



Teachers' Perceptions and Strategies in Promoting Reading Literacy at State Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: This study aims to identify teachers' perceptions of reading literacy and the strategies used to enhance literacy skills at State Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Baubau City.

Methodology: The research employs a qualitative approach using a phenomenological method to explore teachers' views and experiences. Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Instruments used include interview guides, observation sheets, and document analysis formats. Data analysis was conducted interactively through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

Main Findings: The study finds that teachers hold diverse perceptions of reading literacy, ranging from basic technical reading skills to deep critical comprehension. Strategies such as the phoneme-grapheme approach, group discussions, and project-based learning are adapted to suit different grade levels. Key challenges include a lack of reading materials, insufficient support from the family environment, and inadequate school policies on literacy. Nevertheless, the use of interactive and collaborative strategies has enhanced students' critical thinking, especially in interpreting religious texts.

Novelty/Originality of this Study: This study provides a contextual understanding of how teachers at Islamic elementary schools in regional Indonesia perceive and approach reading literacy. It underscores the integral relationship between teacher perception, pedagogical strategy, and environmental factors in cultivating a literacy culture especially in religious education contexts where critical reading plays a vital role.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reading literacy is a fundamental skill that serves as a critical pillar in the educational process, particularly at the elementary education level [1]. Literacy is not merely the ability to recognize words or read texts but also encompasses critical thinking, interpreting information, and integrating knowledge from various sources for students' personal and academic development [2]. At the elementary level, such as Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), reading literacy plays a significant role in preparing students to comprehend not only general academic material but also religious and cultural texts that are distinct to the madrasah [3], [4].

The importance of reading literacy has become increasingly recognized in Indonesia's educational policies, particularly with the development of the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) concept, which emphasizes strengthening basic literacy as a foundation for lifelong learning [5], [6]. This skill is crucial as it

supports students in understanding various forms of knowledge necessary for academic success and for addressing future challenges [7]. In the context of madrasahs, reading literacy holds even greater significance, given the religious texts that demand advanced analytical and interpretative skills, such as the Qur'an, hadiths, and other religious literature [8].

However, statistical data reveals that the reading literacy skills of Indonesian students remain below international standards. According to the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results conducted by the OECD, Indonesian students performed poorly in reading, mathematics, and science compared to other countries [9]. In 2018, Indonesia ranked 72nd out of 77 countries, with a reading literacy score of 371 points, significantly below the global average of 487 points [10]. At the elementary education level, only about 30% of students in Indonesia achieve a reading proficiency level deemed sufficient for critically understanding texts [11].

In addition, national surveys such as AKSI (Indonesian Student Competency Assessment) also highlight the low level of reading literacy among students across various educational levels. Data from the 2023 Indonesian Education Report revealed that 61.53% of elementary school and Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) students have yet to meet the minimum standard for reading literacy [12]. This underscores an urgent need to implement more effective and relevant literacy strategies, particularly in madrasahs, which face unique challenges and characteristics in literacy education [13].

Furthermore, findings from the Indonesian Madrasah Competency Assessment (AKMI) indicate that many madrasah students still exhibit low basic literacy skills. AKMI assesses foundational skills in four key areas: reading literacy, numeracy, science, and socio-cultural literacy. According to the latest report, the majority of MI students remain at a low literacy level, particularly in understanding complex texts and integrating information from various sources. The data reveals that approximately 60% of madrasah students have not yet reached adequate literacy competence to critically comprehend and analyze texts [14]. Reading literacy in madrasahs is also closely linked to the character development of students. In the context of Islamic education, reading literacy is not only utilized to comprehend general academic material but also to understand the religious values that underpin students' daily behavior [15]. Therefore, teachers in madrasahs require specific strategies to promote reading literacy that are not only effective in enhancing reading and writing skills but also in fostering understanding and appreciation of Islamic values [16].

In the context of State Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Baubau City, teachers face unique challenges in implementing reading literacy programs [17], [18]. As a religious educational institution, madrasahs have a curriculum that includes religious materials that students need to comprehend thoroughly. However, limitations in reading resources, a lack of varied teaching methods, and insufficient literacy modeling from teachers and principals hinder efforts to improve students' literacy. The use of teaching materials relevant to students' religious context and the implementation of structured strategies in reading literacy instruction are critical factors that require further investigation.

