

Exploring the School Literacy Program and Reading Interest of Fourth-Grade Students in Muaro Jambi Regency

Eca Safitri^{✉1}, Sukendro¹ & Hendra Sofyan¹

¹ Master's Program in Primary Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Jambi, Jambi, Indonesia

✉ ecasafitri752@gmail.com

Abstract: This case study examined how school literacy programs were carried out in practice and how implementation connected to fourth graders' reading interest, in four elementary schools in Sekernan District, Muaro Jambi Regency, Indonesia. The four schools sit along the same access road within one sub-district, and were chosen through criterion sampling because preliminary observation showed a similar symptom, inconsistent fifteen-minute reading, at each school. Over twelve days, the researcher observed without participating, interviewed twenty-four informants (principals, teachers, students, librarians, staff), and reviewed documents, then analyzed the material using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's within-case and cross-case procedures. Literacy practice across all four schools remained at a shaky habituation stage: only the reading session and library visits were running at all, and even those only partially, while writing and appreciation activities never happened. Across every site, the literacy slot was handed to numeracy content on one of three observed days, suggesting teachers and principals alike may have conflated literacy with numeracy. Among the eight fourth graders followed for reading interest, six showed little enthusiasm toward reading. Self-determination theory helped explain why: none of the three basic psychological needs it identifies, choice, competence, and connection to others, were nurtured by the school program, yet the two students who enjoyed reading described parental encouragement at home. The findings suggest the program struggled less for lack of facilities, which were present though worn and outdated, than because implementers did not share a clear understanding of what it was for.

Keywords: School Literacy Program; Reading Interest; Elementary School; Self-Determination Theory; Case Study.

1. Introduction

Definitions of literacy have widened considerably over time. Reading text used to be treated as a narrow, mechanical skill; today the umbrella stretches to cover writing, numeracy, digital know-how, science, and money matters all together (Wiedarti et al., 2018). Kern (2000) captured this shift early on by describing literacy as a *social practice*, something bound up with thinking, feeling, and taking meaningful action within a particular setting, rather than a purely technical decoding skill. Dewani et al. (2025), in a recent correlational study of elementary school students, found that only some reading-interest indicators, namely reading motivation and attention when reading, correlated significantly with reading literacy, while overall reading interest had no significant effect, a reminder that interest and skill cannot be assumed to move together. Why does building literacy early matter so much? Indonesia's showing on international assessments gives a blunt answer. On the 2025 *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)*, Indonesian students scored a reading average of 365, only marginally higher than the 359 recorded in 2022 and still about 96 points below the OECD average of 461 (OECD, 2026). Government policy responded on two fronts: the Ministry of Education's School Literacy Program under Regulation No. 23/2015 (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2015), later folded into the National Literacy Movement launched in 2016, resting on five linked pillars, fifteen minutes of reading before class starts, a reading corner in every room, use of the school library, writing activities, and literacy appreciation work such as *book talks* (Wiedarti et al., 2018).

Facilities alone, however, do not fully explain why reading interest grows or stalls; psychological mechanisms matter just as much (Toste et al., 2020). Ryan and Deci's (2000) *self-determination theory* frames it this way: whether a person feels intrinsically pulled toward an activity, reading included, comes down to whether their environment meets three basic psychological needs. Teachers themselves play into this picture too. Budiman (2022) found that how actively a teacher engaged with literacy activities significantly shaped younger students' reading interest. Fourth grade was chosen deliberately as the study's focus because it sits at a developmentally sensitive turning point. Chall's (1983) stage theory, still widely referenced in research on children's literacy, places fourth graders, usually nine to ten years old, right at the hinge between *learning to read* and *reading to learn*. Nay et al. (2024) warned that when reading skills and interest fail to take hold at this particular stage, students risk carrying compounding learning difficulties into later grades across multiple subjects.

Muaro Jambi Regency, which according to Dapodikdasmen (2024) is home to 261 public elementary schools, has likewise tried to put the national literacy policy into practice. A preliminary look conducted in January 2026 at four schools in Sekernan District, SDN 02/IX Sekernan, SDN 50/IX Berembang, SDN 67/IX Tunas Mudo, and SDN 118/IX Pematang Pulai, suggested that having a formally complete program on paper did not guarantee consistent classroom practice. Reading corners looked underused and worn down, library shelves seemed dominated by textbooks rather than storybooks, and none of the schools appeared to have formally appointed a literacy coordinator. These early signals hinted that the real problem might sit less in the absence of formal structures and more in how those structures were, or were not, carried into everyday classroom life, a hypothesis this study then set out to test more systematically.

1.1. Problem Statement

Several interconnected problems motivate this study. To begin with, Indonesian students' reading literacy sits well below the international average, as the 2025 PISA results make plain, pointing to a need for more systematic literacy-building starting at the elementary level. Preliminary observation across the four target schools also revealed that the fifteen-minute reading session was not running consistently despite having a formal schedule on paper, raising the question of what was keeping a complete formal structure from becoming orderly daily practice. Reading corners and libraries were physically present in every school, yet early signs already pointed to corners that sat unused and poorly kept, alongside collections dominated by textbooks, both of which threatened to work against the growth of reading interest.

