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Bridging the Literacy Gap: Read-Aloud Implementation in a University-Based Daycare Center

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian sebelumnya menunjukkan bahwa tingkat literasi masyarakat Indonesia masih rendah, akibat kurangnya minat baca. Para ahli bahasa dan pendidikan anak usia dini menilai hal ini disebabkan oleh tidak diterapkannya kegiatan pra-membaca seperti *read aloud*, meskipun telah direkomendasikan oleh Kemdikbud RI. Namun, studi terkait implementasi *read aloud* di lembaga pendidikan non-formal masih minim, padahal banyak anak usia dini menghabiskan waktu di daycare karena orang tua bekerja. Salah satunya adalah Daycare Dharma Wanita Persatuan UIN Walisongo Semarang yang tidak mengimplementasikannya, padahal berada di bawah naungan institusi Pendidikan Tinggi Keagamaan Negeri. Selama dua bulan, peneliti mengoptimalisasi kegiatan read aloud di daycare tersebut. Hasilnya, *read aloud* dapat meningkatkan minat baca anak, yaitu dengan terjadi peningkatan minat baca anak, terbukti dari terpenuhinya lima dari enam indikator kegemaran membaca. Indikator-indikator tersebut adalah: (1) kebutuhan akan bahan bacaan; (2) inisiatif untuk mencari bahan bacaan; (3) kesenangan dalam membaca; (4) keinginan untuk terus membaca; dan (5) ketertarikan terhadap bahan bacaan. Untuk menjaga dan meningkatkan minat baca tersebut, setelah optimalisasi berakhir, *read aloud* perlu dilakukan secara rutin oleh para pengasuh.

ABSTRACT

Previous studies have shown that Indonesia's literacy rate remains low, primarily due to a lack of reading interest. Experts in linguistics and early childhood education attribute this to the absence of pre-reading activities such as read-aloud sessions, despite recommendations from the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture. Research on the implementation of read-aloud activities in non-formal educational institutions is still limited, even though many young children spend their early years in daycare due to their parents' work commitments. One such case is the Dharma Wanita Persatuan Daycare at UIN Walisongo Semarang, which, despite being under a state Islamic higher education institution, had not implemented read-aloud activities. Over a two-month period, the researchers optimized read-aloud sessions at the daycare. The results read-aloud activities can increase children's reading interest, as evidenced by the fulfillment of five out of six indicators of reading enjoyment. Those indicators are: (1) the need for reading materials; (2) the initiative to seek out reading materials; (3) enjoyment of reading; (4) the desire to read continuously; and (5) interest in reading materials. To sustain and further improve this interest, daily read-aloud activities should be consistently carried out by caregivers following the optimization period.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2022, PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) revealed that Indonesian students achieved an average reading score of 359 points, which is below both the OECD average (476) and the global average (404), placing Indonesia 6th out of eight ASEAN countries (Kemendikbudristek, 2023). Previously, in 2015, PISA reported that Indonesia ranked 64th out of 72 countries in literacy levels (Anjani, 2019). The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reported that in 2015, Indonesia ranked 64th out of 72 countries in literacy levels (Anjani, 2019). Further research conducted by Central Connecticut State University in March 2016, titled *Most Littered Nation in the World*, revealed that Indonesia ranked 60th out of 61 countries in reading interest, positioned just below Thailand and above Botswana (Sulistiyono, 2016). Additionally, UNESCO's 2012 statistical data indicate that Indonesia's reading interest index is only 0.001, meaning that only one person per 1,000 Indonesians demonstrates an interest in reading. According to the UNESCO index, Indonesia ranked 69th out of 127 countries (Rusniasa, 2021).

