Safitri, N.R., Syaikhu, A., Nadar, W.
Enhancing Reading Literacy in Early Childhood Children Aged 4–5 Years through the Whole Language Method.
DOI 10.37640/ice.03.968
In *Proceedings of International Conference on Education-03*, pages 34-44
ISSN 2964-7479

Enhancing Reading Literacy in Early Childhood Children Aged 4-5 Years through the Whole Language Method

Nadia Riyanti Safitri[1]*, Ahmad Syaikhui[1], Wahyuni Nadar[1]
Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, STKIP Kusuma Negara, Jakarta, Indonesia
*safitririantinadia@gmail.com

Abstrak

Whole Language method at RA Nursyamsi Depok, involving ten students. While focusing on reading literacy, challenges such as a limited number of teachers can hinder the individual attention necessary for effective literacy learning and writing. The Action Research model employed in this study, developed by Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart, consists of planning, action, observation, and reflection in a spiraling system. The analysis of research findings indicates that the Whole Language strategy significantly improves early childhood reading literacy skills. Comparative scores from pre-cycles and Cycles I and II reveal an 80% increase in children's reading abilities. The involvement of parents, teachers, and the community is crucial in fostering a reading environment that stimulates children's literacy growth. Overall, the Whole Language approach proves effective in enhancing early childhood literacy skills, highlighting the importance of a supportive learning environment.

Keywords: early childhood, reading literacy, whole language

1 INTRODUCTION

The Whole Language method is an approach to teaching reading that emphasizes the importance of reading and writing as holistic and organic processes. This approach asserts that children learn to read in the same way they learn to speak—through continuous exposure to and practice with written language. For young children, the Whole Language method begins by introducing them to letters and the sounds of the alphabet through various interactive and enjoyable activities, such as identifying and writing letters, counting sounds, and following simple words. During this stage, children also start learning about the structure of words and sentences, as well as understanding that words have meanings and can be used to communicate ideas and feelings.

In the early stages of reading instruction, children are often asked to identify and interpret simple words and sentences, follow simple stories, and identify elements such as characters, settings, and themes. The Whole Language approach in the context of enhancing reading literacy in young children must also take into account several specific considerations. One of these is creating a learning environment that supports exploration, creativity, and diversity in children's acceptance and understanding. Children at this age tend to learn better through hands-on experiences, play, and interaction with their surroundings. Therefore, using engaging, stimulating, and relevant learning materials aligned with children's interests can be key to successfully enhancing their visual literacy.

According to Cunningham & Stanovich, reading literacy is the ability to understand written text by recognizing words, comprehending sentence meanings, and interpreting implicit messages within it (Cunningham, A.E., & Stanovich, K.E, 1998). The reading literacy theory proposed by Anne E. Cunningham and Keith E. Stanovich emphasizes the importance of reading experiences in shaping an individual's cognitive abilities and literacy. Children who are more skilled in reading tend to read more, which in turn further enhances their skills. Conversely, less skilled children tend to read less, which slows their

development. Reading not only aids in word recognition and sentence comprehension but also has a broad impact on other cognitive abilities, such as information processing and general knowledge. A rich reading experience can enhance critical and analytical thinking skills.

According to Goodman, Whole Language for young children is a language learning approach that emphasizes the use of language in a holistic and meaningful way in the development of reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. This approach acknowledges that children learn language naturally and comprehensively, and that they can learn to read and write through exposure to various texts and meaningful language experiences (Goodman, K. S., 1986). The Whole Language approach proposed by Kenneth S. Goodman in 1986 highlights the importance of using language in a holistic and meaningful manner in the development of early literacy skills. 1. Holistic Approach: Goodman argues that children learn language naturally and holistically. This means they do not learn to read, write, listen, and speak in isolation but as part of a comprehensive language experience. This approach emphasizes that literacy skills develop concurrently and support one another. 2. Meaningful Language Experiences: One of the key principles of Whole Language is that children learn better when they are engaged in meaningful language experiences. This can include reading storybooks, writing their own stories, or participating in rich conversations. These experiences help children understand the function and purpose of language in real-life contexts. 3. Exposure to Various Texts: Goodman emphasizes the importance of exposure to different types of texts. This includes storybooks, poetry, articles, and even nonfiction texts. By being exposed to a variety of texts, children can develop a broader understanding of language and how it is used in different contexts. 4. Contextual Learning: The Whole Language approach also emphasizes learning in context. Children learn language in contexts they understand and that are relevant to their lives. For example, reading stories about pets may be more meaningful for children who have pets at home. 5. The Role of the Teacher as Facilitator: In this approach, the teacher acts as a facilitator who creates a rich and supportive learning environment (Evi, et.al., 2024; Aleksius, M. 2024; Utami, 2024). The teacher provides a variety of reading materials, encourages discussions, and helps children find meaning in the texts they read (Wulan, 2024). The Whole Language approach is highly relevant in early childhood education because it recognizes the natural ways children learn language and the importance of meaningful language experiences. By creating a supportive and language-rich environment, children can develop strong literacy skills from an early age.

