

Differentiated Graded Readers in A School Literacy Movement Program: An Instrumental Case Study of Reading Literacy at SDN Bojongsari 01

Larasati Diana^{1*}, Wuri Wuryandani²

^{1,2} Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study investigated the planning and implementation of a differentiated graded-reader School Literacy Movement (GLS) program at SDN Bojongsari 01 in response to a decline in reading literacy achievement, with the proportion of students meeting minimum competency decreasing from 50% in 2023 to 40% in 2024. The study employed a qualitative instrumental case study design involving 45 informants: one principal, eight teachers, 30 students, and six parents. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), supported by thematic coding and iterative verification. The findings show that program planning was collaborative and data-informed, while implementation integrated a consistent 15-minute reading routine with differentiated texts and learning support. Following implementation, school-level literacy indicators increased, including minimum competency attainment from 40% to 48.28%, average literacy scores from 44.03 to 48.26, and literary-text competency from 37.81 to 48.29. Observations and interviews also indicated greater reading engagement and confidence among some students. However, limited book collections, uneven home reading habits, and diverse reading needs remained challenges. Given the school-level nature of Education Report Card data, the observed improvements are interpreted as associated with the program rather than as direct causal effects.

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Corresponding Author:

Larasati Diana

Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Email Author: larasatidiana.2025@student.uny.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Reading is the first door every child must pass through to enter the world of knowledge. However, reality on the ground shows that this door often feels difficult to open not because children are unwilling, but because the door's size does not match their height. This is the core of the literacy issue facing elementary education in Indonesia: the books available often do not align with children's actual, diverse reading abilities.

International data provide a broad context for Indonesia's literacy challenges. In PISA 2022, Indonesia obtained a reading score of 359, below the OECD average of 476 (OECD, 2023). However, PISA assesses 15-year-olds and therefore does not directly represent the elementary-school children examined in this case. It is used here only to situate the national literacy context; greater analytical weight is placed on elementary-level evidence from the National Assessment, AKM, and the school's Education Report Card, which are more directly aligned with the study population.

At the national level, the National Assessment, which has been conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) since 2021, provides a clearer picture of literacy levels at individual schools. The Minimum Competency Assessment (AKM) instrument measures students' reading literacy skills through questions that require comprehension of both informational and fictional texts at various cognitive levels. The results of this assessment are then presented in an Education Report Card that can be downloaded and analyzed by each school as a basis for planning quality improvements.

SDN Bojongsari 01 is a public elementary school located in the border area between Bekasi and Karawang districts, with students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. According to the 2023 Education Report Card data, the literacy proficiency of students at SDN Bojongsari 01 falls into the Moderate category, with 50% of students having achieved the minimum reading literacy competency. Although this figure represents a significant increase of 30.95 percentage points compared to 2022 (19.05%), the school's ranking remains in the lower-middle tier at both the regency/city and national levels. Competence in reading informational texts scored 52.18, while literary texts scored 40.87, indicating that students' ability to enjoy and understand literary texts still needs significant improvement.

Unfortunately, the upward momentum seen in 2023 did not hold. Data from the 2024 Education Report Card reveals a rather alarming decline: the percentage of students meeting the minimum literacy competency dropped from 50% to just 40%, with the achievement rating shifting from "Moderate" to "Insufficient." The proportion of students below the minimum competency level increased from 45.45% to 46.67%, while the proportion of students far below the minimum competency level surged dramatically from 4.55% to 13.33%. Literacy proficiency in literary texts also declined to 37.81. School rankings at the district/city and national levels have moved into the lower tier (81–100%). These data are not merely a warning but a call to action.

In response to this situation, SDN Bojongsari 01 did not sit idly by. The principal and teachers designed and implemented the School Literacy Movement (GLS) Program using a more structured approach tailored to students' individual needs. This program relies on graded readers based on differentiated learning as its primary tool. Graded readers are books organized and classified based on reading ability levels, ranging from Level A (for early readers), Levels B1–B3 (for beginning readers), to Level C (for intermediate readers). Each student receives a book based on the results of an initial reading assessment, ensuring that no student feels the text is "too easy" or feels "overwhelmed" by a text that is too difficult.

In this study, the term reading literacy is used more precisely than the broader term literacy. It refers to students' ability to engage with written texts through related dimensions of foundational decoding and oral-reading fluency, comprehension of text, access to explicit information, and reading engagement or interest (Castles et al., 2018; Duke & Cartwright, 2021). The differentiated

graded-reader program was intended to support these reading-related dimensions by matching text difficulty and instructional support to students' current reading profiles (Connor et al., 2007). The study does not claim to measure broader forms of literacy beyond reading.

The 2025 Education Report Card shows that school-level reading-literacy indicators improved after the program had been implemented more systematically. The percentage of students meeting minimum literacy competency increased from 40% to 48.28%, the average literacy score rose from 44.03 to 48.26, literary-text competency increased from 37.81 to 48.29, and L1 competency in accessing and locating text content increased from 35.69 to 47.54. These annual results describe school-level cohorts rather than repeated measurement of the same children; therefore, they are treated as contextual trend evidence and not as proof of individual growth or a direct program effect.

These school-level trends were accompanied by observable literacy practices within SDN Bojongsari 01. Students read graded readers matched to their current profiles for 15 minutes each morning, teachers periodically reviewed reading progress and adjusted book levels, parents were encouraged to accompany reading at home, and classroom reading corners were developed through community cooperation. These practices provide contextual evidence for examining how the program may have contributed to changes in reading participation and school literacy conditions, while recognizing that other factors may also have influenced annual Report Card outcomes.

