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Holistic-Integrative Indonesian Language Learning as a Foundation for Early Childhood Literacy

Andri Hardiyana^{1✉}, Nur Syamsiyah²

¹ Early Childhood Islamic Education Program, FITK, UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon

² Indonesian Language and Literature Education Program, FITK UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta

Email: andrihardiyana@syekhnurjati.ac.id¹, nursyamsiyah.hardiyana@gmail.com²

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Abstract

Early childhood Indonesian language learning is an important foundation for sustainable literacy development. The integrative holistic approach emphasizes the integration of aspects of child development, language, cognition, social-emotional, moral, and motor skills into a single meaningful learning process. This study aims to describe the implementation of holistic integrative Indonesian language learning and analyze its contribution to strengthening the literacy foundation of early childhood. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with teachers and children at RA Alwaqiah, Cirebon City, as subjects. Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. The data analysis techniques were data condensation, data presentation, and conclusions. The results showed that the achievements of the implementation of the five main components of holistic integrative Indonesian language learning were a) integration of language with cognitive (85%), b) integration of language with social-emotional (80%). c) integration of language with motor skills (75%). d) collaboration between schools/teachers and parents (88%). e) literacy environment (90%). Language learning designed through activities such as playing, storytelling, singing, dialoguing, and integrated environmental literacy can improve children's listening and speaking skills as well as their readiness for early reading and writing. In addition, the integrative holistic approach encourages active child involvement, enriches vocabulary, and builds an interest in reading from an early age. Thus, integrative holistic Indonesian language learning has proven to be an effective strategy in building a comprehensive and sustainable foundation for early childhood literacy

Keywords: *Learning, Holistic Integrative, Literacy, Early Childhood.*

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is a fundamental phase in human development that lays the foundation for success in later stages of education. One important aspect that needs to be developed from an early age is literacy. Early childhood literacy is not only defined as the ability to read and write, but also includes the ability to listen, speak, understand meaning, and express ideas through spoken and written language. Emphasizes that early literacy is a continuous developmental process that begins when children interact with language in their family and social environments. This is in line with the results of research conducted by (Astuti & Yafie, 2025), which emphasizes that *early literacy* includes listening, speaking, understanding meaning, and early reading and writing skills that develop through language exploration in the child's social environment.

Literacy in early childhood does not happen suddenly but through a complex process because children cannot read immediately. This is in line with the results of research conducted by (Krygsman, Amanda, 2019) that children do not "immediately learn to read" after a certain age, but rather develop reading and writing readiness through language experiences from an early age. She further explains that activities such as storytelling, reading together, and playing with letters help to develop *phonological awareness*, vocabulary, and an understanding of printed text.

Listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills are the four basic skills in language. Language plays a central role in children's cognitive and social development. This is in line with the opinion of through his sociocultural theory, which states that children's language development is greatly influenced by social and cultural interactions, where language functions as a tool for thinking and communicating. Therefore, Indonesian language learning in early childhood must be designed to be communicative, contextual, and meaningful in order to optimally support children's literacy development (Vygotsky, 2018).

Regarding the development of language Dewi (Dewi & Randi, 2024b) explains that early childhood language development is greatly influenced by social processes and interactions with adults and a language-rich environment, which supports children's thinking and communication skills. Bibliometric research also shows an upward trend in early childhood literacy research over the past two decades, emphasizing the importance of oral language interaction and the support of *a home literacy environment* for early childhood literacy development (Dewi & Randi, 2024).

In order to stimulate early literacy development in young children, it is necessary to design a holistic integrated Indonesian language learning concept. The holistic integrative approach in early childhood education emphasizes the integrated development of all aspects of child development, including religious and moral values, physical-motor skills, cognitive skills, language skills, social-emotional skills, and artistic skills. This approach is in line with the Holistic Integrative PAUD policy developed by the Ministry of Education and Culture as an effort to meet the essential needs of children in a comprehensive manner. (Sujiono, 2019) states that the holistic integrative approach is in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood who learn holistically through direct experience and play activities.

