Curriculum Management Strategy in Early Childhood Education Based on Early Literacy Strengthening: A Case Study at TK Al-Battani Mranggen Demak

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study aims to examine the curriculum management strategy in Early Childhood Education (ECE) based on the strengthening of early literacy at TK Al-Battani, Mranggen, Demak. Early literacy is a crucial foundation in shaping young children's school readiness, encompassing skills in reading, writing, and numeracy. However, structured curriculum management that aligns with children's developmental needs remains a challenge in many early childhood education institutions. This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation, involving the school principal, Group B teachers, and students' parents as subjects. The findings reveal that curriculum planning remains general and is not yet fully based on assessments of children's literacy development. Learning implementation reflects concern for reading, writing, and numeracy (calistung) skills, but the approaches tend to be conventional and lack variety. Literacy development evaluation is conducted through observation but is not systematically documented. Furthermore, the classroom environment does not fully support a literacy-rich culture, and parental involvement is still limited to administrative communication. In conclusion, the early literacy-based curriculum management strategy at TK Al-Battani needs to be strengthened through planning based on children's developmental data, contextual and engaging learning implementation, and structured, communicative evaluation. Supportive literacy environments and active parental involvement are also essential factors in optimizing early childhood literacy readiness.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is the most fundamental phase in the development of children's character and basic competencies. At this stage, children begin to form learning readiness, which will serve as the foundation for their future education. One of the crucial competencies to be developed is early literacy, particularly in the form of reading, writing, and numeracy skills, commonly referred to as *calistung* (an acronym in Indonesian). Early literacy is not merely an academic skill, but also a component of strengthening cognitive abilities, fine motor skills, as well as language and social development (Suyadi, 2020). Therefore, the role of curriculum management in supporting early literacy strategies needs to be optimized to facilitate the development of *calistung* by emphasizing not only cognitive aspects but also psychomotor and affective aspects according to the developmental characteristics of young children.

In Islamic education, the upbringing of children is considered a great trust with both spiritual and social dimensions. The Qur'an states: *"O you who believe, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire..."* (QS. At-Tahrim: 6). This verse emphasizes the importance of family responsibility in education, including shaping character and capability from an early age. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also said, *"Every child is born in a state of fitrah (natural disposition); then his parents make him a Jew, Christian, or Magian..."* (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim). This Hadith stresses the significance of well-directed education from an early age so that a child's innate potential develops in line with truth and life skills. In today's context, strengthening early literacy is part of the effort to educate children holistically as a form of fulfilling that trust. Strengthening early literacy is increasingly relevant for developing a generation that excels not only intellectually but also spiritually, socially, and adaptively, as emphasized in various studies (Aliwan, 2023; 2024a; 2025) which highlight the importance of directed education in the global and digital era.

Generally, the state of early literacy among young children in Indonesia still presents serious challenges. Based on the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) data released by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemdikbudristek, 2022), it was found that a majority of early-aged children are not yet ready to read when entering elementary school. This indicates a strong need for systematic and integrated early literacy programs embedded within the ECE curriculum. Effective curriculum management plays a vital role in guiding learning processes aligned with children's developmental stages. Appropriate managerial strategies can foster a learning environment that encourages children's motivation and development of basic skills (Mulyasa, 2017). Therefore, managing an ECE curriculum that is rooted in early literacy development is an urgent need within the context of basic education in Indonesia.

Theoretically, this research is based on early childhood education curriculum management theory (Siregar, 2016), which emphasizes the integration of curriculum planning, learning implementation, and learning outcome evaluation as a unified managerial cycle. In addition, early literacy theory (Neuman & Roskos, 2005) explains that children's early experiences with reading, writing, and counting are foundational to cognitive development, influenced by learning environment interactions, teaching strategies, and learning media. These theories provide an important framework for analyzing the connection between curriculum managerial strategies and the development of children's *calistung* skills.

In this context, managing the ECE curriculum should not rely solely on the Merdeka Curriculum or the 2013 ECE Curriculum, but must be adapted to local needs, children's potential, and a sustainable literacy approach. Curriculum management should also include synergy among principals, teachers, and parents in developing plans, conducting learning activities, and engaging in in-depth evaluations. As stated by Wahyuni (2018), an effective ECE curriculum is one that is flexible yet well-structured, developed based on initial assessments of children's abilities, and supported by a literacy-rich learning environment.

Based on initial observations at TK Al-Battani in Bandungrejo, Mranggen, Demak, it was found that many students still struggle with mastering basic *calistung* skills. Some children show delays in recognizing letters and numbers, and there is a lack of consistency in practicing reading and writing. Although teachers have implemented various teaching methods, these approaches are not yet

systematically organized within a literacy-based curriculum management framework. TK Al-Battani itself is a private ECE institution in a suburban area, with a diverse socio-economic background among parents and a limited number of teachers. Initial interviews reveal that teachers are still using conventional and homogeneous approaches without taking individual children's needs into account. According to Hurlock (2006), every child has a unique developmental stage, and therefore teaching strategies should be individualized and contextual.

