

Building a Culture of Literacy in Schools: The Role of Students in Improving the Quality of Elementary School Education

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Abstract

Literacy culture in schools plays a crucial role in improving the quality of education. Through strengthening the role of students, literacy becomes a strategic instrument to develop critical, creative and collaborative skills. This article reviews how students can be the main actors in creating a strong literacy culture through various innovative programs, such as reading and writing activities that actively involve them. In addition, collaboration between students, teachers and parents is also very important to create a conducive literacy environment. This study used a qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of observation, interviews and literature study. The results showed that direct student involvement in literacy activities has a significant positive impact on the success of literacy culture in schools. Students who are actively involved in reading and writing activities not only develop their literacy skills but also improve their critical and creative thinking skills. Thus, a thriving literacy culture in schools not only improves the quality of education but also shapes the character of students who are more independent and collaborative.

Keywords : Literacy Culture, Student Role, Education, Quality

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1. Introduction

Literacy culture is the main foundation in developing quality human resources. Literacy does not only include the ability to read and write, but also includes the ability to understand, analyze, and use information critically. (Budiarti, Y., et al. 2024). This is one of the important indicators in measuring the quality of education in various countries. In Indonesia, literacy culture among students is still a major challenge. Based on UNESCO data, Indonesia's literacy index is still relatively low compared to other countries in Southeast Asia (UNESCO, 2021). Efforts to improve literacy culture often focus on providing facilities such as libraries or reading books. However, the success of literacy culture is not only determined by the availability of facilities, but also by the active role of students as the main actors (Aryani, WD, et al. 2024). Without student involvement, various literacy programs are only formal activities that are less meaningful. This happens because students are the main subjects in the literacy process. If students do not participate actively, various literacy activities only become administrative routines that have little impact on changing their mindsets and habits.

For example, the existence of a complete library or compulsory reading program will be ineffective if students do not have the motivation or initiative to use the facilities. Student motivation is the main driving factor that determines the extent to which they are involved in literacy activities. Without encouragement from within, students tend to ignore the available facilities or only use them to a limited extent. For example, even though the library has an interesting collection, students may only come when required by the teacher or simply borrow books to fulfill assignments, not to develop independent reading habits. Students' initiative to utilize literacy facilities is also greatly influenced by how they view these literacy activities



(Roianita, A., & Bahtiar, RS 2023). If students do not see the value or direct benefits of reading, they tend to feel that literacy is just an additional burden. As a result, facilities such as libraries or compulsory reading programs become mere formalities, without having a significant impact on improving students' literacy skills or the quality of education. When facilities such as libraries or compulsory reading programs are not supported by active involvement and interest from students, then these literacy initiatives will only run mechanically without having a significant impact. The library, although complete and organized, is just a space that is not optimally utilized. Students may visit the library or read books simply to fulfill an obligation, such as completing a school assignment or meeting a certain schedule, without any desire to actually learn or enjoy the process of reading.

Compulsory reading programs often become administrative routines if they are not accompanied by good management and motivation from students. For example, students only read books in a hurry or choose easy books without understanding the content and values contained therein. In this context, the main objectives of the literacy program—building critical thinking skills, broadening horizons, and increasing interest in reading—are not achieved. Without a significant impact on students' literacy skills, the program also fails to support the long-term goals of education, namely creating a generation that is intelligent, creative, and ready to face global challenges (Khoiron, M. 2021). In other words, literacy activities that are merely formalities not only waste existing resources but also miss opportunities to improve the quality of education as a whole.

To avoid this, the literacy program approach needs to be directed at building students' intrinsic interest through interesting and relevant methods. For example, reading activities can be packaged in the form of interactive discussions, book clubs, or activities involving digital technology, so that students feel that literacy activities are useful and enjoyable (Dwi Aufiyaauddin, H. 2024). Therefore, building student motivation and initiative is very important. This can be done through a more personal approach, such as providing reading materials that suit their interests, creating a fun literacy environment, or involving them in interactive literacy activities that are relevant to everyday life. In this way, literacy facilities such as libraries and reading programs can be utilized optimally to support student development. In cases like this, literacy programs are only seen as an obligation or demand of the school, not as an opportunity to develop. As a result, students do not get maximum benefit from literacy efforts, and the program fails to achieve its main goal, namely building a strong literacy culture in schools (Nofita, R., & Latif, L. 2024).