Fourth graders' engagement during the fifteen-minute session also appeared to vary a great deal from one student to the next, with some simply opening a book without reading it or choosing to chat with classmates instead, which raises the question of how implementation actually connects to reading interest. None of the four schools had formally appointed a literacy coordinator, which left daily implementation resting entirely on each homeroom teacher's own initiative. There were also early signs that teachers held a confused understanding of what the literacy program was actually meant to do, including a tendency to fill the literacy slot with content that looked more like another subject altogether. Finally, to our knowledge, few studies have examined how school literacy program implementation relates to fourth graders' reading interest across a cluster of schools that were relatively similar in location and accessibility, leaving a gap in contextual, field-grounded recommendations for improving literacy programs.

1.2. Related Research

Earlier studies offer a useful starting point, though they leave real gaps unaddressed. Ilmi et al. (2021) showed that how well the School Literacy Movement succeeds depends heavily on the commitment of everyone involved and on the resources available to support it. Lestari et al. (2023) found that consistently carrying out the school literacy movement meaningfully builds students' reading literacy skills, while Khusna et al. (2022) stressed that effective literacy programs need careful planning together with a clear-eyed mapping of what helps and what gets in the way. Much of this earlier work, including Trianggoro and Koeswanti's (2021)

evaluation of the movement, tends to treat reading interest simply as an outcome to be measured, without digging into how failures at the level of daily practice, rather than at the level of policy or formal structure, might explain why reading interest sometimes fails to grow even when a program is technically up and running. Internationally, meta-analytic evidence shows that motivation and reading achievement are reliably linked (Toste et al., 2020) and that school-based interventions can raise reading motivation (van der Sande et al., 2023), yet many of the studies behind these syntheses did not examine how faithfully programs were implemented (van der Sande et al., 2023), which is the very question this study takes up.

Most of these earlier studies also concentrated on a single school, or on regions where facility conditions varied so widely that it became hard to separate the effect of location and accessibility from the effect of a school's own internal management. This study tries to close that gap by deliberately choosing four schools that are fairly similar in location and accessibility, so that any gap found between formal structure and actual practice, whether in the program itself or in students' reading interest, can be attributed more convincingly to how each school is run internally rather than to differing geographic circumstances.

1.3. Research Objectives

This study sets out to: (1) describe how the school literacy program was implemented across the four schools; (2) describe the condition of fourth graders' reading interest at those same schools; (3) analyze how program implementation relates to that reading interest; (4) identify which factors in implementation support students' reading interest; and (5) identify which factors work against it.

2. Theoretical Framework

This section presents the concepts underlying the analysis of this study: the nature of school literacy programs, the psychological basis of reading interest, and the developmental position of fourth-grade students within literacy learning.

2.1. School Literacy Programs

Taken at face value, people usually shrink literacy down to reading and writing. That is not exactly wrong, but it barely scratches how layered the idea has become in practice. Kern (2000) pushed for something broader: literacy as a *social practice* woven from thought, feeling, and meaningful action within a specific setting, rather than a purely technical skill of decoding and producing text. Wiedarti et al. (2018) later split this into six recognizable strands, reading-writing, numeracy, science, digital, financial, and cultural-civic, each carrying its own object of study and its own success markers. Rohim et al. (2021), working from Indonesia's Minimum Competency Assessment framework, drew a related line: reading literacy centers on grasping, applying, reflecting on, and judging written texts, while numeracy literacy centers on using numbers and mathematical symbols to work through practical problems, two skills that live under one broad literacy umbrella yet get measured through entirely different tools. Koyuncu and Firat (2020), working through PISA 2018 data from China, Mexico, and Turkey, likewise measured reading, mathematical, and scientific literacy as separate domains, yet found them closely linked: reading performance explained about 65% of the variance in mathematics and 77% in science performance. As this study's findings will show, that line tends to blur badly once a program actually reaches the classroom.

Operationally, Indonesia's School Literacy Movement (*Gerakan Literasi Sekolah*), set out under Ministerial Regulation No. 23/2015 on Character Cultivation, rests on five pillars meant to reinforce each other: fifteen minutes of reading before lessons begin (either *silent reading* or a teacher-led *read aloud*), a reading corner in each classroom, use of the school library, writing activities, and literacy appreciation and expression work such as *book talks* and literacy trees (Wiedarti et al., 2018). It is designed to move through three stages, *habituation*, *development*, and *learning*, starting from routine exposure and eventually weaving literacy strategies across the whole curriculum. Wiratsiwi (2020) described these five pillars as

scaffolding for a literacy ecosystem meant to build character through habit, not a one-off ceremonial slot squeezed awkwardly into the school day.

