

CULTIVATING READING-LOVING CHARACTER THROUGH PICTURE STORYBOOK-BASED LITERACY PRACTICES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Sunarsih¹, Hisbiyatul Hasanah², Selasi Priatiningsih³

^{1,2,3} PG-PAUD FKIP Universitas PGRI Argopuro (UNIPAR) Jember

^{1*}sunarsihsunarsi hf44@gmail.com, ²zahsysahrazade@gmail.com,

³selasicezzi26@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the use of picture storybook media in fostering a reading-loving character among early childhood learners at KB Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember. Previous studies have predominantly emphasized early literacy skills, language development, and reading interest, while limited attention has been devoted to examining picture storybooks as a medium for character formation, particularly within Islamic early childhood education settings in rural areas. This study contributes to the conceptual understanding that reading-loving character is developed through the integration of literacy habituation, enjoyable reading experiences, and supportive literacy environments. The findings reveal that children voluntarily visit reading corners, actively engage in storytelling activities, and demonstrate sustained enthusiasm for reading through repeated exposure to picture storybooks. This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive case study design. The research was conducted at KB Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember involving eight informants, consisting of one principal, two teachers, two parents, and three children who actively participated in literacy activities. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, while data analysis involved data reduction, organization, interpretation, and conclusion drawing to identify recurring themes related to reading character formation. The findings indicate that picture storybooks function not only as instructional media but also as an effective means of cultivating reading-loving character. Literacy facilities, teacher motivation, and parental involvement emerged as supporting factors, whereas limited home literacy resources and excessive digital media exposure became major challenges. Nevertheless, picture storybooks consistently maintained children's reading enthusiasm and promoted sustainable literacy habits from an early age.

Keywords: Picture Storybooks; Character Loves Reading; Early Childhood Education; Literacy Habituation.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penggunaan media buku cerita bergambar dalam menumbuhkan karakter cinta membaca di kalangan anak-anak usia dini di KB Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember. Studi-studi sebelumnya sebagian besar menekankan keterampilan literasi awal, pengembangan bahasa, dan minat baca, sementara perhatian terbatas telah diberikan untuk meneliti buku cerita bergambar sebagai media pembentukan karakter, terutama dalam konteks pendidikan anak usia dini Islam di daerah pedesaan. Studi ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman konseptual bahwa karakter cinta membaca dikembangkan melalui

integrasi kebiasaan literasi, pengalaman membaca yang menyenangkan, dan lingkungan literasi yang mendukung. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa anak-anak secara sukarela mengunjungi sudut baca, aktif terlibat dalam kegiatan bercerita, dan menunjukkan antusiasme yang berkelanjutan untuk membaca melalui paparan berulang terhadap buku cerita bergambar. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus deskriptif. Penelitian ini dilakukan di KB Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember yang melibatkan delapan informan, terdiri dari satu kepala sekolah, dua guru, dua orang tua, dan tiga anak yang aktif berpartisipasi dalam kegiatan literasi. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan dokumentasi, sementara analisis data melibatkan reduksi data, organisasi, interpretasi, dan penarikan kesimpulan untuk mengidentifikasi tema-tema yang berulang terkait pembentukan karakter membaca. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa buku cerita bergambar tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai media pengajaran tetapi juga sebagai sarana efektif untuk menumbuhkan karakter cinta membaca. Fasilitas literasi, motivasi guru, dan keterlibatan orang tua muncul sebagai faktor pendukung, sedangkan sumber daya literasi di rumah yang terbatas dan paparan media digital yang berlebihan menjadi tantangan utama. Namun demikian, buku cerita bergambar secara konsisten mempertahankan antusiasme membaca anak-anak dan mendorong kebiasaan literasi yang berkelanjutan sejak usia dini.

Kata Kunci: Buku Cerita Bergambar; Karakter Gemar Membaca; Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini; Kebiasaan Literasi

A. Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) philosophically serves as the main foundation in shaping human quality from the early stages of life (Fitri et al., 2026). At this stage, children experience rapid development, often referred to as the golden age, which is a period that determines the formation of character, habits, and basic abilities that will influence the child's life in the next stages (Kholifah et al., 2020). One of the important characters that need to be instilled from an early age is the love of reading. Therefore, the formation of a reading habit cannot be separated from an education process

that is systematically designed, engaging, and in accordance with the developmental characteristics of early childhood (Aziz et al., 2025).