From an institutional perspective, there is no well-documented or structured curriculum management system in place. Learning programs remain general and are not specifically designed to enhance early literacy skills. A lack of teacher training in curriculum management also serves as an obstacle to achieving optimal literacy learning goals. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of reinforcing early literacy in ECE, such as Nurhadi (2021), who discussed literacy approaches in thematic learning, and Lestari & Kurniawan (2020), who investigated the impact of learning environments on children's early reading ability. However, few studies have specifically addressed structured ECE curriculum management strategies for enhancing *calistung*, particularly in private institutions located in suburban areas like TK Al-Battani.

Based on the above, this study is both relevant and novel in its focus on managerial approaches to strengthening early literacy through a structured ECE curriculum strategy. This research does not merely focus on teaching methods, but on comprehensive curriculum management strategies—from planning and implementation to evaluation—based on the early literacy needs of young children. Thus, this study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of curriculum management in ECE. Theoretically, it expands the body of literature on the relationship between curriculum management and early literacy. Practically, it can serve as a reference for other ECE institutions in designing adaptive curriculum strategies based on children's needs.

The focus of this study is the curriculum management strategy at TK Al-Battani, aimed at developing early childhood *calistung* abilities through an early literacy-based approach. The objective of this research is to describe and analyze ECE curriculum management strategies based on early literacy and to evaluate their effectiveness in developing foundational *calistung* skills in young children.

2.   METHODS

This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because the study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of curriculum management strategies in Early Childhood Education (ECE) based on early literacy strengthening within a specific context, namely TK Al-Battani, Bandungrejo, Mranggen, Demak. A case study is particularly suitable for research that examines educational phenomena contextually and in depth, where the researcher plays an active role in interpreting the meaning of actions, processes, and policies implemented (Yin, 2018).

The subjects of this study included the school principal, who is responsible for curriculum management; Group B teachers, who implement the learning process; and several parents as supporting informants. The subjects were selected purposively based on their relevance and direct involvement in the management and implementation of the curriculum. The focus was placed on Group B, as this group is in the readiness phase for entering primary education, where the mastery of basic reading, writing, and numeracy (calistung) skills serves as a key indicator of early literacy development (Depdiknas, 2007).

The research was carried out through four systematic stages. The first stage was planning, which involved the preparation of research instruments and establishing communication with the school. The second stage was implementation, consisting of observation, interviews, and documentation to collect relevant data. The third stage, data processing, included transcription of interview results and the reduction of data to identify key themes and patterns. The final stage was reporting, in which the findings were organized into thematic narratives that were both systematic and analytical. These stages are consistent with the principles of qualitative research, which emphasize a flexible yet structured approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The main instrument in this study was the researcher as a human instrument, supported by additional tools such as observation guidelines, semi-structured interview guides, and documentation formats. The observation guidelines were used to directly observe the learning and curriculum management processes in the classroom, while the interview guides explored the experiences, perspectives, and strategies used by the school principal and teachers. The documentation review focused on data such as Daily Lesson Plans (RPPH), children's development evaluation notes, and the school's work programs. These instruments were developed based on the emergent design principle, meaning they were open to adaptation depending on field dynamics (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

Data collection techniques included participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted directly on literacy learning activities and curriculum management carried out by the teachers and school principal. In-depth and flexible interviews were conducted with the principal, Group B teachers, and some parents to explore perspectives on curriculum strategies and challenges in strengthening early literacy. Documentation was used to trace the planning and implementation of literacy-related activities in the curriculum.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction was done by sorting important information from observations, interviews, and documentation. The reduced data were then presented in the form of thematic narratives, tables, and direct quotations from informants. Finally, conclusions were drawn inductively and verified through a triangulation process. To ensure data validity, triangulation of sources and methods was applied by comparing data from different informants and techniques. Member checks were conducted to confirm data with informants, and peer debriefing was carried out with ECE academic experts to validate the researcher's interpretations (Sugiyono, 2019). Ethical considerations in Islamic education research go beyond administrative obligations and involve moral values such as honesty and responsibility. The researcher must uphold the dignity of participants and ensure fairness throughout the research process (Aliwan, 2025).