2.2. Reading Interest and Self-Determination Theory

Reading interest, broadly speaking, is a pull, something that draws a person toward seeking out and sticking with reading material because it genuinely satisfies them, shaped jointly by what is happening inside them and around them. Interest theory distinguishes a situational interest, triggered by features of an activity, from a more stable individual interest (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Ryan and Deci (2000) built *self-determination theory* around a simple claim: a person's drive toward any activity, reading included, rises or falls with whether three basic psychological needs get met. The first, *autonomy*, is about feeling in charge of one's own choices and actions. The second, *competence*, is about feeling capable and successful while doing something. The third, *relatedness*, is about feeling genuinely connected to other people. Niemiec and Ryan (2009) carried this logic into everyday classroom practice, arguing that students' motivation depends on whether teachers and schools meet these same three needs. Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) *reading engagement theory* adds a complementary piece to this: in their reading, interest is not simply a byproduct of having books around, but something that grows out of engagement pulling together cognitive, affective, and behavioral threads at once. This theoretical link has since been validated empirically outside Indonesia as well: De Naeghel et al. (2012), working with more than a thousand Flemish fifth graders, found that autonomous forms of reading motivation predicted both reading frequency and comprehension, while De Smedt et al. (2020) confirmed the same autonomy-competence-relatedness structure held consistently across grades three through eight.

A body of empirical work backs this up from different angles. Alpien and Ruwaida (2022) found that libraries stocked with varied collections, comfortable spaces, and solid management played a strategic role in nurturing students' reading interest, though thin collections and cramped space kept showing up as common obstacles. Syafitri and Yamin (2022) found that carrying out the School Literacy Movement significantly moved the needle on elementary students' reading interest, which points toward quality and consistency of execution, not simply having a formal structure on paper, as what really decides whether reading interest takes hold. At the senior high school level, Komariah et al. (2023) found that the habituation and development stages were being carried out, yet teachers' own limitations, stemming from personal factors and a lack of school facilities to improve their literacy skills, still held implementation back.

2.3. Fourth-Grade Students and Literacy Development

Chall (1983) placed fourth grade within what she called the "*Reading for Learning the New*" stage (roughly ages 9 to 14), a transitional window sitting between *learning to read* (grades 1 through 3) and *reading to learn* (grades 4 through 8). Around this point, children begin pulling information and fresh knowledge out of print rather than simply decoding it, a shift away from the fluency-and-decoding focus that defines grades 1 through 3. Fourth grade, in that sense, becomes a genuine *leverage point*, one that can tip a school literacy program toward success or failure.

Cognitively, fourth graders sit within the concrete operational stage, meaning they can give fairly reliable, useful accounts of their own reading experiences and interests, and whatever reading interest forms at this stage tends to hold steady and carry forward into later schooling.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study leaned on a qualitative approach built around a *case study* design. Qualitative methods fit the task at hand: the goal was to dig into, and really understand, how school literacy programs unfold and how fourth graders come to feel about reading within their own natural setting (Creswell, 2014). A case study design made sense too, given how deeply the

research wanted to explore literacy program implementation and reading interest across four schools with differing characteristics, echoing Yin's (2018) point that a case study earns its keep when a researcher wants to understand a contemporary phenomenon in depth within real life, particularly where the line between the phenomenon and its surrounding context is not obvious.

Specifically, the study used a collective, or *multiple case study*, design spanning four research sites: SDN 02/IX Sekernan, SDN 50/IX Berembang, SDN 67/IX Tunas Mudo, and SDN 118/IX Pematang Pulai. Working across four sites let the researcher line findings up against each other, building a fuller picture than any single school could offer on its own. The overall approach leaned descriptive-exploratory, aiming to spell out in real detail how the literacy program was carried out and where students' reading interest stood, while digging into what connected the two and what was shaping them.

3.2. Participant

Participants were picked through *purposive sampling*, chosen for traits judged relevant to what the study was after. The four schools themselves came out of a *criterion sampling* strategy (Patton, 2015; Creswell, 2014), grounded in a preliminary observation conducted in January 2026. That observation showed the same symptom at all four schools, which sit along the same access road within one sub-district: the fifteen-minute reading session was not running consistently even though implementation guidelines were available, reading corners were poorly maintained and little used, library collections were dominated by textbooks, and students' reading interest appeared to vary between individuals. Holding location and accessibility roughly constant meant that differences in implementation were more likely to reflect internal school management than geography.

Five informant groups made up the participant pool across the four schools: four principals, four fourth-grade homeroom teachers, eight fourth-grade students (two per school, nominated by their homeroom teachers from students who were willing to be interviewed and able to communicate well, and later categorized by reading interest from their answers on the study's interview indicators), four library staff, and four administrative staff, twenty-four people in all. That figure sits comfortably within what qualitative work usually treats as enough for data saturation; Guest et al. (2006) found saturation beginning at around twelve interviews, and Hennink and Kaiser (2022) found it is typically reached within nine to seventeen interviews, a range this study met given its wider informant spread. Table 1 presents the distribution of informants by group.

Table 1. Distribution of Informants by Group

Informant group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Principals	4	16.7
Fourth-grade homeroom teachers	4	16.7
Fourth-grade students	8	33.3
Library staff	4	16.7
Administrative staff	4	16.7
Total	24	100.0

Fourth-grade classes ranged from 11 to 25 students (SDN 02/IX Sekernan: 20, ten boys and ten girls; SDN 50/IX Berembang: 11, three boys and eight girls; SDN 67/IX Tunas Mudo: 25, fourteen boys and eleven girls; SDN 118/IX Pematang Pulai: 16, five boys and eleven girls). All principals and homeroom teachers held at least a bachelor's degree, and one principal also held a master's degree. Student informants are identified by the codes S1 to S8 throughout. Permission was obtained from each school before data collection, students were interviewed with their homeroom teacher's knowledge, and student identities were masked with these codes in every table and quotation; all data were used only for research purposes.

