

## READ ALOUD AS A METHOD FOR IMPROVING LITERACY IN CHILDREN AGED 4-5 YEARS TOWARD GOLDEN INDONESIA: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY AT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SCHOOLS IN CILEGON CITY

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### ABSTRACT

Indonesian society falls into the category of low literacy activity, stagnating at a rate of 37.32. This indicates that there is still an urgent need to improve literacy across all layers of society, including early childhood. Read aloud has become one of the methods to enhance literacy development in early childhood. Thus, the researcher wants to determine the effectiveness of read aloud as a method for improving literacy in children aged 4-5 years at early childhood education (PAUD) schools in the city of Cilegon toward a golden Indonesia. This study employed a pre-experimental design. Data collection techniques included questionnaires, observations, and documentation. Hypothesis testing was conducted using a paired-sample t-test with SPSS 27. Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the calculated t-value (46.142) is greater than the critical t-value (1.666), meaning that the read-aloud method is significantly effective in improving literacy among 4- to 5-year-old children at early childhood education (PAUD) schools in the city of Cilegon, contributing to the "Golden Indonesia" initiative. In practical terms, this study is expected to be of practical benefit to early childhood education (PAUD) teachers in Cilegon City in implementing the read-aloud method, encouraging PAUD institutions to further integrate the read-aloud method into classroom activities, and providing an adequate collection of storybooks. The practice of read-aloud by teachers in schools serves as a form of ongoing literacy stimulation. This study can serve as evidence-based input for policy formulation through the development of more targeted teacher training modules.

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### INTRODUCTION

The Reading Literacy Activity Index released by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology shows a stagnation in Indonesian reading interest and culture, at 37.32, falling into the low literacy category (Nasrullah dan Puteri. 2024). This indicates an urgent need to improve literacy across all levels of society, including early childhood. The concept of literacy in children is a highly dynamic, ongoing process, ranging from the

emergence of curiosity and critical thinking skills to oral language skills, and ultimately to reading and writing skills. These skills evolve with the times and are applied throughout a person's lifelong learning process (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2021). Reading is also a necessity for all humans to acquire new information or knowledge, as stated in QS. Al-'Alaq verses 1-5.

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ﴿١﴾ اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ﴿٢﴾ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ﴿٣﴾ عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ ﴿٤﴾  
اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ﴿١﴾

“Read in the name of your Lord who created! He created humankind from a clot of blood. Read! Your Lord is the Most Glorious. who taught (mankind) with the pen. He teaches people what they don't know.” (QS. Al-'Alaq:1-5)

Teachers play a crucial role in providing meaningful literacy experiences for children. Collaboration between teachers and parents is essential in developing literacy skills. Reading aloud significantly helps children learn to listen, concentrate, and absorb language more quickly than those without similar experiences.

Early literacy encompasses not only reading and writing skills, but also the ability to understand, process information, and communicate effectively, which are fundamental prerequisites for children's future academic and social success. Reading aloud is considered one of the most effective ways to improve literacy development and language proficiency in preschool children. The importance of early literacy is even more pressing given the vision of Golden Indonesia 2045, which targets the creation of superior, innovative, and globally competitive human resources.

The future education system of the Indonesian nation is one that will guide today's generation to become Indonesia's “golden generation” by 2045. In 2045, Indonesia will mark 100 years since its liberation from colonial rule. By that year, Indonesia hopes to have a “golden generation” capable of building the nation toward a better future. This generation will be a global citizenry with a transcultural nature, yet must continue to live and thrive within the identity and culture of Indonesia as a nation of dignity.

Reading aloud is an effective tool for extending children's attention spans (Jim Trelease, 2017:120). Reading is a window to the world, and reading with children from an early age can lay an important foundation for their language and cognitive development. One of the most effective and enjoyable ways to foster a love of reading is through read-aloud activities. Beyond simply reading stories, read-aloud plays a significant role in enriching a child's vocabulary and fostering their imagination.

Stanovich's research findings indicate that children with a large vocabulary read extensively. Meanwhile, children with a limited vocabulary read slowly and without enjoyment, and their vocabulary development is slower; they face difficulties because these issues hinder their reading ability (Anwas, 2022). The quality of the literacy environment in the child's home and shared reading interactions between mother and child are associated with the development of children's early literacy skills. The findings are discussed in relation to the importance of understanding the relationship between parents' literacy beliefs and behaviors in designing effective literacy interventions and fostering literacy partnerships between schools and families (Bingham, 2007).

