

EARLY READING READINESS LEVELS AMONG YOUNG CHILDREN IN THAILAND AND INDONESIA

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Abstract

Early reading readiness in early childhood is still a concern in the world of education, because not all children have adequate literacy skills when they enter elementary school. Although comparative studies on early reading readiness between Indonesia and Thailand remain limited, this study aims to address this gap by comparing children's reading readiness in both countries. This study aims to determine the early reading readiness of early childhood and to compare the readiness between kindergartens in Indonesia and Thailand. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method with a case study approach. Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. The results show that there are similarities and differences in children's reading readiness in both countries. The similarities can be seen in children's ability to speak clearly, imitate the sounds of letters and words, recognize alphabet letters, understand the direction of reading from left to right, and show interest in books, especially picture books. In addition, children are able to hold pencils properly, write simple letters, and retell stories even though they are not yet fully complete. Meanwhile, the differences lie in the level of vocabulary mastery and the process of letter introduction. Children in Thai kindergartens tend to have a wider vocabulary and have been introduced to the alphabet since kindergarten 1, while in Indonesian kindergartens the introduction of letters is given gradually according to the child's developmental stage. These differences are influenced by teaching methods, educational curriculum, children's language environment, and support from teachers and parents in reading and daily communication activities. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of early literacy development in Southeast Asia and provide implications for designing developmentally appropriate literacy programs for young children.

Keywords: *early childhood; early reading readiness; early childhood education*

Abstrak

Kesiapan membaca awal pada anak usia dini masih menjadi perhatian dalam dunia pendidikan, karena belum semua anak memiliki keterampilan literasi yang memadai saat memasuki sekolah dasar. Meskipun studi komparatif mengenai kesiapan membaca awal antara Indonesia dan Thailand masih terbatas, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengisi celah tersebut dengan membandingkan kesiapan membaca anak di kedua negara. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui kesiapan membaca awal pada anak usia dini serta membandingkan kesiapan tersebut antara taman kanak-kanak di Indonesia dan Thailand. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya persamaan dan perbedaan dalam kesiapan membaca anak di kedua negara. Persamaan terlihat pada kemampuan anak untuk berbicara dengan jelas, meniru bunyi huruf dan kata, mengenali huruf alfabet, memahami arah membaca dari kiri ke kanan, serta menunjukkan ketertarikan pada buku, khususnya buku bergambar. Selain itu, anak-anak mampu memegang pensil dengan benar, menulis huruf sederhana, dan menceritakan kembali isi cerita meskipun belum sepenuhnya lengkap. Sementara itu, perbedaan terletak pada tingkat penguasaan kosakata dan proses pengenalan huruf. Anak-anak di taman kanak-kanak Thailand cenderung memiliki kosakata yang lebih luas dan telah diperkenalkan pada alfabet sejak jenjang taman kanak-kanak 1, sedangkan di taman kanak-kanak Indonesia pengenalan huruf diberikan secara bertahap sesuai dengan tahap perkembangan anak. Perbedaan-perbedaan ini dipengaruhi oleh metode pengajaran, kurikulum pendidikan, lingkungan kebahasaan anak, serta dukungan dari guru dan orang tua dalam aktivitas membaca dan komunikasi sehari-hari. Temuan ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman yang lebih mendalam mengenai perkembangan literasi awal di Asia Tenggara serta memberikan implikasi dalam merancang program literasi yang sesuai dengan tahapan perkembangan anak usia dini.

Kata kunci: anak usia dini; kesiapan membaca awal; pendidikan anak usia dini

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Introduction

Early childhood education is a crucial stage in developing children's foundational skills, particularly in language and literacy. One skill that needs to be developed from an early age is early reading, as this skill serves as the foundation for children's academic success at subsequent educational levels. Early reading encompasses the ability to recognize letters, understand language sounds, and connect symbols with meaning, all of which play a vital role in children's literacy development (Fahmiyah et al., 2025). In addition, early literacy stimulation contributes significantly to children's cognitive and social development because reading activities encourage communication, vocabulary enrichment, and critical thinking skills (Jannah et al., 2025).

The importance of early reading skills from a young age cannot be overlooked, as this ability is directly linked to a child's readiness to participate in learning at the elementary school level. Children with strong reading readiness tend to find it easier to understand lesson material, most of which is presented in text form. Conversely, children who have not yet mastered early reading will struggle to understand instructions, recognize words, and participate in classroom activities, which ultimately leads to lower academic achievement (Hutton et al., 2019). Furthermore, reading readiness also influences children's self-confidence and motivation in the learning process because children who are able to recognize and understand written symbols tend to adapt more easily to academic environments (Jannah et al., 2025).

