



Strategy for improving school literacy culture in developing student character at Madrasah in Palu city

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the strategy for improving school literacy culture to develop student character at Madrasahs in Palu City. This study employs a multiple case study method. Data were collected through field observation, in-depth interviews with the school's Principal, vice principals, teachers, and students. Data were also gathered through the analysis of written materials, such as teaching materials and teaching plans. The validity of the data was ensured through source and method triangulation techniques. The findings show that the implementation of the school literacy movement in Palu City has shown great potential in shaping students' character through strengthening an integrated literacy culture, involving the active roles of teachers, parents, madrasah principals, and all school components in creating a comprehensive literacy learning environment. The success of this program is supported by integrating literacy across all subjects, improving teacher competency, involving families and communities as partners, and regular evaluation and monitoring to ensure the program remains relevant and effective. However, to achieve optimal results, further strengthening of literacy facilities, especially digital literacy, is needed through the provision of libraries, reading corners, and adequate internet access, as well as more intensive communication among stakeholders, so that a culture of literacy develops not only in schools but also at home.

Keywords: School literacy, Literacy culture, Students' character, Madrasah

1. Introduction

The development of student character through strengthening character education is often carried out through the implementation of the school literacy movement (Achdiyaradzan, Nurdin, & Alhabsyi, 2022; Berkowitz & Bier, 2007) [1, 6]. The school literacy movement is an initiative that aims to improve students' literacy skills through reading, writing, and text comprehension activities (Ali, Afwadzi, Abdullah, & Mukmin, 2021) [2]. In addition, the School Literacy Movement also plays an important role in shaping positive attitudes and values in students, such as a love of reading, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and independence. Within the school literacy movement, students can develop literacy skills that include reading with comprehension, writing with good expression, and accessing, interpreting, and using various types of texts. In addition, through literacy activities that involve social interaction, students can also acquire important character values in everyday life (Rustina *et al.*, 2026) [16]. Thus, the school literacy movement is an integral part of instilling character education to shape high-quality students ready to face life's challenges. The school literacy movement also provides students with space to learn about and love national culture through reading local content, while broadening their understanding of global dynamics. By forming good literacy habits, students not only have the skills to process information but also a wise attitude in using it. Therefore, literacy in schools

must continue to be strengthened as a foundation for producing an intelligent generation with character and resilience in facing the challenges of the times.

Increasing the school literacy movement's focus on character development among students is a concrete step towards producing a generation of intellectually gifted young people, both individually and socially (Au, 1998) [5]. Therefore, most schools in various regions of Indonesia currently project an increase in literacy culture as "one indicator of achieving school quality based on student character development." Through the school literacy movement, it is hoped that students' personalities will be formed and they will possess intellectual competence, enabling them to face the challenges of the 21st century. One example is schools in Central Sulawesi, from elementary to secondary levels, that aim to shape students' personalities so they possess character traits aligned with the school's characteristics.

Efforts to improve the school literacy movement in Central Sulawesi reflect the global education community's commitment to preparing a young generation that is not only academically intelligent but also possesses strong character aligned with the nation's noble values. Each school strives to instill a culture of literacy through various creative programs, such as reading corners, literacy classes, daily journals, and even writing and poetry reading competitions. These activities are not merely formalities but also serve as a platform for character development, such as discipline, curiosity, hard

work, and independence. The school literacy movement, particularly in Palu City, has been implemented by several schools, for example, at State Junior High School 5 Model, which is developing Environmental Literacy as an effort to shape student character. The implementation begins with the example of teachers interacting with students, and is then implemented in the Development of Environmentally Based Teaching Materials. Nature and Social Sciences contained in the RPP for Social Studies subjects at State Junior High School 5 Model, Palu City.

The implementation of the school literacy movement at State Junior High School 5 Model, Palu City, serves as a concrete example of how literacy can be integrated with character education through a contextual approach. The environmental literacy developed not only teaches students to understand texts but also fosters awareness of the natural and social conditions around them. Teachers, as role models, play a crucial role in instilling character values, such as environmental awareness, discipline, and responsibility, which are then reinforced through the development of environmentally based teaching materials. The integration of environmental literacy into the Social Studies Lesson Plan provides students with the opportunity to connect theory with the realities of everyday life. Through activities such as field observations, group discussions, and writing reports based on direct experience, students not only acquire literacy skills but also develop caring, critical, and solution-oriented characters in addressing environmental issues. Thus, the School Literacy Movement at State Junior High School 5 Model, Palu City, serves as a good practice that can inspire other schools to develop relevant literacy programs oriented towards character building.

