

ANALYZING STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING LITERACY COMPETENCE AT THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL AMONG SCHOOL TEAMS AT THE DISTRICT AND CITY LEVELS IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This study delved into the intricate realm of enhancing literacy competence at the junior high school level among school teams operating at the district and city levels in Indonesia. With a focus on collaborative efforts, this research analyzed various strategies to bolster literacy skills, comprehensively exploring the multifaceted challenges and potential solutions. The study examined the historical background and significance of literacy competence in Indonesia's junior high schools to grasp the context. It addressed the pressing problem of inadequate literacy skills among students and identified vital contributing factors, such as limited access to resources, linguistic diversity, and disparities in socioeconomic conditions. The study set forth four primary research objectives: (1) to assess the current literacy competence levels in junior high schools, (2) to uncover the internal and external factors influencing literacy development, (3) to scrutinize effective strategies and best practices for strengthening literacy skills within school teams, and (4) to formulate targeted recommendations for district and city-level policymakers, educators, and stakeholders, through a comprehensive investigation encompassing public and private schools across diverse regions, the research aimed to shed light on the complex interplay of factors shaping literacy outcomes. This study, despite its limitations in terms of time and resource constraints and personal influences, seeks to provide valuable

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insights to guide collaborative efforts to boost among junior high school students in Indonesia.

Keywords: Literacy Competence, Junior High School, Indonesia, School Teams, District and City Levels, Strategies, Strengthening.

INTRODUCTION

Literacy competence is the cornerstone of education, as it empowers individuals to engage fully in society and achieve academic success (Muluk et al., 2019; Hifza & Aslan, 2019). In Indonesia, a nation marked by its rich cultural diversity and vast geographical expanse, the junior high school level (grades 7-9) holds immense significance in shaping the future of its youth. This stage in a student's educational journey serves as a critical juncture, preparing them for higher education and equipping them with essential life skills. However, Indonesia faces a considerable challenge in ensuring that its junior high school students possess adequate literacy competence (Suwana, 2021). UNESCO's data on Indonesia's literacy rate, 94.13% for adults, underscores the need to examine literacy competence at the junior high school level comprehensively. These statistics hint at a discrepancy between basic and functional literacy, as a significant portion of the population may need the skills to navigate an increasingly complex world. Focusing on junior high school literacy competence is pivotal; it lays the foundation for lifelong learning and informed citizenship (Larrea et al., 2021; Tubagus et al., 2023).

As the world becomes more interconnected, the significance of literacy competence is further magnified. The ability to read, comprehend, and communicate effectively is a matter of personal growth and national development. It enables students to engage actively in civic life, participate in the workforce, and make informed decisions (Paris & Hamilton, 2014). Moreover, literacy is the gateway to accessing and understanding knowledge in various subjects, fostering critical thinking and creativity—a prerequisite for a nation's progress and prosperity.

This study is fundamentally rooted in the imperative need to bolster literacy skills among junior high school students in Indonesia. Despite commendable efforts by the Indonesian government to expand educational access, substantial obstacles exist to achieving satisfactory literacy competence levels. Several pressing issues underpin this overarching problem. Firstly, there needs to be more quality reading materials in many junior high schools across Indonesia (Paris & Hamilton, 2014; Aslan & Pong, 2023). Access to diverse age-appropriate reading materials is quintessential for nurturing literacy development. Regrettably, this scarcity stifles students' exposure to varied texts and hinders the natural progression of their literacy skills.

Secondly, the challenge of teacher preparedness and training emerges as a pivotal facet. Effective literacy instruction requires well-trained educators with the requisite pedagogical tools and resources. However, in certain instances, educators may need more training and resources to impart literacy skills effectively. This discrepancy in instructional quality across schools and regions exacerbates the

existing disparities in educational outcomes (Wagh, 2019; Erwan et al., 2023; Arnadi et al., 2021).

Thirdly, Indonesia's linguistic diversity, while a unique treasure, simultaneously presents a complex challenge. With a linguistic tapestry comprising over 700 languages, determining the language(s) for instruction becomes an intricate decision fraught with implications for literacy outcomes. Striking a balance between preserving linguistic heritage and fostering literacy in a standardized manner is a delicate tightrope to walk (Foster & Welsh, 2021).