Still related to the integrative holistic approach, Fitriani explains that the integrative holistic approach in early childhood education emphasizes that the development of all aspects of language, cognitive, social-emotional, and motor skills must be carried out in an integrated and contextual manner. This holistic concept has become the focus of early childhood education

literature, including in educational studies that emphasize that early childhood learning practices must be *child-centered*, active, and oriented towards meaningful direct experiences (Fitriani, 2025). Regarding integrated learning in the field of language in early childhood, a number of previous studies have shown that language learning integrated with play activities and real experiences has a positive impact on the literacy development of early childhood. (Suyanto, 2018) found in his research that play-based language learning can improve children's speaking skills, vocabulary, and courage in communicating. Another study by (Dhieni, N., Fridani, L., Muis, A., & Yarmi, 2017) shows that a language-rich learning environment and intensive verbal interaction between teachers and children have a significant effect on early literacy development.

Another previous study that examined holistic integrative Indonesian language learning was conducted by (Nurhayati dkk., 2024). It explained that in the context of Indonesian language learning, a holistic integrative approach can be realized through learning strategies that combine storytelling, role-playing, interactive dialogue, and literacy activities that are relevant to children's daily lives. Research shows that holistic and constructivist learning strategies can contribute positively to the development of early childhood literacy through increased social interaction and intensive language stimulation.

International research also supports the importance of an integrated approach to early childhood language learning. (Neuman, S. B., & Dickinson, 2011) reveals that integrating reading, speaking, and playing activities in a responsive learning environment can strengthen children's literacy foundations before they enter primary education. However, in practice, Indonesian language learning in early childhood education is often oriented solely towards academic activities, such as letter recognition and writing exercises, and children are even taught to read without integrating other aspects of development.

This is in line with a case study conducted by Syafrudin et al., which found that learning in early childhood education (PAUD) is largely focused on the introduction of alphabet letters, even becoming the main indicator of children's abilities. This indicates that literacy is understood narrowly as early reading skills, rather than as a comprehensive language ability (Ulwan Syafrudin, 2023). This condition has the potential to hinder children's natural and comprehensive literacy development. Therefore, this study discusses holistic integrative Indonesian language learning as the foundation of early childhood literacy, including concepts, principles, and their implications in learning practices in early childhood education.

METHODS

This research was conducted at RA Al Waqiah, located at Jl. Pramuka No.18, RT 01/RW 09, Sitopeng Hartamukti, Argasunya Village, Harjamukti District, Cirebon City, West Java, from September to October 2025, using a descriptive qualitative method. This research method is used to describe and explain phenomena in depth based on data obtained from research subjects in a natural context. The data collected consists of words, actions, documents, and observation results, not numerical data. (Creswell, J. W., & Poth, 2018) explains that qualitative research focuses on understanding the meaning given by individuals or groups to a social problem. In descriptive design, researchers do not attempt to construct new theories in a complex manner, but rather present factual and systematic descriptions of the phenomena being studied.

Meanwhile, qualitative research according to (Lexy J Moleong, 2018) is research that aims to understand phenomena regarding what is experienced by research subjects holistically through descriptions in the form of words and language. In line with Moleong, Sugiyono explains that qualitative research methods are approaches used to examine objects in natural conditions, where the researcher acts as the key instrument, and the results of the research emphasize meaning rather than generalization (Sugiyono, 2019).

The subjects of this study were 20 students in class A1 and 18 students in class B1 at RA Al Waqiah in the 2024/2025 academic year. In addition, it also involves four teachers from classes A1 and B1. Meanwhile, the object of this study is the children's learning outcomes based on the implementation of holistic integrative Indonesian language learning. The data collection techniques used in this study are observation, interviews, and documentation studies. Meanwhile, the data analysis techniques used are data *condensation*, data *display*, conclusion drawing, and verification.

