



**A NEED ANALYSIS OF READING MEDIA TO SUPPORT READING
ENGAGEMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION**

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ABSTRAK

Keterlibatan membaca dan kesetaraan gender merupakan aspek penting dalam pendidikan anak usia dini karena keduanya berkontribusi terhadap perkembangan literasi dan kesadaran sosial anak sejak usia dini. Namun, bahan bacaan yang digunakan di kelas pendidikan anak usia dini umumnya masih berfokus pada keterampilan literasi dasar dan jarang mengintegrasikan nilai kesetaraan gender. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi kebutuhan guru dan siswa terhadap bahan bacaan yang dapat mendukung keterlibatan membaca sekaligus mempromosikan kesetaraan gender dalam pendidikan anak usia dini. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan analisis kebutuhan. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas dan wawancara dengan seorang guru taman kanak-kanak pada kelas TK B di TK Danend Kiddy School Singaraja. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keterlibatan membaca siswa masih rendah dan tidak konsisten ketika menggunakan bahan bacaan konvensional berukuran kecil, sehingga membatasi perhatian dan partisipasi siswa selama kegiatan membaca. Selain itu, guru menyampaikan kebutuhan akan bahan bacaan berukuran besar, menarik, sesuai dengan tahap perkembangan anak, serta mampu mengenalkan nilai kesetaraan gender secara sederhana dan bermakna. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa pengembangan bahan bacaan seperti Big Book diperlukan untuk meningkatkan keterlibatan membaca dan menumbuhkan kesadaran kesetaraan gender pada anak usia dini.

Kata kunci: *Keterlibatan Membaca, Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, Kesetaraan Gender.*

ABSTRACT

Reading engagement and gender equality are important aspects of early childhood education because both contribute to children's literacy development and social awareness from an early age. However, reading materials used in early childhood classrooms generally still focus on basic literacy skills and rarely integrate gender equality values. This study aimed to identify teachers' and students' needs for reading materials that support reading engagement while promoting gender equality in early childhood education. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design using a needs analysis approach. Data were collected through classroom observations and interviews with a kindergarten teacher in TK B class at TK Danend Kiddy School Singaraja. The findings indicate that students' reading engagement was low and inconsistent when using conventional, small-sized reading materials, which limited students' attention and participation during reading activities. In addition, the teacher expressed the need for large-sized, engaging, and developmentally appropriate reading materials that are able to introduce gender equality values in a simple and meaningful way. These findings suggest that the development of reading materials, such as Big Books, is necessary to enhance reading engagement and foster awareness of gender equality among early childhood learners.

Keywords: *Reading Engagement, Early Childhood Education, Gender Equality.*



INTRODUCTION

Literacy stands as a cornerstone in the development of young children, serving as the essential bedrock for a lifetime of continuous learning and growth. It is widely recognized as a fundamental life skill that empowers individuals to critically analyze various phenomena while gaining a deeper understanding of modern science and technology. When children are exposed to early literacy experiences, they benefit from significant language development and cognitive expansion, which directly contributes to their academic readiness for subsequent stages of education. Through consistent exposure to diverse reading activities, children gradually build a rich vocabulary and refine their listening skills. However, a significant gap exists as many young learners currently face substantial hurdles in cultivating these skills, which often results in long-term academic challenges such as limited word recognition and poor reading comprehension. If these foundational difficulties are left unaddressed during the early years, children may develop deep-seated negative attitudes toward reading that persist throughout their schooling. This situation highlights the urgent necessity of bridging the divide between the ideal of universal literacy and the actual struggles faced by students (Ferrer et al., 2023; Graham et al., 2020; Stocker et al., 2023; Stuhr et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the disparity in literacy achievement during early childhood often exacerbates educational inequality, particularly affecting children from less fortunate socio-economic backgrounds. Those who lack access to high-quality reading materials or meaningful storytelling experiences are frequently at risk of falling behind their peers, creating a persistent achievement gap. In the specific context of Indonesia, the development of literacy among young learners remains a profound national concern. Recent international assessments indicate that the country ranks near the bottom in reading performance, placing seventy-second out of seventy-seven surveyed nations. While initiative assessments typically involve older students, the findings clearly suggest that the root of initiative literacy challenges can be traced back to early childhood development. Several contributing factors have been identified for this low reading interest, including a lack of intrinsic motivation, the prevalence of unattractive or outdated learning materials, and instructional strategies that fail to capture a child's imagination. These prevailing conditions underscore the critical requirement to revitalize literacy instruction at the early childhood level by introducing more engaging and developmentally appropriate resources that meet the needs of modern learners (Alramamneh et al., 2023; Bernardino et al., 2025; Hayes et al., 2025; Yakubu & Obafemi, 2023).

