



Fostering Reading Interest in Elementary Students through Local Wisdom: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Literacy challenges and low reading interest among students remain global concerns, including in Indonesia. Despite initiatives like the School Literacy Movement (GLS), studies reveal that young learners, especially in lower elementary grades, still exhibit low intrinsic motivation to read. This preliminary study aims to examine the reading interest of second-grade students and explore the potential integration of local wisdom—specifically Madurese culture—into reading materials as a culturally responsive pedagogical strategy. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected from 20 students and one classroom teacher through questionnaires, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. The findings show that most students are more engaged with illustrated books, yet reading has not become a consistent habit. Only 17% of students are familiar with Madurese folklore, although 90% expressed interest in culturally themed illustrated stories. These findings support the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) framework, highlighting the value of aligning instructional content with students' cultural backgrounds. Data analysis involved thematic coding of qualitative responses and descriptive statistics using Microsoft Excel for questionnaire results. This study recommends the development of culturally relevant storybooks to enhance literacy and cultural identity. Future research will pilot such materials and evaluate their impact on students' reading engagement and literacy growth.

Keywords: *reading interest; local wisdom; elementary education; cultural integration.*

ABSTRAK

Permasalahan literasi dan rendahnya minat baca siswa masih menjadi perhatian global, termasuk di Indonesia. Meskipun program seperti Gerakan Literasi Sekolah (GLS) telah diluncurkan, berbagai studi menunjukkan bahwa siswa sekolah dasar, khususnya di kelas rendah, masih memiliki motivasi intrinsik yang rendah untuk membaca. Studi pendahuluan ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi minat baca siswa kelas II serta mengeksplorasi potensi integrasi kearifan lokal khususnya budaya

Madura ke dalam bahan bacaan sebagai strategi pembelajaran yang responsif terhadap budaya. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, melibatkan 20 siswa dan satu guru kelas. Data dikumpulkan melalui angket, observasi kelas, dan wawancara semi-terstruktur. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar siswa lebih tertarik pada buku bergambar, namun belum memiliki kebiasaan membaca secara konsisten. Hanya 17% siswa yang mengenal cerita rakyat Madura, meskipun 90% menyatakan tertarik membaca cerita bergambar dengan unsur budaya lokal. Temuan ini mendukung pendekatan *Culturally Responsive Teaching* (CRT) yang menekankan pentingnya mengaitkan isi pembelajaran dengan latar budaya siswa. Analisis data dilakukan melalui pengkodean tematik untuk data kualitatif dan statistik deskriptif menggunakan Microsoft Excel untuk hasil angket. Studi ini merekomendasikan pengembangan buku cerita bergambar berbasis budaya lokal untuk meningkatkan literasi dan identitas budaya siswa. Penelitian lanjutan akan menguji efektivitas bahan tersebut terhadap keterlibatan dan perkembangan literasi siswa.

Kata Kunci: minat baca; kearifan lokal; pendidikan dasar; integrasi budaya.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, literacy issues and low reading interest among students have become global concerns (Y. G. Kim et al., 2020; Pitoyo, 2020; Sulfemi, 2023). The education sector increasingly recognizes that literacy should no longer be narrowly defined as the ability to read and write but rather as an essential competency for understanding, evaluating, and utilizing information in various forms, including visual and digital texts. Literacy is both a fundamental right and a prerequisite for social participation and sustainable development (Milenkova & Lendzhova, 2021; Ozaki & Shaw, 2022). Similarly, (Bravo et al., 2021; Komalasari, 2021) 21st-century literacy includes digital literacy, cultural literacy, and the ability to think critically and collaborate effectively. In Indonesia, literacy has also become a significant focus (Haloho & Napitu, 2023). The government has launched national programs such as the School Literacy Movement (GLS) to foster reading habits from an early age (Nikmah & Zafi, 2025; Retnasari et al., 2022). However, several studies, including those by (Kasiyun & Ghufon, 2022) and (Ekayani & Suwedawati, 2023) indicate that implementing GLS has been unsuccessful, particularly at the lower elementary level. Students' reading interest remains low and has not developed naturally.

