



## Integration of Reading and Writing Literacy in Islamic Education Learning to Develop Student Competencies

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### ABSTRACT

The changing times require the education system to not only focus on academic aspects, but also the development of 21st century skills. One strategic approach is the integration of reading and writing literacy in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. This study aims to examine how the integration of literacy in Islamic Education learning can shape students' competencies, especially critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration skills. This research used a qualitative approach with a case study at MTs Al-Khoiriyah 2 Gresik. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The results show that literacy practices in PAI have involved reading religious texts, writing reflections, and collaborative projects. However, there are still challenges such as limited learning time and contextualized reading materials. This study contributes to the development of literacy-based learning strategies that are transformative and relevant to the needs of the 21st century, and emphasizes the need to strengthen the role of teachers and restructure the curriculum to make PAI learning more meaningful.

Keywords: Literacy, Islamic Education, 21st-Century Skills, Contextual Learning, 4C Competencies.

### ABSTRAK

Perubahan zaman menuntut sistem pendidikan untuk tidak hanya fokus pada aspek akademik, tetapi juga pengembangan keterampilan abad ke-21. Salah satu pendekatan strategis adalah integrasi literasi baca dan tulis dalam pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI). Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji bagaimana integrasi literasi dalam pembelajaran PAI dapat membentuk kompetensi siswa, khususnya keterampilan berpikir kritis, kreativitas, komunikasi, dan kolaborasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan studi kasus di MTs Al-Khoiriyah 2 Gresik. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa praktik literasi dalam PAI sudah melibatkan aktivitas membaca teks keagamaan, menulis refleksi, serta proyek kolaboratif. Namun, masih terdapat tantangan seperti keterbatasan waktu pembelajaran dan bahan bacaan yang kontekstual. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan strategi pembelajaran berbasis literasi yang transformatif dan relevan dengan kebutuhan abad ke-21, serta menekankan perlunya penguatan peran guru dan restrukturisasi kurikulum agar pembelajaran PAI lebih bermakna.

Kata Kunci: literasi Baca Tulis, Pendidikan Agama Islam, Keterampilan Abad 21, Pembelajaran Kontekstual, Kompetensi 4C.

### INTRODUCTION

The Fourth Industrial Revolution and the wave of global digitalization have brought major changes to the structure of social, economic, and cultural life, including in the field of education. The current education system is required to produce a generation that not only possesses academic intelligence and religiosity but is also equipped with 21st-century skills,

such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration (4C). These skills have become key pillars in shaping human resources that are adaptive, innovative, and capable of responding to the fast-paced and complex challenges of the times.<sup>1</sup> One of the main foundations in developing these skills is mastery of basic literacy, especially reading and writing literacy. Literacy is no longer understood as the mere technical ability to recognize letters, but as the competence to understand, interpret, and reflect on meaning within various social and cultural contexts.<sup>2</sup>

In the context of religious education, literacy plays a dual role: on one hand, it strengthens the understanding of religious texts, and on the other, it fosters critical, analytical, and reflective thinking towards the realities of life.<sup>3</sup> Islamic Religious Education (PAI) essentially aims to shape students' religious, ethical, and social character. This goal reflects the core values of Islamic teachings, which balance the spiritual and moral behavioral aspects of daily life. However, amidst increasingly complex contemporary challenges, PAI learning needs to go beyond normative-dogmatic approaches and transform into a space for developing cross-disciplinary competencies, encompassing the cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of students holistically.<sup>4</sup> This transformation aligns with the constructivist approach as proposed by Suparlan, which emphasizes the importance of students' active involvement in constructing meaning through learning experiences, reflection, and social interaction.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, students are not positioned as passive objects receiving information, but as active subjects who construct knowledge based on their experiences and life contexts. Therefore, PAI learning that is still dominated by lectures and memorization is no longer adequate. One relevant approach that can address these challenges is the integration of reading and writing literacy into PAI learning. Activities such as reading tafsir, writing reflections, discussing social issues from an Islamic perspective, and creating value-based collaborative projects have been proven to provide students with space to build meaningful and relevant understanding. Literacy becomes a bridge between Islamic teachings and the challenges of contemporary life, enabling students to develop social awareness, value consciousness, and critical reasoning rooted in spirituality.<sup>6</sup> From the perspective of Paulo

<sup>1</sup> Sri Nopiani et al., "Kompetensi 4C Dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Di Kelas IV Sekolah Dasar," *Didaktik: Jurnal Ilmiah PGSD FKIP Universitas Mandiri* 09, no. 02 (2023): 5202–10.

