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Analysis of The Factors Causing Low Reading Literacy Among Students at SD 29/II, Bungo Regency

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Abstract:
Reading literacy underpins the acquisition of twenty-first-century competencies, yet Indonesian primary students continue to perform below the minimum proficiency standard, particularly in semi-rural districts. This study aims to analyse the factors causing low reading literacy among students at SD Negeri 29/II, Bungo Regency, and to explain how these factors interact within a single literacy ecosystem. A descriptive qualitative approach with a single-case study design was employed. Sixteen informants—the principal, three classroom teachers, six upper-grade students, and six parents—were selected purposively. Data were gathered through participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and document analysis of the school's internal literacy assessment (Academic Year 2025/2026), then analysed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model; credibility was established through source and technique triangulation, member checking, and an audit trail. The results show that 66 of 90 students (73.3%) fall into the "requires special intervention" category. Three interlocking causes were identified: (1) internal factors—weak intrinsic motivation and limited vocabulary; (2) family factors—minimal parental mediation, the absence of non-textbook reading materials, and unmanaged short-video exposure; and (3) school factors—administrative implementation of the School Literacy Movement and non-interactive reading corners. The study contributes an ecological explanation of *compensatory failure*, in which the school microsystem reproduces rather than offsets the home literacy deficit. These findings imply that literacy interventions should target the interaction between systems rather than isolated variables.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

Reading literacy is no longer understood as the technical ability to decode letters and sound them out; it is a complex competency encompassing the ability to locate, understand, analyse, evaluate, and use information from written texts to solve problems (OECD, 2023). Theoretically, this shift is explained by the *Simple View of Reading*, which posits that reading comprehension is the product of decoding and linguistic comprehension; when either component is weak, comprehension collapses even if the other is intact (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Snow, 2002). At the primary level, this implies that fluent decoding is a necessary but insufficient condition for literacy. Stanovich's (1986) *Matthew Effect* further explains why early comprehension gaps widen over time: children who read little accumulate less vocabulary and background knowledge, which in turn makes subsequent reading more effortful and less rewarding—a self-reinforcing downward spiral highly relevant to the upper grades of elementary school.

Motivational and sociocultural theories complement this cognitive account. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) demonstrate that *engaged reading* emerges only when intrinsic motivation, strategy use, and a socially supportive reading environment converge. From a sociological perspective, Bourdieu (1986) argues that the *embodied* and *objectified* forms of cultural capital—parental reading habits and the physical availability of books—are transmitted within the family and converted into academic advantage. Vygotsky (1978) adds that comprehension of complex texts develops through mediated interaction with a more capable other within the learner's zone of proximal development. Taken together, these frameworks position reading literacy as an outcome of the *interaction* between individual cognition and the social systems that surround the child, rather than of any single determinant.

In Indonesia, the urgency of this competency is institutionalised through the Minimum Competency Assessment (*Asesmen Kompetensi Minimum*/AKM), which replaced the National Examination and measures reading literacy alongside numeracy (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Empirically, however, PISA 2022 placed Indonesian students near the bottom of the reading distribution, with the majority failing to reach Level 2—the threshold for identifying the main idea and interpreting implicit meaning in moderately long texts (OECD, 2023; Yuliana, 2021).

This problem is not confined to metropolitan centres. SD Negeri 29/II, Bungo Regency, Jambi Province, is situated in an agrarian community undergoing rapid digital transition, where oil-palm labour, farming, and small-scale trading dominate parental occupations. Preliminary documentation of the school's internal literacy assessment for the 2025/2026 academic year shows that 73.3% of upper-grade students (Grades IV–VI) were categorised as "requiring special intervention" in informational-text literacy. Students could decode texts fluently yet struggled to infer, conclude, and evaluate (Susanti, 2023; Zulfiani, 2023).

Previous studies have identified relevant but partially competing explanations. **Table 1** synthesises them critically.

