

READING LITERACY CULTURE AS A DETERMINING FACTOR OF SOCIAL STUDIES LEARNING OUTCOMES IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the relationship between reading literacy culture and students' learning outcomes in Social Studies among seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Mantingan. The study employed a mixed-methods approach with a correlational research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the variables. Quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire to measure students' reading literacy culture, while qualitative data were obtained through structured interviews and observations to explore contextual factors influencing literacy habits and Social Studies learning. Secondary data were derived from official school documents, including students' test scores and report card records. The population of this study consisted of all seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Mantingan, totaling 33 students. Due to the relatively small population size, a total sampling technique was applied, in which all members of the population were included as research participants. Data analysis techniques included instrument validity and reliability tests, normality testing, linearity testing, and hypothesis testing using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation with the assistance of SPSS software. The results of the analysis indicated that the data were normally distributed and exhibited a linear relationship. The Pearson Product-Moment correlation test revealed a positive relationship between reading literacy culture and students' Social Studies learning outcomes, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0) and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_1). These findings demonstrate that reading literacy culture plays an important role in improving students' Social Studies learning outcomes. Therefore, strengthening reading literacy culture should be systematically integrated into Social Studies instruction, particularly within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Keywords

Reading Literacy Culture, Learning Outcomes, Social Studies, Merdeka Curriculum, Junior High School.



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's education system is currently undergoing a transformation in response to global demands and the increasing complexity of twenty-first-century competencies. Since the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum, the national education system has been continuously directed toward improving the quality of learning, although it still faces various challenges related to the relevance of learning materials, the effectiveness of instructional methods, and teachers' readiness to guide students in developing competencies aligned with contemporary developments (Emmiyati & Mardiana, 2024). Findings from the Programme for International Student Assessment indicate that Indonesian students' literacy and numeracy achievements remain below the average of OECD member countries, signaling the existence of fundamental problems in the mastery of essential competencies. This condition was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in learning loss and widened disparities in educational access across regions. This situation was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in learning loss and widened disparities in educational access across regions (Azevedo et al., 2022). In response to these challenges, the government introduced the Merdeka Curriculum as an educational reform that is more flexible, contextual, and learner-centered, providing greater autonomy for schools and teachers to design learning activities according to students' needs (Putri & Aliyyah, 2024; Suryana et al., 2023). Recent studies also suggest that adaptive curricular frameworks like the Merdeka Curriculum can support differentiated literacy instruction tailored to student readiness and learning contexts, further enhancing student outcomes (Kurniawati, 2024).

Within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, literacy occupies a strategic position as an essential twenty-first-century competency. Literacy is understood as an individual's ability to critically interpret information in order to access knowledge and technological developments, as mandated by Law Number 3 of 2017 concerning the Book System. Meta-analytic studies indicate that basic literacy issues remain a major challenge in Indonesian basic education, including the roles of family support, digital literacy, and critical literacy in shaping students' competency attainment (Anggraini et al., 2023). Literacy strengthening is also implemented through the School Literacy Movement, which emphasizes sustained and integrated reading habituation within the school environment. Research on programs like the School Literacy Movement confirms their positive impact on students' reading interest and comprehension skills, highlighting the potential of structured literacy initiatives to improve academic engagement (Yulianti & Sukasih, 2023). In line

with this perspective, literacy is not limited to basic reading and writing skills but also encompasses the ability to comprehend, process, interpret, and respond to information presented in various forms of texts and symbolic representations (Abidin, 2017; Kusuma et al., 2022; Mulasih & Hudhana, 2020).

