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# Elementary School Children's Reading Development

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**Abstract**

Reading proficiency serves as the fundamental cornerstone that shapes the academic performance and cognitive potential of children in the future, particularly during the elementary education stage which marks the transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." This paper explores the dynamics of literacy progress among primary school students, emphasizing the shift from phonetic recognition to increasingly complex text comprehension. Through a literature review, it is found that this growth does not occur uniformly; rather, it is driven by the interplay between neurological maturity, support from the family environment, and the effectiveness of teaching strategies within the classroom. The study in this paper explains that challenges in early literacy often stem from weaknesses in mastering phonemic awareness at the lower levels, which, if not promptly addressed, will hinder the fluency and depth of meaning comprehension at higher levels. Beyond technical elements, this writing also discusses the role of affective factors, such as intrinsic motivation and student self-confidence when encountering challenging texts. The results of the discussion indicate the need for differentiated and integrated strategies which do not merely prioritize pronunciation fluency, but also encompass vocabulary enhancement and critical thinking abilities. The conclusion of this article asserts that focused early intervention is an absolute strategy to ensure every child can overcome literacy barriers and achieve a comprehensive level of functional literacy as a provision for lifelong education.

**Keywords**: Reading development, elementary literacy, text comprehension, elementary scholl, pedagogical strategies

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## INTRODUCTION

Elementary school is the most crucial phase in the formal education system, a time when a child's intellectual foundation begins to be structured. Among the many basic skills taught, reading plays the most crucial role because it serves as the "key" to all other fields of study. Without adequate reading skills, students will face numerous obstacles in understanding mathematical processes, analyzing social phenomena, and exploring scientific concepts. Therefore, reading development in elementary school is not simply a

technical matter of letter pronunciation, but rather a complex cognitive process that involves the integration of visual, auditory, and semantic abilities.

Theoretically, the elementary school period is often defined as a transitional period, meaning the shift from learning to read to reading to learn. In the early grades (grades 1 to 3), the primary focus of literacy education is on mastery of mechanics, such as sound awareness, recognition of written symbols, and fluent decoding. However, as students advance in age and grade level, curriculum demands shift, with students expected to use reading skills to capture information, draw compelling conclusions, and construct critical arguments. Inability to navigate this transition often triggers cumulative learning problems, where failure at one stage leads to greater difficulties in the next.

However, conditions in the field indicate that reading progress is not always smooth for all children. There is a clear picture of the pace and quality of student literacy, driven by various hidden factors. Beyond internal neural maturity, external factors such as the home literacy environment, accessibility of reading materials, and communication patterns between parents and children have a significant impact. Furthermore, the role of teachers in schools, through the use of models, ensures appropriate teaching, and determines whether children view reading as a burden or a hobby. Lack of variation in teaching patterns often makes the literacy process feel rigid and boring, thus decreasing student motivation.

In addition to cognitive and environmental elements, affective aspects such as students' self-confidence in reading have also begun to receive significant attention in modern literacy research. Children who encounter difficulties in the early stages of decoding tend to feel anxious about text, which ultimately makes them reluctant to read voluntarily. If this situation is allowed to continue, children will not only lose access to information, but also lose the opportunity to develop imagination and empathy which is usually felt through story literacy.

Through a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics, this article seeks to more thoroughly examine how reading development occurs in elementary school children and the factors that can act as drivers or obstacles. By examining various perspectives—from phonetic techniques to environmental support—it is hoped that a more effective intervention model can be identified. The main focus of this discussion is to emphasize that each child has a unique developmental rhythm, but with integrated support between school and family, comprehensive functional literacy can be created as the primary foundation for lifelong learning.

**METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach through a descriptive-analytical library research method. The primary focus of this method is to collect, publish, and synthesize a diverse range of scientific literature relevant to the topic of reading development in elementary school-aged children. This method was chosen based on the need to deeply analyze established theories of cognitive and linguistic development and then connect them with contemporary research findings to obtain a holistic picture of the phenomenon of child literacy.

