

INVESTIGATES THE ROLE OF LITERACY IN EDUCATION AT THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

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Abstract

This paper investigates the role of literacy in education at the junior high school level, emphasizing its importance as a foundational skill for academic and personal development. Literacy in this context goes beyond the ability to read and write; it includes digital literacy, media literacy, and critical thinking. The study examines how literacy is taught across various subjects, the pedagogical strategies employed by teachers, and the challenges faced in enhancing students' literacy competencies. Using a qualitative approach, data were gathered through interviews with educators, classroom observations, and analysis of instructional materials. The findings suggest that while basic literacy is being addressed, there is a need to integrate broader literacy concepts to better prepare students for future academic demands and real-world challenges. The paper concludes with suggestions for improving literacy instruction through curriculum development, teacher training, and the use of technology-enhanced learning tools.

Keywords: literacy, junior high school, education

INTRODUCTION

Literacy constitutes a cornerstone of educational development, serving as the essential conduit through which learners' access, process, and apply knowledge within both academic settings and broader real-world contexts. While conventionally associated with the basic ability to read and write, the concept of literacy has evolved significantly to encompass a wider array of competencies, including the capacity to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and engage with a diverse range of information and communication modalities. At the junior high school level—where students undergo pivotal stages of cognitive, emotional, and social development—literacy assumes a particularly critical role in supporting not only academic achievement but also the foundational skills necessary for lifelong learning and informed citizenship.

In light of the complexities and uncertainties that characterize the twenty-first century, a broader and more integrative understanding of literacy is indispensable. As emphasized by the World Economic Forum (2016), students must acquire a combination of foundational literacies (such as reading, writing, and numeracy), competencies (including problem-solving and critical thinking), and character qualities (like resilience and adaptability) to succeed in a globalized, rapidly changing world. Consequently, literacy education must extend beyond the mechanical act of reading traditional print texts and embrace

multiliteracies, which involve the interaction with digital, visual, auditory, and multimodal forms of information that are increasingly prevalent in modern learning environments (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Unsworth & Chan, 2009).

Despite widespread recognition of literacy's significance, Indonesian students have consistently underperformed in international literacy assessments, reflecting systemic educational challenges. For instance, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2011 ranked Indonesian fourth-grade students 42nd out of 45 participating countries in reading literacy, while the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2015 placed Indonesia 64th out of 70 countries, signaling a nationwide literacy crisis (OECD, 2016). These troubling statistics underscore persistent issues such as overreliance on textbook-centered instruction and a limited conceptualization of literacy, often reduced to a brief, ritualistic pre-class reading activity rather than being understood as a dynamic and integrative element of all learning processes.

In response to these challenges, the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture launched the School Literacy Movement (*Gerakan Literasi Sekolah*) in 2016, with the aim of fostering character development and cultivating reading habits through the systematic incorporation of literacy instruction across all subject areas (Wiedarti, Pangesti, & Kisyani-Laksono, 2016). This initiative, aligned with the revised 2013 Curriculum, provided training for teachers of various disciplines to embed literacy strategies into their lesson planning and instructional practices.

Nevertheless, empirical studies indicate that, although many junior high school teachers have begun to integrate literacy strategies into their pedagogy, their implementation remains inconsistent, implicit, and often lacks the depth required to make a substantial impact on student learning outcomes. Critical strategies—such as making predictions, identifying unfamiliar vocabulary, utilizing non-textbook resources, and organizing information through visual tools like graphic organizers—are frequently underemployed, and in many cases, educators lack sufficient familiarity with the principles of multimodal literacy and the importance of explicit instruction, both of which are vital in the current media-rich, digitally mediated educational landscape (Kisyani-Laksono & Retnaningdyah, 2017; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005).

Given these conditions, there is an urgent need to reconceptualize the role of literacy in junior high school education, not as an isolated concern of language instruction but as a cross-curricular pedagogical imperative. Literacy strategies must be systematically implemented across all subject areas to nurture students' higher-order thinking skills, including critical analysis, problem-solving, and metacognitive awareness (Robb, 2003; Greenleaf et al., 2011). Accordingly, this study seeks to investigate the extent to which literacy strategies are embedded within lesson plans and teaching practices among junior high school teachers, while also exploring the broader implications for educational policy, teacher training, and classroom implementation to ensure that literacy functions as a tangible and transformative element of effective instruction.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to explore the use of literacy strategies in Junior High School education. The data were collected from three primary sources: lesson plans, classroom observations, and teacher interviews.

Data Sources

1. Lesson Plans

The study analyzed lesson plans written by teachers from fifteen different subjects taught at the Junior High School level. These subjects included Islamic Studies, Catholic Studies, Christian Studies, Hindu Studies, Buddhist Studies, Confucianism, Indonesian Language, English, Science, Mathematics, Social Studies, Arts, Crafts, Civics, and Physical Education.

2. Classroom Observations

Teachers' teaching practices were observed during training sessions. Observations aimed to identify which literacy strategies were actually implemented during instruction.

3. Interviews

Interviews were conducted with selected teachers to gain deeper insight into the reasons behind the presence or absence of specific literacy strategies in their lesson plans and teaching practices.

Instruments

An observation and analysis checklist based on a literacy strategy framework was used to examine: The presence of specific literacy strategies in lesson plan stages (before reading, while reading, after reading), The actual application of those strategies during classroom teaching.