Reading engagement plays a pivotal role in facilitating successful early literacy development, acting as the bridge between simple exposure and deep understanding. This concept of engagement refers to a child's active and enthusiastic involvement in reading activities, which encompasses their attention, interest, and the genuine enjoyment they derive from the experience. In the realm of early childhood education, low levels of reading engagement often act as a barrier to progress, primarily because young learners possess naturally short attention spans and are inherently drawn toward play-based interactions. When reading sessions are perceived as dull or overly formal, children tend to lose focus, leading to limited participation and diminished motivation for learning. Therefore, the implementation of innovative learning media in teaching activities becomes essential to stimulate a student's curiosity and maintain their focus. Media that are visually striking, interactive, and specifically tailored for young minds are necessary to transform standard lessons into meaningful and joyful reading experiences. By prioritizing engagement, educators can foster a more inclusive



environment where children are not just passive recipients but active participants in their own literacy journey (Arta et al., 2025; Cremin et al., 2025; Sawal et al., 2026; Wagner et al., 2020).

One particularly effective learning medium that has gained prominence for supporting interactive literacy instruction is the big book. These resources are uniquely characterized by their oversized format, featuring large-scale text and vibrant illustrations that allow an entire group of students to easily view the content during shared reading sessions. The sheer physical presence of a big book can significantly stimulate a child's motivation and spark an immediate interest in the story being told. During these shared reading activities, teachers are able to guide children through a process of observing pictures, listening to narrative structures, repeating key words, and responding to inquisitive questions. This highly interactive process is instrumental in helping young learners connect printed text with abstract meaning while simultaneously increasing their overall levels of engagement. Previous explorations into early literacy have consistently highlighted how initiative oversized formats encourage classroom interaction and invite children to participate more actively in the reading process. By utilizing such tools, educators can create a collaborative atmosphere that bridges the gap between individual reading struggles and the collective success of the classroom, making literacy a shared triumph (Alqahtani, 2024; Andrade-Arenas et al., 2023; Changcai et al., 2025; Rizki & Purwati, 2025; Wijaya, 2025).

Beyond the development of traditional literacy skills, early childhood education serves as a vital platform for introducing essential social values, such as gender equality. As a core component of the global sustainability targets, specifically *Sustainable Development Goal* five, gender equality emphasizes the necessity of ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all individuals regardless of their gender. Introducing these concepts during the formative years can help dismantle ingrained stereotypes and encourage children to view both boys and girls as having equal potential in all roles. At places like TK Danend Kiddy School, observations suggest that current literacy efforts are often limited to repetitive vocabulary introduction, frequently ignoring narrative-based visual media or social values. Furthermore, there is a noticeable lack of awareness regarding education based on global sustainability goals. This research offers an innovative value by developing a big book that integrates these social values into literacy instruction. While previous materials focused solely on reading mechanics, this study addresses the gap by creating a resource that simultaneously supports reading engagement and introduces gender equality in a simple, meaningful way, fostering a more equitable worldview.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopted a qualitative descriptive design centered on a needs analysis approach to investigate the requirements for reading media in early childhood education. The primary objective was to capture real-classroom phenomena and understand the specific needs of both teachers and learners in their natural environment. The study took place at *TK Danend Kiddy School Singaraja*, specifically focusing on the *TK B* class where reading activities are a routine part of the daily curriculum. Participants included a purposively selected kindergarten teacher who has direct experience in implementing literacy lessons and using various instructional media. Additionally, a group of young learners was involved through collective observation during their standard reading sessions. This setting was chosen because it provided an authentic context to assess current levels of reading engagement and the adequacy of existing resources in promoting social values such as gender equality. By avoiding any manipulation of the educational process, the study documented actual practices.