Despite literacy being a central focus of national education policy, Indonesia's reading literacy culture remains relatively low. Limited access to reading materials, the absence of consistent reading habits, and insufficient support from family and school environments are among the factors that hinder students' literacy development (Afghani et al., 2022; Adawiyah, 2021; Yulianingsih et al., 2024). Other findings suggest that reading literacy is closely related to students' metacognitive skills, which can more accurately predict their academic achievement (Banat & Pierewan, 2019). Moreover, large-scale international research confirms that students' reading engagement and habits show significant positive correlations with academic performance, suggesting that stronger reading practices are associated with better subject-area achievement (Abid et al., 2023). A weak reading literacy culture has a direct impact on the quality of human resources, particularly in terms of mastery of science and technology, critical thinking skills, and social mobility, while also potentially widening social inequality. In educational contexts, low reading literacy also affects the effectiveness of learning processes, especially in subjects that require conceptual understanding and analytical skills.

Social Studies is a subject that requires students to comprehend texts, process information, and reason logically in analyzing social phenomena. Social Studies content is conceptual, reflective, and analytical in nature, thereby requiring adequate reading literacy skills to enable students to understand social contexts comprehensively (Akbar & Anggraeni, 2017; Fathin, 2020). Quantitative research indicates a significant influence of reading literacy on students' learning outcomes in specific themes at the elementary level, reinforcing the notion that literacy is a crucial variable in academic achievement (Indah et al., 2024). Evidence from junior high schools also shows that higher reading proficiency is significantly correlated with students' academic performance across multiple core subjects, including science, mathematics, and language arts, pointing to literacy as a broad predictor of academic success (Abao, 2025).

The literacy culture of students at SMP Negeri 2 Mantingan has begun to develop through the implementation of the School Literacy Movement (*Gerakan Literasi Sekolah/GLS*), particularly the 15-minute reading activity conducted before lessons begin. Based on preliminary observations and an interview with a seventh-grade Social Studies teacher conducted on 19 November 2024, this

literacy practice has been implemented routinely but remains suboptimal in terms of quality and sustainability. Of the 33 seventh-grade students involved in this study, only a proportion consistently engage in meaningful reading activities using materials relevant to learning, while others demonstrate low reading motivation and participate merely as a formality. As a result, students experience difficulties in comprehending conceptual texts, especially in Social Studies, which requires historical, social, and analytical understanding. Although most students have achieved the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM), several students still encounter challenges in developing deep conceptual understanding, indicating that the existing literacy culture remains at the habituation stage rather than being internalized as a reflective learning practice.

At the institutional level, SMP Negeri 2 Mantingan has adopted policies supporting literacy development through the implementation of GLS in accordance with the Regulation of the Ministry of Education and Culture Number 23 of 2015. However, its integration into classroom instruction remains limited. Empirical findings at SMP Negeri 2 Mantingan indicate that some seventh-grade students have not yet achieved the Minimum Mastery Criteria in Social Studies, which is partly attributed to low reading motivation and difficulties in understanding complex informational texts (Desi, 2023). This condition demonstrates a clear linkage between reading literacy culture and students' Social Studies learning outcomes. Given that Social Studies heavily relies on reading comprehension, critical interpretation of texts, and analytical reasoning, examining the relationship between literacy culture and students' level of understanding is particularly important. With a relatively small population of 33 students, SMP Negeri 2 Mantingan provides an appropriate setting for an in-depth empirical investigation. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the evaluation of school literacy policies and to offer practical recommendations for integrating literacy activities more effectively into Social Studies instruction.

This situation aligns with findings from various studies that emphasize the important role of reading literacy culture in improving students' academic achievement. A strong reading culture supports students' comprehension skills, independent learning, and critical engagement with academic texts, which collectively contribute to better learning outcomes. Empirical evidence shows that habitual reading practices have a significant relationship with secondary school students' academic performance, indicating that consistent reading activities positively affect learning outcomes (Oniikoyi, 2024). Furthermore, studies at the junior high school level demonstrate that reading literacy culture and reading interest jointly exert a positive influence on students' academic

achievement, highlighting the role of both literacy skills and motivation in learning success (Anju Siregar, Debbi Petra Meyana, 2023). These findings reinforce the view that reading literacy is a fundamental factor in supporting effective learning in schools.