Read aloud is a method of reading a text or story aloud and expressively to a child. The goal is not only for children to hear the story but also to experience the rhythm of the language, intonation, and emotion behind the words. This activity is conducted by teachers, typically 15 minutes before the start of the lesson. Through read-aloud, children can hear new vocabulary in a meaningful and engaging context.

Reading aloud can convey the lessons and advice contained in the story being read, as stories contain examples of good behavior and noble values that influence the listener's spirit. Reading aloud can also serve as a means to develop personality and instill character values through the appreciation of the meaning of a story being read (Yusra and Dewi, 2019).

The hypotheses of this study are: Ha: Read-aloud is Effective as a Method for Improving Literacy in Children Aged 4-5 Years Towards a Golden Indonesia: An Experimental Study at Early Childhood Education Schools in Cilegon City Ho: Read-aloud is Not Effective as a Method for Improving Literacy in Children Aged 4-5 Years Towards a Golden Indonesia: An Experimental Study at Early Childhood Education Schools in Cilegon City Based on the background above, the research problem is formulated as follows: Is read-aloud effective as a method for improving literacy in children aged 4-5 years in early childhood education schools in Cilegon City towards a golden Indonesia? The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of read-aloud as a method for improving literacy in children aged 4-5 years in early childhood education schools in Cilegon City towards a golden Indonesia.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a one-group pre-test-posttest design. This design employed a pretest measure administered to respondents. Pretest observations were conducted on a

group of respondents who were then given the treatment. Afterward, the researchers conducted posttest observations on the same measures as before (Creswell, 2014: 149).

The study included several early childhood education (PAUD) schools located in Cibeber, Citangkil, Cilegon, Ciwandan, Purwakarta, Pulomerak, and Grogol districts. The population consisted of 285 early childhood education (PAUD) children in Cilegon, one of whose teachers had participated in read-aloud training. The Slovin method was used as the sampling technique, resulting in a sample size of 74 children.

Data collection techniques in this study used questionnaires, observation and documentation. The type of questionnaire in this study included closed statements with only one answer selected. The use of questionnaires in quantitative research is to measure variables. The indicators of the effectiveness of read-aloud activities include the child (listener), the teacher (reader), the materials (book), the method, supporting tools/media (Interactive Flat Panel or big book), and the physical environment (bookish play). All respondents answered statements based on their experiences. Meanwhile, the data analysis technique used validity tests, reliability tests, normality tests, homogeneity tests and paired sample t-test hypothesis tests with the SPSS 27 application.

The effectiveness of read aloud can be seen from the reading aloud activity whose components consist of the child as listener, teacher as reader, reading materials or materials adjusted to the level, methods or techniques applied when reading, media or facilities in the form of printed books or digital books, a conducive and supportive physical environment. All of these components will support the effectiveness of read aloud in schools. The activity will be calculated according to the established assessment. The evaluation of this activity is based on the achievement of the indicators provided by teachers at each school. A child is categorized as BB (Not Yet Developing) if they get a score of 1. A child is categorized as MB (Starting to Develop) if they get a score of 2. A child is categorized as BSB (Developing Very Well) if they get a score of 3. A child is categorized as BSH (Developing According to Expectations) if they get a score of 4.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Storytelling with young children is certainly different from telling stories with children who have entered the concrete stage. Storytelling with young children should have a context of everyday life so that they understand the story. This is in accordance with (Parrott, 2017), who stated that good readers will be more certain of the contents of a book if the contents are related to things close to the child. Readers also encourage retelling of the story. Furthermore, readers also train their imagination through the images in the book.

This allows young children to understand the main points of the story and the images well. Readers should also be able to choose children's books according to their child's age level.

The next stage is a mentoring process for teachers to measure the success of the training. Teachers are given a week to choose books, whether digital or printed. Afterward, the teacher representatives will practice reading aloud. Overall, it can be seen that most teachers have a good understanding of the read-aloud activity and the preparation process. Therefore, it is hoped that going forward, teachers can continue reading aloud activities at school for at least 15 minutes before the start of teaching and learning activities.