According to Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written field notes or transcriptions. In other words, data condensation is the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming data obtained from field notes and interview results (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, 2014). The indicators of successful data condensation include:

1. Relevance (Data aligns with the focus of the research),
2. Focus (Data is directed toward specific themes),
3. Conciseness (Data becomes more compact without losing meaning),
4. Clarity of Meaning (Information is easy to understand and unambiguous),
5. Organization (Data is arranged systematically in the form of codes, categories, and themes), and
6. Consistency (Coding and categorization are carried out consistently) (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Holistic Integrative Indonesian Language Learning

The results of the study show that Indonesian language learning in early childhood is integrated into all learning activities, rather than being taught as a separate subject. Teachers integrate language development with cognitive, social-emotional, moral, artistic, and motor aspects through play, storytelling, singing, and interactive dialogue. In the initial activities, teachers build children's listening and speaking skills through simple conversations, question and answer sessions, and experience-sharing activities. Children are encouraged to express their ideas and feelings using polite and contextually appropriate Indonesian. In the main activities, language is used as the primary tool in role-playing, reading picture books, small group discussions, and exploring the surrounding environment. Meanwhile, in the closing activities, teachers reflect with children by inviting them to recount their learning experiences.

Holistic integrative learning is also evident in the involvement of parents through regular communication between teachers and parents, so that language stimulation for children does not only occur at school, but also continues in the family environment.

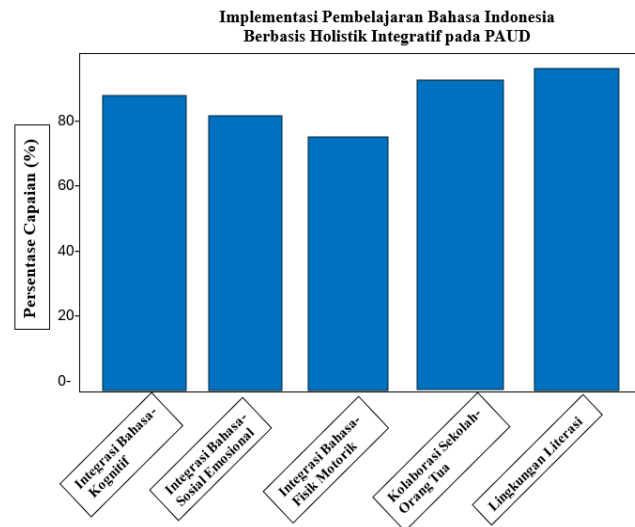


Diagram 1. Implementation of Holistic Integrative Indonesian Language Learning

The diagram above shows the percentage of implementation achievement in five main components:

Integration of Language with Cognition (85%)

Language and cognitive integration in early childhood is the interconnected process between the development of language skills (speaking, listening, early reading, and early writing) and the development of thinking skills (observing, remembering, understanding, problem-solving, and reasoning). At this stage, language is not only a means of communication but also a primary tool for building and developing children's cognitive processes.

The results of this study show that 85% of language integration occurs with cognitive skills. Language learning is integrated with thinking activities such as: grouping objects, sequencing stories, and answering cause-and-effect questions. These high results show that the use of language is effective in stimulating children's thinking skills.

In addition, forms of integration between language and cognition include:

- a. Talking while thinking: Children use language to express ideas, for example, when explaining why an object falls.
- b. Asking and answering questions: Questions such as "why?" and "how?" demonstrate both cognitive development and language skills.
- c. Storytelling: When children recount experiences, they are: Remembering (memory), Sequencing events (logic), and Using vocabulary (language).
- d. Symbolic play: For example, playing "doctor-doctor."

Language Integration with Social-Emotional Learning (80%)

Language and socio-emotional integration in early childhood is a process in which language development goes hand in hand with and supports the development of a child's emotions and social skills. The two do not develop separately, but rather influence each other in a child's daily life.

Language integration with social-emotional learning occurs 80% of the time and includes activities such as role-playing, small group discussions, and sharing personal experiences. This encourages communication skills and emotional management. This figure indicates fairly good implementation, but there is still a need for strengthening in emotional regulation and verbal empathy. Integration means children use language to:

- a. Express feelings (happy, angry, sad)
- b. Interact with friends
- c. Understand social rules

Language integration with motor skills (75%)

Language integration with motor skills occurred 75% of the time. Examples of these activities included: early writing (meaningful scribbling), playing letter cards, and story-based movement and songs. Language integration with motor skills had the lowest percentage compared to other components. This shows the need for innovation in integrating motor activities with language learning to make it more optimal.

