



Playing as a Bridge to Early Childhood Literacy: A Literature Review of Best Practices in Early Childhood Education

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood literacy development is a critical foundation for future learning success. However, many early education practices still rely on teacher-centered approaches, with limited emphasis on meaningful play-based learning. This gap highlights the need for a comprehensive review of best practices that effectively integrate play into early literacy instruction. The fact remains that literacy levels in Indonesia are very low, and most of the population is unaware of it. This study aims to identify and analyze best practices in enhancing early childhood literacy through play-based approaches. Using the Literature Review method, relevant studies were selected, reviewed, and synthesized to explore patterns, similarities, and differences across various play-based literacy interventions. The data collection involved identifying peer-reviewed journal articles from reputable databases, followed by a structured analysis to extract key themes and strategies. The findings reveal that methods such as storytelling with puppets, letter-sound games, role-playing, and interactive literacy boards significantly boost children's interest and literacy skills. Active engagement of children and the teacher's role as a facilitator emerged as critical success factors. Nonetheless, challenges such as limited resources and a lack of teacher understanding of meaningful play hinder effective implementation. The study implies that targeted teacher training and the provision of supportive learning environments are essential to maximize the potential of play-based literacy learning.

Introduction

Literacy in early childhood includes the ability to read, write, understand, and utilize information from various media types (Harris, 2023). Literacy skills need to be developed from an early age because they are crucial aspects that will influence a person's literacy ability in adolescence and adulthood (Roche et al., 2024). Therefore, early literacy education should be given serious attention using techniques and media appropriate to the developmental stages of children (Sinulingga et al., 2024). Early literacy skills, such as letter recognition, story comprehension, and verbal communication, play a critical role in

preparing children for the next level of education. However, overly academic approaches that ignore children's developmental characteristics can hinder the natural internalization of literacy (Monica et al., 2023). Literacy is a complex skill, but it plays a highly significant role in improving the quality of human resources and acquiring knowledge (Hanifah & Solehuddin, 2023). Knowledge acquisition is divided into two domains: first, the general educational domain, which is conceptual in nature, and second, literacy which is technically involved in the learning process (Mindarwati et al., 2024).

Playing is a primary activity in the life of early childhood that is not only enjoyable but also supports holistic learning processes (Harris, 2023). Through play, children can explore their environment, develop imagination (Roche et al., 2024), and build language and social skills (Yee et al., 2022). Research has shown that integrating play activities into literacy learning can increase children's engagement and motivation to learn (Roche et al., 2024). For example, the use of role-playing and vocabulary-based activities has proven effective in enriching vocabulary and language skills in early childhood (Amalia & Nurlina, 2024).

One innovative play-based approach is the playworld activity, which combines elements of play and storytelling to create deep learning experiences. Experimental studies show that playworld activities significantly improve the literacy abilities of children aged 5–6 years. Additionally, the systematic use of picture storybooks in pre-literacy activities has also proven effective in increasing children's involvement in reading activities and their ability to recognize letters and simple words (Musrifah, 2023).

However, the fact remains that literacy levels in Indonesia are very low, and most of the population is unaware of it. This issue is increasingly relevant in the context of modern cultural revival (Khairiyati et al., 2024). The serious issue of low literacy in Indonesia has been highlighted by various international survey findings. For instance, in the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Indonesia ranked 69th out of 81 participating countries (Lutfiana et al., 2024). Developing early childhood literacy is crucial in addressing the global learning crisis. According to UNICEF (2022), around 70% of 10-year-old children worldwide cannot understand a simple text—an increase from 57% before the COVID-19 pandemic. In Indonesia, school closures during the pandemic affected more than 60 million students and caused a decline in reading ability. Furthermore, the participation rate of Indonesian children in preschool education is still low. BPS data in 2022 shows that only 36.4% of preschool-aged children were enrolled in early childhood education institutions, far below the regional average of 80% (BPS, 2022).

