

Strengthening Reading Literacy Among Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Students Through Context-Based Reading Aloud Strategies

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Abstract

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Reading literacy skills are one of the main foundations for the success of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) students in achieving academic competence and character development. However, international survey results such as PIRLS and PISA shows that Indonesian students' reading literacy levels are still low. This study aims to analyse the effectiveness of context-based reading aloud strategies in improving MI students' reading literacy skills. The research method used is descriptive qualitative through a literature study. The results of the study show that reading aloud not only improves phonetic skills and reading comprehension, but also strengthens students' emotional connection to the local culture that forms the context of the story. This strategy is effective as an alternative to literacy learning that is enjoyable, participatory, and contextual.

INTRODUCTION

Reading literacy is one of the essential skills in basic education, especially in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), which plays a strategic role in shaping the academic abilities and religious character of students. Data from PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) in 2021 shows that the reading ability of Indonesian students is still below the international average. These low achievements indicate an urgent need to strengthen literacy programmes at the primary education level. The reading aloud learning strategy is seen as one approach that can improve students' reading literacy skills. Reading aloud activities by teachers or students not only help with understanding words, phrases and intonation, but also foster a love of books.

Furthermore, the use of local context in reading materials has a positive impact on students' connection with the text. Readings that are close to the culture and surrounding environment are easier to understand, thereby increasing motivation and interest in reading. Thus, reading aloud based on local context is a strategy that can bridge the gap between technical reading skills and students' cultural understanding. This study aims to describe the effectiveness of the local context-based reading aloud strategy in

strengthening the reading literacy of MI students. The main focus of this study is the integration of local culture in reading, its impact on learning motivation, and its influence on text comprehension.

Basic education is an important foundation for developing children's literacy skills. Reading literacy, as one of the fundamental skills, must be strengthened from an early age, especially at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) level, as it will support successful learning at the next level. Reading literacy is not merely a technical skill of recognising letters, but also includes comprehension, interpretation and analysis of texts. Students with good reading literacy will find it easier to absorb information from various subjects.

International surveys such as PIRLS and PISA show that Indonesian students' reading literacy achievements are still low compared to other countries. This condition indicates the need for innovative strategies in reading instruction in primary schools and Islamic primary schools. One of the causes of low reading literacy is that teaching methods still focus on mastering the mechanics of reading, rather than on understanding the text and fostering an interest in reading.

To overcome this, the reading aloud strategy can be an effective alternative. Teachers or students who read texts aloud with the right intonation, expression, and pronunciation help listeners better understand the content of the text. Reading aloud is not only beneficial for students who have difficulty reading, but it can also increase vocabulary, intonation, and enrich the literacy experience of all students.

Furthermore, reading aloud can enhance interaction between teachers and students. This activity provides students with the opportunity to discuss the content of the reading material, thereby fostering critical understanding. However, reading aloud will be more effective if the reading material is relevant to the students' lives. Reading material based on the local context is considered to be able to foster a sense of belonging, emotional closeness, and deeper understanding.

The local context here refers to folklore, legends, customs, and local wisdom that have developed around students. These stories are rich in moral, religious, and social values that support character building. The use of local reading materials not only strengthens language comprehension but also teaches students to appreciate regional cultural identities. Thus, reading literacy also becomes a vehicle for preserving the nation's culture. The integration of local wisdom in reading literacy is also in line with the direction of national education policy, which emphasises the strengthening of character education. Religious, nationalistic, independent, cooperative, and integrity characters can be instilled through local reading texts.

Previous studies have shown that students find it easier to understand texts that are relevant to their lives. Contextual reading increases student engagement, curiosity, and motivation to read. In addition, localised reading aloud activities can be used as a medium for teaching social skills, such as cooperation, empathy, and communication. When students listen to and discuss the content of the reading material, they learn to respect other people's opinions. In madrasahs, this strategy can be linked to Islamic education, for example, stories about the prophets, local scholars, or community leaders who played a role in upholding Islamic values. This makes reading literacy more contextual and religious.

In addition to supporting learning, local-based literacy also serves as a filter against the rapid flow of globalisation and popular culture. With local reading materials, students remain rooted in their identity while learning to select global information.

