

DEVELOPING EARLY WRITING READINESS THROUGH TEACHERS' EFFORTS AND CHILDREN'S ENGAGEMENT IN ISLAMIC KINDERGARTEN

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the efforts of teachers and children's involvement in developing writing readiness in early childhood at Siti Khadijah Islamic Kindergarten Ponorogo. Writing readiness is understood as a part of early literacy that includes fine motor skills, symbol recognition, and motivation to write. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. Data analysis was carried out with the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which included reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawn. The results of the study showed that teachers played the role of facilitators who provided gradual guidance, individual support, and positive reinforcement in writing learning. Children show varied involvement, influenced by motivation, confidence, and the emotional atmosphere of the class. The integration of Islamic values such as patience, discipline, and gratitude strengthens the learning process and shapes children's character. This study concludes that children's writing readiness develops through the synergy between teacher strategies, child involvement, and spiritual values embedded in Islamic education. The implications of these findings emphasize the importance of learning to write that is fun, adaptive, and based on Islamic values in the development of early childhood literacy.

Keywords: *Writing readiness, early childhood, child involvement, role of teachers, Islamic education*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan upaya guru dan keterlibatan anak dalam mengembangkan kesiapan menulis pada anak usia dini di TK Islam Siti Khadijah Ponorogo. Kesiapan menulis dipahami sebagai bagian dari literasi awal yang mencakup kemampuan motorik halus, pengenalan simbol, serta motivasi untuk menulis. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan dengan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman, yang meliputi reduksi, penyajian, serta penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru berperan sebagai fasilitator yang memberikan bimbingan bertahap, dukungan individual, dan penguatan positif dalam pembelajaran menulis. Anak menunjukkan keterlibatan yang bervariasi, dipengaruhi oleh motivasi, rasa percaya diri, dan suasana emosional kelas. Integrasi nilai-nilai Islam seperti kesabaran, kedisiplinan, dan rasa syukur memperkuat proses pembelajaran dan membentuk karakter anak. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kesiapan menulis anak berkembang melalui sinergi antara strategi guru, keterlibatan anak, dan nilai-nilai spiritual yang tertanam dalam pendidikan Islam. Implikasi temuan ini menekankan pentingnya pembelajaran menulis yang menyenangkan, adaptif, dan berlandaskan nilai keislaman dalam pengembangan literasi anak usia dini.

Kata kunci: *Kesiapan menulis, anak usia dini, keterlibatan anak, peran guru, pendidikan Islam*

INTRODUCTION

Writing readiness in early childhood is one of the important foundations in the development of early literacy. Writing skills involve not only hand movements and fine motor coordination, (Chandler et al., 2021) but also the child's cognitive and affective processes in expressing thoughts in symbols. (Slamet Riyadi et al., 2023) In the Early Childhood Education (ECE) environment, the introduction to writing is ideally presented through activities that are fun, meaningful, and in accordance with the child's developmental stage so that it can arouse children's interest and confidence in writing. (Barratt-Pugh et al., 2021) Research has shown that early writing experiences are closely related to later literacy and academic success. (Dinehart, 2015)

In Indonesia, many kindergarten institutions have begun to introduce writing activities as part of their preparation for entering elementary school. (Hariyani et al., 2023) But in practice, challenges often arise, such as external expectations that children entering elementary school must be able to write letters or words independently, even though the principles of early childhood learning emphasize playful and child-

centered learning. (Kamelia Olga Litna et al., 2025) Research in Indonesia shows that the construction of "school readiness" for early childhood involves various aspects of child development, including motor, cognitive, social-emotional, and pre-academic skills. (Setiawati et al., 2017) Teachers therefore face the challenge of balancing academic expectations with the holistic principles of early childhood development. (Pangestuti et al., 2019)

In the context of Islamic-based kindergarten, these challenges are also combined with a moral-religious dimension, where learning to write is part of character formation such as discipline, patience, and gratitude. (Fadillah & Mariyati, 2022) Teachers in Islamic-based institutions are expected not only to teach technical writing skills, but also to instill Islamic values through these activities. (Al-Ghazali, 1993)

The role of teachers is crucial in creating a meaningful writing learning experience for children. (Widiyanti & Anggreni, 2025) Teachers make efforts such as designing appropriate media and teaching materials, providing demonstrations, guiding individually, and maintaining children's motivation during the learning process. (Bingham & Gerde, 2023) For example, according to international sources, teachers can facilitate "emergent writing" by embedding writing activities into children's daily routines, modeling writing, and providing many opportunities for writing exploration through learning activity centers. (Rusawalsep et al., 2003)

