

## LITERACY CULTURE AS AN EFFORT TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' INTEREST IN READING AT STATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 088 PANYABUNGAN

**Juli Avni<sup>\*</sup>, Yenni Efrida Lubis, Nur Azizah Zulkifli, Laila Sakinah Siregar, Rika Fitri Adelina, Nurul Hidayah, Rosita Rangkuti**

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri Mandailing Natal  
Jl. Prof. Dr. Andi Hakim Nasution, Komplek Stain Madina, Pidoli Lombang, Panyabungan, Kabupaten Mandailing Natal, Sumatera Utara 22976, Indonesia  
Email: [juliavnisiregar01@gmail.com](mailto:juliavnisiregar01@gmail.com)

### Abstract

This study explores the phenomenon of literacy culture in an effort to increase students' reading interest at SD Negeri 088 Panyabungan. This activity is carried out daily during the first period, where the homeroom teacher brings students who are not yet fluent in reading to a special room to be guided by the teacher to improve their reading skills. The research approach used is descriptive qualitative to collect students' and teachers' experiences in the process of habituating reading. The results show that the routine implementation of literacy culture has a positive effect on students' interest and reading ability, so that students tend to be more confident and more active in school literacy activities. These findings also indicate the need for consistent school environmental support and literacy-based learning strategies to truly form strong reading habits. This study recommends improving reading facilities and integrating literacy culture into daily school activities.

**Keywords:** Literacy Efforts, Reading Interest, Elementary Schools

### INTRODUCTION

A culture of literacy in elementary schools is a crucial foundation for developing sustainable reading habits in students. Literacy is not only defined as the technical ability to read and write, but also as the habit of thinking, understanding information, and interpreting texts in everyday life. At elementary school age, children are at a stage of cognitive development that is highly sensitive to the formation of learning habits. Therefore, fostering a reading habit from an early age is a long-term investment in students' academic and social development. Research shows that schools that consistently implement literacy programs are able to increase students' interest in reading and engagement in learning activities. A well-planned literacy program helps students see reading as a necessity, not just a school assignment (Pradana, 2020).

Elementary school students' interest in reading plays a strategic role in determining their success in understanding various subjects. Reading is the primary gateway for students to

access information, broaden their horizons, and develop critical thinking skills. When reading interest develops, students tend to be more active in seeking knowledge independently. Conversely, low reading interest can hinder the overall learning process. Research on school literacy movements shows that regular reading habits can increase students' motivation to learn. Structured reading activities help students build positive relationships with books and reading materials (Rohim & Rahmawati, 2020).

Efforts to build a culture of literacy in schools require a shared commitment from the entire school community. Teachers, principals, and education staff must share a shared vision of the importance of reading habits for student development. A school environment rich in reading materials and literacy activities will create a supportive learning atmosphere. Research shows that the success of literacy programs is greatly influenced by consistent implementation and support from the school environment. When literacy becomes part of the school culture, students are more likely to internalize reading habits. This confirms that literacy is not a one-time program, but rather an ongoing process (Prasrihamni et al., 2022).

In today's digital age, the challenges of fostering reading interest are increasingly complex. Children are more easily attracted to gadgets and visual entertainment media than to printed books. This situation requires schools to design literacy strategies that are creative and relevant to children's worlds. A reading program during the first hour of class is one effective approach because it establishes a daily routine. Instilling a reading habit before core learning helps students enter the learning environment with greater focus. Research shows that a morning reading routine can improve students' concentration and readiness to learn (Sa'dan, 2023).

SD Negeri 088 Panyabungan develops literacy practices that are adaptive to student needs. Students who are not yet fluent in reading receive special guidance in the first hour from a dedicated teacher. This approach demonstrates the school's attention to the differences in individual student abilities. The program serves not only as a habit-building tool but also as a targeted remedial strategy. Through intensive guidance, students have the opportunity to improve their reading skills without pressure. This model aligns with research emphasizing the importance of early intervention in improving basic literacy skills (Tarmidzi & Astuti, 2020).

A consistently developed literacy culture helps students begin to enjoy reading. When reading is presented as a fun activity, students no longer view it as merely an obligation. They begin to explore various types of reading materials according to their interests. This process enriches vocabulary and improves students' language comprehension. A supportive environment makes students feel safe to learn and experiment. Research shows that positive reading experiences at an early age influence long-term reading habits (Handayani & Maknun, 2022).