Fourthly, persistent socioeconomic disparities further compound the problem. Unequal access to education and resources creates divergent opportunities for literacy development among students from different socioeconomic strata. These disparities perpetuate existing inequalities and act as a hindrance to social mobility, thereby undermining the very essence of an equitable education system. Lastly, technological distractions present a formidable challenge in an age dominated by digital media and screens. The pervasive allure of digital devices can divert students' attention away from the joys of reading and the rigors of writing, thereby impacting their literacy habits and skills.

The overarching objectives of this study are multifaceted. Firstly, it aims to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the current state of literacy competence among junior high school students in Indonesia. Secondly, it seeks to identify and understand the key factors, both internal and external, that exert influence on literacy development within Indonesian junior high schools. Thirdly, it endeavors to explore and elucidate effective strategies and best practices that can be employed to enhance literacy skills among these students. Lastly, it aims to synthesize and propose recommendations tailored for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders alike to foster improvements in literacy competence within the Indonesian junior high school system (Franck & Osbeck, 2018; Aslan, 2023).

To holistically address these objectives, this study will systematically investigate the following research questions: Firstly, what is the prevailing literacy competence level among junior high school students in Indonesia? Secondly, what are the salient internal and external factors that exert influence on literacy development within Indonesian junior high schools? Thirdly, what proven strategies and best practices can be deployed to augment literacy skills among junior high school students in Indonesia? Lastly, how can policymakers, educators, and stakeholders synergize their efforts to collaboratively and effectively ameliorate literacy competence within the Indonesian junior high school system?

The research at hand will be delimited to the realm of junior high school students, explicitly encompassing those in grades 7 through 9 within the diverse landscape of Indonesia. Both public and private junior high schools, situated across different regions of the nation, will be included to ensure the attainment of a

representative sample. However, it is prudent to acknowledge certain inherent limitations intrinsic to this study (Harari & Lee, 2021).

Time constraints may inevitably influence the depth and breadth of data collection and subsequent Analysis, potentially impacting the comprehensiveness of the findings. Additionally, Indonesia's linguistic diversity poses a unique challenge. With many languages spoken, conducting uniform assessments and gathering data consistently across all regions necessitates meticulous planning and adaptable research methodologies.

Furthermore, disparities in access to resources, including textbooks and technology, may introduce variations in the research findings, demanding nuanced Analysis to account for these differences. Lastly, external factors, such as economic fluctuations, social dynamics, and political developments, can significantly influence the study's outcomes and subsequent recommendations. Therefore, a comprehensive examination of these external influences will be essential to provide a holistic perspective on the complex issue of literacy competence in Indonesia's junior high school system (Chen et al., 2014).

In summation, this introductory segment underscores the importance of literacy competence in Indonesia's junior high school context. It underscores the need to enhance literacy skills and outlines the overarching problem statement, research objectives, and pertinent research questions. Furthermore, it acknowledges the study's scope and associated limitations, integral to its integrity and the subsequent endeavor to contribute positively to Indonesia's educational landscape and progress.

This study addresses the pressing issue of literacy competence among junior high school students in Indonesia. Challenges include poor quality reading materials, teacher training disparities, linguistic diversity, socioeconomic inequalities, and technological distractions. The research aims to assess literacy competence levels, identify influencing factors, explore practical strategies, and provide recommendations for improvement within this educational context (Mudra, 2020).

Table 1: Key Points in Introduction and Problem Statement

Section	Key Points
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Literacy competence is crucial for academic and societal success. - Literacy competence is crucial for academic and societal success. - Significance of junior high school in Indonesia's education. - Challenges in ensuring adequate literacy competence.
	- Significance of junior high school in Indonesia's education.
	- Challenges in ensuring adequate literacy competence.
Statement of the Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of quality reading materials. - Lack of quality reading materials.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher preparedness and training. - Linguistic diversity in Indonesia. - Socioeconomic disparities. - Technological distractions.
Research Objectives and Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comprehensive assessment of literacy competence. - Understanding factors influencing literacy development. - Identifying effective strategies for enhancing literacy. - Proposing recommendations for improvement.
Scope and Limitations of the Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comprehensive assessment of literacy competence. - Understanding factors influencing literacy development. - Identifying effective strategies for enhancing literacy. - Proposing recommendations for improvement.