2. Literature review

2.1 School literacy movement

The school literacy movement is a program or movement aimed at fostering character in students, cultivating a culture of reading and writing, and thereby promoting learning (Cairney, 2002) [7]. The specific objectives of the school literacy movement are to foster literacy within the school environment and enhance knowledge management through a fun, child-friendly school environment that fosters reading strategies, ensuring the continuity of learning. Therefore, the School Literacy Movement, in this study, encompasses the intellectual and personal development of students through various development innovations to foster literate individuals capable of contributing to the development of the nation and state. The school literacy movement is not limited to reading books; its implementation involves a compulsory reading curriculum derived from the manual supporting its implementation. From the time children enter elementary school, they are assisted in reading correctly. Full concentration while reading is essential (Shibata & Omura, 2020) [17]. Sometimes people lose focus when reading books, just as they do when reading news in newspapers. Practice focused reading, and carefully repeat sentences you don't understand. Pause for a moment, and repeat them until you truly understand. After you've finished reading, try to create your own questions related to the topic and answer

them yourself, then write down the key points from the chapter you've read (Kieffer & Weaver, 2024) [8]. This way, you can be sure that you've studied seriously.

In the context of this research, efforts to enhance the School Literacy Movement are seen as concrete steps toward intellectual development and the strengthening of student identity. Various innovations need to be continuously introduced, both through curriculum development, literacy-based learning methods, and creative programs such as reading corners, literacy journals, and collaborations with libraries. By developing literate individuals, students are expected to not only keep up with current developments but also actively contribute to nation-building through thoughts, attitudes, and actions that reflect an intelligent, character-driven, and competitive generation. This research aims to explore the forms of literacy culture implemented by schools, including planning, implementation, and continuous evaluation, to enhance literacy culture within these schools. The designated locations are Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Muhammadiyah Nunu and MI Alkhaerat Pengawu in Palu City.

2.2 Character building for students

The word "character" means a psychological trait, morality, or character that distinguishes one person from another (Allport, 1921; Aslamzai, Del, & Sajid, 2024) [3, 4]. Furthermore, character also means what a person brings from birth. Character differentiates between people, reflected in their actions and behavior. Students, or other terms used in education, are the main subjects in the implementation of learning that involves teachers as educators with the main task of educating, teaching, and directing. The educational process is not only about the provision of knowledge but also about the formation of positive character to support good learning outcomes, so as to produce output that is on target. The definition of character building for students in this study is a continuous process of formation carried out in education to instill basic values or character in a person and to build that person's personality, both character values for God and character values for humanity (Valeeva & Kalimullin, 2024) [19]. Teachers can begin educating students' character by fostering nationalistic values, instilling mutual respect and tolerance.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle defined character as a life of action that relates to oneself and others (Robinson, 2006) [13]. Aristotle reminded us of something that tends to be forgotten today: a virtuous life includes both self-oriented virtues (such as self-control and moderation) and other-oriented virtues (such as generosity and compassion), and these two virtues are related. Character, as contemporary philosopher Michael Novak observes, is "a compatible blend of all the virtues identified by religious traditions, literary narratives, sages, and the collectives of reasonable people throughout history." Russell Williams described character as a "muscle," which becomes flabby if not exercised. With practice, the "muscles" of character become stronger and become habits. People with character do not engage in activities out of fear of punishment, but out of love for the good. From the perspectives of Aristotle,

Novak, and Williams, it can be concluded that character is not something that arises instantly, but rather the result of a dynamic interaction among personal virtues, social virtues, habituation, and teleological orientation. Aristotle emphasized the interconnectedness between virtues that govern the self and virtues that govern social relations, so that character is formed in a balanced way. Novak broadens the horizon by emphasizing that character is the nexus of virtues drawn from religious traditions, literature, and human wisdom. Williams, through the metaphor of a "muscle," emphasizes that virtue will become habitus only through consistent practice.