Reading Without Spelling book written by Paramita (2021) reveals that many children could read fluently but struggled with comprehension. This issue arises from the lack of "bridges" in the reading process, as parents, caregivers, and educators often focus solely on "reading techniques," such as recognizing letters and phonetics, rather than fostering comprehension (Paramita, 2021). To address this gap, pre-reading activities should be introduced before children engage in formal reading instruction (Montessori, 2020).Trelease (2017) emphasized that reading activities should be enjoyable and introduced gradually. One widely recognized pre-reading activity that enhances children's love for reading is the read-aloud method (Paramita, 2021). Sulistiyono (2016) further stated that stimulating children's cognitive abilities aligns with enjoyable learning experiences, which positively impact their cognitive development.

In Indonesia, early childhood care follows various models, including (1) parental care, (2) care by grandparents, (3) care by domestic helpers or babysitters, and (4) daycare or childcare services while parents work. These different caregiving models yield varying developmental outcomes. This study focuses on children in daycare settings, as their parents often entrust educational responsibilities to childcare institutions rather than actively participating in early childhood education. However, early childhood education should be a collaborative effort between parents and educational institutions.

UIN Walisongo hosts several early childhood education institutions, including the Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD) program and the Daycare Dharma Wanita Association of UIN Walisongo Semarang. Unlike the well-established PIAUD program, the daycare center is relatively new, having been established for less than two years. The daycare accommodates approximately 16 children under the supervision of three caregivers, most of whom are children of UIN Walisongo employees. Pre-research findings revealed that read-aloud activities were not routinely conducted at the daycare. This was corroborated by interviews with caregivers, conducted on January 8 and 20, 2023, in which one caregiver stated:

> "*Ya kalau kegiatan (rutin) belum ada, karena anak-anak juga datangnya tidak bersamaan. Kadang ya main-main ke luar*."
>
> (Currently, there are no routine read-aloud activities because the children's arrival times vary. Sometimes they prefer to play outside.)

Similarly, when asked on January 16, 2023, whether they were aware of read-aloud activities being implemented at the daycare, a parent responded:

"*Kayaknya belum ada, paling mewarnai terus main sama anak-anak*."

(I don't think there are any. Mostly, they focus on coloring and playing with the children.)

Despite the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture recommending read-aloud activities for children aged 0–5 years as a fundamental pre-reading practice (Hafidz, 2022), such activities were not implemented at the daycare. Given that Daycare Dharma Wanita PBB UIN Walisongo Semarang operates under a higher education institution, it is expected to incorporate read-aloud activities into its daily routine. However, the absence of such activities prompted researchers to optimize read-aloud sessions and assess their impact on children's reading interest.

Several previous studies have highlighted the significant benefits of read-aloud activities in enhancing children's cognitive development. For instance, research conducted at RA-Annur Prima in Medan Labuhan District found that after implementing the read-aloud method, students exhibited enthusiasm for book reading sessions and demonstrated the ability to retell stories (Musfirah, 2022). Other literature reviews have also affirmed that the frequency of informational texts being read aloud is related to kindergarten students' improvement in vocabulary and content knowledge throughout the school year (Wang, 2025). Additionally, research on 17 PAUD students found that while literacy seminar activities had no impact, read-aloud sessions significantly contributed to language development and increased students' confidence in expressing thoughts and ideas (Sary, 2023). However, most previous studies have focused on formal educational institutions, such as kindergartens and elementary schools. There remains a gap in research regarding the implementation of read-aloud activities in non-formal education settings, such as daycare centers.

Being under the umbrella of a prominent higher education institution, the daycare at UIN Walisongo carries a significant responsibility. This is in contrast to independent daycare centers that are not affiliated with educational institutions. The Dharma Wanita Persatuan Daycare at UIN Walisongo is expected not only to provide child care while parents are at work but also to offer stimulation through activities that support the cognitive development of the children entrusted to its care.

