



# Empowering Early Childhood Educators: Innovative Approaches to Literacy Instruction

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## Abstract:

This study aims to describe the smart teaching of kindergarten teachers in teaching literacy. Smart teaching literacy is the ability of teachers to teach literacy. The problems found in literacy teaching are related to the ability to recognize the alphabet, write the alphabet, and read. This research is qualitative research using observation and in-depth interviews and documentation. The data analysis techniques used are data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The results of this study show that smart teaching carried out by kindergarten teachers in teaching literacy as a means of exploration, experimentation, and self-expression for children uses various types of media used in smart teaching, including digital media, namely through the Kids Academy application. Smart teaching literacy is expected to have open and effective communication, involve parents, create a positive environment, and provide rewards and consequences to children.

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## INTRODUCTION

Literacy means practices and social relationships related to knowledge, language, and culture (Weng, 2023; Muryono et al., 2023; Taylor & Clarke, 2021; Humaira et al., 2021). Literacy shows the relationship between the potential that children have and the culture in which they belong. Literacy requires humans to be able to compete in the 21st century (Mirra & Garcia, 2021; Ratama et al., 2021). It is marked by the development of the times where the Global Monitoring Report Education for All (EFA) states that literacy plays a very important role for society in modern times (Fute et al., 2023). This is prepared from an early age in early childhood education institutions. Early childhood education is enriched with literacy experiences, literacy-rich early childhood education is designed to develop children's language skills from an early age such as providing opportunities to get used to books, storytelling, and word-based activities (Hadley et al., 2021; Chapman & O'Gorman, 2022; Sanjani, 2024). Children acquire language by encouraging language development, i.e. adults interacting with children provide motivation, encouragement, and support.

Reading, writing, and arithmetic are the hopes for parents when children complete their education in PAUD (Slicker et al., 2021; Purwaningtyas et al., 2023; Simangunsong et al., 2022). Problems found in the teaching of literacy are related to the ability to recognize the alphabet, write the alphabet, and read (Lynch, 2021; Slicker et al., 2021; Rajabi et al., 2023; Solichah et al., 2022). *Smart teaching* is the ability of PAUD teachers in teaching literacy (Yulia & Suhardini, 2021). Teachers have basic teaching skills

and creativity in designing literacy activities (Hasibuan et al., 2023; Ratama et al., 2021; Purwanto et al., 2023). Smart teaching of literacy literacy is carried out by teachers in PAUD units in a fun atmosphere. The method used in smart teaching is a way for teachers to achieve learning goals. The learning method is used by the teacher during the learning process. The smart teaching method in literacy learning is applied with a variety of methods. Therefore, teachers cannot do one method alone. The problems found, for example, teachers only give children the task of rewriting letters (Bagus et al., 2022; Rahmawati et al., 2022; Mahardhani et al., 2021). This is not recommended to be done in the teaching of literacy. In implementing the learning method, of course, teachers use learning media. The learning media used in smart literacy is a means of exploration, experimentation, and self-expression for children using various types of media.

Previous research has investigated various important aspects in the development of literacy among kindergarten teachers. Study by (Tatminingsih, 2022; Asmara et al., 2023) explore the implementation of technology in early education, focusing on how technology can improve literacy skills in early childhood. Another study considered the effectiveness of innovative learning approaches such as "Smart Teaching" in improving early childhood literacy skills (Wang, 2022; Alyousify & Mstafa, 2022). Sulasmi, (2022) examines the important role of teachers in using technology to improve literacy teaching for early childhood. Alyousify & Mstafa, (2022) evaluated the impact of the "Smart Teaching" approach on children's learning motivation, especially in the context of reading and writing literacy. These studies provide an important foundation for understanding how innovative technologies and strategies can make a significant contribution to improving literacy education at the preschool level.

This study investigates an innovative "Smart Teaching" approach in the context of literacy teaching in kindergarten, with a focus on developing adaptive and interactive teaching strategies. This approach is designed to strengthen the foundation of children's literacy from an early age by utilizing technology as the main tool in learning. Through the use of educational applications and interactive software, teachers can increase students' active involvement in reading and writing activities, while providing a fun and meaningful learning experience.

This study aims to describe the smart teaching of kindergarten teachers in teaching literacy. The results of this study can be important information to develop literacy teaching skills for kindergarten teachers. On the other hand, it also contributes to the development of technology in education, but also fills in the knowledge gap about the effectiveness of innovative approaches in improving literacy in the early stages of children's development.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research is a type of descriptive qualitative research conducted to explore the implementation of the "Smart Teaching" approach in teaching reading and writing literacy by kindergarten teachers. The research was conducted in several kindergartens in the South Tangerang area, focusing on how innovative technologies and strategies are used by teachers in teaching literacy to early childhood children (Renjith et al., 2021). This research method includes direct observation of the interaction between teachers and students during the learning process, as well as in-depth analysis of feedback and responses from both parties to the applied approach. The teachers involved in the study

were trained to use a variety of educational apps and software specifically designed to improve children's literacy skills.

