The Influence of School Literacy Programs on Students' Reading Ability in Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

Literacy applied in elementary schools is very important because it is the main foundation for the development of children's knowledge and skills in the future. Good literacy will help students understand other lessons. To develop literacy in schools, a culture of literacy is instilled in students, and learning resources are provided. The low literacy rate is due to a lack of understanding of the concept of basic literacy and the implementation of literacy that is less supportive. In addition, there is a gap in access and quality of education between urban and rural areas. In some remote areas, children have less access to reading books and minimal libraries, resulting in low interest in reading for students. The low interest in reading for students will have an impact on their reading ability. The existence of libraries and reading corners in schools is a school literacy program that can be carried out to develop students' reading skills. The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of school literacy programs on students' reading skills. This study is a descriptive qualitative study with observation and interview methods. Data Analysis Techniques are through the stages of reduction, display, and conclusion/verification. The research sample can be determined from related data sources, from interviews and observations of students from grade IV, such as class teachers, librarians, and other data sources. The results of this study indicate that this study with the title found that literacy in the scope of students at SD Negeri 7 Buntao is still low, so it is necessary to increase literacy in the scope of the school. This study is useful for other schools that want to carry out literacy programs.

Keywords: Literacy Programs; Reading Ability

INTRODUCTION

Literacy in elementary education is very important because it is the main foundation for the development of children's knowledge and skills in the future. Literacy is not only about reading and writing skills, but also includes understanding, analysis, and critical thinking. With literacy skills, students are able to understand information and apply it in everyday life. Good literacy skills are therefore essential for children

to succeed not only in language subjects but also in other academic areas, since most learning activities require the ability to read, comprehend, and analyze information.

Good literacy will help students understand other lessons more effectively. If students lack literacy skills, they will have difficulty following lessons in class because they cannot properly grasp instructions, explanations, or texts provided by teachers. Literacy also trains children to analyze information, distinguish between facts and opinions, and make better decisions. This ability not only serves them in academic contexts but also in their daily life when they are required to evaluate different sources of information and form their own perspectives. Moreover, students with strong literacy foundations are more confident in expressing their ideas, both verbally and in writing, which contributes to their personal growth and participation in classroom learning.

Early literacy skills are also the key to future opportunities because children who master basic literacy are better prepared to face challenges in higher levels of education, the world of work, and social life more broadly. Literacy is not a skill that appears naturally but one that is nurtured and cultivated. Habits such as reading regularly, writing journals, or even discussing stories with peers contribute to the development of literacy as part of a child's identity. The habit of reading and writing is not innate but built from continuous practice so that it becomes a permanent routine in students' lives (Abd. Mannan et al., 2023). To develop literacy in elementary schools, a culture of literacy must be instilled in students, and teachers and schools need to provide supportive learning resources.

Despite its importance, low literacy rates remain a concern in many schools. A lack of understanding of basic literacy concepts and weak implementation of literacy programs often cause these. Elementary school age is actually an ideal stage to strengthen literacy because children at this age are in a period of rapid cognitive and language development. However, many factors hinder the full development of literacy. One of the main barriers is inequality in access to quality education between urban and rural areas. Children in remote areas often have limited access to books, libraries, and digital resources, which leads to a lack of reading practice and a lower interest in reading.

Low interest in reading among students has a direct impact on their reading ability. According to Irwan (2023: 5), someone who does not have a high interest in reading will tend to avoid reading activities, become lazy to read, and engage with texts only when required. On the other hand, high interest and motivation to read can significantly improve both skills and enjoyment in reading. Good reading skills make it easier for students to understand and enjoy the content of reading materials. Furthermore, strong reading ability helps develop critical and analytical thinking skills, which are essential for understanding and evaluating the information they encounter in school and everyday life.

One strategy to foster literacy development in schools is the provision of libraries and reading corners. These facilities are part of school literacy programs designed to encourage students to read more actively. The organization and appearance of the library, including how books are displayed and the comfort of the reading space, can make a significant difference in how students perceive reading. Kalida and Mursyid (2015: 38) stated that schools and libraries are one unit that cannot be separated because the library functions as a center of knowledge. Similarly, the Ministry of Education and Culture (2016: 16) emphasizes that libraries play a crucial role as a center for managing learning resources and supporting school literacy culture.