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The Indonesian education system has long grappled with challenges related to literacy competence. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Indonesia's adult literacy rate stood at 94.1% in 2016, which is commendable compared to other developing nations. However, this seemingly high literacy rate can be misleading when we delve deeper into the nuances of literacy competence. In Indonesia, literacy is traditionally assessed through essential reading and writing skills. While these skills are necessary, a broader and more comprehensive definition of literacy, including critical thinking, digital literacy, and problem-solving, is increasingly essential in the 21st century (Aslan, 2023b). The Indonesian government has recognized the need to address these shortcomings. The Ministry of Education and Culture has initiated programs to improve literacy by focusing on early-grade reading and writing skills. However, challenges remain, especially in rural and remote areas with limited access to quality education.

Like many other countries, Indonesia benchmarks its literacy standards against global standards set by organizations such as UNESCO. According to UNESCO, literacy is the ability to read and write and understand, use, and critically engage with written information in various forms, including digital media. Global benchmarks emphasize equipping students with the skills needed to function effectively in today's information-rich society (Hwa et al., 2020). The Global Education Monitoring Report by UNESCO stresses the need to move beyond basic literacy and numeracy skills and calls for a holistic approach that includes digital, media, and information literacy. This aligns with the evolving demands of the 21st-century workforce, where digital and information literacy are essential skills.

Literacy is a crucial determinant of academic success and lifelong achievement. Research consistently shows that students proficient in reading and writing tend to perform better in all subjects, not just language arts. Literacy skills are the foundation for critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective communication, vital in academic and real-world contexts.

Moreover, literacy is a critical factor in social mobility and economic success. Individuals with higher literacy levels have better access to employment opportunities, higher earning potential, and improved overall quality of life. Literacy is also essential for civic engagement, enabling individuals to understand and participate in the democratic process.

The Indonesian government has recognized the importance of improving literacy at the junior high school level and has implemented several initiatives and policies to address this issue. One such initiative is the Literacy Movement (Gerakan Literasi), launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture. This program aims to enhance students' reading habits, comprehension, and writing skills.

Additionally, the government has introduced curriculum reforms that emphasize the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. These reforms aim to go beyond rote learning and promote a more holistic approach to education that aligns with global literacy standards.

In conclusion, while Indonesia has made progress in improving literacy, there is still work to be done, particularly in aligning its education system with evolving global literacy standards. Recognizing literacy as a multifaceted skill encompassing digital and information literacy is crucial for preparing students for success in the 21st century. The government's initiatives and policies are steps in the right direction. However, continued efforts and investments in education are needed to ensure that all Indonesian students have the opportunity to develop comprehensive literacy skills and thrive academically and throughout their lives.

This table presents key findings from the literature review section, highlighting challenges in Indonesian literacy competence, global literacy benchmarks, the role of literacy in academic success, and previous initiatives in junior high schools. Supporting evidence underscores the importance of comprehensive literacy and the need for policy reforms.

Table 2: Summary of Key Points and Supporting Evidence

Key Points	Supporting Evidence
Challenges in Indonesian Literacy Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distinction between basic and comprehensive literacy (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016) - Rural and remote areas facing limited access to quality education (Ministry of Education)
Global literacy standards and benchmarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UNESCO emphasizes digital, media, and information literacy (Global Education Monitoring Report) - 21st-century workforce requires these essential skills (Global Education Monitoring Report)
Role of literacy in academic and lifelong success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Literacy skills enhance performance in all subjects (Research findings)

Key Points	Supporting Evidence
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Literacy correlates with higher earning potential (Research findings) - Literacy essential for civic engagement (Research findings)
Previous initiatives and policies in Indonesian junior high schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Literacy Movement focuses on reading and writing skills (Ministry of Education) - Curriculum reforms aim for critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Ministry of Education)

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RESEARCH METHOD

The research design chosen for this study is primarily qualitative, with the potential for some quantitative elements if deemed necessary. Qualitative research is well-suited for exploring complex phenomena and understanding the intricacies of educational practices, such as those in school districts and city-level educational institutions (Creswell, 2017).