In addition to improving academic abilities, a culture of literacy also contributes to students' character development. Reading helps children develop empathy, imagination, and the ability to understand others' perspectives. Through the stories and texts they read, students learn social and moral values. Literacy activities carried out with friends also strengthen social interactions. Discussions about reading materials encourage students to express their opinions.

However, implementing a culture of literacy often faces various practical obstacles. A limited collection of interesting books can reduce students' interest in reading. Inadequate

reading room facilities also affect student comfort. Furthermore, parental involvement in supporting reading habits at home remains variable. These challenges demonstrate that school literacy requires multi-stakeholder support. Previous research has shown that literacy success is greatly influenced by synergy between schools and families (Riyanti & Rahmi, 2024).

Schools need to continue innovating to overcome obstacles to developing a culture of literacy. Establishing classroom reading corners, book lending programs, and creative reading activities can be alternative solutions. Parental involvement through family literacy programs is also crucial for strengthening reading habits at home. Innovative literacy programs help maintain students' enthusiasm for reading.

Based on these considerations, this study focuses on how a culture of literacy is implemented at SD Negeri 088 Panyabungan and its impact on students' reading interest. This study is crucial for understanding the actual practice of literacy at the elementary school level. By describing the process and experiences of program implementation, this research is expected to contribute to the development of school literacy strategies. The research findings can serve as a reflection for other schools wishing to develop similar programs. Ultimately, strengthening a culture of literacy is a strategic step in improving the quality of basic education. This effort is part of a shared responsibility in preparing a generation of learners who enjoy reading.

## **IMPLEMENTATION METHOD**

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach because it aimed to provide an in-depth description of the literacy culture process at SD Negeri 088 Panyabungan as an effort to increase students' reading interest in the context of formal education. This approach was deemed appropriate because the phenomena studied consisted of the daily experiences and social practices of students and teachers without any manipulation of variables. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of literacy activities within the school (Sugiyono, 2013).

### **1. Research Location and Time**

The research was conducted at SD Negeri 088 Panyabungan, Sipolu Polu, Panyabungan District, Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra Province. Literacy activities were conducted every day during the first period throughout the semester to ensure consistent observation of students' habituation.

### **2. Research Subjects**

The research subjects were students participating in the literacy program, as well as the classroom teachers and supervising teachers responsible for implementing daily literacy activities at the school. The teachers supervising the students were key informants because they were directly involved in mentoring the students.

### **3. Data Collection Techniques**

- a. Participatory observation: Researchers observed the literacy activities from the time students entered the room until they finished, guided by the teacher.
- b. In-depth interviews: conducted with students and teachers to understand their experiences, motivations, and challenges in implementing a culture of literacy.
- c. Documentation: in the form of photos of activities, observation notes, and daily

student reading reports, used as data verification tools.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. The Need for a Culture of Literacy in Elementary Schools.**

A culture of literacy in elementary schools is an undeniable necessity, especially when various surveys show that children's reading interests still require serious attention. At SD Negeri 088 Panyabungan, a culture of literacy is understood not simply as a formal program, but as an effort to build reading habits that develop naturally in students' daily lives. Instilling a reading habit from an early age helps children not only recognize letters and words, but also understand the meaning of what they read and foster curiosity about new knowledge. Consistent literacy practice has been shown to foster students' intrinsic motivation to learn. Regular school literacy initiatives have a positive impact on increasing students' interest in reading and engagement in learning. These findings confirm that a culture of literacy is not merely a complement to school activities but a vital part of the ongoing learning process (Rohim & Rahmawati, 2020).

A culture of literacy plays a role in shaping students' character and mindset from an early age. Through structured reading activities, students learn to comprehend information, organize ideas, and develop empathy through the stories they read. The habit of reading in the morning before the start of core lessons also helps students build concentration and mental readiness to absorb the material. Consistent implementation of school literacy movements can increase learning motivation and foster positive reading habits. Thus, a culture of literacy in elementary schools impacts not only academic ability but also the development of students' attitudes and learning habits. Therefore, strengthening a culture of literacy is a strategic step in creating a generation that loves reading and is ready to face future educational challenges (Pradana, 2020).

### **2. Literacy Implementation Process**

The process of implementing a culture of literacy in this school is designed as a consistent and scheduled activity in the first hour of each day before core lessons begin. This repetitive pattern aims to establish reading habits as part of students' learning routines, rather than as an incidental additional activity. Students who are not yet fluent in reading receive special guidance in a designated room, accompanied by a teacher who is not teaching during the first hour. Meanwhile, other students engage in independent reading activities, selecting books according to their interests and ability levels. This approach creates a more inclusive atmosphere because each child is facilitated according to their needs (Tarmidzi & Astuti, 2020).

