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## Improving Reading Skills Through a Classroom Literacy Program: A Case Study at SMPN 1 Balaraja

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### Abstract

Reading literacy continues to represent a significant educational challenge among junior high school students. This study investigates the implementation and effectiveness of a classroom literacy program in enhancing students' reading skills at SMPN 1 Balaraja. A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed. The participants consisted of 15 seventh-grade students selected through purposive sampling and two English teachers as key informants. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and reading tests. The research instruments were developed based on classroom literacy indicators and validated by two English education experts. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, supported by descriptive analysis of students reading test results. The findings indicate that the classroom literacy program has been implemented consistently and institutionally across grade levels in line with the Independent Curriculum. The program contributes positively to students vocabulary development, pronunciation, and overall reading ability. However, its effectiveness is constrained by students low learning motivation, limited English proficiency, and insufficient support from family and community environments. In conclusion, the study suggests that classroom literacy programs can enhance students reading skills when supported by continuous pedagogical guidance and strong collaboration among schools, families, and the wider community.

Keywords: Classroom literacy, English learning, junior high school, reading skills

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## INTRODUCTION

Reading skills are a fundamental component of the learning process, especially at the junior high school level, which represents a critical transition toward more complex academic demands. Students' ability to understand texts not only supports language learning and communication but also influences overall academic achievement. However, various studies indicate that Indonesian students still experience significant difficulties in reading comprehension and literacy performance. National and international assessments consistently reveal that students' reading literacy remains below the OECD average, as reflected in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 results (*PISA 2018 Results*,

2019/2020). This condition highlights that strengthening reading literacy remains an urgent educational priority.

The empirical condition at the school level further reinforces this issue. Initial observations at SMPN 1 Balaraja show that many students struggle to comprehend English reading texts, possess limited vocabulary knowledge, and have not optimally utilized existing literacy facilities such as school libraries. These findings align with (Ahyar & Zumrotun, 2023), who argue that school literacy development is often constrained by limited resources and low student reading engagement, which ultimately affects academic achievement (Silitonga et al., n.d.). Although national initiatives such as the School Literacy Movement (GLS) have been widely implemented, their classroom-level execution frequently lacks structured pedagogical integration and measurable learning outcomes (Apriani, n.d.).

Previous studies demonstrate that literacy models such as sustained silent reading, guided reading, literacy-rich classroom environments, and structured reading activities can improve students' motivation and comprehension when implemented consistently (Mayuni et al., 2020; Fachri et al., 2023; Fatimah et al., 2024). Other research emphasizes the importance of teacher involvement and institutional support in sustaining literacy practices (Djatkiko, 2022; Indrawati et al., 2025). However, existing studies predominantly examine literacy programs as institutional or large-scale interventions rather than pedagogically integrated classroom practices that directly connect daily instruction, student engagement, and measurable reading improvement.

More specifically, three major research gaps remain. First, limited studies investigate literacy implementation in suburban public junior high schools characterized by moderate facilities and heterogeneous student literacy backgrounds. Second, prior research tends to rely either on qualitative descriptions of literacy culture or quantitative achievement data, rarely combining both approaches to explain how instructional processes lead to measurable literacy gains. Third, few studies conceptualize classroom literacy programs as an instructional model grounded in learning theory rather than merely as extracurricular or policy-driven activities.

Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in integrating classroom-based literacy practices with mixed-method evaluation, combining qualitative classroom observation and quantitative gain score analysis to explain not only whether literacy programs work, but how and why they influence students reading development. This study positions literacy programs as structured pedagogical interventions embedded within daily teaching practices rather than supplementary school activities.

Based on these gaps, the main research problem concerns how the implementation of a classroom literacy program contributes to improving students reading skills at SMPN 1 Balaraja. The study assumes that a structured literacy program enriched with varied reading activities and supported by an interactive learning environment can significantly enhance students reading competence and motivation, consistent with previous findings highlighting the positive relationship between literacy practices and reading achievement (Apriani, n.d.; Djatkiko, 2022)).

In addition to contextual contributions, this research offers theoretical contributions by extending classroom literacy implementation toward a pedagogical framework that integrates constructivist learning principles, reading engagement theory, and literacy habit formation. The study proposes that literacy improvement emerges from the interaction between structured reading exposure, guided teacher mediation, and reflective student response activities.