School/teacher collaboration with parents (88%)

One of the successes of holistic integrative learning is the involvement of parents in the learning process. The results of this study show that 88% of collaboration between schools/teachers and parents influences children's success. This is evident in activities such as: home literacy programs, daily communication books, and literacy parenting. This collaboration strengthens the continuity of language stimulation between school and home.

Literacy Environment (90%)

Based on research data, it shows that 90% of the literacy environment influences the success of holistic integrative learning. This environment includes: reading corners, visual alphabet media, labeling objects in the classroom, and picture storybooks. The highest percentage is in the literacy environment. This shows that the physical environment greatly supports natural language learning.

Indonesian Language Learning as a Holistic Process

The results of this study reinforce that teaching Indonesian to young children is more effective when done holistically and integratively. Language is not only positioned as a learning objective, but as a means to develop all aspects of a child's development. In addition, language is not taught separately, but is used as the main tool in play, interaction, and exploration activities. This is in line with Vygotsky's view, which emphasizes that language develops through social interaction and meaningful and contextual activities in *the Zone of Proximal*

Development (Vygotsky, 2018) A holistic integrative approach allows children to gain authentic language experiences because language is used in the real context of children's lives. Thus, children do not merely memorize vocabulary, but understand the meaning and function of language in everyday life and contribute to the formation of critical thinking, imagination, and social intelligence. Simple activities such as talking, listening to stories, and singing play a strategic role in stimulating natural language development.

In addition, Indonesian language learning as a holistic process also emphasizes the integration of language with other aspects of development. When children listen to stories such as " " for example, they not only develop listening skills, but also cognitive abilities (understanding plot and cause and effect), social-emotional skills (empathy for characters), and moral values (the message of the story). Similarly, in role-playing activities, children learn to speak, interact socially, and manage their emotions at the same time.

A holistic approach to language learning in early childhood education emphasizes direct experience and a language-rich environment. Indonesian is introduced through the context of children's daily lives, such as eating together, playing, or interacting with friends and teachers. A classroom environment that provides reading corners, visual media, and positive communication will enrich children's language experiences. Thus, language is not taught separately, but is present naturally in every activity.

The Role of Teachers in Holistic Integrative Language Learning

The results of the study show that teachers act as facilitators, language models, and providers of *scaffolding*. Teachers consistently use proper and correct Indonesian, provide clear pronunciation examples, and expand children's vocabulary through meaningful responses. Teachers do not require children to read and write formally, but rather emphasize the process and enjoyable language experiences. In addition, the role of teachers as language models is in line with Skinner's behaviorism theory, which states that children's language develops through imitation and reinforcement (Skinner, 2014) Positive responses and the use of proper and correct Indonesian by teachers are important stimuli in enriching children's language skills.

In addition, in holistic learning, teachers act as facilitators who create meaningful learning situations. Teachers not only deliver language material, but also stimulate children to actively speak, ask questions, and express their opinions. The use of strategies such as interactive storytelling, question and answer sessions, simple discussions, and language games helps children develop language skills in a fun way that is appropriate for their stage of development.

The integrative holistic approach is also in line with the view of which emphasizes that early childhood education must integrate language, cognitive, social-emotional, moral, and physical aspects in a holistic manner. Language acts as a link (integrator) between these aspects of development. Therefore, the use of Indonesian in various learning activities allows children to gain authentic and meaningful language experiences.

Early Childhood Literacy Development

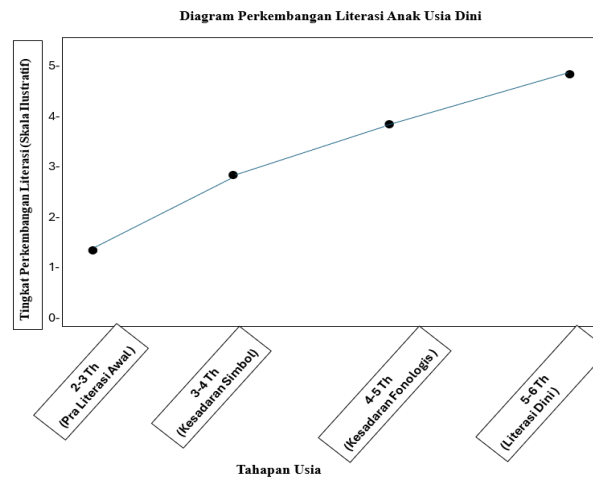


Diagram 2. Early Childhood Literacy Development

Early childhood literacy development occurs gradually and progressively, in line with the cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional maturity of the child. The following diagram illustrates early childhood literacy development. Based on the diagram above, it shows the development of literacy in early childhood. The following will describe the development of literacy based on age.

