

# The Low Literacy of Phase A Students: Causal Factors and Solutions Elementary School Case Study in Malang

Rizky Fara Nabila<sup>1</sup>, Candra Utama<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> State University of Malang

<sup>2</sup>Department of Primary and Preschool Education, State University of Malang, Malang, Indonesia

\*Corresponding author, email: [rizky.fara.2301516@students.um.ac.id](mailto:rizky.fara.2301516@students.um.ac.id)

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## Abstract

Literacy is a very important basic skill for primary school students, especially in grade one, as it is the main foundation for their academic and social development. However, low literacy levels are still a significant problem in many schools, including some primary schools in Malang City. This study aims to identify the factors causing students' low literacy skills and examine effective learning methods to overcome them. This research used a qualitative approach with a case study design conducted in one of the elementary schools in Malang. Data collection techniques included observation of learning activities, interviews with teachers, and documentation. The results showed that the lack of varied learning methods, limited learning media, lack of attention to students' individual needs, and lack of parental involvement were the main causes of low student literacy. To overcome this, adjustments to teaching modules, the use of interesting and interactive learning media and intensive assistance for students with literacy difficulties are needed. In addition, a conducive learning environment and good communication between teachers and parents are essential to support students' holistic literacy development. Therefore, teachers are required to develop innovative, adaptive and student-centered learning.

## 1. Introduction

Literacy is a basic skill that is very important for every student to have in supporting the learning process in various subjects (McGowan, 2018). At the primary school level, particularly in Phase A (grades I and II), reading and writing skills serve as a key foundation in supporting children's cognitive, social and emotional development. Good literacy mastery enables students to understand learning instructions, express ideas in writing and develop critical and creative thinking skills. However, the facts show that Indonesian students' literacy skills are still at an alarming level. Based on data from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), Indonesia ranks 64th out of 65 countries in terms of literacy skills. Test results from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reinforce these findings, showing that Indonesian students' literacy skills in reading, mathematics and science lag far behind those of neighboring countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand. This achievement reflects the low literacy culture in society, including among primary school students.

The phenomenon of low literacy skills is also found in a local context, one of which is an elementary school in Malang city. Based on observations and interviews with the first grade teacher, it was found that out of 28 students, there were still some students who could not read fluently, understand the content of reading or write simple sentences correctly. Some of the problems identified included a lack of interest in reading, weak comprehension of the text, and difficulty composing sentences. In addition, the limited number of varied and interesting learning methods, the lack of availability of age-appropriate reading materials, and the lack of parental involvement in accompanying reading and writing activities at home also exacerbate this condition. Teachers as learning facilitators also face obstacles in managing heterogeneous classes without adequate training or learning media support. Within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, which is now starting to be implemented in a number of schools, Literacy is the main focus in improving students' identity Pancasila (Faridahtul Jannah & Thooriq Irtifa' Fathuddi, 2023). This shows a gap between the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum which emphasizes strengthening literacy and the reality of its implementation in the field. Delays in mastering literacy can have a negative impact on overall academic achievement and hinder the development of students' social-emotional competencies.

Given the complexity of the problem, this study aims to understand in depth how literacy learning takes place in a Phase A class in one of the primary schools in Malang City. This research also wants to identify the factors that cause students' low literacy skills and find applicable and contextual solutions to overcome these problems. Within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, literacy is one of the main focuses in forming capable, competitive and characterful learners. Therefore, understanding the barriers and opportunities in implementing literacy learning is very important to support the successful implementation of the curriculum. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to capture the learning reality fully and deeply. Through observations, interviews and documentation, it is hoped that a concrete picture can be obtained of the challenges faced by teachers and students, as well as strategies that have been or can be applied to improve literacy skills. The results of this study are expected to not only contribute to the development of more effective and enjoyable learning practices but also encourage the involvement of parents, communities and policy makers in creating a literacy ecosystem that supports children's early development. Thus, efforts to improve the literacy of Phase A students cannot be blamed solely on teachers or schools but are a shared responsibility between families, communities and the government. Strong collaboration between these parties will form a solid literacy foundation for the nation's next generation.