The data collection technique in this study involves direct observation and in-depth interviews using observation sheets and interview sheets (Burdine et al., 2021). Data was collected from seven kindergartens in various sub-districts in the South Tangerang region. Observation was carried out by observing the teaching process in one kindergarten from each sub-district that was selected representatively by Table 1. Meanwhile, interviews were conducted with teachers and principals to gain a deeper understanding of the implementation of the "Smart Teaching" approach in teaching literacy and literacy. This approach allows researchers to gain a comprehensive perspective on how innovative technologies and strategies are adopted and implemented in the context of preschool education in the region.

**Table 1. Sample PAUD in South Tangerang**

NPSN	Name of Educational Unit	Address	Village/Sub-district	Code
70048222	TK AL ARASY	JL. Gelatik RT.01/03 No.29B	Rice Fields / Ciputat	AA
70042115	KB PAUD Alif Montessori School	Jl. Bintaro Tengah Blok V-1 No.21 RT.07/07	Rengas/ East Ciputat	AM
70001532	KB AL Fattahu	Gg. Ketapang III RT. 004 RW. 06 No.80	West Pamulang / Pemulang	AF
69972204	KB British School Jakarta	Bintaro Jaya Sector IX Jl. Raya Jombang-Ciledug	Perigi/ Pondok Aren	BS
70013361	SPS PAUD Rumah Main Cikal	Jl. Ciater RT.001 RW.001	Rawa Mekar/ Serpong	RN
69818816	KB Abdi Siswa Bintaro	Graha Raya Bunga M9/1	East Corn Pond / North Serpong	AS
70000648	KB Kepikuning	Amarapura F1/1-2 Complex	Set/ Setu	KG

The data collected from observations and in-depth interviews in this study were analyzed using data reduction approaches, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The data reduction stage involves organizing and simplifying the information obtained from observation sheets and the results of interviews with teachers and principals. Furthermore, the data is presented by describing the main findings based on the themes that emerged during the data collection process. The presentation of this data provides a clear and structured picture of the implementation of the "Smart Teaching" approach in the context of reading and writing literacy in kindergarten. Finally, from this analysis, conclusions were drawn to conclude the effectiveness of the approach in improving early childhood literacy skills, as well as its potential implications for curriculum development and teaching practices in the future.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Methods Used in Smart Teaching of Literacy

Smart teaching is the ability that teachers have in teaching. In this case, teaching literacy. The method used by teachers in smart teaching is play, one of the play activities is playing mimicry, body movements, and guessing expressions. Where one of the children expresses one mimic and the child guesses the mimic displayed by the child. Then, the child is asked to find a word card that represents the mimic displayed by his

friend. According to Jean Piaget's theory (1980), children in the pre-operational stage (aged 2-7 years) still have difficulty understanding abstract concepts (Weng, 2023). They tend to focus on concrete and literal aspects of language, so understanding more abstract non-verbal language such as body movements, facial expressions, or sign signs can be more difficult for them (Hadley et al., 2021). Smart teaching carried out by teachers in teaching literacy using digital media in the form of educational applications (Muryono et al., 2023). Digital applications are used such as the "Learn to Read" application to introduce letters, syllables, and words to children in an interesting and creative way. In addition, teachers can use speech recognition learning software, online learning platforms, and educational platforms. Other media that supports literacy learning by using storybooks, picture cards, letter cards, and objects around them.

The play method is a method applied in smart teaching. Play is a staple activity for early childhood. Playing makes all activities done by children feel fun, exciting and indirectly learn. This is in line with Piaget's opinion stated in (Wynberg et al., 2022) that "Viewed play as a vital component of cognitive development. He proposed that play allows children to practice and consolidate their understanding of the world". This opinion states that play is an important component of children's cognitive development proposed by experts such as Jean Piaget in (Chapman & O'Gorman, 2022). Through play, children can practice and consolidate their understanding of the world around them. Play allows children to explore and experiment with new objects, situations, and ideas, which supports the development of cognitive skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and decision-making. In addition, play involves the use of symbols and imagination, helping children understand abstract and social concepts. Through social interaction during play, children also learn to share, take turns, and communicate, all of which support their cognitive and social development, and provide opportunities to think flexibly and creatively.

The results of in-depth interviews with several kindergarten managers including AA, AM, AS who stated that in the learning process they used several applications to support children's literacy. Such as visualization through youtube and Kids Academy which displays visuals and audio to help provide understanding to students as literacy material by children.