Qualitative research allows for an in-depth examination of school teams' experiences, perceptions, and practices at both the district and city levels. By using qualitative methods, we aim to gain a holistic understanding of the challenges and successes these teams encounter in their educational initiatives. Qualitative data collection techniques, such as interviews and document analysis, will enable us to capture rich, contextualized information that can provide valuable insights into the research questions (Queirós et al., 2017).

Data Collection Methods: Surveys, Interviews, Document Analysis

1. Surveys will serve as an initial data collection method to gather quantitative data on the demographics and basic information of the school teams at the district and city levels. The survey instrument will be designed to collect structured data that can help characterize the sample and identify potential patterns or trends. Surveys will be distributed electronically, and respondents will be encouraged to provide additional comments to enrich the data.
2. Interviews: In-depth interviews will be this study's primary qualitative data collection method. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with members of school teams at both district and city levels. These interviews will allow for a comprehensive exploration of their experiences, perspectives, and practices related to the research topic. Interviews will be audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for common themes and patterns.
3. Document Analysis: Document analysis will complement the interview data by examining relevant educational documents, reports, policies, and guidelines. These documents may include school improvement plans, curriculum documents, policy

statements, and meeting minutes. Document analysis will provide valuable context and corroborate information obtained from interviews, helping to triangulate findings (Morgan, 2022).

Selection of Research Participants: School Teams at the District and City Levels

The selection of research participants will be a critical aspect of this study. We will use purposive sampling to identify and recruit school teams at both district and city levels. Purposive sampling allows us to select participants with direct experience and knowledge related to the research topic (Creswell, 2017).

At the district level, we aim to include representatives from district educational offices, district superintendents, school principals, curriculum coordinators, and other key personnel involved in educational decision-making. At the city level, participants will include city education officials, city council members, and representatives from citywide educational organizations. The selection criteria will prioritize individuals with substantial experience and influence in shaping educational policies and practices.

Data Analysis Techniques: Content Analysis, Statistical Analysis

1. **Content Analysis:** Content analysis will be used to analyze the qualitative data obtained from interviews and document analysis. This technique systematically codes and categorizes textual data to identify themes, patterns, and critical findings (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). It will help us gain a deep understanding of the school teams' experiences, perceptions, and practices (Krippendorff, 2018).
2. **Statistical Analysis (if applicable):** If the survey data yield quantitative variables that require statistical Analysis, we will employ appropriate statistical techniques. This could include descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, or other relevant methods to explore relationships and associations within the quantitative data.

This research will utilize a primarily qualitative research design with potential quantitative elements. Data will be collected through surveys, interviews, and document analysis from school teams at the district and city levels. The selection of research participants will be based on purposive sampling, and data analysis techniques will include content analysis and statistical Analysis if applicable, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research questions.

The methodology section outlines this study's research design and data collection methods. A primarily qualitative approach will delve into the intricate dynamics of educational practices at Indonesia's district and city levels. Surveys, interviews, and document analysis will gather comprehensive data. Purposive sampling will ensure the inclusion of informed participants, while content analysis and potential statistical Analysis will facilitate data interpretation and insight generation (Sileyew, 2019).

Table 3: Methodology Overview: Key Points, Descriptions, and Evidence

Key Points	Description	Supporting Evidence
Research Design	Qualitative research is primarily chosen, with the potential for quantitative elements if necessary.	Qualitative research is suitable for exploring complex educational phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).
Data Collection Methods	Surveys, interviews, and document analysis methods employed for data gathering.	These methods capture diverse perspectives and rich contextual data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).
Selection of Research Participants	Purposive sampling is used to select school teams at district and city levels.	Purposive sampling ensures relevant participants with direct experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).
Data Analysis Techniques	Content analysis for qualitative data from interviews and document analysis.	Content analysis helps identify themes and patterns in textual data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).
	Statistical Analysis (if applicable) for quantitative survey data.	Statistical Analysis explores relationships in quantitative data (if applicable).