Beyond its impact on cognitive aspects, a consistently developed reading literacy culture also contributes to the formation of positive learning attitudes, increased motivation, and greater student engagement in the learning process (Pradana, 2020; Abidin, 2017; Cholifah, 2024; Rilo Rianda, Mashudi, 2019). A literacy-supportive school environment plays a significant role in enhancing students' reading abilities and overall learning quality (Pamularsih, 2022). Meanwhile, challenges arising from technological advancements and the multimedia era require the adaptive integration of reading literacy into instructional practices to remain relevant to students' characteristics (Fitriani & Suryaman, 2019). Strengthening reading literacy culture also demands systematic and sustainable management within the school environment to ensure optimal implementation (Yulianingsih et al., 2024).

Although numerous previous studies have consistently confirmed the significant role of reading literacy culture in influencing students' academic achievement, a relevant research gap can still be identified. Most existing studies tend to examine learning outcomes in a general or cross-subject context, integrate additional variables such as gender differences, reading interest, school climate, or parental support, or place greater emphasis on literacy program management and policy implementation rather than classroom-level learning outcomes. Furthermore, several studies focus on literacy development at the primary or senior secondary level, leaving limited empirical evidence that specifically addresses junior high school students as a critical transitional stage in formal education. More importantly, studies that explicitly explore the relationship between reading literacy culture and Social Studies learning outcomes remain relatively scarce, particularly within the instructional context of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning, critical thinking, and the integration of literacy-based and project-based approaches.

Based on empirical conditions observed in schools, support from previous research findings, and the research gap identified in the literature, this study aims to analyze the relationship between reading literacy culture and Social Studies learning outcomes among seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Mantingan. By focusing on this specific educational context, the study seeks to generate contextual empirical evidence that reflects actual literacy practices and learning conditions under the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. In addition, comprehensive reviews of literacy

development research underscore that enriching literature exposure and instructional support correlate with deeper comprehension and critical engagement, which are foundational for academic success (Sutriani, 2025). The findings of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the enrichment of literacy and Social Studies education research, as well as practically to serve as a reference for teachers and schools in strengthening literacy-based Social Studies instruction. In the long term, this research is anticipated to support the development of more effective instructional strategies that foster students' comprehension, critical analysis, and meaningful engagement with Social Studies content within the framework of twenty-first-century education.

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods research design with a correlational approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative procedures to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between students' reading literacy culture and their Social Studies learning outcomes. The quantitative approach was used to statistically examine the strength and direction of the relationship between variables, while the qualitative approach aimed to explore contextual factors influencing students' reading literacy habits through structured interviews and systematic observations (Cholifah, 2024; Noveliana & Ghani, 2022). The integration of these two approaches enabled the study to generate findings that are not only statistically robust but also contextually meaningful.

The variables examined in this study consisted of one independent variable and one dependent variable. The independent variable was students' reading literacy culture, while the dependent variable was Social Studies learning outcomes. The operational definitions of variables and indicators used in this study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Variables and Indicators

No.	Variable Type	Variable	Indicators
1.	Independent Variable (X)	Reading Literacy Culture	Reading frequency, quantity, and diversity of reading materials, reading motivation, and students' attitudes toward literacy activities
2.	Dependent Variable (Y)	Social Studies Learning Outcomes	Cognitive achievement, conceptual understanding, and application of Social Studies concepts

The data sources in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from questionnaires completed by the research respondents and from direct observations conducted by the researcher at the research site. Secondary data were derived from documents relevant to the focus of the study, including students' academic records and other supporting documents related to literacy activities implemented at the school.

The population of this study comprised all seventh-grade students of SMP Negeri 2 Mantingan, totaling 33 students. Given the relatively small population size, a total sampling technique was applied, in which all members of the population were included as research samples. This technique was selected to obtain more representative data and to minimize sampling bias, thereby allowing the research findings to accurately reflect the overall population conditions (Niati, 2018). In addition to students, the Social Studies teacher was involved as a key informant in the qualitative data collection to provide supplementary perspectives on literacy implementation and students' learning outcomes.

