The Role of *Pra Calistung* (Pre-Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic) Tutoring Activity in Developing Children's Reading and Writing Skills Aged 4-6 Years

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ABSTRACT

Readiness in pre-school basic literacy is a crucial foundation for academic success in elementary schools, yet many students do not have adequate preparation when the transition begins, making the urgency of early structured intervention. This research aims to describe the role of *pra-calistung* (pre-reading, writing, and arithmetic) tutoring activity in developing students' reading and writing skills at Raudhatul Athfal (RA). The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with the subjects of organising tutors, group B students, and parents; the data were collected through observations, deep interviews, and documentation using observational and interviewing guidelines as the main instruments. The data was then analysed using Miles and Huberman's model, with the steps of data reduction, data serving, and conclusion drawing. The result showed that the *pra-calistung* activity involving the introduction of voice, letter shapes, and articulation contributed significantly to children's reading and writing skill enhancement, supported by the collaboration between teachers and parents. It implied that the program could become an effective and adaptive early literacy intervention model.

INTRODUCTION

In early childhood education, reading and writing skills play a major role in the foundation that determines the success of the learning process in future education. Reading and writing activities mean a door to knowledge comprehension and effective communication for children. Children with good reading skills will have more opportunities to access various information sources and broaden their cognitive insights (Suyanti, Shalahudin, & Riyanti, 2022). Writing activities are also beneficial for children in training their fine motor coordination, developing critical thinking skills and composing structured ideas.

Empirical evidence shows that basic reading and writing are often not optimally addressed by formal educational institutions or parents. Many students in early childhood education experience limited literacy stimulation from an early developmental age (Hasanah, Riskiyah, Sholehah, & Saleh, 2023). The early childhood education context demands pre-literacy developmental skills such as reading and writing, taught integratedly through play, and not in separate activities. *Play-based learning* approach emphasises that students learn actively through meaningful play experiences, so that literacy

stimulation needs to be designed in an enjoyable play without any instruction or force (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). Often, parents and teachers do not understand that children's curiosity, empowerment, and pre-literacy skills can be developed naturally through directed and cognitively stimulating play activities. The lack of awareness could cause children to miss important opportunities to develop early academic abilities, which become a foundation for future development.

This condition becomes a serious problem needing deep attention. The children's underdeveloped reading and writing skills are influenced by environment, stimulation, and learning support, not merely internal factors. Instead, it is due to the lack of systematic and sustainable learning interventions in early education. The children's golden age is a crucial time to develop these foundations so that if they are neglected, it will potentially hinder academic and future learning attutides(Apriyanti & Aprianti, 2023). Therefore, giving a proper learning and planed stimulation in *pra-calisting* (pre-reading, writing, and arithmetics) is important so that the children could have enough literacy preparation. Systematic activities with letters, words, and numbers, and early writing sklls will be beneficial for their learning. The importance of reading and writing in early childhood encourages various attempts to overcome children's challenges in mastering these skills. One of the strategies developed is conducting *pra-calistung* tutoring activities specially to give proper stimulation to them (Sugiono & Kuntjojo, 2016). The activities aim not only to teach letters, words, and numbers, but also to develop children interest and learning motivation early. Interactive and enjoyable approaches are expected to more easily develop children's skill levels as a strong foundation to face the following education. This study is expected to present the roles and effectiveness of *pra-calistung* in developing reading and writing skills for children aged 4-6 years in a Raudhatul Athfal (RA), an Islamic early childhood school. The research focus includes how the activities could bring positive changes on children literacy skills and respond challenges during the learning sessions (Hidayat, 2023a). By conducting the research, there would be a real description of *pra-calistung* turoting activities and suggestion to develop more optimum learning method in early childhood development (Rachmawati & Watini, 2023).