3.3. Data Collection

Three techniques worked together to build the dataset. The first, *non-participatory observation*, ran over three consecutive days at each school, twelve days altogether, watching how the fifteen-minute reading session actually played out, what shape the library and reading corner were in, and how students behaved during literacy time. The second, *in-depth, semi-structured interviews*, put the researcher face-to-face with all twenty-four informants, following a protocol loosely enough to let people elaborate on their own experiences; every interview was recorded with consent and later transcribed in full. The third, *document review*, helped confirm what the administrative paperwork actually said, including whether formal appointment letters for literacy coordinators genuinely existed anywhere.

A preliminary observation was carried out in January 2026, and the main data collection took place in June 2026, over three consecutive days at each school: 4 to 6 June at SDN 02/IX Sekernan, 8 to 10 June at SDN 50/IX Berembang, 11 to 13 June at SDN 67/IX Tunas Mudo, and 18 to 20 June at SDN 118/IX Pematang Pulau. The instruments were an observation guide (covering the five program components, students' behavior during literacy time, and the morning activities preceding it), semi-structured interview guides for each informant group, and a document review grid.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data moved through the interactive model laid out by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014): condensing the material down, displaying it in usable form, then drawing and checking conclusions. Analysis started with a *within-case* pass, laying out each school's findings on its own, before shifting to a *cross-case* pass that lined the four schools up against each other to see where patterns converged or pulled apart.

3.5. Validity and Reliability

Confidence in the data rested on several pillars: *triangulation* across sources (principals, teachers, students, librarians, administrative staff) and methods (observation, interview, document review); *member checking*, going back to informants to confirm interpretations held up; referential adequacy through the audio recordings and field notes kept throughout; and *peer debriefing* with the research supervisors along the way.

4. Findings

4.1. Implementation of the School Literacy Program

Implementation gets examined here across the five components that make up the School Literacy Program: the fifteen-minute reading session, the classroom reading corner, use of the school library, writing activities, and literacy appreciation and expression activities.

4.1.1. The Fifteen-Minute Reading Session

Recurring morning routines at all four schools collided with the literacy slot: flag ceremonies on Mondays, morning exercise on Thursdays and Saturdays, and ceremonies or shared Qur'anic recitation on Fridays repeatedly ate into the time meant for the fifteen-minute reading session. Taken together, the three observation days at each school and the weekly morning schedule revealed a fairly steady pattern: the literacy session happened when whatever came before it wrapped up on time, and got skipped when it ran long. One homeroom teacher at SDN 02/IX Sekernan put it plainly:

"If the ceremony finishes quickly, we still get two or three minutes to read. But if the principal's remarks run long, well, we just go straight into the lesson." (Interview, Homeroom Teacher, SDN 02/IX Sekernan)

Something worth noting: two principals, when first asked, said literacy implementation ran every day without fail; it was only through follow-up questions within the same interview that both eventually admitted implementation was, in practice, inconsistent. That shift, from a tidy first answer toward a more candid one, surfaced through re-confirmation within the interview

itself, lined up with what observation had already shown and confirmed that the triangulation built into this study's design was actually doing its job rather than sitting on paper as a formality.

4.1.2. The Literacy Slot Filled with Mathematics Content: A Key Finding

Across the twelve days of observation, every single school, without a single exception, had one day where the fifteen-minute literacy slot got handed over to numeracy instruction instead, teaching number recognition through concrete media like play money and folded paper. Asked why, teachers at all four schools gave answers that lined up almost word for word, captured well by one teacher's response: "That's a form of literacy too, since it's about learning numbers and counting" (Interview, Homeroom Teacher, SDN 67/IX Tunas Mudo). A teacher at SDN 50/IX Berembang went further, explaining that using play money to help students recognize monetary denominations had become a routine fixture of her morning literacy slot, not something that happened only now and then.

Numeracy literacy is, admittedly, one of the six basic literacies recognized within the broader National Literacy Movement. But the specific fifteen-minute reading policy under Regulation No. 23/2015 is written around reading-writing literacy habituation specifically, meaning non-textbook reading material such as stories, not numeracy content or math curriculum. The whole point of the habituation stage is reading material that sits outside textbooks, aimed purely at building enjoyment of reading with zero academic pressure attached; once the activity turns into arithmetic drills, that point evaporates and the session becomes just another ordinary instructional block. Because this pattern showed up consistently across all four schools rather than as a one-off slip, it points toward a genuine conceptual confusion about what the literacy program is actually for, not merely a scheduling hiccup.