<sup>2</sup> Suhud Aryana, Subyantoro Subyantoro, and Rahayu Pristiwati, "Tuntutan Kompetensi Guru Profesional Bahasa Indonesia Dalam Menghadapi Abad 21," *Semantik* 11, no. 1 (February 18, 2022): 71–86, <https://doi.org/10.22460/semantik.v11i1.p71-86>.

<sup>3</sup> Devi Rofidah Celine et al., "Urgensi Dialektika Akal Dan Wahyu (Perspektif Fazlur Rahman) Dalam Pengembangan Pendidikan Agama Islam Di Era Gen Z," *Jurnal Al-Fatih* 8, no. 1 (May 30, 2025): 172–99, <https://doi.org/10.61082/alfatih.v8i1.378>.

<sup>4</sup> Yusup Abdul Aziz, "Implementasi Literasi Digital Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Upaya Meningkatkan Minat Baca Di SMA YP IPPI Petojo Jakarta" (Jakarta, Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> Suparlan Suparlan, "Teori Konstruktivisme Dalam Pembelajaran," *Islamika: Jurnal Keislaman Dan Ilmu Pendidikan* 1, no. 2 (2019): 79–88.

<sup>6</sup> Adam Hasyim and Ernawati M. Mahbub AI Basyari, "Pendidikan Islam Di Era Society 5.0: Perspektif Nurcholish Madjid Dalam Dinamika Kontemporer," *Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar* 10, no. 02 (June 13, 2025): 305–20, <https://doi.org/10.23969/jp.v10i02.25900>; M. Agus Kurniawan, "Islam dan Modernitas Menelusuri Hubungan Antara Tradisi dan Inovasi," *al-Akmal: Jurnal Studi Islam* 3, no. 6 (December 31, 2024): 28–42, <https://doi.org/10.47902/al-akmal.v3i6.335>.

Freire's liberatory education, these literacy activities are not merely about reading and writing, but also serve as a means of critical reflection on reality and moral decision-making in real life. Literacy here is transformative, not merely instructional.<sup>7</sup>

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of literacy in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. Aziz, for instance, found that the use of digital literacy can enhance students' reading interest and text analysis skills.<sup>8</sup> Alwi's study at SMA Negeri 1 Ajibarang showed that community-based programs such as *Gerobak Optimalisasi Skill Literasi* (GOKIL) and *Pojok Baca* help foster a positive literacy culture among students.<sup>9</sup> However, both studies have yet to explicitly integrate literacy with the reinforcement of 21st-century skills, particularly the 4C competencies. Ratnawati's research also emphasized the importance of reading and writing habits in PAI, but her approach remained conventional and did not empower students in a reflective and collaborative way.<sup>10</sup> A more recent study by Aryani and Purnomo began to view literacy as a process of student empowerment.<sup>11</sup> However, few studies have directly examined the link between literacy practices and the achievement of 21st-century skills in the context of *madrasah tsanawiyah*, which characteristically involves a traditional and religion-focused learning model.

From this, a research gap becomes evident: most literacy studies in PAI concentrate only on reading culture, rather than how literacy contributes to the integrated development of 4C competencies. Therefore, research is needed that not only describes literacy activities but also examines their contribution to shaping a holistic 21st-century student profile, especially within the *madrasah* environment. This study aims to explore in depth how reading and writing literacy is integrated into PAI learning at MTs Al-Khoiriyah 2 Gresik. The main focus is directed toward the contribution of literacy activities to the strengthening of students' critical thinking, communication, creativity, and collaboration skills. This research not only looks at learning practices descriptively but also explores the reflective and social dynamics formed through reading, writing, discussions, and collaborative projects.

Practically, the results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for teachers in designing more contextual and meaningful literacy-based PAI learning. For *madrasah* institutions, these findings encourage literacy to become a strategic program, not merely a formality of the curriculum. Meanwhile, for policymakers, this study provides a strong foundation for developing more relevant religious literacy policies aligned with the needs of today's digital generation. Theoretically, this research expands the discourse on literacy in religious education by offering an integrative model that is reflective, collaborative, and contextual. This model is not only rooted in Islamic values but is also open to pedagogical innovations based on projects and dialogue.