Reading, writing, and arithmetic skills are the main foundation in early childhood education, widely known as *calistung* (a short form of "baca" (reading), "tulis" (writing), and "hitung" (counting)). *Calistung* learning, if delivered based on children's development, could significantly and positively impact their readiness for future formal education. Much research has found that by doing varied, enjoyable and interactive approaches, children's pre-intellectual skills, such as recognising letters, numbers, and basic writing training, can make them understand the upcoming lessons faster and better. Language abilities, especially the skills to read and write (literacy), and cognitive development aspects, especially early skills of arithmetics, the three skills are known as *pra-calistung* (Sugiono & Kuntjojo, 2016) Some previous research has reviewed the implementation of *calistung* learning in early childhood education. Agustanti (2022) through her systematic literature study has found that *calistung* learning must be delibered in learning approaches with plays, because coercive implementation potentially causes academic pressures towards children. Nafaikah, Mudzanatun, and Wakhyudin (2019) also show that children aged 4-6 years could significantly increase their *calistung* skills through play-learning strategies from the first to the third cycles. These studies are generally literature reviews or media learning development-oriented, which do not specifically study the roles of *pra-calistung* tutoring activities in the contexts of RA/ early childhood education. Besides, specific variables such as small learning groups, tutoring duration after regular school hours, and collaborative patterns between teachers and parents are not the focus of the previous studies. This research aims to fill the gap by empirically investigating the implementation mechanism and results of *pra-calistung* (pre-reading, writing, and arithmetics) tutoring activities in RA as pre-school institutions, so it will bring novelty in early childhood literacy, which is not widely explored.

However, the implementation of *calistung* learning must consider children's development characteristics so that it will not cause academic pressure or counterproductive stress to this development phase. Besides its importance to cognitive development, *calistung* learning also plays a role in developing children's learning motivation and interests [10]. Through a method that prioritises play and creative activities, *calistung* learning could be delivered as an enjoyable process, and the children can learn while playing. These ways could help children actively participate, develop multiple intelligence potentials, and decrease boredom that might arise during the learning process (Shihabuddin, n.d.).

Based on the problems above, this research presents to specifically contribute to early childhood education study, especially explore and describe integrated early literacy strategy stimulation in *play-based literacy approach,* so that it can be a practical guide for teachers and parents in planning learning environments based on the principles of early childhood education. This finding is aimed at enriching the early childhood treasure, especially in developing a holistic, contextual, and play-centred stimulation model.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive type, aiming to obtain a deep understanding of the roles of *pra-calistung* (pre-reading, writing, and arithmetics) tutoring activities in developing students' reading and writing skills at RA Bina Mutiara Hati Klampisan Semarang. The research focuses on (1) how the *calistung* tutoring activities are conducted directly to students, what strategies implemented by teachers to guide students, and how far the activities contribute to group B students' reading and writing skill development. (2) What are the roles of *pra-calistung* tutoring activities in developing group B students' reading and writing skills?, and (3) what factors support and hinder the implementation of *pra-calistung* tutoring activities?

The research was conducted for three months, from July to September 2025, and included an initial observational step, field data collection, data analysis, and report writing. The subjects of this study were *pra-calistung* tutors, students from group B who participated in tutoring activities, and parents who took part in guiding their children's learning. Overall, the number of informants was 10 people, consisting of two *pra-calistung* tutors, six students of group B, and two parents. The selection of the subject was deliberately conducted based on their direct involment in *pra-calistung* tutoring activities.

The research data was collected through three main techniques, they are: (1) direct observation during the tutoring sessions, using structured observation sheet containing indicators: teacher's appropriate steps, students' activeness during the sessions, the use of learning media, the students' ability to recognise and recite letters and syllables, and students' ability to write letters and simple words, (2) deep interviewes with the teachers related to the tutoring activities and children's development using an interview guideline with indicators that involve: learning aims and plans, delivered materials, children need adjustment, changed skills in reading and writing before and after the lesson, and guidance intensity at home, and (3) documents include activitiy notes, children's products, informal assesmente sheet, and children grup division using document review sheets indicators containing consistency schedule,the quality and the readibility of students' writing, and periodical notes of children's improvement. The collected data were then analysed using Miles & Huberman's model, including data reduction, data serving, and conclusion drawing. The three step analysis was conducted repeatedly to ensure robust and consistent findings.