A number of previous studies have shown that strengthening literacy in early childhood students is not enough with conventional methods but requires innovative approaches and collaboration between schools, families and the environment. The following is a synthesis of some relevant studies:

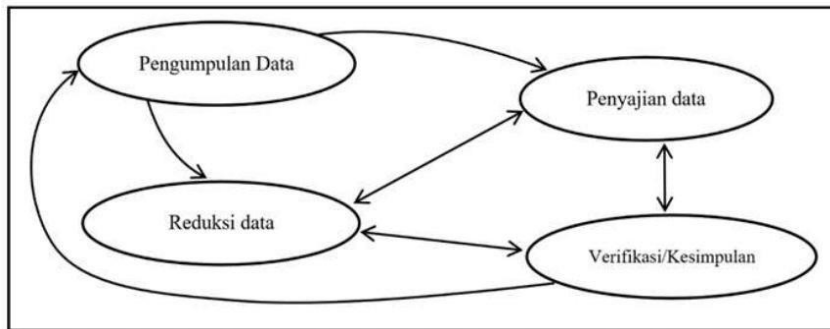
No	Author & Year	Study Focus	Key Findings	Relevance to this Research
1	Rahmawati (2022)	Use of visual media in early learning	Image and video media effectively increase literacy Interest and understanding	The importance of contextual media for students Phase A
2	Yuliana (2021)	An inquiry approach in basic literacy	Increase student activeness in asking questions and understanding the content of reading	Demonstrating the effectiveness of the inquiry approach in lower grades
3	Ningsih & Putra (2020)	Parents' role in Early childhood literacy	Parental involvement has a positive impact on children's reading skills	The need for school and home Synergy in supporting literacy
4	Maulida (2023)	Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in elementary school	Many teacher still do not understand the principles of differentiation and inquiry.	Support the importance of teacher training and curriculum understanding

Based on this synthesis, it can be concluded that improving literacy skills in Phase A students requires a holistic and collaborative approach. The use of appropriate media, contextualized learning, family support and teachers' good understanding of the curriculum and students' characteristics are key elements to creating effective and enjoyable literacy learning.

## 2. Method

The type of research applied is qualitative research with a case study approach in one of the public elementary schools in Malang. Qualitative research aims to understand phenomena based on people's experiences, behaviors, views, or actions as a whole and explained through words and language. On the other hand, the case study method describes situations, conditions, or events that represent the reality of individual and communal life. Data collection is done using observation and interviews. Based on these techniques, the research tools used include interview guidelines and observation guidelines. An interview is a meeting of two individuals to share information and ideas through question and answer sessions, so that meaning about a particular topic can be built. In this study, researchers used interviews directly with the class teacher (BK & Hamna, 2022). The time of observation was March 14, 2025, starting from 07.00 - 10.00, for the duration of the interview, which was only 10 minutes. The observation was conducted at an elementary school in Malang city. Researchers conducted open observations, what is meant in this study is that researchers clearly

convey to data sources that they are conducting research, so that information is known from the beginning to the end of the researcher's activities (Utomo, 2022)



The initial stage in this process was to collect data by documenting various findings in the field through observation and interviews. Next, data reduction is carried out which aims to summarize and focus attention on information related to the core of the research, while eliminating irrelevant data. Once the data was collected, the next phase entailed displaying it by organizing it into categories based on the main issues in the form of charts and brief descriptions. In the end, the researcher summarizes the results based on the information collected during the research process.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Based on the results of data analysis, a number of factors were found to influence students' low literacy, some of which include the use of less diverse learning methods "The teacher stated 'that I once used the game method but many students were already regulated in the method, so I returned to using the method as usual' ". Lack of availability of interesting reading materials that are suitable for the age group of students "the teacher stated 'here for reading books or media is very lacking mbak'", as well as the limited skills of classroom teachers in the teaching process.

Based on the results of interviews in one elementary school in Malang, it was revealed that class teachers in this school were too dependent on learning modules from the government without making adjustments to the situation and characteristics of students. This condition makes learning less interesting and does not provide diverse learning experiences. Teachers only use inquiry and group discussion methods as well as lecture methods, but these applications are less effective due to the limited instructions and assistance provided by the teacher, which causes students to not understand what to read, do not know how to write correct writing, and are not used to exploring or processing information from reading. Without a good understanding of instructions, the reading and writing process will not take place effectively. Teachers also only use storybooks as the main reading material, which makes students' reading literacy levels in the classroom low. Then when there are students who cannot read or write, they do not get special help or treatment from the teacher or students are only asked to draw to fill learning time. The lack of attention to students with special learning needs makes it difficult for them to achieve the expected basic skills.

Various solutions can be applied, such as adapting learning modules to student characteristics, applying more varied and interactive learning methods, and developing and varying the learning media used. special interventions for students with reading or writing literacy difficulties and first analyzing students' reading and writing literacy skills.