However, the school-level improvement raises questions that cannot be answered by annual scores alone. How was the differentiated graded-reader GLS program planned and implemented by teachers and the principal? How did students with different reading profiles experience the program? What changes were observed or perceived in reading engagement, confidence, and text use? What challenges emerged, and how were they addressed? These questions support the use of an instrumental qualitative case study to understand the program in context rather than to estimate a causal treatment effect.

The School Literacy Movement itself arose from the realization that reading skills cannot be developed solely through Indonesian language classes. As outlined in the master design of the School Literacy Movement (Wiedarti et al., 2016), the GLS is a comprehensive effort that involves the entire school community in building a literacy ecosystem. The School Literacy Movement proceeds through three stages: habituation (reading for 15 minutes of non-curricular texts), development (enriching literacy skills through non-academic activities), and learning (integrating literacy strategies into the teaching-learning process).

The differentiated graded-reader GLS program at SDN Bojongsari 01 is an adaptive initiative that integrates official GLS principles with differentiated instruction responsive to student diversity. This aligns with the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on learner-centered instruction and with process standards that encourage teaching to respond to students' learning needs. Within this study, differentiation refers not merely to varying daily activities but to adjustments in text difficulty, teacher support, grouping, response format, and follow-up according to students' reading profiles (Deunk et al., 2018; Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019).

This study is important not only because it documents a school literacy program, but because it examines how differentiated graded readers are embedded in a school-wide routine in a resource-constrained elementary setting. The case offers insight into the interaction among

Education Report Card data, school leadership, cross-grade teacher participation, differentiated reading support, and students' reading experiences. Its contribution is therefore primarily analytical and implementation-oriented, with transferability depending on similarity of context rather than on statistical generalization.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design with an instrumental case study approach (Crowe et al., 2011; Yin, 2018). The case is explicitly bounded as the differentiated graded-reader School Literacy Movement (GLS) program implemented at SDN Bojongsari 01 during the 2024/2025 academic year, with formal research data collection conducted from March to May 2026. The primary unit of analysis is the program and its school-wide implementation rather than individual students as isolated units. The case is instrumental because it is used to illuminate a broader educational issue: how a resource-constrained elementary school organizes data-informed, differentiated reading support across grades. The design therefore supports contextual interpretation and examination of plausible program contributions, not causal estimation.

This study was conducted at SDN Bojongsari 01, Kedungwaringin Subdistrict, Bekasi Regency, West Java. The site was selected purposively because it had consecutive Education Report Card data and had implemented a differentiated graded-reader GLS program in response to identified reading-literacy needs. The researcher was also a practitioner-teacher at the school, a position that provided contextual access but introduced potential power and confirmation-bias risks. These risks were addressed through a reflexive journal, explicit documentation of assumptions, active attention to disconfirming evidence, and peer debriefing with persons outside the immediate program (Berger, 2015). The available study documentation does not specify whether the researcher directly taught every participating student; this potential role overlap is therefore treated as a positionality limitation rather than assumed away.

Formal research data collection was conducted from March to May 2026 in three phases: (1) March, pre-fieldwork activities including instrument development, ethics clearance, and document review; (2) April, fieldwork involving participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation; and (3) May, data analysis, interpretation, member checking, and report writing. The researcher's longer practitioner familiarity with the school provided contextual knowledge but was distinguished from the formal March–May 2026 research fieldwork.

Research Procedures

This study employed a qualitative research design using a systematic and sequential four-stage research process. The research procedure was designed to ensure that data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting were conducted coherently and iteratively. Each stage was interconnected, with findings and reflections from earlier stages informing subsequent research activities. The four stages consisted of pre-fieldwork, fieldwork, data analysis and interpretation, and report writing, as presented in Figure 1.

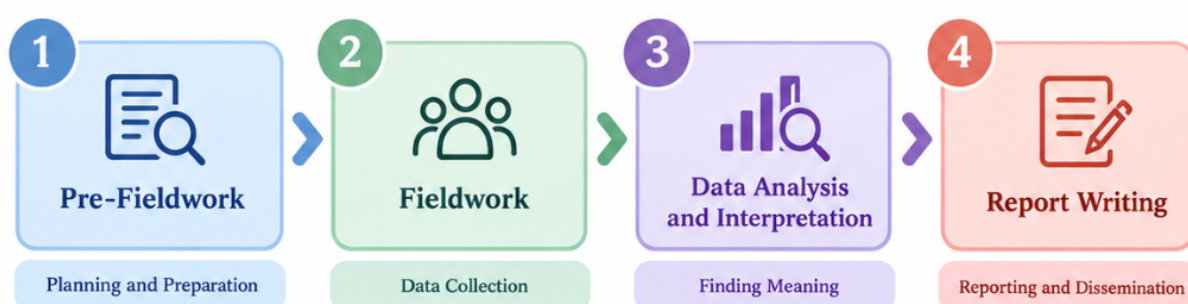


Figure 1. The research stages

Stage 1: Pre-Fieldwork. The pre-fieldwork stage focused on research preparation and the establishment of the conceptual and methodological foundation. The researcher conducted a literature review to develop the conceptual framework and refine the research questions. Research instruments, including observation and interview guides, were developed and validated through supervisor consultation and pilot testing. The researcher also secured the necessary research permits and conducted a preliminary review of relevant documents, including the Education Report Cards for 2023–2025, GLS program documents, and Ministry of Education guidelines on the School Literacy Movement (GLS). In addition, the researcher documented initial assumptions and potential biases arising from the researcher’s practitioner role to establish a reflexivity baseline before entering the field.