In Indonesia, the role of parents and the community in improving early childhood literacy has not been optimal. A study in Yogyakarta found that parental involvement in literacy activities for children aged 4–5 years was still low (~62%). Meanwhile, community-based initiatives such as village reading corners in rural areas, operated by 300 parents and 73 facilitators, showed a positive impact on increasing children's reading interest (Partijem et al., 2023).

On the other hand, international studies show that learning methods through play can enhance early childhood literacy skills. For example, play sessions after reading books

significantly improved both receptive and expressive vocabulary mastery in preschool children. Likewise, programs such as Read Aloud Learning integrated with Play (RALL) and systematic play-based learning models have been proven to increase early literacy interest and skills (Yee et al., 2022).

Although various studies have shown the effectiveness of play-based approaches in enhancing early childhood literacy, there is still a need to identify and synthesize best practices applied in different contexts. Based on this background, the research questions are as follows:

1. What are the best practices that have been implemented to improve early childhood literacy through play-based approaches?
2. What is the context of implementing play practices that support early childhood literacy?
3. What are the advantages of the play-based approach in terms of child engagement?
4. How effective are different types of play in developing early childhood literacy skills?
5. What are the roles of teachers and the environment in facilitating meaningful play to support children's literacy development?
6. What challenges are faced in implementing play-based approaches to enhance early childhood literacy in Indonesian early childhood education environments, and what strategies can be applied to overcome them?

This literature study aims to review and synthesize various best practices in improving early childhood literacy through play-based approaches, in order to provide guidance for educators and policymakers in designing effective and enjoyable learning strategies for children.

Research Methods

This study employed a literature review approach to identify and analyze best practices in improving early childhood literacy through play-based approaches (Astuti & Yafie, 2025). This method was chosen because it enables the researcher to synthesize various findings from previous studies in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the topic under investigation (Lestarinigrum et al., 2024). As presented in Table 1, the following journal articles serve as the primary references for the literature review in this study.

Table 1. Journal References for Literature Review

Authors	Title	Source title
Alotaibi, M. S. (2024)	Game-based learning in early childhood education: a systematic review and meta-analysis	Frontiers in Psychology
Amalia, W. O. S., & Nurlina, N. (2024)	Strategi Guru untuk Meningkatkan Perkembangan Bahasa Anak Usia Dini melalui Aktivitas Bermain	ULIL ALBAB: Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin
Amelia, R., Zamzani, Mustadi, A., Ghufro, A., Suriyansyah, A., & Aslamiah. (2023)	Parental Involvement in Digital Learning: Mother's Experiences of Elementary School Students	International Journal of Interactive Mobile Technologies
Amir, I., Rohmadheny, P. S., Purnama, Rosada, U. D., & Maharani, E. A. (2024)	Play-based learning in practice: An exploration of early childhood education teacher's experiences in Yogyakarta City	JECCE (Journal of Early Childhood Care and Education)

