



The 2nd International Conference on Islam and Civilization (ICONIC)

October 25, 2025, Purwakarta, Indonesia

Available online at <https://iconic.staimuttaqien.ac.id/>

IMPROVING THE EARLY LITERACY SKILLS OF 5-6 YEAR OLD CHILDREN THROUGH THE USE OF READING BOX MEDIA AT ALAM PURWAKARTA KINDERGARTEN

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ISBN: 978-623-97987-1-0

Received: 01 October 2025

Accepted: 25 October 2025

Published: 21 January 2026

Abstract:

This study aims to improve the early literacy skills of 5-6 year old children through the use of reading boxes at Alam Purwakarta Kindergarten. The method used in this study is a quantitative approach in classroom action research (CAR) conducted in two cycles, each consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The subjects in this study were 14 children aged 5-6 years (group B). Data collection techniques included observation and documentation, using instruments such as checklists and child development achievement assessments. The results showed that the use of reading boxes as a teaching aid improved the early literacy skills of 5-6 year old children, with an average pre-cycle score of 52.7% in the beginning to develop (MB) category, increasing to 56.30% (MB) in cycle I, and then increasing again in cycle II to 69.78% in the developing as expected (BSH) category. Thus, it is evident that the reading box is effective in improving the early literacy skills of 5-6-year-old children in a fun way and can increase children's motivation to learn.

Keywords: *early literacy skills, reading box, children aged 5-6 years*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan literasi awal anak usia 5-6 tahun melalui penggunaan media reading box di TK Alam Purwakarta. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dalam penelitian tindakan kelas (PTK) yang dilaksanakan dua siklus yang masing-masing terdiri dari perencanaan, tindakan, observasi, dan refleksi. Subjek dalam penelitian ini adalah anak usia 5-6 tahun yang berjumlah 14 anak (kelompok B). Teknik pengumpulan data berupa observasi dan dokumentasi, dengan instrument yang digunakan yaitu lembar sheklist dan assessment pencapaian perkembangan anak. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemberian tindakan menggunakan media reading box memberikan perkembangan kemampuan literasi awal anak usia 5-6 tahun dengan nilai rata-rata awal pra siklus 52,7% berada dalam kategori mulai berkembang (MB) mulai meningkat pada kegiatan siklus I sebesar 56,30% (MB) dan kemudian terdapat peningkatan kembali pada siklus II 69,78% berada dalam kategori berkembang sesuai harapan (BSH). Dengan demikian, terbukti bahwa media reading box efektif untuk digunakan dalam meningkatkan kemampuan literasi awal anak usia 5-6 tahun dengan menyenangkan dan dapat meningkatkan motivasi belajar anak.

Kata Kunci: *kemampuan literasi awal, reading box, anak usia 5-6 tahun*

INTRODUCTION

Childhood is often referred to as the golden age, a period in which various fundamental aspects of life develop rapidly and complexly. This period shapes a person's personality and abilities in the future (Pohan et al., 2024). It is a period that should not be overlooked. In order for children to reach their full potential, appropriate stimulation is needed at this time in all areas of development. Based on Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System in chapter 1 article 1 point 1 page 2, it is stated that education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process so that students actively develop their potential to have spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, as well as the skills needed by themselves, the community, the nation, and the state (Law No. 20 of 2003).

Stimulation provided to early childhood can be done through education, whether in the form of formal education, non-formal education, or informal education. Law Number 20 of 2003 states that Early Childhood Education is the basic right of every child from birth to early childhood, with the aim of providing optimal stimulation to support the growth and development process of children (Mardiyani & Aulina, 2024).

This education aims to stimulate various aspects of child development, including physical and mental development, so that children are ready to face the next stage of education. Education has a major impact on children's language development, especially in terms of literacy. This process begins with the pre-reading or early literacy stage in children, such as letter recognition, then continues to the stage of reading syllables, words, and more complex writing. Mastering early reading skills, such as recognizing letters, understanding letter sounds, and being able to read sentences fluently, are important stages in building children's literacy skills. The process of early literacy development in children takes place gradually (Shidah et al., 2023).

