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Causes Of Low Literacy Ability Of Low-Grade Students

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Abstract

Reading and writing literacy is a fundamental competence that influences primary school students' academic achievement. This study aims to identify factors contributing to low literacy skills among lower-grade students at SDN 6 Gelumbang and assess the implications for educational practice. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, with data collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Findings indicate that students' literacy skills remain low, characterized by difficulties in letter recognition, spelling, and basic text comprehension. Contributing factors include limited innovative teaching strategies, suboptimal school support, restricted literacy facilities, and minimal family involvement. The study highlights the need for a holistic approach incorporating innovative pedagogy, structured literacy program management, and active support from parents and the community to enhance students' functional literacy.

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INTRODUCTION

Literacy skills are the main foundation in the learning process in elementary school. Literacy includes not only the ability to read and write, but also the ability to understand, analyze, and use information effectively. In low-grade students, literacy is the initial stage that greatly determines the success of learning at the next level. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbud, 2022) emphasized that basic literacy is an essential competency in the Independent Curriculum. Literacy is a basic competency that not only serves as an initial tool in learning in elementary school but also as a cognitive foundation that influences subsequent academic skills. Strong literacy skills in low-grade students at the age of 6 to 9 years are an important prerequisite because at this stage of development children are building a foundation of critical thinking and language skills that will be used throughout their education. Without adequate literacy skills from an early age, students are vulnerable to experiencing obstacles in understanding other subject matter such as mathematics, science, and social studies that require the ability to read instructions and texts (Suparya, 2022).

In Indonesia, strengthening literacy has become a concern through the School Literacy Movement (GLS) program. However, implementation in the field still faces various obstacles, especially in elementary schools in the regions. SDN 6 Gelumbang is one of the schools that shows problems in the literacy ability of low-grade students. This can be seen from the difficulty of students in reading and writing basicly. Observations and preliminary assessment results revealed that most students in grades 1–3 had difficulty in letter recognition, spelling words, and understanding simple texts. Based on these conditions, this study is focused on identifying the factors that cause students' low literacy skills and their implications for educational practices in elementary schools. Recent literature studies also show that there is a paradox in the development of literacy in low-grade students. In a *systematic literature review* study that compared various literacy learning approaches in Indonesia, it was found that many interventions emphasized the technical aspects of reading but paid less attention to literacy as a contextual and participatory social practice, so its effectiveness was limited in improving students' functional literacy skills (Maslihah Zahroh Agustina, 2025). In addition, the analysis of the factors causing low literacy shows that obstacles are not only internal in students, such as low interest and cognitive readiness, but are also influenced by external factors such as parental support, the availability of

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reading facilities, and the quality of the implementation of literacy programs in schools (Ansya, 2024).

Theories of cognitive development such as those put forward by Vygotsky emphasize the importance of social interaction, learning environment support, and scaffolding from teachers and parents in helping students achieve abilities that are beyond their initial abilities (*zone of proximal development*). In the context of literacy, this means that literacy is not just an individual ability but is the result of a dynamic relationship between learners, the environment, and the practice of meaningful reading-writing. Conversely, the lack of environmental support can slow down the development of students' functional literacy, especially in lower grades that still require a lot of guidance (Vygotsky, 1978). Although a number of studies have identified the factors that cause low literacy in elementary school students, most are still case-descriptive and have not comprehensively linked field findings to the theoretical framework of literacy development and empirically measurable solutions. This shows that there is a research *gap* related to the relationship between causative factors, real learning contexts, and effective interventions that have not been widely tested.