Data collection was carried out through two primary instruments: classroom observations and a semi-structured interview with the teacher. The observation phase evaluated students' reading engagement by monitoring attention spans, active participation, and interest during shared reading activities. The researcher recorded how children interacted with small story cards and worksheets, noting their focus and responses to instructions. Following this, a semi-structured interview explored the teacher's professional perspective. This dialogue aimed to uncover challenges in maintaining interest and expectations for effective reading materials. Special attention was given to the teacher's understanding of gender equality and her preference for larger media. The flexible interview format allowed for deep probing into pedagogical hurdles while ensuring that all developmental and aesthetic requirements for future media were clearly identified. This combined approach provided a rich data set regarding the limitations of current tools and the necessity for visual innovations in the classroom to support social awareness.

The gathered data were processed using a thematic analysis framework to identify recurring patterns and core needs. The procedure began with a familiarization phase, where the researcher repeatedly reviewed observation field notes and interview transcripts to ensure a comprehensive grasp of the content. Initial codes were generated to label meaningful segments of data related to students' behavioral responses and the teacher's instructional desires. These codes were subsequently categorized into broader themes, such as media availability, text suitability, and the absence of social value integration. A rigorous process of reviewing and refining these themes was conducted to maintain accuracy and relevance to the research focus. Classroom data and interview insights were analyzed concurrently to provide a holistic view of the educational landscape. This systematic approach ensured that the final recommendations for developing a *Big Book* were grounded in empirical evidence, focusing on physical visibility, age-appropriate vocabulary, and the meaningful incorporation of gender equality themes to enhance literacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Findings from Classroom Observation

The findings of this study were obtained through classroom observations and a semi-structured interview with the English teacher at TK Danend Kiddy School Singaraja. The findings focus on students' reading engagement during classroom reading activities and the teacher's needs regarding appropriate reading materials for early childhood learners. Overall, the results reveal several key issues related to students' participation in reading activities and the limitations of the reading media currently used in the classroom.

Classroom observations were conducted to examine students' reading engagement during reading activities using the existing learning media. The results of the observation are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of Classroom Observation on Students' Reading Engagement

Aspect Observed	Indicators	Findings
Availability of Reading Media	Quantity and variety	Reading media were limited in number and variety and were not fully adequate for classroom use.
Suitability of Text	Age appropriateness	Text and illustrations were appropriate for kindergarten



		students in terms of font size, vocabulary, and simplicity.
Size of Reading Media	Visibility for students	The reading media were small-sized (A6 story cards and A4 worksheets), limiting students' ability to clearly see the text during reading activities.
Reading Strategy	Shared reading practice	The teacher implemented shared reading strategies, including reading aloud, pointing to text, and involving students during reading activities.
Students' Attention	Focus during reading	Three out of five students showed limited attention and were easily distracted during reading activities.
Students' Participation	Active involvement	Three out of five students showed low active participation during reading activities.
Engagement Consistency	Beginning vs end of activity	Students showed enthusiasm at the beginning of the reading session but became bored and unfocused toward the end.
Vocabulary Understanding	Language difficulty	Students experienced difficulties in pronouncing and understanding vocabulary and following teacher instructions.
Gender Equality Content	SDG-related content	The reading media did not include stories related to gender equality.
Overall Engagement	Reading Level of engagement	Students' reading engagement was not fully developed due to limited media size and lack of large-sized reading media.

The classroom observation results indicate that students' reading engagement was generally low and inconsistent. Although reading activities had been implemented, the availability and quality of reading media were still limited. As summarized in Table 1, the reading media used in the classroom were not sufficient in number or variety and were mostly small-sized, such as A6 story cards and A4 worksheets. These conditions limited students' ability to clearly see the text and illustrations during reading activities. Furthermore, Table 1 shows that three out of five students demonstrated limited attention and participation during



reading activities. Students were easily distracted and showed minimal involvement, such as responding to questions, pointing at illustrations, or repeating words. While students appeared enthusiastic and interested at the beginning of the reading session, their engagement gradually decreased toward the end of the activity. This indicates that the existing reading media were not able to sustain students’ reading engagement throughout the session.

