

THE HABIT OF READING STORY BOOKS IN IMPROVING EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY ABILITIES AT RAIHAN KARINA KINDERGARTEN MEDAN TEMBUNG

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the role of teachers and parents in fostering the habit of reading storybooks to improve early childhood literacy at Raihan Karina Kindergarten, Medan Tembung. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The research subjects consisted of 4–6 parents who actively accompany their children reading at home, 2–3 teachers involved in reading activities at school, and 4–6 early childhood children who regularly participate in storybook reading activities. The results show that interactive reading activities at school, as well as active parental involvement at home, have a significant influence on increasing children's reading interest, vocabulary mastery, and comprehension. The success of the literacy program depends heavily on the synergy between the school and home environments and the availability of interesting and age-appropriate reading materials..

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INTRODUCTIONS

Childhood is a crucial phase in establishing the foundations of literacy, which includes the ability to read, write, speak, listen, and comprehend information. At the age of five to six, children show rapid development in recognizing letters, words, and concepts through pictures and stories (Novrani et al., 2021). One effective approach to supporting this development is interactive picture book reading, which not only introduces vocabulary and sentence structure but also instills moral values and story comprehension through discussion activities, role-playing, or drawing characters (Bambang, 2019).

Research shows that active interaction in reading can improve language skills and children's emotional and social engagement (Weadman et al., 2023; Mutiara & Noorgianib, 2022). However, challenges such as children's preoccupation with electronic devices and limited reading facilities at home still hinder the habit of early reading (Rohana, 2022). Furthermore, most previous studies have not explored the active role of parents in the interactive reading process.

Therefore, this study focuses on storybook reading habits at Raihan Karina Kindergarten, emphasizing the involvement of parents and teachers in creating a participatory literacy environment. This approach is expected to uncover more effective strategies for improving early childhood literacy both at home and at school, while also addressing the gaps in previous research that tended to focus on passive reading activities.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to describe in depth how the habit of reading storybooks can improve the literacy skills of early childhood children at Raihan Karina Kindergarten, Medan Tembung. This approach was chosen because the focus of the research is to understand social phenomena contextually and exploratively, rather than measuring variables statistically. This research is descriptive in nature because it aims to provide a concrete and detailed picture of reading practices implemented in the school and home environments.

The data collected consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from in-depth interviews with teachers and parents and direct observations of storybook reading activities with children. Secondary data were obtained from relevant documents such as school literacy activity reports, curricula, and lists of reading books used in the teaching and learning process. Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences and understandings of informants, participant observation of reading interactions, and documentation of teaching materials and literacy activities.

The data analysis process in this study followed the stages developed by Miles and Huberman: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Operationally, data reduction was carried out by filtering important information from interviews, observations, and documentation, then grouping the data based on relevant themes, such as teacher reading strategies, parental involvement patterns, and children's responses to reading activities. For example, information from teachers about children's increased interest in reading when stories were read to with a certain expression was separated and grouped separately. The reduced data was then presented in descriptive narrative form and thematic tables, such as tables comparing teacher reading strategies with children's responses. The final stage is drawing conclusions and verifying, where researchers draw meaning from the data patterns found and then verify them through source triangulation (data from teachers, parents, and observations) and method triangulation (interviews, observations, documentation). Member checking is also conducted by confirming preliminary findings with informants to ensure the validity and accuracy of the data obtained.

Using a holistic and in-depth approach, this research hopes to fully illustrate how the habit of reading storybooks can shape children's literacy skills from an early age. The primary focus is on how the active role of parents and teachers can foster a sustainable literacy culture through structured and enjoyable interactions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

The results of this study were obtained through three data collection techniques: observations of classroom reading activities, interviews with Raihan Karina Kindergarten teachers, and interviews with parents of students. These three techniques were used to complement each other and form data triangulation, resulting in a comprehensive and valid picture of early childhood storybook reading habits.

Observations showed that book reading activities occurred routinely every morning. Children not only read individually but also engaged in story retelling sessions, which served to reinforce narrative comprehension. During one observation session, a child named A (5 years old) was able to retell the story "The Rabbit and the Lion" in his own words, demonstrating internalization of the text's content and narrative construction skills. The teacher facilitated this activity with an expressive and appreciative approach, evident in the applause and praise given when the child successfully answered questions.

Interviews with four teachers revealed that the methods used not only emphasized letter recognition skills but also developed children's empathy, imagination, and interpretation skills. One teacher stated: "I always ask, 'If you

were the character, what would you do?' so they learn to think and express their opinions." Teachers also acknowledged challenges, such as low reading interest in some children due to the influence of gadgets.