As previously discussed, read-aloud activities are known to foster a love of books in children and have a positive impact on their cognitive growth. Unfortunately, the Dharma Wanita Persatuan Daycare at UIN Walisongo has not yet become well-acquainted with or fully implemented read-aloud activities. Therefore, this study aims to explore the optimization of read-aloud activities in daycare settings, specifically at the Daycare Dharma Wanita Association of UIN Walisongo. Moreover, this study seeks to examine whether optimizing read-aloud activities can effectively enhance children's interest in reading.

2. METHOD

This study employs a mixed method, which a qualitative and a quantitative research approach. According to Strauss and Corbin, as cited in Murdiyanto (2020), qualitative research is used to explore social phenomena such as community life, history, behavior, organizational functions, social movements, or kinship relations. The research design used is pre-experimental. Unlike experimental research, which involves both control and experimental groups, pre-experimental research focuses on observations before and after an intervention. In this study, the researcher aims to examine the increase in reading interest among children at the Dharma Wanita Persatuan Daycare, UIN Walisongo, before and after the implementation of read-aloud activities.

Data collection techniques used in this study include observation and interviews. The observation method used is participant observation, in which the researcher is directly involved in the daycare's activities. The interview technique employed is auto-anamnesis, conducted directly with key informants in this case, the daycare caregivers.

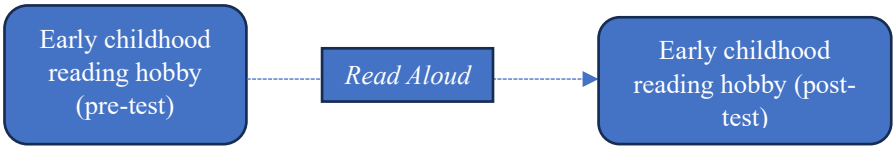
The interviews will be conducted in two sessions, namely before and after the research. The researcher will inquire about the availability of picture books for children, as well as the implementation of read-aloud activities. In addition, the researcher aims to understand the extent of children's reading interest prior to the research.

After the research is conducted, the researcher will carry out interviews to explore children's reading interest following the availability of reading materials and to determine the extent to which their enthusiasm for read-aloud activities has increased.

Some examples of questions addressed to caregivers include:

1. Do the children appear to have a desire to read?
2. Do the children seem to search for books to read?
3. Do the children look happy when participating in reading activities?
4. After being read to, do the children ask to be read another book?
5. Do the children respond to the books (e.g., by asking questions about the content or retelling the story)?

The research process can be illustrated as follows in the diagram below:



This study involves two variables: the independent and the dependent variable. The independent variable is the *read-aloud activity*, while the dependent variable is the *reading interest of early childhood Islamic learners* at the Dharma Wanita Persatuan Daycare, UIN Walisongo. According to Burs and Lowe in Prasetyono (2008), the indicators of reading interest in early childhood include: 1) The need for reading; 2) The act of seeking reading materials; 3) Enjoyment of reading; 4) Interest in reading; 5) A consistent desire to read; 6) Follow-up actions (responding to what has been read).

Prior to data analysis, the researcher will ensure data validity. This study uses *technical triangulation* to verify the accuracy of the collected data, combining interviews with informants and direct field observations. To enhance credibility, the researcher will also document the research process through photos, audio recordings, and videos during both observation and interview sessions. According to Miles and Huberman (2014), there are three stages of data analysis:

a) Data Reduction

In this initial stage, the researcher classifies the research subject, informants, and research location. The subjects of this study are early childhood Islamic learners at the Dharma Wanita Persatuan Daycare, UIN Walisongo. The informants are the caregivers, and the research site is the daycare itself. After identifying these elements, the researcher performs coding to organize the data collected from observations and interviews.

