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Teachers' Understanding of Quality Reading Books in Brebes District Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

Literacy plays a crucial role in enhancing students' ability to comprehend information and develop critical thinking skills. Therefore, strengthening the literacy culture in schools requires the provision of quality reading materials that meet students' needs and are appropriately selected by teachers. This study aims to analyze the level of elementary school teachers' understanding of quality reading books in Brebes District and to examine differences based on gender and teaching experience. A descriptive quantitative approach was employed using a survey method involving 100 teachers selected through cluster sampling. Data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, including score calculation and percentage distribution for each indicator. The findings indicate that most teachers demonstrate a good level of understanding of quality reading books. Female teachers show slightly higher levels of understanding compared to male teachers, while teachers with shorter teaching experience tend to have slightly better understanding than those with longer experience. It is recommended that future research expand the study area and include additional variables related to literacy practices to provide a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' competencies in selecting quality reading materials.

1. Introduction

The development of the globalization era requires the education sector to prepare individuals who possess critical thinking skills, adaptability, and global competitiveness. Education plays a strategic role in shaping high-quality human resources through the strengthening of fundamental competencies, one of which is literacy. Literacy is not merely the ability to read and write, but also includes the capacity to understand information, communicate ideas, and apply knowledge effectively in daily life. Individuals with strong literacy skills tend to broaden their

knowledge, improve communication abilities, and make rational decisions (Annisa et al., 2023). Therefore, strengthening literacy culture must be initiated from an early age through formal education, particularly at the elementary school level, which serves as the foundation for lifelong reading and learning habits (Meyla & Widya, 2022). Efforts to strengthen literacy are also an important part of educational strategies to prepare future generations capable of facing global challenges (Anjarwati et al., 2022).

One of the fundamental aspects of literacy in education is reading literacy. Reading is the primary activity through which students acquire information and understand various learning concepts. Through reading, students can develop cognitive abilities, expand their knowledge, and enhance their comprehension of subject matter. However, reading literacy in Indonesia still faces significant challenges. Based on the results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2022, Indonesia's ranking in reading has improved compared to previous years, yet the average reading score has declined (Kemdikbud, 2023). The average reading score of Indonesian students was recorded at 359, lower than the 2018 score of 371 and still far below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 476 (Lubis, 2023). In addition, national indicators also show concerning trends. The Community Literacy Development Index (IPLM) in Central Java Province decreased from 74.36 in 2022 to 64.4 in 2023 (Dinas Kearsipan dan Perpustakaan Provinsi Jawa Tengah, 2025). These findings indicate that strengthening reading literacy remains a critical issue that requires systematic and sustainable educational efforts.

Previous studies published in the *Journal of Educational Sciences* also highlight similar concerns regarding literacy development in elementary education. For instance, studies on literacy learning approaches demonstrate that improving reading literacy requires appropriate instructional strategies and alignment with students' learning levels (Komalasari et al., 2025; Azhahra et al., 2025). In addition, the implementation of literacy programs such as structured reading activities has been shown to contribute significantly to students' reading skills and engagement (Nurani et al., 2026; Pujiningsih et al., 2026). These findings reinforce the urgency of strengthening literacy practices in primary education.

One important strategy to improve students' reading literacy is the provision of appropriate and high-quality reading materials. Reading materials that align with students' cognitive development, language proficiency, and interests can enhance reading motivation and facilitate better comprehension (Willya et al., 2023). In this regard, the concept of quality reading books becomes essential. Quality reading books are defined as books that meet specific standards in terms of content, language, presentation, and graphical aspects, ensuring their suitability for students' developmental levels (Riski et al., 2024). This is in line with Hidayatullah et al. (2022), who stated that the quality of reading materials is determined by language appropriateness, content relevance, and their contribution to students' cognitive and moral development. Furthermore, Yolanda et al. (2025) explain that good reading books should contain content that is relevant to students' experiences, use understandable language, and reflect cultural appropriateness. These perspectives

are also supported by national policies, such as Law Number 3 of 2017 and Government Regulation Number 75 of 2019, which regulate standards for book quality in educational contexts. Supporting this argument, research in the *Journal of Educational Sciences* also emphasizes that literacy success is strongly influenced by the quality of learning resources and instructional design used in classrooms (Sugiarsih et al., 2026; Adriani et al., 2025). These studies suggest that well-designed reading materials and appropriate pedagogical approaches are key factors in enhancing students' literacy outcomes.