3.   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Early Literacy-Based Curriculum Planning

Interview results with the principal of TK Al-Battani revealed that curriculum planning is still oriented toward monthly themes and scheduling, without an in-depth analysis of children's literacy achievements. Although there have been efforts to include reading and writing activities in the daily lesson plan (RPPH), the formulation of literacy objectives has not yet been designed in a measurable way. The curriculum is still developed based on general guidelines without diagnostic assessment of students' *calistung* (reading, writing, and numeracy) development. According to Afriani and Arifin (2022), effective early childhood curriculum planning must be based on developmental assessments conducted from the outset so that the learning process can be aligned with children's growth stages. The absence of initial assessments at TK Al-Battani leads to inappropriate mapping of literacy materials and activities, resulting in a gap between planning and implementation.

The analyzed documents also show that the syllabus and semester program only include general indicators, such as "children recognize letters" or "children can write their names," without clear strategies or assessment tools. In the context of curriculum management, planning should be systematic and based on developmental data rather than simply following thematic sequences or the academic calendar (Fadillah & Wahyuni, 2023). In addition to the lack of initial assessments, curriculum planning at TK Al-Battani has not yet involved regular collaborative reflection between teachers and the principal. Interviews indicate that RPPH development is still carried out individually by teachers, rather than through a curriculum forum or structured development team. Ideally, curriculum management emphasizes reflective dialogue among teachers in formulating learning strategies based on students' needs (Roekhan & Murtadlo, 2020).

Furthermore, the development of the semester program is not yet based on literacy achievement data from the previous semester. Planning is carried out based on the academic calendar and themes, rather than the actual needs of the children. This indicates a discrepancy between the designed

curriculum and classroom realities. As stated by Afriani and Arifin (2022), the success of the early childhood curriculum strongly depends on the quality of data-driven management based on accurate and structured child development data.

3.2 Implementation of *Calistung* Learning in the Classroom

In the implementation phase, Group B teachers at TK Al-Battani used drilling and imitation methods to teach reading and writing. Observations revealed that children were asked to repeatedly copy letters or numbers in their exercise books. Activities such as shared reading, letter recognition through games, or writing through art-based activities had not yet become part of daily instruction. This demonstrates a lack of variety in approaches that could foster children's interest in literacy. As explained by Damayanti (2020), effective early literacy learning should be contextual, interactive, and enjoyable, employing multisensory methods such as singing, storytelling, or word games. However, teachers at TK Al-Battani have not optimally applied these principles. Interviews suggest that limited training and teaching resources are major obstacles preventing teachers from exploring more effective literacy strategies.

In addition, the learning activities fail to account for instructional differentiation for children with varying learning speeds. Teachers tend to apply a uniform approach, even though some children show delays in letter recognition. According to Kurniawati and Sari (2019), applying responsive teaching strategies to individual needs is a key element in inclusive early childhood education. Beyond drilling, teachers have yet to implement play-based learning approaches in literacy instruction. Children appear disengaged with repetitive writing tasks that are not linked to real-life contexts. The lack of language-based educational games—such as word guessing, letter cards, or phonemic games—weakens the stimulation of literacy development. This contradicts the principles of ECE learning, which position children as active subjects in constructing meaning through exploration (Kemdikbudristek, 2022).

Moreover, teachers have not utilized simple technologies such as audio stories, reading videos, or educational songs as literacy learning media. Yet, according to Puspitasari and Widodo (2021), the use of audiovisual media in early literacy instruction has been proven to enhance children's attention and motivation to learn. The lack of variety in instruction is one of the key factors contributing to children's low motivation to naturally develop reading and writing skills.

3.3 Learning Evaluation and Literacy Progress Monitoring

The evaluation of children's literacy skills at TK Al-Battani remains informal and is not yet systematically documented. Based on portfolio analysis, it was found that literacy development records only consist of students' work samples, with no reflective notes from teachers. Interviews revealed that teachers conduct general assessments without specific instruments to measure early literacy achievement. In the context of early childhood education (ECE), evaluation should not be merely administrative; it should serve as a tool to monitor learning growth and to design appropriate teaching strategies (Arifin & Rosyidi, 2021). The absence of indicator-based assessments makes it difficult for teachers to identify children who require targeted early literacy interventions.

Moreover, evaluation is not yet used as a basis for discussion or reflection between teachers and parents. The lack of concrete data results in minimal information being communicated to parents regarding their child's literacy progress. In fact, communicative and transparent assessment is essential in building synergy between home and school in supporting children's literacy development (Kholid & Mardiana, 2023).

In addition to the absence of written instruments, the evaluation process also fails to provide feedback for instructional improvement. Teachers do not prepare individual progress reports in thematic or specific formats. Evaluation is conducted primarily for administrative purposes rather than as a reflective tool for enhancing teaching strategies. As emphasized by Arifin and Rosyidi (2021), ECE assessments should be diagnostic, progressive, and communicative. The lack of documentation also affects parental involvement. Without concrete data, teachers find it difficult to explain children's literacy development to parents in detail. This hinders collaborative efforts in guiding children's

literacy at home. A well-designed evaluation can serve as a bridge between school and home in establishing a consistent literacy environment (Kurniawati & Sari, 2019).