Based on the above, the author plans to design reading literacy learning using the Whole Language method, which is expected to provide a more varied learning experience while having a significant impact on improving children's reading literacy skills.

The purpose of this study is to enhance literacy skills. This Classroom Action Research has two objectives: a general objective and specific objectives. Each objective is outlined as follows:

The general objective of this Classroom Action Research is to improve the quality of learning at RA Nursyamsi, Depok. This study also aims to enhance children's language skills in understanding and interpreting images and visuals around them.

The specific objective of this research is to identify the effectiveness of the Whole Language method in improving children's visual comprehension at RA Nursyamsi, Depok. Additionally, this study aims to observe changes in visual literacy learning skills. Thus, this research will provide in-depth insights into how the Whole Language method can be used to enhance visual literacy among children at the RA level.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The action research used in this study refers to the action research model developed by Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart. The action research model created by Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart includes planning, action and observation, and reflection

within an interconnected spiral system. The action research model developed by Stephen Kemmis and Robin McTaggart is visualized in the image below:

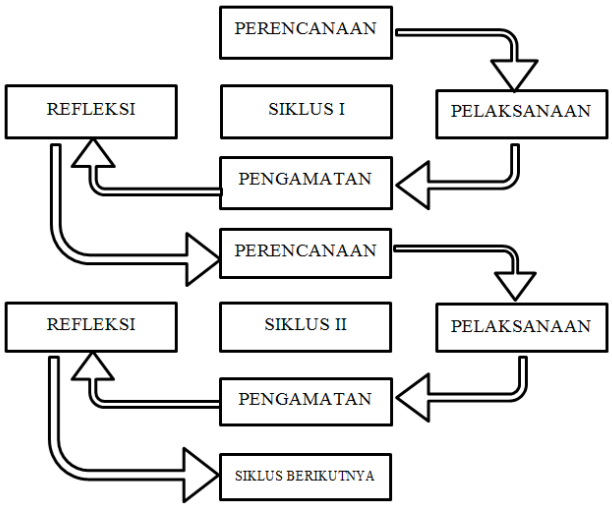

Figure 1. Classroom Action Research Model

Before conducting the research, the researcher must outline the steps of the study. This research consists of several cycles according to the expected results, where each research cycle includes planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. The steps of the research are as follows:
a) Problem Identification: How can the Whole Language method enhance visual literacy skills in early childhood at RA Nursyamsi, Depok?
b) Action Planning: The implementation of classroom actions is carried out through a series of lessons that follow three components: planning, implementation, and reflection. These three components are viewed as a single cycle of action. The results of the reflection from Cycle I are formulated into hypotheses for planning the next cycle, Cycle II. If the problem remains unresolved or new issues arise, actions will be taken in Cycle III.
c) Action Implementation: The implementation of actions in each cycle follows the same stages: planning, implementation, observation, and reflection.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1.1. Research Findingssil Penelitian

3.1.1. Pre-Action

To enhance reading literacy among children at RA Nursyamsi, Depok, education practitioners need to understand the importance of reading in the learning process. The Whole Language approach will be used to improve literacy skills comprehensively, focusing on understanding the meaning of texts and providing stimulating reading experiences that engage children's interests. This initiative also involves the participation of parents and the community. Collaboration among teachers, parents, and the community is crucial in creating a reading environment that supports children's literacy development. With the support of all parties, it is hoped that children's reading skills will improve, creating synergy between the school, home, and community. The Whole Language strategy also includes selecting books that align with children's interests and reading levels. Providing access to

a variety of engaging and relevant reading materials will be an integral part of this effort. With a combination of pedagogical, social, and environmental approaches, it is expected to create a conducive atmosphere for the development of reading literacy among children at RA Nursyamsi, Depok.