Stage 2: Fieldwork. The fieldwork stage involved systematic data collection through observations, interviews, and document collection. Fieldwork began with exploratory observations to obtain an overall understanding of the implementation of the GLS program, followed by focused observations of specific aspects relevant to the research questions. Interviews were conducted sequentially, beginning with the principal and TLS coordinator, followed by classroom teachers, students, and parents. Each interview session was transcribed before the subsequent interview was conducted, allowing preliminary themes and emerging issues to inform subsequent data collection. Relevant documents were collected concurrently with observations and interviews. Field notes and reflexive notes were also updated after each fieldwork session to record contextual information, researcher reflections, and emerging interpretations.

Stage 3: Data Analysis and Interpretation. Data analysis was conducted concurrently with fieldwork to allow emerging patterns and preliminary interpretations to inform subsequent data collection. Following the completion of fieldwork, the researcher undertook an iterative process of thematic coding, category development, and theme refinement. Data from interviews, observations, and documents were compared across sources to identify convergent and divergent patterns and to strengthen the credibility of the findings. Preliminary interpretations were subsequently subjected to member checking with key informants to clarify meanings, verify interpretations, and minimize potential misrepresentation of participants’ perspectives.

Stage 4: Report Writing. The final stage involved synthesizing and presenting the findings in a comprehensive research report. The report emphasized thick description and grounded each finding in multiple sources of evidence, including interview excerpts, observation records, and relevant documents. The findings were interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework and the

research questions. The report was structured to address all five research questions systematically and to highlight the implications of the findings for educational practice and policy.

Research Instruments

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument (Creswell, 2014). To ensure consistency and rigor, five auxiliary instruments were employed: (1) an observation guide specifying focal aspects for each session; (2) semi-structured interview guides tailored to each informant group (principal, teachers, students, parents); (3) field notes recorded immediately after each session; (4) a reflexive journal documenting assumptions and emerging questions throughout the study; and (5) a document analysis sheet covering each document's identification, relevance, and key findings.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The use of multiple data collection techniques enabled the researcher to examine the implementation of the School Literacy Movement (GLS) from different perspectives and to compare evidence across sources. This triangulation was particularly important for understanding not only how the program was implemented in practice but also how it was perceived and interpreted by different participants (Carter et al., 2014).

Participant observation focused primarily on the daily 15-minute morning reading routine, differentiated reading activities in classrooms, and relevant informal moments within the school environment. The observations followed the school's Monday–Friday literacy schedule and examined teacher–student interactions, the use of graded readers, adaptations to different student reading profiles, student engagement, and the broader literacy environment. Detailed field notes were prepared after each observation and were used to identify recurring patterns as well as negative or disconfirming cases. Because the available observation documentation does not preserve a single auditable total number of sessions or a complete per-class duration log beyond the 15-minute routine, the observation data are interpreted as qualitative evidence of practices and experiences rather than as quantitative estimates of frequency or exposure.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to explore both participants' experiences of the GLS program and their interpretations of its implementation and perceived effects. Interviews with the principal and School Literacy Team (TLS) coordinator focused primarily on program planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, while teacher interviews explored classroom practices, particularly the use of differentiated reading activities and graded readers. Student interviews employed child-friendly and concrete questions to elicit students' reading experiences, engagement, and perceptions of the literacy activities, whereas parent interviews focused on students' reading behaviors and literacy practices at home. Interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and subsequently used as part of the iterative analytical process. Key interpretations were also returned to participants for member checking (Birt et al., 2016). Given that children served as important informants, the interview questions were intentionally simplified and framed in concrete rather than abstract terms. However, the available study records do not separately report student age

ranges, interview duration by grade level, or distinct documentation of child assent and parental consent; these omissions are acknowledged as methodological reporting limitations.

Document analysis was conducted to complement the observational and interview data and to examine the consistency between program planning, implementation, and documented outcomes. The documents included the school's GLS program materials, Education Report Cards for 2023–2025, reading assessment instruments, student reading-monitoring cards, graded-reader inventories, literacy activity schedules, book-rotation records, photographs and videos of literacy activities, student reading summaries, and relevant meeting minutes. These documents provided contextual and longitudinal evidence that supported the interpretation of field-based data and enabled comparison between intended program activities and their implementation in practice. The annual Education Report Card data were interpreted as school-level cohort evidence rather than as longitudinal measurements of the same individual students across years.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed the interactive qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), comprising data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing and verification, and interpretation. Analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection so that emerging patterns, questions, and inconsistencies could inform subsequent observations and interviews. The analytical process was oriented toward developing case-based themes that addressed the research questions rather than generating a grounded theory.

Data condensation involved an iterative process of organizing, coding, and refining information obtained from interview transcripts, field notes, and documents. In the first coding cycle, descriptive and process codes were assigned to meaningful segments of data to capture relevant actions, experiences, and practices. Related codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories, which were further refined into themes corresponding to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding decisions were organized using matrix tables in Microsoft Excel, while thematic relationships were explored through thematic maps in Microsoft Word. The study deliberately used the terminology of descriptive and process coding, category development, and thematic refinement rather than open, axial, and selective coding to maintain conceptual consistency with the instrumental case-study design.