This implementation model also helps students feel valued in the reading learning process. Those who are not yet fluent are not positioned as students who are left behind, but rather as individuals who receive special attention and support to develop. The calm and non-judgmental learning environment makes students more confident in attempting to read aloud or spell out words. Observations show that students appear more enthusiastic and show no signs of stress during the activities. Daily routines also build a sense of responsibility and mental readiness before starting other lessons (Rohim & Rahmawati, 2020).

### **3. The Role of Teachers in a Culture of Literacy**

The role of teachers in a culture of literacy in elementary schools is inseparable from the success of a sustainable reading program. In the school environment, teachers are the primary figures who introduce, model, and instill reading habits in students from an early age. As mentors, teachers assist students who are still experiencing reading difficulties with a patient and gradual approach. As motivators, teachers foster students' self-confidence through praise and positive encouragement whenever they show progress. Furthermore, teachers also act as facilitators, helping students choose reading materials appropriate for their age and interests.

The role of teachers in a culture of literacy extends beyond the technical activities of reading; they also create a fun and supportive learning environment. Teachers who consistently provide positive feedback help students feel safe learning without fear of making mistakes. Warm interactions between teachers and students make reading a pleasurable experience, rather than an academic burden. Teachers also often relate reading to students' daily experiences to make it easier for them to understand the contents of the text (Valentina et al., 2023).

#### 4. Impact on Reading Interest and Ability

Consistent daily literacy activities have a significant impact on the development of students' reading interest and ability. Students who were initially less interested in reading began to show a more positive attitude toward books and literacy activities. This improvement was evident in their increased reading fluency, vocabulary mastery, and their courage in attempting to understand texts. Furthermore, students appeared more confident when asked to read in front of the class or retell their reading. The interactions fostered during literacy activities also encouraged students to share stories and discuss the books they had read.

This positive impact was not only evident in the technical aspects of reading, but also in the growing habit of reading as part of their daily lives. Many students began to take the initiative to seek out additional books in the school library or bring reading materials from home. Daily literacy activities helped them view reading as a fun and rewarding activity, not just an academic task. Students' active participation in discussions about reading content also indicated the development of their critical thinking and communication skills. A supportive learning environment made students feel comfortable expressing their opinions about what they read (Sa'dan, 2023).

#### 5. Challenges and Solutions

Although a culture of literacy has been implemented routinely, its implementation still faces a number of challenges that require serious attention. One major obstacle is the limited collection of books that are varied and appropriate to students' interests and developmental levels. Books that are less interesting or irrelevant to children's worlds often cause students to quickly lose their enthusiasm for reading. Furthermore, parental involvement in supporting reading habits at home remains uneven, so habits developed at school do not always continue within the family environment. Yet, synergy between school and home is crucial to the success of a comprehensive literacy culture.

As a remedial measure, schools can build partnerships with regional libraries, literacy communities, and the private sector to enrich their collections with engaging and age-appropriate reading materials. Parental involvement can also be strengthened through family literacy programs, such as shared reading schedules at home or regular book loans.

Furthermore, schools can develop more creative literacy activities to further motivate students, for example through book clubs, reading competitions, story corners, or the use of child-friendly digital technology. The integration of literacy technology, such as the use of interactive digital books, can be an alternative way to reach students' interests in today's digital age. Varied and innovative programs have been proven to increase participation and sustain students' interest in reading (Riyanti & Rahmi, 2024).

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study indicates that the literacy culture implemented at SD Negeri 088 Panyabungan plays a significant role in gradually and sustainably increasing students' interest and reading ability. The implementation of daily literacy activities during the first hour provides space for students to develop reading habits while receiving guidance tailored to their individual needs. The role of teachers as guides, motivators, and facilitators has proven to be a key factor in creating a supportive and enjoyable learning environment. The visible impact is not only on improving technical reading skills, but also on growing students' self-confidence, active discussion, and interest in various reading materials. Although challenges remain, such as limited book collections and parental involvement, collaborative efforts between schools, families, and relevant parties can strengthen the sustainability of literacy programs. Thus, a literacy culture in elementary schools can be a strategic foundation in shaping a generation of students who love reading, are critical, and are ready to face the demands of future learning.

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