4.1.3. The Reading Corner

A consistent pattern showed up across all four schools: reading corners existed physically in every fourth-grade classroom visited, yet sat unused without exception. Observation turned up damaged bookshelves and collections that were outdated and disorganized, in every single case. A teacher at SDN 02/IX Sekernan admitted her classroom's reading corner had "not received attention for some time, the shelf is a bit rickety, and the books have been the same ones since last year" (Interview, Homeroom Teacher, SDN 02/IX Sekernan). Nowhere was there evidence of teachers actively steering students toward the reading corner during the literacy slot, whether through spoken instruction or by periodically refreshing the materials on offer, a sharp contrast with what the corner is supposed to be: an easy, freely accessible source of storybooks, educational comics, and children's magazines.

4.1.4. School Library and Its Utilization

All four schools kept a formally scheduled, once-a-week library visit on the calendar for fourth grade. Two problems kept surfacing regardless. First, these visits landed during recess rather than before lessons, which undercut their intended role as part of daily habituation; a librarian at SDN 02/IX Sekernan explained this scheduling choice was meant to avoid disrupting instructional time, since students were not allowed to leave the classroom before lessons started. Second, collections leaned heavily toward regularly refreshed textbooks, while the storybooks and picture atlases students actually preferred stayed outdated and rarely got replaced, something a librarian at SDN 50/IX Berembang confirmed directly: "Textbooks arrive every new school year from the district office, but storybooks have not been added for a very long time." The upshot was that library visits ended up functioning more like a recreational break-time ritual than an integrated, carefully monitored piece of daily literacy habituation.

4.1.5. Writing Activities

The previous three components at least had some form of implementation, however imperfect. Writing activities did not share even that: simple journaling, rewriting stories in students' own words, or putting together a classroom wall magazine never happened with any of the four homeroom teachers across the entire study period. That absence is

qualitatively different from the problems described above. Rather than being carried out poorly, this component seems to have never been designed into the program at all, from planning through to execution, suggesting the literacy program as observed was never built to move past the receptive side of reading into the productive side of writing, even though both are supposed to be core parts of the program as defined.

4.1.6. Literacy Appreciation and Expression Activities

This mirrors the finding on writing activities: appreciation and expression activities, things like *book talks*, storytelling competitions, literacy trees, or exhibits of students' written work, were also never carried out at any of the four schools. A principal at SDN 67/IX Tunas Mudo admitted such activities had "honestly never been held here; perhaps it could be a suggestion for the future" (Interview, Principal, SDN 67/IX Tunas Mudo). Both of these final components being absent everywhere reinforces a pattern already visible in the components above: literacy implementation at these research sites essentially never got past the most basic, and itself inconsistent, habituation stage, let alone reaching the richer pedagogical stages that were supposed to follow it.

4.1.7. Cross-Case Pattern

Table 2 lays out a cross-case matrix comparing the five components across the four schools.

Table 2. Cross-Case Matrix of School Literacy Program Implementation

Component	SDN 02	SDN 50	SDN 67	SDN 118	Cross-school pattern
15-minute reading	Irregular (numeracy on 1 of 3 days)	Irregular (numeracy on 1 of 3 days)	Irregular (numeracy on 1 of 3 days)	Irregular (numeracy on 1 of 3 days)	Uniform: disrupted by morning schedule, textbook material, conceptual confusion
Reading corner	Damaged, unused	Damaged, unused	Damaged, unused	Damaged, unused	Uniform: not functioning
Library	Monday, at recess	Tuesday, at recess	Tuesday, at recess	Thursday, at recess	Uniform: not integrated with the literacy slot
Writing	Not done	Not done	Not done	Not done	Uniform: absent
Appreciation / expression	Not done	Not done	Not done	Not done	Uniform: absent

Even though the four schools are separately managed, the way the five components were implemented turned out to be strikingly uniform rather than varied. Of five components meant to work as one integrated literacy program, three were physically in place, but only two, the reading session and library visits, were genuinely running, and both carried significant problems, while the reading corner stood damaged and unused and the remaining two components sat entirely untouched. Reading the matrix across (school by school within one component) shows how consistent these problems were; reading it down (component by component within one school) shows that not a single school did well across all five components, not even the school that appeared most organized. This cross-reading is the basis for an argument developed further in the Discussion: that the implementation problem here looks shared across sites rather than a matter of any one school's individual capacity.

4.2. Condition of Students' Reading Interest

Reading interest among the eight student informants (two per school, nominated by their homeroom teachers) was examined across five angles: attraction, frequency, duration,

preferred reading material, and intrinsic motivation, the last mapped onto the three basic psychological needs from *self-determination theory*.

Only two of the eight students, S5 at SDN 67/IX Tunas Mudo and S7 at SDN 118/IX Pematang Pulai, showed consistently high reading interest across the three days of observation at their respective schools. Neither knew what the other had said, yet both, independently, credited encouragement from parents at home, as one put it: "At home, Mom often tells me to read a book before playing. Eventually I just started liking it, especially when the story is good" (Interview, S5, SDN 67/IX Tunas Mudo). Tellingly, neither of these two students, nor any of the remaining six, brought up the school literacy program, the reading corner, or the library as a reason for enjoying reading; every attribution pointed back to family, not the school.