However, in reality, there are still many young children who have not yet developed optimal reading readiness. This situation is caused by a lack of early literacy stimulation, teaching methods that are not appropriate for the children's developmental stage, and minimal parental involvement in reading activities at home (Neuman, 2019). A lack of exposure to literacy activities means that children are not accustomed to recognizing letters and the sounds of language, causing their reading skills to develop more slowly.

In addition, excessive use of gadgets is also a contributing factor to children's low interest in reading. Children tend to be more interested in visual entertainment than in reading, resulting in less time being spent on literacy-building activities. This situation leads to low reading interest and a lack of readiness among children to enter formal education (Sari et al., 2023). Widia Nur Jannah (2025) also explains that the rapid development of digital technology has shifted children's attention away from conventional literacy activities, making parental supervision and balanced literacy stimulation increasingly important.

If children do not receive appropriate early reading instruction, various negative consequences may arise, such as difficulty understanding academic material, low literacy skills, and a lack of confidence in learning activities. In the long term, this situation can hinder children's academic development and affect their success in future education.

Previous research has shown that a supportive literacy environment has a significant impact on children's reading readiness. Children who receive early literacy stimulation, such as reading books together and engaging in frequent verbal interactions, tend to have better reading skills than children who receive less stimulation (Neuman, 2019). In addition, phonological

awareness is also a key factor in early reading, as the ability to recognize speech sounds significantly influences a child's success in learning to read (Milankov et al., 2021).

Family environment also plays a role in a child's readiness to read. Not all parents provide sufficient stimulation, such as reading storybooks aloud or providing age-appropriate reading materials. This results in children becoming less accustomed to literacy activities from an early age. According to (Jannah et al., 2024), collaboration between parents and teachers is essential in creating a literacy-rich environment that supports children's reading readiness before entering elementary school.

On the other hand, there is also pressure from parents and educational institutions requiring children to be able to read before entering elementary school. These demands often fail to take into account the child's overall developmental readiness, which can cause stress and diminish the child's interest in learning (Sari et al., 2023).

Reading readiness is a crucial aspect that must be considered before a child begins formal reading instruction. Children with strong reading readiness tend to adapt more easily to the learning process in elementary school. Conversely, children who are not yet ready to read may struggle to understand course material, much of which is presented through text. Therefore, identifying the level of early reading readiness in young children is essential as a foundation for providing appropriate learning stimulation tailored to the child's developmental needs (Fahmiyah et al., 2025).

Readiness to learn to read in young children cannot be forced; rather, it must be tailored to each child's developmental readiness. Research findings indicate that some children are not yet ready to begin reading instruction at an early stage, so a gradual, play-based approach is necessary to avoid creating academic pressure (Rohde, 2015).

Furthermore, environmental factors such as teacher and parent involvement play a crucial role in shaping children's readiness to read. A supportive environment, both at home and at school, can enhance children's motivation and readiness to learn to read before they enter elementary school (Neuman, 2019).

In addition, innovations in digital learning materials are also being developed to improve early reading readiness. The use of materials such as digital flashcards has proven effective in providing early reading stimulation because they capture children's attention and increase their engagement in the learning process (ILA, 2021).

Research shows that early reading skills need to be stimulated from an early age through approaches appropriate to the child's developmental stage. Early literacy activities, such as recognizing letter symbols and sounds, can be developed through engaging and interactive media to ensure children have optimal readiness for learning (Regina et al., 2024).

Another study by (Neuman, 2019) examines the importance of an early literacy environment for the reading development of young children. The results indicate that children who receive literacy stimulation at home, such as reading books together and engaging in frequent verbal interactions, exhibit better reading readiness than children who receive less such stimulation. This study underscores the critical role of the family in laying the foundation for early reading skills.

Research by (Rohde, 2015) examined the relationship between phonological awareness and early reading skills in young children. The results of the study indicate that phonological awareness is a strong predictor of children's reading readiness. Children who can recognize letter sounds and syllables tend to find the process of learning to read in elementary school easier.

The study emphasizes that a fun learning approach tailored to a child's developmental stage is highly effective in improving early reading readiness. Findings from other studies also indicate that the appropriate use of digital media can support children's literacy development; however, parental supervision is necessary to prevent any negative impact on children's interest in reading.