On the other hand, the phenomenon of low reading culture among early childhood children remains an important issue in the world of education, including in Indonesia (Mu'alimah et al., 2024). The changing lifestyle of society, which is increasingly close to digital devices, causes some children to be more interested in audiovisual entertainment than in reading books (Sugara et al., 2023). This condition can hinder the development of early

literacy skills if not balanced with appropriate learning strategies. Therefore, early childhood education teachers are required to create a learning environment that fosters children's love for books thru the use of engaging media, one of which is picture storybooks.

The urgency of fostering a love for reading is increasingly needed in line with various studies showing that early literacy skills in children correlate with academic success in subsequent educational levels. Research shows that children who have early reading experiences tend to have better language, communication, and reading comprehension skills compared to children with minimal literacy experiences (Romeo et al., 2022). Additionally, reports from various other studies reveal that children's involvement in reading activities together using picture storybooks can enhance vocabulary, narrative skills, and sustained reading interest (Dicataldo et al., 2022).

In the perspective of constructivism, children build their knowledge thru direct experiences and interactions with meaningful learning environments (Saleem et al., 2021). Engaging and contextual

learning media are important factors in shaping those learning experiences. One of the media widely used in early childhood education is picture storybooks. Picture storybooks not only present text but also visual illustrations that can attract attention, stimulate imagination, and help children understand the story's message more concretely (Silaban et al., 2024). According to the Dual Coding theory developed by Allan Paivio, information received thru both verbal and visual channels simultaneously will be easier for learners to understand and remember (Mir et al., 2023).

In the context of early childhood education, efforts to build a reading culture require an approach that aligns with the child's world. Picture storybooks become one of the effective media alternatives because they can integrate elements of play, learning, and storytelling into one enjoyable activity (Herlina & Romdiyah, 2025). Engaging illustrations can help children understand the story, stimulate their imagination, and encourage them to interact with the book actively. Research shows that the use of picture storybooks can enhance

children's engagement in reading activities, strengthen story comprehension, and foster a positive attitude toward literacy activities (Sonya & Muthi, 2025). Therefore, this media is considered relevant to be applied in the formation of a reading-loving character in early childhood.

This condition is also a concern at KB Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember. As an early childhood education institution striving to develop a literacy culture from an early age, KB Raudlatul Ulum implements the use of picture storybooks as one of the learning media integrated into the children's daily activities. Children are not only invited to listen to stories, but are also actively involved in observing pictures, retelling the story's content, and showing interest in reading books independently. This situation shows that picture storybooks have the potential to be an effective means of fostering a love for reading in children if used appropriately and consistently.

Several previous studies have proven the effectiveness of picture storybooks in enhancing various aspects of child development. Research conducted shows that shared reading activities using picture books have a positive impact on early

literacy development and language skills in young children (Dowdall et al., 2020). Another study by Oktarina et al., (2020) emphasizes that children's interaction with picture books can enhance early reading skills and strengthen intrinsic motivation to learn. The results of these studies indicate that picture books not only serve as educational media but also as a means of fostering reading habits in children.

Nevertheless, most previous research still focuses on improving early reading skills, listening skills, language development, and increasing reading interest. Studies that specifically discuss the use of illustrated storybooks in fostering a love for reading in early childhood, especially in the context of religious-based educational institutions in rural areas, are still relatively limited. However, the formation of a reading habit character is not only related to skill aspects but also involves the habituation, attitude, and tendency of children to make reading a necessity and a pleasurable activity in their daily lives (Chen et al., 2023).

Based on this phenomenon, this research starts from the argument that the formation of a reading habit

character in early childhood requires a learning experience that is enjoyable, meaningful, and appropriate to the child's developmental stage. The use of illustrated storybooks is assumed to foster a love for books, increase the frequency of children's interactions with reading, and gradually develop a reading habit. Thus, this research aims to uncover how the use of illustrated storybooks is applied in fostering a love for reading among early childhood children at KB Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember.

The position of this research lies in the focus of the study, which not only examines the effectiveness of picture storybooks as a learning medium but also analyzes their role in fostering a love for reading in early childhood within the context of Islamic educational institutions based on pesantren in the Ledokombo Jember area. This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of character education based on literacy and serve as a practical reference for early childhood education teachers in designing learning that can foster a reading culture from an early age.