3. Methodology

This study uses qualitative methods. In qualitative research, theory serves only as a guide for data gathering and analysis (Nurdin & Pettalongi, 2022; Nurdin, Stockdale, & Scheepers, 2016) [9, 12]. The data was collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and written document analysis at the research site (Rusli, Hasyim, & Nurdin, 2021; Rusli & Nurdin, 2022) [14, 15]. The research was conducted within four Islamic elementary schools in Palu City, Indonesia. The researcher chose the schools based on the consideration that the Islamic elementary schools were implementing a literacy policy to support students' character building. The results of this study can later serve as a reference and a guideline for integrating literacy policy with character building at the elementary school level and for making schools a model for other educational institutions.

Data were collected through direct observation, focus group discussion, in-depth interviews, and written document analysis. The interviews involved the school principal, five teachers, and ten students. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were consulted with participants to obtain their consent (Nurdin, Scheepers, & Stockdale, 2022; Nurdin, Stockdale, & Scheepers, 2014) [10, 11]. The data analysis used a deductive approach, which can be interpreted as a research procedure that produces deductive data from interviews and field notes. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis from Strauss and Corbin (1998) [18]. The analysis started with open, axial, and selective coding. The final result of the data analysis is the set of themes identified from the data.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Implementasi Gerakan Literasi Sekolah

The school literacy movement in Palu City has been implemented through various structured programs since its inception, including 15 minutes of shared reading every morning, the provision of reading corners in each classroom, and writing and reading competitions. These various programs are designed to create a culture of literacy in schools and improve students' reading habits. Meanwhile, activities are organized regularly and consistently to help ensure that the literacy program becomes an integral part of the school day. The various forms of support available, including from the Palu City government, are evident in the results of interviews with the head of the Palu City Ministry of Religious Affairs.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) has established various policies and strategic programs to improve the culture of literacy in the school environment. One of the main programs initiated is the School Literacy Movement (GLS), which is an integral part of the Character Education Strengthening Program (PPK). This program aims to instill reading and writing habits from an early age and to build a literacy ecosystem that supports the learning process in schools. The main goal of GLS is to shape students' character by improving literacy skills, not limited to reading and writing, but encompassing various other aspects such as digital literacy, financial literacy, scientific literacy, cultural and civic literacy, and numeracy literacy. With GLS, it is hoped that students will develop critical thinking skills, filter and understand information wisely, and be better prepared to face the challenges of the digital era. Furthermore, this program also involves various stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and the wider community, to create an environment conducive to the sustainable development of student literacy.

The School Literacy Movement (GLS) program, initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, is a strategic and comprehensive step towards building an educational foundation that strengthens character and life skills for the 21st century. By expanding the scope of literacy beyond reading and writing to include digital, financial, scientific, cultural, civic, and numeracy literacy, GLS demonstrates its relevance to the needs of the times, which demand critical, creative, and adaptive thinking skills. Multi-stakeholder involvement, from teachers, parents, to the community, is key to the success of this program, because literacy is not solely the responsibility of schools, but rather a collective movement. However, for the GLS goals to be achieved optimally, consistent implementation, adequate infrastructure support, and continuous evaluation are needed to ensure that a culture of literacy is truly internalized by students and becomes part of their daily lives. In an interview with the Principal of the Madrasah, he emphasized the importance of the school's role in developing a culture of literacy as part of the formation of student character. According to him, literacy is not only the ability to read and write, but also a foundation for developing critical and creative thinking skills among students.

One informant explained that the school is currently integrating the School Literacy Movement (GLS) program into various learning and extracurricular activities. For example, this includes providing reading corners in each classroom, holding group reading programs before class, and involving students in short story writing competitions and book reviews. Furthermore, the Principal highlighted the importance of digital literacy in the technological era. He stated that students need to be trained not only to access information but also to verify its accuracy and use it wisely. "We want children to not only be good at reading texts, but also to be able to interpret data, understand digital information, and be aware of the importance of using media responsibly," he explained.

Furthermore, the involvement of teachers, parents, and the surrounding community is considered crucial. The school strives to collaborate with parents through storytelling

activities, book donations, and family literacy training. Support from the surrounding community is also seen as a strengthening factor, ensuring that literacy becomes not only a school activity but also a culture at home and in the community. Furthermore, the Madrasah Principal hopes that through GLS and various other literacy initiatives, students will develop character, possess strong reasoning skills, and be able to face the challenges of the times. "Literacy is the primary foundation for producing a superior and competitive generation," stated one Principal as follows:

As the Principal of a Madrasah, I view literacy as a crucial foundation in education. For us, literacy is not just the ability to read and write, but also to understand, analyze, and use information appropriately. Especially in today's era, literacy must be broader, encompassing digital literacy, scientific literacy, financial literacy, cultural literacy, and even civic literacy. At school, we have strived to integrate the School Literacy Movement (GLS) into various activities. One step we have taken is to get students into the habit of reading for 15 minutes before class begins. Furthermore, we provide each class with a reading corner, and we regularly hold literacy competitions, including short story writing, poetry, and book reviews. In this way, children not only become accustomed to reading but also learn to express their ideas in writing.