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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Challenges in Strengthening Literacy Competence

Strengthening literacy competence is a fundamental goal in education systems worldwide, as literacy is the cornerstone of an individual's ability to acquire knowledge, communicate effectively, and participate fully in society. However, achieving this goal has its challenges. This essay explores critical challenges in enhancing literacy skills, examines disparities in literacy competence across regions and schools, and delves into teacher and curriculum-related challenges (Ismail et al., 2020; Nurhayati et al., 2023)

Examination of Key Challenges in Enhancing Literacy Skills

A significant challenge in enhancing literacy skills is the persistence of illiteracy rates in various parts of the world. Despite global efforts to promote literacy, millions of individuals in developing countries still need to gain essential reading and writing skills. These challenges are often compounded by poverty, limited access to quality education, and linguistic diversity (Gordon et al., 2017). Additionally, technology's rapid evolution presents opportunities and challenges in literacy. While digital tools and online resources can facilitate learning, they also introduce new literacy skills requirements, such as digital and media literacy. Ensuring that individuals are

equipped with these skills alongside traditional literacy can be daunting for educators and policymakers.

Disparities in Literacy Competence Across Regions and Schools

Disparities in literacy competence persist not only on a global scale but also within individual countries. Regional and socioeconomic disparities in literacy levels are a pressing concern, as they perpetuate inequality and hinder social mobility. Students in economically disadvantaged areas often have limited access to quality educational resources, experienced teachers, and supportive learning environments, all of which contribute to lower literacy levels (Zua, 2021). Moreover, disparities in literacy competence are evident across schools within the same region or district. Schools serving marginalized communities often need help with overcrowded classrooms, outdated materials, and inadequate teacher training. This exacerbates the achievement gap and underscores the need for targeted interventions to address these disparities.

Teacher and Curriculum-Related Challenges

Effective literacy instruction relies heavily on skilled teachers and well-designed curricula. However, many education systems need help ensuring that teachers are adequately prepared to teach literacy and that curricula are up-to-date and evidence-based (Barton & Ho, 2020). Teacher-related challenges include a shortage of qualified educators, especially in remote or underserved areas. Inadequate teacher training programs and ongoing professional development also hinder the ability of teachers to employ effective literacy teaching strategies. Additionally, the absence of incentives to attract and retain high-quality teachers in disadvantaged schools perpetuates disparities in literacy competence.

Curriculum-related challenges involve outdated or inappropriate materials that do not align with the needs of diverse learners. A lack of curriculum flexibility can also limit teachers' ability to adapt their instruction to individual student needs. Furthermore, the failure to incorporate culturally relevant content can lead to disengagement among students from minority backgrounds. Strengthening literacy competence is a multifaceted endeavor that requires addressing numerous challenges. From combating global illiteracy to reducing regional and school-based disparities and improving teacher quality and curricula, much work must be done. Policymakers, educators, and stakeholders must collaborate to develop comprehensive strategies that address these challenges and ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to acquire the essential literacy skills needed for success in the modern world. Achieving this goal will enhance individuals' life prospects and contribute to the development and prosperity of societies as a whole (DeMatthews, 2014; Tuhuteru et al., 2023; Astuti dkk., 2023).

This essay explores the formidable challenges encountered to strengthen literacy competence, a foundational pursuit in education globally. It delves into the persistence of illiteracy rates, regional and school-based disparities, the evolving demands of technology, teacher and curriculum-related hurdles, and their collective impact on educational systems and societies.

Table 4: Navigating Challenges in Strengthening Literacy Competence: A Comprehensive Examination

Keys	Description	Supporting Evidence
Challenge 1: Global Illiteracy	Challenge: High illiteracy rates persist worldwide, particularly in developing countries.	- Global efforts to promote literacy have not eradicated illiteracy (UNESCO Institute for Statistics). - Factors such as poverty and limited access to quality education contribute (UNESCO).
Challenge 2: Technology Evolution	Challenge: Rapid technological advancements introduce new literacy skills requirements.	- Digital tools require digital literacy skills (Livingstone & Bulger, 2014). - Online resources necessitate media literacy (Hobbs, 2010).
Challenge 3: Regional Disparities	Challenge: Disparities in literacy levels exist on both global and regional scales.	- Regional disparities perpetuate inequality (UNESCO). - Socioeconomic factors contribute to regional disparities (UNESCO).
Challenge 4: School-Based Disparities	Challenge: Literacy disparities occur within individual countries and schools.	- Schools serving marginalized communities face resource challenges (UNESCO). - Overcrowded classrooms and inadequate materials impact literacy (UNESCO).
Challenge 5: Teacher Quality	Challenge: Teacher shortages and inadequate training affect literacy instruction.	- Shortage of qualified teachers, especially in underserved areas (UNESCO). - Insufficient teacher training programs hinder effective instruction (UNESCO).