Based on the above background, this study aims to identify teachers' perceptions of the importance of reading literacy and the strategies they use to address literacy challenges in madrasahs. The results of this research are expected to contribute to the development of reading literacy strategies that are relevant to the needs of madrasahs and serve as a reference for stakeholders in improving students' literacy skills in Baubau City.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative-phenomenological approach within a constructivist paradigm to understand teachers' perceptions and strategies in enhancing reading literacy at State Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Baubau City. The study population consists of teachers at these madrasahs, selected using purposive sampling based on their experience in teaching reading literacy.

Data were collected through direct observation of teaching practices, semi-structured interviews to explore teachers' perspectives, and document analysis of lesson plans (RPP) and teaching materials [19], [20]. The research instruments include interview guides, observation sheets, and documentation formats. Data analysis was carried out through the stages of data reduction to filter relevant information, data presentation in narrative and visual forms, and conclusion drawing based on patterns of findings that were verified for validity. This study emphasizes an in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences and perspectives, focusing on the madrasah context as the research setting, with the implementation timeline aligned with the planned schedule.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

Reading Literacy Teaching Practices Implemented by Teachers at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

Based on observations at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, it was found that reading literacy teaching practices are implemented in a variety of ways depending on the grade level. In Grade 2, the teacher uses an intensive reading

approach with a focus on phonological awareness and the introduction of phoneme-grapheme relationships. Students are introduced to basic sounds, particularly those related to reading the hijaiyah letters. This activity aims to strengthen students' understanding of letter symbols and their corresponding sounds, which is a crucial foundation in early literacy skills [21]-[23].

In Grade 4, the teacher applies an interpretative reading method that encourages students to understand texts more deeply, particularly religious texts such as the Qur'an and simple hadiths. The teacher incorporates small group discussions to facilitate broader understanding, and students are asked to summarize the text and present their understanding to the class [24], [25]. In Grade 5, students are more frequently invited to analyze moral values in texts through more critical group discussions, where they are given space to explore the connection between readings and personal experiences or everyday realities.

These reading literacy teaching practices directly support the development of progressive reading skills, in line with Edmund Burke Huey's reading development theory. In the early stages, the phonological awareness-focused approach is crucial to ensure students have a solid foundation before progressing to more complex comprehension. The learning process in Grades 4 and 5, which involves critical discussions and text analysis, demonstrates how literacy can enhance students' critical thinking skills, enabling them not only to read but also to understand and interpret texts independently [26], [27].

This learning process has a significant impact on students' critical thinking skills, particularly in the context of religious and cultural values relevant to their daily lives. Furthermore, by providing students with the opportunity to discuss and present their understanding, teachers indirectly boost students' confidence in communication, which is an integral part of higher-level reading literacy.

Teachers' Perceptions at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah on the Importance of Reading Literacy

Interview results with teachers indicate that the majority view reading literacy as a fundamental skill that is crucial not only for academic success but also as a tool for internalizing religious values. Many teachers mentioned that reading literacy plays a significant role in educating students to become morally and intellectually intelligent individuals [28]-[30]. These teachers recognize that students need adequate reading literacy skills to comprehend not only general lessons but also more complex religious texts.

However, there are differing perceptions among teachers regarding the depth of literacy. Some teachers see literacy merely as the ability to read texts literally, without the need for follow-up activities such as discussion or deep reflection. Meanwhile, other teachers view literacy as a skill that also includes critical and reflective thinking, expecting students not only to read but also to understand and apply the values they read [31].

These differing perceptions may be influenced by teachers' teaching experiences and educational backgrounds. Teachers who understand literacy as a comprehensive skill are more likely to employ interactive approaches, such as discussions and critical analysis, to support meaningful learning for students [32]. This aligns with Social Perception Theory, which suggests that an individual's views are shaped by their experiences and background.

In this context, teachers' perceptions directly impact the strategies used in the classroom. Teachers who have a positive perception of reading literacy as a foundation for critical thinking tend to use teaching methods that encourage students to delve deeper, whereas teachers with a more limited perception, focusing only on technical reading skills, may prioritize technical aspects of reading. By understanding these perceptions, madrasahs can more effectively design teacher training that emphasizes the importance of literacy as a comprehensive skill [33].