Data collection was conducted using multiple techniques. A closed-ended questionnaire with a modified Likert scale (1–4) was administered to measure students' reading literacy culture. The questionnaire was developed based on indicators of reading frequency, quantity, and diversity of reading materials, reading motivation, and students' attitudes toward literacy activities (Sugiyono, 2019; Erinsyah et al., 2024). To complement the quantitative data, structured interviews were conducted with students and the Social Studies teacher to explore reading motivation, reading habits, preferred reading materials, and perceptions of the influence of literacy on academic achievement. Furthermore, structured observations were carried out to document the implementation of literacy activities at school, including reading habituation practices, library utilization, and the integration of literacy-based instruction.

Data on Social Studies learning outcomes were obtained from students' test scores and report card grades, sourced from official school documents. These data served as indicators of students' cognitive achievement, conceptual understanding, and ability to relate Social Studies content to real-world social phenomena (Tabrani, 2023; Niati, 2018). The use of documented academic records was intended to ensure the accuracy and objectivity of learning outcome measurement.

Data analysis in this study began with instrument validity testing to determine the accuracy of each questionnaire item, followed by reliability testing to ensure the consistency of the research instrument. Data that met the validity and reliability requirements were subsequently analyzed

using statistical techniques, including normality testing and linearity testing as prerequisite analyses, as well as the Pearson Product-Moment correlation test (Imam, 2002; Deny, 2013; Sudjiono, 2009). The Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis was employed to test the research hypothesis regarding the relationship between reading literacy culture and Social Studies learning outcomes among seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 2 Mantingan, with the assistance of SPSS software (Machali, 2018). The correlation formula applied in this study is presented as follows:

$$r_{xy} = \frac{N\sum X^1Y - (\sum X_1)(\sum Y)}{\sqrt{[N\sum X_1^2 - (\sum X_1)^2][N\sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2]}}$$

Description:

- r_{xy} = Product-moment correlation index "r"
- N = *Number of cases* (number of respondents)
- $\sum XY$ = Sum of the products of the X and Y scores
- $\sum X$ = Total number of X scores

Prior to conducting correlation analysis, instrument validity was tested using the product-moment correlation to determine the accuracy of each questionnaire item in measuring the intended indicators. Instrument reliability was then assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with coefficients exceeding 0.60 indicating acceptable internal consistency. Normality testing was conducted using the Shapiro–Wilk test, followed by a linearity test to ensure that the relationship between the independent and dependent variables was linear. After all analytical assumptions were met, the Pearson Product-Moment correlation test was performed to examine the research hypothesis. Qualitative data obtained from interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving data reduction, coding, categorization, and interpretation to identify recurring patterns related to factors that support or hinder students' reading literacy culture. The qualitative findings were used to strengthen and clarify the quantitative results, thereby providing a deeper and more contextualized understanding of the research findings.

Through this integrative methodological approach, the study is expected to generate findings that are statistically valid, methodologically reliable, and highly relevant to the real conditions of Social Studies instruction within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This research provides an in-depth overview of students' reading literacy culture and their learning achievements in Social Studies (IPS) at SMP Negeri 2 Mantingan. The analysis further explores the degree of association between both variables. Data were collected from 33 seventh-grade learners using questionnaires, interviews, and documentation of mid-semester test results. The reading literacy questionnaire employed in this study had previously undergone validity and reliability assessments to ensure the precision and stability of the measurement instrument.

Overall, the reading literacy culture among students exhibited considerable variation. Some students demonstrated strong reading habits, while others showed minimal engagement with reading activities. The lowest reading literacy score recorded was 61, and the highest was 91, indicating that although a number of students had developed good reading habits, a significant portion still required improvement and guided support.