Table 1. Critical Synthesis of Prior Studies and Remaining Gaps

Study	Focus & Main Finding	Methodological Limitation	Gap Addressed by This Study
Rahayu (2021); Sari (2020)	Internal factors: low reading interest and intrinsic motivation are the primary barriers	Treat motivation as an individual trait; largely survey-based	Motivation is re-read as an *outcome* of environmental deprivation, not merely a cause

Study	Focus & Main Finding	Methodological Limitation	Gap Addressed by This Study
Pratama (2022); Wardani (2022)	External factors: teacher pedagogic competence and classroom reading corners correlate more strongly with literacy	Variables analysed separately; correlation ≠ mechanism	Explains the *mechanism* through which school factors fail to compensate for home deficits
Lestari (2021); Fauzi (2025)	Family cultural capital in rural areas is nearly absent	Descriptive; digital dimension underexplored	Links cultural capital to unmediated digital substitution
Hidayati (2023); Saputra (2023); Wulandari (2024)	Short-form video and *digital babysitting* reduce attention span and comprehension	Focused on young urban families; single-domain analysis	Situates digital exposure within a semi-rural, agrarian–industrial transition ecology
Anggraini (2022); Maharani (2020); Tambunan (2021)	GLS is implemented administratively; post-pandemic learning loss persists	Evaluative/programmatic; limited micro-level process data	Documents *how* GLS becomes ceremonial in everyday classroom practice

Two limitations recur across this literature: most studies are conducted in urban settings, and most employ quantitative designs that isolate variables. Consequently, little is known about **how internal, family, digital, and school factors interact** to sustain low literacy in semi-rural communities. This study addresses that gap through an in-depth single-case study at SD Negeri 29/II, Bungo Regency. Its novelty lies not in identifying new variables but in explaining their *interaction pattern* within one bounded ecosystem, thereby generating contextually grounded and theoretically transferable insight. The research is guided by three questions: (1) What is the reading literacy profile of upper-grade students? (2) What internal, family, and school factors cause low reading literacy? (3) How do these factors interact to sustain the condition?

Method (منهج)

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a single-case study design (Yin, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The design was chosen because the research objective is to explain how and why low reading literacy persists within a bounded, naturally occurring context, rather than to measure the magnitude of variable effects. The case is bounded by place (SD Negeri 29/II, Bungo Regency), participants (upper-grade ecosystem), and time (February–April 2026).

Research Setting

The study was conducted at SD Negeri 29/II, Bungo Regency, Jambi Province, Indonesia, over three months (February–April 2026). The school serves a semi-rural catchment area in which

most parents work as oil-palm labourers, farmers, or small traders. The site was selected purposively because it (a) recorded persistently low internal AKM literacy results, (b) exhibits the agrarian–digital transition characteristics central to the research problem, and (c) granted full research access.

Informants and Sampling

Informants were selected through purposive sampling with maximum-variation criteria, followed by limited snowball referral for parent participants. Inclusion criteria were: teachers teaching Grades IV–VI with at least two years of service; students classified across the literacy ability range and confirmed by teachers as active readers or non-readers; and parents/guardians living with the selected students. Sixteen informants participated (Table 2). Data collection ceased when thematic saturation was reached at the fifth and sixth student/parent interviews, with no new codes emerging.

Table 2. Research Informants and Coding

Code	Informant	n	Selection Criteria	Primary Data Elicited
KS1	Principal	1	Policy holder at school level	GLS policy, supervision, budgeting
G1–G3	Classroom teachers (Grades IV, V, VI)	3	≥2 years teaching upper grades	Literacy instruction, reading-corner management, assessment
S1–S6	Students (2 per grade level)	6	Variation in literacy category (basic–intervention)	Reading motivation, vocabulary, reading habits, gadget use
O1–O6	Parents/guardians of S1–S6	6	Co-residing guardians	Home literacy practices, mediation rules, occupation
Total		16		

Data Collection Procedures

Three complementary techniques were used.