#### 3.1. Factors causing the problem of students' lack of literacy in the classroom

Based on the results of data analysis from one elementary school in Malang City, it was found that students' low literacy skills were caused by various interrelated and mutually influencing factors. These problems do not only stem from the individual abilities of students, but are also related to the teaching methods applied by teachers and the lack of support from the learning environment (Hijjayati et al., 2022).

One of the main findings in this study is the use of learning modules from the government that are general in nature, without being adapted to the characteristics and needs of students in the classroom. In fact, the effectiveness of learning is highly dependent on the teacher's ability to modify teaching materials to suit the classroom context. However, in reality, teachers in schools tend to use raw modules without adapting them, so that the content and learning methods are not relevant to the actual conditions of the students. This situation results in low student engagement in the learning process, as they find the material taught less interesting and difficult to understand. The applied learning approach tends to be less varied, only using the inquiry model and group discussions without clear instructions. If in the classroom only using the inquiry model, it also causes an impact on students' numeracy skills, because in the inquiry model students' abilities are directly involved in finding solutions to questions in a teaching material (Rahmah et al., 2022). Thus, integrating the differentiated learning approach in the inquiry model has an influence and effect on numeracy skills. There is an influence and effect of numeracy skills after being treated with differentiated learning methods in the inquiry model because even though they have different roles, differentiated learning strategies and inquiry models have the same goal, namely to produce learning that has a positive impact on students in order to get the subject matter being studied (Gusti et al., 2024). Differentiated learning functions so that students get equal learning opportunities by paying attention to the learning needs of each student. Classroom teachers also use the group discussion method more, but the implementation is not accompanied by clear instructions or adequate assistance. As a result, discussion activities are less effective; students have difficulty understanding the material to be read and discussed, and are unable to compose sentences or paragraphs properly and correctly. This situation reflects that basic skills such as reading, comprehension and narrative writing have not been nurtured optimally. Learning still focuses on the role of the teacher and has not encouraged students to independently seek and explore information through various reading sources. Teachers can provide clear concepts to students, because then students can see the application of their concepts (Nuangchalerm & Kanphukiew, 2024).

In addition, the reading resources used in class are very limited, namely only general storybooks without various types of texts that can broaden students' horizons and train their critical thinking skills. Limited access to reading materials that are interesting and suitable for students' developmental stages is one of the main causes of the low literacy culture in schools. Ideally, students are given the opportunity to read different types of texts, such as children's poetry, informative texts, educational comics and picture reading that not only improve reading skills but also foster interest and love for literacy. As well as in the classroom do not have learning media that support learning. only reading books that are also less diverse.

In the learning process, there are students who face challenges in basic reading and writing skills. However, instead of providing appropriate support, the teacher only provides picture books to keep the student busy without disturbing other students. The teacher also does not provide additional classes or special remedial programs to support the development of the student's reading and writing skills. This reflects a lack of attention to the learning needs of individual students, especially those who require additional support. As a result, students are denied opportunities to improve basic skills that are crucial to their future academic success. This lack of early intervention can exacerbate students' delays, causing them to lose confidence, enthusiasm for learning and increasing the likelihood of academic failure at a later stage. This issue is exacerbated by the lack of early assessment programs that recognize students' difficulties, teachers' lack of effort to apply a personal approach to students who face learning difficulties, the absence of differentiated learning strategies to meet the needs of each student, and insufficient training for teachers in dealing with students with special needs in the area of literacy. If this situation continues, there will be a bigger educational gap in the classroom. Learners who need help are left behind, reducing their opportunities for growth. Therefore, serious attention is needed to provide education services that are inclusive and sensitive to the needs of all students.

### **3.2. Steps that can be taken to improve literacy skills**

To address primary school students' inadequate literacy skills, a comprehensive and integrated strategy is essential. One of the first steps that can be taken is to make adjustments to the learning modules. Teachers should not rely solely on modules from the government without taking into account the conditions, characteristics and learning needs of students in the classroom. Modules need to be modified to be more contextual and relevant to students' daily lives, such as incorporating

local stories, topics close to children's world, and adjusting the difficulty level of reading texts. Teachers should also get training in creating or adapting teaching modules so that they have the skills to design customized and engaging learning. In addition, teachers can implement more interactive learning strategies that are tailored to each student's learning style. In general, this type of learning can be divided into three categories (Rudini & Agustina, 2021): Visual Learning Style: Students with this learning style understand information through vision faster, such as pictures, diagrams, graphs, and writing (Magdalena et al., 2020). They usually remember information presented visually faster and have a high sensitivity to colors and shapes. Auditory Learning Style: Students with auditory learning styles are more efficient at processing information through sound. They tend to understand material delivered orally more quickly, such as presentations or debates, and often prefer listening to reading (Assidiqi & Sumarni, 2020) Kinesthetic Learning Style: Students who have a kinesthetic learning style gain the best understanding through hands-on experience, training, and physical activity (Azis et al., 2020).