Practically, this research formulates an applicable step-by-step classroom literacy model consisting of: (1) diagnostic reading assessment to identify students initial literacy levels; (2) daily structured reading sessions (10–15 minutes); (3) guided comprehension activities through questioning and discussion; (4) reflective literacy tasks such as summaries or response journals; (5) teacher feedback and scaffolding; and (6) periodic evaluation using reading progress measurement. This framework provides actionable guidance for teachers and schools seeking sustainable literacy implementation.

Thus, this study aims to comprehensively describe the implementation of a classroom literacy program and evaluate its effectiveness in improving students reading skills through a case study approach at SMPN 1 Balaraja. Beyond describing a local context, the findings are expected to contribute theoretically

to classroom-based literacy pedagogy and practically to the design of scalable, evidence-based literacy programs applicable to similar suburban educational settings.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This section describes the methodological framework employed to investigate the implementation and effectiveness of a classroom literacy program in improving students reading skills at SMPN 1 Balaraja. It explains the research design, time and place of the study, research subjects and sampling technique, research procedures, instruments and data collection techniques, as well as the data analysis methods. The research methodology was designed to ensure the credibility, validity, and trustworthiness of the research findings.

### ***Research Design***

This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. The primary objective was to explore in depth how a classroom literacy program was implemented and how it contributed to the improvement of students reading skills and motivation. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of learning processes, classroom dynamics, participants perceptions, and contextual factors influencing the success of literacy programs. The case study design enabled an intensive examination of literacy practices within a specific educational setting and their impact on students reading development.

SMPN 1 Balaraja is a public junior high school located in a suburban area of Tangerang Regency, Indonesia. This research was carried out over a period of approximately three months, covering the stages of planning, implementation of the classroom literacy program, observation, interviews, documentation, and assessment of students reading skills.

### ***Research Target/Subject***

The participants of this study consisted of seventh-grade students at SMPN 1 Balaraja, selected through purposive sampling. A total of 15 students who actively participated in the classroom literacy program were involved as research respondents. The relatively small sample size was intentionally chosen to allow in-depth observation and detailed qualitative analysis of students literacy development within a specific instructional context. Additionally, English teachers directly engaged in the planning and implementation of the literacy program were selected as key informants, as they possess relevant experience and valuable insights into literacy-based instructional practices. However, the limited number of participants and the use of purposive sampling may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader student populations or different educational settings. Therefore, the results should be interpreted as context-specific insights rather than universally applicable conclusions.

### ***Research Procedure***

The research procedures were conducted systematically in several stages. The study began with the identification of problems related to students low reading skills, followed by the planning of classroom literacy activities. The literacy program was then implemented during regular classroom learning activities. Throughout the implementation, data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and reading tests. The final stage involved data analysis and drawing conclusions based on the research findings.

### ***Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques***

Data were collected using classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and reading tests. Observations focused on students reading activities, engagement, and teachers instructional strategies during the literacy program. Interviews were conducted to explore students and teachers perceptions and experiences related to the program. Documentation included students reading portfolios,

teachers reflective notes, and instructional materials used in the literacy activities. Reading tests were administered to measure students reading skill development before and after the implementation of the classroom literacy program. All research instruments were validated through expert judgment by two English education experts to ensure their relevance and suitability.

***Data analysis technique***

The data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Qualitative data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation were analyzed inductively by categorizing them into themes related to program implementation, students responses, changes in reading behavior, and challenges encountered. Quantitative data from the reading tests were analyzed to identify trends in students reading skill improvement. To ensure data validity, triangulation of sources, techniques, and time was applied, and member checking was conducted with teachers and students.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents the research results concerning the implementation of the classroom literacy program at SMPN 1 Balaraja, students responses toward English reading literacy, and teachers instructional strategies and challenges. The findings are described descriptively and supported by tables and figures to provide clearer empirical evidence. Each result is followed by analysis and discussion to connect the data with the research objectives and relevant theoretical perspectives.

In addition to qualitative descriptions, this study incorporates a simple quantitative analysis of students reading test results through a pre-test and post-test comparison to examine measurable learning improvement after the implementation of classroom literacy activities.