Ambariani, A., & Suryana, D. (2022)	Hambatan Implementasi PAUD Berbasis Holistik Integratif	Jurnal Obsesi: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini
Aminah, A., Nurhayati, S., & Komala, K. (2021)	Implementasi Literasi Dini Melalui Permainan Arisan Huruf Pada Anak Usia 5-6 Tahun	CERIA (Cerdas Energik Responsif Inovatif Adaptif)
Anggarani, F. K., Setyowati, R., Satwika, P. A., & Andayani, T. R. (2022)	Pengaruh Pendidikan Literasi Keuangan dengan Pendekatan Bermain Peran pada Anak Usia Dini	Jurnal Obsesi: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini
Cavanaugh, D. M., Clemence, K. J., & Teale, M. M. (2017)	Kindergarten scores, storytelling, executive function, and motivation improved through literacy-rich guided play	Early Childhood Education Journal
Hasanah, N. (2020)	Implementasi Model Sentra Bermain Peran Pada Anak Kelompok B Di TK IT Al-Hasna	Jurnal Golden Age
Jonef, F., & Rakimahwati, R. (2023)	Efektivitas Permainan Kotak Kata Dalam Meningkatkan Kemampuan Membaca Permulaan Anak Usia Dini Di Taman Kanak-kanak Negeri Pembina Painan	Jurnal Pendidikan AURA (Anak Usia Raudhatul Atfhal)
Kangas, J., Lastikka, A., & Arvola, O. (2023)	Inclusive Play: Defining Elements of Playful Teaching and Learning in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse ECEC	Education Sciences
Kesawan, P., Ningsih, J., & Masran, A. (2024)	Penerapan Teknik Bercerita menggunakan Media Boneka untuk Meningkatkan Minat Membaca AUD	Inovasi Pendidikan Dan Anak Usia Dini
Lidya, A., Suriansyah, A., & Aslamiah, A. (2022)	The Effect of Parents' Education Level and Educational Game Tools on Social Emotional Development	JURNAL SOCIUS
Maulida, S., & Suyadi, S. (2021)	Pengembangan Literasi Anak Usia Dini melalui Media ABC Magnet Box di RA M Gandu I	Paudia
Nicolopoulou, A., Cortina, K. S., Ilgaz, H., Cates, C. B., & de Sá, A. B. (2015)	Using a narrative- and play-based activity to promote low-income preschoolers' oral language, emergent literacy, and social competence	Early Childhood Research Quarterly
Pyle, A., Wickstrom, H., Gross, O., & Kraszewski, E. (2024)	Supporting literacy development in kindergarten through teacher-facilitated play	Journal of Early Childhood Research
Tupalessy, P. (2024)	The Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in Indonesia Early Childhood Education (PAUD): A Literature Review	HUELE: Journal of Applied Linguistics, Literature and Culture
Utami, A. D., Fleer, M., & Li, L. (2023)	The 'Player' Role of the Teacher in Playworld Creates New Conditions for Children's Learning and Development	International Journal of Early Childhood (IJEC)

The data collection process was conducted through a systematic search across various academic databases such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and ResearchGate. The keywords used in the search included: “early childhood literacy,” “play,” “play-based approach in literacy,” and “best literacy practices for children.” The inclusion criteria applied were as follows (Dewi & Pranoto, 2024):

- Articles published within the last ten years (2015–2025).
- Studies focusing on early childhood literacy using a play-based approach.
- Studies available in either Indonesian or English.

Articles that did not meet these criteria, such as those irrelevant to the topic or unavailable in full text were excluded from the analysis.

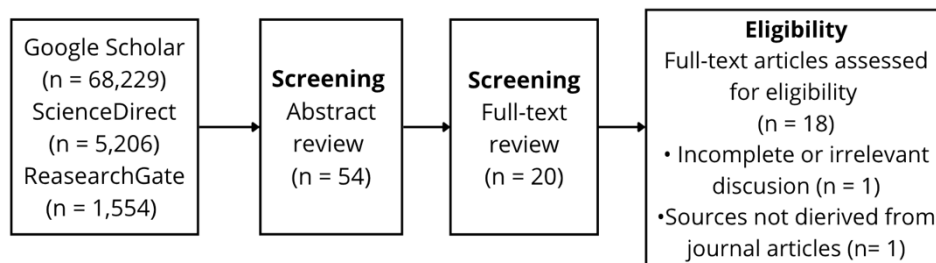
After the initial selection, the chosen articles were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach. Each article was reviewed to identify the following:

1. The research objectives and questions.
2. The Methodology used .
3. Key findings and results related to literacy and play.
4. Practical implications and recommendations.