The condensed data were then displayed in several complementary forms to facilitate comparison and interpretation. These included thick descriptive narratives, thematic matrices linking categories with different data sources, conceptual maps showing relationships among emerging themes, and selected verbatim quotations from informants. These displays enabled the researcher to examine patterns within individual data sources as well as relationships and differences across interviews, observations, and documents.

Conclusion drawing and verification were conducted iteratively throughout the analysis process. Preliminary conclusions were repeatedly examined against the original data and refined when necessary. Verification involved member checking, comparison across interviews, observations, and documents, examination of negative or disconfirming cases, comparison with relevant literature, and discussion with supervisors or peers. Interpretive claims were retained when they were supported by converging evidence or when differences across sources could be

reasonably explained by contextual factors. This process was intended to strengthen the credibility, consistency, and evidentiary grounding of the findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

Finally, interpretation and meaning-making extended the analysis beyond the description of observed practices and participant perspectives. The researcher interpreted the emerging themes through a dialogue between the empirical evidence, the theoretical framework, and practitioner reflexivity. This interpretive process examined what the findings revealed about the nature of literacy learning, equity in access to differentiated reading experiences, and the role of the school ecosystem in supporting children's reading development. The researcher's practitioner position was treated reflexively throughout the process, with attention to how prior assumptions and experiences might shape observation, interaction with participants, coding decisions, and interpretation of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Planning of the Differentiated Graded-Reader GLS Program

The School Literacy Movement (GLS) program which uses a differentiated graded-reader collection at SDN Bojongsari 01 did not arise from a top-down policy that simply had to be implemented, but rather from a real need identified by the teachers and principal themselves. Based on interviews with the principal, the program originated from a shared concern: students in the same class had vastly different reading abilities, yet until then, all children had been treated as if their abilities were the same and given identical reading materials. As a result, children who were already strong readers quickly became bored, while those who still struggled with reading felt increasingly pressured and lost motivation.

The planning process began with a joint identification of issues through discussions between the principal and the teachers. Data from the 2024 Education Report Card, which showed a decline in literacy achievement from 50% to 40% of students meeting the minimum competency served as a critical catalyst that prompted the school not merely to react, but to design a structured response. As the principal stated in an interview: "The decline in education report card scores was one of the considerations. However, we did not focus solely on the numbers, but also on the actual conditions in the classroom, which indicated that students' reading skills indeed required special attention."

The development of the program then involves the principal, all classroom teachers, literacy coordinators, subject teachers, and, indirectly, the students' parents. The school received feedback from parents regarding students' reading habits at home, so that the program was designed to be more contextual and aligned with the students' actual circumstances. From this discussion process, a schedule of literacy activities was developed, designed to take place every Monday through Friday, from 7:00 AM to 7:15 AM.

Table 4. Schedule of Literacy Activities for Students at SDN Bojongsari 01

DAY	TIME	ACTIVITY	FORM OF DIFFERENTIATION	PERSON IN CHARGE
Monday	7:00– 7:15	Independent Reading: Graded Readers	Books tailored to students' reading levels	Class Teacher
Tuesday	7:00– 7:15	Pair Reading	Students who read fluently assist those who are still struggling	Class Teacher
Wednesday	7:00– 7:15	Reading Aloud	Teachers use stories appropriate for the class's characteristics	Class Teacher
Thursday	7:00– 7:15	Retelling the Book's Content	Students choose a storytelling method based on their abilities	Class Teacher
Friday	7:00– 7:15	Literacy Reflection and Reading Journal	Journal entries are tailored to students' abilities	Class Teacher

The schedule above provides varied reading experiences through independent reading, paired reading, reading aloud, retelling, and reading journals. Variation by day was not treated as differentiation by itself. Differentiation occurred when teachers adjusted text difficulty, instructional support, grouping, response format, and expectations according to students' reading profiles. For example, students needing greater support received simpler texts, repeated reading, and teacher guidance, while more proficient readers used longer texts and completed summaries or retellings. Peer assistance was used as situational support; however, the available records do not document a formal rotation protocol, so the possibility of fixed “strong” and “weak” reader labels is recognized as an implementation risk.

Initial reading assessment informed placement within the school's A–B1–B3–C graded-reader system. Teachers considered letter and word recognition, oral-reading fluency, and basic text comprehension when forming a reading profile. Level A was used for children still relying heavily on pictures and simple words, Levels B1–B3 for beginning readers with progressively greater text demands, and Level C for readers able to handle paragraphs with stronger comprehension. These labels functioned as a local school-organizing framework rather than a standardized developmental or psychometric scale. The available documentation does not report a validated numerical cut-off rubric or inter-rater reliability procedure; placement therefore relied on teacher judgment supported by periodic reassessment, with book levels reviewed at the end of each month.

Table 5. The Five-Finger Rule for Selecting Books

Words That Cannot Be Pronounced Fluently	Explanation	Recommendation
0–1	Too Easy	Look for another book at a higher level
2–4	Challenging	Keep reading
5	Too difficult	Find another book at a lower level

The five-finger rule was used as a student-friendly heuristic for book choice, not as the sole measure of instructional reading level. Students sampled a book and noted words they could

not pronounce fluently, but teachers also considered the initial reading profile, comprehension, oral-reading fluency, vocabulary demands, text complexity, and student interest when guiding book selection. The rule therefore supported self-selection within a broader teacher-informed matching process. Because pronunciation difficulty alone cannot establish an instructional reading level, reliance on this heuristic without the other information would be a limitation.

