The Implementation of Independent Reading Literacy Activities in Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at describing the implementation of independent reading literacy activities at SMA N Bali Mandara and how it affects students' English literacy skills. This study followed case study design, and the primary data were obtained through interview, observation, and document analysis. The results of the study revealed that the implementation of independent reading literacy activities was applied in three stages: 1) the habituation stage; 2) the development stage; and 3) the learning stage. In the habituation stage, the school used silent reading to form reading habits. This positive habit maintained by providing students real-world literacy activities in the development stage to develop their reading interest through storybook writing and cooperative literacy program. In the last stage, the teachers implemented reading for enjoyment in the learning process through news reading and book review. The students' average score in storybook writing was 90.6, in cooperative literacy program was 90.36, in news reading program was 90.2, and in book review was 90.47. The findings of this study indicate that independent reading literacy activities are effective to enhance students' English literacy skills.

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1. Introduction

In exploring the literature, it is believed that the 21st century world is characterized by the emergence of globalization and digitization (Fandiño, 2013; Apriani, 2016; Prakoso, Yuliarti, & Anggreni, 2017). It is an era that would bring more significant changes than everything that had gone before. For this reason it comes along with new interests and demands of our learners and our society. As a result, in this globally interconnected world, the educational paradigm has begun to shift from a major emphasis on core subject knowledge to the 21st century learning (Suwono, 2016; Maryam, 2018). Students are mandated to develop their foundational skills to be readily engaged in the 21st century. Considering this, literacy can be seen as one of the essential skills that should be used by students comprehensively as a gateway to proficiently develop the other 21st century skills as it is the foundation of all processes of learning. (Hasanah, & Sholihah, 2017; Noortyani, 2018).

Traditionally, literacy is viewed as the ability to read and write in a language (Richards & Schmidt, 2010; Maryam, 2018; Erwinsah, Solin, & Adisaputera, 2019). So that literacy can be seen as a unitary process with two icomplementary aspects, reading and writing because as stated by Lawrence (2013), and Kisyani-Laksono et al, (2017), and Gustine (2018), both language skills are the basis for the development of literacy in various ways. For this reason, in the past people can be considered as literate when they are capable of reading and writing. As we go through the 21st century, the term literacy has been widely viewed as having various definitions. Some researchers have attempted to conceptualize, characterize, and redefine literacy (Kurbanoglu, 2004; Lawrence, 2013; Ahmadi, & Yulianto, 2017; Maryam, 2018). Sometimes it refers only to reading, sometimes to reading and writing and more rarely, to reading, writing, speaking and listening, it is a multidisciplinary context which experts have called as a set of basic literacy skills (Kisyani-Laksono & Retnaningdyah, 2017; Erwinsah, Solin, & Adisaputera, 2019). Basic literacy covers the complex of knowledge and skills of an individual which enables them to demonstrate the ability to use and understand the language in an analytical way (Maryam, 2018; Gustine, 2018; Syawaluddin, 2018). In the same vein, Kurbanoglu, (2004), Hobbs (2016) and Tavdgiridze (2016), argue that literacy is the ability to interpret varied form of information critically. In a nutshell, it is a process of acquiring meaning from an analytical understanding of information. At least it can be arguable that literacy is defined as the valuable skill regarded by the public to live in the 21st century. Hence, literacy is inseparable from the world of education because anyone who is not literate, will not fit with the fast-moving world development.

The question then arises considering the lack literacy skills of Indonesian learners. The academic results in Indonesia indicated that there is a high number of academic and personal failure. Numerous studies have consistently revealed that Indonesian students have low literacy skills. The latest PISA report in 2019 revealed that there was no significant improvement since joining the international program by consistently remaining at the bottom of the rankings. Based on the report, it was known that Indonesian students were ranked 74th out of 79th participating countries around the world in terms of reading skill (OECD, 2019). It can be inferred that Indonesian learners still lack literacy skills, especially in basic literacy skills. Thus, as a developing country, Indonesia needs to make a lot of improvements because Indonesian students underperform compared to their regional and global peers. Otherwise, they will be left behind from the competition of human resources.

Judging from the fact that literacy becomes the national problem in Indonesia, students' achievement will continue to be in poor condition and may result in bad civilization. Recognizing the need for improvements of students' literacy, the Central Government through the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 23 of 2015 has arranged a program called the School Literacy Movement (Suryawati, 2018). The main goal of this program is to form students' reading habits by using schools as the front line in the development of literacy culture which instructs students to read non-learning books for 15 minutes before the learning time begins (Suwono, 2016). Subsequently, every school is expected to implement and promote the program to all school cavities.