The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method in this study was used to identify and analyze best practices in enhancing early childhood literacy through play-based approaches. The literature review process was carried out through several systematic stages. The first stage was the data search from three main sources: Google Scholar (n = 68,229), ScienceDirect (n = 5,206), and ResearchGate (n = 1,554). The initial selection process involved filtering out duplicate and irrelevant articles, resulting in a total of 20 articles reviewed in depth. The second stage was screening, which involved reviewing the full texts to ensure the content aligned with the research topic. Articles that lacked complete data or relevant discussion (n = 1) and those not sourced from scholarly journals (n = 1) were eliminated in this phase. The final stage was the eligibility analysis, in which the articles that met the inclusion criteria were critically evaluated to extract findings and implications. In total, 18 eligible articles were used as the foundation for synthesizing the findings of this literature study.

As shown in figure 1, this analysis aimed to identify patterns, similarities, and differences among the reviewed studies, as well as to synthesize findings that could offer in-depth insights into best practices for improving early childhood literacy through play.

Figure 1. Systematic Literature Review Method



Findings

As shown in Table 2, the systematic literature review identified best practices that enhance early childhood literacy through play-based approaches.

Table 2. Summary of Effective Play-Based Literacy Practices

Play-Based Activity	Literacy Skill Developed	Age Group	Key Benefit
Storytelling with puppets	Listening, speaking, narrative comprehension	4–6 years	Enhances attention and moral understanding
Letter and sound games	Letter recognition, phonemic awareness	4–6 years	Supports early reading and fine motor skills

Role-play and simple drama	Expressive language, vocabulary, social-emotional development	5–6 years	Encourages imagination and empathy
Rhythm and song-based games	Alphabet knowledge, word structure, phonological awareness	3–5 years	Improves memory and motivation through music
Interactive literacy board games	Early reading, concentration, letter identification	5–6 years	Promotes interactive learning and focus
Thematic guided play (e.g., pretend play)	Vocabulary, story structure, comprehension	4–6 years	Enhances narrative thinking and engagement
Digital and physical literacy media	Reading-writing, digital literacy, vocabulary	4–6 years	Provides multisensory and technology-based engagement

The Sub Findings

This systematic literature review reveals key insights into how play-based approaches effectively support early literacy development in early childhood education settings. One widely recognized best practice is guided play, where educators subtly embed literacy elements such as phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and print concepts into play without overtly directing it. This method allows children to retain agency while still being exposed to rich language experiences.. In addition, teacher-directed play which involves more structured and intentional literacy activities has proven effective when balanced with child-initiated play. For instance, letter games or story reenactments guided by teachers help reinforce foundational literacy skills while still allowing room for imagination.

The implementation context of these practices varies across a continuum of play pedagogies, from free play to more structured formats. Each approach offers different levels of adult involvement and differing impacts on literacy outcomes. Successful application often depends on how well teachers understand their facilitative role, how classrooms are organized to support playful literacy, and whether the curriculum intentionally incorporates play as a vehicle for learning. Awareness of these contextual elements is essential to ensure meaningful integration of literacy goals into daily activities.

Play-based learning offers significant advantages in terms of children's engagement. When children participate in play especially guided play, they exhibit higher levels of motivation, emotional connection, and sustained attention. The combination of fun, freedom, and subtle guidance keeps children curious and focused, which enhances their willingness to explore new vocabulary and concepts. Emotional safety and enjoyment further amplify their learning outcomes during such play experiences.

Various types of play have demonstrated strong effectiveness in supporting the development of early literacy skills. Each type of play offers distinct benefits. Free play helps children develop oral language, narrative skills, and social confidence, although it may not directly target technical literacy. Teacher-directed play is more efficient in teaching specific literacy components like phonics or decoding. Guided play offers the most holistic benefits,

blending child autonomy with embedded literacy support to enhance vocabulary, print awareness, and phonological processing.

Teachers play a vital role as facilitators during play. They observe, listen, and provide scaffolding through open-ended questions, prompts, and strategic materials. Rather than leading the play, they enrich it by creating opportunities for literacy to emerge naturally. The learning environment also matters greatly. Classrooms should be rich in print and storytelling opportunities, with areas designed for dramatic play, role-playing, and access to labeled objects, books, and writing tools, all of which help promote literacy in an organic and enjoyable way.