The findings indicate that SMPN 1 Balaraja has institutionally implemented a classroom literacy program across grade levels VII, VIII, and IX. The program is supported by formal school policies and aligned with the Independent Curriculum, demonstrating that literacy activities are embedded within daily classroom instruction rather than positioned as supplementary activities. This result addresses the first research objective regarding the implementation of the classroom literacy program at the school level.

However, the scope of literacy implementation shows an imbalance between Indonesian and English literacy. Indonesian reading literacy is fully integrated into daily learning activities and functions as a school-wide literacy practice. In contrast, English reading literacy is implemented contextually and limited to English subject lessons, positioning it as subject-specific literacy rather than as part of a comprehensive literacy culture. The scope of classroom literacy implementation is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Scope of Classroom Literacy Implementation

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Indonesian Literacy</b>	<b>English Literacy</b>
Grade Level Coverage	VII, VIII, IX	VII, VIII, IX
School Policy Support	Strong	Moderate
Integration into Daily Learning	Fully Integrated	Contextual and Subject-Based
Literacy Orientation	School-Wide	Subject-Specific

This finding is consistent with studies by Krashen (2004), Widodo (2016), and UNESCO literacy reports (2019), which argue that sustainable literacy development occurs when reading practices become part of whole-school culture rather than subject-bound activities. However, unlike previous studies that emphasize policy readiness, the present study reveals a practical implementation gap between institutional policy and classroom-level English literacy execution. This indicates that policy alignment alone does not guarantee balanced literacy outcomes across languages.

To measure students reading development quantitatively, a reading comprehension test was administered before (pre-test) and after (post-test) the classroom literacy program implementation. The test assessed vocabulary recognition, reading fluency, and comprehension accuracy.

Table 1A. Pre-test and Post-test Reading Scores (N = 15)

Measurement	Mean Score	Minimum	Maximum
Pre-test	62.4	50	74
Post-test	74.8	60	88
Mean Gain	<b>+12.4</b>	—	—

The results show an average improvement of 12.4 points, indicating a moderate increase in students reading comprehension after participating in structured literacy activities. Approximately 80% of students demonstrated score improvement, while only a small proportion showed minimal change.

The gain score analysis suggests that repeated exposure to reading activities contributed positively to vocabulary acquisition and comprehension ability. Although advanced inferential statistics were not applied due to the small sample size, the consistent upward trend across participants provides empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of the literacy intervention.

The results reveal varied levels of students motivation toward English reading literacy activities. Approximately 45% of students demonstrated positive motivation, characterized by active participation, higher confidence, and willingness to engage with English texts. These students generally possessed stronger academic performance and better foundational English skills. Conversely, a considerable number of students showed low motivation toward English reading activities. They tended to hesitate during reading-aloud sessions, experienced anxiety related to pronunciation accuracy, and displayed limited confidence when interacting with English texts.

The quantitative score improvement supports this motivational pattern, as students with higher participation levels showed greater score gains compared to less engaged learners, indicating a relationship between motivation and literacy achievement outcomes.

The distribution of students' motivation levels toward English reading literacy is illustrated in Figure 1.

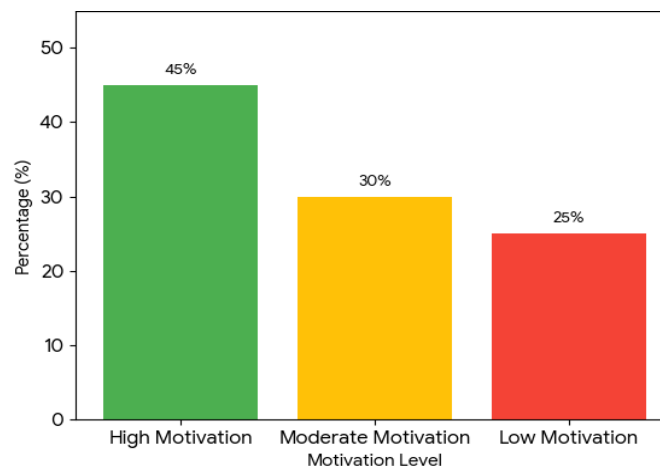


Figure 1. Distribution of Students' Motivation Levels toward English Reading Literacy

These findings can be explained through the perspective of foreign language anxiety theory, which suggests that fear of making mistakes and negative evaluation can significantly reduce learners participation in language tasks. Students with limited English proficiency experienced higher anxiety, particularly during oral reading activities, which negatively affected their engagement. This indicates that the effectiveness of

classroom literacy programs is influenced not only by instructional design but also by the emotional safety of the learning environment.

