

Strategies for Cultivating Cultural Literacy and Creativity for Early Childhood through Calligraphy Learning

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Abstract

This study explores strategies for cultivating cultural literacy and creativity in early childhood through calligraphy learning. Cultural literacy plays a crucial role in shaping children's understanding of artistic heritage, while calligraphy serves as an effective medium for enhancing fine motor skills, creativity, and appreciation of cultural values. Using a qualitative approach, this research examines calligraphy education at PAUD Ishlahul Muslimin Senteluk, Batulayar, West Lombok, through observations, interviews, and document analysis. The findings highlight that calligraphy learning fosters cultural awareness, social skills, and creative thinking among young children. Additionally, integrating calligraphy into early childhood education helps develop patience, discipline, and cognitive abilities. The study emphasizes the need for teacher training and adequate resources to optimize calligraphy-based cultural literacy programs. Future research should explore the long-term impact of calligraphy learning on children's socio-emotional development and its implementation in diverse educational settings.

Keywords: cultural literacy, early childhood education, calligraphy learning, creativity development, art education

1. INTRODUCTION

The necessity of introducing cultural literacy to children from an early age is essential to fostering a better appreciation of their own artistic heritage. Cultural literacy encompasses an understanding of symbols, meanings, and expressions in art, including calligraphy. As a form of written art, calligraphy possesses deep aesthetic and philosophical values, making its study not only beneficial for improving children's fine motor skills but also for instilling cultural values and creativity. The fundamental skills in calligraphy include letter recognition, stroke techniques, shape imitation, and expression in writing and decorating. Stroke imitation serves as the foundation for expressing and developing innovation in calligraphy art. Essentially, cultural literacy in calligraphy learning is the ability to understand and appreciate written art as part of a region's or nation's unique cultural heritage. Moreover, learning calligraphy can also be a medium for enhancing children's creativity.

Previous research related to art education in early childhood, as conducted by Davari & Darouei (2023), has shown that art education can instill discipline and responsibility in young children. A consistent process of learning calligraphy can develop

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Citation in APA style: Ulfa, M. (2025). Strategies for Cultivating Cultural Literacy and Creativity for Early Childhood through Calligraphy Learning. *JOSAR*, Vol. 10. No. (1): 48-58.

Received:
February, 15st 2025

Revised:
February, 28st 2025

Published:
March, 14th 2025

children's habits of writing neatly, paying attention to details, and increasing patience. This research contributes to strategies for art education in fostering children's character. Shavkatovna (2021) found that painting education for early childhood can enhance their creativity and imagination. In the context of calligraphy, this art form provides a space for children to express their ideas through variations in letter shapes and ornaments. Research by de Abdulhameed & Rashid (2022) revealed that artistic activities such as writing and drawing can improve children's cognitive skills, including concentration, eye-hand coordination, and problem-solving abilities. Thus, learning calligraphy offers broader benefits for children's holistic development. The study by Masfufah & Darmawan (2023) found that (1) efforts to preserve traditional art can be carried out through routine education from an early age, (2) strategies for passing down cultural arts should involve the community and relevant stakeholders, and (3) maintaining local values is crucial in art education, including calligraphy.

Calligraphy education, as a strategy for instilling cultural literacy, aims to strengthen personal and group identity and values. Cultural literacy is a vital aspect needed in the 21st century for students, parents, and society at large. Additionally, calligraphy learning can stimulate children's creativity. Effective creativity development can be achieved through education, as it is a crucial means of creating quality human resources. Therefore, proper infrastructure and educational representation are needed to support calligraphy learning in early childhood education curricula. The lack of cultural literacy in schools often results in a focus on final outcomes rather than a comprehensive learning process. Research by Umiarso et al. (2022) demonstrated that cultural literacy could serve as a solution for enhancing children's cognitive intelligence through various activities such as writing, reading cultural symbols, and understanding their meanings. Morais & Kolinsky (2021) study also indicated that developing literacy culture based on local wisdom through art can attract children's interest in developing their literacy talents, as reflected in their ability to read, write, and express meaning through calligraphy. Early childhood education aims to lay the foundation for children's physical growth and development (fine and gross motor coordination), intelligence (thinking ability, creativity, emotional intelligence, mental intelligence), socio-emotional aspects (attitudes and behavior), language, and communication in line with their developmental characteristics (Saleha, Baharun, & Utami, 2022). Attention to early childhood education is crucial, as children who receive education from an early age tend to have better imagination, creativity, innovation, and initiative skills than those who do not receive formal education. This is relevant in facing the increasingly competitive global landscape, where superior human resources with high competitiveness are in great demand (Hu, Li, Li, & Xu, 2022). Early childhood is a golden period in an individual's life that should not be wasted, as it is during this time that fundamental skills and character begin to take shape (McFarland, Hauer, & Reuben, 2022).

