The Low Reading Literacy of Indonesian Children: A Qualitative Perspective through Literature Review

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Abstract: Reading literacy plays a crucial role in learning activities both in school and in daily life. However, various research findings still show that reading literacy in Indonesia remains low. This article aims to analyze the factors contributing to the low reading literacy among children in Indonesia through a qualitative approach using a literature review method. Based on the results of the literature study, it was found that the low reading literacy among children in Indonesia is caused by factors such as low interest in reading, limited access to reading materials, insufficient support from the family environment, and ineffective teaching methods. The results of this study are expected to provide insights for educators, parents, and the government, so that they can collaborate to improve literacy through cooperation between schools, families, and the government.

Keywords: *Reading Literacy, Education, Indonesia Children*

Abstrak: Literasi membaca memiliki peranan yag sangat penting dalam kegiatan belajar di sekolah maupun dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Namun, berbagai hasil penelitian masih menujukkan bahwa literasi membaca di Indonesia masih rendah. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis faktor-faktor rendahnya literasi membaca pada anak-anak di Indonesia melalui pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi pustaka. Berdasarkan hasil studi literatur ditemukan bahwa rendahnya literasi mempaca pada anak di Indonesia

disebabkan karena rendahnya minat baca, kurangnya akses terhadap bacaan, keterbatasan dukungan dari lingkungan keluarga dan metode pengajaran yang kurangh efektif. Hasil penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan wawasan bagi pendidik, orang tua, dan pemerintah sehingga dapat digunakan untuk meningkatkan literasi melalui kolaborasi antara sekolah, keluarga, dan pemerintah

Kata Kunci*: Literasi Membaca, Pendidikan, Anak Indonesia*

INTRODUCTION

Reading literacy is an essential skill for children at the elementary school level and serves as the foundation for learning at higher educational stages. At every educational level, reading activities hold significant importance as a means of mastering learning materials. Reading literacy plays a vital role as a tool for acquiring knowledge from various subjects across curricula, most of which are presented in the form of texts.

Reading literacy is a basic skill that forms the foundation for both academic and social development, both in education and in daily life. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2020), reading literacy involves the ability to understand, evaluate, and use written texts to achieve personal and social objectives. However, the results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey consistently show that Indonesian students' reading abilities are still quite low compared to other countries. Indonesian students' scores fall below the reading literacy standards set by PISA, indicating a significant gap in reading comprehension (Kemendikbud, 2020). This issue presents a substantial challenge for the education system in Indonesia.

Reading literacy is defined as the ability to comprehend and use written language that holds value for individuals and is essential for society (Mullis et al., 2011: 11). In addition, Snow (2010) explains that reading literacy involves not only technical skills in reading words but also the ability to understand the information contained

in texts and connect it to existing knowledge. Reading literacy includes a variety of skills, not only technical abilities (decoding), but also critical thinking skills that involve analytical capabilities to gain a deeper understanding of the text. This aligns with the OECD's (2018) assertion that reading literacy involves not only the ability to directly understand information but also to evaluate it within a broader context, including the ability to apply knowledge in daily life.

In Indonesia, the government has made efforts to improve literacy through various programs and policies. Unfortunately, the level of reading literacy in Indonesia remains relatively low. According to the PISA survey results conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the reading literacy of Indonesian students is consistently below the average of other countries. In the 2022 PISA report, Indonesia ranked 74th out of 79 countries, with a reading literacy score of 380. This score is significantly lower than other Southeast Asian nations, such as Singapore (ranked 1st with a score of 573) and Vietnam (ranked 13th with a score of 487). This suggests that there is a deep-rooted issue that needs to be urgently addressed within Indonesia's education system.

Several studies have been conducted to identify the factors contributing to low reading literacy in Indonesia. One such study, conducted by Hadiyanto and Hermanto (2021), found that a major cause of low reading literacy among Indonesian students is the lack of a reading culture at home and in schools. The study revealed that many students are not accustomed to reading outside of school hours. Another study by Lestari (2019) also indicated that the quality of literacy education in many elementary schools in Indonesia is still quite limited, with a focus primarily on the technical aspects of reading without integrating critical thinking skills, which should be an essential component of literacy development.

This study aims to further explore the issue of low reading literacy among Indonesian children. Based on the observed phenomenon, this research will delve deeper into the factors influencing low literacy among Indonesian children through a literature review. Given that low reading literacy can hinder educational development in Indonesia, this research aims to provide valuable insights and practical solutions to improve reading literacy in the country.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a literature review methodology. This method was selected because it allows the researcher to explore, understand, and synthesize relevant literature related to the research topic. The qualitative approach enables in-depth exploration of social phenomena through document and textual data analysis (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, Bowen (2009) highlights the significance of literature reviews in providing comprehensive insights by collecting and analyzing secondary data.

The data for this study are gathered from scholarly journals, research reports, articles, and books that are pertinent to the topic of reading literacy in Indonesia. These data serve as the foundation for obtaining detailed information on the subject. The purpose of data collection in this qualitative study is to obtain relevant and in-depth information from various sources (Sugiyono, 2013).

The collected data are then categorized based on topics and research focus. This categorization process helps the researcher to identify patterns and relationships within the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By organizing the data into specific categories, the researcher can more easily interpret and understand the findings, making them relevant to the research objectives.