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design to explore in depth how picture storybooks are utilized in fostering reading-loving character among early childhood learners at KB Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember. This approach was selected because the study focused on understanding educational practices, interactions, and children's responses within their natural learning environment rather than measuring variables quantitatively. The research specifically examined the implementation process of picture storybook media, the emergence of reading habits among children, and the supporting as well as inhibiting factors encountered during the learning activities. The participants consisted of the school principal, teachers, parents, and children involved in literacy activities, enabling the researcher to obtain comprehensive perspectives regarding the formation of reading-loving character through picture storybooks. Qualitative inquiry is considered appropriate for investigating educational phenomena in authentic contexts and for capturing

participants' experiences and meanings in a holistic manner (Alam, 2020; Stanley, 2023).

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, allowing the researcher to examine both instructional practices and children's behavioral responses during literacy activities. Observations focused on children's engagement with picture storybooks, while interviews explored teachers' strategies, parental support, and children's reading experiences. Relevant documents, including learning plans and literacy-related activities, were also examined to strengthen the findings. Data analysis was conducted continuously through data reduction, data organization, interpretation, and drawing conclusions to identify recurring themes related to reading character formation. This analytical process enabled the researcher to provide a contextual and comprehensive understanding of how picture storybooks contribute to nurturing children's interest and habitual engagement in reading activities at KB Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember.² The choice of this design allowed the

study to reveal not only the educational outcomes but also the processes through which literacy values are cultivated in early childhood settings (Alam, 2020).

C. Result and Discussion

Result

1. The Use of Illustrated Storybooks in Fostering a Love for Reading in Early Childhood at KB Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember

The research results show that the use of illustrated storybooks at KB Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember is carried out in a planned manner and is part of the literacy activities conducted regularly in the learning process. Teachers use picture storybooks as a medium to introduce reading activities thru simple stories, engaging illustrations, and interactions that actively involve the children. Children not only listen to the story read by the teacher, but are also given the opportunity to observe the pictures, express their opinions, answer questions, and retell the story based on their understanding. This condition creates a pleasant learning atmosphere, making children more interested in interacting with books

and turning reading into an enjoyable activity. This is in line with the interview results that revealed:

"The children really like picture storybooks. When the reading activity started, they immediately picked up their favorite books and seemed enthusiastic about reading or retelling the story to their friends." (Group B Teacher, interview, May 15, 2026).

Observation findings show that most children voluntarily visit the reading corner available in the classroom after the learning activities. They choose their favorite picture storybooks, turn the pages while observing the illustrations, and then try to read or explain the story's content according to their abilities. Some children even showed the courage to stand in front of the class and retell the story with the help of the illustrations in the book. This situation shows that children's interaction with picture storybooks is not limited to reading activities, but also develops into activities that encourage language skills, self-confidence, and voluntary reading habits. These findings align with the initial observations, which showed that children appeared enthusiastic when given the opportunity to read in the reading corner and displayed a high level of

interest in the picture storybooks available in the classroom.

In addition, the research found that the habit of reading thru picture storybooks gradually shapes a love for reading in early childhood. Children no longer view reading as a forced activity, but as an enjoyable and engaging activity to do. They show a high level of curiosity toward new stories, a desire to reread books they have previously read, and excitement when the teacher presents different storybooks in each learning activity. One of the teachers said:

"We encourage the children to read every day, even if it's just for a few minutes." Over time, they become accustomed to it, and some even go straight to the reading corner without being asked because they have come to enjoy reading picture storybooks. (Teacher of Group B, interview, May 15, 2026).

The findings indicate that the use of illustrated storybooks not only serves as a means of delivering material but also becomes an effective habituation medium in fostering a love for reading in early childhood thru enjoyable learning experiences that are appropriate for their developmental stage.

2. Supporting and Hindering Factors in the Formation of a Reading Habit Character Thru Illustrated Storybooks

The research results reveal that the success of using illustrated storybooks in forming a reading habit character is influenced by several supporting factors. One of the main factors is the availability of literacy facilities in the form of reading corners in the classroom, which allows children to access books easily and independently. In addition, the variety of picture storybooks provided with attractive illustrations makes children more interested in reading and exploring the content of the stories. The role of the teacher is also an important factor, especially in providing motivation, guiding reading activities, and creating a pleasant learning atmosphere that does not put pressure on the child. The principal stated that:

"We provide a reading corner and various types of illustrated storybooks so that children have many reading options." Teachers also always provide motivation so that children become accustomed to and enjoy reading from an early age." (Principal, interview, May 16, 2026).

