

Research Article

Analyzing the Reading Literacy Competence of Primary School Teacher Education Students at Universitas Cenderawasih

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the reading literacy skills of second-semester students based on the results of the Even Semester Midterm Assessment in the Indonesian Language and Literature course within the Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD) Program at Universitas Cenderawasih for the 2023/2024 academic year. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, with data collected through tests, interviews, and questionnaires. A total of 200 students from eight different classes participated in the study and were categorized into four literacy proficiency levels: in need of special intervention, basic, proficient, and advanced. The findings reveal variations in students' reading literacy levels, with 4% categorized as needing special intervention, 30% at the basic level, 44% at the proficient level, and 22% at the advanced level. These literacy levels were measured using midterm test items that assessed three cognitive domains: retrieving information, interpreting and integrating, and evaluating and reflecting. The results indicate that students struggled particularly with cognitive tasks related to evaluation and reflection. These findings offer valuable insights for lecturers, providing a clearer understanding of students' reading literacy capabilities. This information can serve as a foundation for reflective teaching practices and the formulation of more effective strategies aimed at improving students' reading literacy especially their critical and reflective thinking skills.

Keywords: Reading Literacy; Mid-Semester Assessment; Primary School Teacher Education

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization and the rapid development of science, technology, and innovation (STI) have posed inevitable challenges to modern societies, especially in the field of education. As a result, Indonesia's education system must adapt to ensure that graduates are equipped with the competencies needed to compete globally in the 21st century. Among these essential competencies is literacy, which encompasses reading, writing, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills (Brookhart, 2010; Ananiadou & Claro, 2009). According to Trilling and Fadel (2009), 21st-century literacy extends beyond the traditional ability to read and write; it includes critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills particularly within increasingly complex digital environments. Reading literacy, one of the six foundational literacies, is essential for enabling young people to participate actively in modern society (Mulyaningsih et al., 2023). It involves the capacity to comprehend, evaluate, and apply information from written texts to solve problems and make informed decisions (Pujiati et al., 2022). Therefore, reading literacy must be strengthened at the tertiary education level to prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century.

Bloom's taxonomy, revised by Heer (2012), emphasizes the importance of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) such as analysis, evaluation, and creation. These cognitive skills are crucial for reading literacy, as students are expected not only to understand texts literally but also to integrate information, analyze meanings, and make decisions based on critical reflection (Hermawati & Safitri, 2023). In this context, HOTS fosters deep analytical engagement, especially when students are required to answer essay-based questions or address complex problems. HOTS-oriented instruction, often implemented through mid-term assessments, enables students to move beyond memorization and apply knowledge in dynamic and realistic scenarios (Trisiana et al., 2020). Assessment for learning has emerged as a popular approach in modern pedagogy. This approach involves the use of formative assessments to continuously provide feedback that helps students understand their learning progress (Black & Wiliam, 1998). In the context of reading literacy, formative assessment can help identify areas where students need to enhance their comprehension and provide opportunities to develop their critical thinking abilities before facing summative evaluations such as midterm exams (Makrifah et al., 2023).

Problem-based learning (PBL) is another educational approach that emphasizes real-world problem-solving as a central element of the learning process. Within higher education specifically among primary school teacher education students at Cenderawasih University, this method has been applied to enhance both reading literacy and higher-order thinking. By encouraging active student participation, PBL improves reading comprehension and supports students in overcoming challenges related to text evaluation and reflection, particularly in the context of mid-semester assessments.

Literacy is a fundamental skill in daily life, especially in the rapidly evolving digital age (Kusnandar, 2022). However, according to the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Indonesia's literacy performance remains low. The country ranked 68th out of 81 participating nations in science, reading, and mathematics literacy, scoring 398, 371, and 379 respectively (OECD, 2022). These results highlight the urgent need to improve literacy education at all levels, including higher education. Students born in the digital era exhibit distinct learning patterns compared to previous generations (Hidayati et al., 2024). The use of technology in reading and writing activities has become integral to everyday life. Nevertheless, literacy education in Indonesia still struggles to adequately support the development of HOTS—such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and creativity (Safira Nur Rahma et al., 2024). To address this, university lecturers have implemented various innovative learning models, including project-based and problem-based learning, to enhance students' literacy skills (Muslimin, 2018). Yet, findings from the Mid-Term Examination in the Indonesian Language and Literature Education course at the PGSD program of Cenderawasih University reveal that many students still struggle to comprehend exam questions. Their answers often fall short of expectations, indicating deficiencies in reading literacy skills.