*"If here we use several educational applications that are specifically designed to help children understand the concept of reading and writing interactively. For example, we often use apps that offer learning games and interactive stories to engage children." (I-g-aa, 12/06)*

*"In kindergarten, tablets and projectors are used to display digital learning content in the classroom. Using a projector, I can show the digital storybooks on a larger scale to the whole class, while the children can learn to read and write directly on their tablets." (I-g-am, 12/06)*

*"Early childhood teachers try to make learning as much fun and interactive as possible. I often have small group activities where children can read together and discuss stories. In addition, we also use visual media such as educational videos to strengthen their literacy skills." (I-g-as, 12/06)*

The results of interviews with teachers in kindergarten show that technology plays an important role in improving literacy learning in the classroom. They use a variety of educational apps specifically designed to facilitate the understanding of reading and

writing concepts in an interactive way, by offering interactive learning games and stories that are engaging for children. The use of tablets and projectors in presenting digital learning content is also an effective strategy, allowing teachers to massively display digital storybooks to the entire classroom while providing opportunities for children to learn directly on their tablets. In addition, efforts to make learning more fun and interactive by holding small group activities, where children can discuss and read together, as well as utilizing visual media such as educational videos, are a form of successful approach in strengthening the literacy skills of preschool children. Likewise, it is in line with the results of interviews with several other institutions who stated that literacy for children is a collaborative experience.

*"I try to make every learning a collaborative experience. We use an app that allows children to write stories together or share their projects with classmates. This helps increase their involvement in literacy learning." (I-g-af,12/06)*

*"We conduct regular evaluations using applications that provide tests and evaluation activities. I also do formative assessments by looking at their progress in reading stories and writing simple sentences on the board." (I-g-bs,12/06)*

*"I have attended various workshops and trainings organized by schools or other parties to deepen the use of technology in literacy learning. This training helps me design more varied and effective learning." (I-g-rn,12/06)*

*"I believe that this approach is very effective because it makes literacy learning more interesting and relevant for children. Technology helps us to access a wider range of resources and provide a more enjoyable learning experience for children." (I-g-kg,12/06)*

The play method is a need for children because it can develop creativity, improve language skills, improve cognitive skills, and can develop children's social skills. The results of the interview conducted on one of the teachers played using the application. Where children take turns using devices. Teachers can use educational platforms, speech recognition software, and online learning platforms to help children learn to read and write. The method of playing using applications is a skill that teaches teachers in holding media variations. Teachers can meet the needs of children according to the times. At the beginning of the teacher's explanation of how to use it, of course, it invites children's curiosity in working using the application. At the same time, teachers can observe children's abilities in literacy. Smart teaching where teachers can provide variety to the media, making learning fun.

In addition, the project method is applied to smart teaching literacy literacy. In projects carried out by children, children explore by telling, writing, and describing the ideas and ideas made. The project method is carried out in groups where children gain various learning experiences. The project method gives responsibility to the child because the child gets a variety of jobs to achieve a common goal. In the project method, smart teaching literacy literacy begins when children make a mind map related to the topic to be discussed. Next, the child gives ideas or ideas related to what projects to make with friends in groups. When children are in the process of making a project, the teacher directs the children to write down symbols, letters, and numbers related to the project (Hadley et al., 2021; Hadley et al., 2021; Taylor & Clarke, 2021). The project method has the virtue of providing experiences that deal with daily life problems, encouraging children to be able to discuss their feelings and attitudes towards daily life situations, and

describing an event that is happening, and focusing on questions with the aim of being answered about a theme that can come from students, educators or the surrounding environment. In addition, the project method also has benefits for children to be able to solve puzzles of daily problems, provide more learning experiences, make children relaxed, cooperative, creative and independent.

### Media Used in Smart Teaching Literacy Literacy

The media used by teachers in smart teaching literacy is diverse. Teachers use digital media in smart teaching literacy. When your child uses the "Learn to read" and "Kids Academy" apps, your child needs a device to be able to access the app. In addition, visual teachers such as letter cards, syllable cards, word cards, and storybooks are the media that teachers prepare to play the language. In utilizing diverse media, it is a means of exploration, experimentation, and self-expression for children (Taylor & Clarke, 2021). Children explore the media provided so that they get direct experience from their senses. Experiments give children the opportunity to do experiments. In this case, when syllable cards are provided by the teacher as a learning medium, children will pair the likes cards with each other. So that it will produce a lot of new vocabulary. Word cards are an effective medium to help students develop their cognitive aspects in remembering words, can whine for children's intelligence, memory and interest in learning.