3.4 Environmental Support and Parental Involvement

The learning environment at TK Al-Battani does not yet fully support the development of early literacy. Classroom observations revealed the absence of dedicated literacy areas, such as reading corners or language-based learning tools. Children's storybooks are very limited, and visual media such as letter posters are not utilized optimally. Yet according to Putri and Kusumawati (2020), a rich literacy environment can significantly stimulate children's interest in reading. Beyond the physical factors, parental involvement is also minimal. Teachers have not provided home literacy guides, such as shared reading activity sheets or reading journals. School–parent communication is limited to general announcements, with no reflective exchange regarding children's development. This indicates a lack of two-way communication strategies to support literacy (Kholid & Mardiana, 2023).

This condition reinforces the finding that early literacy strategies are not yet integrated into the school's managerial system. Literacy-rich environments and parental involvement are two critical elements in the success of early literacy development. When these are not systematically designed, literacy learning becomes confined to the classroom and unsustainable (Damayanti, 2020).

Further observation of the physical environment showed that literacy corners such as word walls or permanent reading areas were unavailable. The books in the classroom were outdated and not regularly updated. According to Damayanti (2020), a literacy-rich classroom environment significantly enhances children's engagement with letters, words, and texts in enjoyable contexts. The lack of instructional media has contributed to the slow development of literacy skills. Parents also admitted that no guidance was provided for conducting literacy activities at home. Teachers did not offer reading or writing task sheets that parents could use with their children. This reflects a lack of two-way communication strategies between teachers and parents in supporting literacy. A study by Kholid and Mardiana (2023) confirmed that parental involvement in home literacy activities significantly increases young children's readiness to read.

3.5 Integration of Curriculum Management and Early Literacy

The findings of this study indicate that curriculum management strategies at TK Al-Battani have not yet fully integrated early literacy strengthening. The lack of assessment-based planning, monotonous implementation, and unsystematic evaluation reflects weak coordination among educational components. Teachers, principals, and parents have not yet engaged in a collaborative framework to support literacy. According to Arsyad and Wahyuni (2023), integrating literacy strategies into ECE curriculum management requires structural support in the form of academic supervision, teacher professional development, and programs based on children's developmental data. Without such support, literacy strengthening remains a bureaucratic notion rather than actual classroom practice.

Within the Merdeka Curriculum framework, early literacy is a core competency that children must develop before entering primary school. However, without an adaptive and purposeful managerial approach, this goal is difficult to achieve. Therefore, curriculum management must transform from a mere administrative planner into the primary facilitator of early literacy development (Kemdikbudristek, 2022).

The integration of curriculum management elements and early literacy strategies has yet to become part of the school culture at TK Al-Battani. No school policy documents were found that position literacy as a top priority. Even literacy activities such as "Reading Day" or "Storytelling Morning" are not included in the annual school calendar. This indicates weak systemic support for early childhood literacy initiatives at the institutional level (Putri & Kusumawati, 2020). The absence of regular meetings to discuss literacy achievement and strategies further demonstrates that curriculum management remains static. The school principal has not yet developed academic supervision focused on literacy reinforcement, either through classroom observation or teacher mentoring. According to

Arsyad and Wahyuni (2023), ECE principals should be the driving force behind a culture of literacy through collaborative and visionary managerial leadership.

4. CONCLUSION

The early literacy-based curriculum planning at TK Al-Battani still requires strengthening in terms of structure and approach. The curriculum developed remains general in nature, not yet fully based on assessments of children's literacy development, and has not been formulated with measurable learning objectives or operational strategies. The curriculum is prepared individually by teachers, which limits opportunities for collaboration among educators to reflect on students' actual needs. Responsive and data-driven planning is a crucial aspect of establishing adaptive curriculum management in early childhood education. The implementation and evaluation of literacy learning have been carried out, but there is room for improvement through more varied, engaging, and structured approaches. Teachers have shown concern for developing children's reading, writing, and numeracy skills; however, the teaching methods tend to be conventional and uniform. The evaluations conducted are observational in nature, not well-documented, and have not been fully utilized as a basis for instructional reflection or communication with parents. Systematic and communicative evaluation is essential for monitoring developmental achievements and supporting the improvement of literacy learning. The support of the learning environment and parental involvement in early literacy reinforcement still needs optimization. Classroom facilities that support a literacy culture, such as reading corners and educational media, are still limited. Literacy activities have not yet become a collective school culture, and parental involvement remains primarily administrative. An effective early childhood curriculum management strategy must integrate data-driven planning, contextual and enjoyable implementation, and reflective evaluation—supported by a rich literacy environment and active parental engagement in the educational process.

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