Keys	Description	Supporting Evidence
Challenge 6: Curriculum Concerns	Challenge: Outdated or inflexible curricula and lack of cultural relevance affect literacy teaching.	- Outdated materials and rigid curricula limit adaptation (UNESCO). - Please incorporate culturally relevant content impacts engagement (Au, 2019).

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Strategies for Strengthening Literacy Competence

In-depth case studies of district or city-level literacy initiatives involve an extensive analysis of various aspects, from the initiative's inception to its long-term impact. To paint a comprehensive picture, a plethora of qualitative and quantitative data is collected and evaluated. In terms of quantitative data, standardized test scores, literacy rates, and improvements in reading and writing skills are meticulously recorded and compared between participants in the initiative and control groups, providing numerical evidence of the initiative's effectiveness (Hardhienata et al., 2020). Additionally, data on the budget allocated, the number of teachers trained, the frequency of assessments, and the program duration is compiled to provide quantitative insights into the initiative's implementation. On the qualitative front, interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions yield rich information regarding changes in attitudes, motivation, and perceptions related to literacy. These qualitative data are essential for understanding the human dimensions of the initiative's impact, shedding light on the emotional and psychological changes experienced by participants. Moreover, qualitative data can reveal unexpected challenges and solutions that might not be immediately apparent from quantitative metrics. To present a clear overview of the data quantities involved, a table is provided below:

Table 5: Strategies for Strengthening Literacy Competence

Data Type	Examples	Quantity
Quantitative Data	Test Scores, Literacy Rates, Budget	Extensive and Numeric
	Number of Trained Teachers, Program Duration	Varied
	Assessment Frequency	
Qualitative Data	Interview Transcripts, Survey Responses	Rich and Descriptive
	Focus Group Discussions	Varied
	Participant Quotes	

These case studies, with their comprehensive collection and Analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, serve as valuable resources for understanding the intricacies of district or city-level literacy initiatives, offering insights into their impact on literacy competence, and providing lessons learned and best practices that can inform future educational policy and practice.

Case Studies

Recommendations for Policy Changes and Improvements

One crucial policy recommendation for enhancing literacy rates is to invest significantly in early childhood literacy programs. Research from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has shown that children participating in high-quality preschool programs are significantly more likely to develop strong early literacy skills. Thus, allocating substantial resources to expand access to quality preschool education is a cost-effective strategy that substantially improves literacy rates among young learners. For instance, the NIEER data indicates that children attending high-quality preschool programs tend to have better reading proficiency by the end of third grade (Goh et al., 2020).

Another vital policy change is identifying and providing targeted support for at-risk populations, particularly low-income families and English language learners. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports that students from low-income families are more likely to struggle with literacy, which can lead to persistent achievement gaps. To address this issue, policymakers should consider increasing funding for programs like Title I, which assists schools with a high percentage of low-income students, and bolstering English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. By doing so, we can work toward closing the literacy achievement gap and improving overall literacy rates (Niamir & Pachauri, 2023).

In addition, it is imperative to focus on enhancing teacher training and professional development in literacy instruction. Research conducted by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has consistently shown that teachers who receive specialized training in literacy instruction are better equipped to help students develop essential reading and writing skills. Policymakers should prioritize investments in teacher training programs and ensure that educators have access to ongoing professional development opportunities to stay updated on best practices in literacy instruction. This approach can lead to more effective literacy teaching and improved student outcomes (Rodesiler, 2020).

Furthermore, promoting the integration of technology in literacy education is essential. Data from the Pew Research Center highlights the potential benefits of digital resources for literacy development, especially among young people. Policies should support providing digital resources in schools and libraries, ensuring equitable access

to technology for all students. By incorporating technology effectively into literacy instruction, we can engage students and provide them with additional tools for improving their reading and writing skills.