Procedure Lesson plans were collected and analyzed to identify explicitly stated literacy strategies. During teacher training sessions, direct observations were carried out to assess how teachers implement literacy strategies. After the observations, semi-structured interviews were conducted with several teachers to understand their perceptions and challenges regarding literacy integration. This multi-method approach allowed the researchers to triangulate the findings and provide a comprehensive picture of the role and implementation of literacy strategies in the Junior High School context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This research was conducted to explore how far literacy strategies have been integrated by junior high school teachers into various subjects, both in the written lesson plans (RPP) and in actual teaching practices, especially during the training phase for the revised 2013 Curriculum; these literacy strategies are grouped into three main stages, namely before reading, during reading, and after reading, with each stage having specific functions in guiding students' comprehension and engagement with texts.

Based on the analysis of 15 lesson plans, it can be seen that although most teachers have included some literacy elements in their learning processes, the depth and consistency of their application vary significantly, where the strategies most frequently found were those that involved identifying learning objectives (used by approximately 93% of teachers) and extracting key information from texts (present in 100% of the lesson plans), while other strategies—such as making predictions before reading (only 13%), confirming or revising those predictions afterward (just 7%), and helping students identify difficult vocabulary (20%)—were rarely used or not explicitly stated (Kisyani-Laksono & Retnaningdyah, 2017, p. 167).

These findings indicate that although many teachers are already practicing certain components of literacy instruction, they often do so without a clear understanding of the theoretical concepts or pedagogical terminology behind these strategies; for example, stating

the purpose of learning is often perceived merely as a routine or administrative step rather than being recognized as a literacy activity aligned with the multiliteracies approach (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), which places emphasis on meaning-making across diverse contexts.

Interestingly, when interviewed, several teachers expressed feelings of “relief” upon learning that many of the activities they already carry out in their classrooms—such as asking students to analyze or summarize texts—are actually part of recognized literacy strategies, and this realization reflects the flexible nature of literacy practices, which can be applied across a variety of teaching models, including project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and the scientific approach, as emphasized by Robb (2003) and Toolin (2004).

However, some essential and proven-effective strategies still remain underutilized, such as the use of graphic organizers (which appeared in only 13% of the lesson plans), even though numerous studies have shown their role in improving students’ metacognitive skills and comprehension (Robinson et al., 2006; Lee & Tan, 2010); similarly, the use and understanding of multimodal texts—such as diagrams, audio materials, or visual texts—is still very limited, as many teachers continue to interpret literacy narrowly, equating it solely with reading printed texts, and therefore overlooking other important forms of communication like images, videos, and digital media (Unsworth & Chan, 2009).

Moreover, it was found that some teachers tend to delegate full responsibility for understanding difficult vocabulary to the students themselves, without providing effective vocabulary learning strategies such as using contextual clues, even though research has shown that this approach is more beneficial than relying solely on dictionaries (Beers et al., 2010), which reflects the pressing need for ongoing, hands-on teacher development programs that emphasize practical applications, as recommended by Pahl & Rowsell (2005).

In addition, although children today are surrounded by diverse and rapidly evolving forms of information, the incorporation of multimodal texts—like illustrations, diagrams, and video content—remains rare in junior high school classrooms, despite the fact that the ability to interpret and create meaning from multiple forms of media is a vital component of 21st-century literacy skills (Sewell et al., 2011; Clary et al., 2013).

Ultimately, this study highlights that the role of literacy in junior high school education is not only foundational for students’ critical thinking, communication, and analysis, but also pivotal for preparing them to thrive in modern, complex learning environments; however, the current implementation of literacy strategies—assessed through the analysis of ten lesson plans across five core subjects—shows an average application rate of only 55%, with some strategies like identifying key information and using “think aloud” methods being frequently employed, while other higher-order strategies such as evaluating texts, producing multimodal responses, and revisiting predictions are either rarely applied or completely absent, which points to the urgent need for stronger curriculum integration, cross-subject training, and a broader understanding of literacy beyond traditional print-based definitions (Abidin, 2017; Kemendikbud, 2018; Fisher & Frey, 2008; Ming, 2012).

CONCLUSION

The integration of literacy-based learning strategies into classroom instruction is fundamentally essential for nurturing a broad spectrum of students’ cognitive and interpersonal competencies including critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, character building, and metacognitive awareness and while this study affirms that many teachers acknowledge and support the pedagogical importance of such strategies, their actual implementation remains inconsistent and frequently superficial, as

evidenced by the limited use of core literacy techniques such as predicting content, identifying complex vocabulary, making connections across texts, engaging with alternative sources, and constructing multimodal expressions, all of which are vital to achieving the holistic objectives of 21st century education moreover, the findings highlight a troubling disconnect between the expectations embedded in the Independent Curriculum which positions literacy as a central vehicle for enhancing comprehension, critical analysis, and lifelong learning and the real practices observed in junior high school classrooms, where lesson plans often fail to incorporate essential indicators like vocabulary clarification, inference making, mode transformation, and prediction revision, thereby signaling the urgent need for targeted professional development programs that not only raise educators' awareness of the practical significance of these strategies but also equip them with the skills to integrate such approaches effectively and consistently across subject areas, ensuring that students are empowered with the cognitive and reflective tools necessary for academic achievement and adaptive success in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

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