1. Participant observation (12 sessions, 35–70 minutes each). The researcher adopted a moderate-participation role, observing the 15-minute pre-lesson literacy routine, Indonesian and Science lessons, reading-corner use during breaks, and home study settings during six home visits. Structured field notes and an observation checklist recorded book condition, curation, teacher scaffolding behaviour, and student engagement duration.
2. In-depth semi-structured interviews (16 informants; 25–60 minutes; audio-recorded with consent). Interview guides covered four domains aligned with the research questions: reading motivation and vocabulary; home literacy environment; digital mediation; and GLS implementation. Student interviews used simplified language and text-elicitation prompts (students read a short informational passage and verbalised difficulties).
3. Document analysis of the internal literacy assessment records (AY 2025/2026), AKM simulation results, GLS programme plans and attendance logs, reading-corner inventory

lists, and school report cards.

Research Instruments

The researcher served as the primary instrument (human instrument), supported by observation guidelines, interview protocols, and a document-analysis matrix. Protocol drafts were reviewed by two experts in primary-school language education and revised for clarity and age-appropriateness before fieldwork.

Data Analysis

Analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) and proceeded concurrently with data collection through: (1) data condensation—verbatim transcription, open coding, and grouping of codes into categories; (2) data display—thematic matrices, informant-by-theme tables, and a causal-network diagram; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification—pattern matching across sources and negative-case checking. Coding moved from 47 initial open codes to 11 categories and finally three overarching themes: internal factors, family environmental factors, and school environmental factors.

Trustworthiness

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were addressed following Lincoln and Guba (1985):

- Source triangulation: comparing principal, teacher, student, and parent accounts of the same phenomenon (e.g., the 15-minute literacy routine).
- Technique triangulation: comparing interview claims with observation field notes and documentary records.
- Member checking: returning summarised interpretations to eight informants (KS1, G1–G3, O1, O2, S3, S5) for confirmation.
- Audit trail and peer debriefing: maintaining a chronological log of raw data, codes, and analytic decisions, reviewed by a colleague not involved in data collection.
- Thick description of the setting to enable readers to judge transferability.

Research Ethics

Written permission was obtained from the school and the local education office. All participants received an explanation of the study's purpose and procedures and provided informed consent; parental consent and child assent were obtained for student participants. Identities are protected through codes, participation was voluntary with the right to withdraw, and all recordings are stored securely and used solely for research purposes.

Result (نتائج)

1. Students' Reading Literacy Profile

Documentation of the school's internal literacy assessment for the 2025/2026 academic year shows that most upper-grade students fall into the "Requires Special Intervention" category for informational-text literacy. The data derive from cognitive diagnostic assessments and periodic AKM simulations administered by the classroom-teacher team, referencing the reading-literacy indicators of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's Center for Educational Assessment (Table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of Reading Literacy Ability Categories, Grades IV–VI, SDN 29/II Bungo, Academic Year 2025/2026

No	Literacy Ability Category	Grade IV (n=30) f	%	Grade V (n=30) f	%	Grade VI (n=30) f	%	Total (N=90) f	%
1	Proficient (evaluates and synthesises complex information)	1	3.3	2	6.7	3	10.0	6	6.7
2	Competent (interprets and draws inferences)	3	10.0	4	13.3	5	16.7	12	13.3
3	Basic (locates explicit information)	2	6.7	2	6.7	2	6.7	6	6.7
4	Requires Special Intervention (cannot yet fully comprehend text)	24	80.0	22	73.3	20	66.7	66	73.3
	Total	30	100	30	100	30	100	90	100

Source: Internal Literacy Assessment Documentation, SDN 29/II Bungo, 2026

Table 3 shows that 66 of 90 students (73.3%) require special intervention. Although the proportion declines slightly from Grade IV (80.0%) to Grade VI (66.7%), two-thirds of graduating students still cannot fully comprehend informational texts requiring inference, evaluation, and synthesis. Students generally read short fiction fluently and answer literal questions (who, where, when), but fail when asked to infer implicit meaning, compare two texts, or judge credibility—consistent with Susanti (2023). The decoding–comprehension gap is thus the central empirical indicator of low reading literacy at this school.

2. Internal Factors: Reading Motivation and Vocabulary Mastery

Observations and interviews converged on weak intrinsic motivation. Students described reading as "boring," "makes me sleepy," and "too much writing."