Implementation of the Differentiated Graded-Reader GLS Program

The 15-minute morning routine functioned primarily as a habituation and reading-exposure component of the GLS program. Students read graded readers before core lessons in an environment designed to make reading regular and accessible. This short routine was not treated as the sole source of gains in decoding or comprehension; more explicit support occurred through teacher-guided reading, repeated word practice, read-aloud activities, peer assistance, and differentiated tasks during literacy activities and other instructional moments. The distinction is important because daily reading habit and explicit reading instruction serve related but different purposes.

Observation checklist data showed that the planned program components were present during observed activities: graded readers were prepared and grouped, reading spaces were used, students could select texts, and teachers provided several forms of support. Because the checklist was largely binary, these entries indicate occurrence rather than frequency, quality, or consistency across every class. For this reason, checklist results were interpreted together with field notes describing variation, difficulties, and exceptions.

Table 6. Summary of Program Implementation Observation Sheet Results

Observation Indicators	Yes	No	Notes
A. Preparation for Literacy Activities			
The teacher prepares graded readers before the activity begins	Yes		
The teacher groups the books according to the students' reading levels	Yes		
Teachers set up a reading corner or reading area	Yes		
The teacher explains the purpose of the reading activity	Yes		
The teacher creates a comfortable reading atmosphere	Yes		The teacher allows students to choose where to read
B. Implementation of Differentiation			
Teachers provide books according to students' reading ability	Yes		Uses the five-finger rule method
Teachers provide differentiated support based on students' needs	Yes		
Teachers help students who are struggling with reading	Yes		
Teachers give students the opportunity to choose books based on their interests and skill levels	Yes		Using the five-finger rule method
The teacher uses a variety of reading strategies	Yes		Reading together, reading aloud

C. Student Reading-Literacy Activities		
Students read enthusiastically	Yes	Levels A, B1, B2, B3, and C are available
Students read at their appropriate skill level	Yes	
Students actively ask questions about the reading material	Yes	
Students are able to retell the content of the reading	Yes	
Students show an interest in reading during the activity	Yes	
D. Teacher-Student Interaction		
The teacher motivates students to read	Yes	Guided students to stay enthusiastic Encouraging students to reflect and providing motivation
Teachers provide feedback on reading activities	Yes	
The teacher patiently guides the students	Yes	Teachers award stars in reading journals
Teachers foster positive communication with students	Yes	
Teachers show appreciation for students' reading efforts	Yes	
E. Literacy Program Management		
GLS activities proceed according to schedule	Yes	Conducted at the end of each month Recording obstacles and challenges in implementation
Teachers make optimal use of the classroom reading corner	Yes	
Teachers monitor students' reading activities	Yes	
Teachers use student reading journals	Yes	
Teachers reflect on literacy activities	Yes	
F. Obstacles and Challenges		
There are students who still have difficulty reading	Yes	They still stumble over words, sound them out, and do not yet understand the vocabulary
The number of graded readers is still limited	Yes	The number of students exceeds the number of available books
The time allocated for literacy activities is limited	Yes	Students are given 15 minutes
Students easily lose focus while reading	Yes	Students read books that are not appropriate for their skill level
Teachers face challenges in implementing differentiated instruction	Yes	Some students insist on reading books that are not at their level

Table 4 should therefore be read as an implementation checklist rather than as a measure of program quality. The predominance of “Yes” responses documents that the listed practices were observed, but it does not establish that they occurred equally often or equally well in all settings. Field notes provided the necessary variation: teachers offered different levels of assistance, some students required repeated word-level support, some lost focus, book availability was uneven, and some students selected texts beyond their current reading profile. These disconfirming observations were retained in the analysis to reduce positive-case bias.

A separate note appears in the section on obstacles and challenges. Observations revealed that some students still stumble while reading and do not yet have a good grasp of vocabulary; the number of graded readers available is not yet sufficient for the number of students; the 15-minute time slot feels too short; some students lose focus when reading books that are not at their level; and some students insist on reading books that are beyond their current ability level. These challenges are not hidden issues—teachers are aware of them and are actively seeking ways to address them.

Differentiation was most visible in the way teachers adjusted support and expected responses. A first-grade teacher explained, “For students whose skills are still developing, I provide special support, such as reading together and repeated practice recognizing simple words.” More proficient readers were offered longer texts and asked to produce simple summaries or retellings. In fourth and fifth grade, peer-assisted reading was also used. This practice was interpreted as temporary instructional support rather than as evidence that some children should remain permanently positioned as “weak readers”; nevertheless, the absence of a formally documented role-rotation procedure is an implementation limitation that should be addressed in future practice.

Physical Education and Islamic Education teachers, although their fields are not directly related to literacy, also support the program in their own ways. Physical Education teachers provide light reading material on sports and encourage students to read casually, while Islamic Education teachers use simple reading materials and a take-turn reading method to guide students whose skills still need development. This demonstrates that the GLS at SDN Bojongsari 01 is not a program exclusive to classroom teachers, but has become a shared responsibility of the entire school community.

The principal monitored the program through classroom observations and regular discussions with teachers. At the end of each month, teachers reviewed students’ reading progress and adjusted graded-reader levels when needed. Reading journals were used for monitoring and teachers sometimes awarded stars to recognize effort. Students’ visible pride in receiving stars was treated as evidence of immediate recognition and encouragement, not as proof of enduring intrinsic motivation.

