

**Evaluating the effectiveness of reading logs in early literacy programs:  
a case study of a rural elementary school in Indonesia**

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**Abstract.** *The purpose is to evaluate the effectiveness of reading logs and identify alternative literacy activities that are developmentally appropriate for young learners. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through classroom observations, document analysis, semi-structured interviews with teachers and librarians, and focus group discussions with students. The findings reveal that while reading logs offer structure for reading practice, they present cognitive, emotional, and practical challenges that reduce students' reading motivation and comprehension. Many students struggled with summarization tasks, often viewing the logs as a burden. In contrast, alternative activities such as interactive storytelling, drawing, peer discussions, and digital tools were found to be more engaging and effective. The study concludes that integrating diverse and interactive literacy activities better supports early literacy development and fosters a more positive reading experience for young learners.*

**Keywords:** *early childhood literacy; reading logs; literacy challenges; alternative literacy activities; Indonesian elementary education*

## **Introduction**

In recent years, early literacy development has received growing attention from educators, practitioners, and policymakers worldwide. Literacy is widely recognized as a foundational competence that not only supports academic achievement but also enables individuals to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As children's learning becomes increasingly interconnected with social and cognitive development, the implementation of literacy education at the early childhood level is considered essential. Research highlights the importance of initiating structured and meaningful literacy education activities and programs as early as possible to cultivate both reading habits and language comprehension skills (Neuman, 2014). In the Indonesian context, national policies such as the *Gerakan Literasi Nasional* (transl. National Literacy Movement) aim to strengthen literacy culture across all educational levels, starting from elementary schools to senior high schools, within the 12-year National Compulsory Education policy (Nurchayoko et al., 2024; Sari, 2024). These efforts encourage collaboration among teachers, school principals, and broader communities to enhance literacy environments for young learners.

Globally, several strategies have been introduced to improve early literacy outcomes. Among these strategies, reading logs have become a commonly adopted tool to monitor students' reading behavior and comprehension development. Reading logs typically require students to summarize what they have read, record the title and author of the book, and occasionally reflect on the content. These tools are intended to promote consistent reading

habits and provide educators with insights into student progress (Pico et al., 2021). While reading logs offer benefits for upper elementary and secondary students, their appropriateness for younger learners remains contested (Woulfin, 2015). For children in early grades, summarization and written reflection may pose cognitive and motivational challenges. Research by Pak and Weseley (2012) suggests that mandatory reading logs can reduce intrinsic motivation to read instead, turning the pleasurable literacy activities of into mechanical tasks. Similarly, Cruz (2017) found that reading logs often create pressure among younger students who lack the expressive and fine motor skills required to complete them effectively.

In Indonesia, the implementation of literacy programs in elementary schools, especially in rural areas, faces some excessive constraints, including limited resources (Kartikasari & Nuryasana, 2022), insufficient teacher training to supervise the programs (Prawira et al., 2023), and over-reliance on standardized literacy tools. While educators show a strong commitment to improving literacy outcomes, studies indicate that they often lack the necessary pedagogical preparation to adapt literacy instruction to young children's developmental needs (Srirahayu et al., 2023; Pursitasari et al., 2020). For example, teachers and librarians may apply the same literacy tasks across grade levels both lower and higher grades of primary schools without accounting for differences in cognitive readiness. This approach can create a mismatch between the instructional design and students' learning capacity. Furthermore, the availability of diverse and developmentally appropriate reading materials is still lacking in many school libraries, limiting the effectiveness of literacy interventions (Pratiwi et al., 2022).

Despite these documented challenges, limited research has critically examined the suitability of reading logs as a core activity in early literacy programs. While much of the current literature acknowledges the value of structured reading activities, few studies in the Indonesian context explore how reading logs function in practice for 1st to 3rd-grade students. There is a gap in evaluating how such tools align with the developmental profiles of young learners and what alternative strategies may better support literacy acquisition. Additionally, most studies on reading logs focus on middle and upper-grade students, leaving a research void regarding their effectiveness for emergent readers in lower grades. The intersection between cognitive development theories (e.g., Piaget's preoperational stage and Vygotsky's ZPD) and practical classroom implementation remains underexplored.

The present study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the implementation of a school-based literacy program that relies on reading logs as the main post-reading activities. This investigation is situated within a rural elementary school in Indonesia where students from grades 1 to 3 are required to visit the school library once a week, read a book, and complete a reading log. The log includes basic bibliographic information and a written summary. While the program aims to encourage reading habits, emerging evidence suggests that the requirement to summarize texts may present significant challenges. For instance, younger students often struggle with recalling story details or articulating them in written form, which may hinder their enjoyment and engagement with reading (Pak & Weseley, 2012; Cruz, 2017).