Considering government policy, many schools in Bali have implemented the school literacy program. However, in its implementation, many schools in Bali cannot implement the program accurately or even not executing the program at all due to lack of adequate literacy resources such as varied reading materials, literacy team that run the program, and teacher competence to design the appropriate literacy development program to stimulate students' interest as well as promote students' literacy skills. Moreover, the availability of the program that specifically designed to strengthen students' English literacy is very limited. That is very unfortunate considering that it becomes one of the main factors to create a literate nation to be more competitive globally. As a result, it is necessary to provide a model that can be utilized as an example to promote students' English literacy skills.

According to Padmadewi and Artini (2017), independent reading literacy is one of the four stages of literacy development model. It is the highest level of students' literacy development. Generally, the goal of the program is to help students in developing the ability to read and learn independently in which the teacher assistance is minimized to help students in taking responsibility for their learning and becoming more independent and autonomous both inside and outside the classroom (Padmadewi & Artini, 2017; Noortyani, 2018). In other words, it directs students to be analytical, critical, in understanding, communicating, and using various forms of information intelligently since they have to be independent and focus on specific aspects to develop their learning mastery. As a result, the literacy program that uses this literacy development model offers a complete mastery of basic literacy skills which relates to students' ability in language proficiency. Therefore, it is essential to implement the school literacy movement program by adding the enrichment of independent reading literacy activities to optimize students' literacy development in English because they are expected to master English as a foreign language to be readily engaged in the 21st century.

Realizing its importance to be literate in this fast-moving world development, the researcher conducted this study at SMA N Bali Mandara that has been proven successful in improving students' English literacy skills. The interesting thing is the school has conducted the literacy program since the school was established in 2011, long before the literacy movement was promoted in 2015, and the notion of literacy movement module was launched in 2016. Moreover, literacy in English has been introduced as the first step to have a global and multicultural understanding and high literacy skills. On Thursday, students are directed to read English literature in the school hall to broaden up their horizons and become more familiar with other cultures. Hence, it serves as a platform for enhancing their English literacy and a good activity to make students build a habit to love reading. Thus, most possibly, the implementation of independent reading literacy activities in this school can inspire the other schools in Indonesia, specifically in Bali on how education can accomplish levels far beyond the mandated public school curriculum. For that reason, this study intended to describe the implementation of independent reading literacy activities and how it affects students' English literacy skills at SMA N Bali Mandara.

2. Methods

This study was designed in the form of case study design. The rationale of using the case study design was to conduct an in-depth investigation of the implementation of independent reading literacy activities and its impact on students' literacy skills in English as it is. In other words, there will be no manipulation of the data and it will be in the form of reports and descriptions of words. Thus, this research design is very suitable to be applied to this study.

The setting of this research was at SMA N Bali Mandara. The school was chosen based on purposive sampling techniques. There are several reasons for selecting this school as the setting of the research. First, the school has introduced the literacy in English for students as the first step to have a global and multicultural understanding and high literacy skills since 2011 long before the literacy movement was promoted in 2015. Second, the school has a good reputation in Bali because it has won many International and National prizes even though it only chooses children from the poorest and most disadvantaged backgrounds from Bali. Third, the school has complete facilities in supporting the implementation of independent reading literacy activities to promote students' literacy skills in English. For those reasons, the researcher chose this school as the setting of the research.

The subjects of this study were two English teachers, and two classes from twelfth-grade students. These subjects of the study were chosen because they had the ability and strongly associated with the problem that was investigated. In this study, two English teachers were used as subjects. Both of them were chosen because there were only two English teachers in the school. Moreover, to find relevant information about the process of implementing independent reading literacy activities, these two English teachers were essential to be used as subjects since they were directly involved in the activities. Therefore, they could give a rich description of the preparation, the implementation, and the obstacles which might be faced properly. Meanwhile, the reason for choosing these two classes as subjects of the study was because according to the teachers, the students in these classes already had a good mastery of basic literacy skills, such as recognizing words, reading fluently, comprehending printed materials, and writing in English. Hence, the implementation of independent reading literacy activity in these classes can provide more varied data.