On the other hand, children's involvement or engagement in writing activities is also a determining factor for the success of developing writing readiness. Children who are actively engaged, show curiosity, interest and are emotionally connected to activities will have more potential to develop writing readiness effectively. A study showed that children's classroom engagement profiles correlated with improved language skills or literacy. (Zurcher & Stefanski, 2025) However, children's responses to writing tasks often vary, some are enthusiastic, some are reluctant or get tired quickly, so teachers need to tailor strategies to the needs of children. (Deci & Ryan, 2000)

Although there has been research on early literacy, writing literacy, and school readiness, there is still limited research that explicitly focuses on how teachers' efforts and children's involvement interact with each other in the development of early

writing readiness in kindergarten/RA institutions, especially in the context of Islamic education in Indonesia (Widiyanti & Anggreni, 2025). This is a gap that needs to be answered because the Islamic PAUD environment provides distinctive characteristics and values, a combination of academic learning and the formation of religious character.

Based on this, this study aims to describe how teachers' efforts and children's involvement contribute to the development of early writing readiness in Islamic kindergarten, which is carried out at Siti Khadijah Ponorogo Islamic Kindergarten. The research focus include the methods used by teachers, children's responses, and strategies applied to support writing readiness in an Islamic-based learning environment.

LITERATUR REVIEW

1. Writing Readiness in Early Childhood

Writing readiness is a developmental stage where children begin to master the basic skills needed to write. This stage is part of a broader concept, *emergent literacy*, which includes the development of spoken language, phonemic awareness, print awareness, and fine motor coordination. (Pinto et al., 2012) According to Sulzby et al., children's writing skills develop gradually, starting from doodles and drawings, to forming meaningful letters and words, showing that literacy develops through a continuous process, not suddenly. (Sulzby et al., 1989)

Writing readiness also includes aspects of the child's motivation and confidence to express ideas through symbols. Based on Piaget's theory of cognitive development, children build an understanding of symbols and language through active interaction with their environment. (Cohen & Waite-Stupiansky, 2022) Meanwhile, Vygotsky emphasized that writing skills develop in social contexts, where children learn through guidance and collaboration with more competent people, such as teachers or peers. (Irshad et al., 2021)

In the context of early childhood education in Indonesia, writing readiness is often associated with the demands of *school readiness*. Research shows that parents and teachers often emphasize pre-academic skills such as reading and writing as an indicator of readiness to enter elementary school. (Jahreie, 2023) As a result, teachers

face the challenge of designing activities that can grow children's writing skills naturally, without violating the principles of play and learning that are appropriate to the stage of development.

2. The Role of Teachers in Developing Writing Readiness

Teachers play a central role in creating a literacy-rich environment and supporting children's writing development.(Zurcher & Stefanski, 2025) Teachers' efforts include providing appropriate teaching materials, modeling examples, providing structured guidance, and providing individualized attention to children who need support.(Bingham & Gerde, 2023) Through intentional teaching, teachers can help children in holding pencils correctly, forming letters, and arranging words, while still giving children room to explore and express themselves.

The concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) from Vygotsky is an important basis for understanding the role of teachers. In ZPD, teachers play the role of facilitators who help children do tasks that they cannot do independently. In the context of writing, this means that teachers need to balance providing assistance and opportunities for children to be independent, by gradually reducing guidance as the child's abilities improve.(Irshad et al., 2021)

Teachers' beliefs and views on writing also influence their teaching practices. Research shows that teachers who view writing as a developmental process (not just a technical skill) tend to create a more flexible and enjoyable learning experience (Gerde, Bingham, & Wasik, 2012).(Gerde et al., 2012) In early childhood learning, teachers' efforts can include a multisensory approach, play integration, and providing positive feedback to keep children motivated. Thus, writing activities are not only a mechanical activity, but also a means of meaningful communication for children.

3. Children's Engagement in Writing Activities

Children's engagement is a multidimensional concept that includes aspects of children's behavior, emotions, and cognition in participating in learning activities. In the context of learning to write, children's involvement can be seen from curiosity about letters, perseverance when writing, pleasure in producing doodles or writing,

and willingness to participate in both teacher-guided and independent activities.(Fredricks, 2011)

According to the theory of *Self-Determination* put forward by Deci and Ryan, children's involvement will grow when their basic needs are met, namely the need for autonomy, competence, and positive relationships with others. Teachers who provide opportunities to choose, reward children's efforts, and create a warm emotional atmosphere will foster higher engagement. Children's involvement is very important because it affects the achievement of long-term literacy; Children who are actively involved in writing activities tend to have better literacy skills and academic achievement in the future.(Guay, 2022)

However, children's involvement is dynamic and can change according to the level of difficulty of the task, motivation, classroom atmosphere, and individual character. Some children show high enthusiasm when writing, while others may be reluctant or get tired quickly. Therefore, teachers need to understand these variations and implement adaptive strategies, such as giving pauses, compliments, or adjusting the difficulty level of assignments to maintain a positive learning climate.