<sup>7</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pendidikan Kaum Tertindas* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Aziz, "Implementasi Literasi Digital Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Upaya Meningkatkan Minat Baca Di SMA YP IPPI Petojo Jakarta."

<sup>9</sup> Destiningtias Nur Alwi, "Implementasi Budaya Literasi Dalam Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Di SMA Negeri 1 Ajibarang" (Purwokerto, Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Purwokerto, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Anik Beti Ratnawati, "Program Literasi Dalam Peningkatan Mutu Proses Belajar Mengajar Pendidikan Agama Islam Siswa Kelas VII A SMP Negeri 2 Plupuh, Sragen Tahun Pelajaran 2016/2017" (Surakarta, Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Surakarta, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Wahyuni Dwi Aryani and Heru Purnomo, "Gerakan Literasi Sekolah (GLS) dalam Budaya Membaca Peserta Didik Sekolah Dasar di Indonesia," *MIND Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Dan Budaya* 4, no. 2 (July 19, 2024): 47–68.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design conducted at MTs Al-Khoiriyah 2 Gresik. This location was deliberately chosen because the *madrasah* is known for its active development of literacy programs in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), both through intracurricular activities and the reinforcement of school culture. This approach was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of the context, dynamics, and meaning of reading and writing literacy practices in PAI learning at the *madrasah*.

The research subjects consist of the head of the *madrasah*, PAI teachers, and students from grades VII to IX. Subjects were selected purposively, considering that they are directly involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of literacy activities in learning. The head of the *madrasah* was selected due to their authority over school literacy policies; PAI teachers because they are the main implementers of literacy-based learning; and students as active participants who experience these literacy activities firsthand. This purposive technique was used because the researcher needed informants with experience, knowledge, and involvement relevant to the focus of the study, namely literacy practices in PAI that are contextual and oriented toward 21st-century skills.<sup>12</sup>

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and learning documentation. The main research instrument is the researcher themselves, supported by interview guides, observation sheets, and field notes. The primary focus of the study includes three aspects: (1) the implementation of reading and writing literacy in PAI learning; (2) its contribution to strengthening 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration; and (3) supporting and inhibiting factors in integrating literacy within the learning context.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study applies source and method triangulation techniques, as well as member checks with informants to confirm the accuracy of the findings and the researcher's interpretations.<sup>13</sup> This approach is considered appropriate for examining complex and contextual reading and writing literacy practices, particularly within religious learning environments that cannot always be represented numerically.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the in-depth interviews conducted with several Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at MTs Al-Khoiriyah 2, it was found that reading literacy activities have become a routine habit designed to build a religious atmosphere while also strengthening text comprehension. As explained by one teacher, every Qur'an lesson begins with *binadhor* (reading aloud) of verses, followed by contextual explanation of their meanings. This was affirmed by the Head of the *Madrasah*, who stated:

<sup>12</sup> Hardani et al., *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif & Kuantitatif* (Yogyakarta: CV. Pustaka Ilmu, 2020).

<sup>13</sup> Sugiyono Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan Pendekatan Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Dan R&D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2015).

*“Activities like banjari and tahfidz are our main mediums for religious literacy. The children don't just read—they internalize. Some even continue to Islamic boarding schools because they fell in love with the Qur'an while studying here.”*

This routine also applies to other subjects like *fiqh* and *aqidah akhlak*, where students are invited to read excerpts from classical texts or *kitab kuning* (traditional Islamic books) before discussing their contents. Teachers mentioned that this practice aims for students not only to read technically but also to understand the meanings contained within the texts. As the *Fiqh* teacher added: “For reading literacy, what's applied is reading religious texts, then analyzing the texts, and then engaging in discussion.” The *Qur'an Hadith* teacher also explained:

*“In my class, when it comes to literacy, the students usually take turns reading aloud... sometimes we add kitab kuning, like on Fridays, we study them too... some students read, others write...”*

In several sessions, students were assigned to read short texts outside class time, which were then discussed in the next meeting. These activities are not merely aimed at technical reading skills but are directed toward deep religious understanding. This reflects a religious literacy approach that simultaneously builds both spiritual and intellectual awareness.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to reading, writing literacy activities are also actively implemented. Teachers assign thematic essays, lesson summaries, and reflective notes after completing each topic. The *Aqidah Akhlak* teacher emphasized:

*“I teach my students not just to memorize the material, but also to connect it to their daily lives. Otherwise, religious literacy will get stuck in the head and not reach the heart.”*

One teacher explained that after discussing topics such as respect toward parents, students were given time to write personal reflections on how those values are or are not reflected in their own lives. Tasks like this encourage students not only to store knowledge cognitively but also to connect it with affective and spiritual dimensions. The reflections produced serve as valuable evaluation materials for teachers to assess the internalization process of Islamic values in students.