However, in the Indonesian early childhood context, several challenges exist. These include limited teacher understanding of guided play, pressure to prioritize formal literacy instruction, and a lack of appropriate materials that support literacy through play. To address these issues, strategies such as ongoing professional development, curriculum revision to embed guided play practices, and parental education campaigns are necessary. These efforts aim to shift perspectives and show that play is not a distraction from learning but a powerful pathway to literacy.

Discussion

Best Practices to Improve Early Literacy through Play-Based Approaches

The literature review conducted has identified various best practices in improving early childhood literacy through play-based approaches. Below are the common forms of practices along with their implementation contexts:

a. Storytelling with Puppets

The technique of storytelling using hand puppets or finger puppets has proven effective in increasing children's interest in reading and language skills. Puppets function as visual tools that attract children's attention, bring stories to life, and help in understanding moral messages. Additionally, this method encourages active participation from children in listening and responding to stories, thereby strengthening their connection to the world of literacy (Kesawan et al., 2024).

b. Letter and Sound Games

Games that involve arranging letters and recognizing sounds such as building words around the theme of vehicles can enhance children's literacy skills. These activities help children recognize letters, develop hand-eye coordination, and understand the relationship between letters and sounds. This approach also supports cognitive and social-emotional development through peer interaction (Aminah et al., 2021).

c. Simple Drama and Role Play

Role play or simple drama activities allow children to express stories through action and dialogue. These activities help children understand and manage emotions, improve speaking and listening skills, and develop imagination and creativity. Role play also gives children the

opportunity to understand real-life situations and expand their vocabulary (Anggarani et al., 2022).

d. Song and Rhythm-Based Games

Games that combine songs and rhythm, such as singing the alphabet or action songs, can strengthen letter and word recognition in children. Through music and rhythm, children can more easily remember the order of letters, understand word structure, and improve their phonological skills. These activities are also fun and motivate children to actively engage in literacy learning (Simatupang et al., 2024).

e. Interactive Literacy Board Games

The use of interactive board games, such as initial letter bingo, is effective in enhancing letter recognition skills in children aged 4–6 years. These activities engage children in identifying letters, developing concentration, and improving early reading skills. Board games can also be adapted to various themes and levels of difficulty according to the child's development (Maulida & Suyadi, 2021)..

Contexts of Implementation

Play-based practices that support early childhood literacy are carried out in various contexts, including:

- In the Classroom: Activities such as puppet storytelling and letter arrangement games are often conducted as part of structured classroom learning.
- Outdoor Settings: Song and rhythm-based games, as well as interactive board games, can be conducted outdoors to provide a different and enjoyable learning atmosphere.
- Play Centers: Role play and simple drama are usually held in dedicated play areas designed for imaginative activities, allowing children to explore various roles and situations.

By integrating various forms of play within appropriate contexts, teachers and educators can create a learning environment that holistically supports the development of early childhood literacy.

Advantages in Terms of Engagement

The play-based approach in early childhood education has clear advantages in increasing active child engagement. Through play activities, children are directly involved in the learning process, allowing them to learn naturally and enjoyably. This is aligned with the developmental characteristics of children, who require stimulation through interaction with their surroundings and peers. Thus, the play method can enhance children's interest in learning and make them more enthusiastic about participating in learning activities (Amalia & Nurlina, 2024).

Compared to traditional approaches, play-based learning offers several advantages: higher levels of cognitive, emotional, and social engagement; better language and literacy development through exploration and storytelling in meaningful contexts; sustained motivation and interest in learning, as children actively explore and gain meaningful

experiences; social interaction and soft skill development, such as collaboration and emotional regulation; and improved executive functioning, which is crucial for long-term success.