Based on various research findings related to art education and the importance of preparing young children with cultural literacy and creativity skills, studies on calligraphy learning are highly relevant. This relevance pertains to identifying appropriate strategies for instilling cultural literacy through calligraphy so that children can develop creatively. Preparing young children with cultural literacy and creativity skills through calligraphy learning also contributes to achieving national education goals. Teaching children various fundamental skills, including reading and writing calligraphy, is a primary objective in early childhood art education. These basic skills are essential for children in developing attitudes, knowledge, skills, and creativity that will help them adapt to their environment

and grow optimally. Cultural literacy through calligraphy art should be developed as part of cultural arts education, as it closely relates to achieving core competencies in education. The process of learning calligraphy as part of artistic activities provides a meaningful experience for children in understanding and expressing their cultural values. Research by (Borawska, 2021) specifically demonstrated that the artistic elements in children's learning serve as a medium for fulfilling aesthetic needs and self-expression, both through direct participation in artistic activities and through appreciation of their peers' artwork. Therefore, an in-depth study of calligraphy education that can instill cultural literacy and creativity in young children is necessary.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Cultural Literacy and Creativity Development through Calligraphy Learning

Cultural literacy is an essential aspect of early childhood education, enabling children to develop an understanding of cultural diversity and heritage (Suri & Chandra, 2021). Creativity, on the other hand, fosters cognitive and emotional development, allowing children to express their ideas in various artistic forms (Hoffmann, Ivcevic, & Maliakkal, 2021). The integration of cultural literacy and creativity in early childhood education can be achieved through artistic activities such as calligraphy learning. Calligraphy, as an art form deeply rooted in cultural traditions, serves as a medium for children to appreciate aesthetic values while enhancing their creative thinking skills (Leo, Lin, Katrina, & JUDAN, 2022).

2.1.1. Calligraphy as a Medium for Cultural Literacy

Calligraphy is a form of visual art that represents a cultural and historical legacy across civilizations, particularly in Islamic, Chinese, and Western traditions (Ying, Sisi, & Lin, 2024). Through calligraphy, children are exposed to different writing systems and artistic expressions, which can help them understand and respect diverse cultural backgrounds (Zhao, 2023).

According to Langheinrich et al. (2022), “connected speech represents somewhat more natural data than the rather artificial vowels derived from specially articulated citation speech.” This statement highlights the role of artistic expression in capturing natural and authentic forms of cultural identity. Similarly, calligraphy learning provides an opportunity for children to connect with their cultural heritage in an engaging and meaningful way.

Research suggests that early exposure to calligraphy enhances children's cultural awareness and aesthetic appreciation. For instance, studies have shown that children who participate in culturally rich artistic activities demonstrate higher levels of tolerance and open-mindedness toward cultural differences (Leo et al., 2022). Furthermore, integrating calligraphy into early childhood education curricula can strengthen cultural identity and foster a sense of belonging among young learners (Wei, Nawi, Yin, & Rahman, 2024).

2.1.2. Enhancing Creativity through Calligraphy

Creativity is a fundamental skill that supports problem-solving abilities and innovative thinking in children (Gao, 2024). Calligraphy learning encourages children to experiment with different artistic techniques, such as stroke variations, color combinations, and decorative elements, which stimulate their creative potential (Karawani, Baydoun, & Shariman, 2023).

Calligraphy serves as a form of personal expression where each child develops unique artistic styles. Studies by Turner (2021) emphasize that creativity in early childhood is significantly influenced by an environment that promotes artistic exploration and freedom. Calligraphy learning fosters such an environment by allowing children to create original lettering designs and experiment with various artistic materials (Guirong & Xu, 2024). Furthermore, calligraphy learning has been linked to improvements in children's fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination, which are essential for cognitive and physical development. These skills not only benefit artistic expression but also contribute to other areas of learning, such as writing and spatial reasoning (Zhou, Liu, & Sang, 2021).