Challenges Faced by Teachers in Promoting Reading Literacy at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

Several key challenges faced by teachers in promoting reading literacy at madrasahs include limited access to quality reading materials, insufficient time dedicated to literacy activities due to a packed curriculum, and a lack of support from the family environment [34]. According to the interview results, many teachers expressed concerns about the scarcity of reading materials that meet the literacy needs of students, especially those that integrate religious and general knowledge contexts. Teachers also mentioned that school policies still focus primarily on achieving academic targets measured through exams, which often leads to literacy activities being neglected [35].

Referring to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, these literacy challenges can be analyzed through the influence of broader environmental systems [36], starting from the microsystem (teacher-student), mesosystem (school-family interactions), exosystem (school policies), and macrosystem (literacy culture in society) [37]. In this case, school policies that do not sufficiently support literacy activities, along with the underdeveloped literacy culture within families, play a significant role in hindering teachers' efforts to improve students' literacy skills.

These challenges indicate the need for a more comprehensive approach to enhancing literacy. Environmental support and access to reading materials relevant to students' religious context can have a

significant impact on improving their literacy. Additionally, allocating specific time within the school curriculum for literacy activities and involving families in the literacy process can yield more optimal results.

Reading Literacy Teaching Strategies Commonly Used by Teachers at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

Based on the observation results, it was found that teachers at madrasahs use various strategies in reading literacy instruction, such as project-based learning, group discussions, modeling reading, and literacy reflection activities. In Grade 2, the strategy focuses more on phoneme-grapheme mastery and introducing simple readings through letter play activities. Students are encouraged to recognize letter shapes and sounds while engaging in enjoyable activities [38].

In Grade 4, teachers use a discussion-based approach that involves simple religious texts. Students are invited to understand the meanings of verses or simple hadiths and relate them to their daily lives. Meanwhile, in Grade 5, teachers apply a project-based learning approach where students are asked to draw conclusions from certain readings and present their findings to the class.

The strategies applied by teachers are highly relevant to Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes the importance of modeling, reinforcement, and collaborative learning. Teachers in madrasahs serve as literacy models for students by actively demonstrating interest in reading and engaging in discussions. When teachers are involved in reading or appreciating students' efforts, they provide positive reinforcement that boosts students' motivation to participate in literacy activities [39].

The collaborative approach implemented through group discussions or reading projects is also effective in enriching students' literacy experiences. By learning together, students can observe how their peers understand the text and use similar strategies. Additionally, collaborative learning helps students build self-confidence and social skills, which are essential components of broader literacy.

Overall, these strategies support the achievement of comprehensive literacy, where students not only improve their technical reading skills but also develop deep understanding and critical thinking abilities that will benefit them in their academic and social lives in the future.

3.2 Discussion

The reading literacy teaching practices implemented by teachers at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah demonstrate a graduated approach that starts with mastering basic skills, such as phonemes and graphemes, and progresses to analytical skills. According to Edmund Burke Huey's Reading Development Theory, students' reading abilities develop through several stages, from phonological awareness to deep understanding and critical interaction with texts [40]. In Grade 2, students are taught to recognize language sounds and basic symbols through letter and phoneme-grapheme play activities. This aligns with the early stages described by Huey, where phonological awareness serves as the foundation for further reading skills. In Grades 4 and 5, students are introduced to more complex texts and are encouraged to interpret meanings, particularly from religious texts, which sharpens their critical thinking abilities. This stage supports the development of deep comprehension and critical thinking skills in students, as outlined in Huey's later stages.

This practice shows that teachers successfully implement an approach aligned with students' cognitive development. Through this graduated approach, students' literacy skills evolve from basic skills to critical thinking skills, which are necessary for understanding moral and religious values. The research findings show that teachers' perceptions of reading literacy vary, ranging from views that literacy only involves technical skills to perceptions of literacy as a critical thinking skill [41]. According to Vaughn et al (2024), individual perceptions are influenced by their social background, experiences, and cultural values [42]. Teachers who have a positive perception of reading literacy as a critical thinking skill tend to adopt more interactive and reflective teaching methods [43]. Their more comprehensive view encourages them not only to teach students to read technically but also to help them understand, interpret, and connect reading material with everyday experiences [44]. In contrast, teachers with a perception limited to technical reading skills tend to focus solely on the mechanical aspects of reading without providing space for the development of reflective skills.

