THE GEMERLANG PROGRAM AS A STRATEGY TO INCREASE STUDENTS' INTEREST IN READING AT SMP TARUNA ISLAM AL KAUTSAR

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the Gemerlang Program and its impact on students' reading interest at SMP Taruna Islam Al-Kautsar. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach. The research sources are teachers and students at SMP Taruna Islam Al-Kautsar. The research data are from the principal and 10 eighth-grade students who took the literacy test. Data collection techniques were obtained through interviews. The results of the study indicate that the Gemerlang Program, which requires students to read non-fiction books, summarize them, and give presentations to demonstrate their potential for success in increasing students' reading interest, is effective. This program also combines the 3P approach (must read, must write, and must present), which further strengthens students' literacy, communication, and critical thinking skills. Overall, the Gemerlang Program is a strategic step that can be used as a model by other schools in their efforts to foster students' interest in reading. Based on previous research, most literacy programs in schools are still limited to independent reading activities or mere visits to the library without any structured follow-up to develop critical thinking, writing, and speaking skills in an integrated manner. Additionally, studies specifically evaluating the effectiveness of 3P-based literacy programs (guaranteed reading, guaranteed writing, and guaranteed presentation) systematically at the junior high school level are still very limited. Therefore, this research was conducted to address this gap through the implementation of the Gemerlang Program at SMP Taruna Islam Al-Kautsar.

Keywords: Gemerlang Program; reading interest; literacy;

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, low reading interest among students is a problem that needs serious attention, as stated by (Yoni 2020). Survey results show that many students prefer to spend their time playing with gadgets, exploring social media, and watching online content rather than reading books. This situation has a negative impact on students' literacy skills, critical thinking abilities, and analytical capabilities when faced with various types of information (L. Larayba, N.M. Pujani, and L.M. Priyanka 2022). At SMP Taruna Islam Al-Kautsar, educational report cards show that students' reading literacy skills are still in the low category, marked by a red code on the school literacy indicator, as stated by (Ninawati 2019) that literacy skills in Indonesia are still far behind when compared to other countries in the world. This indicates that various efforts to improve literacy have not been maximized. Additionally, students' growing preference for visual content and instant information further diminishes the habit of reading books comprehensively. If this condition is left unaddressed, it will have a negative impact on students' ability to understand texts, compose writing, and express ideas systematically. Therefore, an innovative and engaging literacy program is needed that not only enhances reading interest but also sharpens critical thinking skills and systematic communication abilities among students.

Literacy is the ability to read, write, understand, and utilize information appropriately. According to (Rahmatullah, Pasani, and Yulinda 2021), the purpose of the school literacy movement is to cultivate and promote reading and writing activities among students, increase awareness among all school members of the importance of literacy, create a comfortable and child-friendly school environment, and provide a variety of reading materials and reading strategies to support the continuity of the learning process. More broadly, literacy is not only related to reading and writing skills but also includes critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective communication skills. According to (Mustoip, Nurmaliki, and Ambiya 2024), literacy is one of the main benchmarks for assessing the level of educational progress and the well-being of a society. Literacy is often associated with basic reading and writing skills, which form the foundation for learning and communication. However, literacy is not limited to reading and writing skills. In this rapidly changing era, literacy also encompasses the ability to think critically, understand various information, and apply it in daily life.

Students' interest in reading is a crucial factor in supporting the learning process. Individuals who are interested in reading activities tend to feel engaged and emotionally involved during the reading process (Arum, Ahmad, and Anam 2023). When students have a high interest in reading, they tend to find it easier to expand their knowledge, enrich their insights, and hone their critical thinking skills. If students are accustomed to reading, this habit will become a routine that is carried out continuously. In addition, the hobby of reading has a positive influence on students. A high interest in reading usually goes hand in hand with a high enthusiasm for learning. Students who enjoy reading will have broad insights from the books they have read. However, the reality on the ground shows that the level of interest in reading among students is still relatively low. According to Ruslan (2019), the low level of interest in reading among the public is closely related to the level of education in a country. Therefore, collaboration between teachers, parents, and related parties is needed, as well as the implementation of educational and interesting activities to foster and increase reading interest among school students. One of the efforts of SMP Taruna Islam Al-Kautsar to encourage an increase in reading interest among students is through the implementation of the Gemerlang Program.