Calligraphy learning plays a crucial role in fostering cultural literacy and creativity among young children. By engaging in calligraphy activities, children develop an appreciation for cultural heritage while enhancing their artistic and cognitive skills. Integrating calligraphy into early childhood education can create a holistic learning experience that nurtures both cultural awareness and creative potential. Future research should explore the long-term impact of calligraphy learning on children's socio-emotional development and its applicability in diverse educational settings.

3. METHODS

The research approach employed in this study is a qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the research objective, which is to gain an in-depth understanding of the process and meaning embedded within the studied phenomenon. In line with Haq et al. (2023), the qualitative approach is used to examine various aspects, including: (1) social processes, (2) understanding phenomena without statistically testing hypotheses, (3) verstehen (deep understanding), (4) symbolic approach, (5) meaning exploration, (6) inductive nature, and (7) emphasis on research subjects as the primary source of data.

According to Creswell & Poth (2016), qualitative research is conducted in natural settings without excessive intervention from the researcher, whether towards individuals or the environment where the study takes place. The selection of this method is also supported by the views of (Taherdoost, 2022), who state that qualitative research results are easier to comprehend because they are presented in detailed narratives. Additionally, research in the field of arts has specific characteristics as it is related to creative experiences and the appreciation of artistic works.

In this study, the researcher's participation is passive, meaning they do not directly engage in the activities being studied but act as an observer using a pre-established research guide. The primary data collected in this study includes learning activities related to the studied phenomenon. Data collection was conducted from December 2024 to February 2025 at PAUD Ishlahul Muslimin Senteluk, Batulayar, West Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara.

The data collection methods used in this research include observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were carried out to obtain data on learning activities, covering various aspects such as pre-learning preparation, appreciation of the material, mastery of the material by the instructor, and the use of methods appropriate to the characteristics of the research subjects. Additionally, the observation focused on classroom management, interactions between the instructor and research subjects, and the effective and efficient use of learning media. Other aspects observed include motivation

and interactions in the learning process to enhance active participation and create an enjoyable and interactive learning atmosphere. The assessment and evaluation process was also examined, including monitoring progress during learning and final evaluation based on competency achievements. The clarity of language used in delivering the material and the appropriateness of communication styles to the characteristics of the research subjects were also part of the observation.

Interviews were conducted with various parties, including institutional leaders, instructors, and research subjects, to gather information regarding policies, needs, challenges, and the effectiveness of the applied learning methods. Meanwhile, documentation was used to complement the data obtained through observation and interviews. Collected documents included subject identity records, learning notes, and various supporting documents.

To ensure data validity, this study applied source triangulation techniques. This approach was implemented by comparing observational data with interview results, cross-checking interview findings with related documents, and reviewing research results based on visual sources and written records. Data analysis was conducted using the interactive analysis method developed by Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah (2024), which consists of four main stages. First, data collection was carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. Second, the collected data was reduced by filtering and summarizing relevant information. Third, the summarized data was then presented in narrative or tabular form to facilitate analysis. Fourth, conclusions were drawn based on the interpretation of the collected data and verified to ensure the validity of the findings.

With this systematic approach, the research is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomenon and yield findings that contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the relevant field.

4. RESULTS

Several previous studies related to cultural literacy and early childhood creativity have shown that art, particularly in the form of cultural activities such as dance, music, and visual arts, can enhance children's understanding of local culture and foster their creativity. The study by Lorenza & Carter (2021) found that the development of students' cultural literacy in terms of understanding regional cultural material and sustainable needs had an average score of 95.8%. Meanwhile, the level of student appreciation in cultural literacy through the take and give picture method using local wisdom-based pavilions was recorded at 86.8%, categorized as excellent. This indicates that arts-based learning, including calligraphy, can be an effective means of instilling cultural literacy in early childhood.

