

Impact of the School Literacy Movement on Elementary Students' Reading Interest and Reading Ability: Evidence from Southwest Sumba Regency, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the effect of the School Literacy Movement (SLM) on the reading interest and reading ability of elementary school students. A quantitative survey was conducted using a questionnaire distributed to 97 teachers selected by simple random sampling from a population of 3,058 teachers, with a 10% margin of error calculated using the Slovin formula. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, prerequisite tests, and hypothesis testing. The results indicate that SLM implementation, reading interest, and reading ability were all in the high category. Due to non-normal data distribution, Spearman's rank correlation was employed. The analysis revealed a significant, moderately strong correlation between SLM and reading interest ($r = 0.492$, $p < 0.05$), whereas the correlation between SLM and reading ability was weak and not statistically significant ($r = 0.057$, $p > 0.05$). This study contributes empirical evidence on SLM implementation in Eastern Indonesia, especially in Southwest Sumba Regency.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Literacy is crucial for sustainable human development. UNESCO defines it as more than just basic reading and writing, but rather encompasses essential skills for accessing, understanding, and communicating information, especially in the digital age [1]. Literacy empowers individuals and communities to face modern challenges such as the digital revolution and social change. Despite this, approximately 739 million adults worldwide still lack basic literacy, highlighting the need to improve access and quality globally [2]. The OECD emphasizes literacy as a vital competency for today's workforce, linking it to quality education and 21st-century skills such as critical thinking and effective problem-solving [3], [4], [5].

Indonesia has achieved high literacy rates, reaching approximately 96% for those aged 15 and above and nearly 100% for youth aged 15–24. However, challenges remain in access to technology, teacher capacity, and the relevance of the curriculum to local needs [6]. The government is promoting SLM to increase reading interest and literacy nationwide, alongside ongoing curriculum reforms to improve the quality of education. Reading is crucial for improving learning outcomes [7], expanding scientific and technological knowledge [8], and supporting a range of developmental benefits [9], [10]. Schools are encouraged to continuously cultivate students' reading motivation [11]. Effective, structured, and sustainable literacy programs are crucial for equipping students with the reading skills necessary to address modern challenges [12], [13]. Strengthening reading skills in elementary school students is urgently needed to support academic achievement and long-term growth, as proficient readers can better access information, develop vocabulary, and improve critical thinking skills [14], [15].

According to data from the Central Statistics Agency of East Nusa Tenggara, the literacy rate in Southwest Sumba in 2024 was 84.91% for the population aged 15 and over. This figure is lower than the national average, indicating specific challenges in improving literacy. Factors such as limited access to technology, the quality of school facilities, and teacher involvement are important considerations when implementing SLM in Southwest Sumba Regency [16]. In 2018, the Regent of Southwest Sumba Regency issued instructions on SLM to improve the literacy skills and reading abilities of elementary school students. Weetebula Catholic University supported the Regent's instructions by establishing the "Umma Pande" Learning Center, an institution dedicated to improving the reading skills of elementary school students [17].

One of the main challenges in Southwest Sumba Regency is the low reading ability and interest among elementary school students. Students tend to be more attracted to social media platforms such as television, YouTube, and TikTok than to book-reading activities. Additionally, parents seldom encourage reading at home, schools lack adequate reading facilities, and teachers tend to focus more on curriculum content than on fostering students' creativity [18], [19]. In line with these issues, the results of the PISA assessments from 2009 to 2012 ranked Indonesian students 64th out of 65 countries in mathematics, science, and reading [20]. Similarly, the PIRLS 2012 report ranked Indonesia 45th out of 48 countries in reading proficiency among fourth-grade students [10], and Indonesia was ranked 72nd out of 78 OECD countries in 2018 [21].