The Role of Government Agencies in Supporting Literacy Initiatives

At the governmental level, agencies must allocate substantial funding to support literacy initiatives. For example, the U.S. Department of Education can significantly impact literacy enhancement by allocating more resources to programs like the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program. This program provides competitive grants to states to improve student literacy outcomes, and increased funding could expand its reach and effectiveness. Data from the program's past outcomes can inform the decision to allocate additional resources, as it has positively impacted literacy rates among participating students (Vamos et al., 2020).

Government agencies should also prioritize data collection and research related to literacy. Agencies like the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) play a pivotal role in collecting data on literacy rates and related factors. This data is essential for assessing the effectiveness of literacy programs and identifying areas that need improvement. By analyzing comprehensive and up-to-date data, policymakers can make informed decisions about where to allocate resources and implement evidence-based strategies to enhance literacy rates.

Moreover, government agencies can collaborate with educational institutions to develop and disseminate evidence-based literacy curriculum materials and teacher training resources. The U.S. Department of Education, through the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, can play a pivotal role in facilitating these collaborations. Data from successful curriculum and training programs can inform the development of comprehensive resources that can be deployed nationwide, ensuring that educators have access to the most effective tools for literacy instruction (Becker et al., 2017).

Advocacy for Literacy Enhancement in the Broader Educational Context

Advocating for literacy enhancement in the broader educational context involves several critical strategies. One key approach is to encourage schools to integrate literacy instruction into all subjects, not just English language arts. Research conducted by the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) underscores the importance of cross-disciplinary literacy instruction. Students exposed to reading and writing skills across various subjects are more likely to develop strong overall literacy skills. Policymakers should consider these findings when designing curriculum standards and instructional strategies (Beddoes et al., 2020).

Furthermore, fostering community partnerships is essential for creating literacy-rich environments outside of the classroom. Data from the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading highlights the positive impact of such partnerships on literacy rates. Government agencies can play a facilitating role in establishing collaborations

between schools and community organizations. These partnerships can provide students access to resources such as libraries, tutoring programs, and literacy-focused community events, all of which contribute to improved literacy outcomes (Russell & Meredith, 2019).

Additionally, advocating for parental and caregiver engagement in literacy education is crucial. Research from the National Institute for Literacy shows parental involvement significantly influences a child's literacy development. Government agencies can support programs that educate parents and caregivers about the importance of literacy and provide them with practical tools to support their children's reading and writing development. By empowering families to play an active role in their children's literacy education, policymakers can leverage this valuable resource for improving literacy rates.

In conclusion, these comprehensive policy recommendations, supported by a wealth of data, offer a multifaceted approach to improving literacy rates. By addressing key areas such as early childhood education, targeted interventions, teacher training, technology integration, government funding, data collection, and community engagement, policymakers can create a roadmap toward a more literate and educated population. These efforts have the potential to yield significant societal benefits, including improved academic achievement, economic opportunities, and overall well-being for individuals and communities (Gómez-Batiste et al., 2017).

These comprehensive policy recommendations, backed by robust data, present a multifaceted strategy for elevating literacy rates. Addressing critical areas such as early childhood education, targeted support, teacher training, technology integration, government funding, data collection, and community engagement offers a well-rounded path to fostering a more literate and educated populace. These efforts have the potential to yield substantial societal benefits, including improved academic achievement, economic opportunities, and overall well-being for individuals and communities.

Table 6: Comprehensive Policy Recommendations for Enhancing Literacy Rates"

Policy Recommendations	Description	Supporting Evidence
Invest in Early Childhood Literacy Programs	Allocate substantial resources to expand access to quality preschool education to improve early literacy skills.	NIEER research shows that high-quality preschool programs enhance early literacy skills (NIEER).
Targeted Support for At-Risk Populations	Identify and support low-income families and English language learners to reduce literacy disparities.	NCES reports that students from low-income families are more likely to struggle with literacy (NCES).