The data for this study were obtained from both primary and secondary literature sources accessed through reputable academic databases, including Google Scholar,

ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, and the Indonesian academic journal portal Garuda. The selected literature consisted of scholarly journal articles, conference proceedings, and educational textbooks focusing on early literacy and child developmental psychology. To ensure relevance to current educational practices and curriculum developments, only publications published between 2016 and 2026 were included. Particular attention was given to studies examining phonemic awareness, reading fluency, and reading comprehension among elementary school students.

Data collection was conducted through a systematic digital literature search using relevant keywords such as "elementary students' reading development," "early literacy," "cognitive development theory in reading," and "barriers to basic literacy." The process involved identifying relevant literature, screening abstracts and conclusions for thematic suitability, evaluating the methodological rigor and validity of previous studies, and selecting the most relevant sources for in-depth analysis.

In this literature review, the researcher served as the primary research instrument responsible for interpreting and synthesizing the collected data. The analysis employed content analysis and comparative analysis techniques. Previous studies were organized into thematic categories, including developmental theories, instructional approaches, and learning barriers. The findings were then synthesized to identify theoretical relationships, research trends, and existing gaps in the literature concerning children's reading development. A critical interpretation of the data was subsequently undertaken to generate coherent and objective arguments, leading to conclusions regarding the dynamics of reading development in elementary school students and the most effective strategies to support this process.

To strengthen the analytical framework, the study examined previous research from three perspectives. First, an ontological perspective was used to explore developmental theories, particularly reading development stages, in order to understand students' cognitive characteristics across different grade levels. Second, a determinant perspective was employed to identify key factors influencing reading achievement, including internal factors such as phonological awareness and working memory, as well as external factors such as teaching methods and family literacy environments. Third, a solution-oriented perspective was adopted to evaluate various pedagogical interventions, including Phonics, Whole Language, and multisensory approaches, with the aim of identifying the most effective instructional strategies for diverse elementary school learners.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation was applied by comparing evidence across multiple journal articles, textbooks, and recent empirical studies. This approach enabled the study to develop conclusions that are not only theoretically grounded but also practically relevant to contemporary elementary education.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Based on a comprehensive literature review of various previous studies, this research findings demonstrate that reading development for elementary school children is a hierarchical and continuous cognitive pathway. As a student in the Elementary School Teacher Education Program (PGSD) at the State Islamic University of Padang (UNP

Sawahlunto), the researcher observed that the transition from lower to higher grades requires mental readiness that relies not only on mechanical skills but also on emotional maturity. The results of this study validate Jeanne Chall's theory that elementary school students go through a crucial period from decoding to fluency. Within the Faculty of Education at Padang State University, literacy is emphasized beyond spelling, but also the ability to assign meaning to graphic symbols. Literature review data demonstrates that students with strong phonemic awareness skills in first grade tend to have significantly more stable reading skills by fourth grade, when texts begin to become more informative and complex.

Furthermore, a review of factors influencing reading development reveals a significant relationship between environmental stimulation and children's literacy development. The researchers believe that the role of teachers in elementary schools, especially in developing areas such as those targeted by the PSDKU UNP Sawahlunto study, must be able to address the literacy gap through varied strategies. Previous research consistently demonstrates that the Phonics method combined with the Whole Language approach is far more effective than conventional, boring teaching. This aligns with the principles applied at Padang State University, where pedagogical innovation must be aligned with the psychological characteristics of elementary school children. Students who receive early intervention through multisensory learning tools have been shown to be more confident in overcoming the challenges of reading narrative and expository texts, as they not only memorize letters but also understand the complete language structure.

However, a major obstacle emerging in this description is the often-overlooked symptoms of reading disabilities, such as mild dyslexia or minimal intrinsic motivation. As part of the UNP Educational Sciences academic community, the authors argue that literacy strategies must prioritize collaboration between schools and families as a whole. Research shows that parents' role in reading books at home creates a "rich literacy environment" that neurologically strengthens the language circuitry in children's brains. This analysis emphasizes that elementary school children's reading progress is a result of the interplay between biological readiness, the quality of teacher instruction in the classroom, and emotional support at home.