Several teachers also assigned short-term projects involving the writing of religious narratives, such as experiences participating in worship activities or helping their families. This practice provides space for students to explore religious narratives through direct experiences, rather than merely relying on memorized material. These teachers integrated reading and writing literacy into project-based and discussion-based learning models. For example, after reading a text about the virtue of helping others, students were asked to engage in small group discussions and then write their group's conclusions in the form of an infographic or poster. Such projects show that literacy does not stand alone but is embedded in collaborative activities that foster comprehensive understanding. This supports the

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<sup>14</sup> Herlina, “Pembelajaran Baca Tulis Al-Qur'an (BTA) Untuk Meningkatkan Akhlak Dan Moral Pada Anak Usia Dini,” in *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Program Pascasarjana Universitas PGRI Palembang* (Seminar Nasional Program Pascasarjana Universitas PGRI Palembang, Palembang: Program Pascasarjana Universitas PGRI Palembang, 2017), 3–5.

meaningful learning approach proposed by Ausubel, which states that students understand material more easily when learning is linked to their existing knowledge structures.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the literacy practices at this school bring together text, context, and social learning processes.

Most of the teachers interviewed expressed the view that literacy is not merely a technical skill of reading and writing, but a part of character development and a deep understanding of Islamic values. They recognize that literacy habits can shape reflective, critical, and responsible thinking in students. One teacher stated: *"If students are used to writing reflections, they become more honest with themselves. We can also tell who really understands the material and who is just staying quiet."* This statement highlights the relationship between literacy practices and character formation through the cultivation of reasoning and emotional awareness.

The implementation of reading and writing literacy in PAI learning at MTs Al-Khoiriyah 2 is not carried out in a mechanistic or merely procedural manner. Based on interviews with several teachers, the approach used tends to be contextual and reflective, aimed at developing students' critical thinking while also meaningfully instilling Islamic values. Teachers strive to ensure that literacy is not just an activity of reading and writing, but a tool to connect religious texts with the realities of students' lives.

One form of implementation carried out is learning activities that begin with the reading of Qur'anic verses relevant to current social topics, such as solidarity, justice, or honesty. The teacher then invites students to analyze the content of the verse and relate it to social phenomena in everyday life. In an interview, a teacher explained that students were asked to work in small groups, then create summaries or concept maps based on their analysis. This activity not only strengthens text comprehension but also develops students' critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills.

This activity is reinforced through value-based project assignments. One practice described by a teacher involves students creating thematic posters about Islamic values such as tolerance, responsibility, or moral conduct toward others. This project does not merely emphasize the visualization of religious messages but also encourages students to filter information, interpret values, and present them creatively. In some cases, students are also asked to present their project outcomes in front of the class and explain their choice of theme and its relevance to their lives. This literacy approach aligns with Paulo Freire's perspective, which rejects education as a "banking" process, where students passively receive information. According to Freire, literacy must serve as a means of liberation—an ability to read the world critically and act to change it.<sup>16</sup> In the context of PAI learning, literacy does not merely

<sup>15</sup> D. P. Ausubel, *Educational Psychology: A Cognitive View* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968); Muhammad Syaikhul Basyir, Aqimi Dinana, and Aulia Diana Devi, "Kontribusi Teori Belajar Kognitivisme David P. Ausubel Dan Robert M. Gagne Dalam Proses Pembelajaran," *Jurnal Pendidikan Madrasah* 7, no. 1 (June 7, 2022): 89–100, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpm.2022.71.12>; Hidayatul Muamanah and Suyadi, "Pelaksanaan Teori Belajar Bermakna David Ausubel Dalam Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam," *Belajea: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 1 (May 22, 2020): 161–80, <https://doi.org/10.29240/belajea.v5i1.1329>.