There were three techniques of data collection applied in this research. Those techniques were observation, interview, and document analysis. The observation conducted in this research aimed at observing the implementation of independent reading literacy activities. The observation was conducted regularly by the researcher to collect richer data as well as to experience the real situation in the field

where the data were collected. The interview was done to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon which could not be gained through observation. To be more specific, it was used to get the reason behind the use of certain data on the implementation of the independent reading literacy activities. Also, it was contributed to obtaining more complete data when interesting findings were found during observation. The document analysis conducted in this research aimed at obtaining additional information for the implementation process of each activity and its impacts on students' literacy skills in English. The primary document used in this study was the students' assessment results in each activity. This document was used to get a clear description of the students' basic literacy skills. It was then analyzed and described descriptively to get an understanding of the data before presented in the data display..

3. Result And Discussion

Based on the interview and the observation session, it was found that there were five independent reading literacy activities implemented in the school, namely silent reading, storybook writing, cooperative literacy program, news reading, and book review. The numerous independent reading literacy activity identified in this study indicated that the school is seriously concerned about enhancing the capacity of their students who come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds in Bali to become literate in English.

First, there was an activity called silent reading. It was a special program that equips students to be lifelong independent readers, as it facilitates students a specific time to accustom them to read a diverse range of English books on Thursday in the school hall by involving all school members for 45 minutes before the class starts. Students used 45 minutes to read, record, and retell meaningful things from the books that have been read during the program. This set of times is given for students to concentrate and process the information on what they are reading at their speed.

Figure 1. Students' activity in silent reading

As can be seen in Figure 1 above, students really enjoy their reading time. They read books based on their choices silently in the school hall with all school members. Additionally, they looks fully comprehend the contents of their reading because there is no specific requirement in this program to instruct students successfully read an entire book in a single day. Therefore, it does not matter how fast their reading speed is, but how good they infer the information of the books they read. As a result, students can develop their self-confidence in English as they mostly come from various educational backgrounds and circumstances which prevented them to experience inadequate exposure to the target language. Therefore, silent reading can engage students in literacy practices as they develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to interpret and use language confidently through reading independently. As they consistently read English literature every Thursday, students encountered new words, sentence structures, and other essential information. In this sense, it implies that silent reading is a program that prepares students to cultivate life-long reading habits. The power of repetition stimulates the formation of reading habits by students.

Second, there was storybook writing. The purpose of the storybook writing was to give a chance for students to express their imagination into a meaningful story with a good arrangement of words. Thus, it helps students to reach high levels of proficiency in writing in English. The teacher allowed students to get inspiration by reading books or searching on the internet. Reading as many as possible stories surely give students ideas of their structure and style. However, they were not allowed to do plagiarism by keeping reminding them to avoid it and put some effort to create their original works. When students got the ideas of their stories, they were directed by the teacher to create a draft. During the writing process, there were some revisions and suggestions from the teacher and also from their friends to make the story well-developed. This activity was done in the discussion session to measure students' progress. The students' final draft then was used as their storybook.
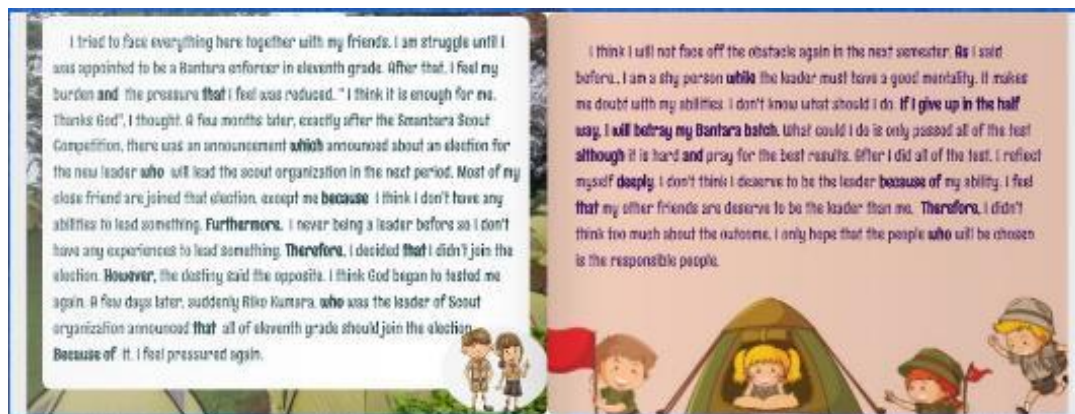

Figure 2. An example of student's storybook writing

Figure 2 shows one of the results made by the students in writing storybook. Apart from the grammatical mistakes made by the student, it is very noticeable that the student can direct themselves on what to write and what to put in illustrating the story to make it more interesting. Therefore, the student can make the reader pleased to find out what happens next at the end of the story. Based on the process of writing and the behavior shown by the students during the activity, it can be said that they were always on-tasked and concentrated. They just enjoyed their projects and seemed fully confident with their ability in writing.