In addition to support from the school, parental involvement also becomes a factor that strengthens the formation of a reading habit. Children who receive support and reading habits at home tend to be more active in literacy activities at school. However, this study also found several inhibiting factors that affect the formation of that character. The limited number of books available at home causes some children to only interact with books when they are at school. In addition, an environment that does not support reading activities and excessive use of digital media presents its own challenges in fostering a reading habit in children. One of the teachers expressed:

"There are some children who are very fond of reading at school, but when they are at home, they rarely read because they don't have many books or they often use their mobile phones to watch." (Group B Teacher, interview, May 15, 2026).

Although there are various obstacles, the research results show that the use of illustrated storybooks media can still maintain children's enthusiasm for reading activities. Children show a high interest in books, actively participate in storytelling activities, and gradually develop positive reading habits. Thus,

illustrated storybooks have become one of the effective means of fostering a love for reading in early childhood at KB Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember thru supportive learning environments and continuous habituation.

DISCUSSION

1. Picture Storybooks as a Literacy Medium for Fostering Reading-Loving Character in Early Childhood

The research results show that the use of illustrated storybooks at KB Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember not only serves as a learning medium but also as a means of fostering a love for reading thru enjoyable and meaningful literacy experiences. The active involvement of children in activities such as observing pictures, listening to stories, answering questions, and retelling the story's content shows that the reading process in early childhood develops thru multimodal interactions. These findings indicate that the habit of reading does not emerge instantly, but rather is formed thru consistent habituation in a supportive learning environment (Adilah et al., 2025). When children feel that reading is an enjoyable activity, the intrinsic

motivation to interact with books will grow naturally (Fawaz et al., 2025). This condition is evident from the children's enthusiasm as they voluntarily visit the reading corner, choose their favorite books, and show interest in the stories read by the teacher. Thus, picture storybooks not only serve as a medium for conveying messages but also as a means that brings together cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects in fostering a love for reading (Petrová & Vašíková, 2026).

These findings are in line with the Dual Coding theory, which explains that information presented thru both verbal and visual elements simultaneously is easier to understand, remember, and generates learning interest in children. (Caviglioli, 2019) Engaging illustrations in picture books provide visual stimuli that reinforce children's understanding of the story's content, while simple text helps children connect language symbols with the meanings they learn (Aulia et al., 2025). Recent research shows that picture books play an important role in enhancing reading engagement because children gain enjoyable, interactive reading experiences that

are appropriate for their developmental stage (Janawati & Ananda, 2025). In the context of this research, engaging illustrations and stories that resonate with children's experiences encourage them to continue interacting with books, so reading is no longer seen as merely an academic activity, but rather as part of the play and learning activities they enjoy.

Furthermore, the habit of reading regularly thru the use of picture books shows that the character of being a reading enthusiast develops thru a continuous habituation process (Dewi, 2022). Children who initially were only interested in looking at pictures gradually began to show interest in understanding the story's content, asking about the characters, and even retelling the story they had read. These findings reinforce the results of the research conducted by Grolog (2020) which states that shared reading activities with picture storybooks can enhance reading motivation, language skills, and foster reading habits from an early age. These research results are also in line with the study by Niland (2023) which found that children's interaction with picture storybooks has a positive

impact on early literacy development because children have the opportunity to actively explore language and story meaning. Thus, the formation of a reading habit is not only influenced by reading ability itself but also by the positive experiences children gain while interacting with reading materials.

From the researchers' perspective, these findings indicate that the success of fostering a love for reading in early childhood greatly depends on how teachers present engaging, repetitive, and developmentally appropriate reading experiences for children. Picture storybooks have proven to bridge this process by presenting a combination of visual elements, stories, and interactive activities that make children feel close to books. Therefore, the significant meaning of this research is not only in the use of picture storybooks as a learning aid but also as a strategy for fostering a literacy culture from an early age. When children have positive experiences with books from an early age, the tendency to make reading a necessity and habit will grow sustainably.