<sup>16</sup> Freire, *Pendidikan Kaum Tertindas*; Ratri Ayu Bethari, "Eksistensi Dan Kebebasan Dalam Pemikiran Paulo Freire: Menuju Humanisasi Melalui Kesadaran Kritis," *Paradigma: Jurnal Filsafat, Sains, Teknologi, Dan Sosial Budaya* 30, no. 3 (October 31, 2024): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.33503/paradigma.v30i3.69>; Madhakomala et al., "Kurikulum Merdeka Dalam Perspektif Pemikiran Pendidikan Paulo Freire," *At-Ta'lim: Jurnal Pendidikan* 8, no. 2 (July 30, 2022): 162–72, <https://doi.org/10.55210/attalim.v8i2.819>.

produce ritualistically religious students but fosters reflective thinking, value awareness, and social responsibility.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to cognitive development, teachers also emphasize the affective and value dimensions through reflective writing activities. After discussing topics such as patience, honesty, or *qana'ah* (contentment), students are guided to write personal experiences related to those values. One teacher noted that these writings are not assessed solely based on grammar but also on the sincerity and depth of meaning conveyed. This illustrates that literacy practices do not stop at the final product but also serve as a medium for shaping students' self-awareness. This model of literacy implementation aligns with the contextual teaching and learning (CTL) approach, in which learning occurs when students actively connect new knowledge with their real-life experiences.<sup>18</sup> Thus, literacy in PAI learning does not merely target academic achievement but also supports character formation and the development of 21st-century skills.<sup>19</sup>

Although reading and writing literacy practices have been consistently pursued in PAI learning at MTs Al-Khoiriyah 2, interview results with teachers show that their implementation still faces various systemic and practical challenges. These obstacles affect the depth of the learning process and the continuity of literacy activities in the classroom. Teachers reported that they have never received specific training on contextual literacy strategies in PAI instruction. Some still rely on lectures or conventional written assignments due to a lack of understanding about how to integrate literacy into more interactive and meaningful learning activities. This results in limited variation in approaches used, which are often repetitive. The lack of training also impacts teachers' ability to design literacy assessments that evaluate not only cognitive but also affective and reflective aspects of students. Yet, the success of literacy programs heavily depends on teachers' preparedness as the primary facilitators of the learning process.<sup>20</sup>

The second major inhibiting factor is the availability of supporting facilities. Teachers revealed that the school library's book collection is still very limited, both in quantity and in the variety of reading materials. Most books are normative and not contextual, thus failing to engage students' interest in independent reading. Additionally, the reading room is uncomfortable and has not been optimally managed as a literacy space. Some teachers also mentioned the lack of access to technology such as computers, internet, and digital learning

<sup>17</sup> Shella Sayidatuz Zahro et al., "Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Islam Dalam Tradisi Gusjigang Sunan Kudus: Refleksi Dan Implementasi," *Al'Ulum Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, March 15, 2025, 45–62, <https://doi.org/10.54090/alulum.672>.

<sup>18</sup> Elaine B. Johnson, *Contextual Teaching and Learning: Menjadikan Kegiatan Belajar-Mengajar Mengasyikkan Dan Bermakna* (Bandung: Mizan Learning Center, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Dedi Candira et al., "Evaluasi Proses Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Di Sekolah Menengah Pertama Negeri," *JIIP - Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan* 8, no. 6 (June 2, 2025): 5725–33, <https://doi.org/10.54371/jiip.v8i6.7991>; Uswatun Hasanah et al., "Membangun Karakter Generasi Digital Melalui Literasi Digital Perspektif Pendidikan Islam," *Equilibrium: Jurnal Pendidikan* 12, no. 2 (May 16, 2024): 138–144, <https://doi.org/10.26618/equilibrium.v12i2.14116>; A Wathon, "Manajemen Nilai Moderasi Beragama Dalam Teknologi Pembelajaran," *FONDATIA* 9, no. 1 (March 1, 2025): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.36088/fondatia.v9i1.5572>.

<sup>20</sup> C Day and J Sachs, *International Handbook on the Continuing Professional Development of Teachers* (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2004).

media. Yet, digital literacy is a vital part of 21st-century literacy development.<sup>21</sup> This disparity hinders both teachers and students from exploring learning resources independently and extensively.