These challenges raise questions about whether reading logs are appropriate for young learners or whether alternative post-reading activities might be more effective.

This study introduces a novel perspective by combining a developmental lens with classroom-based qualitative inquiry. It not only assesses the challenges associated with reading logs but also explores alternative activities—such as storytelling, drawing, peer discussions, and digital tools—that may enhance literacy learning in a more engaging and developmentally appropriate way (Damayanti, 2017). Unlike previous studies that focus on evaluating literacy outcomes through quantitative measures, this research adopts a qualitative case study approach to provide a rich, contextualized analysis of students' experiences, teachers' perspectives, and the literacy program's implementation dynamics. This contribution is especially relevant in rural Indonesian schools where practical constraints often necessitate flexible and context-sensitive educational strategies.

This study aims to evaluate the literacy program implemented at an elementary school in Indonesia, focusing on the use of reading logs and exploring alternative follow-up activities. By addressing the challenges faced by 1st to 3rd-grade students, the study seeks to contribute to the development of effective literacy practices that support young learners' growth and engagement in reading. Through a thorough analysis of current practices and potential improvements, this research aspires to enhance literacy education in Indonesia and beyond.

## **Method**

The research design for this study is a qualitative case study which allows for an in-depth exploration of the literacy program within its real-life context, specifically focusing on the experiences of young learners of lower grades of elementary schools (1st to 3rd grades) at a public elementary school in Indonesia in a rural community. The qualitative case study design is suitable for understanding the complexities and nuances of literacy program and identifying both its strengths and areas for improvement. The study was conducted at one public elementary school in Indonesia involving 90 students, evenly distributed across the 1st to 3rd grades. The school's librarian, who manages the library and oversees the literacy program at the library, along with school administrators involved in the program's oversight, were also integral to the research. This selection strategy was designed to provide comprehensive insights from those most directly involved with the literacy program, thereby ensuring a robust understanding of its impacts and challenges. To adhere to ethical standards, consent was obtained from the parents and/or the teacher of all student participants, and assent was also secured from the students themselves.

Data collection was designed to align with the qualitative case study approach, focusing on various interactive and observational methods to gain comprehensive insights into the literacy program at the public elementary school in Indonesia, e.g. observation, document analysis, interview, and focus-group discussion. Observations were carried out in classrooms and the school library to observe the real-time implementation of the literacy program. The focus was on how students interacted and engaged with reading materials, their engagement with the reading logs and friends, and the overall learning environment during the implementation of the literacy program. An observation checklist was employed to

systematically record detailed observations, highlighting student engagement, participation, and any challenges they faced during the literacy (library visits) sessions. Document Analysis involved collecting and examining the reading logs completed by the students. This analysis was crucial to identify common issues, patterns in the students' summaries as assigned by the school librarian and teachers, and the overall quality of their written responses. It provided valuable insights into the appropriateness of reading logs as a literacy practice for young learners and helped gauge their comprehension abilities and writing skills.

In addition to site observations and document analysis at the library, interviews and focus-group discussion were conducted with teachers, school librarian, and administrators to gain insights from their perspectives on the literacy program at the school, especially the use of reading logs during literacy session at the library. Each interview, lasting approximately 30-45 minutes, explored the perceived challenges and outcomes of the program. These interviews were semi-structured to allow for flexibility in responses. Focus groups with students from each grade level (1st to 3rd) were organized to capture the children's experiences and opinions regarding the reading logs, their reading habits, and their preferences for follow-up activities. These focus groups comprised 6-8 students each and were facilitated in a manner that ensured all children felt comfortable to express their views openly. Each session lasted about 15 minutes after their library visits.

The data analysis process for the study on the literacy program at an Indonesian elementary school followed a structured approach to ensure a thorough understanding of the qualitative data collected. Interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed, and together with observation notes and reading logs, were systematically organized for analysis. Thematic analysis involved an iterative process of coding to identify significant themes and patterns. These themes were reviewed and refined to accurately represent the data, a process that included comparing themes across various data sources such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis. The reading logs underwent face and content analyses to assess the completeness and quality of the summaries, identifying common errors and the overall effort put into the logs. This document analysis helped triangulate the findings with the qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the literacy program's challenges and effectiveness.

## **Results and Discussion**

The research findings are presented based on the key themes identified during data analysis. These include the challenges faced by students with the reading logs, to what extent the reading logs is effective in promoting literacy, and the potential alternative activities that could enhance literacy practices. The discussion integrates students' inquiries and comments to provide a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives.