All items regarding the read-aloud method had a calculated  $r > r$  table (0.432). Therefore, all items are valid and suitable for use in research.

**Table 1.** Reliability Results

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based On Standardized Items	N of Items
0,766	0,974	22

Based on the table above, it shows that the pre-test read aloud and post-test read aloud variables have been declared reliable because they have a value of  $0.766 > 0.60$ .

**Table 2.** Hypothesis Results

Paired	Mean	Std.Deviation	t	df	Sig. 2-tailed
Postest-pretest	3,716	0,692	46,142	73	< 0,001

Based on the results of the hypothesis test, the calculated t-value was 46.142 with a p-value  $< 0.001$ , which means:

- a) There is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores
- b) Since the p-value is  $< 0.05$ ,  $H_0$  is rejected and  $H_1$  is accepted, meaning that the treatment administered has a significant effect on improving scores.

However, regarding the aspect of retelling the book's content—even though the wording differs from the language used—no progress has yet been observed. Teachers have facilitated children in question-and-answer activities regarding the story's content, but have not yet facilitated children by giving them the opportunity, one by one, to retell the story read by the teacher. In fact, by giving children the opportunity to tell a story, they can practice simple speaking and listening skills of a psycho-social nature, which involve children's thinking and interaction

There are three stages of read-aloud: book Introduction, Book Reading, and Post-Reading Discussion. The first stage of read-aloud is Book Introduction. The teacher introduces the main characters and the central theme. The teacher can also explore the illustrations on the book cover, back cover, and relevant book titles. The teacher expands

the vocabulary by 5–10 words by referring to the illustrations, using dramatic gestures, or by providing definitions. The teacher offers commentary that reveals the main character's thoughts and feelings and asks critical questions based on the commentary provided. The teacher asks "why" questions to elicit an explanation. Use follow-up questions to encourage answers. Demonstrate how to answer the question by saying, "I think..."

During the second phase of the read-aloud, the teacher reminds the children that they are familiar with the main character in the story. The teacher asks several questions about the main character and the central theme. The teacher incorporates vocabulary enrichment for the same words, including more oral definitions. The teacher offers comments that reveal the thoughts and feelings of other characters. The teacher asks critical questions based on the comments provided. The teacher asks other "why" questions or "what would happen if..." questions. Use questions that encourage the children's thinking.

In the third stage of Read Aloud, the teacher encourages the children to identify the problem and describe a solution. The teacher asks the children to repeat the book's title. Before reading the next page, the teacher should point to the illustration and ask, "What is happening here?" Follow up on the children's comments by expanding on them or asking clarifying questions. The teacher asks additional "why" questions or asks, "What would happen if..."

Before beginning the read-aloud activity, the teacher prepares by using icebreakers, leading the children in singing, and setting rules for the storytelling session. When the teacher reads aloud, they use various intonations adapted to the story's content – such as sad, happy, or surprised. After reading aloud, the teacher engages the children in a Q&A session based on the story's content and encourages them to retell the story according to their ability. When the teacher encounters a child who is noisy and disrupting classmates, the child is directed to be quiet; the teacher calls the child over and encourages the child to focus on the story by posing statements and questions that engage the child in the storybook.

During the preparation stage, teachers should look for books that are appropriate for the children's age and the lesson's theme; choose books that are visually appealing in terms of both color and illustrations, books that relate to the children's life experiences, and stories that are new to them; read them first before reading them aloud to the children, and encourage the children to choose books they like once they are accustomed to read-aloud activities. Then, during the implementation phase, encourage the child to guess the characters and the story in the book; read with full expression and emotion, using both body language and verbal language, and add dramatic effects while telling the story;

involve the child during the story by asking them questions about it and let the child ask questions about the story they are listening to.

Research findings show that children who are regularly read to from an early age have:

1. Higher early literacy skills, including listening, speaking, and text comprehension skills.
2. Better concentration, as they are accustomed to focusing on listening to a story until the end.
3. More mature social-emotional skills, as they learn to understand the characters' feelings and the moral values in the stories

A big book is a picture book measuring 14 x 20 inches to 24 x 30 inches. It has several specific criteria, both in terms of physical appearance and content, namely: it features large, engaging illustrations; the font size is enlarged so that children can see and read it clearly; there are more illustrations than text; it contains a rhythm that appeals to children, making the text easy to remember; it includes repeated vocabulary; the plot is clear; and it is easy to predict (Nurtiani and Ajimah, 2019).

