing educational gaps from an early age, giving every child, no matter their background, an equal opportunity to succeed in further education and life as a whole. The importance of an individual approach and activities that spark creativity is also emphasized, as this encourages children to express themselves and fosters a curiosity and love of learning that will take them far throughout their lives.

In addition, literacy programs for early childhood have the potential to inspire lifelong learning and pave the way for the development of critical and innovative thinkers who are able to adapt and contribute to an ever-changing society. Thus, investment in literacy programs for early childhood playgroups holds the key to not only improving individual literacy skills, but also to driving broader social and economic progress.

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