### **Challenges with Reading Logs for Literacy Program at Primary School**

One of the most significant findings from the data was the various challenges students faced when using reading logs. Teachers and librarian reported that many students, who mainly belong to 1st and 2nd grades, struggled with the process of retelling and summarizing

their reading materials. This condition was echoed by the students themselves during focus group discussions.

**Table 1.** Challenges Students Faced when Using Reading Logs

Aspects	Elaboration	Inquiries
Cognitive and Writing Difficulties	Students in the lower grades often found it difficult to condense their reading into a coherent summary, both orally and written summary; written format is more challenging than oral summary.	A second-grader commented, "I don't know what to write because I forget the story."
Emotional and Motivational Challenges	Students experience feeling of frustration and anxiety associated with the reading log as they consider it as additional burden instead of encouragement.	A student (2 <sup>nd</sup> grade) commented, "I'm confused. I can't write what the story was about."
Practical and Logistical Issues	Many young learners struggled with the physical act of writing, especially those who were still developing fine motor skills. Some students at 1 <sup>st</sup> grade even just started writing short words and phrases.	Even those who are on the third-grade said, "Writing takes too long. I'm tired. I hurt my fingers."

Table 1 classifies three main aspects becoming the challenges faced by students while engaging in post-reading activity in the form writing summaries while visiting library for literacy program. Cognitive and writing difficulties prominently emerged as challenges among the lower grades in the literacy program. Many students in the 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> grades exhibited difficulty in effectively summarizing the content and information they have read, a task that fundamentally requires cognitive and linguistic ability. This issue is rooted in the developmental stages of young children, as theorized by Jean Piaget. According to Piaget's stages of cognitive development, children in these age groups are typically in the preoperational stage, where their ability to process abstract information and perform complex cognitive tasks like summarization is still developing. On the other hand, the post-activity to condense a story or text into a summary demands high levels of comprehension, the ability to memorize information, and identification of main ideas from details; such skills are often still in the early stage of growing among younger children (Rabindran & Madanagopal, 2020). Young children often struggle with tasks requiring the condensation of information due to limited working memory and underdeveloped executive function skills (Bogaerds-Hazenberg et al, 2021; Sung et al, 2016).

Furthermore, the act of writing as the post-reading activity poses significant challenges. Many students displayed difficulties not only with the cognitive aspects of writing but also with the physical act of writing (Li, 2022), exposing broader issues identified in educational research especially among younger learners (Reynolds & Teng, 2021; Grabe & Zhang, 2013). Writing, especially in an academic context, requires a coordination of cognitive and motor skills that may be overwhelming for young learners. It becomes double-demanding activity which can intensify the cognitive load, leading to simplistic and often incomplete summaries instead of improving critical thinking among young learners (Sumner & Connelly,

2020). In addition, physical act of writing can be laborious for young children, which often detracts from their ability to focus on the content and structure of their writing. Data from this study showed that when faced with the task of summarizing, many students opted for either verbatim copying or very brief recounts (which are likely available on the back cover of the book while they were at the library), which may indicate not just a lack of understanding but also an avoidance strategy to reduce the cognitive and physical strain. These findings suggest that literacy practices need to be carefully aligned with the developmental capabilities of children, potentially incorporating more oral-based activities that can help bridge the cognitive gap until their writing skills are more fully developed.

### Effectiveness of Reading Logs in Promoting Literacy

Despite the challenges, there were mixed views on the effectiveness of reading logs in promoting literacy. Some teachers and students acknowledged certain benefits, while others questioned their overall impacts on the learning development process. Table 2 shows the information on the effectiveness of reading logs as part of literacy activities at school.

**Table 2.** Effectiveness of Reading Logs in Promoting Literacy

Stances	Elaboration	Inquiries
Positive points	Reading logs can serve as a structured way to reflect on their reading, which could enhance comprehension and retention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A teacher of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade observed, “The reading logs help some students remember the story better and think of the story deeply.”</li> <li>- One 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student noted, “I like writing when I finish because it shows I’ve read the book.”</li> </ul>
Negative point: Limited Engagement and Comprehension	Students completed the reading logs as a mechanical task without truly engaging with the content	A second-grade teacher asserted, “Most students just copy parts of the text (excerpts in the text of the epilogue on the book cover). They just write. (For them, it’s) practical.”
Questioning: Teacher and Librarian Perspectives	Growing concerns whether the reading logs’ ability fosters genuine literacy skills	The librarian stated, “Reading logs are supposed to encourage reading (more books). But, the report becomes a barrier for many students. Students hesitate to write (the logs).”