To ensure the validity of the data, the research utilised a triangulation technique, including resource triangulation (teachers, documents of tutoring activity implementation, and documents of students' results) and a triangulation technique (observation, interview, and documentation). The use of triangulation wa to compare and confirm findings, making them more valid and accountable. The qualitative approach with a deep analysis enabled researchers to understand the roles of *pra-calistung* tutoring activities in the learning context in RA and capture teachers' experiences involved in the activities.
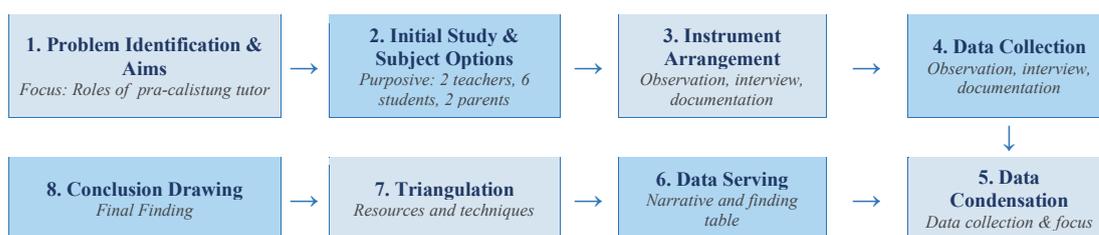

Figure 1. Plots of Research Instrument for *Pra-Calistung* Tutoring for Children

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Aims and Reasons of Pra-Calistung (Pre-Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic) Tutoring

Pra-calistung tutoring activities in Raudhatul Athfal (Islamic early childhood schools) were aimed to fulfil students' demands and parents' expectations that, their children be ready to study in elementary schools. The teachers explained that parents demanding calistung (reading, writing, and arithmetic) learning had risen since the beginning of the school year, especially after parenting activities discussing children's literacy readiness. It was reflected by one of the teachers' statements below:

> "Many parents ask, whether their children have already been able to read and write. Even during the meeting with parents, they are more enthusiastic in asking calistung for their children before going to elementary school."

Therefore, the school decided that tutoring activities be delivered to students in group A in the second semester to accommodate the needs of parents and the school regulation that formal tutoring activities should not be given to group A in the first semester since the students were still on school orientation phase. Another purpose of these tutoring activities was to prepare students with reading, writing, and arithmetic skills as a minimum competence to be achieved before entering elementary schools (Nurul Usnadiyah, 2025). The finding was in line with the research by Wulandari and Fachrani (2023), indicating that parents tended to make calistung (reading, writing, and arithmetic) the main point of their children's readiness to study in elementary.

The implementation pra-calistung (pre-reading, writing, and arithmetic) tutoring activities in Raudhatul Athfal (RA) aimed to fulfil the demand of students and parents' expectations who wanted their children to be ready for elementary school. The teachers explained that the demands of calistung had begun since the beginning of the school year, especially after the parenting activities discussing children's literacy readiness. Therefore, the schools the decided that the tutoring activities be given to the students in group A, semester 2, to accommodate the parents' needs and the school regulation that the formal tutoring should not be given to group A students in semester 2 because they were still in the school orientation phase. Another aim of the tutoring activities was to prepare students with basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic as a minimum competence that should be obtained before entering elementary school

The Process of Tutoring Activities

The process of tutoring activities at RA Bina Mutiara Hati was conducted in its school buildings by its own teachers. The duration of the tutoring activities was from sixty to ninety minutes after the school lessons ended. It was regularly conducted from Monday to Saturday during school days. The tutoring activities were delivered based onthe students' achieved skills. Those who had been able to recognise letters and numbers better than others would be in one group. The group orders were based on the similar level of the group members .

> "We decided the group based on students' levels. Those who could recognise letters and numbers well will be in one group, the other who still need many exercises will be in another group. It can make us easier in teaching and the students will not feel left-behind."(Interview with Teacher Coordinator, 2025)

Rodiah and Yoseptry (2025) in their research on RA learning management stated that the effectiveness of learning service in RA depended on structured planning and clear job division among teachers. The existence of RA teachers as tutors was relevant because it enabled them to perform continuous personal guidance, which they had been doing during regular learning sessions.