4. Learning to Write in the Context of Islamic Education

In Islamic-based early childhood education, learning to write has not only academic goals, but also moral and spiritual goals. The process of learning to write is seen as part of *tarbiyah*, a comprehensive coaching that develops the intellectual (*'aql*), physical (*body*), and spiritual (*spirit*) potential of children. Islamic philosophy of education views that the search for knowledge and skills is part of worship (*ta'lim worship*), if done with good intentions and values.(Fransisca, 2024)

Writing activities in Islamic kindergarten can integrate literacy goals with Islamic values. For example, children can practice writing Arabic letters, simple words, or short sentences from daily prayers. These activities not only train fine motor skills, but also strengthen religious understanding. Teachers can also instill values such as patience, perseverance, and gratitude during the writing process. Al-Ghazali emphasized that children's education from an early age should foster intelligence and moral discipline through habituation and good example.(Al-Ghazali, 1993)

The integration between spiritual values and academic learning is in line with the goals of Islamic education which seeks to balance the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development of children. Thus, teachers' efforts in teaching writing in Islamic kindergartens are not only pedagogical, but also ethical, because they help shape children's attitudes towards learning. The study of writing readiness in the context of Islamic kindergarten provides a distinctive understanding of how cognitive and spiritual elements interact in children's early literacy development.

From the above theoretical study, it can be understood that the development of early childhood writing readiness is the result of a dynamic interaction between teachers' learning strategies, children's involvement, and the socio-religious context in which the learning process takes place. Teachers play a role in guiding and facilitating; the child shows active involvement and response; while Islamic education provides a moral basis and values that animate the entire learning process. These three dimensions are the conceptual framework in analyzing the findings of this research.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to understand the phenomenon of early childhood writing learning in depth based on real experience in the field. This approach was chosen because it is appropriate to describe in detail the processes, strategies, and interactions between teachers and children in the context of natural learning. (Creswell, 2014) Through this approach, the researcher tries to interpret the meaning of teachers' actions and children's responses to writing activities as part of the development of children's writing readiness in Islamic kindergartens.

The research was carried out at Siti Khadijah Ponorogo Islamic Kindergarten, an early childhood education institution under the auspices of an Islamic-based foundation. This school was chosen purposively because it has implemented writing activities from an early age as part of the preparation for elementary school entry, but still strives to maintain Islamic values in every learning activity. The research subjects consisted of teachers in groups A and B who actively taught writing skills, as well as students who participated in writing activities in the class. The selection of informants was carried out by purposive sampling, which is based on the criteria that they have

direct experience in the implementation of writing activities at the Islamic Kindergarten.

Data was collected through three main techniques, namely, 1) in-depth interviews with classroom teachers to obtain information about the goals, methods, media, and strategies used in teaching writing to children; 2) participatory observation of writing activities in the classroom to see firsthand the interaction between teachers and children, learning atmospheres, and forms of child involvement during the activity; 3) documentation, in the form of photos of activities and notes of children's learning outcomes, to strengthen observation and interview data.

Data analysis was carried out interactively following the model of Miles and Huberman, (Miles et al., 2014) which includes three main stages, namely, 1) *data reduction*, selecting and focusing data from interviews, observations, and documentation relevant to the research focus, such as teacher strategies, children's responses, and Islamic values that appear in writing activities; 2) *data presentation (data display)*, compiling data in the form of narrative descriptions and categorization tables so that the relationship between themes is easy to understand; 3) *conclusion drawing/verification*, interpreting the meaning of the data and drawing conclusions that are consistent with the research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Overview of the Implementation of Writing Learning at Siti Khadijah Islamic Kindergarten Ponorogo

Writing learning at Siti Khadijah Islamic Kindergarten Ponorogo is carried out as part of the initial literacy activities that are integrated into the daily classroom program. Based on the results of interviews with teachers, the main purpose of this activity is to prepare children for the elementary school level, where children are expected to be able to write basic fluently. The teacher emphasized that writing skills do not stand alone, but are related to reading readiness and children's cognitive abilities in general.

Writing activities are carried out every day for approximately 30 minutes. For group A, the activity was carried out during the day with a focus on bolstering letters

and imitating simple shapes. Meanwhile, group B carried out writing activities in the morning, with a higher level of independence – children were asked to copy words or write their own names in notebooks. Teachers use tile books, notebooks, pencils, whiteboards, and markers as the main learning medium.