Although the SLM has been implemented in Southwest Sumba Regency since 2018, research on its impact on elementary school students' reading interest and ability remains limited, often focusing on specific schools or classes [22], [23]. Comprehensive studies examining the overall impact of SLM in the region remain scarce [24]. This study addresses this gap by objectively analyzing the impact of SLM on elementary school students' reading interest and skills in Southwest Sumba. This research is urgently needed given the limited existing publications, the lack of government support for SLM as a non-curricular reading initiative, and evidence from other regions showing the positive impact of SLM on students' reading motivation and ability [25], [26], [27], [28].

This study offers several novel contributions: (1) it addresses the scarcity of research on literacy in Eastern Indonesia, particularly East Nusa Tenggara and Southwest Sumba Regency, helping to fill the regional knowledge gap shaped by unique social and geographical factors [29]; it provides quantitative evidence on the effectiveness of SLM in Southwest Sumba, where such validation is limited despite its national implementation [30]; and (3) it focuses explicitly on the reading interest and reading ability of elementary school students in Southwest Sumba, highlighting local challenges and the development of a reading culture influenced by regional geographical, social, and economic conditions [31].

2. METHOD

This study used a survey method to measure teachers' perceptions of the impact of SLM on elementary school students' reading interest and reading ability. The research instrument was a questionnaire administered to elementary school teachers. The study involved 97 teachers randomly selected from a total of 3058 teachers across 273 elementary schools in 11 sub-districts within Southwest Sumba Regency [32]. The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula [33] with a 10% margin of error. Teachers were chosen because they are the most knowledgeable about improvements in students' reading interest and abilities. The research procedure is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

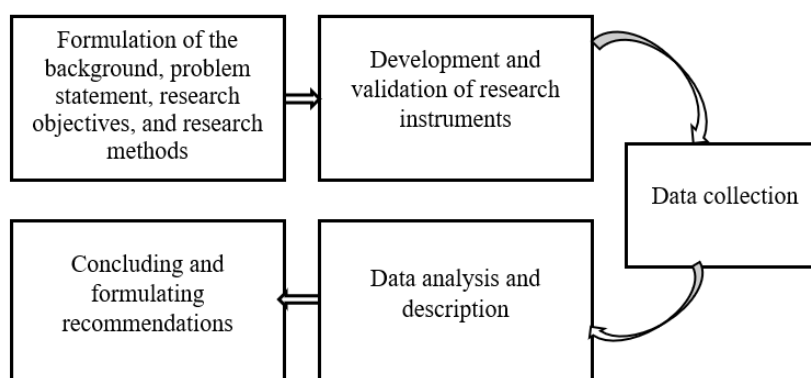


Figure 1. Research Steps

The SLM encompasses three main aspects: habituation, development, and learning [34]. Meanwhile, indicators of students' reading interest include enjoyment of reading activities, attraction to reading, attention to reading, and the level of reading engagement [35]. Reading ability among elementary school students is divided into two stages: initial reading and reading comprehension. Initial reading refers to the basic skills generally possessed by early-grade students (grades I–III), including recognition of letter sounds, reading words, reading simple sentences, arranging letters into sentences, and associating words with pictures [36]. Reading comprehension, on the other hand, develops in upper-grade students (grades IV–VI) and includes indicators such as the ability to understand text content, summarize information, answer questions based on the reading, and retell the content in their own words [37]. The research design is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

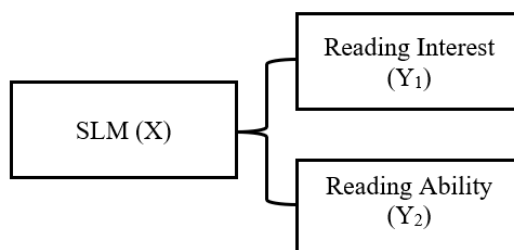


Figure 2. Research Design

The research design shown in Figure 2 indicates that this study examines the partial effect of SLM (X) on two variables: reading interest (Y1) and reading ability (Y2). Data collection was carried out using a Likert-scale questionnaire with five response options [38]: strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Instrument validation was conducted through a trial with teachers who were not part of the research sample. A total of 50 questionnaire items were tested, and the validation results, with an *r*-table value of 0.396, indicated 45 valid items and five invalid items. Furthermore, the reliability test produced a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.963, indicating a very high level of internal consistency. If the data is normally distributed, simple linear regression is used for analysis. However, if the data is not normally distributed, Spearman's rank correlation is used with a significance level of 0.05. The entire data analysis process used SPSS software version 25. Descriptive analysis was used to identify trends in the SLM, reading interest, and students' reading ability. The score for each variable was calculated using the formula [39]:

$$\text{Score} = \frac{\text{Average score} - \text{Minimum score}}{\text{Maximum score} - \text{Minimum score}} \times 100 \quad (1)$$

The categorization criteria followed the general opinion stated by Riduwan [40], as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Categorization Criteria

Score Range	Category
0 – 20	Very Low
21 – 40	Low
41 – 60	Moderate
61 – 80	High
81 – 100	Very High

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

The presentation of the research findings includes a description of the research data, results of assumption testing, and results of hypothesis testing. Table 3 below presents the descriptive statistics of the research data, including the maximum and minimum values, the average (mean), and the standard deviation. Based on Table 2, the School Literacy Movement variable had an average score of 45.03 (72.39); reading interest, 56.03 (61.00); and reading ability, 99.73 (73.44). All three variables fall into the high category.

Table 2. Research Data Description

	Descriptive Statistic							
	N	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	SD	Score	Category
School Literacy Movement	97	32	50	4368	45,03	2,903	72,39	High
Reading Interest	97	42	65	5435	56,03	4,554	61,00	High
Reading Ability	97	75	109	9674	99,73	6,936	73,44	High

The comparison of the averages and scores for these three variables—SLM, reading interest, and reading ability—is presented visually in Figure 1 below.

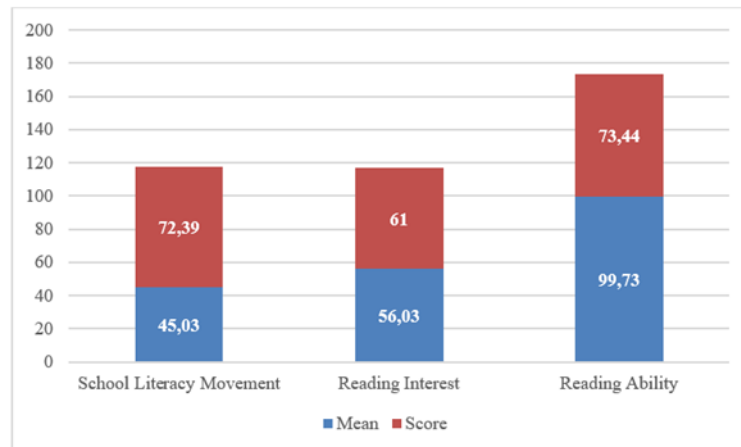


Figure 3. Comparison of the means and scores of the variables

Figure 3 shows that although all three variables fall into the high category, each has a different average value and score. The reading ability variable obtained the highest average value, followed by reading interest, and then the SLM. Meanwhile, the highest score was found in the reading ability variable, followed by the SLM, with the lowest score in the reading interest variable. The high category for the SLM variable indicates that the literacy program has been implemented effectively and consistently, thereby successfully forming reading habits and culture among students. For the reading interest variable, the high category indicates that students have a high interest and motivation to read actively and continuously. Meanwhile, for the reading ability variable, the high category indicates that students have adequate reading skills, including the ability to understand texts in depth and interpret information. Overall, the high category for this third variable indicates positive achievements in literacy development at the elementary school level that align with expected literacy standards, namely the ability of students not only to read technically but also to understand, disseminate, and utilize information critically in the context of education and everyday life.