Materials and Learning Methods in Tutoring Activities

Materials being taught in the tutoring activities focused on reading, writing, and arithmetic were

delivered gradually based on students' individual needs. The teachers used a step by step guidebook starting from the recognition of letters, syllables, and spelling and simple sentences. In the arithmetic sessions, the students were trained to memorise numbers 1-10, dictate numbers, and do simple exercises. The learning methods were personalised because each student had different mastery levels, meaning that the teachers gave advanced materials if their students understood the basics. This approach enabled teachers to monitor students' development more accurately compared to classical lessons.

> "If a student has not memorised letters A to Z, we will not skip to another syllable. We are patient, we repeat again and again until he or she understands well. Then, we continue to ba, bi, bu (syllables). Every student is different." (Interview with Teacher, 2025)

This individual approach enabled teachers to monitor their students' progress more accurately than classical learning (Nurul Usnadiyah, 2025). The gradual method implemented was in line with the principle of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* (DAP), emphasising that early childhood education should be based on the child's individual development and ability. Hidayati (2023), in her study on introduction to early reading in RA, maintained that introducing letters gradually was an important foundation of early literacy, and teachers should ensure that students understand every step before moving to a higher level.

Constraints in Tutoring Activities

During the tutoring activities, the teachers experienced some constraints due to the varied students' abilities in one group. A too wide gap within a similar group made the teachers need to more strategies for students with more advanced skills so that they would be more challenged, while the students with difficulties would receive intensive guidance. Besides, some students experienced obstacles in recognising letters and differentiating uppercase and lowercase letters, so that the process of this habituation required a longer duration. The teachers also revealed that students' attitudes at home also impacted their achievement at school; some students had lower motivation due to excessive pressures from their parents to consistently obtain good academic success.

The constraints had become one of the annual evaluations in deciding learning groups and adjustment methods. The teachers also explained that technical difficulties related to different students' motoric development

> "There is a student who can memorise letters, but his/her hands are still stiff to write. Some students can write, but they cannot read yet. Every child is unique with different challenges. The most difficult part is when parents at home put too much pressure on them, the student becomes stressed,, and they do not want to study at school (Interview with Teacher, 2025)

The finding was confirmed by Wulansuci and Kurniati (2019), mentioning that learning *calisting* (reading, writing, and arithmetic) and parental excessive pressure correlated with academic stress early childhood students. Learning results of *pra-calistung* (pre-reading, writing, and arithmetic) were adequately effective to increase students' basic skills. The teachers explained that the students who participated in the tutoring activity showed significant improvement in reading syllables, copying letters, and doing simple arithmetic operations. The parents also felt financially assisted because the cost of tutoring at school was more economical than private tutoring. The teachers stated that through intensive guidance in small groups, the students could achieve the minimum competence required for elementary school. Thus, *pra-calistung* tutoring activities had functions to as early literacy improvement was beneficial for both students and parents.

The collaboration between teachers and parents was regularly conducted via WhatsApp groups and linking books. The teachers delivered information about the students' progress, including the achievements of reading, writing, and syllables taught, so that the parents could continue the guidance at home. This communication pattern was considered important because students had a relatively short

time, and parents had a big role in maximising learning results. The teachers also found that students who experienced greater improvement were generally coming from families who supported learning process positively. Instead, those who were pressured by their parents tended to worry and experience difficulties in showing abilities. Therefore, the good cooperation between teachers and parents became an important factor in successful tutoring activities.

Apart from tutoring activities as an additional service, RA Bina Mutiara Hati Selain also conducted regular evaluations to develop programs based on students'needs in every school year. By the evaluation process, the teachers could review the effectiveness of group numbers, the schedule, and the number of additional teachers needed if the number of students increased. The tutoring activities were not integrated into the official curriculum to follow the rules of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, so the development was conducted internally based on the professional consideration of the teachers. This evaluative approach showed that the school attempted to maintain service excellence and ensure the relevance of tutoring activities to the students' developmental needs

The implementation of *pra-calistung* (pre-reading, writing, and arithmetic) RA Bina Mutiara Hati Klampisan Semarang also became teachers' opportunity to observe individual student's learning styles more deeply. In the context of small group learning, teachers could understand students' learning characteristics, such as focus patterns, the speed at which they understand instructions, and responses to reading and writing activities. This information helped the teacher adapt more proper learning approaches, present direct examples, and strengthen certain learning strategies. Therefore, the tutoring activities not only increased *calistung* abilities, but also became an important instrument to map individual learning needs that might not be observed in big classes