Table 2 classifies the information on different perceptions on the effectiveness of reading logs in promoting literacy among young learners remains a subject of debate, drawing varied opinions and outcomes. While some educators and students recognize the benefits of reading logs as tools for enhancing comprehension and retention, serving as a structured activity rather than voluntary activities (Madjdi et al, 2024), this view is not universally accepted. In Indonesia, recent studies highlight that while reading logs encourage students to engage more deeply with texts, this is not consistently effective across all student groups. For instance, a study conducted in Indonesia found that while reading logs helped some students reflect more on their reading, others treated the task as mere homework without substantial engagement (Salsabila et al, 2021).

The concerns about the superficial engagement with reading logs are echoed in broader academic studies. According to a study, many students complete reading logs mechanically, choosing simpler texts to minimize effort and potentially stunting their literacy development. This phenomenon is particularly evident in observations from this study where students often copied text directly or wrote minimal summaries that failed to demonstrate a deep understanding of the material (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; Conradi, Jang, & McKenna, 2013). These findings are similar to those observed in Indonesia, where educators have reported that the use of reading logs often leads to reduced enthusiasm for reading, especially among younger students. Reading logs or reading response logs are likely relevant with an added element of social interaction in which students were asked to share one entry from their logs with the class (Tzamoutzian & Oikonomidou, 2023; Branigan & Donaldson, 2020; Dewi et al, 2018; Hurst, 2005).

Moreover, the skepticism regarding the true efficacy of reading logs in fostering genuine literacy skills is shared among educators globally. Recent discussions in academic circles suggest that reading logs might sometimes act more as a barrier to reading enthusiasm than as a facilitator of engagement (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; Conradi, Jang, & McKenna, 2013). A highlighted that the compulsory nature of reading logs could transform reading from a pleasurable activity into a chore, echoing concerns similar to those expressed by Indonesian educators. This suggests a re-evaluation of the use of reading logs, particularly for younger learners, and the exploration of more effective alternative methods. For instance, incorporating more interactive and digital reading activities could potentially cater better to the diverse needs of young learners, offering more engaging and enriching literacy experiences (Artini, 2017; Marsh, 2017).

### Alternative Activities for Enhancing Literacy

The findings also pointed to a range of alternative activities that could potentially address the challenges associated with reading logs and better promote literacy among young learners.

**Table 3.** Alternative Activities to Promote Literacy among Young Learners

Alternative Activities	Elaboration	Inquiries
Interactive Storytelling and Discussions	Interactive storytelling sessions emerged as a highly favored alternative among both students and teachers. Interactive storytelling not only engaged students but also helped them understand and remember the stories better	A first-grader enthusiastically said, "I like telling stories. It's fun and we can act out the parts."
Drawing and Creative Expression	Allowing students to draw scenes or characters from the books they read. This method enables students to express their understanding of the text in a more accessible and enjoyable manner.	A second-grade student commented, "Drawing what I read helps me remember the story. It must be more fun."
Group Activities and Peer Discussions	Peer discussions can facilitate deeper comprehension and critical thinking as	A third-grade teacher mentioned, "Students enjoy discussing books with

Alternative Activities	Elaboration	Inquiries
Reading Aloud and Shared Reading	students articulate their thoughts and respond to others' ideas. Shared reading allows teachers to model fluent reading and comprehension strategies, providing students with a guided and supportive environment to develop their literacy skills.	their classmates, and it helps them see different perspectives." N/A
Gamification and Digital Tools	Digital tools can offer interactive and personalized reading experiences, making the process more enjoyable and accessible for young learners.	A third-grade student shared, "I like using the tablet to read because there are games and quizzes after the story."

Alternative activities, such as interactive storytelling and creative expression, have been identified as effective methods for enhancing literacy skills among young learners, offering a more engaging alternative to traditional reading logs. The benefits of interactive storytelling sessions, where students can actively participate and even perform parts of the stories, have been emphasized in recent studies, such as one by Yulianawati (2022), which found that storytelling significantly improves retention and comprehension in primary students compared to traditional reading practices. This method leverages Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development by utilizing social interactions and scaffolding to enhance learning. Moreover, teachers observed that storytelling sessions not only make the reading process enjoyable but also allow for better retention of material, making it an invaluable tool in early education literacy programs. For instance, a study by Nicolopoulou et al. in 2015 found that incorporating storytelling and other story-telling-related activities in early education are believed to enhance children's narrative skills and emergent literacy development. Additionally, Curenton and Craig (2011) reported that oral storytelling is closely associated with the improvement of social skills and decreases issues of behaviors among children, further highlighting its benefits in early childhood education.