The six aspects of early childhood development, consisting of religious and moral values, physical motor skills, cognitive skills, language skills, social-emotional skills, and artistic skills, are very important to develop from an early age. One of the most important developments to nurture is language skills (literacy), which enable children to communicate with others. This allows children to express their desires or feelings verbally or in writing. Therefore, early childhood is the right time to start building the foundations of early literacy, as it is very important as preparation for children to enter the next level of education. According to Whitehurst & Lonigan (2001: 11-28) in (Nurkhasanah & Utami, 2022), early literacy skills are children's knowledge, skills, and attitudes in reading and writing.

The level of developmental achievement for children aged 5-6 years based on the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 137 of 2014, regarding language aspects in the scope of literacy, is as follows: 1) children can name familiar letter symbols, 2) children can recognize the initial sounds of letters in objects around them, 3) children can name groups of pictures that have the same initial letter sounds, 4) children understand the relationship between sounds and letter shapes, 5) children can read and write their own names, 6) children can understand the meaning of words in a story (Permendikbud No. 137, 2014). Early literacy skills for children aged 5-6 years should include the ability to recognize letters, understand sounds, connect letters with words, and write them down.

However, observations made during lessons with the 14 children in group B2 at Alam Purwakarta Kindergarten show that the children's early literacy skills are still not optimal and some children still have difficulty understanding letters comprehensively. The children are not yet fully able to connect several letters into syllables or simple words. Even when the letters are successfully arranged into words, there are still children who find it difficult to read and write the words again. Based on this, early literacy skills still need additional stimulation through learning strategies that are more varied, enjoyable, and appropriate for the children's stage of development.

The learning process for early childhood is carried out through play, because learning that does not involve play tends to be effective in optimizing the psychological, physical, and sensory development of children who are in a period of rapid growth. Therefore, children need the opportunity to explore, move, and fulfill their basic needs, namely to play.

A learning method can be considered successful if it is supported by the use of effective media, which plays an important role in shaping concepts in children. This can be proven by the results of a study (Mardiyani & Aulina, 2024) entitled "Improving Early Reading Skills in Children Aged 5-6 Years Through the Roda Baca Media at KB Permata Sunnah". The researchers explained that games based on the reading wheel media can improve early reading skills in children aged 5-6 years at KB Permata Sunnah with a data percentage of 92%. The improvement in early reading skills in young children is greatly influenced by the use of interactive and innovative learning media.

One type of media that can be used for early literacy development is educational media or educational toys such as Reading Box. Reading Box is one type of media that will be used to stimulate early literacy skills in children aged 5-6 years at Alam Purwakarta Kindergarten. This Reading Box is a learning medium designed with various literacy play activities, such as recognizing and connecting letters, arranging letters into words, rewriting the formed words, and reading simple words. Through this medium, children not only learn about literacy, but they can also learn fine motor skills by arranging or rewriting the letters that are formed. The reading box medium is also in line with the thematic learning approach applied in kindergarten, where through this medium, teachers can adjust and combine literacy activities with themes that are close to children's lives.

Based on the problems found and the importance of early literacy stimulation for early childhood, the researcher was interested in conducting classroom action research using the Reading Box media. This study aims to determine the improvement in early literacy skills of 5-6 year old children at Alam Purwakarta Kindergarten through the use of Reading Box media. In addition, this study also aims to contribute to educators in selecting and designing innovative, enjoyable learning media that is appropriate for the developmental stage.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used by the author in this study was classroom action research. Classroom action research is action research conducted in the classroom during learning time with the aim of improving and enhancing the quality of learning that focuses on the learning process that occurs in the classroom (Solehan Arif & Shinta Oktafiana, 2023). This research was conducted in two cycles, namely cycle I and cycle II. The approach used was descriptive quantitative, utilizing numerical

data as an indicator of learning effectiveness to obtain information or results that could describe the phenomenon being studied and provide an overview to a wider population (Rahmadi, S.Ag., 2011).

Data collection in this study was conducted using observation and documentation. Observations were made by observing and recording the children's achievement levels during learning activities using the reading box media. Documentation was carried out when children were learning while playing with the reading box educational media. The documentation collection technique was in the form of photos or videos, which were used as supporting evidence in this study. The research design used was the Kemmis and Mc Taggart model. This model uses four steps in one cycle, consisting of 1) planning, 2) action, 3) observation, and 4) reflection. After one cycle is carried out, it is evaluated and then the action is repeated until the researcher is convinced that the action taken is successful (Solehan Arif & Shinta Oktafiana, 2023).