Many students read only when instructed by teachers rather than being driven by intrinsic motivation. According to (Barton & Lennon, 2020), literacy encompasses understanding and interpreting information presented in various formats, including texts, images, and symbols. In line with this, (Polizzi, 2020) assert that literacy also involves the skills to evaluate information and communicate critically within social contexts. The importance of digital literacy in an increasingly digital world, which refers to the ability to search for, assess, and wisely use information through digital technology (Pangrazio et al., 2020; Widana, 2020).

Preliminary observation and interview data indicate that second-grade elementary students are less interested in reading. Although literacy programs such as library visits have been implemented, these activities have not fostered a strong enthusiasm for reading. Most students show a preference for books with illustrations and visually engaging content. Furthermore, elements of local culture, such as Madurese traditions, are not yet optimally represented in children's reading materials. Without culturally relevant interventions, students may become increasingly disengaged from traditional texts, potentially widening the literacy

gap in the digital era. The erosion of reading habits, if unaddressed, not only hampers academic development but also risks alienating young learners from their own cultural roots. Therefore, this study aims to identify students' reading interests and explore how integrating local wisdom can serve as a meaningful and contextual pedagogical approach to enhance reading motivation among elementary school students, particularly in the digital age.

On the other hand, Indonesia is rich in diverse local cultures, including Madurese culture, which is abundant in values, traditions, and folklore (David, 2025; Fatmawati, 2021; Latif et al., 2024). Local wisdom such as folktales, customs, and life philosophies of the Madurese people – holds great potential to be developed into engaging and contextual reading materials for students. Unfortunately, the integration of local cultural elements into literacy learning at the school very limited (Adam et al., 2022; Murti, 2020; Ratminingsih et al., 2020). One of the key theoretical frameworks in this study is Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), first introduced by Ladson-Billings (1995) and further developed by Gay (2010) (Ladson-Billings, 2020). CRT emphasizes the importance of a teaching approach that respects, understands, and accommodates students' cultural backgrounds (Idrus & Sohid, 2023; Khunou & Makda, 2025). Instruction grounded in CRT builds connections between the subject matter and students' lived experiences, ultimately enhancing their motivation and engagement in learning (Copeland Solas & Kamalodeen, 2022). Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) encourages educators to incorporate students' cultural backgrounds into instruction (Abdalla & Moussa, 2024; Idrus & Sohid, 2023). It affirms their identities an essential aspect in literacy education, where cultural disconnection often results in student disengagement. Integrating local culture into reading materials represents a tangible application of CRT in elementary classrooms, fostering engagement and cultural relevance in literacy development.

The teachers should use students' cultural characteristics as strengths in learning (White et al., 2023). Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) can be implemented in the context of literacy by selecting texts or reading materials that reflect students' social and cultural lives (Hernandez & Burrows, 2021; Idrus & Sohid, 2023). Building on this idea, (Alim et al., 2020) introduced Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, an approach that responds to culture and seeks to sustain and promote cultural practices within education. Research by (Gumartifa et al., 2025; Monica & Soplantila, 2024) supports this perspective, showing that literacy instruction based on local folktales enhances students' reading comprehension and strengthens their sense of belonging to their local culture. These findings indicate that incorporating local wisdom-based stories into reading materials holds excellent potential for developing reading interest while reinforcing students' cultural identity.

In the digital era, students are more familiar with fast-paced visual content such as videos, games, and social media. As a result, conventional reading materials are often perceived as boring. According to (Vaughn et al., 2020), one of the main challenges of literacy today is redirecting students' interest toward meaningful reading texts. (Allred & Cena, 2020) also point out that students' low level of connection with reading content often leads to a rapid decline in interest and a lack of motivation to continue reading. This is where local wisdom serves as a contextual bridge, making literacy more accessible and relevant. The values, stories, and local experiences embedded in reading materials can foster emotional engagement, a key prerequisite for developing reading interest.

Beyond its pedagogical value, culturally-based literacy also plays a critical role in preserving cultural identity in the face of globalization. As stated by (Achille & Fiorillo, 2022; Lovtsova et al., 2021) schools are responsible for preserving cultural heritage through education, including reading activities. Thus, this study is essential for identifying elementary students' reading interests and exploring the potential integration of Madura culture into reading materials as a strategic effort to foster reading engagement amid the challenges of digitalization and globalization.