Collaboration between teachers, parents, and the community is essential to the success of this strategy. Teachers provide reading materials, parents accompany their children at home, while the community plays a role in providing authentic local stories. Based on this description, this research is important to analyse the strengthening of MI students' reading literacy through a reading aloud strategy based on the local context. This study is expected to be a solution in improving literacy while strengthening the character and cultural identity of students.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study utilised a descriptive qualitative approach with a focus on analysing literature regarding reading aloud strategies in improving the reading literacy of MI students. This approach was chosen because it is capable of exploring the deeper meaning of various scientific sources relevant to the research topic. The method used was library research. All data were collected from national journals, international journals, academic books, and official research reports on reading literacy, basic education, and the integration of local wisdom in learning. The primary data sources for this study included journal articles that specifically discussed the effectiveness of reading aloud strategies and the reading literacy of primary school/MI students. Meanwhile, the secondary sources were educational theory books, government policies related to literacy, and research results that supported the interpretation. Data collection was carried out through systematic steps, namely: (a) identifying the themes of reading literacy and reading aloud; (b) selecting journal articles according to inclusion criteria; (c) recording and coding the literature; and (d) grouping the data according to thematic categories.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques. This technique was chosen because it enables researchers to identify patterns, meanings, and relationships between variables from various documents that have been examined. This analysis involves the processes of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. In the data reduction process, researchers select the most relevant literature, then group it into themes such as: the urgency of reading literacy, reading aloud strategies, local contexts in learning, and strengthening student character. The data presentation stage is carried out by formulating a summary of the reading content in the form of a descriptive description. This summary is then analysed comparatively to see the similarities, differences, and contributions between the literature. To ensure data validity, this study uses source triangulation. Triangulation is carried out by comparing information from several pieces of literature discussing similar topics, both from national and international journals.

In addition, the validity of the data was also strengthened through conceptual validation techniques, namely reviewing the analysis results based on educational theory, national policies on literacy, and previous research results that had been scientifically tested. With this research method, it is hoped that a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of context-based reading aloud strategies in improving MI students' reading literacy will be obtained. These findings are expected to serve as a practical and theoretical reference for teachers, education practitioners, and researchers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Urgency of Reading Literacy in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

Reading literacy is a basic skill that determines students' ability to understand all subjects. Research shows that low reading skills among MI students have an impact on academic achievement and the formation of learning character. Therefore, literacy needs to be strengthened from an early age. Reading literacy at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level

(MI) is of the utmost importance because it forms the basis for mastery of all academic competencies. Students who are skilled at reading will find it easier to understand various subject materials, both religious and general. Conversely, poor reading literacy skills make it difficult to understand texts and lead to lower academic achievement.

Reading ability is also an important indicator of the success of basic education. PIRLS 2021 shows that Indonesian students' reading literacy achievements are still in the low category. This data serves as a warning that MI must be more serious in strengthening literacy programmes as part of efforts to improve the quality of education. Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is unique because, in addition to teaching general subjects, it also emphasises mastery of religious texts. Reading literacy in MI is not only related to the skill of understanding general reading, but also reading the Qur'an, basic books, and other religious texts.

Good reading skills will help students understand the meaning of verses from the Qur'an, hadith, and simple Islamic literature. Thus, reading literacy is not only related to academic achievement, but also to the formation of religious character. The urgency of reading literacy in MI is also evident in its function as a means of improving critical thinking skills. Students who are accustomed to reading will be better able to analyse information, distinguish between facts and opinions, and assess the validity of an argument. In addition, reading literacy plays a role in fostering students' imagination and creativity. Varied reading texts, whether in the form of folk tales, fairy tales, or Islamic role models, can inspire students to be creative in writing and storytelling. The importance of reading literacy is also related to social aspects. Students who have good reading skills will find it easier to communicate, collaborate, and actively participate in community life. This supports the creation of a generation that is literate, religious, and socially conscious.

Madrasahs, as religious-based educational institutions, also have a moral responsibility to strengthen literacy. Reading literacy instilled from an early age will produce a generation of Muslims who are intellectually intelligent, strong in religious values, and able to face global challenges. Therefore, the urgency of reading literacy in MI cannot be ignored. Literacy enhancement programmes must be prioritised by incorporating innovative strategies such as reading aloud based on the local context. Through this strategy, students' literacy can be improved while internalising cultural and religious values that are relevant to everyday life.