Third, there was cooperative literacy program. As its name implies, the cooperative literacy program was an independent reading literacy activity that facilitated an awareness of diversity. This activity involved reading books, sharing ideas, and composing scripts on a topic of their own choice, as well as consulting the teacher. The students chose a story with their group members and work with each other to create scripts to be performed in the short movie. In other words, it allowed students to demonstrate how they envisioned a story and its characters or events. Once students finished their manuscripts, they were ready to begin the next step: the actual filming process.

Figure 3. How students perform in a short movie based on the story they read

From Figure 3, it can be seen that students look enthusiastic in doing their roles and not reluctant to act, as well as to speak in front of a camera. The teacher gave students chances to discuss among themselves to negotiate about their roles. For this reason, all students in a group can participate in all activities, such as in scouting a location, making property, recording, editing, based on the theme of the story they would present. Students decided and the teacher just helped if they had obstacles and could not solve them by themselves. It can be said this activity enables the teacher to gradually release the responsibility of learning to students as they learn many things independently with excellence such as identify the cast of the characters, creating the costumes used in the short movie and even on drafting the manuscript of their project as well as in editing.

Fourth, there was news reading. It was an activity that led students to work in a group to produce a news program. The program should be based on the news. For this reason, it required students to create the scripts, headlines, special reports, interviews, perhaps some footage from the story. Students needed to find something to write about – it ought to be newsworthy topics and worth reporting. It could be done by doing an interview for students who wanted to write a report on activities conducted in school that sparked the curiosity of the people. They could interview other students, teachers, or school principals, to get valid data. On the other hand, students also could search for interesting information on the internet related to the current issues that they wanted to report. There were no limitations to the topics they wanted to report. Students could freely choose the topics that they thought worth reporting. However, it had to be checked properly to make sure that it was accurate. Besides, all students were required to create their video where they had to play a role as newsreader alternately. It means although they worked in a group they also needed to make a script and deliver it in the program individually. The purpose of grouping was as a platform for students to share, discuss, and help each other in recording the videos, editing, and so on. However, the focus of the program is to enhance students' ability in writing, reading, speaking in English as it is a part of an independent reading literacy activity.

Figure 4. How students deliver news

Figure 4 shows how students deliver the news. They look and sound natural as if they are not reading. However, their accent is still associated with their first language. It can be said, reading the news might sound easy, but it is more complicated than it seems. For this reason, the teacher guided students to do self-reflection. The teacher invited students to watch the video in the classroom, then asked their honest opinions about their performance to overcome their weaknesses. In a nutshell, it can be stated this program facilitates students with important information to prepare them to face real situations in real life on how newsreaders develop as well as deliver their news reports.

Last but not least, there was book review. The program was designed to enhance students' literary appreciation by voicing their opinions of the English books. They were given the freedom to choose the book to be reviewed based on their interest in one semester. As a result, students could be skilled in processing what they read with critical eyes. In this program, students could review the strengths or the weaknesses of a book based on the cover of the book, the plot, the setting, the character, and its characterization, or the moral values. It did not matter as long as they were encouraged to vocalize their minds. The liberty to express their thought gave courageous for them to critically reviewing books. In reviewing the book, students needed to create the first and the second drafts before doing the finalization of their book review. It was based on the assumption that to achieve a deep analysis of the book, students