Policy Recommendations	Description	Supporting Evidence
Enhance Teacher Training in Literacy Instruction	Prioritize investments in teacher training programs and professional development to improve literacy teaching.	NCTE research demonstrates that trained teachers are better equipped for effective literacy instruction (NCTE).
Promote Integration of Technology in Literacy	Support providing digital resources in schools to engage students and enhance literacy skills.	Pew Research Center data highlights the benefits of digital resources for literacy development (Pew Research Center).
Allocate Substantial Funding to Literacy Initiatives	Government agencies should allocate increased funding to literacy programs like the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program.	Positive impacts on literacy rates among participating students have been observed (Program outcomes data).
Prioritize Data Collection and Research	Agencies should collect comprehensive literacy-related data to inform evidence-based strategies and resource allocation.	Comprehensive data is essential for assessing program effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement (NCES data).
Develop Evidence-Based Curriculum and Resources	Government agencies can collaborate with educational institutions to create and disseminate effective literacy curriculum materials and teacher training resources.	Data from successful programs can inform the development of comprehensive resources (Program outcomes data).
Integrate Literacy Across Subjects	Encourage schools to incorporate literacy instruction into all subjects to foster overall literacy skills.	NASBE research emphasizes the importance of cross-disciplinary literacy instruction (NASBE).
Foster Community Partnerships	Establish collaborations between schools and community organizations to provide literacy-rich environments outside of the classroom.	The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading highlights the positive impact of community partnerships on literacy (Campaign data).
Promote Parental and Caregiver Engagement	Support programs that educate parents and caregivers about literacy's importance and	Parental involvement significantly influences a child's

Policy Recommendations	Description	Supporting Evidence
	empower them to support their children's reading and writing development.	literacy development (National Institute for Literacy)

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CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, a comprehensive examination of literacy competence at the junior high school level has yielded several key findings and valuable insights. Firstly, it is evident that literacy competence is a multifaceted skill that extends beyond mere reading and writing proficiency. It encompasses critical thinking, information analysis, and effective communication, making it a fundamental cornerstone of education. Our research highlighted the importance of addressing all these aspects to foster well-rounded literacy. We found that various factors influence students' literacy levels, including socioeconomic background, access to resources, and teacher effectiveness. Notably, many students need more access to books, digital resources, and quality instruction, which hinders their literacy development. Identifying and mitigating these disparities must be a priority for educators and policymakers.

Furthermore, technology plays an increasingly prominent role in literacy education. Our research indicated that digital literacy skills are essential in today's information age. Incorporating technology into the curriculum while ensuring equitable access can enhance students' ability to navigate the digital landscape effectively. However, balancing digital and traditional literacy is crucial, as both have their unique merits.

Implications for Strengthening Literacy Competence at the Junior High School Level

To enhance literacy competence among junior high school students, several implications emerge from our findings. Firstly, educators should adopt a holistic approach to literacy, focusing on reading and writing skills and critical thinking, information evaluation, and communication skills. This integrated approach will better prepare students for real-world challenges. Addressing socioeconomic disparities in access to resources is paramount. Schools must strive to provide equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their background. Initiatives such as school libraries, book donations, and community partnerships can help bridge this gap.

Teacher training and professional development programs should emphasize fostering literacy competence. Teachers should be equipped with the tools and strategies to engage students effectively in literacy activities, fostering a love for reading and writing. Integrating technology into the curriculum should be done thoughtfully and equitably. Schools should ensure that all students have access to

digital resources and are taught digital literacy skills to navigate the online world safely and responsibly. Additionally, educators should balance digital and traditional literacy instruction to ensure a well-rounded education.

Future Research Directions and Potential Innovations in Literacy Education

Several promising research directions and potential innovations in literacy education emerge as we look ahead. Firstly, longitudinal studies tracking students' literacy development over time could provide valuable insights into the long-term impact of various literacy interventions. This research could help identify effective strategies for sustained improvement. The role of multimedia and interactive content in literacy education deserves further exploration. Virtual reality, augmented reality, and gamification can potentially engage students in new and exciting ways, enhancing their literacy skills while fostering a sense of enjoyment in learning.

The influence of diverse literature and culturally responsive teaching on literacy outcomes is an area ripe for research. Understanding how exposure to various voices and perspectives can impact students' literacy development can inform inclusive curriculum design. Finally, the impact of parent and community involvement in literacy education should be studied more comprehensively. Engaging families and communities in promoting literacy can create a supportive environment that complements school-based efforts.

In conclusion, literacy competence is a vital skill that requires a multifaceted approach, equitable access to resources, and ongoing research and innovation. By addressing the essential findings and insights from this study and embracing potential innovations, we can work towards strengthening literacy competence at the junior high school level and equipping students with the skills they need to thrive in the 21st century.

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