Based on the above discussion, research on early reading readiness among young children is essential. This study is expected to provide insight into children's reading readiness prior to entering elementary school and to serve as a basis for educators in designing more effective learning strategies to develop children's early literacy skills.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach using descriptive methods to describe the level of early reading readiness among young children who are about to enter elementary school. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of children's early reading abilities and the factors influencing such readiness within the context of kindergarten learning. Through descriptive methods, the researcher can obtain a systematic overview of children's reading readiness based on data collected in the field (Kartika & Putri, 2023).

This study was conducted in two different locations—Indonesia and Thailand—both of which have early childhood education institutions. These two locations were selected to gain insight into children's early reading readiness in different learning environments. Data collection took place from February 28 to March 3.

The research subjects were children aged 5–6 years (Group B) who were in the preparatory stage for entering elementary school. The research informants consisted of two teachers: one kindergarten teacher in Thailand and one kindergarten teacher in Indonesia who were directly involved in the children's learning process. The selection of these informants was based on the consideration that teachers play a crucial role in providing early literacy stimulation to children and in understanding the development of early reading skills in the classroom. The age range of 5–6 years was chosen because during this phase, children begin to recognize letters, language sounds, and simple words, which form the foundation for the development of reading skills. (Prasetia et al., 2022).

The data collection methods used in this study included observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to directly observe children's activities related to early reading readiness, such as the ability to recognize letters, identify letter sounds, read simple words, and children's interest in reading activities. Interviews were conducted with teachers at both research sites to obtain information regarding the implemented learning strategies, the methods used, and the various efforts made by teachers to stimulate the development of children's reading skills. Meanwhile, documentation was used as supporting data in the form of records of learning activities, photographs of children's activities, and other documents related to the learning process. The use of these various data collection techniques aimed to ensure that the data obtained was more comprehensive and capable of providing a comprehensive picture of the development of children's early reading skills (Saju et al., 2023).

Data analysis in this study employed an interactive analysis model comprising three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. During the data reduction stage, the researcher sorted and simplified the data deemed relevant to the study's focus. Subsequently, the data were presented in the form of descriptive accounts or narratives to facilitate understanding of the research findings. The final stage is drawing conclusions based

on the interpretation of the analyzed data, thereby providing an overview of the level of early reading readiness among young children as they prepare for elementary school. This analytical approach is widely used in early childhood education research because it effectively captures both the process and outcomes of learning in a more comprehensive manner (Kartika & Putri, 2023).

Results and Discussion

This study aims to determine the level of early reading readiness among preschoolers entering elementary school based on several key aspects, namely language development, letter recognition, interest in reading activities, story comprehension skills, and fine motor skills in writing simple letters. Research data were collected through direct observation of the children and interviews using instruments developed based on indicators of early reading readiness.

Early reading readiness in young children is a key indicator of their success upon entering elementary school. According to research findings, reading readiness varies significantly from one child to another (Nurhabibah et al., 2023).

These differences are evident in children's ability to recognize letters, understand language sounds, and show an interest in reading. Some children have already demonstrated a good level of readiness, while others still require more intensive stimulation.

Teachers also noted that differences in families' socioeconomic backgrounds affect children's access to reading materials. Children from families with many books tend to be better prepared for reading than those with limited access.

Additionally, the amount of time spent using gadgets is another factor that influences children's reading readiness. Children who use gadgets too frequently tend to pay less attention to reading activities.

In the learning process, teachers face several challenges, such as differences in ability among children and limited time to provide individual attention. This poses a challenge in optimizing each child's reading readiness.

Teachers address these challenges by employing a variety of teaching approaches tailored to the children's needs. They also strive to create a pleasant learning environment so that children do not feel stressed while learning to read (Mahardhika Nursahid et al., 2024).

Results of Observations and Interviews in Indonesia

Based on the observations, most children have demonstrated several indicators of early reading readiness. The children appear capable of communicating quite clearly in everyday conversations and using a fairly diverse vocabulary when speaking or telling stories. This indicates that the children's language development is progressing and can support the reading learning process.

Additionally, some children have also been able to recognize letters of the alphabet, particularly the first letter of their own names. Children are also beginning to understand that the text in books has meaning and is read from left to right. When the teacher reads a story aloud, the children show interest in the book and are able to pay attention to the story being told.