Various previous studies have highlighted the contribution of quality reading books to literacy development. Research conducted by Pradana and Winangun (2025) and Jakobson et al. (2022) shows that reading materials that are developmentally appropriate, use simple language, and have attractive visual designs can significantly improve students' reading interest and comprehension. In addition, Lestari et al. (2024) found that the use of quality reading books, when supported by effective library management, can enhance overall literacy outcomes. Other studies have explored literacy from different perspectives. For example, Meyla and Widya (2022) reported that the implementation of literacy culture in schools contributes positively to students' academic achievement and critical thinking skills. Similarly, Willya et al. (2023) demonstrated that engaging reading media, such as digital comics, can increase elementary school students' reading interest. Policy-based research also indicates that the availability of reading materials in schools is often not aligned with students' needs and reading ability levels (Pratiwi et al., 2023).

Although previous studies have provided valuable insights, most of them focus on literacy program implementation, the development of reading materials, or the impact of such materials on students' literacy skills. Limited attention has been given to teachers' understanding of how to select quality reading books, which is a crucial factor in ensuring the effectiveness of literacy practices. Teachers play a significant role as facilitators and decision-makers in determining learning resources used in classrooms (Rohmah et al., 2023). Therefore, their understanding of the criteria for quality reading books is essential in supporting successful literacy programs. This gap is also reflected in recent studies in the *Journal of Educational Sciences*, which tend to emphasize instructional strategies and program effectiveness rather than teachers' conceptual understanding in selecting reading materials (Fadhilah & Kasriman, 2026).

In practice, the implementation of quality reading book selection in elementary schools, particularly in Brebes District, has not yet been fully optimized. Preliminary observations conducted in several schools, including SD Negeri Padasugih 03, SD Negeri Brebes 01, and SD Negeri Brebes 08, indicate that literacy activities such as the 15-minute reading habit before lessons have been implemented. However, the selection of reading materials is often not based on established quality criteria. Teachers tend to choose books based on general grade levels without considering students' developmental stages or language suitability. Similar findings were reported by Pratiwi et al. (2023), indicating that reading collections in schools are often not aligned with students' needs and reading comfort. Interviews with teachers also reveal that although they are aware of the

importance of quality reading books, their understanding of how to select appropriate materials remains limited. In addition, the lack of structured socialization and clear technical guidelines contributes to this issue. This condition suggests that improving teachers' understanding of quality reading book selection is necessary to ensure that literacy activities are not only routine but also effective.

Based on the above discussion, it is evident that teachers' understanding of quality reading books remains an important yet underexplored area. Therefore, this study aims to examine the level of elementary school teachers' understanding of quality reading books in Brebes District and to analyze differences in understanding based on gender and teaching experience. The findings of this study are expected to provide an empirical basis for improving teacher competencies and strengthening literacy practices in elementary schools.

2. Methodology

This study uses a descriptive quantitative approach. Descriptive research aims to collect data to test research questions or hypotheses related to ongoing conditions and events (Sukardi, 2022). The type of research used in this study is a survey, which aims to describe the level of teachers' understanding of the selection of quality reading books in elementary schools. The quantitative approach was chosen because this study involves measuring data in the form of numbers that are analyzed using statistical techniques to obtain an objective picture of the phenomenon being studied.

The population in this study is all elementary school teachers in Brebes District, totaling 813 people. The determination of the number of samples was carried out using the Slovin formula with an error rate of 10%, resulting in 89 respondents. To increase data representation and simplify the statistical analysis process, the sample size was rounded to 100 respondents. The sampling technique uses probability sampling with the cluster sampling method, where elementary schools are used as cluster units. Out of a total of 89 elementary schools in Brebes District, 17 schools were randomly selected as research locations until the required number of respondents was met.