The other six students showed low or essentially no reading interest, which tracked with a mix of overlapping factors consistent with the implementation findings above: monotonous, outdated collections, damaged and unused reading corners, reading skills that were not yet fluent, a pull toward numeracy activities over reading, and peer social disruption during the literacy slot. S8 at SDN 118/IX Pematang Pulai, repeatedly seen being pulled into play by classmates right during the literacy slot, explained: "I don't like reading alone, I'd rather chat with a friend. The books are the same ones too, I've already read them" (Interview, S8, SDN 118/IX Pematang Pulai). At SDN 02/IX Sekernan, S1 instead pointed to a mismatch in the collection: "Most of the books are textbooks, there are rarely any new storybooks, so I'm not very motivated to read" (Interview, S1, SDN 02/IX Sekernan). Even within one school the reasons diverged: at SDN 50/IX Berembang, S3 said, "I don't like it much because I'm not fluent yet. I often make mistakes, so I'm embarrassed to read aloud," while S4 said, "I don't like it. If I read for long I get bored, so I'd rather play kites with friends" (Interviews, S3 and S4, SDN 50/IX Berembang). That students gave such different reasons shows low reading interest cannot be pinned on a single cause; it comes from a mix of factors that differ from student to student.

Reading frequency and duration outside school followed the same attraction pattern: the two high-interest students read almost daily at home, even briefly, a habit their parents built early on, while the other six read rarely, usually only when homework required it.

A clear gap opened up between what students preferred to read, picture storybooks, educational comics, and illustrated reference books such as atlases, and what the available collections actually offered, which was dominated by textbooks. As one student described it: "I wish there were books about animals or fairy tales, not just textbooks on the shelf" (Interview, S2, SDN 02/IX Sekernan). This mismatch between what students wanted and what was available directly chipped away at their sense of autonomy in choosing reading material.

4.2.1. Intrinsic Motivation within Self-Determination Theory

On the *autonomy* front, students clearly wanted to pick their own reading material, but that desire went largely unmet given how outdated and mismatched the available collections were, a gap that appeared to push some students toward *pretend reading*, holding or flipping through a book without really engaging with what was on the page, less a sign of incapacity than a passive adjustment to an environment offering them little real choice. On the *competence* front, some students' not-yet-fluent reading ability chipped away at their confidence during reading activities; a teacher at SDN 50/IX Berembang described a student who, when not yet fluent, "tends to stay quiet or ask to be accompanied when told to read, and looks less confident." That turned reading into a source of negative challenge rather than an enjoyable habit, leaving the competence need unmet. On the *relatedness* front, the pattern flipped: peer social disruption, seen with the student at SDN 118/IX Pematang Pulai, pulled attention away from reading toward socializing instead, something his teacher confirmed by noting that some students, when seated close together, become hard to keep focused on their own books. That points to a genuinely strong social need at this age, one the literacy program as currently run is not designed to channel into collaborative literacy activities such as paired reading or book discussion; instead, an unmet social need ends up competing with reading rather than feeding into it.

Across all eight students, then, the three basic psychological needs went consistently unmet by the school literacy program, yet the two high-interest students described parental encouragement at home, which may have supported their relatedness, although autonomy and competence at home were not directly examined, a pattern Table 3 summarizes.

Table 3. Cross-Case Matrix of Students' Reading Interest

School	Student	Reading interest	Primary driver / barrier
SDN 02/IX Sekernan	S1	Low	Collection does not match interests (no comics available)
SDN 02/IX Sekernan	S2	Low	Monotonous collection, mismatched preference
SDN 50/IX Berembang	S3	Low	Reading competence, not yet fluent
SDN 50/IX Berembang	S4	Low	Preference for other activities; minimal home encouragement
SDN 67/IX Tunas Mudo	S5	High	Habit encouraged by parents at home
SDN 67/IX Tunas Mudo	S6	Low	Reading collection not renewed
SDN 118/IX Pematang Pulaui	S7	High	Habit encouraged by parents at home
SDN 118/IX Pematang Pulaui	S8	Low	Social relatedness: distraction by peers

4.3. The Link Between Program Implementation and Reading Interest

Pulling the implementation and reading-interest findings together, the data point directly toward one conclusion: the reading interest that did show up, in the two high-interest students, traced back to family factors at home rather than to the school literacy program, while the program itself, marked by damaged reading corners, outdated collections, an unprotected time slot, and conceptual confusion, failed to build reading interest among the other six students. Three consistent links stood out: first, an unprotected literacy time slot led to irregular literacy exposure, which in turn fed high variation in reading interest across students; second, outdated and mismatched reading collections left students' autonomy needs unmet, which showed up as pretend-reading behavior; and third, having no formally appointed literacy coordinator meant no one was overseeing implementation quality, leaving room for teachers' understanding of the program's essence to vary widely. Taken as a whole, the relationship between program implementation and reading interest in this study came out negative or null: a struggling program failed to build reading interest, while whatever reading interest did grow in a handful of students traced back to something entirely outside the school.

4.4. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Compared to what got in the way, supporting factors turned out fairly limited, both in number and in how much difference they actually made. Two stood out: a clear formal schedule for literacy activities running Monday through Saturday, confirmed consistently by principals at three of the four schools, and the basic physical facilities, a reading corner and library, present at every school studied. Neither, though, proved enough on its own to guarantee consistent implementation, as the persistent problems described in Section 4.1 make clear despite both being present.