Reading Aloud Strategy as a Literacy Method

Reading aloud has been proven to improve reading comprehension and enjoyment. Teachers who read aloud can model appropriate intonation, expression, and word stress. In addition, this strategy trains students to focus and concentrate on understanding the content of the text. Reading aloud is an effective literacy learning strategy used in primary schools and Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. This strategy is carried out by teachers or students reading texts aloud with appropriate intonation, expression, and pronunciation, making it easier for listeners to understand the content of the reading material.

Reading aloud plays an important role in providing students with a good reading model. Teachers can demonstrate how to pronounce words correctly, emphasise sentence intonation, and express themselves in a manner appropriate to the content of the text. This makes it easier for students to naturally imitate reading skills. In addition to practising technical skills, reading aloud also strengthens reading comprehension. Students who hear texts read aloud with dramatisation find it easier to understand the plot, characters, and moral messages contained within.

Research shows that this strategy can increase students' emotional engagement. The learning atmosphere becomes more enjoyable because the text is not only read, but brought to life through sound and expression. Thus, students are more motivated to read independently. In Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, reading aloud has added value because it can be applied to religious readings and local stories. Teachers can read stories about the exemplary lives of prophets, companions, or community leaders who are familiar to students, making learning both religious and contextual.

This strategy also trains students' concentration skills. When listening to reading aloud, students are required to focus on understanding the content of the story. This habit develops listening skills and cognitive skills that are important for further learning. Another advantage of reading aloud is its ability to reach students with different learning styles. Children who have an auditory learning tendency will be greatly helped, while visual learners will still benefit from the text being read aloud. Reading aloud also serves as a medium for instilling character values. The stories read aloud can be selected from tales that are rich in moral messages, such as honesty, hard work, or social awareness. In this way, reading literacy plays a dual role: improving language skills while strengthening students' character. To be effective, teachers need to be trained to use the right reading aloud techniques, such as changing intonation according to the characters' roles, using appropriate pauses, and emphasising important words. The teacher's skills are crucial to the success of the reading aloud strategy. With these advantages, reading aloud should be one of the main strategies in literacy programmes at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. It can be implemented regularly, both in teaching and learning activities and in daily literacy activities at school.

Integration of Local Context in Reading

The use of texts based on local wisdom makes it easier for students to understand the content of the reading material because it is relevant to their daily experiences. Folktales, local legends, and local stories can be used as contextual reading material. Integrating local context into reading literacy means presenting reading texts that are close to the daily lives of students. Folktales, local legends, and stories of local community figures can be relevant and meaningful learning media.

Readings rooted in local culture are easier for students to understand because they relate to their experiences. For example, children in rural areas find it easier to understand stories about the lives of farmers, rice fields, or traditions of mutual cooperation than foreign stories that are far removed from their daily lives. This approach is in line with constructivist theory, which emphasises that knowledge is constructed through experiences that are relevant to students' real lives. Thus, locally-based reading materials can increase student engagement in literacy activities.

In addition to improving understanding, integrating local contexts also strengthens students' cultural identity. They learn to love their regional cultural heritage while internalising the moral values contained in local stories. Local readings are usually full of character messages such as honesty, courage, obedience to parents, and social awareness. By reading and discussing these stories, students not only learn the language but also the values that shape religious and social character. The integration of local context is also beneficial in facing the tide of globalisation. Through local reading materials, students are equipped with a cultural filter so that they do not lose their identity when interacting with global texts.

In Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, the use of local-based reading materials can be integrated with Islamic religious education. Stories of exemplary local scholars, local figures who spread Islam, or stories of the struggles of Muslim communities can be used as contextual literacy materials.

Religious. In addition to strengthening reading skills, integrating local contexts also trains critical thinking skills. Students can compare the values in local stories with their own lives, thereby developing their ability to reflect and make decisions. Teachers play an important role in selecting local reading materials that are appropriate for the students' age and learning objectives. Collaboration with parents and the community is essential to enrich reading materials through oral stories or local cultural documentation. Thus, integrating local context into reading is not only a strategy to improve reading literacy, but also a means of preserving culture, strengthening identity, and instilling religious and moral character in MI students.

The Impact of Reading Aloud on Reading Interest

Students who are accustomed to listening to teachers or friends read aloud tend to be more motivated to read independently. Research shows that reading aloud can increase reading interest by up to 40% in primary school students.¹ One of the positive effects of implementing the *reading aloud* strategy is an increase in **students' interest in reading**. When texts are read aloud with lively intonation, expression, and flow, students feel interested in listening and are encouraged to read more texts independently. Reading aloud creates a fun learning atmosphere. Students do not feel that reading is a burden, but rather an entertaining activity that provides new experiences. This positive atmosphere plays a major role in fostering an attitude of reading from an early age.