This approach aligns with constructivist principles, where children build knowledge through direct experience, teacher guidance, and social interaction (Vygotsky, Piaget). Therefore, if the primary goal is to increase engagement among the target group (young children), structured, interactive, and teacher-guided play is highly suitable as a core strategy. A comparison between guided play and direct instruction revealed that children who learned early letters and word recognition through guided play achieved significantly higher early literacy scores (Pyle et al., 2024).

Effectiveness of Different Types of Play

Various types of play have been proven effective in developing literacy skills in early childhood. For example, word box games can improve children's ability to recognize and trace words, which are foundational skills for reading and writing. Additionally, modified board games like Snakes and Ladders incorporating letters and numbers help children learn the alphabet and numerals, as well as enhance their numeracy literacy. Traditional games such as Cublak-Cublak Suweng, when adapted, are also effective in fostering early literacy development (Jonef & Rakimahwati, 2023).

Guided play that involves gentle teacher support has shown proven effects in early literacy development. Cavanaugh et al. (2017) found that children taught early letters and word patterns through guided play scored significantly higher in early literacy compared to those using direct methods. Pyle et al. (2024) reported that guided play supports six core literacy skills, including vocabulary, phonological awareness, text comprehension, and meaningful reading and writing abilities. Teacher-structured play activities are effective for teaching phonics, alphabetic knowledge, and writing. In teacher-directed play, the teacher leads activities such as word games or planned reading sessions, which are effective for explicitly introducing literacy concepts. Although less creative than free play, this approach offers opportunities for children to master specific skills in a systematic way. Imaginative play types like Pretend Play/Dramatic Play are closely linked to narrative formation and literacy vocabulary.

Roskos (2017) found that pretend play has moderate to large effects on early literacy. Thematic fantasy play improves story comprehension, as its narrative structure mirrors that of written stories. Play activities involving stories and drama such as Storytelling & Story-Acting have also proven powerful. The STSA program (Storytelling and Story-Acting), in a study of 149 preschool children, showed significant improvements in narrative comprehension, vocabulary, emergent literacy, and self-regulation (Nicolopoulou et al., 2015). Media-based games, both digital and physical, also support early literacy. The use of diverse media such as e-books, natural materials (e.g., sand, palm leaves), and puzzles plays an important role in enhancing young children's reading and writing skills. High-quality digital learning for children includes letter and number recognition, reading, counting, coloring, drawing, playing educational games, and learning (Amelia et al., 2023).

Alotaibi (2024) reported medium to large effects on children's cognitive, social, emotional, motivation, and engagement aspects through game-based learning. Computer-based interventions (e.g., e-books, phonological awareness software) produced an average positive effect of 0.28 on literacy skills, according to a meta-analysis of 59 studies involving 6,786 children (Verhoeven et al., 2020). Educational Play Tools (APE) can also be used as a medium for learning through play. These tools can be developed to suit children's abilities, with consideration of their age group (Lidya et al., 2022).

Teacher and Environmental Roles

Teachers play a vital role in facilitating and guiding meaningful play activities for young children. They also serve as role models whose behaviors and attitudes can be imitated by children. Therefore, teachers do not merely deliver content, but also guide children through the learning process via play (Kemendikdasmen, 2025). Teachers act as facilitators in guided play, setting objectives, preparing the environment, and providing gentle support to meet academic goals. In the Playworld approach, teachers also "play as players," entering the child's imaginative world to integrate cognitive, emotional, and imaginative aspects, thereby creating highly motivating learning conditions. Teachers must adjust their level of involvement according to the type and stage of play. In structured play, teachers take a more active role as facilitators or even provide direct instruction. In free play, the teacher's task is to observe and provide minimal support so as not to hinder the child's initiative. Teacher intervention should be well-timed, not too early to disrupt exploration, but sufficient to enrich the child's understanding (Utami et al., 2023).

