

THE ENGLISH LITERACY DEVELOPMENT AT ISLAMIC HIGH SCHOOLS: AN EVALUATION

Suadi¹

¹ STAIN Mandailing Natal

¹suadi@stain-madina.ac.id

Abstract

English literacy is a captivating topic among language scholars, educators, and learners. English literacy culture in Indonesian schools still has been in a dismaying condition. This study aimed to unveil hindrances and relevant solutions to realize the English literacy atmosphere at three state Islamic senior high schools (Madrasah Aliyah Negeri) in Sumatera Utara. Observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation were swiftly executed during the data collection process. Participants, consisting of five English teachers from three different State Islamic senior high schools, were willingly recruited to be interviewees. The data afterward were analyzed based on thematic analysis. Results highlighted two factors decelerating the English literacy environment at schools. Moreover, six crucial ways were unmasked for accelerating English literacy at school into positive progress.

Keywords: *English literacy, Environment, Islamic High School.*

INTRODUCTION

Literacy is a general term referring to the condition of students' ability to knowledge and skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening and how to realize them in the public sphere (Hill, 2006). Literacy refers to a learner's ability to identify, understand, create, and compute in various contexts (Montoya, 2018). Literacy skills such as reading, writing, and counting are fundamental for everyone and those skills unavoidably determine whether an individual fulfills the requirements for the next stages of education (Anwas et al., 2022). Moreover, in the 21st century, literacy is a notable thing as an indicator of a civilized nation (Sayekti et al., 2023). In brief, literacy is a vital thing to attain due to it deals with the prime ability of human beings in terms of civilization and contemporary development. Accordingly, English literacy is defined as the ability to listen, speak, read, and write in English. At this point, (Brown, 2004) breaks down four characteristics of English literacy skills, *first*, listening skill encompasses sound, stress, intonation, word category, etc. *Second*, speaking skill covers good intonation, stress, phrases, chunks, fluency, filler words, etc. *Third*, reading skill covers vocabulary mastery, accuracy in pronouncing a certain word, and comprehension of a certain text. *Fourth*, writing skill covers spelling, grammar and structure, main idea, supporting idea, etc.

English literacy skills are challenging to possess. One of the ways to obtain it is by creating an English literacy environment at school where English is officially and formally taught to learners from elementary school level to university level. This is in line with what (Malau et al., 2022) asserted that to succeed in English literacy skills, the first thing to do is create an active English environment. On the other hand, English

must be a daily habit either spoken or written. Even (Muharromah & Mahmud, 2023) stated that English literacy skills should be needed from an early age, including basic competence namely reading and writing ability. The students' English literacy skills are in line with their academic achievements. Moreover, it also affects learners' later work and education trajectories where most job vacancies require English proficiency as one of the main requirements in the recruitment selection. Several daily habits heavily affect the Indonesian's achievement in English skills, as stated by (Tambunsaribu & Galingging, 2021) who asserted that English literacy skills depend on habits such as a support system in English learning, limited mastery of English vocabulary, instant learning mindset, wasting time for gadget, and spending time for game online and social media.

Unfortunately, on the global scale, Indonesian English proficiency is seemingly low and poorly concerning. A survey by EF EPI (English Proficiency Index) in 2021 revealed that Indonesia is in the 80th position over 112 countries. In addition, among Southeast Asia countries, Indonesia is in the 5th rank and it is outperformed by Singaporeans in the 4th world position, Philippines (18), Malaysia (28), and Vietnam (66) (EF EPI, 2021). This released data becomes an alert for educators, stakeholders, learners, and society to increase the awareness of English literacy improvement. The initial step to alter the condition is by inserting local culture into English learning. The reason is English literacy will be effectively absorbed by inserting local cultural literacy during the English teaching-learning process (Amalia & Taufiq, 2023).