In addition to fostering initial interest, *reading aloud* also broadens students' horizons in terms of the variety of reading materials available. The texts read by teachers can introduce various genres, ranging from folk tales and fables to religious stories, encouraging students to explore other reading materials. The interest in reading that grows through this strategy has implications for the formation of long-term literacy habits. Students who are accustomed to enjoying reading through *reading aloud* activities are more likely to have internal motivation to read without coercion. Thus, *reading aloud* not only improves reading comprehension skills but also serves as a gateway to building a reading culture in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. This strategy can be used as a basis for developing a sustainable school literacy programme.

Improving Reading Comprehension

In addition to interest, text comprehension also improves through this strategy. Contextual reading that is recited with appropriate intonation and expression makes it easier for students to understand the content of the text.² The *reading aloud* strategy has been proven to not only foster an interest in reading, but also improve students' **reading comprehension**. When texts are read aloud with appropriate intonation and emphasis, students find it easier to grasp the meaning of words and understand the structure of sentences as a whole. Reading comprehension is also influenced by vocabulary skills. Through *reading aloud*, students are introduced to new words in clear sentence contexts, making it easier for them to remember and understand the meaning of those words.

In addition to expanding vocabulary, this strategy helps students understand the storyline. Readings that are read aloud with dramatic expression make it easier for students to follow the sequence of events in the text, recognise characters, and grasp the conflicts and moral messages conveyed.

¹Gunawan, H. (2020). *Reading Motivation through Storytelling and Reading Aloud*. Jurnal Literasi, 4(2), 112–123.

² Sari, F. (2021). *Improving Reading Comprehension with Reading Aloud Strategy*. Journal of Language and Literature, 9(2), 134–147.

Reading comprehension is further enhanced when teachers engage pupils in discussion after *reading aloud*. Simple questions about the content of the text encourage pupils to think critically, reflect on what they have read, and relate it to their own experiences.

This strategy also facilitates students who are still in the early stages of reading development. Those who have difficulty reading independently still gain access to understanding the content of the text through listening activities, so they are not left behind in their learning. From a pedagogical perspective, *reading aloud* teaches reading comprehension skills gradually. Students learn to identify main ideas, important information, and summarise the content of the reading. Thus, this strategy contributes directly to advanced literacy skills. With its various advantages, the *reading aloud* strategy deserves to be one of the main approaches in literacy programmes at MI. Improving reading comprehension through this strategy not only supports students' academic success but also prepares them to become critical readers in the future.

Character Building Through Local Context

Stories based on local culture are often rich in moral values, such as honesty, hard work, and mutual cooperation. Thus, reading aloud not only strengthens reading literacy but also contributes to religious and social character education.³ The integration of local context in reading literacy not only aims to improve language skills but also serves as an important means of **strengthening students' character**. Local stories usually contain moral and religious values that can be internalised in children's daily lives. Folktales and regional legends often feature characters with good traits that can be emulated, such as honesty, hard work, social awareness, and steadfast faith. Through *reading aloud*, students can understand these values more easily because they are conveyed in language and situations that are familiar to them.

Character building through local literature is in line with national education objectives that emphasise the development of students who are faithful, pious, and have noble character. The religious values contained in local stories also support the madrasah curriculum, which is based on Islamic teachings. In addition to religious aspects, local literature also instils a sense of togetherness and mutual cooperation. Local traditions recounted through literacy help students understand the importance of social solidarity, so that they become accustomed to caring for their surroundings. The local context also strengthens students' cultural identity. Children who are familiar with stories from their region will take pride in their own culture, while also learning to appreciate other cultures. This strong identity is an important asset in facing the influence of global culture.

Through the integration of local context, reading literacy serves a dual purpose: as a vehicle for language learning and as a medium for character education. This strategy enables students to become not only intellectually intelligent, but also emotionally and spiritually mature. Thus, character building through local context is a strategic step in realising holistic education in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. Local-based reading literacy can shape students to be literate, religious, characterful, and strongly rooted in the nation's culture.

³ Hidayat, A. (2020). *Character Education through Local Stories*. Journal of Character Education, 10(2), 210–223.