Teachers who take on the role of reflective and responsive researchers (emergent curriculum) will observe, document, and design activities based on the child's interests, providing challenges aligned with their developmental abilities. In the context of Finland's ECEC framework, teachers apply play pedagogies to support the participation of all children, including those from diverse cultural/linguistic backgrounds, by offering varied types of play, providing language scaffolding, and ensuring an inclusive environment. Facilitating two-way communication between teachers and children is increasingly important so that children feel involved and have a voice in play activities (Kangas et al., 2023).

Challenges and Strategies in the Indonesian Context

The implementation of play-based approaches in PAUD (Early Childhood Education) in Indonesia faces several challenges. One major issue is the lack of understanding among teachers regarding effective play-based methods, as well as limited outreach and training from local education authorities or government bodies. In addition, insufficient facilities and infrastructure hinder the implementation of meaningful play activities. To address these challenges, teacher training and mentoring in developing play-based learning methods are essential. Government and community support are also important in providing environments and facilities that support early childhood play activities (Ambariani & Suryana, 2022).

Another challenge is the varying levels of teacher understanding and capacity. A study in Yogyakarta reported that 56% of PAUD teachers had moderate experience and 12.2% had

low experience in implementing play-based learning (PBL), revealing inconsistencies in the comprehension of fundamental concepts and methods of PBL (Amir et al., 2024). Additionally, limited training and resources leave many teachers feeling unprepared due to the lack of professional development and adequate workshops especially related to the Merdeka Curriculum and STEAM-based loose parts methods (Tupalessy, 2024).

Moreover, insufficient teaching aids and play environments also pose significant obstacles. In a study of the role-play center at TK IT Al-Hasna Klaten, teachers experienced difficulties due to the lack of instructional media and adequate play settings (Hasanah, 2020). Another complicating factor is diverse parental responses. Parental expectations for academic achievements can sometimes hinder the adoption of PBL; this value conflict may cause teachers to hesitate in fully applying play-based methods (Amir et al., 2024).

Implementation strategies for overcoming these challenges include:

- Strengthening teacher competence through contextual training. The implementation of tiered training has proven effective in improving the professionalism of PAUD teachers.
- Local workshops on PBL and STEAM are recommended to increase teacher readiness and confidence.
- Provision of loose parts and educational play tools (STEAM tools) supports creativity and accessibility in meaningful play. Investing in simple materials can reduce infrastructure limitations.
- Teacher–parent collaboration through education and active involvement. Educating parents about the benefits of PBL and involving them in play sessions can reduce resistance and enhance implementation of play practices at both school and home (Tupalessy, 2024).

Teachers are also encouraged to conduct observations and apply the emergent curriculum, adapting play activities to suit the interests and needs of children in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum principles (Jf et al., 2022). Building PAUD community awareness of PBL through seminars, teacher practice communities, and sharing case studies (such as the role-play center in Klaten) can help encourage broader adoption of play-based learning in the PAUD environment (Hasanah, 2020).

Conclusion

This study concludes that play-based learning particularly in the form of guided and teacher-facilitated play is an effective approach to fostering early childhood literacy. By synthesizing findings from recent systematic reviews and empirical studies, it is evident that best practices involve balancing child autonomy with structured teacher support, and that a literacy-rich environment significantly enhances learning outcomes. The role of the teacher as a facilitator and the integration of purposeful play strategies aligned with curriculum goals are key to maximizing the effectiveness of this approach. The implications of this study suggest that early childhood educators and policymakers should prioritize training in play pedagogy and develop curricula that support guided play as a core method of literacy instruction. Recognizing play not merely as recreational, but as a strategic literacy

development tool, can shift instructional practices in early education. However, this study is limited by its reliance on secondary data and literature-based analysis, without primary field research to validate implementation outcomes in diverse local contexts. Future studies are recommended to explore classroom-based action research or mixed-method approaches that investigate the long-term impact of specific play-based literacy interventions. Research should also address how teacher beliefs, training, and school infrastructure affect the success of implementing guided play practices for literacy development.

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