The study by Triyono et al. (2023), which discussed various art forms in Jurang Blimbing Village, demonstrated that the success of art education depends on the techniques taught and the teacher's attention in guiding children to master these skills. In the context of calligraphy learning at PAUD Ishlahul Muslimin Senteluk, the approach also emphasizes intensive guidance in mastering calligraphy writing techniques. Teachers play an active role in helping children understand the basics of Arabic script and apply them in calligraphy artworks. This process not only improves their writing skills but also introduces them to the Islamic cultural values embedded in calligraphy.

Observations from this study show that children participating in calligraphy learning experience improvements in fine motor skills, creativity, and artistic appreciation. A recent study by Supeni et al. (2022) revealed that culture-based art activities can enhance children's fine motor skills by 88% compared to conventional learning methods. This is because artistic activities, such as drawing and calligraphy writing, involve more complex hand-eye coordination, thereby accelerating children's fine motor development.

The study by Turner (2021) stated that arts education provides students with insights into positive ethics as a guideline for daily life. This aligns with the findings of this study, where children involved in calligraphy learning showed increased patience, precision, and appreciation for the beauty of Arabic script. Additionally, they became more familiar with the history and meaning behind calligraphy as part of the Islamic cultural heritage. Recent data from Karawani et al. (2023) also confirmed that children's involvement in calligraphy learning enhances their awareness of aesthetic and spiritual values, with 78% of children demonstrating a better understanding of the meaning of Arabic script compared to before participating in the calligraphy learning program.

Consistent with the findings of Leo et al. (2022), which highlighted the potential of local wisdom in arts education, calligraphy learning at PAUD Ishlahul Muslimin Senteluk also integrates various local cultural elements into the learning process. Teachers use teaching materials relevant to the children's environment, such as recycled paper and natural dyes, and relate calligraphy lessons to Islamic stories that are familiar to the children. In Sunassee et al. (2021) study, it was found that 85% of children who learned art using environmentally friendly media showed a significant increase in learning interest, as they felt more connected to the material being taught.

Additionally, this study found that children involved in calligraphy learning exhibited higher levels of creativity. This is supported by the study of Sandi (2018), which demonstrated that arts education can foster children's creativity through the exploration of various techniques and styles in creating artworks. At PAUD Ishlahul Muslimin Senteluk, children were given the freedom to experiment with different colors and forms in writing calligraphy, allowing them to express their creativity freely. Recent data from Taşpinar (2022) showed that 82% of children engaged in arts education experienced increased creativity in thinking and problem-solving.

The study by (Kim, So, & Park, 2022) also indicated that cultural literacy still faces challenges in its implementation, particularly concerning teachers' and students' understanding of cultural literacy concepts. In this study, it was found that most teachers at PAUD Ishlahul Muslimin Senteluk had a good understanding of the importance of cultural literacy; however, further training was needed to enhance the effectiveness of calligraphy teaching methods. Recent data from Aguirre Alonso (2023) stated that 90% of early childhood teachers recognized the importance of culture-based education, but only 60% of them felt confident in implementing it in the classroom. Therefore, professional development programs for teachers are essential to improve their understanding of more creative and innovative arts teaching strategies.

Calligraphy learning at PAUD Ishlahul Muslimin Senteluk significantly contributes to instilling cultural literacy and fostering early childhood creativity. By integrating cultural values into artistic activities, children not only acquire technical skills in calligraphy writing but also develop a deeper understanding of their cultural heritage. Therefore, arts education, particularly calligraphy, should continue to be developed as part of educational strategies to instill cultural literacy in early childhood. These findings

can serve as a foundation for further research in exploring various innovative arts learning methods to enhance the effectiveness of cultural education for young children.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Calligraphy Learning and the Development of Tolerance

Art education, including calligraphy, not only focuses on technical skills but also contributes to the formation of social attitudes, such as tolerance. Tolerance in the context of early childhood education can be understood as a child's ability to accept differences, whether in culture, religion, or artistic expressions created by their peers. Vygotsky's social constructivism theory emphasizes that social interactions in learning allow children to understand different perspectives (Wibowo, Wangid, & Firdaus, 2025). Additionally, Albert Bandura's (1969) social learning theory highlights that children learn through observation and interaction with their surroundings, including understanding and appreciating differences.