Instrument

The research instrument used in this study was a questionnaire in the form of a closed questionnaire designed to measure the level of teachers' understanding of the selection of quality reading books. The instrument was developed based on comprehension indicators, including the ability to translate, interpret, and extrapolate. In addition, the aspects measured include the characteristics of quality reading books. Each statement item in the questionnaire was measured using a five-level Likert scale. Before being used in the study, the instrument was tested for validity and reliability using data from a trial involving 30 elementary school teacher respondents. An item is declared valid if the calculated r-value is greater than the r-table value at a significance level of 5%. Furthermore, reliability was

tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to ensure internal consistency. The instrument is considered reliable if the Cronbach's Alpha value is ≥ 0.60 (Sujarweni, 2024).

Data Collection

Data collection in this study was carried out by distributing questionnaires directly to elementary school teachers who served as research respondents in Brebes District. The completed questionnaires were then collected by the researcher and checked for completeness before proceeding to the data analysis stage.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, which are used to describe data as they are without the intention of making generalizable conclusions (Sugiyono, 2023), in order to describe the level of teachers' understanding of the selection of quality reading books. Data analysis was conducted by scoring each respondent's answers based on the Likert scale, followed by calculating the total score and percentage for each comprehension indicator. The results were then classified into several categories of comprehension levels to provide an overview of teachers' overall understanding. The obtained data were processed by calculating the total score of each respondent and converting it into percentages to facilitate interpretation. Based on the calculation results, five categories of understanding levels were obtained: very understanding, understanding, sufficient, not understanding, and very not understanding. The categories of the level of understanding are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Category Level of Understanding

Interval	Level of Comprehension	Category
211-250	84,4%-100%	Very Understanding
171-210	68,4%-84%	Understand
131-170	52,4%-68%	Enough
91-130	36,4%-52%	Don't Understand
50-90	20%-36%	Very Ununderstanding

This study also analyzed respondent characteristics, namely gender and teaching period, to obtain a more comprehensive picture of teachers' understanding in selecting quality reading books in elementary schools in Brebes District.

3. Results and Discussion

The data were obtained from the distribution of questionnaires to elementary school teachers in Brebes District. The questionnaire was distributed online through

Google Form to 100 elementary school teachers who acted as research respondents. The research instrument used consists of 50 statements that are prepared to describe teachers' level of understanding of quality reading books. Each statement was measured using a Likert scale with a score range of 1–5. The total score obtained from the respondents' answers was then analyzed to determine the level of teachers' understanding of quality reading books. Table 2 presents the percentage of the level of understanding of elementary school teachers in Brebes District towards quality reading books.

Table 2. Teacher's Level of Understanding of Quality Reading Books

Score Interval	Category	N	Percentage
211–250	Very Understanding	36	36%
171–210	Understand	64	64%
131–170	Enough	0	0%
91–130	Don't Understand	0	0%
50–90	Very Ununderstanding	0	0%
Quantity		100	100%

Based on Table 2, the level of understanding of elementary school teachers in Brebes District towards quality reading books shows a high trend. Most of the respondents were in the category of understanding, while some others were in the category of very understanding. There were no respondents who were in the category of sufficient, did not understand, or did not understand very much. These results show that in general, elementary school teachers in Brebes District have a good understanding of quality reading books. This understanding reflects the ability of teachers to recognize the characteristics of quality reading books and understand the importance of using reading books as a learning resource for elementary school students. However, the results in Table 2 are still general because they illustrate the overall level of understanding. Therefore, to provide a more detailed picture of the aspects of understanding that teachers have, the analysis is continued based on comprehension indicators which include translation, interpretation, and extrapolation. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Teacher's Level of Understanding of Quality Reading Books Based on Indicators

Indicator	Mean	Percentage	Category
Translation	71,33	83,91%	Understand
Interpretation	70,31	82,71%	Understand
Extrapolation	68,22	85,27%	Very Understanding

Based on Table 3, *the extrapolation* indicator shows the highest achievement, which indicates that teachers have excellent ability to develop understanding to the stage of drawing conclusions and relate information to a broader context. These findings show that teachers' understanding is not only at a basic level, but has reached a high level of thinking ability. Meanwhile, *the translation* and *interpretation* indicators also showed high achievements, although slightly below *extrapolation*, which indicates that teachers have been able to understand basic information and interpret the meaning of the concept of quality reading books well. The difference in achievement between these indicators gives an idea that the teacher's understanding process develops gradually, starting from understanding information to being able to process and generalize it. Thus, these results show that in general, teachers' understanding of quality reading books is in the good category, with variations in achievement in each indicator reflecting the characteristics of the diverse understanding process.