The reality above is a concrete result of English literacy integrated into our education system all this time. It means, there some factors do not synchronize with the attempts at English literacy skills development at schools, more importantly, it is barely a fact of less effort within the realization of English as a daily habit to be spoken and written. Several previous studies strengthen this fact. The significant role of English literacy activities commenced in primary school had been revealed by (Puspitasari et al., 2021) where students' English literacy activities at a bilingual school are matters for children's English positive development. Eight notable activities were successfully recorded during primary school students namely directed read-think activity, clear thinking, reading by loud voice, dictating, guided reading program, reading by multimedia support, recognizing English alphabets, and writing. Their study spotlighted the essential teaching of English literacy skills from an early age.

English habit integration in the school curriculum also contributed to students' English literacy improvement. This is proven by (Darojat, 2022) unveiling the stages of key success for English literacy implementation among secondary school students. They are habituation, development, and learning which lead to an ability to understand texts, develop critical thinking skills, build creative communication skills, and enrich English vocabulary mastery. Moreover, at the senior high level, English literacy is much needed, chiefly in fostering English literacy skills for students in reading. (Maharani & Triastuti, 2023) emphasized some strategies to get the students' literacy

elevating at the senior high school level. Some of them are giving stimulus of taught material with fun, sharing an amazing real-life story in the past, and driving them into an enthusiastic discussion by high tension of question-answer.

Some predecessor studies (Darajat, 2022; Maharani & Triastuti, 2023; Puspitasari et al., 2021) are divergent from this current one. The studies undertaken previously focus on English literacy development at Bilingual schools for primary school students, an attempt at English habit integration among secondary school students, and strategies to stimulate English literacy at the high school level. This study frames a new angle of study namely investigating factors tackling the efforts of English literacy in high school environments and at the same time digging into the beneficial and prospective ways for enhancing English literacy development.

This study's uniqueness and research goals stem from its focus on some disserve factors decelerating the English literacy development in a high school environment, while concurrently bringing to unmasking some prospective factors accelerating the implementation of English literacy at state Islamic high school. This dual approach provides valuable insights into the factors that can either hinder or promote English literacy in a school setting.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive design through a qualitative approach was employed in the completion of this study. The approach was applied to pursue an exhaustive notion of a certain social phenomenon or human behavioral phenomenon through naturalistic and contextual investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Moreover, descriptive qualitative covers a concrete frame of a particular object and is reported narratively (Emzir, 2015). Since this study was categorized as a case study, an in-depth interview and observation were done in a real-life setting object of the study namely the English literacy environment at three different Islamic state high schools (*Madrasah Aliyah Negeri*) in Sumatera Utara, representing three different area coverage consisting of the urban area of a metropolitan city, medium scale city, and countryside.

In teacher-respondent selection, a purposive sampling was employed. They were selected based on the criteria of (1) they have been enrolled as English teachers, (2) they have sufficient experience in teaching English, (3) They have taught the longest. Initial names are applied concerning their privacy concern request.

The questions list of interviews previously had been carefully evaluated, validated, and revised based on experts' consideration, including deletion, addition, and modification when needed. This study was approximately spent 4 months long in 2023. Eventually, the data obtained were scientifically organized, classified, and analyzed descriptively into particular themes based on the aforementioned design stages.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were organized and discussed specifically based on two following themes.

1. Decelerating Factors on English Literacy Environment at School

The findings outlined two factors potentially decelerating the English literacy environment at school. *First*, a lack number of English teachers is urgently needed at school. *Second*, school infrastructures and facilities poorly do not meet the ideal standard.

During the interview, an issue of the school needing many more English teachers was declared by an English teacher-respondent identified by *S* for her initial name. Her statement vocally emphasized the importance of adding some English teachers at her school to accommodating the ideal comparison between English teachers and the students, and also cover the English teachers who are outnumbered by students, voicing:

'Adding many more English teachers is extremely expected. We have quite good school facilities, including books. Yet, we need many more English teachers due to our school being located in the countryside and access to ideal and complete types of equipment, tools, and facilities from a closed city is challenging and far away. Moreover, English teachers are outnumbered by the total number of students to teach.' (*S*)

It is undeniable that English teachers play a significant role in the English teaching-learning process in the classroom. Their presence and impact as a center of the class are considered able to determine the student's interest in learning English (Nurfalah & Pupah, 2022). When an English teacher does not attend to the classroom or their number cannot cover all classes due to overloaded students, then the teaching-learning English is not well running.