Similar findings were reported by Horwitz et al. (1986), who identified language anxiety as a predictor of reduced performance in reading and oral tasks. Additionally, studies by Yamashita (2013) and Grabe & Stoller (2020) emphasize that motivation and emotional comfort significantly influence reading comprehension development in EFL contexts. Unlike those studies conducted in high-exposure environments, the present research demonstrates that anxiety effects are intensified in contexts with limited English exposure, highlighting contextual dependency in literacy outcomes.

The findings also show that teachers employed various instructional strategies to improve students motivation and participation in English reading literacy. Common strategies included setting minimum reading targets, providing reading challenges, and offering continuous encouragement, particularly to students with low motivation. When reading activities were perceived as less effective, teachers implemented alternative approaches such as vocabulary drills, grammar reinforcement, and habituation of simple English expressions in classroom interactions.

Despite these efforts, teachers encountered persistent challenges, including low student motivation, limited English proficiency, pronunciation anxiety, and minimal exposure to English outside the classroom. Teachers strategies and challenges are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Teachers Strategies and Challenges in English Reading Literacy Implementation

Aspect	Description
Instructional Strategies	Reading Targets, Reading Challenges, Encouragement
Alternative Approaches	Vocabulary Drills, Grammar Reinforcement, Daily Expressions
Major Challenges	Low Motivation, Limited Proficiency, Pronunciation Anxiety
Environmental Constraints	Limited English Exposure Outside Classroom

The use of reading targets reflects an extrinsic motivational approach aimed at establishing reading routines and discipline. While this strategy aligns with findings by Guthrie and Wigfield (2000), who emphasize structured reading engagement, it contrasts with Deci and Ryan’s Self-Determination Theory (2000), which argues that intrinsic motivation produces stronger long-term literacy engagement. The current findings suggest that teachers rely heavily on extrinsic regulation due to students limited initial interest, indicating a transitional stage toward autonomous reading behavior rather than sustained literacy independence.

Environmental constraints also emerged as significant factors influencing English literacy development. This confirms ecological literacy perspectives proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1994), which highlight how learning outcomes are shaped by interactions between school, family, and social environments. However, the present study extends prior research by demonstrating that classroom literacy programs can partially compensate for limited external exposure, as evidenced by measurable reading score improvements despite environmental constraints.

Overall, the results demonstrate that the classroom literacy program at SMPN 1 Balaraja plays a constructive role in supporting students English reading development. However, its effectiveness is shaped by motivational, linguistic, and environmental factors. The integration of qualitative findings and quantitative gain scores strengthens the argument that classroom literacy programs contribute not only to perceived engagement but also to measurable reading achievement. Nevertheless, the moderate improvement level indicates that literacy interventions require broader institutional integration and sustained exposure to achieve optimal outcomes.

The novelty of this study lies in combining institutional literacy analysis, learner motivation data, and empirical pre–post reading performance within a school literacy framework dominated by national language literacy. This multidimensional evidence provides a more comprehensive understanding of how English literacy develops in constrained EFL school contexts.

The findings further emphasize the importance of strengthening collaboration among schools, families, and communities to establish a sustainable English literacy ecosystem that supports students reading development beyond the classroom while ensuring measurable academic progress.

## CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that the classroom literacy program implemented at SMPN 1 Balaraja contributes positively to the improvement of students reading skills and is institutionally supported through consistent implementation across all grade levels in alignment with the Independent Curriculum. The effectiveness of the program is influenced by several key factors, including students motivation, English language proficiency, and the level of environmental support both inside and outside the classroom. Despite persistent challenges such as low reading interest and limited confidence in reading English texts, the classroom literacy program demonstrates clear benefits in enhancing students English vocabulary mastery and pronunciation skills.

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