Teachers' good understanding of quality reading books has an important role in supporting literacy activities in schools. Teachers who understand the criteria for quality reading books tend to be more selective in choosing reading materials that are in accordance with the level of student development. This is in line with research (Tamala, 2024) which states that teachers have an important role in developing student literacy through various reading activities, the use of appropriate reading materials, and the creation of a learning environment that supports literacy activities in schools. Thus, reading books used in the learning process can help increase students' reading interest and literacy skills. This condition is in line with the data of the Brebes Regency Education Report Report in 2025 which shows that the literacy ability of students at the general elementary level is in the good category, which means that more than 70% of students have reached the minimum literacy competency (Kemendikdasmen, 2025). These findings show that most teachers have been quite well prepared to implement the use of quality reading books in learning activities. It also shows that literacy programs implemented in schools may have contributed to increasing teachers' understanding of the importance of choosing quality reading materials.

The analysis of the teacher's level of understanding of quality reading books was then reviewed based on the gender of the respondents. This grouping was carried out to find out whether there is a difference in the level of understanding between male and female teachers in understanding quality reading books. The results of the descriptive analysis by gender are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Teacher's Level of Understanding by Gender

Gender	Highest Score	Lowest Score	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Category
Male	250	184	210	209	16,6	Understand
Female	250	182	212	209	18,0	Very Understanding

Based on Table 4, the level of teachers' understanding of the selection of quality reading books shows a good tendency in both male and female teachers. Both groups of respondents showed a fairly good understanding of the characteristics of quality reading books and the importance of using quality reading books in supporting the learning process in elementary schools. Based on the results of the analysis of questionnaire data regarding teachers' understanding of quality reading books, it was found that male teachers had an understanding score of 84% which was included in the comprehension category. Meanwhile, female teachers obtained a score of 84.8% which is included in the category of very knowledgeable. These results show that female teachers' understanding of high-quality reading books is slightly higher than that of male teachers. The difference of 0.8% shows that the difference in the level of understanding is relatively small, so descriptively the understanding of the two groups can be said to be even.

The small differences found can be understood as variations in data between respondents. However, several studies in the literature provide an idea that aspects of verbal ability have the potential to be related to the level of comprehension. Research shows that female teachers tend to have better verbal skills, such as vocabulary mastery, sentence comprehension, and reading and writing skills. In addition, female also have advantages in verbal fluency and verbal memory which contribute to the ability to understand and remember information in language (Hirnstein et al., 2023). This condition is related to the tendency of female to have stronger literacy and language skills as well as a more positive perspective on reading activities. Research shows that female teachers have a higher intrinsic motivation in reading so that they contribute more to the development of reading literacy skills (Syamsuri & Bancong, 2022). This superiority in this aspect of language is supported by psycholinguistic findings that show that female tend to be better at understanding language structure and meaning in texts (Setiawati et al., 2024). These findings show a trend that is in line with the results of this study, although the verbal ability variable was not directly analyzed.

In addition to language factors, reading habits can also affect comprehension levels. Research shows that female tend to have higher levels of reading engagement, which can improve the ability to understand texts, enrich vocabulary, and strengthen the ability to think critically about the content of reading (Peggy et al., 2023). In the context of this study, the ability to read and understand statements in questionnaires is related to understanding the characteristics of quality reading books. In addition, psychological factors such as emotional intelligence can also play a role, because women tend to have higher levels of emotional intelligence so that they are better able to understand the meaning of information and the context of communication (I. A. Sari, 2025). Other findings also show that there are differences in comprehension skills by gender, where women tend to show better achievement in understanding texts because they are more effective in using elaboration and information processing strategies when reading (Alhalawachy, 2022). However, because these factors were not measured in this study and the percentage difference obtained was relatively small, the discussion remained focused on empirical findings that the level of teachers' understanding in both

groups was in the good category. Thus, literature is used as a support to provide context to emerging trends.