Six factors got in the way, each showing up consistently across all four schools except where noted otherwise. First, how unpredictable the recurring morning activities before the literacy slot turned out to be, detailed already in Section 4.1, was the most consistently observed obstacle, confirmed both through direct observation and through principals' own admissions once pressed further. Second, confusion between reading-writing literacy and numeracy

literacy, this study's central finding, showed up not just among teachers but among principals too, a pattern of both vertical (across position) and horizontal (across school) triangulation of the very same misconception; one principal at SDN 50/IX Berembang, for instance, said: "As long as it's still within the scope of learning, recognizing numbers or simple counting, I think that's part of literacy too, since literacy covers a broad scope." Third, no school had formally appointed a literacy coordinator, confirmed uniformly by administrative staff at all four, which left daily literacy implementation resting entirely on individual homeroom teachers with no accountability mechanism attached; this absence of any sanction from principals reads less like supportive leadership and more like an indicator of weak substantive oversight, particularly given that principals themselves, at some schools, shared the very same conceptual confusion described above. Fourth, reading collections were not being regularly refreshed, something a librarian at SDN 50/IX Berembang traced to the lack of a dedicated budget line for buying new storybooks. Fifth, scheduling library visits during recess rather than folding them into the daily literacy slot reduced the library's role to little more than a recreational break-time activity. Sixth, as a finding the initial theoretical framework had not anticipated, peer social disruption during the literacy slot emerged as an obstacle at the level of individual students, observed specifically at SDN 118/IX Pematang Pulau, suggesting that what gets in the way of literacy extends beyond policy and facilities into the social dynamics among students themselves, dynamics a program still designed around individual rather than collaborative activity has yet to accommodate.

4.5. Central Finding: Conceptual Confusion as the Cross-Site Root Cause

Pulling everything together, this study's central and most consistent finding is that what really holds back literacy program implementation across all four schools is not a shortage of physical facilities or formal scheduling, both of which were present even if worn, outdated, or unrefreshed, but a conceptual confusion about what reading-writing literacy actually is. This confusion showed up identically across four separately managed schools in the same sub-district and across two distinct levels of implementer, homeroom teachers and principals, a pattern consistent both across sites and across levels that considerably strengthens confidence in the finding, since it becomes hard to attribute to the quirks of any single teacher or any one school's particular management style.

5. Discussion

Measured against the three-stage implementation framework of the School Literacy Movement, *habituation*, *development*, and *learning*, the findings suggest literacy implementation across the four schools never got past the habituation stage, and even that stage was shaky. The fifteen-minute reading session, the most basic form of habituation, stayed vulnerable to being displaced by other activities and was, at times, mistaken for a numeracy activity, while what belongs to the development stage, a properly functioning reading corner and genuinely integrated library use, never materialized, and what belongs to the learning stage, literacy strategies woven across the curriculum alongside writing and appreciation activities, stayed entirely untouched. This fragile position lines up coherently with the central finding of conceptual confusion: a program whose essence has not been fully grasped at the implementer level can hardly be expected to push past habituation into the more substantive stages of development and learning. This accords with international evidence that the quality of implementation strongly shapes program outcomes (Durlak & DuPre, 2008), and that interventions delivered by teachers produced smaller gains in reading comprehension than those delivered by researchers, possibly because of weaker implementation fidelity (van der Sande et al., 2023).

On reading interest, the fact that all three basic psychological needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, went consistently unmet by the school program, while the two high-interest students described parental encouragement at home, lines up with Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) *reading engagement theory*, which holds that reading interest comes from engagement that pulls together cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, not simply from exposure to books. The absence of meaningful engagement within the school

program, owing to mismatched collections, an inconsistent time slot, and no real collaborative space among students, explains why the school program came up short as a source of reading interest, while home, offering more personal and steady engagement, worked for a small number of students. The family's role in building a reading culture is also the subject of Aisyah et al. (2025), who studied it among elementary school children. This reinforces the point that interventions meant to boost reading interest cannot stop at simply supplying reading material; they need to be designed to actively and simultaneously meet all three basic psychological needs. Offering students real choice among texts is one concrete way teachers support autonomy (Stefanou et al., 2004), which fixed, textbook-heavy collections cannot do.

These findings both align with and diverge from earlier research. In line with Ilmi et al. (2021), this study found that how well the School Literacy Movement succeeds depends heavily on factors sitting at the school implementer level. This study pushes that finding further by showing that the problem at the implementer level is not simply a matter of commitment or engagement, as Ilmi et al. (2021) and Pratiwi et al. (2022) suggested, but a matter of flawed conceptual understanding, a dimension those earlier studies left largely untouched. Where Irma et al. (2022) pointed to limited physical facilities as the primary obstacle, this study found facilities were, in fact, formally present at all four schools; the problem lay in how those facilities were used and understood, not in whether they existed. Hamzah et al.'s (2023, 2024) findings on the importance of consistent literacy scheduling were strongly borne out here, particularly through the finding on how vulnerable the literacy time slot was to being displaced by other activities.