The involvement of various parties, including teachers, parents, and the community, demonstrates that the literacy program at this school is not seen as the sole responsibility of the educational institution. Instead, literacy is positioned as a collective movement that requires multi-stakeholder collaboration. This finding aligns with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's policy that GLS must involve all stakeholders to foster a strong and sustainable literacy ecosystem. Therefore, this interview reinforces that the success of a literacy program depends not only on policy but also on the Principal's commitment to implementing concrete strategies that are oriented towards the needs of the times and prioritize collaboration. This finding also underscores the crucial role of school leadership in shaping the direction and quality of literacy implementation within educational units.

4.2 Facilities and human resources

Schools in Palu City strive to provide facilities that support literacy activities, including libraries with diverse book collections and reading corners in each classroom. Despite limited book collections, schools collaborate with regional libraries to enrich available resources. Providing these facilities is a crucial step toward enabling students to access quality reading materials. The availability of these facilities is evident in the Deputy Principal for Curriculum's statement as follows. The facilities and infrastructure at our school are generally sufficient to support literacy-strengthening programs. We have a representative library with a diverse collection of books, including textbooks, supplementary books, and general reading materials such as novels, magazines, and popular science

literature. This collection is regularly updated to remain relevant to developments in knowledge and student needs. The library also features a comfortable reading room for independent study and group discussions.

In addition, each class has been equipped with a reading corner containing a collection of light books tailored to students' interests and ages. This reading corner is an effective means to foster a reading culture among students, because they can use their free time in class to read. The reading corner also serves as a literacy facility close to students, so that reading activities are not confined to the library but can be done any time in the classroom. Digital literacy, the school has also provided adequate internet access. This facility supports students and teachers in searching for references, accessing digital teaching materials, and introducing students to digital literacy skills that are relevant to current developments. Teachers can also utilize digital devices, such as projectors and computers, to support literacy-based learning.

Although existing facilities and infrastructure are adequate, we recognize that there is still room for improvement. For example, we need to expand our book collection to include new themes that align with today's reading interests, improve the quality of our internet connection to make it more stable, and procure additional digital devices to support technology-based literacy. With these improvements, literacy strengthening in schools can be more optimal and have a greater impact on student development. Literacy strengthening can be achieved through various school activities, such as providing reading corners in each classroom, conducting teacher training on literacy, and using diverse learning methods.

4.3 The roles of teachers in the school literacy movement

a. Literacy integration in curriculum

Teachers play a crucial role in integrating literacy activities into the curriculum. They assign specific books to read, lead class discussions about the books, and guide students in writing summaries or book reviews. In this way, teachers not only teach reading skills but also help students understand and apply the knowledge gained from their reading. This is evident in the following informant's statement:

Literacy strategies in schools are implemented comprehensively through 15-minute reading sessions before class, developing interests through book clubs and creative writing projects, and integrating literacy into every subject. Literacy activities in the classroom are presented in a fun way through play, storytelling, and shared reading, supported by facilities such as reading corners or literacy corners. This approach helps students become accustomed to reading without feeling overwhelmed and fosters their ability to comprehend texts, think critically, and express ideas.

This information statement demonstrates that the classroom literacy activities have been systematically designed and implemented, integrating aspects of habituation, interest development, and the strengthening of student character. Establishing a reading habit before class begins is an important foundation for a literacy routine that is not coercive but rather

built on a fun, conducive atmosphere. The use of classroom reading corners, play methods, storytelling, and shared reading reflects a pedagogical approach that is responsive to students' characteristics, allowing literacy activities to be more naturally and sustainably accepted. Furthermore, developing literacy interests through book clubs, creative writing projects, and awarding students who actively read demonstrates the effectiveness of motivational strategies.