Time constraints are a serious obstacle to the comprehensive implementation of literacy. PAI instruction is only allocated two class hours per week, most of which are used for delivering core content and conducting summative assessments. Teachers stated that the available time is insufficient for critical reading, in-depth discussion, or in-class written reflection. As a result, some literacy activities such as reading and reflective writing are assigned as homework. However, this approach reduces the essence of literacy as a guided, discussed, and collectively interpreted activity within a dynamic learning environment. Teachers lose valuable moments to provide direct feedback on students' thought processes and understanding. This situation reflects findings also reported in the PISA study, which showed that Indonesia's low literacy achievement is not merely due to individuals' lack of reading interest, but also due to the absence of a well-established educational system that supports a comprehensive culture of literacy.<sup>22</sup>

Literacy activities in PAI learning at MTs Al-Khoiriyah 2 are not solely focused on academic achievement but are also directed toward developing essential 21st-century competencies known as the 4Cs: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. This was emphasized by several teachers who stated that reading, writing, and discussion activities have been designed to train students to think deeply, express ideas logically, and work collaboratively in groups. In interviews, one teacher explained that when discussing themes like honesty or responsibility, students were asked to write argumentative essays expressing their views based on Islamic teachings and personal experiences. After writing, students were asked to present their ideas in groups in front of the class. This activity not only sharpened critical thinking and communication skills but also fostered the confidence to express opinions respectfully and responsibly. The collaborative aspect was evident when students worked together on visual projects, such as posters about Islamic values relevant to teenage life. In this process, they had to agree on themes, divide tasks, and align the design with the intended message. Teachers noted that this process generated dynamics of discussion, negotiation, and mutual respect for each other's ideas.

Meanwhile, creativity is fostered by providing students with space for free reflective writing in their religious journals. Teachers do not impose a specific format but assess how well students are able to express their feelings, thoughts, and interpretations of the religious values they have learned. The evaluation is not solely based on the structure of the writing, but rather emphasizes the thinking process and the depth of the students' spirituality. This evaluation model uses a portfolio approach, weekly reflection notes, and final project assessments. Teachers assess student success not only based on the final product but also on their progress in building understanding, developing ideas, and improving self-expression over time. This approach aligns with the thinking of Trilling and Fadel, who argue that 21st-century competencies cannot grow in passive, one-way learning systems. These

<sup>21</sup> C Hague and S Payton, *Digital Literacy Across the Curriculum: A Futurelab Handbook* (Bristol: Futurelab, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> La Hewi and Muh. Shaleh, "Refleksi Hasil PISA (The Programme For International Student Assessment): Upaya Perbaikan Bertumpu Pada Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini" 4, no. 01 (2020): 30–41.



competencies can only be developed through authentic, meaningful, and contextually relevant learning experiences for students.<sup>23</sup>

Based on empirical findings in the field, reading and writing literacy practices at MTs Al-Khoiriyah 2 have shown positive direction, though they are not yet fully systematic and comprehensive. Therefore, a holistic and sustainable strengthening strategy is needed—involving teachers, facilities, time, and other supporting ecosystems. This strategy is not only aimed at enhancing students' academic competence but also at shaping their character and full 21st-century skillset.<sup>24</sup>

The first and most fundamental step is improving teacher capacity through training on contextual, reflective, and project-based literacy approaches. Interview results indicate that most teachers have never participated in specialized training on literacy in PAI learning. They need guidance in preparing teaching tools, designing literacy-based assessments, and integrating literacy into various forms of active learning. Such training can refer to the *Contextual Teaching and Learning* (CTL) approach, which emphasizes the importance of connecting learning materials to students' real-life contexts. CTL enables teachers to create meaningful learning experiences that encourage active participation and deep reflection.<sup>25</sup>

The second strategy is the provision of reading materials that are relevant, diverse, and contextual. Field findings indicate that most available reading materials are still normative texts and not contextual enough to spark students' interest. The *madrasah* needs to expand its collection of popular Islamic books, short articles, religious infographics, and Islamic materials written in a more communicative style. The additional materials should be tailored to student interests, including illustrated readings, stories of Islamic figures, and thematic Qur'anic interpretations using youth-friendly approaches. These reading materials will serve as important resources for both independent and guided literacy activities in the classroom.