METHODS

Type and Design

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of the reading interest and students' familiarity with local culture in elementary school. A case study was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the learning context holistically and contextually, thus capturing the dynamics that occur in real-life situations (Yin, 2017). This approach aligns with the characteristics of qualitative research, which focuses on deep comprehension of phenomena in their natural settings, where the researcher serves as the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The study is conducted in a second-grade classroom with 20 students and their teacher.

Data and Data Sources

This pre-study will collect data from multiple sources to assess the level of reading interest and students' familiarity with local culture in a second-grade classroom. The primary data source will be 20 second-grade students. Data will be gathered through questionnaires (angket) designed to measure their interest in reading, their reading habits, and their awareness of local cultural elements. The questionnaires will ask questions about their preferences for reading materials, whether they engage in reading at home, and their exposure to local cultural stories. Additionally, the study will involve classroom observations to gain insight into students' participation during reading activities and their interaction with available reading materials. The observations will help to identify how students respond to different types of reading content, especially when they are introduced to texts related to local culture.

The classroom teacher will also be an important data source. A semi-structured interview with the teacher will be conducted to gather insights on their perceptions of students' reading interests, challenges in promoting reading habits, and the integration of local cultural content in the classroom. The teacher's observations and opinions will provide additional context for understanding the students' reading behavior and preferences.

By combining data from the students, teacher, and classroom observations, this study aims to create a comprehensive picture of the current state of reading interest in the classroom and explore potential opportunities for integrating local cultural content in future literacy interventions.

Data collection technique

In this pre-study, data will be collected using several techniques. First, questionnaires will be distributed to 20 second-grade students to measure their reading interest, reading habits,

and awareness of local culture. In addition, classroom observations will be conducted to observe students' participation in reading activities and their interaction with available reading materials. Finally, a semi-structured interview with the class teacher will be conducted to gain insights into their views on students' reading interests and the challenges of integrating local culture into reading instruction. Combining data from the questionnaires, observations, and interviews will provide a comprehensive understanding of students' reading interest and the potential for integrating local culture into reading lessons.

Table 1. Instrument Grid for Student Questionnaire on Reading Interest and Cultural Awareness

No	Aspect	Indicator
1	Reading Interest	Students enjoy reading in their spare time
2	Reading Habits	Frequency of reading at home or beyond school instruction
3	Reading Motivation	Reading without being assigned by the teacher
4	Cultural Awareness	Familiarity with local (Madurese) folklore or traditions
5	Cultural Interest	Interest in stories that contain local cultural elements

In addition to the questionnaire, classroom observations were conducted to examine students' participation in reading activities and their interaction with the available reading materials. These observations provided contextual data on how students responded to various types of texts, particularly those related to local culture.

Tabel 2. Observation Instrument Grid for Student Reading Activities

No	Observed Aspect	Behavioral Indicator
1	Reading Readiness	The student promptly takes a book when asked to read
2	Focus While Reading	The student remains attentive throughout the reading activity
3	Interest in Book Content	The student shows interest through expressions like smiling or pointing
4	Response to Local Cultural Elements	The student recognizes or reacts to cultural content in the story
5	Independent Reading	The student reads without being told or continues reading later
6	Social Literacy Interaction	The student discusses or reads aloud to peers or listens to them

Data analysis

Data analysis for this pre-study followed a systematic and integrated approach. According to (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), the first step in qualitative data analysis involves cleaning the data by identifying and removing incomplete or inconsistent responses. Next, the responses from questionnaires and interviews were manually coded and grouped into

thematic categories related to students' reading interests, reading habits, and awareness of local culture.

Thematic analysis, as outlined by (Braun & Clarke, 2006), was conducted manually by identifying recurring keywords, patterns, and insights from open-ended responses. These were organized into tables and matrices for more precise comparisons and interpretation. For closed-ended questionnaire items, descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were calculated using Microsoft Excel. This helped in summarizing students' preferences and behaviors quantitatively.

The results of the qualitative and quantitative data were then integrated to form a comprehensive understanding of students' literacy engagement and cultural exposure. This mixed-method approach enabled the researcher to triangulate findings, ensure data validity, and generate meaningful conclusions. The analysis was guided by (Miles et al., 2014) qualitative data analysis model, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To determine the level of students' reading interest and their familiarity with local culture, the researcher distributed questionnaires to 20 second-grade elementary school students. The questionnaire results indicated that most students enjoy reading activities, especially when the books are illustrated and engaging. However, reading has not yet become a daily habit, either at school or at home. When asked about readings that feature local culture, most students admitted they were not very familiar with folklore or the Madurese culture. Nevertheless, they expressed interest when introduced to reading materials containing elements of local culture, such as folklore or unique regional traditions.