Observed Reading-Literacy Changes Associated with the Program

Reading-literacy changes were examined through two complementary sources: school-level Education Report Card trends and qualitative accounts from students, teachers, the principal, observations, and program documents. The two forms of evidence were interpreted together, while preserving the distinction between cohort-level annual indicators and individual experiences.

Education Report Card data show a school-level trajectory from 19.05% of students meeting minimum literacy competency in 2022 to 50% in 2023, 40% in 2024, and 48.28% in 2025, when the differentiated graded-reader GLS program had been implemented more systematically. Because each annual result may represent a different student cohort, this pattern cannot be interpreted as direct longitudinal growth of the same children. It is used instead as contextual evidence of school-level change during the program period.

Table 7 Comparison of Literacy Achievement at SDN Bojongsari 01

Indicator	2023	2024	2025	Notes
% of Students Meeting the Minimum Literacy Competency	50%	40%	48.28%	Declined temporarily, then rose again
Literacy Achievement Label	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Back to the Moderate category
Average Literacy Score	-	44.03	48.26	Up 4.23 points
Information Text Literacy Competency	52.18	-	-	Program baseline
Literacy Competence in Literary Texts	40.87	37.81	48.29	Increase of 10.48 points (2024→2025)
L1 Competency (Access & Discover)	-	35.69	47.54	Up 11.85 points
Regional & National Rankings	Lower-Middle	Low (81-100%)	Lower-Middle (61-80%)	Improved at the school-cohort level

Several changes in the school-level indicators coincided with the period of more systematic program implementation. Literary-text literacy increased from 37.81 in 2024 to 48.29 in 2025, and L1 competency in accessing and locating text content increased from 35.69 to 47.54. The school ranking also moved from the lowest group (81–100%) to the lower-middle group (61–80%). These shifts are consistent with the program’s reading focus, but the case-study design cannot attribute them directly to the GLS program because cohort composition and other school or contextual influences may also have contributed. The quantitative trends are therefore interpreted alongside interview, observation, and document evidence as indicators of plausible program contribution rather than causal effect.

Student interviews provided evidence of positive experiences but also showed that the program did not operate uniformly for every child. A fourth-grade student who was still developing reading skills said, “I feel happier and am no longer afraid of making mistakes when reading. I’m also more motivated because I can finish reading on my own.” A fifth-grade student similarly reported, “Now I read more often, even though I’m still slow.” At the same time, observation notes documented students who continued to stumble over words, had limited vocabulary, lost focus, or chose books that were too difficult. Including these less favorable cases indicates that increased confidence and participation were uneven rather than universal.

Some proficient readers also described greater challenge when texts better matched their current abilities. A sixth-grade student stated, “I feel more interested and challenged to read more.” This suggests that differentiation can support access for struggling readers while also maintaining challenge for more proficient readers, although the available evidence is qualitative and should not be generalized to every student.

Observed reading engagement also increased for a number of students. The classroom reading corner, which had previously been used less often, was visited voluntarily more frequently, and some students used break time to read without teacher prompting. These behaviors are interpreted as evidence of increased observed interest and engagement during the study period. They should not, by themselves, be taken as proof of a stable or enduring “love of reading.”

Supporting and Hindering Factors

The success of the differentiated graded-reader GLS program at SDN Bojongsari 01 is attributable to a number of supporting factors, and efforts to sustain it must continue despite several obstacles that have not yet been fully resolved.

The most fundamental enabling factor is the principal's commitment. This program would not succeed without a principal who not only grants permission but is also actively involved in the program's design, monitoring, and evaluation. The principal conducts classroom observations firsthand, holds regular discussions with teachers, and ensures that the literacy schedule is consistently followed. This commitment creates a sense of security for teachers to experiment and learn from their mistakes without fear of judgment (Leithwood et al., 2020).

The second contributing factor is the collective enthusiasm of the teachers. All the teachers interviewed from classroom teachers to physical education and Islamic education teachers demonstrated a sincere commitment to the program. Although they acknowledged that the program added to their preparation workload, they also observed reading-related changes among students during program implementation and felt rewarded by the changes that took place. Collaboration among teachers in developing strategies to address the diversity of student abilities also served as a strong source of social capital.

The five-finger rule was a practical support for student participation in book choice, but it should not be treated as an objective stand-alone measure of reading level. Its value in this program lay in helping students notice text difficulty and discuss book suitability with teachers, while teacher assessment of fluency, comprehension, vocabulary demands, and interest remained necessary for appropriate matching.

The most frequently cited obstacle in interviews and observations was the limited size of the graded-reader collection. Nearly all teachers mentioned that the number of books available was insufficient for all students, particularly at certain grade levels. This situation sometimes forces students to share books or wait their turn, which can diminish the quality of their reading experience. Schools address this by making the most of existing resources and gradually expanding their book collections.

Another challenge is the wide disparity in reading ability among students within a single class. This range makes it difficult for teachers to give proportional attention to all students within the 15 minutes allotted. Teachers need extra creativity to ensure no child is overlooked, even though their attention must be divided among multiple levels simultaneously. The 15-minute time slot designated for morning literacy is also perceived by some teachers as still too limited to provide in-depth guidance.