Table 2. Classification of Students' Reading Literacy Culture

Score Range	Category	Number of Students	Percentage
1-59	Low	7 students	21.2
60-79	Moderate	17 students	51.5
80-100	High	9 students	27.3

Source: Processed by Researchers

Based on Table 2, the distribution of students' reading literacy culture illustrates clear variations in their reading engagement levels. More than half of the students (51.5%) were categorized as having moderate literacy, indicating that while they participated in reading activities, their habits were inconsistent and often driven by school assignments rather than intrinsic motivation. The moderate group generally demonstrated basic awareness of the importance of reading but lacked sustained persistence, reflective reading strategies, or initiative to explore texts beyond academic requirements. Students in the high category (27.3%) exhibited more advanced literacy behaviors: they read regularly, accessed diverse reading materials, and tended to show higher curiosity toward both academic and non-academic texts. This group also displayed stronger independent learning habits. Conversely, the low category (21.2%) represented students with significant challenges. They exhibited minimal interest in reading, had limited exposure to reading materials, and often came from environments with inadequate literacy support. These disparities highlight the unequal development of reading literacy within the classroom and indicate the need for targeted interventions that address motivational, environmental, and access-related barriers.

Table 3. Reliability Test Result

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.941	20

Source: SPSS data Processing

Based on Table 3, the instrument's reliability test was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with a coefficient exceeding 0.60 indicating acceptable internal consistency (Sugiyono, 2019). The reliability test produced a coefficient of 0.941. This very high reliability score indicates that the series of questionnaire items used to measure reading literacy culture has excellent internal consistency. Practically, the items function cohesively in assessing the same construct, indicating that student responses are stable and consistent across various literacy indicators such as reading frequency, diversity of reading materials, and attitudes towards reading. The strong reliability value also implies that the instrument is able to capture nuanced variations in student reading behavior with a high degree of accuracy. Therefore, this questionnaire can be considered a powerful tool for evaluating literacy culture and is suitable for use in further research or educational assessment.

Table 4. Shapiro–Wilk Normality Test

Variable	Statistic	df	Sig.
Reading Literacy Culture	0.970	33	0.000
Learning Outcomes	0.976	33	0.659

Source: SPSS data Processing

Based on Table 4, the Shapiro–Wilk normality test was conducted to verify whether the data from both variables conformed to a normal distribution. The significance values obtained for reading literacy culture (0.489) and learning outcomes (0.659) exceed the 0.05 threshold, indicating that the datasets meet the criteria for normality. This distribution pattern is essential, as it allows the use of parametric statistical procedures such as the Pearson correlation test to be justified and to generate valid analytical outcomes. The normal distribution also implies that student responses were dispersed proportionally, without substantial skewness, thereby reflecting natural variability in reading practices and academic performance. The confirmation of normality further reinforces the rigor of the analytical process and provides a reliable basis for interpreting the relationship between the two examined variables.

Table 5. Linearity Test Result

Component	F	Sig.
Linearity	181.980	0.000
Deviation from Linearity	1.333	0.433

Source: SPSS data Processing

Based on Table 5, the linearity test results evaluate whether the relationship between reading literacy and learning outcomes follows a linear pattern. The deviation-from-linearity significance value is 0.433, which exceeds the 0.05 criterion. This result indicates that no meaningful deviation is present, implying that the relationship between the two variables follows a linear pattern. The linearity of the relationship suggests that as reading literacy increases, learning outcomes tend to rise in a predictable and proportional manner. This finding is essential because it validates the use of Pearson’s Product-Moment correlation for further analysis, ensuring that the correlation coefficient accurately reflects the actual strength and direction of the relationship. Moreover, the strong linear trend highlights the consistent influence of literacy on academic performance, reinforcing the argument that reading habits play a fundamental role in shaping students’ success in Social Studies.

Students’ learning outcomes in Social Studies demonstrated a varied distribution. Scores ranged from 54 to 88. While the majority scored above the Minimum Mastery Criterion (75), some students scored below the standard.