Moreover, a teacher-respondent voiced her views about the necessity of ideal supporting infrastructures and appropriate facilities at school for English literacy skills development. One of the interviewed English teachers, identified as *Ms. N*, expressed her thoughts on ideal supporting infrastructures, saying:

'Means and infrastructure for English learning at school could be said adequate. Yet, not all classrooms are well equipped with supporting media such as in-focus. Consequently, it is time-consuming and frequently wastes more than 15 minutes' (*N*)

This is in line with what (Hardiana et al., 2023) promoted that school facilities have a huge impact on learners' motivation and interest in learning English. Lesser or greater, the existence of school facilities is a must to significantly change students' perception and motivation to learn English. Those school facilities also provide a wider chance for learners to practice English conveniently, freely, and well-standardized.

2. Accelerating Factors on English Literacy Environment at School

Based on the results of the interview, six findings were unveiled that are prospectively accelerating the English literacy environment at school, they are (1) activating the English corner program and English club, (2) Weekly program of giving new vocabulary to students, (3) Daily program of speech for each student by regular turn, (4) Encourage students to actively participate all kinds of English competitions, (5) Empowering English laboratory facility, (6) Supporting all programs which advance English literacy skills.

School program such as English Corner undoubtedly helps English literacy skill improvement. (Muthmainnah, 2013) confirmed that an English corner allows students to freely express their language skills without evaluation or judgment, purely a space to make their self-confidence to practice English skyrocket. It is a space designed reachable for everyone equipped with an LCD, computer, whiteboard, and other

supporting equipment and tools, where all students discuss about random topic, usually a certain topic-set for instance a movie to watch together, and so on. Concerning the promising factors that can accelerate the English literacy environment at schools, some respondents uttered clearly during the interview. A respondent with the initial name *S* claimed that English Corner is suitable for all students for being media and space as an attempt to foster English literacy skills. In addition, respondents with initial names *N*, *Pt*, and *R* were convinced that the weekly program of giving new English vocabulary is relevant to boosting the students' skill in speaking. Both responses are well recorded in the excerpt below:

'Our school has launched a program of English Corner' as space and media for students to improve English literacy skills' (N)

'(Our school) has made a progressive program namely English Corner and supported the existence of an English club' (Pt)

'We mobilize the students to give and use new English vocabulary every week' (R).

Students can widen their capability in speaking by adequate vocabulary mastery. Through vocabulary, a learner can express his/her ideas, expressions, comments, responses, and the like. Without vocabulary, someone can say nothing. Vocabulary represents everything such as things, notions, and real and abstract referents (Miraj et al., 2015). Other ways to succeed the English literacy skills development at school are by allowing the students to deliver a speech in English by turn in front of the public. Moreover, one of the captivating ways is by pushing the students to take part in English competitions. The last, activate the English laboratory at school based on its critical function. These ideas were delivered by English teacher-respondents with initial names *St*, *N*, and *M*. Their views during the interview are selectively written as follows:

'Every morning, students compulsorily are demanded to deliver a speech By the English language in front of the public by turn' (St).

'School supports students who are enthusiastic to participate in all English competitions and school facilitates them, including organizing an early selection to recruit the best of them for intensive training and being a delegate in the English competition (N).

'English laboratory to boost the learners' interest in English language literacy enhancement' (M).

English speech delivery is also promising to enhance the student's English literacy skills, especially speaking skills. (Adawiyah, 2023) pointed out that by English speech delivery program, a learner can improve speaking skills it covers volume, pitch, rate, articulation, pronunciation, pause, and non-verbal aspects such as body language, eye contact, gesture, facial expression, and self-confidence within the speech delivery process. Moreover, an English competition, even if it is organized and designed within an interior area for a limited scale in the classroom, can help students' English literacy skills progress. In addition, speaking in front of the public, including in front of the classroom, is a challenge for learners to increase their English skills and at the same time to remove fears of speaking English (Prayuda S, 2023).