Another challenge that emerged from the observations is that some students insist on reading books that are not yet appropriate for their skill level. This phenomenon actually reflects something positive these children are enthusiastic and ambitious about reading but if not handled wisely, they may become frustrated because they are unable to follow texts that are too difficult. Teachers need subtle communication skills to guide these students toward more appropriate books without making them feel belittled.

Discussion

Planning Rooted in Data and Empathy

The planning process for the GLS program at SDN Bojongsari 01 reflects two strengths that rarely coexist in an educational context: meticulous data analysis and empathy for students' real-world experiences (Mandinach, 2012). This program did not simply emerge from the red marks on the Education Report Card, although that data was indeed a key trigger. More fundamentally, it arose from the teachers' awareness that the children in their classrooms are distinct individuals, each with their own unique trajectory of literacy development.

This approach aligns with what Tomlinson (2017) refers to as "responsive teaching" teaching that is responsive to individual differences. In Tomlinson's conception, differentiation is not about mechanically providing different treatments, but about deeply understanding each student and tailoring the learning experience so that every child can thrive. Planning at SDN Bojongsari 01 reflects this philosophy: initial assessments are conducted not to classify and label students, but to understand where they currently stand so that appropriate interventions can be provided (Puzio et al., 2020).

The weekly literacy schedule extends the 15-minute reading habit beyond a single repetitive activity by offering independent reading, paired reading, read-aloud, retelling, and reflection. The morning routine primarily supports regular exposure, access, and reading habit; it should not be interpreted as sufficient by itself to produce substantial gains in decoding or comprehension. Those outcomes require the additional explicit and differentiated support described in the findings, including guided reading, repeated word practice, comprehension prompts, and level-appropriate response tasks (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003).

From a Vygotskian perspective, matching text challenge and instructional support to a learner's current performance is broadly consistent with the idea of learning within a zone of productive challenge (Wood et al., 1976). The five-finger rule can help students notice when a text feels too easy or too difficult, but it is only a heuristic and should not be equated with a validated measure of the Zone of Proximal Development. In this case, its pedagogical value depended on being combined with teacher judgment, comprehension evidence, and ongoing reassessment.

Consistent Implementation with Prudent Flexibility

One of the most striking aspects of the GLS program at SDN Bojongsari 01 is its consistency. This program is not an activity that pops up occasionally or is only active when an inspector visits. Every morning, in every classroom, the first 15 minutes are dedicated to literacy. This consistency is crucial because reading habits cannot be built sporadically; they require regular repetition to become part of students' identity and daily routine (Mol & Bus, 2011).

On the other hand, this program also offers thoughtful flexibility. Teachers are not rigidly bound to a single approach when guiding students they adapt their strategies to the needs they observe in their classrooms every day. There are days when a teacher decides to read a story aloud because they sense that their students are sluggish and need external stimulation. There are days when a teacher lets students read on their own because they see high concentration and do not want to disturb them. This kind of flexibility is a sign of pedagogical maturity that cannot be produced by a brief training; it grows from continuous observation and honest reflection.

Observation findings show that teachers used several reading strategies, consistent with Fatimah, Sufyadi, and Mastur (2025), who reported benefits from combining graded readers with varied methods such as read-aloud. The value of variation here is not that children possess fixed “learning styles,” but that multiple forms of participation can support different reading needs, preferences, and levels of access (Pashler et al., 2008). Some children engaged more readily during teacher read-aloud, others during independent reading, and others through peer-supported activity.

Peer-assisted reading also illustrates the social dimension of literacy learning. More proficient readers can provide accessible models and immediate support, while peers receiving assistance can participate in a less formal interaction (Fuchs et al., 1997). However, peer assistance should be organized carefully so that reading differences do not become permanent social labels. In this case, the lack of a documented reciprocal or rotating-role protocol limits conclusions about how consistently stigma risk was managed.

Stars in reading journals functioned as visible recognition of effort and completion. Such recognition may encourage participation when used supportively (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), but external rewards can influence motivation in different ways depending on how children interpret them (Deci et al., 1999). The present data show immediate pride and encouragement, not evidence that stars produced enduring intrinsic motivation. Future evaluation should include children’s own views about whether these symbols feel encouraging, controlling, or unimportant.

Reading-Literacy Changes Beyond School-Level Numbers

The Education Report Card data show encouraging school-level changes during the period in which the differentiated graded-reader GLS program was implemented more systematically: the average literacy score increased by 4.23 points, literary-text literacy by 10.48 points, and L1 competency by 11.85 points. These annual values should not be read as pre–post scores for the same children. They represent cohort-level school indicators and therefore provide contextual evidence of change rather than a direct estimate of individual program impact.

Qualitative evidence adds a dimension not captured by annual school indicators: some students described greater confidence, willingness to read aloud, and more frequent voluntary reading (Schiefele et al., 2012). These changes are educationally meaningful as observed experiences, but the study does not establish that they are permanent or universal. The presence of students who remained slow, lost focus, or struggled with vocabulary is equally important for understanding the program’s uneven effects.

The findings are consistent with Amanda, Isrok’atun, and Julia (2023) in showing that book leveling can support reading participation and confidence (see also Nakanishi, 2015). The distinctive contribution of the present case lies less in confirming that graded readers can be useful and more in showing how they were embedded in a school-wide implementation system: planning was triggered by Education Report Card data, the principal coordinated monitoring, differentiation was enacted across grades and by subject teachers, and the program continued despite limited book resources and the absence of a formal library. This provides implementation insight for elementary schools facing similar constraints, while not establishing universal effectiveness.