needed to go through some revision in polishing their work to be better and more critical. In the first draft, students started to write down their review on the book by giving their perception of what they had read. As it was still an initial process of students reviewing the book, they did not have to worry about the spelling or the arrangement of the words. The only thing that they needed to do was express their honest opinion of the book. It could be in the form of positive criticism or compliments. This first drafts were then peer-checked. In peer review, students had to check the flow of their peer's work whether it was logical or not. Students were also allowed to discuss and ask the teacher to comment on their review. Through this activity, students could reflect on themselves to create a better review based on their peer comments or teacher feedback. Furthermore, students made the second drafts, and they were peer-checked one more time but with different peers to get other perspectives. After the second draft was considered good enough by their peers, students created the final drafts of their book review.
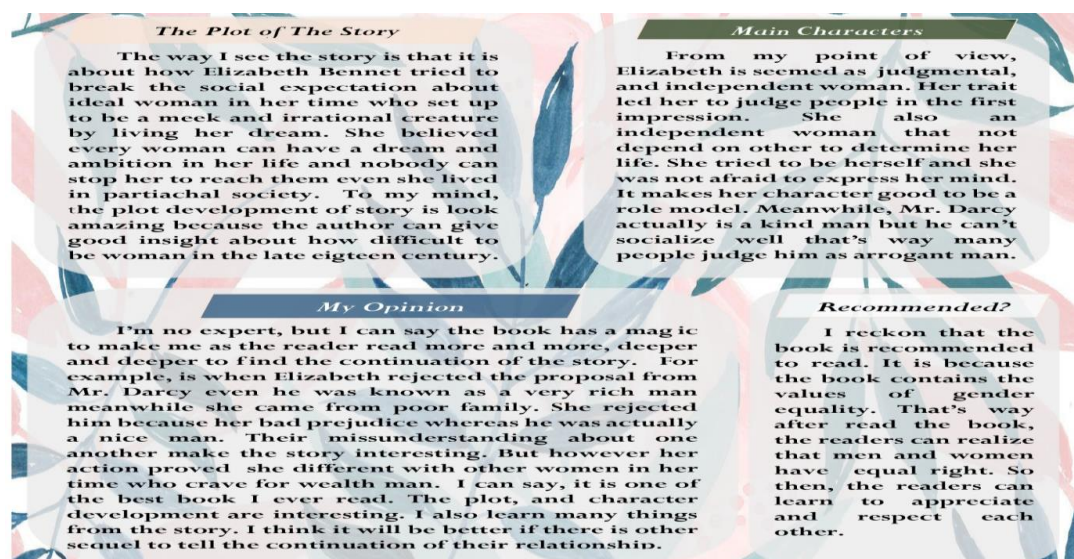

Figure 5. Example of book review made by the student

Figure 5 shows how the student gives personal views of the story. The student gives a brief description of the plot of the story, characters and evaluates the value of it. The student also recommends the book for the other readers as it is can offer a better understanding of gender equality. From this perspective, it can be stated that the student has good critical thinking. The student expects that by reading the book, the society can appreciate the differences of gender by influencing the society to leave the stigma of the patriarchal standards where men are superior and women are inferior creatures. Certainly, the student does not instantly have such broad insights. The habituation stage which directs each student to read books every day has a very big role to broaden their horizons. As a result, each student is benefited from the activity.

All activities stated previously are in accordance with the criteria of the independent reading literacy program proposed by Cullinan (2000), and Padmadewi and Artini (2017), who argue that students become independent and autonomous readers in literacy program since they are given a set of freedom to choose their reading interest to connect them with books that they are loved and thus, delighted to find new information that will impact to the improvement of their skills. Moreover, the samples provided beforehand indicate that the students' literacy skills in English grew properly and they enjoyed the process of learning in the classroom because it was incorporated into the habituation stage, development stage and learning stage to optimize students' literacy development sustainably.

Silent reading was an independent reading literacy activity designed for the habituation stage as part of the school literacy movement since the purpose of this activity was to cultivate a culture of reading habits for students without burdening them with a graded assignment attached to it. This is in line with Abidin (2015), who states that silent reading can be the key to the establishment of a reading habit, as it facilitates students a specific time to be familiar with their reading, and the activity: self-selection, and role modelling that can lead students to become independent readers as well as to assist them in developing confidence in reading. For this reason, the existence of silent reading can be seen as a foundation to cultivate a lifetime reading habit for students.

After students were habituated in the literacy situation then this positive habit should be maintained and kept by providing them interesting activities. For this reason, in the development stage, the school implemented storybook writing and cooperative literacy program to maintain students' interest in reading. In storybook writing, students were allowed to read and then develop their stories into a storybook. Meanwhile, in cooperative literacy program, students were given a chance to choose a storybook with their classmates and it will be modified by rewriting the story. Students then worked collaboratively to perform it in a short movie. As a result, these activities can stimulate students' interest and creativity. This statement is also supported by Purcell-Gates, et. al (2012). They argue that the activities that allow students to do more exploration are a good way to express student's creativity both orally and physically. Besides, real-world literacy can be introduced by providing students with real-world activities. Hence, students can be more engaged in this habit.