The approach used is sequential and gradual, for example, the teacher explains how to write the letter "b" by outlining the steps: make a straight line from top to bottom, then make a curve to the right from the center of the line. Teachers also provide informal evaluations by calling children one by one before going home to write their names on the board as a form of daily reinforcement and monitoring.

2. Teachers as Facilitators in Developing Writing Readiness

The first findings show that teachers play an active role as facilitators and direct guides in each stage of learning to write. Teachers not only give instructions, but also provide visual and verbal examples, as well as individual guidance to children who are struggling.

This role is in line with Vygotsky's view of *the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*, where children learn most effectively when they receive support (*scaffolding*) from teachers. (Irshad et al., 2021) When teachers practice how to write letters on the board and guide children one by one, the process is a tangible form of *scaffolding* that helps children move from dependence to independence.

In addition, the teacher's efforts to call the children one by one to write their names before going home is also a form of formative assessment that reflects attention to individual development. This practice reflects a personal and humanistic approach that is in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood education.

In the context of Islamic kindergarten, the role of the teacher is not only as a teacher, but also as an instiller of the values of patience, neatness, and responsibility, which are implicitly taught through the habit of regular and meticulous writing. This is in line with Islamic education that emphasizes *tarbiyah* – character and moral development along with mastery of basic skills. (Fransisca, 2024)

3. Varied Child Engagement in the Writing Process

The results of the interviews showed that children's responses to writing activities were very diverse. Some children showed high enthusiasm, seemed eager to write and showed their work to the teacher. However, some other children are passive, easily distracted by friends, or complain of fatigue.

These differences in involvement illustrate variations in intrinsic motivation and early childhood concentration ability, which are generally still developing. (Guay, 2022) The teacher realizes that the child's attention span is still short, so that writing activities do not last too long and are interspersed with light activities so that children stay focused.

Children's involvement is also closely related to the teacher's confidence and social support. When children receive warm praise or guidance, they show increased participation. These findings are in line with the Self-Determination Theory which explains that children's involvement increases when their three basic needs, autonomy, competence, and positive relationships are met. (Andrew Lumb, 2015)

Thus, in the context of Siti Khadijah Islamic Kindergarten, children's involvement is an important indicator of writing readiness, because it shows the development of a positive learning attitude and willingness to try, which is an important value in Islamic education.

4. Teachers' Strategies in Fostering Independence and Writing Readiness

Teachers use various strategies to foster writing independence in children. One of them is the gradual assignment – starting from bolding letters, then copying words, to writing independently. This gradual strategy helps children build a sense of ability and internalize the motor and cognitive skills needed to write.

Teachers also carry out positive reinforcement such as simple praise or the opportunity to write names on the board, which fosters a sense of responsibility for the results of writing. This strategy is in line with the view of Bingham & Gerde that effective teachers not only teach writing techniques, but also create positive emotional experiences in literacy activities. (Gerde et al., 2012)

In addition, the learning method carried out at Siti Khadijah Islamic Kindergarten has an inherent element of Islamic values. For example, children are invited to write in an orderly manner, take care of stationery, and be grateful for their abilities. This shows how spiritual and moral aspects are integrated with academic aspects in early literacy activities. In the view of Al-Ghazali, good education should foster manners and discipline through habits and concrete examples, not just through verbal advice. (Al-Ghazali, 1993)

Overall, the results of the study show that early childhood writing readiness develops through the synergy between teachers' efforts and children's involvement in the context of Islamic education. Teachers act as facilitators who provide a conducive learning environment and individualized support, while children show varied involvement influenced by their motivation and developmental level.

The practice at Siti Khadijah Islamic Kindergarten reflects the application of *developmentally appropriate practice* (DAP) principles, where learning is adjusted to the child's abilities and needs. However, there are also external influences from the expectations of parents and elementary schools that encourage academic acceleration. In this case, teachers play an important role in maintaining a balance between academic readiness and humanistic-religious learning principles.

The integration between pedagogical approaches and spiritual values makes learning to write in Islamic kindergartens not only a motor exercise, but also a means of character building. This supports the findings that the integration of Islamic values in early childhood learning is able to strengthen children's moral development as well as academic readiness. (Fransisca, 2024)

CONCLUSION

This study shows that early childhood writing readiness in Siti Khadijah Ponorogo Islamic Kindergarten develops through the efforts of directed teachers and the active involvement of children in an Islamic value learning environment. The teacher plays the role of a facilitator who guides the child gradually until they are independent in writing, while the child learns through motivation and positive

support. The integration of Islamic values makes writing activities a means of character building. These results confirm the importance of fun, adaptive, and spiritually value-based learning of writing in early childhood education.

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