The finding about confusion between reading-writing literacy and numeracy literacy, confirmed both across sites and across implementer levels, offers a fairly novel contribution not addressed in much depth by Rohim et al. (2021) or other prior school-literacy studies cited in the theoretical framework. What this study adds is treating that conceptual confusion as the most consistent underlying factor, one that may also reflect conditions beyond individual schools such as shared district-level guidance, rather than a minor supplementary note, a positioning that matters given how much prior work stops at describing technical problems, limited facilities or time, without asking whether those technical problems actually trace back to a deeper gap in understanding.

Theoretically, this study adds to the understanding of School Literacy Movement implementation by showing that an educational program's success is not determined solely by facilities and administrative scheduling, but depends heavily on how clearly its essence is understood at every level of implementation, from policy down to classroom practice. Practically, the findings point toward a need for stronger, more measurable socialization of the School Literacy Movement's core concepts, running from the district education office down through schools and classroom teachers, paired with clearer monitoring mechanisms, including formally appointing literacy coordinators, currently absent at all four schools studied, and developing the two components left entirely untouched so far, writing and literacy appreciation or expression activities.

6. Conclusion

This study found that the school literacy program across four elementary schools in Sekernan District, Muaro Jambi Regency, largely stayed stuck at a fragile, inconsistent habituation stage. Of five program components, only the fifteen-minute reading session and library visits were genuinely running, and both carried serious implementation problems, while writing and literacy appreciation activities never happened at any of the four schools. The most striking finding was that, without exception across all four schools, the literacy slot sometimes got filled with numeracy content, pointing to a fundamental conceptual confusion about what reading-writing literacy actually means at the implementer level. Among the eight student informants, reading interest was low for six and consistently high for only two, both traceable to family support at home rather than to the school program. The relationship between program implementation and reading interest turned out negative or null: a struggling

program failed to build reading interest, while whatever reading interest did grow traced back to something outside the school. Supporting factors were limited to a formal schedule and basic facilities, neither sufficient on its own, while inhibiting factors were more numerous and more consequential, spanning schedule uncertainty, conceptual confusion, no formally appointed literacy coordinator, outdated collections, unintegrated library visits, and peer social disruption.

Limitation

A few limitations deserve explicit acknowledgment. The study was confined to Sekernan District, Muaro Jambi Regency, so its findings are tied to that context and cannot be generalized directly to other regions without accounting for different policy contexts and local school conditions. The twelve-day observation period, three days per school, may not have captured patterns that are seasonal or that fall outside that particular window, such as activities tied to religious holidays or national commemorations. The researcher's presence in the classroom during observation may also have introduced an *observer effect*, where teacher and student behavior shifted somewhat from how they would normally act unobserved; efforts were made to keep this to a minimum through an unobtrusive approach, but the possibility of this bias has to be acknowledged as something built into direct observation itself. Stated candidly, data depth was also uneven across the research questions: data on program implementation, reading interest conditions, and inhibiting factors were comparatively rich and well triangulated, whereas data on the link between implementation and reading interest, and on supporting factors, were thinner, partly because genuinely observed supporting factors were few in number, and partly because that particular link would benefit from probing further into how aware teachers were of individual students' conditions. The four schools were selected through criterion sampling for a similar initial symptom, so the findings apply to schools in comparable conditions and not to schools where literacy runs well. Student informants were chosen by their homeroom teachers from students who were willing and able to communicate, three schools were observed from Thursday to Saturday while SDN 50/IX Berembang was observed from Monday to Wednesday, and parents were not interviewed, so the role of the home rests on students' accounts.

Recommendation

Based on these findings, a few recommendations follow. District education offices should push clearer, more measurable socialization of what the School Literacy Movement is actually meant to be, explicitly distinguishing reading-writing literacy from numeracy literacy, alongside a mechanism for monitoring literacy program implementation across schools. School principals should formally appoint a literacy coordinator through an official decree, protect the literacy time slot from being displaced by other morning activities, and periodically evaluate the quality of program implementation rather than just its administrative existence. Homeroom teachers should deliberately build out writing and literacy appreciation activities, alongside strategies that give students' social needs somewhere to go through collaborative literacy activities such as paired reading or book discussions. Library staff should integrate library visits more closely with the daily literacy slot and set aside dedicated funding to regularly refresh storybook collections based on what students actually prefer, rather than relying solely on textbook shipments. Future researchers might extend this work by examining the relationship between literacy implementation and reading interest across a wider range of contexts, using longitudinal designs able to capture seasonal variation.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies

This manuscript was prepared with the assistance of Generative AI (Claude, Sonnet 4.5, developed by Anthropic). The AI was used to assist in language refinement, specifically paraphrasing, restructuring, and refining the academic phrasing of the manuscript based on

the authors' own original research data and findings. The underlying research design, data collection, data analysis, findings, interpretations, and conclusions are entirely the authors' own original intellectual work. The AI tool was not used to generate, fabricate, or analyze any research data or findings. All intellectual contributions, critical analyses, and final revisions were conducted by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the content presented in this work.

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