However, the observation results also indicate that children's readiness for reading is not yet fully consistent. There are still some children who cannot consistently recognize letters and who still struggle when asked to repeat the sounds of specific letters or words. Furthermore, children's ability to write simple letter forms still needs development, as some children cannot yet hold a pencil in the correct position.

Furthermore, children's ability to associate letters with sounds is still in the early stages of development. Some children are already able to identify the sounds of individual letters, but still struggle when asked to combine those sounds into simple syllables.

In classroom learning activities, it is evident that children grasp the material more easily when it is presented through engaging media, such as pictures, letter cards, and picture books. Visual media has been proven to enhance children's attention and engagement in the reading learning process.

Additionally, children demonstrate a more positive response when learning activities are presented in the form of games. Activities such as arranging letters, matching pictures with words, and letter-sound games can boost children's active participation.

However, there are differences in activity levels among children. Some children appear very enthusiastic and active in participating in reading activities, while others tend to be passive and lack confidence when asked to participate.

Self-confidence is one of the factors influencing children's readiness to read. Children with high self-confidence tend to be more willing to try reading or naming letters, whereas those with low self-confidence tend to hesitate and require encouragement from the teacher.

In addition, children's attention spans are still relatively limited. Children easily become bored if learning activities last too long or lack variety. Therefore, teachers need to manage time and teaching methods effectively.

During shared reading activities, children tend to be more interested in pictures than in text. This indicates that they are still in the pre-reading stage, where their understanding is dominated by visual cues rather than written symbols.

Children's ability to understand the content of stories is also beginning to develop. Some children are able to answer simple questions related to the stories read aloud, such as about characters and events, although they still require the teacher's assistance.

In terms of fine motor skills, some children are already able to hold a pencil fairly well, but there are still some children who do not yet have optimal hand coordination. This affects their ability to write letters.

The ability to write simple letters is beginning to emerge in some children, although their handwriting is still not neat or consistent. Children still need repeated practice to form letters correctly.

Based on interview results, teachers stated that the learning methods used focus on a play-based learning approach. This approach is considered most suitable for the characteristics of young children.

Teachers also noted that the use of varied learning materials is highly effective in enhancing children's interest and reading skills. Materials such as letter cards, interactive whiteboards, and storybooks serve as effective tools.

In addition to school factors, the family environment has a significant influence on children's reading readiness. Children who are frequently read to at home demonstrate better literacy development.

Conversely, children who receive insufficient literacy stimulation at home tend to experience delays in recognizing letters and have low reading interest. This highlights the importance of parents' role in supporting children's reading development. Differences in family background also influence reading readiness. Children who have access to books and a supportive learning environment tend to be better prepared for reading than those with limited resources.

In addition, the use of gadgets is another contributing factor. Children who use gadgets too frequently tend to be less focused on reading and show less interest in books.

Teachers also face challenges in teaching, particularly when dealing with differences in children's abilities. This requires teachers to adopt different approaches tailored to each child's needs.

To address this, teachers strive to create a learning environment that is enjoyable, interactive, and non-pressured. Teachers also provide special attention to children facing difficulties.

Interview results with teachers indicate that children's reading readiness is significantly influenced by literacy experiences gained at home. Children who are frequently read to by their parents or are accustomed to listening to stories tend to have a higher interest in reading and find it easier to recognize letters. Conversely, children who rarely interact with books demonstrate lower early literacy skills.

Research Findings in Thailand

Several studies on early literacy in Thailand indicate that young children generally possess a fairly strong foundation in reading readiness before entering elementary school. This is attributed to the implementation of early literacy programs that have been integrated into learning activities at early childhood education institutions. Children are given opportunities to interact with various reading materials through shared storybook reading, storytelling activities, language games, and activities that involve active communication between teachers and students.

In addition to school-based activities, the family environment in Thailand also provides significant support for children's literacy development. Parents are generally accustomed to introducing books to their children from an early age and providing a variety of reading materials at home. This habit of reading together helps children understand the function of written language and fosters their interest in reading activities.

Research findings in Thailand indicate that children are not only able to recognize letters but also demonstrate a high interest in books and can comprehend the content of simple stories presented by teachers or parents. These findings suggest that children's reading readiness develops gradually through consistent literacy experiences.

Furthermore, children in Thailand are generally introduced to letters at an early age through a fun and non-coercive approach. Letter recognition is taught through songs, games, and engaging visual activities, making it easier for children to understand and remember the shapes and sounds of letters.