In terms of reading strategies, the teacher had applied shared reading practices, including reading aloud, pointing to the text, and involving students during the activity. However, students’ engagement was still largely limited to oral repetition and basic responses rather than meaningful interaction with the text. This finding suggests that although appropriate strategies were used, the limitations of reading media, particularly size and design, affected students’ overall reading engagement.

Findings from Teacher Interview

Findings from the semi-structured interview further support the results of classroom observations. The interview results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Teacher Interview

Theme/Aspect	Teacher’s Response
Reading Activity Implementation	Reading activities generally ran well, but students often did not listen and had difficulty maintaining focus.
Students’ Engagement Level	Although students were introduced to phonics concepts, three out of five students showed low active participation and slow responses.
Classroom Challenges	Students’ limited attention span and lack of focus were the main challenges during reading activities.
Availability of Reading Media	The school has limited reading media, mainly worksheets and small-sized cards.
Quality of Reading Media	The quality of existing media was not sufficient to encourage students’ active involvement in reading activities.
Preferred Media Characteristics	Ideal reading media should consist of 8 – 10 pages, large-sized format, cheerful illustrations, child-friendly themes, and bright or pastel colors.
Gender Equality Perspective	Gender equality themes were considered important and beneficial, as they have not been meaningfully introduced at school.
Use of Big Book	Big Book media have not been used, existing reading media are mostly small-sized.
Effective Reading Strategy	Shared reading activities focusing on phonics, CVC words, and blending were considered the most effective for young learners.

The interview results further support the classroom observation findings. As presented in Table 2, the teacher explained that reading activities generally ran well, but students often had difficulty maintaining focus and did not consistently listen during reading sessions. According



to the teacher, these challenges were influenced by students' limited attention span and the lack of engaging reading media. As shown in Table 2, the teacher also emphasized that the school has limited reading media, which mainly consist of worksheets and small-sized cards. The quality of the existing media was considered insufficient to encourage students' active involvement in reading activities. Therefore, the teacher expressed a clear need for larger-sized reading media with attractive illustrations, child-friendly themes, and simple stories to support shared reading activities.

In addition, the interview findings in Table 2 reveal that gender equality values have not been meaningfully introduced through reading activities. The teacher considered gender equality themes important and relevant for early childhood learners, as such values have not yet been explicitly addressed in the school context. This finding highlights the need for reading media that not only support students' reading engagement but also integrate moral values, including gender equality, in an age-appropriate manner.

Discussion

The investigation into classroom dynamics at *Singaraja* reveals a significant gap between the intended reading goals and the actual level of student involvement. Based on the systematic observations, it is evident that three out of five students, or 60 percent of the observed group, struggled to maintain their focus during literacy sessions. This lack of attention is directly linked to the physical constraints of the existing instructional materials, which primarily consist of small A6 story cards and A4 worksheets. These undersized formats create a significant barrier for young learners, as they cannot clearly see the text or the accompanying illustrations from their seats. Consequently, while the students often begin the reading session with a surge of genuine enthusiasm, this interest rapidly wanes as the activity progresses. By the end of the session, the majority of the children appear bored and distracted. The inconsistency in engagement levels suggests that the current media are physically inadequate for group settings, failing to provide the visual stimulation necessary to sustain curiosity throughout the entire lesson (Chen et al., 2021; Heard, 2023; Read et al., 2023; udasi et al., 2020).

Beyond the issues of physical size, the study highlights a pattern of low active participation among the young learners. The data shows that 60 percent of the participants demonstrated minimal involvement, rarely responding to teacher inquiries or interacting with the story elements in a meaningful way. This lack of participation is compounded by significant challenges in vocabulary comprehension and pronunciation. Many students found it difficult to follow the verbal instructions provided by the teacher, which further alienated them from the reading process. Instead of engaging in a deep or interactive dialogue about the narrative, student responses were largely limited to simple oral repetitions of sounds and words. This mechanical form of engagement does not foster true literacy development or a love for reading (Fälth, 2021; Hutabalian et al., 2023; Motilal & Fleisch, 2020; Read et al., 2023). The classroom environment becomes one of passive listening rather than active discovery. Without a more engaging and visually accessible medium, these children continue to view reading as a repetitive task rather than an exciting communal experience, highlighting a critical need for materials that facilitate more than just imitation (Hayes et al., 2025; Kaiser et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2024).