"When I'm told to read a storybook, I get tired quickly, Ma'am. Watching YouTube is better." (S3, Grade V, interview, 12 March 2026)

"I only read if the teacher tells me to. If there's no task, I don't read." (S5, Grade VI, interview, 14 March 2026)

Field note (Observation 4, 5 March 2026): During the 15-minute pre-lesson literacy session in Grade V, only 7 of 30 students opened a book voluntarily; 11 chatted, 8 stared at the desk, and 4 completed an unrelated worksheet. Average sustained reading duration before disengagement was approximately 3 minutes.

Limited vocabulary constituted a second, cognitive barrier. During text-elicitation, students halted at unfamiliar terms and abandoned the passage.

"There are many words I don't know, like erosion… conservation. So I stop. I don't know what the text is about." (S1, Grade IV, interview, 10 March 2026)

"Their vocabulary is confined to daily conversation. When a science text uses technical terms, they can pronounce it but cannot explain it." (G2, Grade V teacher, interview, 6 March 2026)

This corroborates Rahayu (2021) on the direct association between limited passive/active vocabulary and low comprehension, and illustrates Stanovich's (1986) cumulative disadvantage: minimal exposure to vocabulary-rich texts outside textbooks keeps lexical knowledge stagnant.

3. External Factors: Family Environment and Digital Exposure

Family conditions emerged as the most pervasive constraint. Most parents work as oil-palm labourers, farmers, or small traders, with relatively low educational attainment and long working hours.

"We don't understand the right way to tell children to learn to read. The important thing is that they go to school. At home, they just play on their phones." (O2, interview, 18 March 2026)

"I come home from the plantation at five, tired. As long as the child is quiet and doesn't disturb us, that's enough." (O5, interview, 21 March 2026)

Home observation (six households) confirmed the absence of objectified cultural capital: none possessed a bookshelf or any non-textbook reading collection; the only printed materials were school textbooks and worksheets, often from the previous academic year (Lestari, 2021; Fauzi, 2025).

Gadgets functioned as digital babysitters:

"If he's fussy, I just give him the phone. He immediately goes quiet." (O4, interview, 20 March 2026)

"There's no time limit. He watches TikTok until he falls asleep." (O1, interview, 17 March 2026)

Teachers observed the classroom consequences:

"On Mondays they are restless. They talk about videos, not lessons. If a text is longer than one page, they ask, 'Is there a video version, Ma'am?'" (G1, Grade IV teacher, interview, 5 March 2026)

Five of six students reported daily short-video use exceeding three hours. This aligns with Saputra (2023) and Wulandari (2024) on attention-span erosion, although the present study documents habitual displacement of reading time rather than clinically measurable cognitive change.

4. External Factors: School Environment and GLS Implementation

A clear policy–practice gap was found. Although a 15-minute pre-lesson literacy programme is formally scheduled, it is frequently repurposed.

"The literacy programme exists in the schedule. In practice, if I'm not ready to teach, the children are told to read silently — sometimes it becomes attendance-taking time." (G3, Grade VI teacher, interview, 7 March 2026)

"We report GLS every semester: photos, reading logs, reading-corner data. What is assessed is the completeness of the documents." (KS1, principal, interview, 3 March 2026)

Field note (Observation 8, 24 March 2026): The Grade IV reading corner contained 23 items — 14 used textbooks, 6 student worksheets, and 3 storybooks from a 2019 government donation, with torn covers and no inventory update since 2022. During two break periods, no student approached the corner.

"The books are the same as when I was in Grade IV. I've read all the storybooks. They're damaged." (S6, Grade VI, interview, 15 March 2026)

This exemplifies the "dead reading corner" phenomenon (Maharani, 2020; Wardani, 2022). Teachers, moreover, act as literacy supervisors rather than facilitators or role models: no read-aloud sessions or interactive book discussions were observed across 12 sessions.

"Honestly, I have never read a storybook aloud in class. My focus is finishing the curriculum targets before the assessment." (G2, interview, 6 March 2026)

Consequently, literacy stimulation is not integrated into Mathematics or Science lessons (Pratama, 2022).