In addition to using big books, some schools have received grants for Interactive Flat Panels (IFPs). As a result, the story can be read on a digital book displayed on an Interactive Flat Panel (IFP). This medium offers a variety of benefits that are revolutionizing teaching and learning, making it more engaging, interactive, and effective.

Reading is a window to the world, and reading with children from an early age can lay an important foundation for their language and cognitive development. One of the most effective and enjoyable ways to foster a love of reading is through read-aloud activities. More than just reading stories aloud, read-aloud plays a major role in enriching children's vocabulary and sparking their imagination.

Read-aloud is a method of reading where a text or story is read aloud to children in a clear and expressive voice. The goal is not only for children to hear the story's content but also to experience the rhythm of language, intonation, and the emotions behind the words. This activity is typically conducted by teachers about 15 minutes before the start of formal lessons. Through read-aloud, children can hear new vocabulary in meaningful and engaging contexts.

Read-aloud activities already implemented in several schools have proven highly meaningful; here are some practices that can be adopted:

1. Choose books appropriate for the child's age and interests. Colorful picture books with simple plots are suitable for young children.
2. Use intonation and expression. A lively voice helps children understand the emotions and characters of the story.
3. Pause to ask questions. For example, "What do you think this child will do next?"
4. Reread the child's favorite stories. Repetition helps reinforce vocabulary retention.
5. Allocate time for discussion after reading. Ask which part they liked best or what moral lesson they learned.

Various studies show that children who are regularly read stories from an early age have:

1. Higher early literacy skills, including listening, speaking, and text comprehension.
2. Better concentration, as they are accustomed to focusing on listening to a story until the end.
3. More mature social-emotional skills, as they learn to understand the characters' feelings and the moral values in the stories

In addition to printed books, some schools have received grants for Interactive Flat Panels (IFPs). This allows stories to be read through digital books displayed on the Interactive Flat Panels (IFPs). This medium offers various advantages that revolutionize teaching and learning, making it more engaging, interactive, and effective.

The advantages of IFP include its all-in-one design, which integrates the functions of a projector, whiteboard, and computer into a single sleek device, reducing cable clutter and the need for multiple accessories. High-Quality Visuals: IFP offers high resolution (Full HD up to 4K) with sharp images, making visual materials such as human anatomy diagrams or world maps appear clearer and more detailed. Personalized Learning: This technology enables the customization of instructional materials to meet students' needs, including support for students with special needs as an assistive technology. Overall, digital books on the IFP create a more dynamic, modern, and inclusive learning environment, equipping children with essential digital skills for the modern era.

There are so many steps that can be taken, and one of them is regularly reading stories to children. Reading Aloud is a simple step that can be taken but offers numerous benefits, especially when done regularly with children. The benefits of reading aloud include:

1. Stimulating Critical Thinking

Reading aloud can stimulate children to think critically. The moral values contained in the story will foster a more critical and creative mindset in children.

## 2. Introducing Literacy

When reading aloud, children pay attention to the intonation, illustrations, and words in the book they are reading. This helps children expand their vocabulary and improve their listening and speaking skills. These skills will eventually help children learn to read and write more quickly.

## 3. Building Bonding

The close interaction during this activity fosters a connection between parents and children, as well as between teachers and students. It serves as a fun activity to build a sense of closeness.

Researchers hope to further examine the impact of the read-aloud method when consistently applied in schools and at home, using a larger sample size to obtain a valid percentage.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the  $t$ -value (46.142) >  $t$ -table (1.666) means  $H_0$  is rejected and  $H_a$  is accepted, meaning it is significant so that the read aloud method is effective in increasing the literacy of children aged 4-5 years in PAUD schools in Cilegon city towards a golden Indonesia.

## RECOMMENDATION

Future research is expected to focus on literacy interventions in early childhood education, particularly within the local Indonesian context. It should also aim to provide a deeper understanding of the variables and mechanisms underlying the success of the read-aloud method in improving specific aspects of literacy (pre-reading skills, narrative comprehension, verbal expression) among children aged 4-5 years.

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