In practice, calligraphy learning at PAUD Ishlahul Muslimin Senteluk involves introducing various calligraphy styles from different Islamic traditions, such as Kufic, Naskhi, and Diwani calligraphy. By introducing diverse forms of calligraphy art, children learn that beauty can be expressed in various ways and that no single form is superior to another. This aligns with research showing that art education based on diversity can enhance openness to differences. Furthermore, collaborative activities in creating calligraphy works, such as sharing painting tools or commenting on each other's work, also strengthen children's social experiences and foster an attitude of appreciation for others' creations.

5.2. Calligraphy and the Development of Children's Social Skills

Social skills are an essential aspect of early childhood development, as they influence their interactions in school and society. Through calligraphy learning, children have opportunities to work in groups, engage in discussions, and appreciate their peers' artwork. From a developmental psychology perspective, Erik Erikson's theory of social development stages suggests that early childhood is in the initiative versus guilt stage, where they begin developing independence and social skills through interactions with their environment (Orenstein & Lewis, 2022).

At PAUD Ishlahul Muslimin Senteluk, calligraphy learning is conducted not only individually but also in groups. For example, children are encouraged to create a joint calligraphy piece, with each child responsible for a specific part of the writing. During this process, they learn to negotiate colors, divide tasks, and resolve conflicts if differences arise. Such activities help children understand the concepts of sharing, mutual respect, and teamwork—skills that are crucial in their social lives.

Studies in early childhood education indicate that group-based art activities can boost children's confidence, as they feel their contributions are valued in a larger project. Additionally, teachers play a role in teaching how to give and receive constructive feedback, enabling children to communicate positively without discouraging each other.

5.3. The Impact of Calligraphy on Children's Creativity Development

Creativity is a cognitive ability that can be developed from an early age through various forms of stimulation, including art. In educational psychology, Guilford

distinguishes between convergent and divergent thinking, where creativity is closely related to divergent thinking—the ability to generate multiple solutions to a problem (Eon Duval, Frick, & Denervaud, 2023).

In calligraphy learning at PAUD Ishlahul Muslimin Senteluk, children are given the freedom to experiment with different colors, letter shapes, and writing techniques. Teachers not only teach the correct way to write Arabic letters but also allow children to add decorative elements based on their imagination. Some children, for instance, create colorful backgrounds with watercolors before writing calligraphy, while others add ornamental patterns around their writing.

Previous research has shown that exploration-based art learning can enhance children's creative thinking skills. Creativity nurtured from an early age contributes to problem-solving abilities later in life, as children become accustomed to thinking outside the box and seeking innovative solutions. Additionally, experimentation in calligraphy art also helps boost children's confidence in expressing themselves through their work.

5.4. Challenges in Implementing Cultural Literacy in Calligraphy Learning

Despite the significant benefits of calligraphy learning in cultural literacy development, several challenges remain in its implementation. One major challenge is the lack of teachers' understanding of effective art-based teaching strategies (Gao, 2024). Studies indicate that many early childhood educators have not received specialized training in art education oriented toward cultural literacy, leading to the use of traditional methods that offer limited opportunities for children's exploration.

Moreover, there are still limitations in available resources, such as materials and tools supporting calligraphy learning. For example, specialized calligraphy ink and paper are not always accessible in all early childhood education centers, so children often use regular paper, which is less optimal for practicing calligraphy writing. To overcome these challenges, some possible approaches include providing teacher training on more creative art education methods and establishing partnerships with relevant stakeholders to ensure adequate resources for calligraphy learning (Jubaidah, Ilham, & Annisa, 2024).

6. CONCLUSION

Calligraphy learning at PAUD Ishlahul Muslimin Senteluk has a broad positive impact on early childhood development, particularly in terms of tolerance, social skills, and creativity. By integrating cultural elements into learning, children not only gain technical skills in calligraphy writing but also develop a deeper understanding of cultural values and diversity.

To maximize the benefits of calligraphy learning, a more systematic approach is needed in its implementation. Teachers should receive more in-depth training on art-based teaching strategies, while schools and other stakeholders must ensure the availability of adequate resources to support these activities.

Looking ahead, further research is necessary to explore how the integration of art education with technology-based approaches can further enhance the effectiveness of early childhood education. In this way, calligraphy learning can serve not only as a means of refining children's fine motor skills but also as a medium for instilling essential values that will shape their character in the future.

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