

Bridging Learning Gaps: A Needs Analysis for Developing Calistung Workbooks for Second Grade Students

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Abstract

This study examines the need to develop dedicated literacy and numeracy instructional materials to strengthen the cognitive skills of second grade primary school students. The study specifically focuses on *Calistung* (an acronym for *membaca*, *menulis*, and *berhitung*, referring to reading, writing, and basic arithmetic), which represents the core foundational competencies in Indonesian primary education. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were gathered through classroom observations, in depth teacher interviews, and documentation of learning activities and student performance. The findings reveal noticeable variation in students' abilities in reading, writing, and arithmetic, while existing thematic textbooks provide limited opportunities for structured and repeated practice. Teachers consistently highlighted the importance of materials that are clear, visually engaging, developmentally appropriate, and supported by concrete examples and progressively organized exercises. The study also shows that students respond more actively to contextual and illustrated learning tasks, which help them connect abstract concepts to familiar experiences. Based on these insights, the development of a structured *Calistung* workbook is considered essential to support stepwise skill acquisition, encourage independent learning, and reduce reliance on constant teacher assistance. Such materials can foster confidence, sustain engagement, and promote gradual mastery of foundational skills. This research contributes to primary education by offering a practical framework for designing instructional resources that align with students' cognitive development and classroom realities, while addressing persistent gaps in early literacy and numeracy learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education forms the foundation of lifelong learning, shaping the cognitive, emotional, and social development of children. In particular, primary school education plays a critical role in fostering basic skills such as reading, writing, and numeracy, collectively referred to as literacy and numeracy skills (Khoiroh, 2025; Khoiroh et al., 2025). These skills are essential not only for academic success but also for the practical engagement of children in daily life and society. Research shows that deficiencies in foundational skills during early schooling can have long-term negative consequences, including low academic achievement, reduced self-confidence, and limited problem-solving abilities (Hefniy & Alwahedi, 2025; Khofsah, 2025). Therefore, developing effective instructional materials to enhance these basic skills has direct implications for societal advancement by ensuring that children acquire the competencies needed to succeed in subsequent educational stages. Addressing this issue contributes to equitable education, reducing learning gaps and preparing children to actively participate in an increasingly knowledge-driven society.

Despite the recognized importance of literacy and numeracy, many primary school students continue to face challenges in mastering these essential skills. Large variations in students' abilities often emerge, even within the same classroom, making it difficult for teachers to deliver instruction that meets every learner's needs (Holidi, 2025; Kusumawati, 2025). Existing educational materials frequently emphasize curriculum coverage over skill mastery, providing insufficient opportunities for repeated practice of reading, writing, and basic calculation. Consequently, students who struggle with foundational skills risk falling behind, leading to increased dependence on teacher intervention and additional support outside regular class hours. This problem is not only educational but also social, as early difficulties in literacy and numeracy can reduce self-efficacy and motivation to learn, ultimately affecting broader cognitive development (Syafiih, 2025). Addressing these gaps requires carefully designed learning resources tailored to the developmental stage and learning pace of young children.

Observations in primary classrooms reveal that students often exhibit diverse levels of competency in literacy and numeracy, particularly in lower grades. Some children can read simple sentences, while others struggle with recognizing syllables, decoding words, or comprehending short texts. Similarly, writing skills vary widely: common errors include letter reversals, inconsistent handwriting, and difficulty forming coherent words or sentences. Numeracy challenges are equally apparent (Lyhne et al., 2025), with students needing guidance to perform simple addition and subtraction independently. Teachers frequently rely on conventional textbooks, which integrate multiple subjects into single exercises, leaving limited opportunities for focused practice on foundational skills. As a result, classroom learning requires substantial

supplemental support, such as repeated explanations, individualized guidance, and additional exercises. Interviews with teachers consistently indicate a strong need for targeted instructional materials that can engage students, provide structured practice, and build confidence gradually, reflecting the necessity of contextually relevant learning resources.

Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of instructional materials specifically designed for early literacy and numeracy. Research by Sukmadinata emphasizes that structured, systematic teaching materials facilitate both comprehension and retention, particularly when aligned with students' cognitive development stages (Mourtzis et al., 2023; Samaila & Al-Samarraie, 2024). Studies on phonics-based reading programs, sequential writing exercises, and stepwise arithmetic instruction indicate that repeated, scaffolded practice improves student outcomes in foundational skills (Maksum, 2025; Rozi, 2025). However, many prior investigations have focused on generalized teaching methods or adult-mediated interventions, neglecting the development of engaging, student-centered materials that allow independent practice. Additionally, existing research often lacks integration between literacy and numeracy exercises, resulting in materials that address isolated skills rather than holistic cognitive development (Haritha & Rao, 2024; Sailin et al., 2024). This highlights a gap: although the importance of structured practice is acknowledged, there is limited evidence on designing integrated, incremental learning materials tailored to early primary school students' developmental needs.

Furthermore, prior research frequently underrepresents the variability in student readiness and prior knowledge, an essential factor in lower-grade learning. While several studies document improvement with standard worksheets or workbooks, these interventions often fail to differentiate difficulty levels or provide contextualized, meaningful examples that connect learning to everyday experiences (Albustomi, 2025; Muali, 2025). The lack of progressive skill-building and visually appealing, concise exercises diminishes engagement and motivation, particularly for students with weaker foundational skills. Consequently, there remains a critical need for instructional materials that not only present content systematically but also encourage active participation, self-paced learning, and repeated practice (Henry Wasosa, 2025; Muali, 2025). Addressing this gap can enhance both cognitive development and academic self-efficacy, ensuring that students attain proficiency in reading, writing, and basic calculation before progressing to higher grades, thereby contributing to long-term educational success.

This study introduces a novel approach to instructional material development by integrating literacy and numeracy exercises into a cohesive, student-friendly workbook designed for lower primary grades (Hidayanti & Safuan, 2025). Unlike conventional textbooks or fragmented practice sheets, the proposed materials are visually engaging, progressively structured from simple to

complex tasks, and aligned with children's cognitive development, particularly the concrete operational stage described by Piaget. The workbook serves both classroom instruction and independent learning at home, providing immediate reinforcement and enabling personalized pacing (Muzakki et al., 2025; Tuala et al., 2024). By embedding repeated practice, contextual examples, and scaffolded exercises, this approach addresses gaps in motivation, engagement, and skill acquisition. Such integration of developmental appropriateness, cognitive scaffolding, and practice-driven pedagogy represents a state-of-the-art contribution, offering practical solutions for educators while supporting early learners in achieving foundational competency in reading, writing, and numeracy.

Based on classroom observations and teacher interviews, it is evident that existing instructional resources do not adequately meet students' needs, particularly for those requiring additional support in literacy and numeracy. The research problem, therefore, centers on identifying and designing learning materials that effectively enhance cognitive skills in early primary education. The study aims to determine which content structure, exercise format, and progression strategy best support students' reading, writing, and arithmetic proficiency. By developing an evidence-based workbook tailored to developmental stages, the research contributes a practical resource capable of improving student engagement, learning autonomy, and skill mastery. This aligns with broader educational goals of reducing learning disparities and ensuring foundational competencies are achieved universally, reinforcing the argument for systematic, developmentally appropriate instructional interventions in primary education.

This research contributes both theoretically and practically to the field of primary education by providing a model for instructional material development that integrates cognitive development principles with practical classroom application. The anticipated outcomes include improved literacy and numeracy performance, increased student confidence, and enhanced engagement with learning activities. Moreover, the study provides empirical evidence supporting scaffolded, visually appealing, and gradually progressive exercises as essential components of effective instructional design. By addressing observed gaps in existing materials, this work demonstrates the potential to improve early cognitive development systematically, equipping students with the foundational skills necessary for academic success. Ultimately, the study argues that targeted, developmentally aligned instructional materials are not merely supplements but essential instruments for fostering cognitive growth and reducing early learning disparities among primary school children.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach, aiming to provide an in-depth understanding of the needs for

developing literacy and numeracy (*Calistung*) instructional materials to enhance cognitive skills of second-grade students (Kusumaputri et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2024). The qualitative approach was selected because it allows researchers to explore real classroom conditions, examine students' learning needs, and understand teachers' perspectives on the instructional materials currently used. Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative research captures the complexity of learning processes, contextual factors, and individual differences among students, providing rich, descriptive data that inform the design of developmentally appropriate and engaging learning resources. By focusing on the lived experiences of students and teachers, this approach ensures that the findings reflect practical and contextually relevant requirements for effective educational interventions.