Furthermore, (Wei et al., 2018) in their study found that a competitive gaming scenario can increase English skills, especially vocabulary mastery. Indeed, (Cabiles, 2023) games, particularly collaboratively organized, can increase positively the students' skills. The next factor that can accelerate English literacy skills is the English laboratory. The role of the English laboratory is vital because students can practice there assisted by relevant and needed contemporary technology for English learning. It is an

effective way to allow a much better performance of the English language to drastically escalate (Mohammed, 2017).

The last factor that contributes to upgrading English literacy skills is the role of the school to support all English language programs. One of the interviewees, identified as *S* also honestly revealed that the school supports and facilitates all programs in terms of English literacy environment. He articulated the reality stating:

'School supports and facilitates all programs to intensify the English literacy environment' (S).

CONCLUSION

This study is truthfully considered challenging in terms of the data collection process. During the interview, the English teacher respondent sometimes answers away from the core topic, out of the English literacy environment context, particularly at school. Nevertheless, an in-depth interview comprehensively was completed within the planned point of this study.

The conclusion sheds light on two factors decelerating the English literacy environment at schools namely the number of English teachers at school is not ideal and the school's infrastructures and facilities urgently needed by students to succeed in the English literacy enhancement are unavailable. Moreover, six factors accelerating the English literacy environment at school were discovered during the interview. Those six factors are; (1) activating the English corner program and English club, (2) a Weekly program giving new vocabulary to students, (3) Daily program of speech for each student by regular turn, (4) Encouraging students to actively participate all kinds of English competitions, (5) Empowering English laboratory facility, (6) Supporting all programs which advance English literacy skills.

This study becomes an evaluation for all parties: school, teachers, students, and society to participate to support the students in enhancing their English literacy skills. This study perhaps could be far from ideal expectations, but it is hopefully accepted nonetheless due to its respondents' coverage from three different state Islamic high schools, in-depth digging information, and area representation diversity. At least, an English literacy environment at school, notably at a state Islamic high school or *madrasah aliyah*, is possible to realize.

REFERENCES

- Adawiyah, R. (2023). A Narrative Inquiry of Student's English Speech Learning Experience through YouTube. *Proceedings.Uinsaizu.Ac.Id*, 600–613. <https://proceedings.uinsaizu.ac.id/index.php/celti/article/view/536>
- Amalia, R., & Taufiq, M. A. (2023). Cultural Literacy in Academic-Related Documents of English Subject in Junior High School Sadar Budaya di Dokumen Akademik Pelajaran Bahasa Inggris di Sekolah Menengah Pertama. *Lingua Didaktika*, 17(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.24036/ld.v17i1.1>