Table 6. Pearson Correlation: Reading Literacy ↔ Learning Outcomes

Variable	Person Correlation	Sig.	N
Reading Literacy ↔ Learning Outcomes	0.905**	0.000	33

Source: SPSS data Processing

Based on Table 6, the Pearson correlation analysis shows a notably strong positive association between reading literacy and Social Studies learning outcomes, indicated by a correlation coefficient of 0.905. This value indicates that improvements in reading literacy are closely associated with increases in academic achievement. The significance value of 0.000 further confirms that this relationship is statistically significant and unlikely to occur by chance. This strong correlation suggests that students who demonstrate better reading habits—such as frequent reading, engagement with varied texts, and positive attitudes toward literacy—tend to perform better academically. The findings underline the essential role of literacy in supporting comprehension, critical thinking, and mastery of Social Studies concepts. The strength of this relationship aligns with theoretical expectations that literacy functions as a foundational skill influencing cognitive processes and learning performance. Consequently, these results emphasize the pressing need for schools to enhance literacy initiatives to support student achievement.

Discussion

The results of this study, conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Mantingan, indicate that students' reading literacy culture significantly contributes to shaping their academic achievement in Social Studies. The strong positive correlation coefficient ($r = 0.905$) demonstrates that reading literacy is not merely a supplementary aspect of learning but a central factor influencing students' academic abilities and broader cognitive development. Literacy encompasses not only the technical ability to decode written text but also deeper cognitive processes of comprehension, interpretation, and reflection (Fahrozi, 2021). This perspective is consistent with contemporary literacy theory, which emphasizes meaning construction and critical engagement with texts as the foundation of learning. In the context of Social Studies, these processes are particularly crucial because students are required to understand conceptual narratives, analyze social phenomena, and draw connections between historical events and contemporary societal issues.

A closer examination of students' reading literacy distribution at SMP Negeri 2 Mantingan reveals that the majority fall within the moderate category. This finding suggests that although students possess a basic awareness of the importance of reading, their engagement with literacy activities remains largely task-oriented rather than intrinsically motivated. Literacy habits cannot flourish without strong internal motivation and consistent guidance from teachers and parents (T. A. Andriani et al., 2022). In many cases, students' reading behavior remains utilitarian, reading only when required for assignments, examinations, or classroom activities, which hinders the development of deeper analytical and critical thinking skills. Who found that students who read primarily due to academic obligations tend to exhibit weaker analytical skills and lower long-term academic achievement (Oniikoyi, 2024). When reading is perceived merely as an academic requirement, students are less likely to develop critical and reflective reading skills.

Furthermore, qualitative interview data reveal a mismatch between the types of reading materials available and students' interests. Many students perceive Social Studies texts as dense, abstract, and difficult to relate to their daily experiences. This challenge is compounded by limited exposure to engaging reading materials such as visual texts, interactive media, or contextualized narratives. Students from the digital generation tend to gravitate toward multimedia content, and when classroom materials fail to align with their digital literacy preferences, reading motivation declines sharply (Fitriani & Suryaman, 2019). who emphasize that reading engagement significantly predicts academic success when instructional materials match students' cognitive and technological

characteristics (Abid et al., 2023).

Environmental support also emerged as an essential factor influencing literacy development. Students who receive encouragement at home, such as access to books, parental supervision during study time, or exposure to regular reading routines, tend to demonstrate higher literacy levels and stronger academic achievement. Children raised in literacy-rich home environments internalize reading as a habitual practice rather than an imposed obligation (Mulasih & Hudhana, 2020). This finding is consistent with sociocultural literacy theory, which emphasizes that literacy development is shaped by social interaction and environmental exposure (Yulianingsih et al., 2024). In contrast, students who lack parental support or access to reading materials outside school often rely solely on school-based literacy activities, which are insufficient for developing sustainable literacy skills.