Table 3. Percentage Results of the Student Questionnaire:

No	Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	I like reading illustrated storybooks	73%	27%
2	I only read when assigned by the teacher	70%	30%
3	I prefer illustrated books over books without pictures	90%	10%
4	I often read storybooks at home	60%	40%
5	I know Madurese folktales or other local cultures	17%	83%
6	I want to learn more about my local culture	80%	20%
7	I am interested in illustrated storybooks about Madurese culture	90%	10%

Based on the questionnaire data obtained, it is evident that 73% of students stated they enjoy reading picture storybooks, and 90% of students prefer books with pictures over those without. However, only 17% of students are familiar with folklore or local Madurese culture, indicating that local cultural content has not been widely introduced in students' reading materials. Nevertheless, 90% of students expressed interest in reading picture storybooks containing elements of Madurese culture. Furthermore, 80% of students want to learn more about their regional culture, and 70% of students only read when assigned by their teachers, highlighting that their reading interest still heavily relies on teacher instructions. These

findings underscore the need to provide engaging and relevant reading materials, such as picture storybooks with local cultural themes, to foster a more natural and sustainable reading interest.

Based on the observations in the second-grade classroom, it was found that most students showed little enthusiasm during reading activities. When the teacher asked the students to read books from the class library, only a few students appeared to be actively reading, while the others showed low interest and were easily distracted. Some students even expressed boredom with the available books, as they were considered unappealing. Although the teacher had provided several storybooks, most of them were without pictures or did not match the children's interests. Additionally, there were no books featuring local culture themes, particularly Madurese culture, which could evoke emotional connections and curiosity in students about their own environment. This highlights the need to provide reading materials that are relevant to the children's cultural context to enhance their engagement in reading activities.

An interview was conducted with the second-grade teacher. The teacher stated that the students' reading interest is still low and that they only read when asked to. The teacher also mentioned the difficulty in finding reading materials that suit the students' characteristics, especially those that include local culture elements. "The children get bored quickly. If the books have pictures and the story is close to their lives, they are more interested," said the teacher. The teacher further added that efforts to introduce local culture into the lessons are still very limited due to the lack of teaching materials.

This preliminary research aims to explore reading literacy practices in elementary schools and examine the challenges and opportunities in integrating local wisdom to increase students' reading interest. The research questions addressed in this study are: (1) What is the current level of reading interest among elementary school students? and (2) What are the challenges and opportunities in integrating local wisdom to foster reading interest?

Reading Interest Level of Elementary School Student

Based on the survey results distributed to 20 second-grade students, it was found that most students have low reading interest. This is evident from the percentage showing that only 35% of students enjoy reading activities, and only 25% read books outside of class hours. The rest showed minimal interest, citing that the books available were either uninteresting or too difficult to understand. Observational data supports these survey results. The teacher noted that students showed little enthusiasm during independent reading activities. The books available in the classroom were not varied enough and did not align with the students' everyday lives. Students seemed more interested in picture books and stories related to daily life, which were closer to their immediate environment.

This finding is in line with research conducted by (Mardiana & Prayuda, 2024) it was found that the reading interest of second-grade students at Santo Ignasius Medan Johor Private Elementary School is relatively low. Observations and interviews revealed that students are less interested in reading because the reading materials do not align with their interests and experiences. In addition, according to (Ramadhani et al., 2025) It identifies that the factors contributing to the low reading interest of students include a lack of internal motivation and insufficient support from the surrounding environment, including the availability of engaging

and relevant reading materials. (Jannah et al., 2022) it also highlights the importance of the School Literacy Movement in enhancing students' reading interest. They emphasize that structured literacy activities that actively involve students can boost reading interest..

Challenges and Opportunities in Integrating Local Wisdom to Enhance Reading Interest

The interview results with the second-grade teacher indicate that there are still challenges in increasing students' reading interest, including the limited availability of contextual reading materials suitable for children. The teacher stated that children prefer books with illustrations and stories close to their everyday lives. However, there is an excellent opportunity through the integration of local wisdom into students' reading materials. The teacher agreed that introducing local cultures, such as bull racing (*Karapan sapi*), Madurese batik, and the *Rokat Tase* tradition in illustrated storybooks, can effectively spark students' interest in reading activities. Stories based on local culture cultivate reading interest and instill a sense of pride in cultural identity.