In practice, however, the implementation of literacy activities does not always run smoothly. Observations at SDN 7 Buntao show that literacy activities have not been fully successful. Students are not accustomed to engaging in independent reading and often show low enthusiasm in literacy-related lessons. When assigned tasks such as summarizing readings, many students struggle to draw accurate conclusions, which negatively affects their learning outcomes. Specifically, fourth-grade students at SDN 7 Buntao demonstrated low interest in reading before the literacy program was introduced. They tended to read only when instructed by the teacher and showed little initiative to read independently. Factors such as limited access to interesting reading materials and the absence of encouragement to read outside class hours contributed to this problem.

Previous research on literacy in Indonesia has mostly focused on urban schools where facilities, resources, and teacher support are more readily available. Rural and remote schools have received less attention, even though these contexts face more severe challenges, such as resource shortages, low reading motivation, and minimal literacy exposure beyond the classroom. Moreover, most existing studies focus on measuring the improvement of reading ability alone, without examining the underlying factors that influence the success or failure of literacy programs in different contexts. This leaves a gap in understanding how literacy programs work in resource-limited environments and what conditions are necessary for them to succeed.

This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the implementation of a school literacy program at SDN 7 Buntao. In this rural school, students exhibit low interest in reading and limited literacy habits. The focus is on fourth-grade students, a critical stage for consolidating literacy foundations. The novelty of this research lies not only in assessing the impact of the program on students' reading ability but also in identifying the factors that influence its effectiveness in a rural setting. By addressing both outcomes and underlying conditions, the study aims to contribute insights into how literacy programs can be adapted to the realities of schools with limited resources.

The purpose of this research is therefore twofold: first, to determine the effect of school literacy programs on the reading ability of elementary school students; and

second, to identify the factors that influence the success of such programs in improving reading ability. The findings are expected to provide practical solutions for running literacy programs more effectively, particularly in rural contexts such as SDN 7 Buntao. This study will strengthen literacy practices in schools and help improve the reading skills of fourth-grade students, thereby laying a stronger foundation for their future learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Study

The first study was conducted by Sri Wahyuni Widyastuti (2022), entitled Implementation of Literacy Corner to Improve Reading Skills of Class I A Students at MI Darul Ulum 02 Ngembarejo Bae Kudus. The similarity between this study and the present research lies in the focus on improving elementary school students' reading skills. The difference is that Widyastuti's research was limited to first-grade students and emphasized only the literacy corner as a strategy. The second study was conducted by Puteri Dewi Lestari et al. (2023) entitled The Influence of Literacy Movement on Elementary School Students' Reading Literacy Skills. The similarity is that both studies examine the role of literacy in enhancing students' reading abilities. The difference lies in the methodology: Lestari's research employed a quantitative experimental design, whereas the present study applies a qualitative approach. Iin Puspasari conducted the third study, and Febrina Dafit (2021) entitled Implementation of School Literacy Movement in Elementary Schools. The similarity is that both focus on the implementation of literacy programs in schools. The difference is that Puspasari and Dafit's study was conducted with third-grade students, while the current study involves fourth-grade students at SDN 7 Buntao. From these three studies, it can be concluded that while there are similarities in focusing on literacy program implementation to improve students' reading skills, the differences lie in the grade levels examined and the methods applied. This shows that the present study contributes by exploring literacy program implementation in a different context, fourth-grade students in a rural school, using a qualitative method.

Literacy Program

According to Ni Nyoman (2018), literacy programs provide valuable literacy experiences for children. These experiences are not limited to learning how to read and write but also extend to developing comprehension, vocabulary, and the ability to use language for different purposes. Literacy programs are designed to systematically expose students to a variety of texts and activities that strengthen their skills. In this way, children are given structured opportunities to grow rather than being left to develop literacy on their own. Ni Nyoman emphasizes that literacy does not emerge naturally or automatically; instead, it must be intentionally fostered, conditioned, and cultivated through continuous practice. Without

deliberate intervention, students may experience delays in mastering basic literacy skills, which in turn will affect their learning in other subjects.