Similarly, the use of drawing and other types of creative practices in post-reading sessions have shown substantial benefits in terms of student engagement and comprehension. A study by Kiefer and Stirling (2017) demonstrated that allowing children to draw what they had read (literally or imaginatively) is believed to increase their ability to recall story details and sequences compared to children who only wrote summaries. This becomes alternative approaches that are particularly beneficial for those who may find traditional writing tasks discouraging. Moreover, when putting the students into group activities and discussions for post-reading activities enhances critical thinking and allows students to view the material from various perspectives, enriching their learning experience (Sheela, 2015). These findings are in line with social constructivist theories, which assert that learning is deeply influenced by community and social interaction, making these alternative activities not only more engaging but also more effective in developing deeper literacy skills among young students (Hmelo-Silver, 2004).

The findings of this study underscore the complexities involved in implementing effective literacy practices for young learners (Artini, 2017). It should be noted that effective



literacy practices must be tailored to young learners' developmental stages, acknowledging the challenges educators face in balancing structure and engagement. The challenges associated with reading logs highlight the need for developmentally appropriate activities that align with students' cognitive and emotional capacities. Guthrie and Klauda (2014) argue that practices like reading logs may not align with younger students' developmental needs, emphasizing the importance of motivation and engagement through alternative methods. The mixed effectiveness of reading logs suggests that while they can provide structure, they may not be suitable for all students, particularly those in the lower grades. In addition, Artini (2017) discusses the effectiveness of interactive and creative activities, such as storytelling and drawing, in engaging young learners and improving their literacy skills. The identification of alternative activities points to several promising directions for enhancing literacy practices. Interactive storytelling, drawing, peer discussions, and digital tools offer more engaging and supportive ways for students to interact with texts. These alternatives not only align with educational theories but also resonate with students' preferences and experiences.

#### **Coda: Implication for Practice**

The findings from the study on literacy practices at an Indonesian elementary school highlight significant implications for enhancing literacy education, particularly for young learners. It is imperative to diversify literacy activities to cater to different learning styles and developmental needs (Yeh & Mitric, 2019; Afrilyasanti & Basthomi, 2011); diversification of learning activities, demonstrating how digital storytelling (e.g. interactive storytelling, drawing, group discussions, and the use of digital tools) can address diverse learning preferences and cater to students' varying developmental needs. Studies have shown that alternative literacy activities, especially those involving creative and interactive elements, not only increase student engagement but also improve comprehension and retention of material. These approaches, by engaging different sensory and cognitive pathways, help in creating a more inclusive and effective literacy environment.

Furthermore, reducing the reliance on reading logs is crucial. While reading logs have been a traditional method for tracking reading progress, their effectiveness in fostering genuine literacy development is questionable, particularly among younger learners who may find the summarization process challenging (Knonamri & Farzanegan, 2016). Replacing or supplementing reading logs with more dynamic activities that are developmentally appropriate can lead to better educational outcomes (Artini, 2017; Afrilyasanti & Basthomi, 2011). The study also underscores the importance of providing adequate support and scaffolding to students. Teachers play a crucial role in modeling comprehension strategies and facilitating discussions that can help students navigate the texts more effectively. For example, read-aloud sessions and guided discussions not only support comprehension but also build students' confidence in their reading abilities. By fostering a positive and supportive reading environment, educators can encourage a lifelong love for reading and learning, transforming the literacy experience from a mundane task into an enjoyable and enriching activity.

## Conclusion

The research conducted on the literacy program at an Indonesian elementary school has underscored significant challenges with the use of reading logs for 1st to 3rd-grade students. The study revealed that while reading logs aim to enhance reading comprehension and engagement, they often result in cognitive overload and a reduction in students' overall enthusiasm for reading. Many students struggled with the demands of summarizing texts, which diminished their engagement and potentially hindered their literacy development. Furthermore, the study identified alternative practices that could be more effective, such as interactive storytelling, creative expression, and digital tools, which align more closely with the developmental needs and interests of young learners.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made to improve literacy instruction. Schools should consider reducing the emphasis on reading logs and instead incorporate a variety of interactive and engaging activities that cater to different learning preferences and developmental stages. Additionally, professional development for teachers on implementing these alternative methods could enhance the effectiveness of literacy programs. However, this study also recognizes its limitations, primarily the focus on a single school, which may not fully represent the diversity of educational contexts across Indonesia. Future research should expand to include multiple schools with varied demographic characteristics to better generalize the findings. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the long-term impacts of different literacy practices on student outcomes, helping to refine educational strategies and policies more effectively.

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