This research was conducted at Alam Purwakarta Kindergarten. The subjects in this study were 14 children in group B2 Saturnus at Alam Purwakarta Kindergarten, consisting of 8 girls and 6 boys with an average age of 5-6 years. The instruments used in this study were observation checklists and child development achievement assessments to measure early literacy skills using reading box educational media. The table of indicators of children's developmental achievements is in accordance with the standards for children's developmental achievement levels, as follows.

Table 1: Early literacy assessment indicators for ages 5-6

No	Indicator	Activity	Category			
			BB (1)	MB (2)	BSH (3)	BSB (4)
1	Literacy	Children can name familiar letters.				
		Children can understand the shapes and sounds of the first letters of the names of objects around them.				
		Children can connect pictures with words/writing.				
		Children can arrange letters into syllables or simple words.				
		Children can rewrite words that have been formed.				
		Children are able to read simple words.				

After the research data was collected, it was then analyzed to determine the average score. Data analysis began by measuring the level of achievement in child development. The children's achievement scores are as follows.

Table 2: Child achievement score categories

Child Achievement Score	Category
85-100	Very Good Development (BSB)
66-85	Expected Development (BSH)
50-65	Starting to Develop (MB)
>50	Not Yet Developing (BB)

Then, to determine the percentage of success achieved by each child, it can be calculated using the following formula.

$$\frac{F}{N} \times 100 = \text{Final Score}$$

Explanation :

F = Score obtained

N = Maximum score for the indicator (16)

100 = Fixed number

To determine the percentage of student achievement on a classical basis, use the following formula.

$$\text{Classical success rate} = \frac{\text{Number of children who received a "BSB" and "BSH"}}{\text{Total number of children}} \times 100\%$$

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Pre-cycle

Prior to implementation, researchers conducted classroom observations of 5-6 year olds at Alam Purwakarta Kindergarten to collect preliminary data on the learning process in improving early literacy. This pre-cycle stage involved children aged 5-6 years in class B2 at TK Alam Purwakarta. At this pre-cycle stage, activities to improve early literacy were still very limited, and the media used were worksheets. The purpose of this activity was to determine the children's learning outcomes before using the reading box educational media.

As shown by the initial observations before the research was conducted, the children's early literacy skills in naming familiar letter symbols, understanding the shapes and sounds of the initial letters of object names, understanding the relationship between sounds and letter shapes, rewriting letters that form words, and reading simple words showed that the pre-cycle score percentage was still far from expectations. The children's developmental achievements before the intervention were as follows.

Table 3: Results from the pre-cycle

No	Name	Final Score	Category
1.	RF	52,1	MB
2.	AR	50,5	BB
3.	AT	51,5	MB
4.	KL	48,8	BB
5.	LG	54	MB
6.	GC	58,8	MB
7.	MR	53	MB
8.	NL	51	MB
9.	NH	52,3	MB
10.	RA	52,5	MB
11.	RYA	54	MB
12.	UM	54,6	MB
13.	YA	54	MB
14.	ZI	51,3	MB
Number			738,4
Average Value			52,7%

The data calculations mentioned above show that the average achievement in early literacy skills was 52.7% with a total of 14 students. This average score falls into the beginning to develop (BB) category. Of the 14 students, 2 students were in the not yet developing (BB) category with a percentage score of 7.09%, and the remaining 12 students were in the developing (MB) category with a percentage score of 45.6%.

Based on these observation results, it is necessary to stimulate early literacy skills for children aged 5-6 years. One solution that can be done to improve early literacy skills in this study is to conduct learning activities while playing using the educational medium of a reading box. The next step is that children will be invited to play while learning through the educational medium of a reading box under the guidance of the researcher.

Cycle I

Based on the data on the development of children's early literacy skills obtained from the pre-action results, the researcher followed up by planning the implementation of actions through reading box play activities, which included recognizing and naming letter symbols, understanding and connecting the same initial letter sounds, arranging letters into words, rewriting the arranged words, and reading simple words. The games were adapted to the theme used on that day. This reading box play activity was used to improve the early literacy skills of 5-6-year-old children at Alam Purwakarta Kindergarten. The first cycle of activities was carried out during two meetings on August 25 and 27, 2022.

The early literacy skills of children in the reading box play activity in cycle I, which was carried out in two meetings, showed the results of their development, which can be observed in the following table.