This influence of teacher perception demonstrates that their understanding of reading literacy significantly determines the approach they take in teaching. Therefore, developing teachers' perceptions through more comprehensive literacy training can help them integrate literacy approaches that are not only technical but also critical [45]. The challenges faced by teachers in improving reading literacy in madrasahs can be understood through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, which identifies how the social environment affects individual development at various levels (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem).

At the microsystem level, limited reading materials in the classroom and scarce resources are immediate obstacles faced by both teachers and students. These conditions hinder the implementation of optimal literacy programs because resources are inadequate. At the mesosystem level, the interaction between the school and students' families also presents challenges, as the lack of parental involvement in supporting literacy activities at home weakens the impact of literacy learning at school.

At the exosystem level, school policies that prioritize academic achievement and do not fully support literacy present significant challenges. The lack of focus on providing reading materials or dedicated time for literacy means that literacy activities are often neglected [46]. At the macrosystem level, the underdeveloped literacy culture in society and limited access to quality reading materials in students' environments also contribute to the low reading interest among students. This analysis shows that the challenges in improving reading literacy are not only due to limitations within the classroom environment but also the lack of support from the broader social environment. By understanding the complexity of these challenges, more comprehensive literacy interventions, such as involving parents and providing reading materials, can be solutions to support more sustainable literacy development [47].

The teaching strategies for reading literacy in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah involve a variety of approaches, such as collaborative learning, group discussions, reading modeling, and reflective projects. These approaches align with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes the importance of modeling, reinforcement, and learning through observation in the learning process [48]. Teachers in Madrasah often play a key role as literacy models for students. They show interest in literacy and encourage students to read together. When students observe their teacher's enthusiasm for reading, they tend to imitate this behavior. Bandura also highlights that positive reinforcement, such as praise or small rewards, can motivate students to become more actively engaged in literacy activities [49]. In this context, teachers who show appreciation for students' reading results or reflections successfully build their motivation to participate more actively in literacy activities [50].

Collaborative strategies like group discussions also align with the concept of learning through observation, where students can learn from their peers [51]. Students not only acquire technical reading skills but also develop a deeper understanding through the exchange of ideas [52]. In higher grades, teachers implement project-based learning, where students are asked to draw conclusions or reports from specific readings and present them. This strategy enhances students' understanding and develops advanced literacy skills, including critical and reflective thinking. By integrating these theories, the discussion of findings suggests that literacy teaching in madrasahs can develop more optimally with the support of positive teacher perceptions, reduction of environmental barriers, and the implementation of teaching strategies that actively engage students in reading literacy.

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This influence of teacher perception demonstrates that their understanding of reading literacy significantly determines the approach they take in teaching. Therefore, developing teachers' perceptions through more comprehensive literacy training can help them integrate literacy approaches that are not only technical but also critical. The challenges faced by teachers in improving reading literacy in madrasahs can be understood through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, which identifies how the social environment affects individual development at various levels (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem).

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This analysis shows that the challenges in improving reading literacy are not only due to limitations within the classroom environment but also the lack of support from the broader social environment. By understanding the complexity of these challenges, more comprehensive literacy interventions, such as involving parents and providing reading materials, can be solutions to support more sustainable literacy development. The teaching strategies for reading literacy in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah involve a variety of approaches, such as collaborative learning, group discussions, reading modeling, and reflective projects. These approaches align with Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes the importance of modeling, reinforcement, and learning through observation in the learning process.

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4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that reading literacy teaching in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in Baubau City is carried out through a tiered approach focusing on the development of students' skills, from basic skills to analytical abilities. Teachers implement strategies appropriate to students' developmental stages, such as phoneme and grapheme recognition in lower grades, as well as critical discussion and reflection in higher grades. This practice has proven effective in enhancing basic reading skills and sharpening students' critical thinking, particularly regarding the understanding of religious texts. Teachers' perceptions of reading literacy vary, from those who see it merely as a technical skill to those who view it as encompassing critical thinking abilities. Teachers with a broader perception tend to use more interactive and reflective methods. However, the development of reading literacy still faces challenges, such as limited reading materials, minimal family support, and school policies that are not fully supportive. Literacy strategies implemented, such as literacy modeling, collaborative learning, and reflective projects, have helped foster students' reading interest and develop their critical thinking skills. To build a strong literacy culture, synergy is needed between teachers' perceptions, teaching strategies, and support from the school environment, family, and educational policies.

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