A recent study by Naufal and Hasanudin (2023), titled *An Analysis of Students' Reading Literacy during Online Learning Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic*, found that consistent reading habits even in an online learning context—could significantly enhance students' knowledge and understanding. Despite the challenges of online education, such as limited face-to-face interaction and the need to adapt to technology, students' ability to manage study time and reading discipline proved critical in maintaining and improving literacy levels. Similarly, research by Melisa and Zaka Hadikusuma Ramadan (2024) titled *The Role of Teachers in Improving Students' Reading Literacy Competence* highlighted the impact of low student motivation and interest in reading on poor assessment outcomes. Their findings emphasize the importance of teacher involvement and effective strategies to foster reading engagement and improve literacy assessment performance. Based on the background outlined above, this study aims to analyze the reading literacy skills of second-semester students in the Indonesian Language and Literature Education course. Specifically, the research focuses on how students understand, interpret, and evaluate texts presented in midterm examination questions. It is expected that this study will contribute to the development of more effective literacy teaching methods in higher education contexts.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore students' reading literacy skills in the context of mid-semester assessments. The research was conducted in the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year at the Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD) program, Universitas Cenderawasih. A total of 200 second-semester students from eight classes participated in the study, selected through total sampling. These students were grouped into four literacy proficiency categories requiring special intervention, basic, proficient, and advanced based on their scores in the Indonesian Language and Literature Mid-Semester Assessment. The data used in this study were derived from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data consisted of students' mid-semester test results, responses to questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires, comprising both open- and closed-ended items, were administered to all participants to gather information about their reading strategies, habits, and experiences during assessment. In addition, interviews were conducted with 24 students who were purposively selected from each literacy category (six per group), in order to obtain in-depth qualitative insights. Secondary data included relevant institutional documents such as syllabi, course outlines, and academic guidelines.

The instruments were validated by two experts in literacy education to ensure clarity and content validity. Data collection was carried out using document analysis, questionnaires, and interviews. Document analysis focused on students' written responses in the assessment, particularly their ability to interpret and analyze text. The interview and questionnaire data were used to complement the test results, thereby enabling triangulation and increasing the credibility of findings. Data analysis followed the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, consisting of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Sugiyono, 2015). During the data reduction phase, researchers filtered and organized relevant data based on the research objectives. The data were then displayed in narrative and tabular forms to facilitate interpretation and synthesis. The final conclusions were drawn after carefully identifying recurring patterns and themes, and they were verified through member checking to ensure the accuracy of interpretation. Triangulation was used to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings by cross-validating information from tests, questionnaires, and interviews.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of reading literacy skills among second-semester students in the Indonesian Language and Literature course within the Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD) Program at Universitas Cenderawasih for the 2023/2024 academic year revealed considerable variations in student abilities across three cognitive domains: retrieving information, interpreting and integrating, and evaluating and reflecting. These domains reflect the hierarchical cognitive dimensions of reading comprehension, as articulated by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and literacy experts (OECD, 2019; Afflerbach et al., 2015; Snow & RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). This study involved 200 students from eight classes (18A through 18H), categorized into four proficiency levels based on their Mid-Semester Assessment scores: Need Special Intervention, Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. The categories align with the literacy performance descriptors adapted from the Indonesian National Assessment Framework and the global standards set by PIRLS and PISA (Kemendikbud, 2021; Mullis et al., 2017).

3.1 Literacy Performance Categories

Need Special Intervention (4%)

This group, representing 4% of participants, displayed significant difficulty in comprehending questions and identifying explicit information in texts. While they were minimally capable of retrieving explicit data, their ability to perform simple interpretations remained limited. At the interpreting and integrating level, these students struggled to understand literal meanings, and failed to derive implicit messages from the text. Their challenges extended to the evaluating and reflecting domain, where they were unable to assess content quality or critically reflect upon the test stimuli. These findings are consistent with studies showing that students in this category often lack foundational vocabulary and decoding strategies, which hampers higher-level comprehension (Cain & Oakhill, 2007; Nation, 2019).

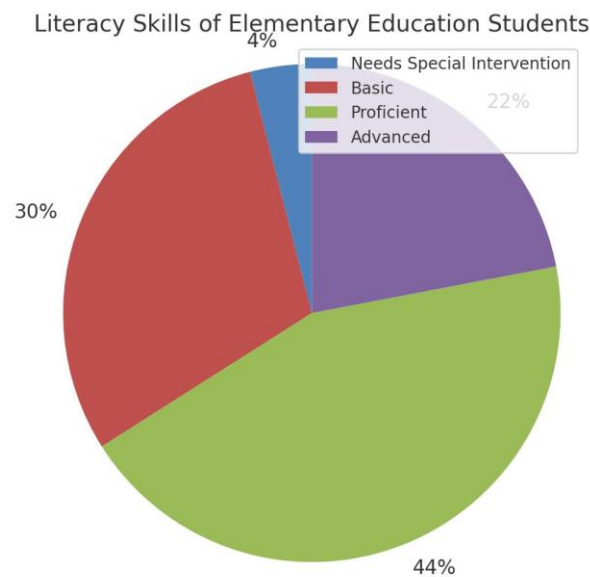


Figure 1. Diagram of Percentage of Literacy Ability Reading Students in Semester II PGSD Study Program