Thus, student involvement in various aspects of the literacy program, from planning to implementation, is very important to ensure that literacy activities are relevant, interesting, and have a direct impact on improving the quality of their education. Student involvement in various aspects of the literacy program, from the planning stage to implementation, is very important to create literacy activities that are relevant and have a significant impact on the quality of their education. When students are involved in planning, they can provide input related to their interests and needs, so that the literacy program is more in line with their preferences and characteristics (Hidayah, D., & Hasanah, E. 2024). This can increase students' sense of ownership of the program, which in turn encourages active participation. For example, if students are given the opportunity to choose the theme or type of book to be read in the literacy program, they will be more enthusiastic to participate. In addition, student involvement in implementation, such as becoming a book discussion facilitator or reading group leader, can build their sense of responsibility and leadership skills. This active role not only increases student involvement but also enriches their learning experience through interactions with peers.

Literacy programs designed with students also tend to be more engaging because they reflect their interests and learning styles. For example, students who are more interested in technology can be invited to create book reviews in the form of videos or podcasts, so that literacy activities become more creative and relevant to their world. With this approach, literacy programs become not only routine activities but also meaningful learning experiences. Ultimately, direct student involvement in various aspects of the literacy program ensures that

the activities are not only relevant but also have a real impact on improving their critical thinking skills, communication skills, and creativity. This contributes to the achievement of the overall goal of education, namely to create a literate, intelligent generation that is ready to face global challenges. Students have great potential to drive a culture of literacy through creativity and innovation. They can be the driving force in community-based literacy activities, such as reading groups or book discussions. (Purwaningsih, E., Anisariza, NU, & Yusuf, C. 2024). However, this potential is often overlooked because the educational approach is still teacher-centered.

Literacy culture also has a broad impact on improving the quality of education. Students who are actively involved in literacy tend to have better critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Cynthia, RE, & Sihotang, H. 2023). Literacy culture has a significant impact on the quality of education, because literacy is the foundation of all learning processes. When students are actively involved in literacy culture, such as in-depth reading, creative writing, and discussions, they not only obtain information, but also develop the ability to analyze, evaluate, and connect the ideas they acquire. These activities stimulate critical thinking skills, namely the ability to think logically, make informed arguments, and solve problems effectively. (Ahyar, AM, & Zumrotun, E. 2023).

For example, students who are accustomed to reading various types of texts, such as story books, articles, or opinions, will have a better ability to understand different points of view. They learn to question information, look for supporting evidence, and draw conclusions based on their analysis. This critical thinking ability is very important for their success in various fields of study, because they do not only receive information passively, but also process it actively and reflectively (Ramadhani, NN, et al. 2024). In addition, involvement in a culture of literacy also improves problem-solving skills. Students who are involved in reading complex texts or solving challenges in creative writing learn to approach problems systematically, identify important elements, and design appropriate solutions. For example, through reading fictional stories, students can understand the conflicts and solutions given by the characters in the story, which can be applied to real-life situations (Pratiwi, AL 2020).

Previous research shows that strengthening the six basic literacies (reading, numeracy, science, digital, financial, and citizenship) is an important step in creating competent students who are ready to face the challenges of the 21st century. Teachers act as role models, motivators, and facilitators in instilling this literacy culture. Although there are challenges in limited learning, technology and other alternative methods can be used to ensure that literacy continues to develop in various situations. (Lestari, P. 2019) (Rizqiyah, AM, & Arsanti, M. 2022).

Therefore, a strong literacy culture not only improves students' academic abilities but also equips them with higher-order thinking skills needed in everyday life and the workplace. With better critical thinking and problem-solving skills, students are able to face educational and global challenges with more confidence and competence. (Ahyar, AM, & Zumrotun, E. 2023). This is in line with the goals of 21st century education which emphasizes mastery of global competencies such as creativity, collaboration, and communication. However, there are still many obstacles faced in developing a culture of literacy in schools, such as lack of support from families, an unsupportive environment, and lack of appreciation for literacy activities. Therefore, a holistic approach is needed that involves various parties, including students, teachers, parents, and the community.

Through this research, it is expected to find effective strategies in building a culture of literacy in schools by maximizing the role of students. The focus of this research is how students can take an active role in advancing literacy to improve the quality of education.