In the digital era, literacy cannot be separated from technology. The third strategy is the utilization of digital media in PAI learning, such as using e-books, Islamic blogs, da'wah audiovisuals, and educational videos. Teachers can also guide students to create simple digital content, such as summarizing material in the form of short videos or podcasts. Strengthening digital literacy is essential so that students are not only media consumers but also capable of becoming producers of educational content. This aligns with Buckingham's view that media literacy is a crucial part of modern literacy, and students need to be trained to understand, analyze, and create media critically and creatively.<sup>26</sup>

The fourth strategy is building literacy partnerships with parents. Literacy activities cannot be confined to schools; families also play a vital role in fostering a reading and writing culture. Teachers can involve parents in activities such as shared reading programs, family journals, or light religious discussions at home. According to Aryani and Purnomo, the effectiveness of the School Literacy Movement (GLS) heavily depends on the active

<sup>23</sup> B Trilling and C Fadel, *21st Century Skills: Learning for Life in Our Times* (San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> Muh Noval Waliyuddinsyah, Muhamad Abdul Muid, and M. Khoirul Umam, "Determinan Partisipasi Wakaf Tunai Dalam Perspektif Millenial," *Afkaruna: International Journal of Islamic Studies (AIJIS)* 1, no. 1 (September 25, 2023): 44–59, <https://doi.org/10.38073/aijis.v1i1.1092>.

<sup>25</sup> Johnson, *Contextual Teaching and Learning: Menjadikan Kegiatan Belajar-Mengajar Mengasyikkan Dan Bermakna*.

<sup>26</sup> David Buckingham, *Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).

participation of the entire educational ecosystem, including household involvement.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, *madrasahs* need to design simple yet meaningful family literacy programs.

The final strategy is to reorganize the time allocation for learning so that literacy activities have adequate space. Teachers have expressed that the current allocation of two class hours per week is too limited to accommodate text reading, discussions, reflective writing, and evaluation. One solution is to integrate literacy activities into character education programs, extracurricular activities, or *tahfiz* and personal development programs. This integration would broaden opportunities for students to practice literacy in a freer, more creative environment without the pressure of formal curriculum constraints.<sup>28</sup>

Overall, strengthening literacy in *madrasahs* cannot rely on a single approach. Synergy between teachers, students, parents, and the school community is required to build a healthy literacy ecosystem. As emphasized in the School Literacy Movement guidelines, literacy is not the responsibility of individuals alone but a collective movement that must be supported by policies, resources, and a conducive school culture.<sup>29</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of reading and writing literacy in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at MTs Al-Khoiriyah 2 has been carried out in an integrated and effective manner in supporting the development of 21st-century competencies. Literacy is not only positioned as a technical skill but also as a pedagogical approach that enhances students' abilities in critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. Through reflective and contextual approaches, PAI learning functions as a space for the formation of religious character as well as the strengthening of functional literacy. Despite obstacles such as limited access to applicable reading materials and digital infrastructure, the success of the program has been supported by institutional commitment and innovative teaching practices by the teachers. Conceptually, these findings contribute to the development of educational psychology and critical pedagogy by affirming that literacy in religious education can build students' cognitive and affective capacities in a balanced manner. Literacy has proven not only to increase understanding of religious texts but also to shape reflective and collaborative thinking patterns that are relevant to students' needs in the modern era. The implications of these findings highlight the urgency of strengthening policies related to the provision of contextual literacy resources, teacher training in innovative literacy strategies, and the development of a PAI curriculum that is integrated with 21st-century skills—relevant to be implemented not only in *madrasahs*, but also in general schools, with necessary institutional and cultural adjustments.

<sup>27</sup> Aryani and Purnomo, "Gerakan Literasi Sekolah (GLS) dalam Budaya Membaca Peserta Didik Sekolah Dasar di Indonesia."

<sup>28</sup> Segaf Baharun and Muhamad Solehudin, "Artificial Learning Environment and Learning Independence in Arabic Learning: Mediating Effect of Learning Creativity," *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research* 104, no. 104 (2023): 283–302; Segaf Baharun et al., "Peran Kecakapan Berbahasa Arab Sebagai Penguat Literasi Keilmuan Islam di Pondok Pesantren Darullughah Waddaâ™wah, Bangil, Pasuruan," *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 02 (August 21, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v12i02.3973>.

<sup>29</sup> Aryani and Purnomo, "Gerakan Literasi Sekolah (GLS) dalam Budaya Membaca Peserta Didik Sekolah Dasar di Indonesia."

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