Ages 2–3 (Early Pre-Literacy)

At this stage, children:

- a. Begin to recognize books as meaningful objects.
- b. Imitate reading (turn pages, scribble).
- c. Recognize simple pictures and symbols.

At this stage, literacy is still exploratory and sensorimotor in nature. Therefore, the role of parents and teachers is very important through *read-aloud* activities.

Age 3–4 Years (Symbol Awareness)

At this stage, children begin to:

- a. Recognize letters and written forms.
- b. Understanding that writing has meaning.
- c. Connecting pictures with words.

At this stage, children begin to develop symbolic awareness, which is the understanding that letters represent sounds and meanings. Therefore, at this stage, the literacy environment (reading corner, letter posters, word cards) is very influential.

Ages 4–5 (Phonological Awareness)

At this stage, children:

- a. Recognize the initial sounds of words.
- b. Distinguish between rhymes and syllables.
- c. Begin to try to write letters or their own names.

At the age of 4-5 years, this is also known as the phonological awareness stage. This is an important foundation for reading skills. Word games, singing, and sound games are very effective.

Age 5–6 Years (Early Literacy)

At this stage, children begin to:

- a. Read simple words.
- b. Write words or short sentences.
- c. Understand the content of simple stories.

At ages 5-6, children enter the *emergent literacy* stage leading to *early reading*. The integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing begins to emerge.

Based on observations conducted by researchers at RA Al Waqiah in Cirebon City, children generally show significant development in early literacy, particularly in listening, speaking, and understanding language symbols. Children are able to:

- a. Listen to stories with longer attention spans.
- b. Express their opinions and retell the content of stories using simple sentences.
- c. Recognize the first letters of their names and simple words.
- d. Show interest in books and shared reading activities.

In addition, children also begin to understand the function of language as a means of communication and social interaction, as seen in the increase in verbal interaction between children when playing and working together in small groups. This is in line with the results of the research " which explains that literacy in early childhood is not just the ability to read and write, but an interrelated process of language development, understanding symbols, stories, and communication from birth. This is a phase called *emergent literacy*, which is the ability to read and write that develops long before formal reading and writing are learned in school.

In practical terms, children aged 0-6 years generally show signs of literacy through: 1) recognizing symbols (letters, pictures), 2) playing with print, 3) storytelling, 4) imitating letters or writing, 5) and everyday language interaction.

Language Learning as the Foundation of Early Childhood Literacy

The results of this study indicate that holistic integrative Indonesian language learning contributes positively to the development of early literacy in children. Literacy in early childhood is not defined as the formal ability to read and write, but rather as the initial ability to understand, use, and enjoy language.

This finding is in line with the theory of *emergent literacy*, which states that literacy develops gradually from an early age through listening, speaking, and interacting with texts. Through storytelling, reading together, and symbolic play, children build strong literacy skills that will serve them well in their future education.

Language learning in early childhood is a key foundation for literacy development. Literacy is not only defined as the ability to read and write, but also as the ability to understand, process, and communicate information through various language symbols (UNESCO, 2017) In

early childhood (0–6 years), language development is the basis for reading readiness and emergent writing.

- a. Meanwhile, according to the *Emergent Literacy* theory (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998) literacy skills develop gradually through children's interactions with their literate environment before they are able to read and write conventionally. This shows that language learning through speaking, listening, storytelling, and symbolic play activities plays an important role in building phonological awareness, vocabulary, and *narrative comprehension skills*. Children learn to construct stories in a coherent manner, which forms the basis for reading comprehension.
- b. *Motivation and Interest in Reading*. A pleasant language environment fosters a love of books and reading activities.
- c. *Symbolic Ability*. Children understand that symbols (letters/pictures) represent meaning. Language learning contributes to the foundation of literacy through the following aspects:
- d. *Vocabulary Development*. The richer a child's vocabulary, the better their understanding of text and oral communication.
- e. *Phonological Awareness*. Children begin to recognize letter sounds, rhymes, and syllables through songs and language games.