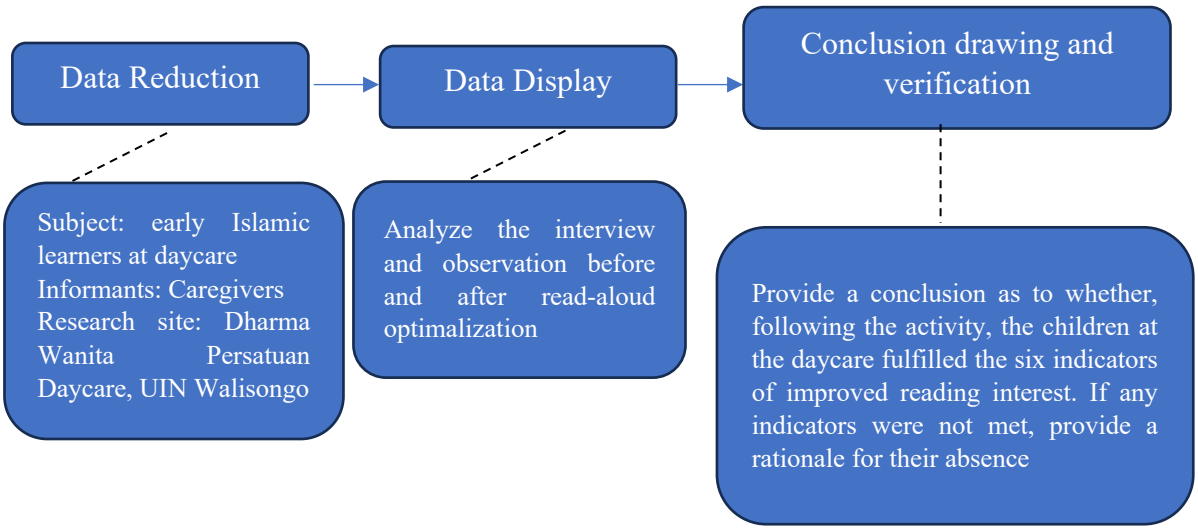
b) Data Display

In this stage, the researcher presents and analyzes the collected data, aligning them with

the indicators of increased reading interest in early childhood. A comparison will be made between pre- and post-intervention data.

c) Conclusion Drawing and Verification

The final stage involves drawing conclusions based on data analysis and comparison. The researcher will determine whether there is a significant improvement in the reading interest of children at the Dharma Wanita Persatuan Daycare, UIN Walisongo Semarang, following the implementation of read-aloud activities.



3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

As part of this study, researchers interviewed several stakeholders, including policymakers from the UIN Walisongo Dharma Wanita Association. One of the informants was the wife of the Deputy Chancellor 1 of UIN Walisongo Semarang and the daycare caregivers responsible for daily operations. During these interviews, researchers gathered data on the daily activities carried out at the daycare center. The schedule of activities, as obtained from the interviews with caregivers, is presented below:

Table.1. Daily activity schedule
at the Dharma Wanita Daycare of UIN Walisongo Semarang

Time	Activity
07:00	Reception of children's arrival at daycare
07:00 - 09:00	Breakfast
09:00 - 10:00	Morning activities (depending on schedule):
	1. Prayer
	2. Monday: Fine motor skills – Playing with blocks
	3. Tuesday: Focus training – Playing ball (passing the ball)
	4. Wednesday: Fine motor skills – Coloring, etc.
	5. Thursday: Experiments – Creating a Mount Merapi lava simulation, germ experiments, etc.
	6. Friday: Gross motor skills – Morning walk
10:00 - 11:00	Free time (watching TV/playing alone while waiting for KB and kindergarten children to return)
11:00 - 12:00	Lunch
12:00 - 14:00	Nap
14:00 - 15:30	Wake up, shower, and prepare to go home
15:30 - 16:00	Child pick-up

Additionally, researchers inquired about the age range of children attending Daycare Dharma Wanita UIN Walisongo Semarang. Data analysis indicated that 87.5% of the children were between the ages of 2 and 5 years, aligning with the "golden age" phase of childhood development (Aspiani, 2021). Furthermore, based on pre-research interviews, it was determined that the children's age range at the daycare spans from 2 to 7 years. This range falls within the age group recommended by the Ministry of Education and Culture for exposure to read-aloud activities. The Ministry strongly encourages read-aloud practices starting from birth (even during pregnancy) up to the early elementary school years (Maulipaksi, 2015). Consequently, conducting research on read-aloud implementation at this daycare aligns with national educational guidelines.