In addition, the sustainability of the tutoring activities brought a positive impact on school culture, contributing to early literacy improvement. The activities encouraged teachers to update their teaching strategies, to write more structured student reports, and to collaborate in an internal evaluation forum. The routines shaped more systematic working patterns, especially to manage students' differences in abilities and learning group distribution each semester. The empowerment of literacy culture eventually created a more conducive learning environment, where students, teachers, and parents actively participated in the process of basic skill improvement needed for future education

Overall, the research showed that the implementation of *pra-calistung* (pre-reading, writing, and arithmetic) at RA Bina Mutiara Hati delivered a real contribution to early literacy development. Through small group learning, personal guidance, and active collaboration between teachers and parents, the students receive adequate support that strengthens their abilities to read, write, and perform arithmetic tasks as preparation for elementary education. Despite varied abilities and constraints during the implementation, the tutoring activities became an effective strategy to increase the similar distribution of children's basic skills and strengthen the school literacy culture.

Based on the finding at the field, the students participating *pra-calistung* (pre-reading, writing, and arithmetic) at RA Bina Mutiara Hati have shown improvement in reading, writing, and arithmetic. However, th children's development levels vary; some students can understand teachers'instructions fast, while others need repetition and additional guidance to understand the learning material. The teachers have identified the condition as one of the variables influencing the tutoring results, so the regular evaluation oof the group learning is conducted every semester as an adaptive response to children's ability dynamics. Based on teachers' explanation, parents generally tend to focus more on reading ability because this is the main competence that should be prepared before elementary school. The observation results also show that the weakness of most students is in their reading ability, while students' writing and arithmetic are considered sufficient. This finding is in line with the research article written by Nurul Ma'ruf and Amir Syamsudin, Syamsudin (2021), stating that parents respond positively to *calistung* (reading, writing, and arithmetic) learning programs because it can fill their children's leisure time more productively, reduce unsupervised outdoor activities, and minimise children's addiction to mobile phone use. The parents' worry also appears due to unoptimal and limited online learning, and the demand to study in elementary school with the basic requirements, such as writing names and copying sentences. Hence, the parents expect that *calistung* program at TK Setia Rini (a kindergarten) can sufficiently prepare their children to develop reading, writing, and arithmetic before entering elementary school.

Another study by Dian Pertiwi, Ulwan Syafrudin, and Rizky Drupadi indicates that the majority of parents or, 30 respondents, state that *calistung* lesson is very important for early childhood students. They maintain that reading, writing, and arithmetic skills as preparation for elementary school will enable their children to participate in the learning process better. On the other hand, 20 participants believe that *calistung* is not the main need in kindergarten-aged children. This group support that early childhood students are given learning experiences through play to develop their developmental aspects based on their ages. It is aligned with the findings showing that the different learning achievements between children at level A (aged 4-5 years) and level B (aged 5-6 years), where at level A, teachers are supposed to introduce letters and numbers on a limited basis without emphasising *calistung* mastery. However, pressures from parents who want their children aged 5-6 years old to be able to read, write, and do arithmetic as elementary school preparation, including being accepted to state elementary schools, making teachers do not have another alternative, and teach these skills to the students.(Pertiwi, Syafrudin, & Drupadi, 2021)

The research indicate that learning stragegies with plays can effectively increase early childhood students' skills at *calistung.* A research at Sanggar Bimbingan At-Tanzil Serdang, Malaysia, states that the use of plays as *calistung* learning media can gradually increase students' reading, writing, and arithmetic abilities from a cycle to others, so a significant improvement can be achieved in the third cycle(Nadya & Harfiani, 2023). The success of *pra-calistung a* tutoring activities not only depend on one aspect; it also due to harmonious interaction between many involving elements in the learning process. The teachers' commitment and competence play important roles in this process. The teachers with deep understanding of children developmental phase and *calistung* teaching technique can adjust methods and materials based on students' individual needs. The teachers' capability to create supportive and spirited learning atmosphere also help students feel comfort and ethusiasm during the tutoring acitivities, so that the learning process become more effective and enjoyable.