In line with this, Kusumastuti (2018) highlights the role of school literacy programs in shaping students' reading habits. According to her, literacy activities in schools can motivate students to read more frequently and view reading as a positive and enjoyable practice. When reading becomes a habit, it is no longer perceived as a compulsion but instead transforms into a necessity for students. This shift is important because a necessity-driven habit is more sustainable and impactful in the long term. Kusumastuti further explains that once reading has become a necessity, it is internalized as part of students' daily lives. Through repetition and consistent engagement, this habit becomes firmly embedded in students' routines and gradually grows into a literacy culture within the school environment.

The cultivation of a literacy culture has broader implications. When students are accustomed to reading on a daily basis, they not only strengthen their language skills but also foster critical and analytical thinking. Reading regularly allows them to encounter new ideas, perspectives, and information that expand their worldview. Over time, this process contributes to the development of lifelong learning skills, which are essential in preparing students for further education and participation in society. A strong reading culture also promotes self-discipline, curiosity, and independent learning.

For this process to succeed, supportive school facilities and structured literacy activities play a crucial role. Schools need to provide adequate resources, such as libraries, reading corners, and access to a wide range of interesting and age-appropriate books. In addition, literacy-supportive activities such as storytelling, reading challenges, or book discussions can create a lively reading environment that motivates students to engage with texts beyond the classroom. When facilities are available and programs are consistently implemented, students are more likely to see reading not just as an academic task but as a meaningful and enjoyable activity.

Based on the perspectives of Ni Nyoman (2018) and Kusumastuti (2018), literacy programs are essential for building both individual literacy skills and collective literacy culture in schools. They show that literacy development must be deliberately nurtured through systematic programs, supported by adequate facilities, and reinforced through daily practice. This understanding provides a strong foundation for the current study, which seeks to examine how literacy programs can be effectively implemented in SDN 7 Buntao to improve students' reading ability and foster a sustainable culture of reading among fourth-grade students.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study uses a descriptive qualitative research design. In this approach, the research data are in the form of words and images rather than numbers. Data are obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation, aiming to describe conditions as they naturally occur without manipulating the variables under study. Descriptive qualitative research emphasizes the meaning of the results rather than statistical measurements. The data used in this study consists of two types: primary and secondary data. Primary data sources include teachers who have implemented literacy programs in their classrooms, as well as classroom activities related to students' reading practices. Secondary data sources include documents and literature, both internal (from the school where the research was conducted) and external (other references relevant to literacy research). This research was conducted at SD Negeri 7 Buntao, located in Salu Losso', Tallang Sura' Village, Buntao' District, North Toraja Regency, South Sulawesi Province. The participants involved in the study were teachers and fourth-grade students engaged in the school literacy program.

Instrument and Procedure

The main research instrument in this study was an interview guide, designed to gather in-depth information from teachers regarding the implementation of literacy programs and their influence on students' reading abilities. Additional instruments included observation checklists to record classroom literacy activities and documentation reviews to collect supporting data from school archives and relevant references. The procedure for data collection consisted of three steps:
1. Observation. Direct observation of literacy activities conducted in the classroom to capture students' participation and responses.
2. Interviews. Semi-structured interviews with teachers to obtain detailed insights about their experiences in implementing literacy programs.
3. Documentation. To validate and strengthen the findings, supporting documents, such as school reports, records of literacy activities, and related literature, should be collected.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study followed the Miles and Huberman model (as cited in Abdussamad, 2021), which involves three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion/verification.
1. Data Reduction involves summarizing, selecting, and focusing on essential information while eliminating irrelevant data. Reduction helps simplify the data so that only material related to the research questions remains. New, unique, and significant data that emerge during the research process are retained for further analysis.

2. Data Display. The reduced data are organized into clear forms such as short descriptions, charts, flowcharts, or category relationships. Presenting the data in these ways facilitates understanding, highlights patterns, and guides the researcher in identifying areas for further exploration.
3. Conclusion and Verification. The final stage involves concluding the data. These conclusions may reveal new insights not previously identified. In qualitative research, conclusions may evolve as the researcher spends more time in the field. Verification ensures that the findings are credible and aligned with the research objectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the School Literacy Program

The school literacy program is designed to develop students' character and foster lifelong learning by cultivating consistent literacy practices. Reading is a fundamental skill that underpins the sustainability of the entire educational process. Without sufficient reading competence, students face difficulties in interpreting messages or concepts embedded in teaching modules, textbooks, and other forms of literature.