Analysis of interview data revealed that there were no structured activities aimed at developing children's language skills, including read-aloud sessions, within the daycare's routine. Given the Ministry of Education and Culture's recommendation that read-aloud activities should be conducted for 10 to 30 minutes daily, the current daycare schedule does not adequately integrate literacy development despite children spending approximately 8–9 hours per day in the facility. Additionally, researchers found that the absence of read-aloud activities was due to a lack of appropriate picture books available for reading sessions. The following table presents data from interviews conducted before the optimization of read-aloud activities, highlighting the unmet indicators of children's reading preferences.

Table 2. Children's Reading Behavior
Before the Implementation of Read-Aloud Activities

Indicator	**Behavioral Characteristics**	**Children's Behavior (Pre-Implementation of Read-Aloud Activities)**
The need for reading	Requests to read a book	✓
Seeking reading materials	Looks for books independently	✗
	Inquiries about book reading activities	✗
Enjoyment of reading	Actively participates in read-aloud sessions	✓
	Engages in meaningful interaction with the reader during read-aloud activities	✗
Interest in reading	Relates personal experiences to the content of books read	✓
	Uses vocabulary from books in daily conversations	✗
Desire to read consistently	Requests to reread a book after the read-aloud session	✗
Comprehension and follow-up	Answers questions related to the content of books read	✗
	Retells stories from books read	✗

Following the implementation of read-aloud activities, researchers observed a significant increase in children's enthusiasm for reading. The findings, derived from observations and interviews with caregivers, are illustrated in the table below:

Table 3. Children's Reading Behavior
after the Implementation of Read-Aloud Activities

Indicator	Behavioral Characteristics	Children's Behavior (Post-Implementation of Read-Aloud Activities)
The need for reading	Requests to read a book	✓
Seeking reading materials	Looks for books independently	✓
	Inquiries about book reading activities	✓
Enjoyment of reading	Actively participates in read-aloud sessions	✓
	Engages in meaningful interaction with the reader during read-aloud activities	✓
Interest in reading	Relates personal experiences to the content of books read	✓
	Uses vocabulary from books in daily conversations	✓
Desire to read consistently	Requests to reread a book after the read-aloud session	✓
Comprehension and follow-up	Answers questions related to the content of books read	Some children
	Retells stories from books read	Partially developed

These findings indicate that five out of six indicators of early childhood reading interest were successfully met following the implementation of read-aloud activities. Before the intervention, most of these indicators had not been fulfilled. However, follow-up activities, such as story retelling, showed only partial improvement, suggesting that continuous engagement in read-aloud activities is necessary for further language development.

3.2 Discussion

This study examined the implementation of read-aloud activities at Daycare Dharma Wanita UIN Walisongo over a two-month period. Each session lasted between 20 and 30 minutes and included various story themes, ranging from classic fairy tales to narratives about daily life, animals, and adventures. The following books were used during the read-aloud sessions: *Please*, *Sorry*, *Thank You*, *I Learned to Go to the Toilet Alone*, *Rabbit and Tortoise*, *Ant Row*, *Hello News: I Can Pray*, *Adventure at the Zoo*, *I Like Vegetables*, *Me and My Body*, and *I Can Brush My Own Teeth*.

The selection of books was not random but was carefully curated to align with the developmental needs of early childhood learners. The books used in these sessions were primarily picture books, featuring more images than text to facilitate comprehension and engagement. The objective was to cultivate an early love of reading among children by making the experience enjoyable and accessible.