In terms of phonological awareness, children in Thailand demonstrate a fairly strong ability to recognize and distinguish language sounds. They are able to imitate letter sounds, identify syllables, and begin to combine sounds into simple words more fluently.

Additionally, children's language skills also develop well. Children are able to communicate using simple to complex sentences and possess a relatively broader vocabulary. This supports their ability to understand texts and stories.

In the classroom, teachers in Thailand tend to use interactive, child-centered approaches. Children are given the opportunity to actively ask questions, respond, and participate directly in literacy activities, making the learning process more meaningful.

The use of a variety of learning materials is another key factor. Picture books, letter cards, visual aids, and digital media are used to boost children's interest and engagement in reading activities.

Additionally, a literacy-rich classroom environment, such as the presence of an attractive and easily accessible reading corner, further supports children's reading habits. Children can choose books according to their interests and read independently or with friends.

From a motor skills perspective, children in Thailand generally possess fairly good writing skills. They are able to hold a pencil correctly and write simple letters more neatly compared to children who have not received optimal stimulation.

Interviews with teachers indicate that children's reading readiness is closely linked to systematic and sustained instructional planning. Teachers consistently provide literacy stimulation through various activities integrated into the curriculum.

In addition, parental involvement is also a key factor. Parents not only provide reading materials but also actively support their children in reading activities at home.

A strong culture of literacy in both the family and school environments helps children become accustomed to reading activities from an early age. This leads to increased reading interest and literacy skills among children.

However, although children's reading readiness in Thailand is generally good, there are still variations in ability among children. Some children still require further guidance, particularly in the area of reading comprehension.

Based on the results of the observations and interviews conducted, the early reading skills of children at the two kindergartens showed differences across several indicators. The analysis focused on aspects of early reading, including the ability to recognize letters, identify letter sounds, match letters with sounds, read syllables, read simple words, and comprehend the content of the text. The data obtained were then organized into a comparison table to clearly illustrate the differences in early reading skills between children in Indonesian and Thai kindergartens. The results of this comparison are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Comparison of Early Reading Skills Among Preschool Children in Indonesia and Thailand

Indicators	Indonesia	Thailand
Reading the Beginning		
Recognizing Alphabet Letters	Fair	Good
Pronouncing Letter Sounds	Fair	Good
Connecting Letters and Sounds	Poor	Good
Reading Syllables	Fair	Good
Reading Simple Words	Fair	Good
Reading Simple Sentences	Poor	Fair
Answering Questions from a text	Good	Good
Retelling a Text	Good	Good

Based on the comparison table of early reading skills, there are differences in ability between children in Indonesian and Thai kindergartens across several indicators. Children in Thai kindergartens demonstrated better skills in recognizing letters, identifying letter sounds, and reading simple syllables. Meanwhile, children in Indonesian kindergartens demonstrated fairly good skills in understanding the content of what they read, such as answering questions and retelling simple stories. These differences indicate that the development of early reading skills in the two schools has distinct characteristics corresponding to the teaching methods implemented.

To clarify the comparison of early reading skills between the two kindergartens, the data was then presented in graph form. The following graph shows a comparison of early reading skill scores for children in Indonesian and Thai kindergartens across each indicator.