Interviews with six parents revealed awareness of the importance of reading books, but implementation is not yet uniform. One mother said: "I often read to my children before bed, but sometimes it gets tiring, especially when my child asks to play with their phone." This suggests that despite the intention, practice is still influenced by the dynamics of household life and digital media competition..

Discussion

Teachers' Literacy Program at School

The literacy program at Raihan Karina Kindergarten emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach, where reading activities serve not only to introduce texts but also to develop children's social-emotional skills. The combination of reading activities with story discussions and children's free expression aligns with Vygotsky's theory of scaffolding, where teachers provide support according to the child's Zone of Proximate Development (ZPD). This is also supported by the teacher's practice of reflective dialogue, which encourages children to not only understand the story but also interpret it from their own perspective.

The teacher's expressive literacy practices have proven effective in maintaining children's attention. This confirms the findings of Chasanatun (2023), who stated that an affective approach to reading strengthens intrinsic motivation and accelerates vocabulary acquisition. However, this study also found that this motivation is unstable without consistent support and reinforcement from the environment outside of school, particularly the home. Furthermore, the teachers at TK Raihan Karina monitor and document each child's literacy progress. Improvements in reading fluency, word and letter recognition, and story comprehension are periodically analyzed. These data are used as the basis for selecting the next set of reading materials, ensuring that books remain aligned with each child's interests and abilities. This practice reflects a responsive and individualized learning approach and supports Chasanatun's (2023) findings, which highlight that consistent, interactive, and enjoyable reading habits are more effective in developing early childhood reading interest. Literacy, as emphasized by numerous studies, cannot be instilled through rote memorization or formal assignments alone it must be nurtured through emotionally engaging and meaningful experiences.

The Role of the Home Environment in Shaping Children's Literacy

Home reading habits appear to be heavily influenced by socioeconomic factors and family dynamics. Time constraints, fatigue, and limited access to reading materials are major barriers. This phenomenon demonstrates that children's literacy cannot be solely the responsibility of schools. As explained by Marie et al. (2023), developing children's literacy requires an active partnership between schools and homes. School initiatives to provide reading recommendations and home reading guides are commendable as a form of cross-sector literacy collaboration.

However, children's resistance to books, replaced by a preference for gadgets, demonstrates the challenges of the digital age. This cannot be addressed simply by admonition; an adaptive approach is needed. Digital literacy integrated with interactive content, such as audio storytelling or educational game-based reading apps, could be a solution to bridge children's interest in technology and literacy, as suggested by Yenti et al. (2023).

Factors Influencing Reading Habits

There are four main factors that influence children's reading habits: (1) the quality of reading materials, (2) the role of adult figures as role models, (3) a supportive reading environment, and (4) technology integration. These four factors are interrelated and demonstrate that literacy is the result of a complex social system.

Bandura's social learning theory reinforces the importance of active adult involvement. When children see teachers or parents reading enthusiastically, they tend to imitate them. Therefore, creating reading role models at school and at home is a simple yet impactful intervention.

Meanwhile, a positive learning environment (both physical and emotional) is also a catalyst for literacy growth. Schools have begun to implement this, but the home remains a weak point. More personalized and sustainable strategies for parental involvement are needed, for example through short story-reading workshops, rotating book loans, or family reading projects.

Implications for Theory and Practice

The findings of this study offer significant contributions to the development of early childhood literacy theory and practice. Theoretically, the results enrich Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which describes the gap between what a child can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance from adults or more capable peers. In this context, the roles of parents and teachers as learning partners are crucial in helping children reach their full literacy potential. Intensive social interactions through shared reading activities serve as an effective means of stimulating children's cognitive, linguistic, and social development.

Practically, the study affirms that literacy is not merely an academic skill but an integral part of a child's daily life. Therefore, schools as formal educational institutions must develop literacy programs that go beyond learning targets and focus on creating enjoyable, meaningful, and sustainable reading experiences. Literacy instruction should be designed in a way that makes children feel excited, engaged, and intrinsically motivated to read.

The research also highlights the importance of training and supporting parents so that they feel confident and capable of facilitating their children's literacy development at home. On the other hand, schools must expand access to reading materials, both in print and digital forms, to provide children with broad opportunities to explore the world through texts. The synergy between family and school becomes a key element in creating a sustainable literacy culture, ultimately contributing positively to the overall development of the child.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the habit of interactive storybook reading plays a significant role in enhancing early childhood literacy, particularly at TK Raihan Karina. Reading activities that actively involve both teachers and parents have been proven to strengthen children's language skills, story comprehension, and reading interest. More than just an academic activity, early literacy serves as a foundation for children's cognitive and social development. The findings of this research emphasize that the success of literacy programs largely depends on the collaboration between school and home. These results are essential for educators, parents, and policymakers as a basis for designing more effective and sustainable early childhood literacy strategies.

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