The programs not only improve reading and writing skills but also foster the internalization of positive values such as responsibility, caring, and self-confidence. Although barriers remain for students with low reading abilities or limited interests, the collaborative efforts of teachers and peers in providing support and motivation demonstrate the school's commitment to inclusivity. Overall, these findings indicate that a holistic, consistent, and student-centered literacy approach has strong potential to foster a sustainable literacy culture in the classroom environment.

The literacy habituation strategy implemented by the Class Representative demonstrates a comprehensive approach while simultaneously being oriented towards character building and student skills. The 15-minute reading activity before class, book clubs, and creative writing projects are concrete efforts that not only foster reading habits but also hone critical thinking, speaking, and writing skills in a balanced manner. The integration of literacy across all subjects further strengthens the school's literacy ecosystem, especially through the exemplary role of teachers, who serve as primary motivators and facilitators. The challenge ahead may lie in maintaining consistency and ensuring the program's sustainability. Still, with the involvement of all parties and continued innovation, this strategy has the potential to produce a literate generation who loves reading, is creative, and is ready to face the challenges of the times.

b. Motivating and Supporting

Teachers are responsible for motivating students to be interested in literacy activities. They employ creative, fun approaches, such as storytelling sessions, reading competitions, and literacy projects in class. Furthermore, teachers provide individual support to students experiencing reading or writing difficulties, ensuring that each student receives the attention needed to develop. The following statement from a class representative illustrates the teacher's approach in this regard:

We ensure that all teachers actively participate in developing a culture of literacy by providing concrete examples in literacy activities. Teachers recommend relevant reading materials, share reading experiences, and assign literacy-based assignments to develop students' reading and writing skills. Through this active role, teachers not only teach technical literacy skills but also integrate them into the learning process. This enables students to understand, process, and apply knowledge from reading more deeply in various learning contexts.

This statement affirms the role of teachers as key actors in the sustainability of the school's systematically designed literacy habituation strategy. Active teacher participation through role models, reading recommendations, and literacy-based assignments strengthens the effectiveness of the reading habituation program, which has become a daily routine. With direct teacher involvement, literacy activities do not stop at mere habits but become meaningful, directed learning processes.

c. Collaboration with parents

Teachers collaborate with parents to support reading habits at home. Through programs like "Home Reading Books," teachers encourage parents to participate in their children's literacy activities. This collaboration is crucial for creating a supportive reading environment at both school and home. This can be seen in teacher interviews.

In our literacy program, we focus not only on school activities but also strive to involve parents so that reading habits continue at home. One example is the "Home Reading Books" program. Through this program, we lend books to students to read with their parents at home. This way, parents not only accompany their children while they study but are also invited to participate in reading activities.

Collaboration between teachers and parents is crucial, as a consistent literacy environment at school and at home will more effectively foster children's interest in reading. Through this collaboration, children become accustomed to reading not only because of school demands, but also because they feel supported and cared for by their families. The results are quite visible: some children have begun bringing their reading material to school for discussion, and some have even become more enthusiastic about borrowing books, encouraged by their parents.

5. Conclusion

The implementation of the school literacy movement in Palu City has shown great potential to shape students' character by strengthening an integrated literacy culture and involving teachers, parents, madrasah principals, and all school components in creating a comprehensive literacy learning environment. The success of this program is supported by integrating literacy across all subjects, improving teacher competency, involving families and communities as partners, and regular evaluation and monitoring to ensure the program remains relevant and effective. However, to achieve optimal results, further strengthening of literacy facilities, especially digital literacy, is needed through the provision of libraries, reading corners, and adequate internet access, as well as more intensive communication among stakeholders, so that a culture of literacy develops not only in schools but also at home.

With formulated strategies and recommendations and consistent and planned implementation literacy policy in Palu City has the potential to continue to develop as a successful model in improving the quality of education and student character, while fostering critical, creative, and productive attitudes needed to face global challenges, so that it can make

a significant contribution to the progress of education in Palu City and become an inspiration for other regions. Overall, the School Literacy Movement in Palu City has had a significant positive impact on student character, not only in reading and writing skills but also in the development of attitudes such as responsibility, discipline, and critical thinking. Policy support from the Palu City Ministry of Religious Affairs, which mandates literacy programs in every school and provides teacher training, has strengthened the program's implementation. Regular evaluation and monitoring ensure that the literacy program runs well and continues to improve. With an organized structure, the involvement of all school components, and supportive policies, the School Literacy Movement in Palu City has succeeded in creating an environment that supports the development of student character through sustainable literacy.

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