The Gemerlang Program is an initiative specifically designed to foster students' interest in reading. Through this program, students are introduced to a variety of reading materials and engaging, enjoyable reading activities, encouraging them to develop a greater love for reading. The program's objective is to enhance students' reading literacy skills through book review activities. These activities train students to analyze, comprehend, and present the content of books in the form of presentations. In addition, students are also trained in communication skills and the ability to use presentation media effectively.

To date, various literacy efforts implemented in schools are still dominated by free reading activities or visits to the library, without any planned follow-up activities to hone students' critical

thinking, writing, and speaking skills. This situation is exacerbated by the high tendency of students to access gadgets and social media, which shifts their attention away from reading activities (Zuhria, Kurnia, and Hasanudin, n.d.). Furthermore, research on literacy programs that integrate reading, writing, and presentation activities through the 3P concept at the junior high school level, especially in Islamic-based schools, is still rare. Most such literacy models are instead more commonly applied at higher education levels. Addressing this issue, the Gemerlang Program emerges as a strategic initiative to enhance students' reading interest and literacy skills in a comprehensive manner within the junior high school environment.

Based on the above explanation, the researcher is interested in discussing the Gemerlang Program as a strategy to increase students' reading interest and explaining how this program can be implemented in a school environment. This article aims to explain the Gemerlang Program as a strategy to increase students' interest in reading and describe the implementation of the program in increasing students' interest in reading through activities such as reading, summarizing, and presenting the contents of the books they have read (non-romance), which are organized under the concept of 3P-based literacy (must read, must write, and must present).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach. This approach aims to describe the Gemerlang Program and its impact on the reading interest of students at Taruna Islam Al-Kautsar Junior High School. There are 11 informants in this study, consisting of 1 principal and 10 eighth-grade students who were selected purposively, based on certain considerations in accordance with the needs of the study. The principal was selected because they are responsible for and implement the program, while the eighth-grade students were selected because they are active participants in the literacy test activities that are part of the Gemerlang Program. The sources of this research are teachers and students at SMP Taruna Islam Al-Kautsar.

Data collection techniques were carried out through direct observation during the literacy test, interviews with the principal, and documentation of program activities. The interviews and observations aimed to explore and analyze information on how the Gemerlang Program was implemented. The interview data were analyzed qualitatively using the following steps: Data Reduction, sorting and selecting data relevant to the research focus on the Gemerlang Program. Data Presentation, organizing data into descriptive narratives that illustrate the Gemerlang Program as a strategy to enhance students' reading interest. Drawing Conclusions and Verification, deriving meaning and conclusions based on the presented data. This approach enables an understanding of the Gemerlang Program as a strategy to enhance students' reading interest at SMP Taruna Islam Al-Kautsar.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Gemerlang Program was implemented due to the low reading interest among students in Indonesia, particularly at SMP Taruna Islam Al-Kautsar. This issue needs to be addressed as low reading interest hinders the learning process and overall development of students. The program involves students in various reading activities and book reviews designed to make reading more engaging and enjoyable. The book review activity trains students in analyzing, understanding, and presenting the contents of a book, while also improving their communication skills and use of presentation media.

Program Background

Based on interviews with the school principal, the implementation of the Gemerlang Program at SMP Taruna Islam Al-Kautsar was based on the low reading literacy achievement of students, as seen in the education report card with literacy indicators in the red category. The school principal explained:

> *"The Gemerlang Program was conceived when the educational report card results for SMP Taruna Islam Al-Kautsar showed that the literacy indicator was in the red zone, prompting the school to take action to improve students' reading skills." (Interview, School Principal)*

Yayasan Amanah Nur Aman

This situation reflects a common issue in many schools, where students are more interested in gadget-related activities than reading books. This aligns with research (Zulaikhah and Amiroh 2022) stating that students' reading interest is low because they spend more leisure time on gadgets than reading books. To address this issue, (Mustoip, Nurmaliki, and Ambiya 2024) emphasize the importance of developing literacy programs based on school needs, designed to align with students' actual conditions to promote literacy skill improvement. (Hati 2021) The Gemerlang Program is seen as an innovative solution because it not only focuses on increasing reading interest but also builds a structured literacy culture in the Taruna Islam Al-Kautsar Junior High School environment with an approach that differs from literacy programs in schools in general.