The research was conducted at a primary school serving second-grade students, chosen due to its representativeness of early primary learning environments. The school provides a setting where foundational literacy and numeracy skills are actively taught and assessed, making it an ideal site to investigate the effectiveness and suitability of instructional materials (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023; Muthmainna & Siroj, 2025). Observations indicated that students displayed varying levels of *Calistung* proficiency, which underscored the need for tailored learning resources. Selecting this location allows for direct engagement with both students and teachers, ensuring that data collection captures authentic classroom practices, challenges, and the specific learning needs that inform the development of instructional materials aligned with cognitive development stages.

Data were collected using non-test techniques, including observation, interviews, and documentation. Classroom observations focused on students' reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, learning activities, and the use of instructional materials. Structured observation sheets were employed to systematically record these aspects. In-depth interviews were conducted with second-grade teachers to gather insights into students' learning difficulties, current materials, and desired features for new instructional resources. Documentation included student work samples, photographs of classroom activities, and existing teaching materials, providing supplementary data to triangulate findings and ensure validity. These techniques together allowed researchers to obtain a comprehensive picture of both student needs and teacher expectations.

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive techniques, following three main stages: data reduction, data display, and verification/conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved selecting and condensing relevant information aligned with research objectives, focusing on students' abilities and instructional material requirements (Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024; Takona, 2024). Data display was carried out through narrative descriptions,

thematic organization, and tabular presentation of learning needs. Finally, conclusions were drawn by verifying findings across observation, interview, and documentation sources, ensuring accuracy and reliability. This systematic process provided a detailed and credible basis for determining the requirements for developing *Calistung* instructional materials aimed at enhancing cognitive skills in second-grade students.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The observation of second-grade classroom activities focused on identifying the learning needs for literacy and numeracy (*Calistung*) and assessing students' foundational skills. The data were collected through direct observation of student participation, teacher student interactions, and the use of instructional materials. Table 1 presents a summary of the observation results, reflecting patterns identified across all observed students.

Table 1. Observation Results on *Calistung* Learning Activities and Instructional Material Usage

No	Observation Results
1	Students' reading abilities vary; some students struggle to read simple words fluently.
2	Certain letters with similar shapes cause confusion among students.
3	Writing activities reveal letter and number reversals among several students.
4	Students still require teacher assistance in constructing simple sentences.
5	Basic arithmetic skills, particularly addition and subtraction, need repeated practice.
6	Instructional materials used are primarily government-provided thematic textbooks.
7	There is no dedicated <i>Calistung</i> workbook for gradual skill development.
8	Students show higher engagement when learning includes illustrations and hands-on exercises.

The observations indicate that students' basic literacy and numeracy skills remain uneven, highlighting the need for structured, stepwise exercises. Current thematic textbooks integrate *Calistung* with other subjects, limiting opportunities for focused practice. Consequently, teachers must provide additional support outside the textbook, which can reduce learning efficiency. These findings emphasize the necessity of a dedicated instructional resource that is visually engaging, cognitively appropriate, and supports repeated practice.

Teacher Perspectives

Interviews with second-grade teachers further confirmed the need for supplementary instructional materials. Table 2 summarizes teachers' insights regarding the design and content of an effective *Calistung* workbook.

Table 2. Teacher Opinions on Instructional Material Needs

No	Interview Results
1	Instructional materials should be clear, concise, and easy for students to understand.
2	Materials must be visually appealing, with colorful illustrations.
3	Content should align with the developmental characteristics of early primary students.
4	Materials should actively engage students in the learning process.
5	Exercises should be arranged progressively, from simple to more complex.
6	A dedicated workbook specifically for reading, writing, and arithmetic is needed.
7	Examples should relate to students' everyday life experiences.
8	Exercise variety is important to maintain interest and motivation.

Teachers emphasized that existing materials do not fully meet students' needs for repeated, scaffolded practice. They suggested that an effective workbook should include clear instructions, stepwise exercises, and illustrations that correspond with students' cognitive abilities. Moreover, the workbook should facilitate independent learning, both in class and at home.