Table 1 Pre-Action Assessment

No.	Nama Siswa	Penilaian	Skor
1	Q	BB	1
2	N	BB	1
3	IB	BB	1
4	AI	BSH	3
5	W	BB	1
6	N	MB	2
7	M	BB	1
8	A	BSH	3
9	AL	BB	1
10	KY	MB	2
11	SB	BB	1
12	PU	BSB	4
13	V	BB	1
14	BISA	MB	2
15	N	BB	1
16	IZ	BB	1
17	ASH	MB	2
18	CH	MB	2
19	Z	BSH	3
20	ME	BB	1

Based on the table above, the report presents the results of children's language literacy skills in Group A at RA Nursyamsi, Depok, during the pre-cycle. The percentage can be calculated using the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Acquisition Score}}{\text{Maximum Score}} \times 100\%$$

a. BB: $\frac{11}{80} \times 100\% = 13{,}8\ \%$

b. MB: $\frac{10}{80} \times 100\% = 12{,}5\%$

c. BSH: $\frac{12}{80} \times 100\% = 15\%$

d. BSB: $\frac{1}{} \times 100\% = 1{,}3\%$

The results of the initial observation of 20 students indicate that many children have not yet developed their language skills. The achievement levels are as follows: in the "Not Developed" (BB) category, there are 11 children, which is equivalent to 11%; in the "Emerging" (MB) category, there are 5 children, or 12.5%; in the "Developing as Expected" (BSH) category, there are 3 children, or 15%; and in the "Developing Very Well" (BSB) category, there is 1 child, or 1.3%. Several suspected causes for the low language development in children are as follows:

a. The learning methods used may not be suitable for the needs and individual characteristics of the children, thus hindering their language literacy development.
Children may not yet have a strong understanding of fundamental concepts in language literacy, such as reading, writing, and speaking. Limited Interaction with Language: Children may have limited active interaction with language, which hinders their language literacy skills.

3.1.2. Results of Cycle 1

In the core part of the activity, the researcher began interacting with the students by introducing the equipment brought along, including a laptop containing a collection of songs and some musical instruments. The song collection consisted of children's songs and educational songs (about fruits, body parts, etc.). Some songs were sung together, allowing the researcher to gauge the children's understanding of the songs and provide opportunities for them to sing. In addition to singing, the researcher also announced the titles of the songs to help train the children's memory. To enhance the enjoyment of learning, the researcher presented a game by providing the lyrics of the songs to the children, who then guessed and sang the songs together. Through this stage, the researcher was able to evaluate the children's language development.

Table 2 Cycle 1 Assessment

No	Nama Siswa	Penilaian	Skor
1	Q	BB	1
2	N	MB	2
3	IB	MB	2
4	AI	BSH	3
5	W	BB	1
6	N	MB	2
7	M	BB	1
8	A	BSH	3
9	AL	MB	2
10	KY	BSH	2
11	SB	BB	1
12	PU	BSB	4
13	V	BB	1
14	BS	MB	2
15	N	BB	1
16	IZ	BB	1
17	ASH	MB	2
18	CH	MB	2
19	Z	BSB	4
20	ME	BB	1

Based on the table above, the report presents the results of children's language literacy skills in Group A at RA Nursyamsi, Depok, during the pre-cycle, and the percentage can be calculated using the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Acquisition Score}}{\text{Maximum Score}} \times 100\%$$

a. BB: $\frac{8}{80} \times 100\% = 10\%$

b. MB: $\frac{14}{80} \times 100\% = 17{,}5\%$

c. BSH: $\frac{12}{80} \times 100\% = 15\%$

d. BSB: $\frac{8}{80} \times 100\% = 10\%$

The results of the initial observation of 20 students indicate that many children have not yet developed their skills. The achievement levels in the "Not Developed" (BB) category show a decrease to 8 children, which is equivalent to 10%. In the "Emerging" (MB) category, there are 7 children, or 17.5%. For the "Developing as Expected" (BSH) category, there are 3 children, equivalent to 15%, and in the "Developing Very Well" (BSB) category, there is an increase to 4 children, equivalent to 10%.