Furthermore, after students developed their habits in literacy development, then, learning should be related to itself. In this stage, the teacher implemented news reading program and book review in the teaching and learning processes to develop students' critical and analytical skills in reading self-selection books. Both skills are strengthened to support learning and literacy development. In news reading, students learned how to process accurate and factual information from their reading to be delivered in the program. On the other hand, students were trained how to develop their critical thinking in reviewing books. Therefore, these activities could help students to correlate what they read and see with the reality of the world they are living in because the main purpose of literacy education is to raise critical awareness of the students. This idea is also supported by Mahecha (2018), who reveals that teachers should provide a learning environment that can prompt students to think critically in reading by helping them to connect the words with the knowledge of the world.

In short, it can be said that the implementation of independent reading literacy activities was integrated in harmony in the school by maintaining the sustainability of the program with various activities to embody literate ecosystems. As a result, students' intelligence and achievement significantly proceeded to develop. The following is the students' average score in each independent reading literacy activity.

Table 1. The Average Students Score of Each Literacy Activity

Literacy Activity	Average Score
Silent Reading	-
Storybook Writing	90.6
Cooperative Literacy Program	90.36
News Reading	90.2
Book Review	90.47

As shown in Table 1, there is no students' average score for the silent reading program because the goal of this program is purely to foster lifelong reading habits for students. Hence, there is no formal assessment or a graded assignment attached to it. However, it can be seen that the students' learning outcomes or the quality of their literacy skills in the other independent reading literacy activities are categorized as very good. In the storybook writing, the average score of the students is 90.6. Furthermore, students' ability to work in a group that is known as an essential part of literacy also indicates as good. It is proven based on the average students' score in the cooperative literacy program is 90.36. The result of the students' average score in the news reading program also shows the similarity. The students' average score in the program is 90.2. Last but not least, the average of students' scores in the book review is 90.47.

The above scores indicate that students have a good mastery level in each activity because they have an outstanding score above the criteria of minimum mastery level set by the school. Thus, it can be inferred that each activity offers learning environments that promote literacy development for students. The results of this study show a similarity with the previous studies investigating the effectiveness of independent reading literacy and it is found to be beneficial for students' skills in some aspects. For instance, it is affirmed beneficial to vocabulary growth, improvement of reading comprehension, verbal fluency, academic success, as well as understanding greater content knowledge than those who do not (Whitten, Labby, Sullivan, 2016; Miller, 2018; Noortyani, 2018). At this point, it can be stated that an independent reading literacy activity is already proven in the world of education. Those positive impact derived from independent reading literacy activities helps students to improve their knowledge and eventually influence their academic achievement in English. Through rich independent reading literacy activities, students can discover the links among reading, writing, thinking, and knowing. They learn how to engage with new ideas as they read, write, and talk about a broad range of themes, topics, experiences,

and perspectives in a multicultural world. To briefly paraphrase, independent reading literacy activities are effective to develop students' English literacy skills as it becomes a medium of students in knowing, comprehending, and implementing the knowledge they have in a real-world literacy activity

4. Conclussion

The results of the study reveal that the independent reading literacy activity is not only effective to promote students' English literacy skills, but at the same time also effective to improve students' academic achievement. It has been proven based on the students' average score in each activity. The presence of silent reading is effective in fostering the foundation of lifelong reading habits for students. As a result, it makes easier for the school to run the program in forming students' character as well as grow literacy habit in the school ecosystem. For that reason, the policymakers may adopt the sequence of the implementation of the independent reading literacy activities as a policy consideration by maintaining the sustainability of the activity starting from the habituation stage, development stage, and in the learning stage to boost students literacy skills in English, critical thinking and build their reading habits. Moreover, the availability of literacy programs to promote students' English literacy is still limited in Indonesian schools. For this reason, it can be used as a new insight that might be taken as a model in implementing the literacy program. Thus, teachers can implement meaningful and joyful activities to empower students' English literacy.

Additionally, there are still many aspects that can be investigated about independent reading literacy. For that reason, further researchers can investigate other aspects of the implementation of the independent reading literacy program and the result of this study may be used as early information to conduct further research. For instance, more empirical evidences need to be collected on the impacts of the independent reading literacy program at the secondary level. It is suggested to employ a longitudinal study to track a group of students who have been exposed to the independent reading literacy program for several years to get more comprehensive and reliable data on the impacts of the program for students' literacy development..

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