The selection of books theme was also a crucial factor in this study. Researchers prioritized books that were relevant to children's daily lives, such as those that encouraged independence through activities like brushing teeth or using the toilet. Additionally, books with Islamic values, such as *Tolong* (*Please)*, *Maaf (Sorry)*, and *Terima Kasih (Thank You)*, were included to integrate religious and moral teachings. These books were sourced from Islamic publishers to ensure content aligned with Islamic teachings, incorporating words such as "*Alhamdulillah*" (Thank God) and introducing divine concepts. This selection was particularly relevant given that the daycare operates under the auspices of UIN Walisongo Semarang, an institution that emphasizes Islamic values in its educational framework. Furthermore, many

parents who entrust their children to this daycare seek an Islamic learning environment for their children. Therefore, the integration of Islamic values through storytelling was an effective approach to early childhood education.

Furthermore, many parents who entrust their children to this daycare seek an Islamic learning environment for their children. Therefore, the integration of Islamic values through storytelling was an effective approach to early childhood education. Similar to the previous study, stated that Islamic stories effectively instill moral values in children by creating a strong emotional connection that positively shapes their thoughts and behavior. Through relatable characters and situations, these stories make moral lessons more memorable and encourage children to apply them in daily life (Helandri & Faizin, 2023).

Read-aloud sessions were conducted at different times throughout the day, specifically at 10:00, 10:30, 11:30, and 15:30, to accommodate the daily activities of the daycare. One of the challenges faced in this study was the presence of television in the daycare, which was often used as a form of entertainment for children. There were initial concerns that children might not show interest in books due to the availability of television. However, observations revealed an overwhelmingly positive response, with children demonstrating enthusiasm and attentiveness during the reading sessions.



Figure 1. The children showed great enthusiasm while listening to the researcher read a picture book



Figure 2. The children brought books they wished the researcher would read to them

The impact of read-aloud activities was evident in children's behavior. Upon the researchers' arrival, children eagerly gathered books from the provided shelves, demonstrating excitement and anticipation for the reading sessions. Many children requested to have their favorite books read repeatedly and actively participated in discussions about the stories. To maintain engagement, researchers employed dynamic reading techniques, such as using different voices to represent characters, thereby making the storytelling experience more immersive and enjoyable.

An example of this engagement was observed during the reading of *Me and My Body (Aku dan Tubuhku)*. In one passage, the main character "Aku" sniffs the aroma of a donut, introducing the word *mengendus* (sniffing) to the children. Responding to this, the researcher read the story while simultaneously demonstrating the act of sniffing and inviting the children to do the same. This interactive approach successfully captured the children's attention and made them feel involved. As a result, they were able to recognize and understand the meaning of the word *mengendus*, thereby enriching their vocabulary. This interactive reading approach helped children connect words to real-life experiences, reinforcing vocabulary acquisition. Many children began to recall storylines, imitate certain words, and ask questions about

characters and situations, reflecting their growing comprehension and linguistic curiosity. This aligns with the statement from the Ministry for Children, Youth, Family, Equality, Refugees, and Integration of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, which emphasizes that intensive vocabulary development is fostered through read-aloud activities that incorporate interactive question-and-answer exchanges focused on the book's content. (Ministerium für Kinder, Jugend, Familie, Gleichstellung, 2024). Another study also reveal that Preschool children showed significant vocabulary gains and instruction during shared storybook reading effectively supports vocabulary development (Cipolletti, 2025).

After several weeks of implementation, researchers noted a significant increase in children's interest in reading. Many children independently selected books and requested to have them read aloud. The read-aloud sessions also encouraged cognitive development by fostering curiosity, as children began asking more questions and sharing their thoughts about the stories. Read-aloud activities can stimulate children's critical thinking, as they encourage children to ask questions, express ideas, and relate story content to real-life experiences (Hardiana, 2024). Additionally, the reliance on television as a source of entertainment decreased, with children opting to engage in book-related activities instead.