3.1.3. Results of Cycle 2

In the core part of Cycle 2, the researcher prepared equipment such as audio, an LCD projector, and a laptop. To begin this section, the researcher selected various songs in two different categories: songs about animals, memorization songs about days and months, as well as cheerful songs. The songs were played one by one while inviting the children to follow the movements displayed on the screen. Some children were chosen to demonstrate their ability to lead the singing and follow the movements from the screen at the front of the classroom.

After conducting this activity, the researcher encouraged the children to share stories related to the songs about animals, as the songs included animal sound imitations. This served as an initiative to encourage children to talk about the animals featured in the songs. At this stage, the researcher observed the children's responses. As an additional stimulus, the researcher rewarded children who were willing to share their stories about the animals they had sung about.

Table 3 Cycle 1 Assessment

No	Nama Siswa	Penilaian	Skor
1	Q	MB	2
2	N	MB	2
3	IB	BSH	3
4	AI	BSH	3
5	W	BB	1
6	N	MB	2
7	M	MB	2
8	A	BSH	3
9	AL	MB	2
10	KY	BSB	4
11	SB	BB	1
12	PU	BSB	4
13	V	MB	2
14	BS	BSH	3
15	N	BSH	3

16	IZ	BB	1
17	ASH	BSH	3
18	CH	BSH	3
19	Z	BSB	4
20	ME	MB	2

Based on the table above, the report presents the results of children's language literacy skills in Group A at RA Nursyamsi, Depok, during the pre-cycle, and the percentage can be calculated using the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Acquisition Score}}{\text{Maximum Score}} \times 100\%$$

a. BB: $\frac{3}{80} \times 100\% = 3{,}8\%$

b. MB: $\frac{14}{80} \times 100\% = 17{,}5\%$

c. BSH: $\frac{21}{80} \times 100\% = 26{,}3\%$

d. BSB: $\frac{12}{80} \times 100\% = 15\%$

The results of the initial observation and the learning activities in Cycle II with 20 students indicate a significant decrease in the number of children who have not developed their skills. The achievement levels in the "Not Developed" (BB) category show rapid progress, decreasing from 8 children in Cycle I to 3 children, which is equivalent to 3.8%. In the "Emerging" (MB) category, there are 9 children, or 17.5%. For the "Developing as Expected" (BSH) category, there is an increase from 3 children to 5 children, which is equivalent to 26.3%. In the "Developing Very Well" (BSB) category, there is also an increase from 2 children to 3 children, equivalent to 15%.

3.1.4. Results and Discussion

After the researcher conducted observations in two rounds of learning, it can be concluded from the reflection on the Cycle II meeting that progress in children's reading literacy skills has been achieved effectively. The children were able to understand and listen to the language, provide simple opinions, recount their learning experiences, and answer basic questions posed by the researcher at the end of the lesson.
Based on these evaluation results, it can be concluded that the final actions in Cycle II have met expectations, thus concluding the research at Cycle II. To facilitate understanding of the levels in each cycle, from the pre-cycle to Cycle II, the details are presented in the table below:

Table 4 Cycle 1 Assessment

	Pra-tindakan	Siklus I	Siklus II
BB	11	8	3
MB	5	7	7
BSH	3	3	7
BSB	1	2	3

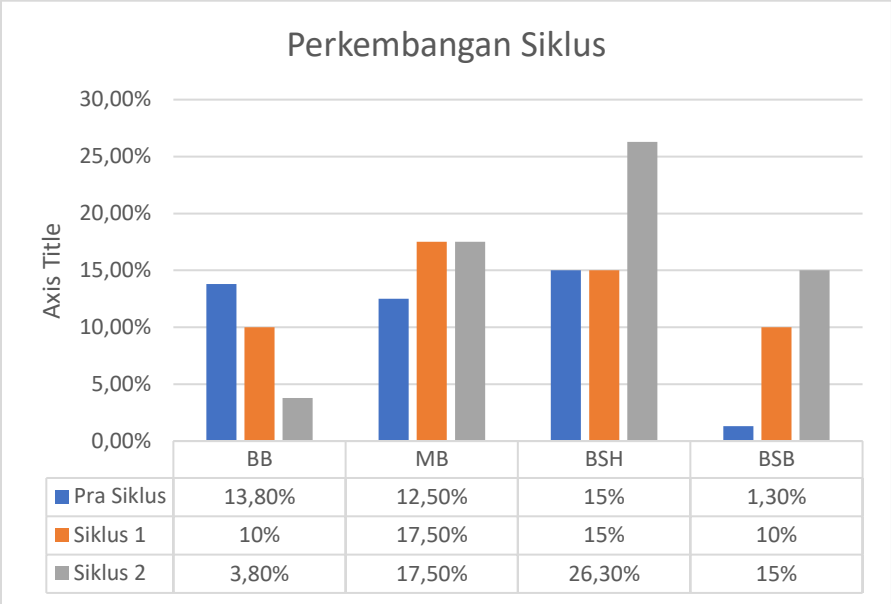

Figure 2 Graph of Assessment for All Cycles

In the pre-action cycle, children's reading literacy skills were at a basic level. However, after the implementation of the Whole Language method in Cycle 1, several children began to show significant improvements in word recognition and text comprehension. In Cycle 2, these improvements became even more evident, with more children able to read fluently and understand the meaning of texts more deeply.

This enhancement was not only seen in technical reading skills but also in the children's interest and motivation to engage in reading activities. Some children who were previously less interested in reading now showed greater enthusiasm and were more active in literacy activities. This indicates that the Whole Language approach is not only effective in improving reading skills but also in fostering children's interest and love for reading.

In the following table, the development of children's abilities after going through all the cycles can be seen:

Table 5 Assessment of Development in Each Cycle for Children

No.	Nama Siswa	Prasiklus	Siklus 1	Siklus 2

1	Q	BB	BB	MB
2	N	BB	MB	MB
3	IB	BB	MB	BSH
4	AI	BSH	BSH	BSH
5	W	BB	BB	BB
6	N	MB	MB	MB
7	M	BB	BB	MB
8	A	BSH	BSH	BSH
9	AL	MB	MB	MB
10	KY	BSH	BSB	BSB
11	SB	BB	BB	BB
12	PU	BSB	BSB	BSB
13	V	BB	BB	MB
14	BS	MB	MB	BSH
15	N	BB	BB	BSH
16	IZ	BB	BB	BB
17	ASH	MB	MB	BSH
18	CH	MB	MB	BSH
19	Z	BSB	BSB	BSB
20	ME	BB	BB	MB

4 CONCLUSION

After going through three cycles—pre-action, Cycle 1, and Cycle 2—there was a significant improvement in children's reading literacy skills. The data indicate that the Whole Language method, applied gradually in each cycle, successfully enhanced the children's reading abilities overall.

The comparison of scores between the pre-cycle and Cycles I and II provides a concrete picture of the effectiveness of the method. Additionally, in the implementation of learning strategies, the involvement of parents and the community has proven to be highly influential in creating a reading environment that stimulates children's literacy development. Collaboration among teachers, parents, and the community has been key to building an inclusive literacy culture.

The evaluation of the effectiveness of the learning method from the pre-cycle to Cycle II shows a significant improvement in children's language literacy skills. This serves as a basis for assessing the success of the Whole Language strategy and its potential for sustainable use in fostering student literacy growth. The implications of the research provide important recommendations for education practitioners to implement the Whole Language approach in enhancing early childhood reading literacy in a holistic and continuous manner. From this study, it can be concluded that the integration of the Whole Language strategy is not only effective in improving reading skills but also in creating a conducive learning environment for the growth of children's literacy.

The results of the study conducted with children aged 5-6 years at TKA Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Gunung Lagan, Aceh Singkil for the 2021/2022 academic year show that in Cycle I, activities were held over 2 meetings, and in Cycle II, there were also 2 meetings. The learning activities in both cycles included: arranging words with letter blocks, assembling letters into a single word, and tracing and imitating letter shapes. After completing the first cycle, the next step was to create an action plan to improve the plans and actions from Cycle I. In Cycle II, the learning activities included: arranging words with letter magnets, assembling letters into a single word, and tracing and imitating letter shapes.

Based on the results of implementing the learning using the Whole Language approach, it can be concluded that this approach can enhance early childhood literacy skills. By introducing vocabulary in a holistic manner, children can more quickly absorb new

vocabulary information along with its pronunciation and have the opportunity to identify the letters of the alphabet in the introduced words.

The Whole Language approach is implemented as a whole, not in isolation. Using this approach helps children recognize letters related to identifying alphabet letters, phonemic awareness, word meaning knowledge, print awareness, and vocabulary expansion. Whole Language is one of the approaches grounded in constructivism and is influenced by the stages of child learning according to Bruner. Children aged 4-6 years are at the iconic stage, where they can more easily retain new vocabulary information through concrete forms, printed materials, letter/word cards, and images along with vocabulary that becomes a cohesive whole, making it easier for children to remember new vocabulary, both through knowledge of word forms and pronunciation (phonemes).