Table 4: Results from cycle I

No	Name	Final Score	Category
1.	RF	56	MB
2.	AR	56,16	MB
3.	AT	55,6	MB
4.	KL	52,6	MB
5.	LG	59,3	MB
6.	GC	63	MB
7.	MR	55,3	MB
8.	NL	53,8	MB
9.	NH	55,6	MB
10.	RA	57	MB
11.	RYA	59	MB
12.	UM	58,3	MB
13.	YA	59,16	MB
14.	ZI	55,3	MB
Number			791,12
Average Value			56,30%

The data above shows that in cycle I, six indicators of early literacy skills were still in the developing (MB) category with an average score of 56.30%. Of the 14 students who obtained this average score, there were still two students who experienced problems or were still confused and needed assistance in playing with the reading box, where the children had problems in arranging letters into words and reading simple words. The other 12 students were able to understand and start participating in the reading box game without assistance. However, based on the data above, these 14 students were still in the developing (MB) category. Therefore, seeing that the results of cycle I had not fully improved, a reflection stage was carried out to implement cycle II with the hope that all children would be able to improve their early literacy skills through reading box activities. Based on the identified shortcomings, the researcher developed new strategies to address the issues encountered in Cycle I of the reading box activity. These strategies will be implemented in Cycle II.

Cycle II

After implementing the actions in cycle I, there was an overall improvement, but it still did not meet the criteria for success. Based on observations in cycle I, the weakness in the implementation of activities using the reading box media was that the children's motivation and focus were visible but not yet optimal. This was evident in the fact that the students were still confused and did not fully follow the instructions given when using the reading box media.

Then, after reflecting on cycle I, the researcher will continue with cycle II using the same medium, namely the reading box, but with a different strategy. Here, the children play with the reading box first by recognizing and naming letter symbols, understanding and connecting letters with the same initial sounds, arranging letters into words, rewriting the arranged words, and reading simple words. Playing with the reading box is adjusted to the theme used on that day. Then,

after playing with the reading box, the children are given worksheets to find numbers according to the colors arranged into a word.

The activities carried out in cycle II show the results of the children's early literacy development, which can be observed in the following table.

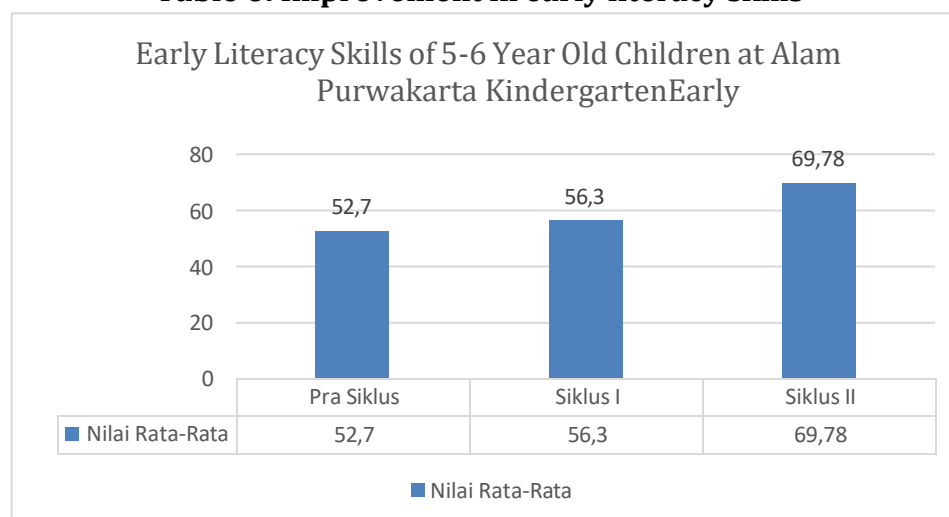
Table 5: Results from cycle II

No	Name	Final Score	Category
1.	RF	70,16	BSH
2.	AR	58	MB
3.	AT	71,16	BSH
4.	KL	59,16	MB
5.	LG	75,5	BSH
6.	GC	81,8	BSH
7.	MR	72,3	BSH
8.	NL	61,3	MB
9.	NH	67,8	BSH
10.	RA	69,8	BSH
11.	RYA	72,16	BSH
12.	UM	74,5	BSH
13.	YA	74,8	BSH
14.	ZI	68,6	BSH
Number			977,04
Average Value			69,78%

Based on the above data on Cycle II activities carried out on children aged 5-6 years, there was a significant increase in six indicators of early literacy skills. The average score was 69.78%, which falls into the category of developing as expected (BSH). From the average scores obtained by 14 students, 3 students were in the beginning to develop (MB) category and 11 students were in the developing as expected (BSH) category.