Basic (30%)

Students in this group demonstrated the ability to locate explicit information but required more time to derive meaning from textual prompts. At the retrieving level, they could identify and extract explicit content and began to manage basic interpretations. Their performance improved in the interpreting and integrating domain, as they started recognizing implicit cues and grasping literal meaning. However, at the evaluating level, their reflections were often surface-level and lacked elaboration. While they were able to judge content and express opinions, their responses often failed to address nuance or provide sufficient justification, echoing prior findings on transitional readers who are still developing metacognitive awareness (Grabe & Stoller, 2013; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995).

Proficient (44%)

The largest proportion of students (44%) fell into the proficient category. These students were able to interpret implicit information and complete most test tasks with moderate success. They efficiently retrieved information and made

appropriate basic inferences. At the interpreting and integrating level, they synthesized information from different parts of the text and responded accurately to implicit cues. Their responses at the evaluation stage indicated a beginning capacity for reflection, judgment, and critique, although some responses lacked comprehensive elaboration. These students likely benefit from explicit strategy instruction, enabling them to integrate information and infer meaning with increasing autonomy (Kintsch, 2005; Duke & Pearson, 2002).

Advanced (22%)

Students in this group exhibited advanced reading literacy skills, including the ability to integrate information across texts and critically evaluate content. They performed well across all three cognitive levels. At the retrieving level, they not only located explicit information quickly but also derived interpretive meaning without assistance. At the interpreting and integrating level, they engaged in thoughtful synthesis and demonstrated strong comprehension of literal and inferential meanings. At the highest cognitive level, these students showed the capacity to critically appraise the text, justify their positions with evidence, and reflect on the underlying messages. Such performance aligns with traits of skilled readers, who employ self-regulated learning strategies and deep processing (Paris & Paris, 2003; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). The distribution of students across these four categories is visually presented in Figure 1, which illustrates the diverse range of reading abilities observed in this cohort. Notably, only a small fraction (4%) required urgent intervention, while a combined 66% of students were in the basic and proficient levels—indicating significant potential for development through targeted instructional strategies.

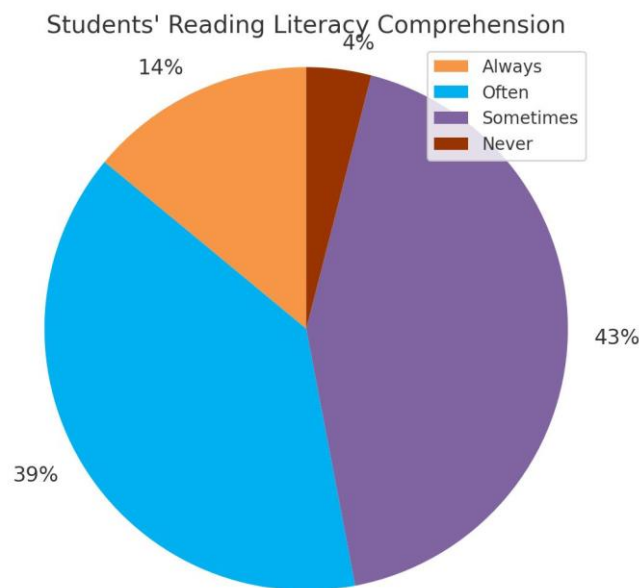


Figure 2. Diagram Percentage of Literacy Questionnaires Reading Students in Semester II PGSD Study Program

3.2 Reading Frequency and Literacy Habits

To triangulate and support the assessment findings, the researchers also analyzed data from a reading literacy questionnaire completed by the same 200 students. The results revealed critical insights into students' daily reading behaviors and their correlation with literacy performance. Based on the responses, only 14% of students reported reading literature daily, while 39% indicated they read often, 43% read occasionally, and 4% admitted to never reading on a daily basis. As visualized in Figure 2, the data suggests that the frequency of reading is positively associated with literacy levels. Students in the advanced and proficient categories were predominantly drawn from those who reported frequent or consistent reading habits. In contrast, students in the basic and need special intervention groups were more likely to report infrequent or inconsistent reading. This relationship is corroborated by prior research demonstrating that habitual reading fosters vocabulary acquisition, fluency, and reading stamina, which in turn enhances comprehension (Krashen, 2004; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Mol & Bus, 2011). Daily reading contributes to what Guthrie (2004) terms "engaged reading", where motivation, background knowledge, and reading strategies intersect to support comprehension. Moreover, students who engage in diverse reading experiences are better equipped to approach a range of text genres and cognitive tasks, particularly when assessments demand integration, interpretation, and critical evaluation.