Program Implementation

In its implementation, the Gemerlang Program is systematically designed through a special schedule for literacy subjects taught by Indonesian language teachers. The principal explained that every student is required to read a non-romance genre book, summarize the content of the reading, and present the results at the end of the semester.

> *"Every child is required to have a non-romance genre book, read it, summarize it, and then present it. The summary results are collected and signed off on, and presented at the end of the semester." (Interview, School Principal)*

In addition, the school also implements the 3P learning model (must read, must write, must present) in the learning process.

> *"Beyond the Gemerlang program, we also require teachers to apply the 3P learning model so that students become accustomed to reading, writing, and presenting their work in various subjects." (Interview with the School Principal)*

This activity aligns with the active literacy concept based on 3P that was previously piloted (Fitriansyah 2024) at the elementary education level. The difference is that at SMP Taruna Islam Al-Kautsar, the Gemerlang Program is enriched with digital presentations using PowerPoint, enabling students to learn to communicate ideas both verbally and visually. Through this strategy, the activities conducted demonstrate the potential for effective success compared to passive literacy methods such as free reading without follow-up, as mentioned by (Ummah 2019)

Challenges in Implementing the Program

During the implementation of the program, the school faced challenges due to low student motivation to read, attributed to high interest in gadgets and social media. According to discussions between the school principal and Indonesian language teachers:

> *"Children nowadays prefer gadgets. They feel everything can be obtained through social media. But that slows down the brain if done too frequently." (Interview, School Principal)*

This is reinforced by the statement from (Chientya Annisa Rahman Putrie 2023), who explains that the habit of reading books is being displaced by the culture of fast and instant digital information consumption. (Ni Luh Wiratami, Ni Kadek Candra Widiastuti 2012) also adds that excessive exposure to social media can reduce students' ability to concentrate on reading long texts. To address this, schools select readings relevant to students' daily lives, such as motivational books, biographies, inspirational stories, and non-romantic novels. This selection strategy is crucial, as (Fitriansyah 2024) notes that reading materials aligned with students' interests and experiences can enhance the effectiveness of literacy programs.

Program Outcomes and Reflections

The implementation of the Gemerlang Program demonstrated a significant improvement in students' reading culture and literacy skills. The school principal stated:

> *"The children have become accustomed to reading, writing summaries, and presenting with more confidence. There has also been an improvement in literacy aspects of the AKM results." (Interview, School Principal)*

Teachers also observed that students' critical thinking skills improved alongside their ability to express ideas orally (presentations). This finding aligns with research results (Rohim, Rahmawati,

and Kudus 2020) stating that integrated literacy activities can enhance reading, writing, and public speaking competencies. Furthermore, reading habits began to form among eighth-grade students, with some students starting to read books independently without being asked. This supports the concept of literacy habit formation (Mustoip, Nurmaliki, and Ambiya 2024), where reading habits can develop gradually through consistent and sustainable literacy programs. Seeing these positive results, the school plans to establish the Gemerlang Program as a permanent subject called literacy, taught by Indonesian language teachers, and to develop a variety of digital media-based literacy activities to make them more interesting and in line with the times.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the research conducted, it can be concluded that the Gemerlang Program at SMP Taruna Islam Al-Kautsar has a positive impact on increasing students' interest in reading and literacy skills. This program has proven to be a solution to the issue of low reading interest, which previously posed a barrier to the learning process at the school. Through activities such as reading non-romance genre books, summarizing the content of the readings, and presenting the results of the readings orally in front of classmates, students not only become accustomed to reading but also develop writing skills and gain confidence in speaking in public. Additionally, the integration of the 3P concept (definitely read, definitely write, definitely present) in this program demonstrates its potential for success and sharpens critical thinking skills, communication skills, and improves students' literacy evaluation results. Overall, the implementation of the Gemerlang Program can serve as an alternative model for other schools in efforts to build a structured and enjoyable literacy culture, while adapting to the characteristics of students in the digital age.

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