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the phenomenon of literacy culture in schools and the role of students in improving the quality of education. Qualitative methods are chosen because they allow researchers to understand social reality in depth through direct interaction with research subjects. Qualitative methods are chosen because they have the advantage of exploring in-depth understanding of complex social realities. This method

focuses on exploring the meaning, experience, and perspectives of individuals or groups in a particular context. By using a qualitative approach, researchers can gain rich insights into how research subjects understand and respond to the phenomenon being studied.

The main advantage of this method is its ability to establish direct interaction between researchers and research subjects. This interaction allows researchers to ask deeper questions, explore details, and understand nuances that may not be visible through quantitative approaches. For example, through in-depth interviews, researchers can explore the views, motivations, and emotions of subjects related to a particular phenomenon. In addition, qualitative methods are suitable for understanding dynamic and contextual social phenomena, where the relationship between variables is often difficult to measure numerically. For example, in research on literacy culture, this method allows researchers to understand how students, teachers, and parents interact in building a culture of literacy, and how the context of the school environment influences this process.

Through qualitative methods, researchers can also identify key themes that emerge from the data, providing a more holistic picture of the phenomenon being studied. Thus, this method not only reveals what happens, but also why and how it happens, providing a deeper understanding of social reality. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with students, teachers, and parents. These interviews aimed to explore their views on the importance of literacy culture and how students can be actively involved in literacy activities. In addition, observations were carried out in the school environment to see how literacy programs are implemented and how students participate in them.

The researcher also used literature study to strengthen the analysis. The literature used included books, journal articles, and previous research reports relevant to the topic of literacy culture and education quality (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The data obtained were analyzed using a thematic approach, which involved grouping data based on relevant themes. In addition, data triangulation was carried out to increase the validity of the research results. Triangulation involves comparing data from various sources, such as interviews, observations, and documents, to ensure consistency and accuracy of the findings (Patton, 2002). The subjects of the study consisted of high school students, subject teachers, and principals in three different schools. The selection of subjects was done by purposive sampling, considering their involvement in literacy programs in schools. The data analysis process involved steps such as interview transcription, data coding, and theme development. The results of the analysis were then interpreted to answer research questions about the role of students in building a culture of literacy in schools.

3. Results and Discussion

a. Understanding and Importance of Literacy Culture in Schools

Literacy culture in schools refers to habits and environments that support the development of literacy skills among students. Literacy is not only reading and writing skills, but also includes the ability to understand, analyze, and communicate information in various forms, whether written, visual, or digital (Aryani, WD, & Purnomo, H. 2023). In schools, literacy culture includes various activities that support students to get used to reading, writing, and thinking critically, both inside and outside the classroom. Literacy culture in schools is built by facilitating various activities that can improve students' literacy skills, such as reading books, writing essays, discussing certain topics, or using technology to search for and disseminate information. Schools that have a strong literacy culture tend to have an environment that encourages students to continue learning and developing their literacy skills all the time (Hasan, M., et al. 2022). The Importance of Literacy Culture in Schools can be explained as follows:

1. Cognitive and Academic Skills Improvement

A strong literacy culture can improve students' cognitive abilities. Reading and writing regularly helps students develop critical, analytical, and problem-solving skills. In addition, literacy is also very important in studying other subjects, because almost all subjects rely on good reading and writing skills (Muliastri, NKE 2020).

2. Preparing Students for the Digital and Information World

In this digital era, the ability to access, evaluate, and use information from various sources is a very important skill. A culture of literacy in schools helps students to be more skilled in using technology and digital media to search for information, understand the content of messages, and communicate effectively in cyberspace.(Cynthia, RE, & Sihotang, H. 2023).

3. Increase Reading Interest and Habits

One of the main focuses of literacy culture is to foster students' interest in reading. When literacy culture is applied consistently, students will be more motivated to read various types of texts, both fiction and nonfiction. This helps students to broaden their horizons, develop their imagination, and enrich their knowledge (Palupi, AN, 2020).

4. Forming Character and Learning Independence

Literacy culture also contributes to the formation of students' character. By accustoming students to reading and writing, they will learn to value knowledge, respect the opinions of others, and develop an open and creative attitude. Literacy also teaches independence in learning, where students can search for information and solve problems independently (Khasanah, U., & Herina, H. 2019, March).