2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Formation of a Reading Habit Character thru Illustrated Storybooks

The research results show that the success of forming a reading habit character in early childhood thru illustrated storybooks is not only determined by the quality of the media used but is also influenced by a supportive learning environment, the availability of literacy facilities, and the involvement of various parties in the reading habituation process. The research findings reveal that the presence of reading corners in the classroom, a variety of engaging picture storybooks, and the active role of teachers in providing motivation are the main factors that encourage the development of a reading habit in children. These conditions indicate that the formation of a reading character is an ecological process, influenced by the interaction between the individual and their surrounding environment (Oktaviana et al., 2023). When children have easy access to reading materials and are in an environment that provides enjoyable reading experiences, the tendency to like reading activities will develop more strongly and sustainably

(Langlois, 2018). Therefore, a learning environment rich in literacy resources becomes an important prerequisite in fostering a reading culture from an early age.

These findings are in line with the developmental ecology theory, which explains that children's behavioral development is influenced by various interacting environmental systems, including schools, families, and social environments (Lubis et al., 2024). In the context of this research, the school provides a conducive environment thru reading corners and a variety of picture storybooks, while teachers act as facilitators who create an enjoyable reading atmosphere. Recent research shows that providing a rich literacy environment, including access to engaging books and teacher support, has a significant impact on the development of reading interest and habits in early childhood (Khosa, 2025). Additionally, a study conducted by Niklas and Schneider found that children in environments that support reading activities show higher literacy engagement compared to children with limited access to reading materials (Niklas & Schneider, 2013). Thus, the findings of this research reinforce the view that the

development of a reading habit is the result of a habituation process supported by a learning environment responsive to the developmental needs of children (Ila & Ladamay, 2021).

On the other hand, this study also found inhibiting factors that affect the formation of a reading habit, namely limited access to books at home, a family environment that does not support a reading culture, and excessive use of digital media. These findings indicate that the reading habits established at school require continuity in the family environment in order to develop optimally (Suardi et al., 2024). When children do not have enough opportunities to interact with books at home, the literacy experience they gain at school becomes less optimal. The results of this study are in line with research that states that the home literacy environment has a strong influence on children's reading habits, especially at an early age (Wati et al., 2024). Other studies also show that uncontrolled intensity of digital device usage can reduce children's interest in printed reading materials because their attention is more focused on audiovisual and instant media (Inayati et al., 2024). However,

the results of this study show that the use of picture storybooks can still maintain children's enthusiasm for reading, even tho they face various limitations in their home environment.

Based on these findings, the researchers argue that the success of fostering a love for reading in early childhood cannot be solely attributed to schools or teachers, but requires close collaboration between schools, families, and the social environment. Picture storybooks serve as an effective means to spark children's initial interest in reading activities, but the sustainability of this character is greatly influenced by consistent environmental support. Therefore, the important meaning of the results of this study is that the formation of a reading habit character should be viewed as a long-term process that requires habituation, exemplary behavior, and the provision of an adequate literacy environment. With the synergy between the use of appropriate media and sustainable environmental support, the character of a love for reading in early childhood will develop into a positive habit that can last until the next level of education.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that the use of picture storybook media plays a significant role in fostering a reading-loving character among early childhood learners at KB Raudlatul Ulum Ledokombo Jember. The integration of picture storybooks into daily literacy activities creates an enjoyable and meaningful learning experience, encouraging children to engage actively in reading, storytelling, and exploring books independently. The findings indicate that children's enthusiasm for reading is not solely influenced by the attractiveness of the media but is also strengthened through continuous literacy habituation, interactive learning experiences, and positive emotional engagement with books. Consequently, picture storybooks function not only as instructional media but also as an effective instrument for cultivating sustainable reading habits and literacy-oriented character from an early age.

Furthermore, the success of fostering a reading-loving character is supported by several interconnected factors, including the availability of literacy facilities such as reading corners, the diversity of picture

storybooks, teachers' motivation, and parental involvement in literacy activities at home. Nevertheless, this study also identifies several challenges, such as limited access to books in the home environment, less supportive literacy cultures within families, and children's increasing exposure to digital media. Despite these challenges, picture storybook media remains effective in maintaining children's interest and enthusiasm for reading when supported by a conducive learning environment and consistent literacy practices.

This study is limited to a single early childhood education institution and focuses specifically on the use of picture storybooks in fostering reading-loving character among young children. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all educational contexts with different socio-cultural backgrounds and literacy environments. Future research is recommended to explore broader educational settings, compare various literacy media, or investigate the long-term impact of picture storybook use on children's literacy development and character formation. In addition, examining the integration of printed and digital storybooks may

provide further insights into developing effective literacy strategies for early childhood education in the contemporary digital era

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