Students at different reading profiles described different forms of engagement with texts. Beginning readers relied more on simple wording and illustrations, whereas more proficient readers described interest in longer texts and different genres. These observations may reflect

movement toward more independent text use, but the available evidence does not establish a strict developmental transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” In elementary education these processes often overlap (Castles et al., 2018), and stronger developmental claims would require direct evidence of comprehension, fluency, and individual level progression over time.

The program also involved a broader school ecosystem. Some parents became more engaged in home reading (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002), non-classroom teachers incorporated reading materials into their subjects, and the principal described reading as becoming more visible in everyday school routines. These observations suggest an emerging school-wide literacy culture, although the extent and durability of that culture were not measured systematically.

Challenges as Opportunities for Learning

An honest program not only celebrates its successes but also openly acknowledges its challenges. The GLS program at SDN Bojongsari 01 is a good example of this kind of honesty: teachers, the principal, and even observation notes consistently acknowledge existing limitations without glossing over them.

The limited availability of graded readers is the most significant structural barrier. Schools that do not yet have a formal library and are just building a collection of graded readers from scratch certainly cannot expect to achieve an ideal book-to-student ratio in a short period of time. However, the way schools respond to this limitation actually reflects their creativity and resilience: making the most of what they have, encouraging regular book sharing, and gradually expanding the collection. This is the same pattern found by Amanda, Isrok'atun, and Julia (2023) in their research: resource limitations do not hinder meaningful literacy programs if teachers' enthusiasm and creativity are present to bridge the existing gaps.

The challenges of implementing differentiation in classrooms with a wide range of abilities also deserve closer attention. Differentiation is conceptually simple provide each student with what they need but operationally very demanding. Teachers must have in-depth knowledge of each of their students, strong multitasking skills, and the stamina to keep going. Advanced training programs on differentiated instruction as requested by nearly all the teachers interviewed, represent a genuine need that policymakers must address.

Teachers' concern that 15 minutes was insufficient also clarifies the role of the morning routine. The routine can sustain access and habit, but deeper reading instruction may need to be integrated into other subjects and longer instructional periods. For schools adopting a similar approach, the practical issue is therefore not simply whether to extend the 15-minute routine, but how to connect habituation with explicit, differentiated reading instruction across the school day.

Overall, the picture that emerges from this research data is that of a school in the process of becoming not yet perfect, but moving in the right direction with clear and deliberate steps. The existing obstacles are not evidence of the program's failure, but rather a remaining agenda for continued improvement. And the fact that these obstacles are openly acknowledged by the program's stakeholders is a sign of professional maturity that deserves recognition.

CONCLUSION

This instrumental case study examined how a differentiated graded-reader School Literacy Movement program was planned and implemented at SDN Bojongsari 01 and what reading-

literacy-related changes were observed or perceived in relation to the program. The findings should be read as a contextual account of one resource-constrained elementary school rather than as evidence of a causal intervention effect.

First, program planning was collaborative and data-informed. The 2024 Education Report Card, which showed a decline in school-level literacy achievement, prompted the principal and teachers to examine classroom reading needs and organize graded readers and differentiated support around students' varied reading profiles.

Second, implementation combined a consistent 15-minute morning reading routine with differentiated texts, teacher guidance, varied response formats, periodic reassessment, and selected peer support. The morning routine primarily supported reading habit and exposure, while explicit support for fluency and comprehension occurred through additional instructional practices.

Third, school-level Education Report Card indicators improved between 2024 and 2025: minimum competency attainment rose from 40% to 48.28%, the average literacy score increased by 4.23 points, and literary-text competency increased by 10.48 points. These cohort-level trends coincided with more systematic program implementation and were supported by qualitative evidence of increased reading engagement and confidence among some students. They do not, however, demonstrate direct individual growth or causal impact.

Fourth, implementation was supported by data-informed school leadership, teacher commitment, classroom reading spaces, and some parent participation. Key constraints were limited graded-reader collections, wide variation in reading needs, the short morning time allocation, uneven home reading habits, and the need for more systematic procedures for assessment, peer-role rotation, and monitoring of individual reading progression.

Overall, the case suggests that differentiated graded readers can be feasibly integrated into a school-wide literacy routine when leadership, teacher collaboration, and responsiveness to reading differences are present. The value of the case is its transferable implementation insight rather than a claim that the same outcomes will occur in all resource-limited schools. Readers should assess transferability by considering similarities in school context, staffing, book access, assessment practice, and student reading profiles.

Study limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, this is a single-site, practitioner-led case study, so the findings are context-dependent and not statistically generalizable. Second, annual Education Report Card values represent school-level cohorts rather than repeated measures of the same students, and the study does not include a complete child-level longitudinal dataset capable of estimating individual reading growth. Third, the researcher's practitioner position created potential power and confirmation-bias risks despite reflexive and peer-debriefing procedures. Fourth, the available documentation does not provide a standardized validation study for the A–B1–B3–C leveling framework, a complete audit of observation-session frequency, or fully reported child-assent and interview-duration procedures. These limitations require cautious interpretation and reinforce that the study identifies patterns, experiences, and plausible program contributions rather than direct causal effects.

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Larasati Diana: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project Administration, Resources, Validation, Visualization, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing.

Wuri Wuryandani: Conceptualization, Supervision, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN MANUSCRIPT PREPARATION

During the preparation of this work, the authors used Claude (Anthropic) in order to improve language clarity and assist with English translation. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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