The Role of Teachers and Family Involvement in Supporting Early Childhood Literacy

The discussion of the research results shows that the success of holistic integrative language learning is greatly influenced by the role of teachers and the learning environment. Teachers who are responsive, communicative, and consistent in using good Indonesian language become effective language models for children. In addition, a learning environment rich in texts, such as storybooks, letter posters, and visual media, also strengthens children's literacy experiences. Collaboration between schools and families is also an important factor in strengthening children's literacy foundations. Continuous language stimulation at home enriches children's language experiences and accelerates early literacy development.

A language-rich learning environment with abundant texts has a positive impact on children's literacy development. An environment that provides storybooks, letter posters, and visual media supports children in recognizing language symbols and meanings. This aligns with Piaget's view that young children learn optimally through concrete and symbolic experiences (Piaget, 2013) Family involvement in language stimulation also reinforces the findings of this study. According to, a holistic integrative approach emphasizes synergy between early childhood education units, families, and communities in supporting child development, including in the aspects of language and literacy.

The Role of Teachers in Holistic Integrative Language Learning

The holistic integrative approach to language learning views children as whole individuals who develop simultaneously in cognitive, linguistic, social-emotional, moral, and physical-motor aspects. In the context of early childhood education, language learning is not taught separately, but is integrated with play, exploration, art, movement, and social interaction activities.

The results of the study show that teachers act as facilitators, language models, and providers of *scaffolding*. Teachers consistently use proper and correct Indonesian, provide clear pronunciation examples, and expand children's vocabulary through meaningful responses. Teachers do not require children to read and write formally, but rather emphasize the process and enjoyable language experiences. The role of teachers as facilitators of language development in a holistic integrative approach means that teachers no longer act as the center of information, but rather as facilitators who:

- a. Provides a rich literacy environment (reading corner, visual media, storybooks, word labels).
- b. Provides language stimulation through meaningful conversations.
- c. Ask open-ended questions to stimulate critical thinking and expressive abilities in children.

In addition to the above, teachers also act as *Language Models*. In this case, young children learn language through imitation. Therefore, teachers must be able to:

- a. Use clear, polite, and communicative language.
- b. Expand children's vocabulary through *scaffolding* techniques.
- c. Provide examples of correct sentence structures in natural contexts.

Meanwhile, another role of teachers is as designers of integrative learning. Teachers need to design learning that integrates language with other aspects of development. For example:

- a. Storytelling activities that develop language and moral values.
- b. Role-playing that trains communication and social-emotional skills.
- c. Simple science activities that involve discussion and exploration of new vocabulary.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study and discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation achievements in the five main components of holistic integrative Indonesian language learning are a) integration of language with cognitive (85%), b) integration of language with social-emotional (80%). c) integration of language with motor skills (75%). d) collaboration between schools/teachers and parents (88%). e) literacy environment (90%).

Holistic integrative Indonesian language learning plays a strategic role as the foundation for early childhood literacy. This approach views children's language development as not standing alone, but rather integrated with cognitive, social-emotional, moral, motor, and artistic aspects. Through integrated, contextual, and child-centered learning, the language acquisition process takes place naturally and meaningfully.

The implementation of holistic integrative Indonesian language learning has been proven to improve listening, speaking, early reading, and early writing skills in a balanced manner. Activities such as storytelling, role-playing, singing, reading picture books, and exploring the surrounding environment provide comprehensive literacy stimulation. In addition, the involvement of teachers as facilitators and the support of the family environment also strengthen the formation of a culture of literacy from an early age.

Thus, the integrative holistic approach not only builds language skills as a means of communication, but also fosters reading interest, critical thinking skills, and children's readiness to learn at the next level of education. Therefore, the application of integrative holistic-based Indonesian language learning is recommended as a strategic model in the development of early childhood literacy in early childhood education institutions.

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