Therefore, a differentiated mentoring approach is needed to ensure that each student, regardless of their learning style, can achieve functional literacy competencies, which are a crucial foundation for their academic success in further education. The summary of these results and analysis highlights the importance of changing the direction of literacy instruction in elementary schools. As a prospective teacher who graduated from the Elementary School Teacher Education Program (PGSD) at Padang State University (UNP), the author understands that the role of educators is not merely to meet curriculum targets but also to foster a love of reading. By incorporating previous research findings into classroom instruction, barriers to basic literacy can be reduced from the outset. This demonstrates that solid mastery of reading techniques in elementary school is a long-term cognitive investment that will determine the quality of future human resources, in line with the vision of excellence championed by Padang State University.

Furthermore, a review of various previous research literature explains that a child's self-efficacy in reading often arises from how their social environment appreciates the small progress they make. As a student in the Elementary School Teacher Education

Program (PGSD) at the Padang State University (UNPS) in Padang, the author believes that literacy challenges in the region are not limited to the availability of physical books, but also to creating an inclusive and enjoyable literacy ecosystem. Research findings consistently confirm that children experiencing delays in reading development often fall into the "Matthew Effect," where the gap between advanced and slow readers widens with age without personalized intervention. Within the academic framework of the Department of Education at Padang State University, it is explained that elementary school teachers must possess diagnostic sensitivity to detect these obstacles early through a humanistic approach.

This discussion demonstrates that the use of learning media based on local wisdom or folklore that is close to children's daily lives can increase emotional engagement, so that reading is no longer perceived as a tedious cognitive burden, but rather as a process of discovering meaning relevant to their cultural realities. Furthermore, the use of technology in teaching basic literacy is an important aspect examined in this study. Although reading ability is neurologically innate, appropriately managed digital media support can stimulate the visual-spatial areas of a child's brain, which in turn accelerates the recognition of linguistic symbols. As a manifestation of the spirit of innovation at Padang State University, the author believes that the literacy curriculum in elementary schools needs to immediately adopt a multimodal literacy model, in which students are asked to analyze texts through a combination of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic approaches.

Findings from various experimental studies show that students guided by multisensory methods have significantly superior word retention rates compared to those who only rely on conventional lecture methods. Therefore, the final summary of this review emphasizes that the success of elementary school children's reading development is the result of a synergy between progressive pedagogical methods, educators' understanding of psychological foundations, and our moral commitment as prospective graduates of the UNP Elementary School Teacher Education Program (PGSD) to functionally illiterate members for the sake of a more intelligent and critical future generation of the nation.

**CONCLUSSION**

As a conclusion to this theoretical series and synthesis of previous studies, it can be stated that reading development in elementary school students is a complex cognitive process that is a key determinant of the academic future and intellectual level of the next generation. This observation clearly demonstrates that literacy success rests not only on a child's technical ability to string letters together, but also on the harmonious relationship between neurological maturity, affective factors such as self-confidence, and a conducive literacy environment both at home and at school. As a prospective educator trained in the academic corridors of the Elementary School Teacher Education Program (PGSD) at the State Islamic University of Sawahlunto (UNP), the author understands that the transition from lower to upper grades is a "golden" period that demands a teacher's diagnostic acumen. Delays in addressing reading challenges at the elementary level will not only hinder students' understanding of other disciplines but will also ensure their intrinsic motivation to explore a much broader understanding of knowledge. Furthermore, this

conclusion reinforces the urgent need for innovative, inclusive, and differentiated pedagogical strategies to address the challenges of literacy in the modern era.

The synergy between multisensory teaching techniques and the judicious use of technology has been proven to significantly accelerate children's decoding and semantic comprehension skills. As part of the extended family of Padang State University of Education, the author believes that the role of elementary school teachers is to be the architects of civilization, laying the foundation for a strong functional literacy. Therefore, a collaborative relationship between educators, parents, and policymakers is needed to create a learning ecosystem that not only pursues curriculum targets but also fosters a love of reading as an empowering and enlightening activity. Through a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of reading development, it is hoped that Padang State University graduates can play an active role in fostering a literate, critical, and character-based golden generation of Indonesia, in line with the vision of excellence that is always upheld in Sawahlunto and West Sumatra in general.

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