The insights gathered from the teacher interviews reinforce the observational data, pointing toward a desperate need for a specialized instructional overhaul. The educator expressed that the limited attention spans of the children represent the primary obstacle in the daily teaching routine. While shared reading strategies are being employed, the poor quality



and insufficient variety of the school's current resources hinder the teacher's ability to spark active involvement. To address this, there is a clear demand for the introduction of large-format media, specifically Big Books. The teacher identified that ideal materials should consist of eight to ten pages and feature bright or pastel colors with cheerful, child-friendly illustrations. Such characteristics are seen as essential for capturing and holding the gaze of young learners who are still developing their cognitive focus. By moving away from small, individual cards toward a large, shared visual experience, the educator believes that the classroom can transition into a more collaborative and focused learning space. This shift would allow for more effective guidance through complex phonics and word blending (Coleman et al., 2020; Hasan et al., 2026; Khasawneh, 2024; Khasyi, 2024).

A noteworthy gap identified during the research is the complete absence of gender equality themes within the current curriculum. At present, the reading materials do not include any stories or narratives that address the values associated with the fifth Sustainable Development Goal. The teacher acknowledged that these concepts have not yet been introduced in any meaningful way at the school, despite their perceived importance for early childhood development. There is a missed opportunity to utilize storytelling as a vehicle for instilling progressive moral values and social awareness from a young age. Integrating themes that portray boys and girls in diverse, non-stereotypical roles could significantly broaden the children's understanding of social fairness and inclusion. The teacher indicated that such content would be highly beneficial, as it would provide a foundation for character building alongside traditional language skills. By embedding these values into the literacy curriculum, the school could move beyond basic phonics to foster a more holistic educational experience. This integration would help children view equality as a natural aspect of everyday social interactions (Jiménez et al., 2025; Minsih et al., 2024).

In conclusion, the study suggests that the development of an instructional Big Book based on gender equality principles is a necessary intervention for this specific educational context. While the current pedagogical strategies are appropriate, they are severely undermined by the lack of high-quality, large-scale visual aids. The primary limitation of this study is its small sample size of only five students in one *Singaraja* kindergarten, which means the findings might not be universally applicable to all early childhood centers. However, for this specific classroom, the evidence clearly points toward a need for a medium that combines visual accessibility with socially relevant storytelling. Transitioning to a large-format book would likely stabilize student attention and encourage a shift from simple repetition to meaningful text interaction. By addressing both the physical needs of the learners and the thematic gaps in the curriculum, educators can create a more inclusive and effective literacy program. This approach ensures that children are not only learning to read but are also learning to think critically about the world around them from a very early age.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the importance of conducting a needs analysis as a foundation for developing appropriate reading media in early childhood education. The findings indicate that students need reading media that are visually engaging and story-based to better support their reading engagement, while teachers require developmentally appropriate learning media that can introduce gender equality values in a simple and meaningful way. These findings suggest that early childhood reading media should not only emphasize basic literacy skills but also support meaningful interaction and active participation during shared reading activities. Based on these findings, early childhood teachers are encouraged to use contextual and engaging



reading media, such as Big Books, to support shared reading activities and help address students' reading engagement needs. Teachers are also advised to actively guide discussions during shared reading sessions to assist children in understanding story content, including values related to fairness and equality. In addition, material developers and curriculum designers are encouraged to integrate gender equality values into early childhood reading media using simple language, relatable characters, and everyday situations that suit children's developmental levels. These efforts may support the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5 in early childhood education contexts. Furthermore, this study provides a foundation for future research on the development of SDG 5–based reading media. Future studies may focus on developing and evaluating Big Book prototypes based on the identified needs to examine their potential role in supporting reading engagement and children's understanding of gender equality. Integrating literacy development with value education has the potential to contribute to more inclusive and meaningful learning experiences for young learners.

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