- Anwas, E. O. M., Afriansyah, A., Iftitah, K. N., Firdaus, W., Sugiarti, Y., Sopandi, E., & Hadiana, D. (2022). Students' Literacy Skills and Quality of Textbooks in Indonesian Elementary Schools. *International Journal of Language Education*, 6(3), 233–244. <https://doi.org/10.26858/ijole.v6i3.32756>
- Brown, H. D. (2004). *Language Assesment: Principles and Classroom Practice*. Pearson Education Inc.
- Cabiles, R. C. (2023). *THE EFFECTS OF COLLABORATIVE GAMES IN TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TO STUDENTS Roldan C. Cabiles*. 4(1), 11–19. <https://jurnal.stain-madina.ac.id/index.php/je21/article/view/1196/980>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. In *Journal of Reproductive Health* (Vol. 2, Issue 3). Sage Publication, Inc.
- Darojat, S. Q. (2022). *Exploring the English literacy program in Indonesian Junior High School context : EFL teacher's and students' perceptions* [UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung]. <https://etheses.uinsgd.ac.id/63285/>
- EF EPI. (2021). *Daftar peringkat terbesar berdasarkan kemampuan bahasa Inggris di negara dan wilayah terbesar dunia*. <https://www.ef.co.id/epi/>
- Emzir. (2015). *Metodologi penelitian pendidikan : kuantitatif dan kualitatif*. Jakarta : Rajawali Pers.
- Hardiana, N. D., Aisyah, N., & Harahap, N. H. (2023). the Effect of School Facilities on Students' Learning Motivation on English. *ANGLO-SAXON: Jurnal Ilmiah Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.33373/as.v13i2.4855>
- Hill, S. (2006). *Developing Early Literacy: Assessment and Teaching*. VIC: Eleanor Curtain Publishing.
- Maharani, D., & Triastuti, A. (2023). School Literacy Program : A Lesson Learned From English Language Teaching At A Senior High School. *International Scientific Journals of Social, Education, Humanities*, 2(1). <https://jurnal-stiepari.ac.id/index.php/LITERACY/article/view/531>
- Malau, J., Sigiro, M., Pardede, H., Munthe, B., & Sinurat, B. (2022). Peningkatan Literasi Bahasa Inggris (Story Telling) Di SDN Pamah Melalui Kampus Mengajar Angkatan 3. *Buguh: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat*, 2(4), 100–105. <https://doi.org/10.23960/buguh.v2n4.1218>
- Miraj, A. A., Anis, M. A. R., Hasan, M. K., Shamem, A. S. M., & Monir, M. (2015). The Role of Vocabulary in English Language Teaching and Learning in Higher Secondary Education Level. *Journal of Science and Technology*, 5(1), 9–16.
- Mohammed, A. (2017). The Role of Language Laboratory in English Language Learning Settings. *English Language Teaching*, 10(2), 86. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n2p86>
- Montoya, S. (2018). Defining Literacy. *UNESCO, (Issued October)*.

- Muharromah, I. A., & Mahmud, L. H. (2023). *Upaya peningkatan literasi bahasa inggris dalam memahami struktur teks narasi di smk al ghozali bogor 1,2*. 4(1), 492–499.
<http://www.openjournal.unpam.ac.id/index.php/Senan/article/view/32417>
- Muthmainnah, N. (2013). English Corner” A Setting To Support Clt Success Enhancing Students’ Speaking Skill [IAIN Ponorogo]. In *NBER Working Papers*.
<http://etheses.iainponorogo.ac.id>
- Nurfalah, R. S., & Pupah, E. M. (2022). English language teacher’s roles as viewed by EFL students. *Englie: English Learning Innovation*, 3(2).
<https://ejournal.umm.ac.id/index.php/englie/article/view/22135>
- Prayuda S, J. (2023). Factors Influencing Students’ Fears in The English Conversation Class. *Journal of English Education and Linguistics*, 4(1), 1–10.
<https://jurnal.stain-madina.ac.id/index.php/je2l/article/view/1195/979>
- Puspitasari, P. I., Padmadewi, N. N., & Dewi, L. P. E. S. (2021). Various English Literacy Activities in Bilingual Primary School. *International Journal of Elementary Education*, 5(1), 48. <https://doi.org/10.23887/ijee.v5i1.31550>
- Sayekti, O. M., Khoirudin, I., & Yi Ying, C. (2023). The Effect of Family Literacy on Students’ Interest in Reading. *Jurnal Prima Edukasia*, 11(1), 131–141.
<https://doi.org/10.21831/jpe.v11i1.56261>
- Tambunsaribu, G., & Galingging, Y. (2021). Masalah Yang Dihadapi Pelajar Bahasa Inggris Dalam Memahami Pelajaran Bahasa Inggris. *Dialektika: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra Dan Budaya*, 8(1), 30–41. <https://doi.org/10.33541/dia.v8i1.3110>
- Wei, C., Kao, H., LU, H., & Liu, Y. (2018). The Effects of Competitive Gaming Scenarios and Personalized Assistance Strategies on English Vocabulary Learning. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 21(3), 146–158.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/26458514>