Following the implementation period, researchers conducted interviews with three caregivers-Mrs. Agis, Mrs. Disca, and Mrs. Nur-on September 9, 2024, at Daycare Dharma Wanita UIN Walisongo Semarang. These interviews aimed to validate the study's findings. The caregivers unanimously confirmed a marked increase in children's interest in reading. One caregiver noted:

> *"They eagerly looked for books and competed to read the ones provided by the researchers."*

Furthermore, the caregivers observed that when picture books were placed on shelves within children's reach, the children often selected books independently and engaged with the pictures, constructing narratives based on their imagination. This aligns with the theoretical framework proposed by the Reading Is Fundamental Organization, which asserts that:

> *"Reading aloud presents books as sources of pleasant, valuable, and exciting experiences. Children who value books are motivated to read on their own" (Koralek, 2022).*

Thus, read-aloud activities can transform reading into a pleasurable and enriching experience, thereby fostering intrinsic motivation to engage with books.

3.2.1 Cognitive and Linguistic Development

The study also highlighted significant improvements in children's vocabulary acquisition. Caregivers reported that after reading *I Learned to Go to the Toilet Alone*, children began using the word *toilet* when expressing their need to use the restroom. This expansion of vocabulary demonstrated children's ability to internalize and apply new linguistic knowledge in daily life, supporting Koralek's assertion that:

> *"The more adults read aloud to children, the larger their vocabularies will grow and the more they will know about the world and their place in it" (Koralek, 2022).*

Additionally, findings align with Trelease's (2017) research, which suggests that children who participate in read-aloud activities at last three times per week develop greater phonemic awareness upon entering kindergarten compared to those who do not engage in such activities. Phonemic awareness, which involves recognizing the relationship between sounds and written language, is critical in literacy development. Saraswati (2020) further explains that:

> *"Phonemic awareness is the ability to associate sounds and writing, followed by the decoding process, in which individuals assign meaning to words, intonations, and body language conveyed by the speaker."*

This was evident in children's ability to recognize and recall words from books, as well as their increased verbal engagement. For example, children asked questions such as, *(Burung apa ini*?)*"What bird is this?"* and related stories to personal experiences, such as saying, *(aku juga makan wortel di rumah)"I eat carrots at home too."* These interactions suggest that read-aloud activities enhance both receptive and expressive language skills. Especially during early childhood, up to the age of four, children are in the stage of developing receptive language skills (Bruchhage, 2020). Phonemic awareness is also one of the indicators of an improvement in the receptive language skills of children in daycare. This improvement is consistent with previous research conducted by Priyantini (2020), which found that there is a relationship between the improvement of preschool students' receptive language skills and read aloud activities.

3.2.2 Challenges in Retelling and Comprehension

In several book reading sessions, the researcher asked questions about the content of the book. Some children were able to answer, while others were not. The questions posed by the researcher during reading were usually about the illustrations in the book. For example, during an activity conducted on July 12, 2024, while reading a book, the researcher asked the children about the front cover which displayed two images: (*Yang mana yang laki-laki? Yang mana Perempuan?*) "Which one is the boy and which one is the girl?" The children then pointed to the images representing a boy and a girl. The researcher then asked why one of the pictures was identified as a girl, and the children responded, *(Karena dia pakai jilbab)* "Because she is wearing a hijab."

From the cover illustration alone, children were able to draw a learning point related to gender. Additionally, Islamic values such as wearing the hijab can also be incorporated into the learning process. This kind of learning, which doesn't feel like formal "learning," is the kind hoped to be instilled in the children at Daycare Dharma Wanita Persatuan UIN Walisongo Semarang.