3.3 Implications of Cognitive-Level Performance

Understanding students' literacy performance across cognitive domains provides valuable pedagogical insights. For instance, difficulties at the retrieving level suggest that students may struggle with locating specific details or decoding textual structures an issue often associated with insufficient practice in scanning and skimming. Instructional support here could include exercises in keyword identification, summarizing, and close reading (Fisher & Frey, 2012). At the interpreting and integrating level, comprehension is influenced by both prior knowledge and cognitive strategy use. Students who falter in this domain may benefit from guided reading sessions, graphic organizers, and think-aloud techniques that scaffold interpretive thinking (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Performance gaps at the evaluating and reflecting level reveal a need to promote metacognition, argumentation, and critical reasoning. Educators might consider incorporating peer discussion, reflective journaling, and rubrics that explicitly model evaluative criteria, fostering students' ability to assess quality and draw conclusions based on evidence (Zohar & Dori, 2003).

3.4 Limitations and Recommendations

While this study provides meaningful insights into reading literacy among pre-service primary teachers, several limitations must be acknowledged. The assessment was limited to one mid-semester exam and self-reported reading habits, which may not fully capture the depth and complexity of students' literacy practices. Future research should integrate longitudinal designs, portfolio assessments, and classroom observation to triangulate findings and account for behavioral variability. Moreover, it is recommended that future interventions be aligned with differentiated instruction principles. Students in the "need special intervention" category may require remedial reading sessions and one-on-one tutoring, while students in the "proficient" and "advanced" groups could be challenged with higher-order tasks such as debate, textual analysis, and academic writing. Universities should also invest in reading programs that cultivate intrinsic motivation and provide access to diverse and engaging reading materials. Library initiatives, reading clubs, and integration of digital literacy tools can support this endeavor (OECD, 2021; Anderson, 2000).

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and discussion presented in the previous sections, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the reading literacy abilities of second-semester students in the Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD) Program at Universitas Cenderawasih during the 2023/2024 academic year. The findings of the mid-semester assessment revealed a distribution of students across four levels of reading literacy proficiency. Specifically, 4% of the students were categorized as needing special intervention, 30% were placed in the basic category, 44% were identified as proficient, and 22% were classified as advanced. From this distribution, it can be concluded that the overall reading literacy level of the students falls within the proficient category, indicating a generally satisfactory but still improvable capacity for academic reading tasks. The study further explored the specific characteristics and competencies associated with each literacy level. Students requiring special intervention exhibited difficulties in understanding text literally and were unable to interpret implicit information in the assessment items. Furthermore, these students demonstrated limited capacity to evaluate the content and quality of texts and were not yet able to reflect critically on the stimulus material provided. This suggests a foundational deficiency in both decoding and comprehension skills, which may require remedial support and targeted instructional interventions. Students in the basic literacy category demonstrated emerging competencies. They had begun to understand texts at a literal level and could make simple interpretations of implicit instructions embedded within test items. In addition, these students showed a developing ability to evaluate textual content and engage in reflective thinking, albeit with limitations in articulating their ideas in a detailed and coherent manner.

Those in the proficient literacy category showed more advanced skills. They were able to understand literal meanings and began interpreting more complex implicit information. Their evaluative and reflective responses showed greater depth compared to students in lower categories, although they still occasionally struggled with presenting fully elaborated and nuanced arguments or insights. This group represents a transitional stage toward academic literacy maturity and could benefit from enrichment strategies focused on critical reading and academic writing. Students in the advanced category demonstrated high-level literacy skills. They successfully identified and extracted explicit information, made clear and accurate interpretations of both literal and implicit content, and engaged in meaningful evaluation and reflection on the questions posed. These students are academically prepared to tackle complex reading tasks and demonstrate strong readiness for higher-order cognitive assessments. Theoretically, the findings of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on tertiary-level reading literacy, especially within the Indonesian context. The results provide empirical data that may inform future studies focused on reading comprehension, critical literacy, and assessment development. Practically, the research offers valuable insights for university lecturers by highlighting the current literacy capabilities of students. These findings can serve as a foundation for reflective teaching practices and the development of instructional strategies tailored to student needs. Furthermore, the outcomes of this study can guide institutional policymakers in designing and

implementing initiatives that enhance reading literacy at the higher education level. Lastly, the study provides a snapshot of the preparedness of second-semester students to engage with future assessments, indicating areas where academic support and curricular refinement may be necessary.

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