5. Triangulation of Findings

Table 4. Source and Technique Triangulation Matrix

Theme	Interview Evidence	Observation Evidence	Document Evidence	Status
Low intrinsic motivation	S1, S3, S5, S6; G1, G2	7/30 voluntary readers; ±3 min engagement	Reading logs largely unfilled	Convergent
Limited vocabulary	S1, S4; G2	Students halt at technical terms	Low scores on inferential items	Convergent

Theme	Interview Evidence	Observation Evidence	Document Evidence	Status
Weak parental mediation	O1, O2, O4, O5; KS1	0/6 homes with non-textbook books	No home-reading programme records	Convergent
Unmanaged gadget use	O1, O4; S2, S3; G1	Phones used during home study	—	Convergent (2 sources)
Administrative GLS	KS1, G1–G3	Literacy time repurposed (4/12 sessions)	GLS reports complete; monitoring notes absent	Convergent
Non-interactive reading corner	S6; G3	23 outdated items; 0 users in 2 breaks	Inventory unchanged since 2022	

Discussion (مناقشة)

1. From Isolated Factors to an Interacting System

Low reading literacy at SDN 29/II cannot be reduced to "student laziness" or "teacher incompetence." The findings reveal a **mutually reinforcing cycle**: an unstimulating home environment restricts vocabulary exposure → limited vocabulary makes reading effortful → effortful reading suppresses intrinsic motivation → low motivation increases susceptibility to low-effort digital entertainment → displaced reading time further restricts vocabulary growth. The school, rather than interrupting this cycle, reproduces it through ceremonial GLS routines. Internal factors are therefore best interpreted as **proximal outcomes of distal environmental conditions**, not independent causes—an interpretation that qualifies the emphasis of Rahayu (2021) and Sari (2020) on motivation as a primary, individual-level barrier.

2. An Ecological Systems Analysis

Read through **Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory**, the findings can be mapped across five levels:

- **Microsystem.** Both immediate settings are literacy-impoverished. The home lacks objectified cultural capital (books) and mediated interaction; the classroom lacks scaffolding, read-aloud modelling, and curated texts. Neither setting provides the "more capable other" required for Vygotskian mediation (Vygotsky, 1978).
- **Mesosystem.** The home–school linkage is virtually absent. No parent–teacher communication mechanism addresses reading habits; parental involvement is reduced to ensuring school attendance (O2). Bronfenbrenner emphasises that developmental potential rises with the number and quality of *connections* between microsystems; here, the mesosystem is effectively empty, so neither setting can reinforce the other.
- **Exosystem.** Parental labour regimes in the plantation economy (long, physically exhausting hours) indirectly shape children's literacy by removing adult time and energy for mediation—a determinant invisible to the child yet decisive (O5). District-level book procurement and GLS reporting requirements similarly operate at a distance from classroom practice.
- **Macrosystem.** A cultural belief that literacy is the school's exclusive responsibility, combined with an accountability culture that values documentary compliance over pedagogical substance (KS1), legitimates administrative GLS.
- **Chronosystem.** Post-pandemic learning loss (Tambunan, 2021) coincided with the

accelerated penetration of short-video platforms into semi-rural households, producing a historical juncture in which literacy recovery and digital disruption occurred simultaneously.

3. Compensatory Failure: The Study's Theoretical Contribution

The most significant analytical insight is what may be termed **compensatory failure**. Ecological theory predicts that a strong school microsystem can buffer deficits in the home microsystem. At SDN 29/II this buffering does not occur: the reading corner contains the *same* genre-limited, outdated, textbook-dominated materials that characterise the home, and the literacy routine demands *silent independent reading* from children who lack the vocabulary and motivation to read independently. The school thus **duplicates rather than compensates for** the home deficit. This extends Pratama (2022) and Wardani (2022), who identify weak school facilities as a correlate of low literacy, by specifying the mechanism: it is not merely the *quantity* of school literacy provision but its *lack of differentiation from the home environment* that nullifies its compensatory potential.