In addition, the learning media used by teachers in the classroom is still very limited, with reliance on reading books as the only main source. This makes the learning atmosphere feel monotonous and less interesting for students. Many students seem to feel bored quickly and lack motivation in participating in learning because the methods applied are not varied enough. In addition, some students also have difficulty in understanding reading due to the absence of other supporting media that can help them learn in a more enjoyable way. To overcome these problems, it is recommended that teachers start using various learning media that are more interesting and interactive. For example, in addition to relying on reading books, teachers can use pictures, word cards, or posters containing vocabulary and simple sentences to make it easier for students to understand the material. In addition, the use of digital media such as educational videos or reading applications can help make the learning process more interesting and fun. Educators can also utilize game techniques, such as reading during word puzzle activities, associating pictures with words, or engaging in role-playing with a basic story. In addition, utilizing tangible items can assist students in improving their reading comprehension. Therefore, it is important for educators to adopt a more innovative approach in selecting learning materials to increase students' enthusiasm and improve their academic results. In teaching and learning activities, learning media plays a role in conveying information from mentors or teachers to students or learners.

Learning media is a tool that helps the learning process to be more interesting and easy to understand (Syahrudin 2023.) If teachers only rely on reading books, students tend to feel bored and less motivated quickly, because learning media plays an important role in attracting students' attention and making learning more interactive. In addition, according to Dale's (1969) theory in the "Cone of Experience", students will more easily understand the material if they learn through direct experience or by utilizing various media such as images, videos, and props. Piaget (1972) also states that elementary school-age children understand concepts more easily if they use real objects or visual media. Thus, to overcome the problem of lack of variety in learning media, teachers can use pictures, word cards, educational videos, and real teaching aids so that students become more interested and can understand the material better.

When students are found who cannot read and write in class, teachers should give more treatment to these students (Nur, 2020) And to overcome the presence of students who cannot read and write, teachers can identify the initial ability of each student in reading and writing sentences, teachers can conduct an initial assessment by asking students to take turns to go to the front of the class to take a reading and writing test. In this test, each student is asked to read a sentence that has been prepared by the teacher, then write it back on the board or paper provided. By using this method, teachers can assess each student's reading and writing ability, so they can group students based on their ability level and design learning strategies that suit their individual needs. Thus, teachers can provide additional sessions outside of class hours Initial assessment to identify students' reading and writing skills is essential in the learning process. Evaluation is the process of making decisions based on the results of measurement and assessment, to determine the effectiveness of learning and take corrective steps (Natasya Lady Munaroh, 2024). Through this evaluation, educators can classify students based on their skill level. This arrangement allows the application of learning strategies that are more suited to the needs of each group, making the learning process more efficient. In addition, educators can also organize additional sessions outside of class time for students who need more support, so that every student can achieve the expected ability. This

approach is in line with the view that reading and writing skills are the foundation of all learning, including science, technology and higher order thinking skills.

### **3.3. Conclusion**

This research shows that the low literacy skills of Phase A primary school students are caused by various interrelated factors, both from internal and external aspects of learning. Lack of variety in learning methods, limited access to interesting reading materials, and low teacher skills in delivering material effectively are the main factors influencing this condition. In addition, the use of learning modules that are general in nature and not tailored to the characteristics and needs of students is also an obstacle in improving literacy.

Monotonous learning methods and the lack of interactive learning media make students less interested and easily lose motivation. In fact, learning motivation is an important aspect in developing literacy skills from an early age. Teachers have also not given special attention to students who have difficulty reading and writing because they have not conducted a thorough initial assessment and have not designed differentiated learning strategies. To overcome this condition, teachers need to make adjustments to the learning module to make it more contextual and appropriate to students' backgrounds. The learning approach should also be more interactive, varied, and adapted to students' learning styles. The use of interesting and innovative learning media, as well as conducting accurate initial assessments, are key strategies in improving students' literacy in the early grades. It is also necessary to support a learning environment that is richer in reading materials and active participation from parents in accompanying their children's learning process at home.

This study was limited to one primary school in Malang city and used a qualitative approach, so the results are contextual and cannot be widely generalized. Therefore, further studies are recommended to be conducted in various regions with a more comprehensive approach to gain a broader and deeper understanding of literacy improvement efforts at the primary school level

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Rizky Fara Nabila: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing.

The author has read and approved the final manuscript.

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