The findings in RA Bina Mutiara Hati strengthen the narrative that enjoyable learning methods and parents' support are important to suceed *calistung* learning for early childhood students. The students who participate in *pra-calistung* tutoring activities at RA show real improvement in reading and writing, aligned with the implementation of play-based and varied-media learning strategies as suggested in many learning activities. The teachers at RA apply integrated educative games and sensoric activities, facilitating balanced-childrens' cognitive development and soft motoric skills. These activities make the students comfortable and motivated to learn, strengthening reseach results (Ardini & Macmud, 2022) on the roles of motivation and emotional involvement in children learning process. The tutors not that most students have weaknesses in reading, while writing and arithmetic skills are sufficient. These differences are clearly seen in the observation results of learning group created based on students' abilities, where a group with the best at recognising letters indicate the fastest improvement in combining syllabes compared to others.

The indicator of reading skill improvement is measured by whether the students are able to recite syllables smoothly, write words dictated by teachers, and recognise uppercase and lowercase letters consistently. The teachers report that the students participating in tutoring activities show significant improvement in reciting syllables, copying letters, and doing simple arithmetic tasks after regular attendance. Parents generally pay more attention to reading skills, because this part is considered a main competence needed by their children before elementary school.

Factors influencing levels of reading abilities include family support, interactive teaching methods, and student grouping based on their abilities. The collaboration between teachers and parents is conducted regularly via WhatsApp and linking books, where teachers give information about the children's development, including achievement in reading, writing, and syllables taught so that the parents can continue their supervision at home. The communication pattern is considered important because students'learning duration is considered short at school, and parents have a big role to maximise the learning results. The teachers also find that the children who experience fast improvement come from families with positive learning support, while the children with excessive pressure from parents tend to experience worry and constraints in expressing their abilities.

The research findings at RA strengthen the narrative of the importance of enjoyable learning methods and parents' support in succeeding *calistung* learning for early childhood students. The teachers

at RA implement integrated educational games and sensory activities that facilitate balanced children's cognitive development and soft motor skills, so the students feel comfortable and motivated to learn. This finding strengthens the research by Ardini and Macmud (2022) on the roles of motivation and emotional involvement in children's learning process. Parental involvement, which supervises and accompanies the learning at home, helps children develop basic literacy and keep the learning continuation from school to home, as aligned with the research from Lundeto(2022) highlighting the importance of emotional support and parents' knowledge in encouraging children's learning success.

The student grouping based on the abilities enables teachers to deliver advanced materials if the students have comprehended the previous step. This individual approach enables teachers monitor individual learning improvement more accurately compared to classical learning. Nevertheless, the teachers face constraints related to varied students' abilities within a group, in which a too wide gap in similar grroups causes teachers to create additional strategies to en sure that students with more advanced skills obtain challenges, while others with difficulties receive intensive guidance.

Parental active support in guiding and accompanying exerrcises at home also becomes an important element observed at RA. The involvement helps students develop their basic literacy skills and maintain continuous learning from school to home. The condition is in line with a study by Lundeto (2022), highlighting the importance of emotional involvement and parents' knowledge in emphasising children's learning results. With a conducive learning environment, and adaptive teaching, the students not only master technical reading and writing skills, but also develop an interest in continuing future education.

CONCLUSION

The research shows that the *pra-calistung* (pre-reading, writing, and arithmetic) tutoring activities at RA Bina Mutiara Hati indicate important roles in developing children's reading and writing skills. The development not only impacts the mastery of letters, words, and simple writing, but also children's cognitive development and soft motoric skills. The learning achievement is influenced by parental active roles, interactive and enjoyable learning, and learning environment support. Factors of children's motivation, social support from the environment, and varied learning media preparation strengthen the learning process. Developmental strategies of tutoring activities with a play-based learning approach and creative media show big potential in maintaining the optimum students' learning spirit. Besides, adjustment materials and responsive methods towards students' learning styles play roles in developing confidence and their learning interest in the future.

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