The next step involves data analysis. In this phase, the data are analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the factors that

contribute to the low reading literacy among children in Indonesia. Thematic analysis is a flexible and valuable approach for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The final step is data interpretation. The analysis results are interpreted to gain a deeper understanding of the factors causing low reading literacy among Indonesian children. This interpretation aims to provide meaning and context to the research findings (Patton, 2022).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the literature review, several key factors have been identified as causes of low reading literacy among children in Indonesia. One of the most significant factors is the lack of a reading culture, which is not only evident in schools but also at home. A study by Hadiyanto and Hermanto (2021) found that the habit of reading outside of school hours is very limited among Indonesian students. Instead, students tend to spend their free time engaging in activities other than reading, such as using gadgets or watching TV. One contributing factor to this issue is the low economic background, leading families to prioritize meeting basic needs over fostering reading habits. Furthermore, the tendency to focus solely on textbook learning and the lack of encouragement from teachers to read beyond the curriculum also play a significant role in shaping this culture. Reading literacy is greatly influenced by reading habits that are developed early on, both at home and in school, which in turn affect students' ability to comprehend and critically evaluate texts (Snow, 2010). Therefore, cultivating a strong reading culture is essential for supporting strong reading literacy.

Another key factor contributing to low reading literacy is the quality of literacy instruction in elementary schools. Although the government has implemented literacy activities such as early reading or reading for 15 minutes before lessons, many schools still

primarily focus on technical aspects. Instruction in schools often emphasizes reading techniques rather than teaching deep comprehension of texts and critical thinking skills. Lestari (2019) in her study found that many teachers are still not adequately trained to develop more complex literacy skills, such as analyzing and synthesizing the information within texts. As a result, children tend to focus more on the technical aspects of reading without fully understanding the meaning and messages contained in their readings.

Reading instruction that focuses only on the technicalities of reading is not enough to foster the deeper understanding that students need to evaluate, connect, and apply information in real-life situations. Reading literacy involves not only the technical ability to decode words but also the ability to understand and critically evaluate the information in a text, which is crucial for mastering literacy comprehensively (Mullis et al., 2011).

Another factor contributing to the low reading literacy among Indonesian children is the limited access to high-quality and diverse reading materials. In many regions, especially remote areas, access to books and engaging reading resources remains very limited. According to data from the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud, 2020), despite efforts by the government to provide reading materials, the distribution of quality books in schools remains uneven. Many schools in rural areas lack adequate library facilities and reading materials that match the interests and skill levels of students. Additionally, many families cannot afford books that could support their children's reading interests. This issue aligns with the statement by the OECD (2018), which highlights that limited access to quality reading materials can impede the development of students' literacy skills. Without sufficient reading resources, children are unable to develop higher-level reading skills. The lack of literacy skills among parents also

contributes to their limited ability to support their children's reading development at home.

The results of the 2022 PISA survey also revealed that Indonesia ranked 74th out of 79 countries in terms of reading literacy, with a score of 380, which is significantly lower than other Southeast Asian countries like Singapore and Vietnam (OECD, 2022). This indicates that the issue of low reading literacy is not only linked to individual factors but also reflects systemic challenges within the Indonesian education system. Countries with higher scores, such as Singapore, have more comprehensive educational policies that focus on developing reading literacy at home, in schools, and within the community, serving as important models for Indonesia to address this issue. According to the OECD (2018), education systems that successfully enhance reading literacy are those that create a supportive educational ecosystem, involving parental engagement, teacher development, and the provision of adequate resources.

Overall, the low reading literacy in Indonesia is driven by several interconnected factors, including the absence of a reading culture, poor quality of literacy instruction, limited access to high-quality reading materials, and systemic issues in the education system. Therefore, improving reading literacy in Indonesia requires a comprehensive approach that not only focuses on the technical aspects of reading instruction but also on fostering a reading culture, improving the quality of teaching, and ensuring equitable access to engaging and high-quality reading materials. This is in line with Snow's (2010) perspective that addressing literacy issues requires a holistic approach, involving families, schools, and public policy to create a supportive environment for children's literacy development.

To achieve this, the government, society, and educational institutions need to work together to create a supportive literacy ecosystem that engages families in fostering reading habits,

provides teacher training to enhance broader literacy skills, and ensures the availability of adequate educational resources in all regions. Through a holistic approach, it is hoped that a generation with strong reading literacy skills can be developed, which will ultimately improve the overall quality of education in Indonesia. This is essential for building a society that is skilled in reading and understanding information, which is a foundational skill for success in the 21st century (OECD, 2022).

CONCLUCION

The low reading literacy in Indonesia is influenced by various interconnected factors, including individual, family, school, and the overall education system. The main factors contributing to low reading literacy are the lack of a reading culture, suboptimal literacy instruction, and limited access to quality reading materials, particularly in remote areas. Despite the government's efforts to improve reading literacy through policies and programs, systemic challenges, such as uneven distribution of reading materials and insufficient teacher training, continue to be significant barriers.

Improving reading literacy in Indonesia requires a comprehensive and holistic approach, involving the active participation of families, schools, and the government in creating a supportive literacy ecosystem. This includes promoting a reading culture both at home and in schools, enhancing literacy instruction that not only focuses on reading techniques but also on developing critical thinking skills and deep comprehension of texts. Additionally, it is essential to ensure more equal access to quality reading materials across Indonesia, particularly in underserved regions.

With more coordinated and comprehensive efforts, Indonesia is expected to produce a generation with stronger reading literacy skills, which will positively impact the quality of education and students' ability to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

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