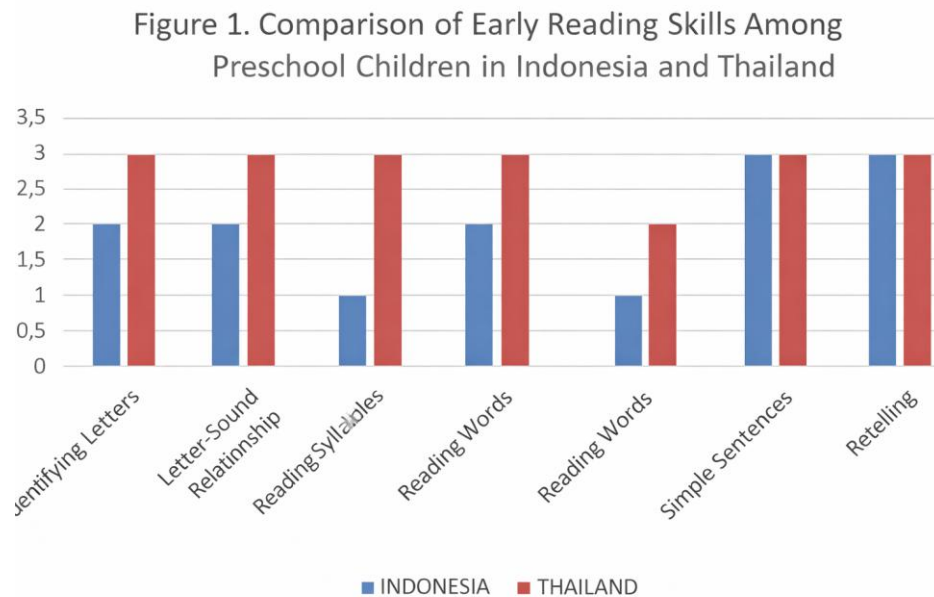


Figure 1. Comparison of Early Reading Skills Among Preschool Children in Indonesia and Thailand

Based on the comparison chart, it is evident that the early reading proficiency scores of children in Thai kindergartens are higher on several basic indicators, such as letter recognition, identifying letter sounds, and reading simple syllables. Meanwhile, regarding reading comprehension, both schools showed relatively comparable results. This indicates that children in Thai kindergartens excel in the technical aspects of early reading, while children in Indonesian kindergartens demonstrate strong abilities in understanding the content of what they read.



Figure 2. An activity in which children at an Indonesian preschool arrange letters into words using letter cards



Figure 2. Vocabulary-building activities using visual aids with preschool children in Thailand

Based on this documentation, it appears that literacy programs in Indonesia place greater emphasis on combining letters to form words, whereas in Thailand, the focus is on vocabulary acquisition through visual media. These differing approaches also influence children's reading readiness in both countries.

Similarities in Research Findings from Thailand and Indonesia

When compared, there are several similarities between the findings of the studies in Thailand and Indonesia. Both studies indicate that early reading readiness in young children is significantly influenced by literacy stimulation provided from an early age. Children who frequently listen to stories, interact with books, and have opportunities for active communication tend to have better early literacy skills.

In addition, the roles of teachers and parents are also key factors in supporting children's reading readiness. Teachers play a role in providing engaging learning activities appropriate for children's developmental stages, while parents play a role in providing literacy stimulation in the home environment.

Differences in Research Findings Between Thailand and Indonesia

Although there are some similarities, there are also differences between the research findings in the two countries. Research in Thailand indicates that reading readiness among young children tends to be more consistent and at a fairly good level. Conversely, research findings in Indonesia reveal significant variation in children's reading readiness.

Some children in Indonesia have demonstrated good early literacy skills, such as recognizing letters and understanding simple stories, while others are still in the early stages of reading development. This suggests that the literacy stimulation provided to children is not yet consistent.

Comparison and Causes of Differences

The differences in results between studies in Thailand and Indonesia may be influenced by several factors. One of the main factors is the difference in early childhood education systems and the implementation of early literacy programs in each country. Literacy programs in Thailand tend to be more integrated into daily learning activities, ensuring that children receive consistent literacy experiences.

Additionally, the availability of learning resources such as children's storybooks and educational materials also influences children's literacy development. A family environment that supports reading activities is also a crucial factor in enhancing children's reading readiness.

Based on the results of observations and interviews in this study, it can be concluded that early reading readiness in young children is influenced by various interrelated factors, namely children's language development, literacy stimulation at school, and support from the family environment. Therefore, collaboration between teachers and parents is necessary to provide enjoyable literacy experiences so that children have optimal reading readiness before entering elementary school.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the observations and interviews conducted, it can be concluded that the early reading readiness of young children in Indonesian and Thai kindergartens shows several similarities and differences. Similarities are evident in the basic skills the children have acquired, such as the ability to speak clearly, imitate the sounds of letters and words, recognize the letters of the alphabet, understand that reading proceeds from left to right, and show an interest in books, especially picture books. Additionally, the children are already able to hold a pencil properly, write simple letters, and retell the content of a story, even if not yet fully complete. Meanwhile, differences are evident in vocabulary mastery and the process of letter recognition. Children in Thai kindergartens tend to have a broader vocabulary and are introduced to the alphabet as early as Kindergarten 1, whereas in Indonesian kindergartens, letter recognition is introduced gradually in accordance with the child's developmental stage. These differences are influenced by various factors, such as the teaching methods used in schools, the educational curriculum, the child's language environment, and the support from teachers and parents in stimulating the child's language development and reading skills. Therefore, appropriate and enjoyable stimulation is necessary so that the child's early reading readiness can develop optimally in line with their developmental stage.

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