Therefore, based on this data, it can be seen that the implementation of Cycle II through reading box media play activities resulted in a considerable improvement in the early literacy skills of 5-6 year old children. Thus, it is not necessary to implement Cycle III. The comparison of the scores obtained by the children from the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II can be seen in the bar chart below.

Table 6: Improvement in early literacy skills



In the Pre-Cycle stage, the success rate of early literacy skills among 5-6 year olds at Alam Purwakarta Kindergarten was 52.7%. In Cycle I, the percentage increased to 56.3%, but the ability to read simple words was still inadequate. In Cycle II, the percentage rose to 69.78%. This shows success in improving early literacy skills. The Reading Box medium has proven to be an effective solution for improving early literacy skills in 5-6 year old children at TK Alam Purwakarta.

From the analysis of the study on improving the early literacy skills of 5-6 year old children at TK Alam Purwakarta using the Reading Box medium, children can achieve general literacy indicators, namely 1) Children can recognize and name familiar letter symbols, 2) Children can recognize and understand the initial letters of object names, 3) Children can connect pictures with writing, 4) Children can arrange letters into words, 5) Children can rewrite words that have been arranged, and 5) Children can read and understand simple words. Therefore, the implementation of the Reading Box media has proven to be effective in improving children's early literacy skills. In addition, children are also very enthusiastic and motivated to learn letters and read using this medium. Thus, it is hoped that by optimizing the use of the reading box medium, children will find it easier to recognize letters and read simple words.

This study is in line with research (Auliah & Hamidah, 2024) which shows that using word cards can help children improve their early reading skills and make learning more interesting. From this, it can be seen that the use of visual media can provide a more interesting learning experience for early childhood and encourage the development of early literacy in children.

One effort to improve the early literacy skills of 5-6 year old children can be done through the use of interactive media such as reading boxes, because at this stage children are experiencing a phase of rapid development and need media that is interesting and effective to stimulate brain development and intelligence. In addition, the learning methods used in early childhood education must be appropriate to the developmental needs of children and effective. Therefore,

designing interesting and effective learning using interactive media can certainly be one solution to improve child development, one of which is early literacy skills.

Interactive visual media not only increase interest in learning, but can also motivate and encourage literacy development from an early age. This certainly contributes to educational literature that emphasizes the importance of utilizing visual aids in the teaching and learning process, especially in building the foundations of literacy skills (Mardiyani & Aulina, 2024).



Figure 1: Use of the reading box media

This interactive media has its own uses that form the basis for developing early literacy skills in children aged 5-6 years. The reading box media can be applied individually or in groups. Interactive media can provide an understanding that the right learning media can accelerate the mastery of skills in early childhood, compared to using conventional learning media. The results of this study open up opportunities for future researchers to explore other interactive media that can be developed to improve early literacy in early childhood.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of classroom action research conducted at Alam Purwakarta Kindergarten on children aged 5-6 years to improve early literacy skills through the use of reading boxes, it can be concluded that the use of reading boxes is proven to be effective in improving children's early literacy skills. This medium can be a solution for children's developmental needs with a fun learning approach that is appropriate for early childhood characteristics.

The improvement in early literacy skills achieved six main indicators of literacy development, namely 1) children can recognize and name letters, 2)

children can understand the initial sounds of the names of objects, 3) children can connect pictures with writing, 4) children can arrange letters into simple words, 5) children can rewrite the words they have arranged, and 6) children can read and understand simple words.

As shown by the percentage of child development achievement, there was a significant increase from 52.7% in the pre-cycle, 56.30% in cycle I, to 69.78% in cycle II. Thus, it shows that the reading box media can be used as a reference learning media as an alternative approach to improve the early literacy skills of children aged 5-6 years. The interactive reading box media that will be used as a learning media reference is recommended to be made with more durable tools and materials so that it can be used for a long period of time. In addition, it is necessary to develop the design of the reading box and various ways of playing with the reading box.

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