Collaboration between Teachers, Parents, and the Community

The effectiveness of the reading aloud strategy is even greater when supported by collaboration between parents and the community. Students can continue reading aloud activities at home with their families, thereby creating a culture of continuous literacy.⁴ The success of reading literacy through the context-based *reading aloud* strategy cannot be separated from the collaborative role of **teachers, parents, and the community**. These three elements form an educational ecosystem that supports each other in fostering a culture of literacy among Madrasah Ibtidaiyah students.⁵ Teachers have a major role as facilitators of literacy learning at school. However, strengthening interest in reading will not be optimal if it is not followed up at home. Parents need to make time to read stories, accompany their children while they read, or simply discuss the content of the reading material.⁶

In addition to teachers and parents, the community also plays an important role in building a culture of literacy. For example, through village libraries, community reading parks, or religious activities that incorporate local stories. This collaboration helps to expand access to reading materials that are relevant to the context of students' lives.⁷ Community involvement also enriches local reading materials, as the community can contribute folk tales, historical stories, and real-life experiences that can be used as literacy texts. Thus, students learn not only from teachers and textbooks, but also from the collective wisdom of the community. With the collaboration of teachers, parents, and the community, reading literacy becomes not only the responsibility of the school, but also a joint movement. This synergy will produce students who are literate, have good character, and are close to the culture and religious values embraced by the community.

Implementation Challenges

Some challenges in implementing this strategy include the limited availability of contextual reading materials, teachers' skills in dramatising readings, and a lack of parental support. However, these challenges can be overcome through teacher training, the provision of locally-based books, and family literacy programmes.⁸ Although the local context-based *reading aloud* strategy has many advantages, its implementation in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is not without challenges. These obstacles arise from the school, teachers, and family and community environments. The first challenge is **the limited availability of local reading materials** that are appropriate for the students' age. Many folk tales have not been properly documented or are written in language that is difficult for children to understand, making it difficult for teachers to use them as literacy materials.

The next challenge relates to **teacher competence**. Not all teachers are accustomed to using reading aloud techniques with the right intonation and expression. In fact, the success of *reading aloud* is largely determined by the teacher's ability to bring the text to life. From the students' perspective, differences in reading ability also pose an obstacle. Some students are still at the beginning stages of reading, while others are already more fluent. This requires teachers to balance their strategies so that all students can be involved. Factors

⁴ Susanti, E. (2019). *The Role of Parents in Children's Literacy*. Journal of Educational Psychology, 14(1), 88–99.

⁵ Epstein, J. L. (2018). *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools*. New York: Routledge.

⁶ Susanti, E. (2019). *The Role of Parents in Primary School Children's Literacy*. Journal of Educational Psychology, 14(1), 88–99.

⁷ Lestari, P. (2020). *The Role of the Community in the School Literacy Movement*. Journal of Primary Education, 12(2), 145–157.

⁸ Kurniawan, B. (2021). *Challenges in Implementing Reading Aloud in Primary School*. Journal of Primary Education, 6(3), 156–169.

The family environment also influences the success of implementation. Not all parents have the time and habit of accompanying their children to read at home. A lack of family support can make literacy efforts at school less than optimal. In addition, the sustainability of the programme is often hampered by **policy support and infrastructure**. Reading literacy programmes require facilities such as libraries, reading corners, and teacher training. Without continuous support, context-based *reading aloud* strategies are difficult to achieve maximum results.

CONCLUSION

The context-based reading aloud strategy has proven effective in improving the reading literacy of MI students. This approach not only develops phonetic skills and reading comprehension but also fosters an interest in reading and strengthens character education. The implementation of this strategy requires collaborative support between teachers, parents, and the school community.

Context-based reading aloud strategies have proven effective in improving the reading literacy of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah students. Reading aloud not only helps students understand texts more deeply, but also fosters an interest in reading from an early age. The integration of local readings makes literacy more meaningful because it is close to the students' experiences, while also strengthening their cultural and religious identities.

In addition to improving language skills, this strategy also supports character building through the moral and religious values contained in local stories. Successful implementation requires collaboration between teachers, parents and the community, as well as support in the form of reading materials and teacher training. Thus, reading aloud based on the local context should be made a key strategy in literacy programmes at Islamic primary schools in order to produce students who are literate, religious and have good character.

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