Based on these empirical and theoretical conditions, this study aims to **identify and analyze the factors that cause the low literacy ability of elementary school students in SD N 6 Gelumbang**, as well as **to present recommendations for evidence-based solutions that are relevant to basic** education practices. The findings of this study are expected to make a scientific contribution in formulating a more contextual and implementable strategy to improve low-grade literacy, as well as narrowing the gap between national literacy policies and the reality of practice in the field.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to understand the phenomenon in depth and contextually related to students' literacy skills. According to (Sugiyono, 2019) Qualitative research is used to examine the natural conditions of objects, where the researcher acts as a key instrument and data analysis is inductive. In addition, (Moleong, 2021) states that qualitative research aims to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects holistically through descriptions in the form of words. The subjects of this study include low-grade students, namely 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade students, classroom teachers, and the school at SDN 6 Gelumbang. The selection of subjects was carried out by purposive sampling, which is based on certain considerations that are relevant to

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the purpose of the research. This technique is in accordance with the opinion (Miles, 2014) which states that the selection of informants in qualitative research is based on in-depth information needs so that the data obtained is representative and has high information quality. The data collection technique is carried out through several methods, first through participatory observation, namely the researcher is directly involved in learning activities to observe students' behavior and literacy skills. According to (Spradley, 2016) Participatory observation allows researchers to obtain more accurate data because they experience firsthand the situation being studied. Both interviews are semi-structured, used to dig into information in depth but remain flexible. (Moleong, 2021) mentioning that semi-structured interviews allow for broader data exploration as per the informant's response. Documentation Kit, in the form of student work results, school archives, and learning records as research supporting data.

Data analysis is carried out through three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. This model refers to the theories of Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana (Miles, 2014) which states that qualitative data analysis is carried out interactively and continues continuously until the data reaches saturation. The validity of the data was tested using source and method triangulation techniques. Triangulation aims to improve the validity of data by comparing different sources and data collection techniques. This is in accordance with Norman's opinion (Denzin, 2017) which states that triangulation can increase the credibility of qualitative research results.



Figure 1. Research Flow Design, (Source, Researcher 2026)

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that the literacy ability of low-grade students at SDN 6 Gelumbang is still in the low category and has not met functional literacy standards. Students show difficulties in letter recognition, word spelling, and understanding simple texts both orally and in writing. These findings confirm that the expected functional literacy competencies at grades 1–3 have not been consistently achieved in this school. Scientifically, this low literacy can be explained through the interaction of internal and external factors. Internal factors include students' cognitive readiness and reading interest, while external factors include limited teaching strategies, lack of variety in learning methods, minimal teacher support, and limited availability of reading facilities. This phenomenon shows that low literacy is not just an individual problem of students, but is the result of systematic conditions in the school environment that are not optimal. These findings are consistent with the purpose of the study to identify and analyze the factors that cause students' low literacy skills. Concretely, the results show that low literacy is not just an individual student problem, but is a **multifactorial** phenomenon involving interactions between the school environment, teaching strategies, and external supports such as family and learning facilities. This emphasizes that literacy problems cannot be separated from the context of actual learning in elementary schools. Scientifically, this low literacy competence can be understood as a result of **the gap between learning practices and the demands of functional literacy.** Practical studies from other primary schools also show that literacy learning barriers are often rooted in **a lack of variety in teaching methods** and the implementation of literacy programs that have not been effectively integrated into daily learning activities (Risfi Aulya Hanni, 2025). Limited reading facilities and low student interest in reading, which were also noted in other related studies, worsened students' functional literacy abilities as students were less exposed to meaningful reading practices outside of formal academic tasks (Aulia My Love Fanza, 2025).

(Eva Manora Matondang, 2025) **strategi pembelajaran literasi yang bersifat repetitif dan konvensional** kurang efektif untuk mencapai kompetensi membaca dan menulis tingkat fungsional. Penelitian lain menyarankan bahwa model pembelajaran yang melibatkan media pembelajaran kontekstual, seperti penggunaan kosakata dalam konteks nyata atau pembelajaran berbasis problem, dapat meningkatkan pemahaman siswa secara lebih signifikan Temuan ini menunjukkan perlunya inovasi pedagogis untuk merespons kebutuhan literasi siswa kelas rendah. Secara umum, hasil penelitian ini (Eva Manora Matondang, 2025) **selaras dengan studi empiris sebelumnya** yang menemukan rendahnya kemampuan literasi dasar di sekolah dasar lain di Indonesia. Misalnya, temuan pada SD Negeri 039/IX Tantan menggambarkan kondisi serupa di