School infrastructure also plays a significant role in shaping students' reading literacy culture. Although SMP Negeri 2 Mantingan has implemented the 15-minute reading program, the effectiveness of this initiative remains constrained by limited library resources. The book collection is relatively outdated, and library supervision is inconsistent. Inadequate facilities hinder the development of reading culture and reduce students' motivation to engage in reading as a voluntary and enjoyable activity (Cholifah, 2024). In this study, students from the low-literacy group frequently reported that the school library did not provide varied, engaging, or relevant reading materials, which further discouraged them from reading independently.

The strong correlation between reading literacy and learning outcomes also reflects the cognitive demands inherent in Social Studies learning. Social Studies integrates multiple disciplinary perspectives, history, sociology, geography, and economics, requiring students to apply comprehension strategies, identify cause-and-effect relationships, and critically evaluate social issues (Tabrani, 2023). Students with stronger reading literacy demonstrated better abilities to analyze case studies, interpret graphs and maps, and respond critically to essay questions. They were also more capable of integrating information from different sources, which contributed to their higher assessment scores. Students with stronger reading literacy demonstrate superior abilities in analyzing case studies, interpreting maps and visual data, and responding critically to essay-based assessments. Literacy and metacognitive strategies are strong predictors of academic achievement

Another important finding is that students with high reading literacy tend to participate more actively in classroom discussions. Exposure to diverse texts-textbooks, online articles, and supplementary reading materials broadens students' knowledge base and increases their confidence

in expressing ideas. Literacy-based learning environments encourage both cognitive and emotional engagement, leading to deeper conceptual understanding and improved communication skills (Antoro et al., 2021). This supports constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes active participation and dialogic interaction as essential components of meaningful learning.

Conversely, students with limited reading habits often struggle with comprehension and information retention. They tend to rely on rote memorization rather than conceptual understanding, which negatively affects their ability to apply knowledge in new contexts. This challenge is particularly evident in Social Studies, where students are required to interpret scenarios and relate historical patterns to contemporary social issues. Without strong reading literacy skills, such higher-order cognitive tasks become significantly more difficult (Kurniawati, 2024).

The findings further indicate that motivation functions as a mediating variable between reading literacy and academic performance. Students who are intrinsically motivated to read, driven by curiosity, enjoyment, or personal interest, demonstrate higher academic achievement than those who read only when required. Motivation is one of the strongest predictors of student success (R. Andriani & Rasto, 2019). External factors such as peer influence, teacher feedback, and classroom climate also shape students' willingness to engage in literacy activities, reinforcing the need for a supportive learning ecosystem.

Overall, this discussion highlights that developing a strong reading literacy culture requires more than the implementation of structured reading programs. While school-based literacy initiatives play an important role, this study challenges the assumption that such programs alone are sufficient without addressing motivational, familial, and infrastructural dimensions. A comprehensive educational ecosystem that integrates engaging reading materials, supportive family environments, motivated teachers, adequate school infrastructure, and adaptive digital literacy strategies is essential. When literacy is positioned not as an isolated activity but as a fundamental component of learning and thinking, students are more likely to achieve higher academic performance and develop the critical thinking skills necessary for understanding complex social realities.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that a culture of reading literacy significantly influences social studies learning outcomes, evidenced by a very strong correlation ($r = 0.905$). Students at SMP Negeri 2 Mantingan generally have moderate literacy levels, but their reading interests are inconsistent and influenced by academic demands, limited reading materials, school facilities, and minimal family support. Students with good reading habits demonstrate stronger comprehension and analytical skills, while those with low literacy tend to struggle with concepts. Qualitative findings confirm that motivation, family support, the school environment, and the availability of engaging reading materials are key factors shaping literacy. Therefore, building a literacy-rich school ecosystem through strengthening libraries, providing digital reading materials, and learning strategies that emphasize reading activities is crucial for improving learning outcomes and 21st-century competencies.

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