Observations at SDN 7 Buntao revealed that several students still struggle with reading, which has become a primary concern for the school community. To address this issue, the school actively promotes literacy programs as a form of implementing the broader School Literacy Movement. Evidence from both interviews and observations shows that literacy activities are conducted before formal lessons begin. Specifically, students engage in a 15-minute reading session, which gradually shapes their reading habits and helps improve comprehension of lesson materials.

In addition to this daily practice, the school organizes weekly library visits. The library houses both textbooks and non-textbook materials, which are catalogued and managed by a teacher in charge. Students are encouraged to borrow books within a specific time frame, thereby fostering responsibility and a structured reading habit. Interviews also revealed that classrooms are equipped with reading corners containing diverse materials such as storybooks, magazines, and supplementary reading texts. These materials, sourced primarily from the library, provide students with opportunities to explore content according to their interests. The presence of these reading corners creates a supportive learning environment where students can access literacy materials not only during instructional hours but also during free time. Overall, the findings highlight that SDN 7 Buntao has made deliberate efforts to embed literacy practices into students' daily routines. Through the combination of structured reading sessions, access to library resources, and classroom reading corners, the program encourages a culture of reading that is both enjoyable and sustainable.

The Influence of School Literacy Programs on Reading Ability

The implementation of literacy programs has shown a measurable influence on the reading ability of fourth-grade students at SDN 7 Buntao. Before the program was implemented consistently, many students demonstrated low levels of reading fluency and limited comprehension, which also affected their overall interest in reading. Lack of habitual reading practices was a contributing factor, as students often read only when instructed and struggled to retain or interpret the content effectively.

The introduction of systematic literacy activities such as the daily 15-minute reading session, classroom reading corners, and regular library visits has contributed significantly to improvements in both reading fluency and comprehension. Interviews with teachers indicated that students are now more motivated to read voluntarily and are better able to understand texts without constant guidance. The comparison between pre-program and post-program observations demonstrates that consistent exposure to literacy activities fosters gradual but meaningful improvements in reading skills.

These findings align with previous research. Cunningham and Stanovich (2018) argue that consistent reading practice from an early age enhances literacy competence by familiarizing children with written texts and improving comprehension. Similarly, Rasinski (2020) emphasizes that structured reading practices enhance fluency, accuracy, and comprehension, confirming the importance of regular reading sessions in schools. The 15-minute reading program implemented at SDN 7 Buntao is a practical application of these theoretical insights.

Furthermore, the program reflects principles of Vygotsky's constructivist learning theory (2019), which highlights the role of social interaction in learning. At SDN 7 Buntao, the reading sessions often involve interaction between teachers and students and peer discussions about the texts being read. This social dimension strengthens motivation, deepens understanding, and encourages students to engage with reading more meaningfully.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that the literacy program at SDN 7 Buntao has not only improved students' technical reading ability but has also nurtured a culture of reading within the school. The program's structured yet flexible approach has created an environment where reading is gradually shifting from being a compulsory task to becoming a personal habit and, ultimately, part of students' academic identity.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that the implementation of the school literacy program at SDN 7 Buntao, which includes daily 15-minute reading activities, weekly library visits, and classroom reading corners, has significantly improved the

reading abilities of fourth-grade students. These activities have fostered stronger reading habits, increased students' interest and comprehension, and created a more supportive literacy environment that enhances discipline and focus. Based on these results, it is recommended that schools continue to strengthen literacy policies by providing adequate reading spaces and varied book collections. At the same time, teachers play a more active role in cultivating positive reading habits and integrating literacy into classroom practices. Students are also encouraged to make better use of literacy facilities to develop their skills further. For future researchers, this study can serve as a reference to explore literacy programs in different contexts, using broader methods such as longitudinal or mixed-method designs, to assess long-term impacts on student engagement and academic achievement. Overall, the school literacy program has demonstrated meaningful benefits for student development and should be further developed and adapted to sustain a culture of lifelong learning.

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