4. Digital Exposure and the Economy of Attention

Consistent with Hidayati (2023), Saputra (2023), and Wulandari (2024), unmediated short-video consumption competes directly with sustained textual engagement. However, the present findings warrant a cautious interpretation. The evidence documents **time displacement and habituated preference for low-effort media**, not neurological impairment; terms such as "digital amnesia" should be treated as metaphors rather than measured constructs, given this study's qualitative design. Theoretically, the mechanism is best explained through **expectancy-value and effort economics** (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000): when the perceived effort of reading is high (limited vocabulary) and its perceived value low (no adult modelling, no discussion, no relevance), children rationally allocate attention to the lower-cost, higher-immediate-reward alternative. Digital exposure is therefore an *amplifier* of pre-existing literacy disadvantage rather than its origin—an interpretation that also explains why device restriction alone is unlikely to succeed.

5. Administrative GLS and the Ceremonial Adoption of Policy

The GLS findings illustrate a classic case of **ceremonial policy adoption**, in which formal structures are maintained to secure legitimacy while core instructional practice remains unchanged (Anggraini, 2022; Maharani, 2020). Because monitoring privileges photographic and logbook evidence (KS1), teachers rationally invest in documentation rather than in read-aloud practice, book curation, or cross-subject integration. This suggests that GLS reform at the school level requires a change in *what is monitored*—from artefacts of compliance to observable indicators of engagement—rather than additional programme prescriptions.

6. Contextually Grounded Implications

Three implications follow directly from the findings. **First**, reading corners should be repositioned as *interactive literacy centres* whose collections are curated with student participation and deliberately differentiated from home materials (levelled, illustrated, high-interest informational texts). **Second**, teachers should shift from silent-reading supervision to *mediated reading*—read-aloud, vocabulary pre-teaching, and dialogic discussion—and embed locally meaningful texts (oil-palm cultivation, the Batanghari river, local environment) across subjects, so that comprehension is supported and relevance is visible (Pratama, 2022; Fauzi, 2025). **Third**, because the exosystemic constraint is parental time rather than parental willingness, school–committee partnerships should promote *low-burden* mediation practices (10–15 minutes of storytelling, agreed gadget-free hours) rather than demanding time-intensive supervision (Lestari, 2021; Wulandari, 2024). These are proposed as testable intervention hypotheses, not as effects demonstrated by the present study.

Figure 1. *Ecological interaction model of low reading literacy at SDN 29/II Bungo* (conceptual): Home microsystem (no books, no mediation, unmanaged gadgets) ⇄ empty mesosystem ⇄ School microsystem (administrative GLS, dead reading corner, no scaffolding) → proximal internal outcomes (limited vocabulary → low motivation) → low reading comprehension, with exosystemic (parental labour, reporting culture), macrosystemic (beliefs, accountability norms), and chronosystemic (post-pandemic loss, digital acceleration) conditions enveloping the cycle.

Conclusion (خاتمة)

Low reading literacy among upper-grade students at SD Negeri 29/II, Bungo Regency—evidenced by 73.3% of students requiring special intervention—is produced by three interlocking sets of factors rather than by any single cause. Internal factors (weak intrinsic motivation and limited vocabulary) function as proximal cognitive-affective barriers; family factors (minimal parental mediation, absence of non-textbook reading materials, and unmanaged short-video exposure) constitute the distal conditions that generate those barriers; and school factors (administrative GLS implementation, non-interactive reading corners, and the absence of teacher scaffolding) fail to interrupt the cycle. The study's principal contribution is the identification of **compensatory failure**: the school microsystem reproduces the home literacy deficit instead of offsetting it, while the mesosystem linking the two remains inactive. Accordingly, recommendations are directed at the *interaction* between systems: schools should differentiate and curate reading provision and shift from supervising to mediating reading; teachers should integrate locally contextualised texts across subjects; and schools and committees should jointly promote low-burden, realistic digital-mediation practices with parents. Future researchers are encouraged to test these propositions through classroom action research or quasi-experimental designs.

Limitations. As a single-case qualitative study with 16 informants in one semi-rural school, the findings are analytically rather than statistically generalisable. The study documents associations and mechanisms as perceived and observed, not causal effects; claims regarding attention span rest on informant reports and behavioural observation rather than cognitive measurement. Longitudinal and multi-site studies, and direct measurement of digital-media use, would strengthen the explanatory model.

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