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mana sebagian besar siswa belum mencapai standar kompetensi literasi dasar akibat kurangnya variasi metode dan dukungan lingkungan belajar. Demikian pula, penelitian lain melaporkan bahwa pemahaman baca siswa secara umum masih rendah, dan strategi pembelajaran tradisional memberikan kontribusi terhadap kondisi tersebut (Bunyamin, 2025).

However, in contrast to some studies that emphasize the development of literacy skills through a structured school literacy movement program, this study found that at SDN 6 Gelumbang, literacy interventions are still lacking in depth. Implicit in these findings is that the existence of literacy programs alone is not enough; Management, implementation, and support of the school context, including teachers' involvement in pedagogical innovation and family support, are important determinants of functional literacy success. The findings of this study have important implications for the development of literacy practices in elementary schools. First, the results show that literacy programs should be more than just a daily reading routine; Learning strategies are needed that support critical thinking skills and meaningful text comprehension. Second, these findings underscore the importance of collaboration between teachers, principals, and parents in creating a conducive literacy environment, including the provision of diverse reading resources. This research helps bridge the gap between national literacy policy and the reality of practice in schools. Theoretically, functional literacy demands an understanding of texts in real-life contexts; However, his practice in the field is often hampered by pedagogical limitations and a learning environment. These findings reinforce the argument that effective interventions should include innovative pedagogy, supportive school management, and community support, not just formal literacy programs.

From the description above, it can be concluded based on the findings of research at SDN 6 Gelumbang, it can be concluded that the literacy ability of low-grade students is still in the low category and has not met functional literacy standards. Students' fundamental difficulties include letter recognition, word spelling, and simple text comprehension, which signals the need for more systematic and contextual literacy interventions. This research confirms that low literacy is not only an individual problem of students, but is a multifactorial phenomenon. Causative factors include: (1) limited innovative and varied learning strategies, (2) suboptimal school environment support, including ad hoc literacy programs, and (3) family involvement and limited access to reading facilities. The implication of this study is the need for a holistic approach to literacy development, which includes pedagogical innovation by teachers, structured literacy program management by schools, and active support from parents and communities. Integrated interventions are expected to improve students' functional literacy skills and narrow the gap

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between national literacy policies and practices in the field.

Table 1. Factors Causing Low Literacy Ability of Low-Grade Students

Category Factor	Subfaktor	Findings Indicators
Internal Factors	Low motivation	Students lack enthusiasm for reading, easily bored during literacy activities, low intrinsic motivation.
	Low interest in reading	Students are more interested in physical play, disturbing friends, rarely reading books outside of class.
	Low cognitive/intelligence readiness	Difficulty recognizing similar letters, composing words, understanding simple texts, limited learning experience during the pandemic.
External Factors	Minima lparental support	Parents rarely read stories or discuss, do not provide literacy stimulation at home.
	Influence of gadgets/television	Children spend more time watching TV or playing gadgets than reading.
	Limited school facilities	Limited book collection, unattractive literacy space, minimal access to library.
	Conventional teacher teaching methods	Teachers focus more on mechanical reading exercises, less on using creative and contextual strategies to improve students' literacy.

CONCLUSION

This study proves that the low literacy of low-grade students at SDN 6 Gelumbang is a multifactorial phenomenon involving teaching strategies, school support, literacy facilities, and family involvement. These findings broaden the understanding of the field of basic education by emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach that integrates innovative pedagogy, literacy program management, and community collaboration. Practically, the results of this research can be used to design more contextual and effective literacy interventions. Further research is suggested to evaluate the impact of the application of an innovative pedagogical model based on

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contextual media on improving students' functional literacy.

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