The need for targeted instructional materials is further reinforced by the observation that students respond more positively to visually engaging and concrete exercises. Students showed increased attention and participation when illustrations and real-life examples were incorporated into reading, writing, and arithmetic activities. This aligns with the theory of multisensory learning, which suggests that combining visual, kinesthetic, and textual elements enhances comprehension and retention in young learners (Mulyati et al., 2024; Richards et al., 2019). Teachers also reported that students became more confident when working with materials that gradually increased in difficulty, enabling them to experience success at each stage. The absence of such structured, scaffolded resources in current textbooks limits students' opportunities for repeated practice, resulting in slower acquisition of foundational skills. Therefore, the development of a dedicated Calistung workbook is not only a pedagogical enhancement but also a motivational tool that can foster positive learning attitudes, support differentiated instruction, and reduce the reliance on continuous teacher intervention.

Additionally, the analysis indicates that integrating contextually relevant examples within the instructional materials can improve the applicability of learning to students' daily experiences. Teachers emphasized that exercises relating to familiar objects, routines, and scenarios helped students understand abstract concepts more effectively. Such contextualization bridges the gap between classroom learning and real-world application, which is particularly important for second-grade students still operating within the concrete operational stage of cognitive development (Maksum, 2025; Rozi, 2025). Furthermore, repeated, varied exercises support mastery learning, ensuring that students consolidate skills before progressing to more complex tasks. The workbook development should therefore include thematic sequencing, scaffolded exercises, and visual prompts that align with both cognitive

development and students' lived experiences, providing a comprehensive framework for foundational skill acquisition.

Finally, the findings suggest that the development of a dedicated Calistung workbook can serve as a model for early primary instructional resources in similar educational contexts. By combining stepwise exercises, concrete examples, and visual appeal, the workbook addresses the observed gaps in current teaching materials and responds directly to teacher and student needs. This intervention is expected to enhance students' literacy, writing, and numeracy competencies, contributing to improved cognitive development and learning outcomes. Moreover, the workbook can facilitate self-directed learning, enabling students to practice independently while maintaining engagement and motivation. In conclusion, the integration of pedagogically designed, developmentally appropriate, and contextually relevant Calistung materials represents a critical step toward optimizing early primary education, providing both practical support for teachers and an enriched learning experience for students.

To provide an integrated representation of the findings, a conceptual model is developed to capture the relationship between classroom learning conditions, instructional material constraints, and the proposed Calistung workbook design framework, as shown in Figure 1.

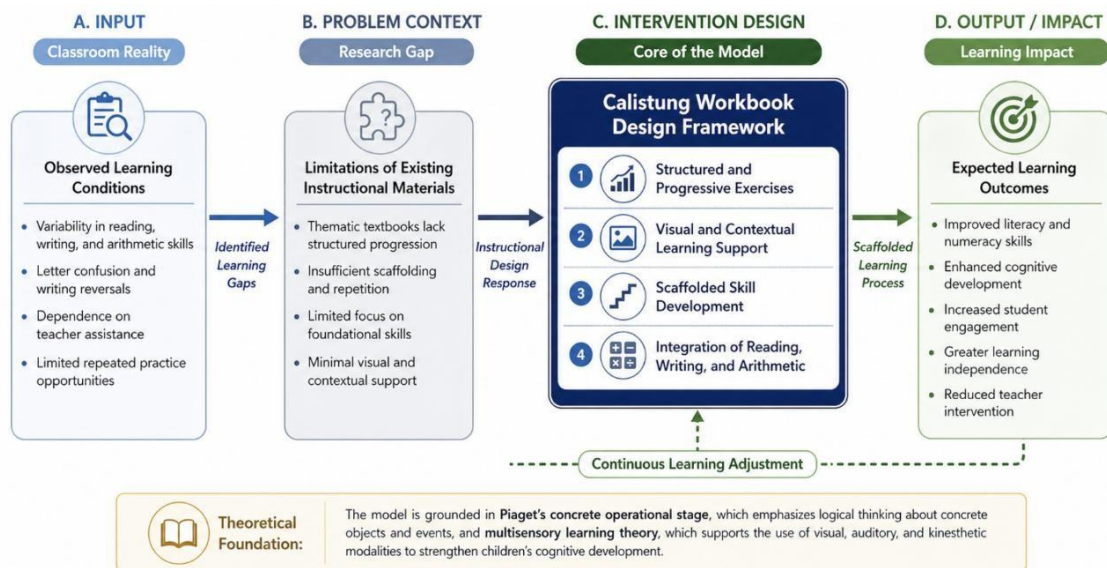


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Calistung Workbook Design

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a persistent mismatch between the learning needs of second grade students and the instructional materials currently used in classrooms. Students demonstrated uneven proficiency in *Calistung*, particularly in decoding words, constructing written expressions, and performing basic arithmetic operations independently. This variation was not incidental but appeared structurally linked to the limitations of existing thematic textbooks,