This aligns with the principles of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), which emphasize the importance of connecting learning materials with students' cultural and personal experiences (D. Kim, 2020). Students' preference for stories relevant to their daily lives, as revealed by both questionnaire and observation data, demonstrates the practical relevance of CRT in the classroom. According to CRT, using students' cultural contexts as a foundation for instruction enhances engagement and motivation. The fact that 90% of students showed interest in illustrated storybooks about Madurese culture aligns with CRT's assertion that culturally relevant materials can foster deeper involvement and identity affirmation in students. Nevertheless, while the core ideas of CRT are present, their complete application in the classroom setting has not yet been realized. Teachers in the field reported difficulties in accessing culturally relevant materials and integrating them into existing curricula. This shows a gap between theory and practice, where the theoretical benefits of CRT are acknowledged, but its implementation remains limited due to structural and material constraints.

This finding is further supported by research (Novitasari, 2024) that developed a local wisdom-based picture storybook media (*Burita-Berbekal*). The media was feasible, practical, and effective in increasing elementary school students' reading interest. The trial results showed a significant improvement in students' reading interest after using the media. In addition, a study by (Budiarsa et al., 2022) noted that elementary school reading books still lack elements of cultural literacy. Their development of Balinese folktale-based reading books aimed to enhance cultural understanding and foster a sense of identity. This resonates with the cultural literacy theory by (Sue et al., 2022), which suggests that connecting reading materials to students' cultural context enriches their textual interpretation and builds stronger reading motivation.

Beyond the materials, the school and family environments play a significant role in supporting literacy. (Sengonul, 2022) emphasized that parental involvement is crucial for developing consistent reading habits outside of school. In this context, local wisdom-based storybooks can serve as a bridge between home and school literacy practices. Teachers and parents can collaborate in selecting materials that reflect the students' local environment and traditions, thereby reinforcing academic and personal literacy. Local wisdom increases engagement and conveys important cultural and moral values, such as responsibility,

cooperation, and respect (Sakti et al., 2024). These values are often embedded in traditional stories, making them suitable for reading development and character education. For instance, *karapan sapi* stories can teach students about hard work and perseverance, while *Rokat Tase'* introduces them to environmental values and communal rituals.

While this research provides valuable insights into the role of local wisdom in enhancing reading interest, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted on a small sample of 20 second-grade students in a single school, limiting the findings' generalizability. The cultural context explored – specifically Madurese culture – may not reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds in other regions of Indonesia. Secondly, the research focused primarily on qualitative instruments (questionnaires, interviews, and observations) without implementing or testing an actual intervention (e.g., using a locally developed storybook). Therefore, the impact of local wisdom-based materials on students' literacy development was inferred rather than directly measured.

In addition, the availability of resources and support for teachers to implement CRT approaches remains a challenge, as highlighted by the classroom teacher. This limitation suggests a need for broader systemic support and access to culturally relevant materials if CRT is to be successfully applied in literacy education. Future research should involve a more extensive implementation phase, possibly including designing and evaluating local wisdom-based literacy materials across multiple schools and cultural contexts.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this pre-study highlights the current level of reading interest among second-grade students and their limited familiarity with local cultural elements, particularly Madurese folklore and traditions. The findings show that while students are generally more attracted to illustrated storybooks, reading has not yet become a consistent habit at home or school. This indicates that developing reading habits among young learners requires teacher instruction, active family involvement, and access to culturally relevant, engaging materials. The low awareness of local cultural content underscores a missed opportunity to embed local wisdom into literacy practices. Therefore, integrating culturally responsive storybooks that reflect students' traditions and daily experiences – such as *karapan sapi* or *Rokat Tase'* can play a vital role in increasing both motivation and cultural identity. Moving forward, the research will implement a series of culturally-based illustrated reading materials in the classroom, focusing on measuring their impact on students' engagement and reading development. This step will help determine how effectively local culture can serve as a medium for improving literacy and a tool for preserving cultural heritage in a meaningful, pedagogically sound way.

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