Some children were also able to retell the contents of the story that had been read, though not all and not in full. Some children were also able to retell the contents of the story that had been read, though not all and not in full. In retelling tasks, children are typically expected to articulate, in their own words, the essential elements of a text they have recently read. Through retelling activities, learners demonstrate their understanding of a story by identifying key ideas and organizing events in sequence while expressing them in their own word (Rifiyanti & Syamsu, 2024). Existing research has identified significant associations between retelling performance and reading proficiency; however, a critical review of the literature indicates that several dimensions of this relationship remain underexplored and merit further scholarly inquiry (Qin, 2019).

One child who showed the ability to retell the story was Hanin, who is older than the other children. Hanin, who is five years old, was able to retell the story of the turtle defeating the rabbit in a race after reading the book *The Tortoise and the Hare*. Hanin also mentioned that she had read the same book at home. In other words, it can be concluded that the more frequently children are exposed to reading, the stronger their ability to comprehend the content becomes.

This fact aligns with the theory proposed by Trelease, who states that the more a child reads, the more they know and understand; the more they know and understand, the more

questions they can answer; and the more questions they can answer, the smarter they will grow (Trelease, 2017).

Out of the five indicators, the last indicator—*follow-up*—which includes: (1) Children can answer questions derived from the book that has been read; and (2) Children can retell the story, has not been fully achieved. While some children are able to answer questions, it is only a portion of them. And when it comes to retelling, most are unable to do so completely.

The researcher observed that the fifth indicator—follow-up to reading—does not improve instantly, especially when the activity is only conducted over a two-month period. Children need to develop a habit of reading if they are to be able to retell the content of a story. As Wilman (2023) stated, one activity that can enhance language skills is reading books together.

Language skills are divided into two categories: receptive language skills and productive (expressive) language skills (Mulyati, 2021). Retelling a story requires not only receptive language skills but also expressive language skills (Sadaruddin, et.al., 2025). Expressive language is an advanced language ability that demands vocabulary, story comprehension, coordination between the brain and speech organs, and the child's confidence to express their thoughts verbally. Expressive language is produced through speech organs and includes pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary as its main components in verbal communication (Ahmad, 2024). Therefore, it is essential to increase the intensity of read-aloud activities, as they play a crucial role in fostering children's receptive language skills, which serve as a foundation for the subsequent development of productive language skills.

Other indicators are more easily achieved because they do not involve the complexity of expressive language skills. Indicators 1 to 5 mostly emphasize expressive behavior rather than cognitive understanding as seen in the sixth indicator, and thus are more easily achieved by the children at UIN Walisongo's daycare.

To further refine the research findings, a Forum Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with members of the Read-Aloud Semarang community, including experts Unik Pratisi, Marla Nur Indrianto, Ali Fiana Raharjayanti, Hengki, and Novita Dwi Lestari. The FGD yielded several key recommendations:

1. The incomplete achievement of all indicators was likely due to the limited time allocated for read-aloud activities at the daycare.
2. To sustain and further enhance early childhood reading interest, read-aloud activities should be conducted daily by caregivers.
3. Policy interventions are needed to formalize the integration of read-aloud activities into the daycare curriculum, requiring communication between researchers and policymakers.
4. Training programs should be developed for caregivers, policymakers, and parents to establish a shared understanding of the importance of read-aloud activities.
5. The timing of read-aloud sessions should remain flexible, adapting to the daily conditions of the daycare and ensuring responsiveness to children's needs.

These insights underscore the necessity of sustained implementation and institutional support for read-aloud activities to maximize their impact on early childhood literacy development.

4. CONCLUSION

After optimizing the read-aloud activities for two months, there has been an increase in the reading interest of the children at Daycare Dharma Wanita Persatuan UIN Walisongo Semarang. This improvement is evident in the achievement of five out of six indicators of children's reading interest, namely: (1) the need for reading materials; (2) the initiative to seek out reading materials; (3) enjoyment of reading; (4) the desire to read continuously; and (5) interest in reading materials. The only indicator that has not been fully achieved is the sixth indicator, which is *follow-up*, consisting of: (a) children being able to answer questions based on the books that have been read; and (b) children being able to retell the story.

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