In addition to gender, teachers' level of understanding of quality reading books is also analyzed based on teaching period. This grouping aims to see the difference in understanding between teachers who have had longer teaching experience and teachers who are relatively new to teaching. The results of the descriptive analysis based on the teaching period are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Teacher's Level of Understanding Based on Teaching Period

Teaching time	Highest Score	Lowest Score	Red	Median	Standard Deviation	Category
> 5 Years	250	182	210	208	16,6	Understand
≤ 5 Years	250	182	215	210	19,1	Very Understanding

Based on Table 5, the level of teachers' understanding of the selection of quality reading books shows a good tendency in each group of teaching periods. Teachers with longer teaching periods and relatively new teachers show an adequate understanding of the characteristics of quality reading books that are suitable for elementary school students. These findings show that teachers' understanding of the selection of quality reading books is not only related to the length of the teaching period. Teachers who have a shorter teaching period also show a good understanding of the criteria for quality reading books. Based on the results of the analysis of questionnaire data regarding teachers' understanding of quality reading books, it was found that teachers with a teaching period of more than 5 years had an understanding level of 84% which was included in the category of understanding. Meanwhile, teachers with a teaching period of less than or equal to 5 years obtained a score of 86% which was included in the category of very knowledgeable.

These findings show that the teaching period is not always directly proportional to the level of understanding of an educational concept. In this study, teachers who are relatively new to teaching actually show a better understanding of the concept of quality reading books. This can be influenced by the up-to-date knowledge gained during pre-service education and professional training. Research shows that the Teacher Professional Education program makes a significant contribution to improving pedagogic competence and understanding of current learning practices (Mustaqim, 2023). In addition, research also shows that novice teachers often have more up-to-date knowledge because they are still close to the teacher education and training process, so the learning experience and reflection gained can influence the way teachers understand learning practices and make pedagogical decisions (Li, 2025).

Teachers who are newer to teaching also tend to have more intense exposure to the latest educational policy developments and approaches. Teachers need to keep

updating their pedagogic knowledge in order to be able to apply learning approaches that are relevant to the demands of today's education (D. N. Sari et al., 2025). Other research also shows that the readiness of novice teachers in carrying out learning is influenced by the learning experiences gained during teacher education programs and the teaching practices they undergo (Kiramba et al., 2022). Therefore, the latest knowledge and the intensity of exposure to the development of learning policies and innovations can be one of the factors that support the high understanding of teachers with a teaching period of ≤ 5 years on the concept of quality reading books.

4. Conclusion

The understanding of elementary school teachers in Brebes District of quality reading books is generally in the good category. This condition shows that most teachers have an adequate understanding of the characteristics of quality reading books, so that they have the readiness to choose and utilize reading materials that are in accordance with the needs and development of elementary school students. When viewed from the perspective of gender, female teachers show a tendency to have a slightly higher level of understanding than male teachers, but the difference is relatively small so there is no significant difference. Thus, the level of comprehension of both groups tended to be evenly distributed, while factors such as verbal ability, reading habits, and psychological aspects could be relevant theoretical contexts, although they were not directly analyzed in this study. Meanwhile, when viewed from the teaching period, teachers with a relatively shorter teaching period show a tendency to have a higher level of understanding than teachers with a longer teaching period. This is related to the up-to-date knowledge gained during pre-service education and professional development programs as well as exposure to the latest educational policy developments and learning approaches. These findings show that teachers' understanding of quality reading books has an important role in supporting the selection of appropriate reading materials and strengthening literacy culture in elementary schools. Therefore, the education office and the school are expected to continue to support the improvement of teachers' understanding through literacy training and the provision of quality reading resources. In addition, further research is suggested to expand the scope of the research area and add other variables related to literacy practices in schools to obtain a more comprehensive picture.

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