This study uses the Shapiro-Wilk test to determine the normality of the research variable data, with the results presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
School Literacy Movement	,146	97	,000	,931	97	,000
Reading Ability	,150	97	,000	,907	97	,000
Reading Interest	,114	97	,003	,972	97	,035

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

As shown in Table 3, the significance values for all three variables were below 0.05, indicating that the data do not follow a normal distribution. Consequently, the hypothesis testing will employ suitable non-parametric statistical techniques. As this study uses non-parametric statistical methods for hypothesis testing, it is not necessary to test for homogeneity or linearity. The assumptions of normality, homogeneity, and linearity apply exclusively to parametric statistical procedures. Because the data were not normally distributed, hypothesis testing was conducted using Spearman's rank correlation. The results of the hypothesis test regarding the effect of the SLM on students' reading interest and reading ability are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Correlation of SLM with Reading Interest and Reading Ability

		Correlations			
			SLM	Reading Interest	Reading Ability
Spearman's rho	SLM	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	,492**	,057
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,000	,578
		N	97	97	97
	Reading Interest	Correlation Coefficient	,492**	1,000	,223*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	.	,028
		N	97	97	97
	Reading Ability	Correlation Coefficient	,057	,223*	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,578	,028	.
		N	97	97	97

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Based on Table 4, the Spearman Rank correlation test indicates a moderate, significant positive relationship between SLM and students' reading interest, with a correlation coefficient of 0.492 and a significance value of 0.000. This indicates that increasing SLM implementation is directly proportional to a significant increase in students' reading interest. Conversely, the correlation between SLM and students' reading ability is very weak and insignificant, with a correlation coefficient of 0.057 and a p-value of 0.578. Thus, the data in this study do not provide sufficient evidence to state the influence of SLM on students' reading ability. Overall, SLM has a significant effect on students' reading interest but does not significantly affect reading ability in this study.

3.2. Discussion

The successful implementation of SLM to increase students' interest in reading can be explained by the theory of intrinsic motivation, which emphasizes the importance of an individual's inner drive to voluntarily and enthusiastically engage in an activity [41]. Strong

intrinsic motivation within students will stimulate high interest, willingness, and enthusiasm for learning, because there is a close relationship between motivation and enthusiasm for learning [42]. Empirically, research on the effectiveness of a literacy culture on elementary school students' learning motivation shows that 80% of students are in the very good category, 18% are good, and 2% are quite good [43]. This intrinsic motivation plays a significant role in increasing students' interest and enthusiasm for learning and reading, encouraging them to engage in reading activities voluntarily and enthusiastically, thus establishing deep involvement in the learning process [44]. High intrinsic motivation significantly increases students' interest in reading, thereby strengthening their enthusiasm and willingness to learn [45]. This aligns with studies showing that intrinsic motivational components, such as self-needs and goals, encourage students to be more active in reading and learning [46]. Therefore, developing intrinsic motivation in students is key to successfully building a culture of literacy in schools.

According to the educational literacy framework, literacy activities carried out routinely and enjoyably can encourage the process of reading habits that ultimately improve students' reading skills. Therefore, the successful implementation of SLM in fostering students' reading interest in Southwest Sumba Regency provides evidence that increased reading interest begins with motivation developed through quality, consistent literacy practices. However, the weak correlation between SLM and reading ability suggests that other factors, such as teaching methods and learning resources, also play a significant role in improving students' reading competence [47]. In the context of literacy, continuous, student-centered reading activities can increase strong motivation to learn, resulting in a significant increase in students' reading interest [41]. The implementation of SLM, which provides contextual reading materials and engaging learning methods, can strengthen students' intrinsic motivation, making them more active and enthusiastic in reading activities [41].

The increase in students' reading interest achieved through the implementation of the SLM aligns with the educational literacy framework, which emphasizes the importance of cultivating and developing a culture of literacy within the school environment. SLM involves various activities, such as reading for 15 minutes before the learning process, providing a variety of reading materials, and creating a school environment that supports students' reading interests [48]. This approach is consistent with literacy theory, which states that increased reading interest stems not only from the reading activity itself but also from the development of regular reading habits, along with teacher support and adequate learning resources [49], [50]. Therefore, a sustainably implemented SLM program can foster students' reading interest by establishing a culture of literacy that supports their motivation and active involvement in reading activities.