5. Support for Better Academic Achievement

By strengthening the culture of literacy, students will have a stronger foundation to achieve higher academic achievement. Literacy is the foundation for students' ability to understand subject matter, complete assignments, and prepare for exams. Schools that emphasize a culture of literacy tend to have students with better achievements (Humaeroh, S., et al. 2024).

6. Building Effective Communication

Good literacy is also directly related to communication skills. Students who are accustomed to reading and writing will be better able to convey ideas and arguments clearly, both orally and in writing. This is very important in the personal development of students and for their future in the professional world. Overall, building a culture of literacy in schools is a long-term investment that is very important to prepare students for success in their education, careers, and lives. Literacy is a basic skill that not only affects academic achievement but also helps students to become intelligent, critical, and creative individuals in facing the challenges of the times (Abidin, Y., et al. 2021).

b. The Role of Students in Building a Culture of Literacy

Students have a very important role in building a culture of literacy in schools. As the main actors in the learning process, students can make a major contribution by improving their reading and writing habits. By reading various types of books and reading materials, students not only broaden their horizons, but also train their critical and analytical thinking skills. In addition, students who are accustomed to writing, be it journals, essays, or other creative works, can hone their communication skills and express ideas clearly (Gusti, Y. 2020). Student participation in literacy activities, such as book clubs, discussions, and writing competitions, is also very important to create an environment that supports the development of literacy in schools. They can share the knowledge gained through reading or writing with peers, encouraging the creation of an active and collaborative learning atmosphere. In the digital era, students can also utilize technology to access information, share knowledge through online platforms, and expand their literacy horizons. By becoming role models in literacy, students can inspire their friends to read and write more, thereby creating a positive literacy culture throughout the school (Adinda, N., et al. 2024).

C. The Role of Teachers in Supporting Students' Roles in Literacy

The role of teachers is very important in supporting students' roles in literacy, because teachers function as facilitators who help create an environment that supports students' literacy development. Teachers not only teach reading and writing skills, but also guide students to develop sustainable literacy interests and habits. First, teachers can create a fun and interesting learning atmosphere by introducing various types of reading materials that suit students' interests and ability levels (Kholis, MN, et al. 2024). By providing access to various materials, such as story books, scientific articles, and digital texts, teachers can encourage students to read more and expand their knowledge. In addition, teachers play a role in teaching deeper literacy skills, such as the ability to analyze, assess, and interpret information. This is very important to help students understand more complex texts and develop critical thinking skills (Pratiwi, S., & Dewi, TU 2023). Teachers can also use various teaching methods that combine digital technology to improve student literacy, such as using interactive learning applications or online resources. Teachers also act as mentors in developing students' writing skills. By providing constructive feedback, teachers help students improve their writing skills, both in terms of structure, grammar, and idea development. In addition, teachers can design tasks that encourage students to write creatively, such as writing essays, stories, or other literacy-based projects. Moreover, teachers also have a role as motivators who can inspire students to like literacy activities more. By giving praise or awards for students' efforts in reading or writing, teachers can increase students' self-confidence and encourage them to continue to develop in literacy skills. Overall, teachers play a very large role in supporting students' roles in literacy by creating a supportive environment, providing appropriate guidance, and motivating students to continue to improve their literacy skills, both individually and in collaboration with peers (Fitriani, A., et al. 2022).

d. Challenges in Building a Culture of Literacy in Elementary Schools

Building a culture of literacy in elementary schools faces a number of challenges that need to be addressed to create an environment that supports students' literacy development. The first challenge is the lack of interest in reading among students. Many students are less interested or not used to reading, especially with various distractions such as social media and other digital entertainment that are more interesting to them. This makes students tend to be reluctant to allocate time to read books or other reading materials. The second challenge is limited resources. Many elementary schools face the problem of limited access to quality books and other literacy support facilities, such as adequate libraries or technology that can support digital literacy activities. Without sufficient resources, it is difficult to create an effective and sustainable literacy culture in schools (Tulodo, RP et al. 2024).