which prioritize content integration over skill reinforcement. Observations further indicated that students required repeated guidance and scaffolding, especially when tasks lacked clear progression or contextual grounding. Teachers confirmed that the absence of dedicated *Calistung* materials constrained their ability to provide differentiated instruction, often leading to increased reliance on direct intervention. Importantly, students showed higher engagement when exposed to visually supported and contextually meaningful exercises, suggesting that cognitive accessibility plays a decisive role in early skill acquisition. These findings align with broader discussions on the importance of structured and supportive learning environments in improving educational quality (Mulyati et al., 2024; Richards et al., 2019).

The results of this study resonate with and extend prior research on structured instructional design and early literacy development. Consistent with previous studies, scaffolded and sequential learning activities have been shown to significantly enhance student engagement and learning outcomes (Samaila & Al-Samarraie, 2024). However, this study moves beyond general pedagogical strategies by emphasizing the integration of literacy and numeracy within a single *Calistung* framework, addressing a gap identified in earlier research that often treats cognitive skills as separate domains (Haritha & Rao, 2024). From a theoretical perspective, these findings are consistent with Piagetian views of the concrete operational stage, where learners benefit from structured, visually grounded, and contextually relevant materials. At the same time, this study highlights a critical limitation in current instructional practices, where generalized textbooks may contribute to learning disparities, particularly in contexts where equitable access to quality education remains a concern (Khoiroh et al., 2025; Syafiih, 2025). In contrast to studies that emphasize teacher mediated instruction, the present research underscores the role of student centered materials in fostering independent learning processes.

This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions, particularly within the domain of educational management and Islamic educational management contexts. Theoretically, it advances the discourse on instructional material design by integrating cognitive development principles with scaffolded learning strategies in the *Calistung* framework. It also aligns with contemporary perspectives on educational transformation and adaptive learning systems, where instructional design is positioned as a strategic component in improving learning outcomes (Hidayanti & Safuan, 2025; Kusumawati, 2025). From a practical standpoint, the study provides a framework for developing structured, visually engaging, and contextually grounded workbooks that support differentiated learning and reduce dependency on teacher intervention. In Islamic educational management contexts, this contribution is particularly relevant, as it supports the development of holistic competencies that integrate intellectual, behavioral, and value based dimensions of learning (Muzakki et al., 2025; Sailin et

al., 2024). By addressing gaps in existing instructional materials, this research reinforces the importance of aligning pedagogical design with students' developmental needs and classroom realities.

This study underscores the critical role of developmentally appropriate instructional materials in shaping early cognitive outcomes. The evidence suggests that without structured, progressive, and contextually relevant *Calistung* resources, students are likely to experience fragmented learning and prolonged dependence on teacher support. By demonstrating how targeted materials can enhance engagement, confidence, and skill mastery, this research contributes to a broader rethinking of how foundational education is designed and implemented. The implications extend beyond classroom practice to inform curriculum development, teacher training, and policy formulation, particularly in contexts seeking to reduce early learning disparities. Nevertheless, the study is limited by its focus on a single institutional setting, which may constrain the generalizability of its findings. Future research should explore cross institutional applications, longitudinal impacts of workbook implementation, and potential integration with digital learning environments. Such directions would not only validate the current findings but also expand their applicability, ensuring that *Calistung* development becomes a sustained and scalable component of primary education reform.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the critical importance of developing a dedicated *Calistung* instructional workbook to support second-grade students' cognitive development, particularly in reading, writing, and arithmetic, as classroom observations and teacher interviews revealed considerable variation in students' foundational skills and the limitations of existing thematic textbooks in providing structured, stepwise, and repeated practice. The study demonstrates that instructional materials designed with clear content, simple language, visual appeal, concrete examples, and progressively structured exercises can significantly enhance learning outcomes and foster independent, active engagement, thereby contributing to the academic discourse on developmentally appropriate pedagogical resources in early primary education. Despite these insights, the research is limited by its focus on a single school and a relatively small sample size, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research could expand the investigation across multiple schools, examine the long-term impact of the *Calistung* workbook on students' academic performance, and explore integration with digital learning tools to further optimize literacy and numeracy development in early childhood education.

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