Digital media such as e-books, interactive learning applications, and online learning platforms play an important role in providing literacy learning experiences. E-books provide easy access to a wide range of readings, while interactive apps can stimulate students' interest through educational games and quizzes that support the development of reading and writing skills. In addition, learning videos and animations are also used to explain concepts in an attractive and easy-to-understand way. The use of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technology in literacy is also growing in popularity, as it can provide an immersive and immersive learning experience. All of these media allow teachers to present material in a more dynamic and engaging way, as well as support students in learning in a way that suits their respective learning styles.

Smart teaching literacy aims to create a more dynamic, interesting, and effective learning environment. This approach not only helps students develop basic reading and writing skills but also encourages them to think critically, creatively, and collaborate with their peers. In several kindergartens in the South Tangerang area, there are various strategies and media. The results of the observation include a modern approach in teaching literacy that utilizes various digital media and technology to improve student skills.

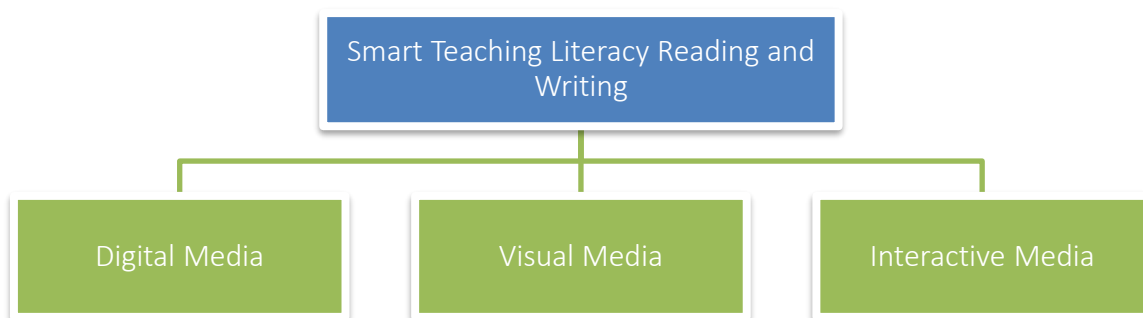


Figure 1. Smart Teaching on Reading and Writing Literacy

The use by Figure 1 of digital, visual, and interactive media in Kindergartens (TK) in the South Tangerang region strongly supports the development of children's literacy. E-books allow easy access to a wide range of readings through digital devices such as tablets and computers, with word search features, bookmarks, and annotations that enrich students' understanding. Interactive learning apps incorporate games, quizzes, and exercises that make the learning process fun and provide immediate feedback. Online learning platforms provide learning materials and literacy resources that can be accessed independently or with teacher guidance, and allow online interaction. Learning videos and animations are used to explain literacy concepts in an engaging and easy-to-understand way, helping students develop their imaginations. Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) technologies provide interactive and immersive learning experiences, such as seeing characters from "live" storybooks in front of them or stepping into the virtual world of the stories they are reading. The use of various media creates a dynamic and effective learning environment, encouraging the development of literacy in kindergartens in the South Tangerang region.

Media allows children to express themselves where children can tell about previous experiences. In addition, children can express themselves by playing guessing mimics. Based on the results of interviews conducted with teachers, it is known that playing mimic guessing develops children's understanding of the variety of emotions that children have. Through guessing mimics, children look for symbols and pair words according to the mimics they are playing with (Muryono et al., 2023; Hadley et al., 2021). Smart teaching of literacy literacy carried out by kindergarten teachers makes learning meaningful. As David Ausubel initiated, the concept of meaningful learning is learning where a person can relate the new knowledge he has gained with the knowledge he has previously obtained. The results of the meaning of learning can be seen by the relationship between theories, facts, or new circumstances that are appropriate in the child's cognitive framework. Meaningful learning through Smart teaching literacy is not only with children memorizing vocabulary, numbers or events that occur, but activities in which all concepts are connected so that children will not easily forget and so that learning is carried out easily. There are three advantages of using the theory of meaningful learning, namely: the information that Shiva learns meaningfully will be remembered for a longer time, the information that is consumed will affect the increase in the differentiation of the subsumi, so that it will facilitate the learning process in the next material that has similarities, and the information that has been learned later that is forgotten after the consumption will make it easier to learn similar things even though they have been forgotten.

## CONCLUSION

Smart teaching of literacy applied by teachers uses the play method and the project method. The play method is carried out to activate the child's full potential. Through play, children sharpen their senses. The project method applied in literacy begins when children present ideas and ideas until children appreciate them in pictures, words and sentences. The media used in smart teaching uses digital media, namely through the Kids Academy application and the application. smart teaching carried out by

kindergarten teachers in teaching literacy as a means of exploration, experimentation, and self-expression for children using various types of media.

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