Furthermore, a dense and exam-focused curriculum is also a challenge. In many elementary schools, the curriculum tends to focus more on academic achievement through exams, so that literacy activities are often considered additional activities and not the main part of the learning process. This causes students and teachers to focus more on other aspects, while literacy does not receive adequate attention. Differences in students' literacy abilities are also a challenge. In a class consisting of students with different reading and writing abilities, teachers often find it difficult to provide appropriate material for all students. Some students may already have good literacy skills, while others need a special approach to understand and enjoy literacy activities (Anggraena., et al. 2022).

In addition, the lack of training for teachers in effective literacy teaching methods is also a challenge. Many teachers have not received adequate training to use technology in literacy or to teach literacy skills in a comprehensive and enjoyable way. Without adequate training, teachers may struggle to deliver literacy materials in a way that is engaging and relevant to students. Another challenge is the lack of support from parents. Many parents do not fully support literacy activities at home or do not have the time and resources to be involved in supporting their children's literacy. Without this support, a culture of literacy in schools cannot develop optimally. Overcoming these challenges requires a collaborative effort between

teachers, students, parents, and schools to create an environment that supports a strong and sustainable culture of literacy in elementary schools.(Nurhidayat., et al. 2022).

The results of the study showed that students play a central role in the success of literacy programs in schools. Student involvement in literacy activities, such as shared reading, book discussions, and creative writing, has a positive impact on their learning motivation. In addition, student-based literacy programs, such as reading clubs and writing competitions, have been shown to increase reading interest among students. For example, in one of the schools studied, the formation of student-led book discussion groups succeeded in attracting the participation of more than 70% of students in the school.

Teachers also play an important role in supporting student engagement. Teachers who give students the freedom to choose reading materials tend to be more successful in fostering reading interest. In addition, support from teachers in the form of appreciation for student work, such as publishing student writing in the school magazine, provides additional motivation for students. Reading together, for example, allows students to share reading experiences with their friends, deepen their understanding of the text, and develop discussion and critical thinking skills. This activity can also increase a sense of togetherness among students, which in turn can strengthen their commitment to learning. Book discussions, as part of literacy activities, provide opportunities for students to voice their opinions and share ideas with their friends. This improves speaking and listening skills, and encourages students to delve deeper into the content of the reading, understand various points of view, and think analytically. Involvement in discussions also enriches their learning experience, making them more connected to the material being studied.

Creative writing, whether in the form of stories, essays, or poems, also has a great influence on students' motivation to learn. This activity not only improves their writing skills, but also allows students to express themselves, imagine, and explore their creativity. Writing gives students the freedom to express their ideas freely, which can increase their self-confidence and involvement in the learning process. Overall, students' involvement in literacy activities not only enriches their reading and writing skills but also increases their motivation to learn. By being more involved in fun and meaningful literacy activities, students become more motivated to learn and appreciate the importance of literacy in their lives.

Parental involvement is also important. This study found that students who receive literacy support from parents at home, such as providing reading books and special time for reading, tend to be more active in literacy activities at school. However, challenges remain. Some students admit that they have difficulty finding time for literacy activities due to heavy academic burdens. Therefore, school policies are needed that provide special space for literacy activities, such as literacy hours or literacy activities outside of class hours. In addition, the results of the study also show that collaboration between students and other parties, such as literacy communities or regional libraries, can improve the quality of literacy programs in schools. This collaboration provides opportunities for students to learn from the experiences of others and broaden their horizons. In the context of education, a strong literacy culture not only improves students' cognitive abilities but also shapes their character. Students who are active in literacy tend to have high curiosity, empathy, and good communication skills.

4. Conclusions

Literacy culture in schools is highly dependent on the active role of students as the main actors in each process. The success of a literacy program will be achieved if students are directly involved in reading, writing, and discussion activities. With a holistic approach, literacy is not only limited to language subjects, but is also integrated into various disciplines, developing students' critical and creative thinking skills. In addition, a collaborative approach involving cooperation between students, teachers, and parents is very important to create a supportive literacy ecosystem inside and outside of school. Adequate facilities in schools, such as a complete library and creative space, are also determining factors in developing a literacy culture. No less important, in an increasingly digitally connected world, digital and media literacy must be an integral part of school literacy programs, to equip students with the ability

to access, assess, and use information wisely. Overall, through a holistic, collaborative approach and supportive environmental support, a literacy culture in schools can develop well and prepare students to face increasingly complex educational and life challenges.

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