Based on a thorough analysis of the research findings, the implementation of the Whole Language strategy in enhancing early childhood reading literacy, the evaluation of the effectiveness of the learning method, and the implications of the research for education, it can be concluded that the Whole Language approach is effective in improving early childhood literacy skills. The comparison of scores between the pre-cycle and Cycles I and II shows a significant increase in children's reading abilities by 80%. The involvement of parents, teachers, and the community plays a crucial role in creating a reading environment that stimulates children's literacy growth.

The evaluation of the effectiveness of the learning methods across various cycles also indicates the successful integration of the Whole Language strategy in strengthening children's language literacy. The implications of this research provide important recommendations for education practitioners to continue applying the Whole Language approach to enhance early childhood reading literacy in a holistic and sustainable manner, as well as to create an inclusive literacy culture within educational settings. Thus, the integration of the Whole Language approach not only succeeds in cognitive aspects but also in fostering a conducive learning environment for children's literacy development.

5 REFERENCES

Aleksius, M. (2024). English Teacher’s Employment of Code-Switching in EFL Classroom: Types and Functions. Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan (JIP) STKIP Kusuma Negara, 16(1), 61-70.

Ana Widyastuti, Analisis Tahapan Perkembangan Membaca Dan Stimulasi Untuk Meningkatkan Literasi Anak Usia 5-6 Tahun, Paedagogia 21, no. 1, 2018, h. 31.

Ann Pelo, The Language of Art: Inquiry-Based Studio Practices in Early Childhood Settings.Clements, D. H., & Sarama, J. (2020).

Aylor, B. M. et. al, (2003). "Reading Growth in High-Poverty Classrooms: the Influence of Teacher Practices that Encourage Cognitive Engagement in Literacy Learning". The Elementary School Journal, 104(1), 3-28.

Evi, E., Yurniwati, Y., & Ulfa, M. (2024). Optimizing Algebraic Thinking in Elementary Students: Exploring the Impact of Generative Learning. Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan (JIP) STKIP Kusuma Negara, 16(1), 1-8.

Barrs, M., & Cork, T. (2001). Young Children's Literacy Development and the Role of Televisual Texts. British Journal of Educational Studies, 49(3), 275-287.

Belcher, D. D., & Brain, P. (2003). "Bringing Grammar to Life". For The Love of Language: Integrating Grammar into the Writing Process, h. 133-152.

Goodman, K. S. (1986). What's whole in whole language. The Reading Teacher, 39(5), 564-567.

Goodman, K. S. (1994). The Whole language Movement. Educational Psychologist, 29(4), h. 17-21.

Goodman, K. S. (2003). What's Whole in Whole language in the 21st Century?

Harste, J. C., & Burke, C. L. (1999). Whole language and School Achievement. Childhood Education, 75(2), h. 70-74.

Huang, L.Y, learning to read the whole language approach, hlm. 8.
Ida Bagus A.L.W, Pemupukan Budaya Literasi, Toleransi, dan Budi Pekerti untuk Membangun Sakura yang Berprestasi, (Bali:Nilacakra, 2021), Cet-1, h. 32.
Marwany dan Heru Kurniawan, Pendidikan Literasi Anak Usia Dini: Meningkatkan Keterampilan Membaca, Berfikir, Dan Menulis Berpikir Anak, ed. Imamah Nurul, (Yogyakarta: CV. Hikmah Media Utama, 2020). Cet-1, h. 47-48.
Pantaleo, S. (2016). Young Children's Engagement with Picturebooks: Visual Literacy and the Question of Pleasure. Journal of Early Childhood Literacy, 16(2), 133-155.
Rudiger, J. A. (1995). "Collaborative learning in a multicultural classroom: A classroom case study". Multicultural Perspectives, h. 23-27.
Utami, P. P., Vioreza, N., Nugraheny, D. C., & Alghadari, F. (2024). The Influence of Responsibility on the Job Commitment of Public Elementary School Principals in East Jakarta. Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan (JIP) STKIP Kusuma Negara, 16(1), 71-77.
Wulan, S. (2024). Factors Affecting Teacher Performance. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan (JIP) STKIP Kusuma Negara*, *16*(1), 112-118.