The SLM implementation, which showed a weak correlation with students' reading ability, indicates that other factors, such as teaching methods and learning resources, also play an important role in improving students' reading competence [47]. The use of interactive learning methods and a variety of media, such as visual media and group discussions, can increase students' interest and understanding of reading texts [51], [52]. Furthermore, the availability of adequate learning resources, including relevant and interesting reading

materials, significantly contributes to the development of students' reading skills [53]. The active role of teachers is also crucial, as they can guide and motivate students to be active in reading activities, which ultimately increases their reading interest and reading ability significantly. Therefore, the success of SLM does not only depend on the consistency of implementation, but also on the application of innovative methods, adequate learning resources, and the maximum role of teachers in building student motivation and involvement.

Relevant research from outside Southwest Sumba Regency includes several significant findings. A study in Setia Budi District found a positive correlation between lower-grade elementary school students' literacy interest and reading ability, with 56% of students showing strong reading interest, consistent with prior findings. However, the correlation with reading ability was weaker [54]. Correlational research conducted at SDN 1 Kuta, Pujut District, Central Lombok showed that SLM had a positive and significant influence on fourth-grade students' reading interest, accounting for 22.6% of the variability in reading interest [55]. A study at SDN Brakas II found a positive and significant relationship between SLM implementation and students' reading interest, with a correlation coefficient of 0.578 ($p < 0.05$), reinforcing the role of literacy programs in increasing reading interest at the elementary school level [56]. Research with fifth-grade students at SD Negeri 146 Pekanbaru reported a positive and significant impact of SLM on students' reading interest, with the more optimal the SLM implementation, the greater the increase in students' reading interest [57]. Furthermore, a study at SD Inpres Pattung, Gowa Regency, showed that basic literacy activities significantly increased fourth-grade students' reading interest, with a significant increase both descriptively and inferentially ($p = 0.001$) [58].

Based on the findings of this research and the literature review on literacy in elementary schools, several practical and policy implications emerge. First, schools and teachers need to continue strengthening teacher capacity to implement the SLM to maintain students' high interest in reading and foster stronger reading skills. Second, schools are advised to provide adequate access to and facilities for reading, such as comfortable reading corners with a varied collection of books tailored to students' needs and interests. Third, daily literacy activities, such as reading for at least 15 minutes before class, need to be maintained to foster a consistent reading culture. From a policy perspective, the Southwest Sumba Regency government should prioritize implementing systematic, ongoing teacher capacity development training, particularly in reading and literacy teaching strategies. The local government should also allocate a regular budget for the procurement of quality books and the development of library facilities in elementary schools. Furthermore, the Southwest Sumba Regency Education Office should regularly monitor and evaluate literacy implementation in schools, while reporting on student reading interest and ability to inform targeted policy decisions. Finally, the regency government can collaborate with local and national universities to develop literacy programs relevant to the local conditions of Southwest Sumba Regency.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of the SLM program in Southwest Sumba Regency since 2018 has been at a high level, as have students' reading interest and reading ability, both of which are categorized as high. Spearman's correlation analysis shows a moderate, significant positive relationship between SLM and reading interest, whereas the correlation with reading ability is weak and insignificant. This study provides empirical evidence regarding the implementation of SLM in Eastern Indonesia, which has been relatively under-researched in the context of literacy. The study recommends literacy pedagogy training for teachers, as well as regular monitoring and evaluation of literacy implementation to assess its impact on students' reading ability. Furthermore, integrating literacy into the school learning process and providing literacy support in family and community environments are considered very important. Future research is recommended to use a mixed-methods approach or longitudinal studies to provide a more comprehensive description of SLM activities and impacts in Southwest Sumba Regency and Eastern Indonesia.

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