



Fostering reading literacy in transnational education: Practices and challenges at Indonesian overseas schools in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the implementation of reading literacy practices at Indonesian Overseas Schools (SILN) in the Philippines to understand strategies, outcomes, and challenges in a transnational context. The study is grounded in behaviorist, constructivist, and 21st-century literacy theories to frame the adaptation of national literacy policies in multicultural settings. An exploratory qualitative approach was used, involving semi-structured interviews with four teachers and two students and analyzed through Miles and Huberman's model and NVivo thematic coding. Findings reveal that structured programs such as DEAR, reading journals, and creative literacy products effectively foster reading habits, despite challenges like limited Indonesian proficiency, resources, and home support. NVivo analysis identified key themes including daily reading routines, personalized teaching strategies, digital integration, and student engagement. Results suggest the need for inclusive, data-driven literacy policies, resource diversification, and teacher training tailored for transnational Indonesian education contexts. This study contributes novel insights into literacy policy adaptation in diaspora schools, emphasizing cultural diplomacy and contextualized literacy strategies abroad.



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INTRODUCTION

Reading literacy at elementary school is the primary basis for developing student competencies (Batini and Toti 2024; Xu, Xiong, and Kong 2024). Students' ability to comprehend texts in depth not only supports mastery of other subjects but also develops their critical, reflective, and communicative thinking skills (Din 2020; Guo, Jantharajit, and Thongpanit 2024). In the era of globalization, reading literacy has evolved into the ability to understand meaning, interpret information, and evaluate messages from various reading sources (Gjerazi 2024; Winarni, Hambali, and Purwandari 2020). Therefore, elementary education plays a crucial role in instilling strong literacy habits and skills, considering that this period is a golden period for children's cognitive and language development (Hafiz Abdul Sattar Awan 2023; Marleni, Mustoip, and Sulkhah 2024).

A study conducted by Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows that Indonesian students' reading literacy skills are still low (Ismawati et al. 2023; Katoningsih and

[Sunaryo 2020](#)). The Indonesian government has created various strategic initiatives, such as the School Literacy Movement to strengthen students' literacy competencies ([Kartikasari and Nuryasana 2022](#); [Nandiasoka Annisawati and Ika Oktora 2024](#)). Furthermore, teachers need to improve their capabilities through literacy training so that they can develop contextual teaching materials and supportive learning environments continuously ([Emilia, Sujatna, and Kurniasih 2022](#); [Kawuryan et al. 2021](#)).

Indonesian Overseas School (SILN) is educational institution organized by Indonesian government to fulfil the educational rights of Indonesian Citizen, especially children oversea ([Matin, Sugiarto, and Pujiastuti 2020](#); [Yulianto et al. 2023](#)). These schools not only provide formal education but also maintain Indonesia's national and cultural identity in the international environment ([Aulya Putri, Arasy, and Nelwati 2023](#); [Saefudin, Jumintono, and Rejokirono 2024](#)). In this context, reading literacy is one of the strategic aspects that must be maintained and developed, because through literacy, cultural values and nationalism can be instilled ([Fatmawati 2021](#); [Ruslan and Irham 2022](#)).

One of the most representative Indonesian Overseas Schools is Indonesian School in the Philippines, Southeast Asia. Geographically, Philippine is close to Indonesia but has distinct cultural and educational form. IOS in Philippine teach students the intercultural between Indonesian national identity and local environment ([Rahmawati et al. 2024](#); [Rengganis et al. 2023](#)). However, the practices of literacy practices face both challenges and opportunities in its implementation. Teachers are required to deliver literacy content that meet the Indonesian national curriculum but relevant to students' everyday life influenced by the local language and culture ([Hadianto et al. 2022](#); [Jingyi and Dios 2025](#)). Therefore, examining how literacy practices are implemented in IOS in Philippine can offer comprehensive insights into how well Indonesian literacy policies and strategies adapt within a global context ([Asmayawati, Yufiarti, and Yetti 2024](#); [Marmoah and Poerwanti, Suharno 2022](#)).

Although Indonesian Overseas Schools have long operated and contributed significantly to educational diplomacy, but few studies have explored the implementation of reading literacy practices within these settings ([Liansari, Taufiq, and Santoso 2021](#); [Librea et al. 2023](#)). Especially in Philippine, data and documentation on the literacy learning strategies implemented, the teaching methods used by teachers, and student engagement in literacy activities are still limited ([B. Gaviño and N. Chua 2022](#); [Marmoah and Poerwanti, Suharno 2022](#)). Therefore, there is a need to systematically examine how reading literacy is practiced in Indonesian educational contexts abroad ([Fitriadi, Sinaga, and Muhammad 2024](#); [Norman 2023](#)). Without adequate understanding, the development of literacy improvement policies and programs risks being misdirected or lacking its context.

Despite long presence of Indonesian Overseas Schools in Philippine, research on literacy reading remains largely focused on domestic contexts, both urban and rural ([Anwas et al. 2022](#); [Shaturaev 2021](#)). Prior studies have addressed reading interest, technological integration in literacy instruction ([Brata et al. 2022](#); [Prasetia and Adlan 2022](#)), and factors influencing school literacy movements ([Agung et al. 2020](#); [Jatmika et al. 2020](#)), as well as cultural literacy in elementary education ([Garzón-Díaz 2021](#)). However, these studies largely focused on domestic contexts otherwise address how literacy policies are implemented in transnational environments such as IOS. This study offers a novel perspective by examining reading literacy practices in Indonesian

School in the Philippines, a distinctive transnational educational setting. The findings contribute to both academic discourse and the development of more inclusive, context-sensitive national education policies, reinforcing Indonesia's educational adaptability and national identity in a globalized world.

METHOD

This study used exploratory qualitative approach to explore reading literacy practices in Indonesian Oversea Schools (IOSs) in Philippine through perspectives of teachers and students. According to Creswell & Poth (2016), A qualitative approach is used to explore how individuals or groups construct meaning from their direct experiences, enabling researchers to uncover new patterns and dynamics in emerging literacy practices abroad. Thus, this study shows a comprehensive overview of the background, characteristics, strategies, and challenges in implementing the reading literacy movement in OIS's environments. The researcher, as the primary instrument in qualitative research, determines the focus, selects informants, collects and analyzes data, interprets findings, and draws conclusions from empirical evidence.

The subjects were four elementary school teachers and two elementary school students from the Indonesian Oversea School located at KDPI General Santos, Barangay Quilantang, Mindanao, Southern Philippines. Teachers were selected through their teaching experience from four months to fourteen years. Meanwhile, Students were selected for their active participation in reading and daily literacy programs. The informants purposively selected for their relevance and insight into literacy practices to make a deep result of this study.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers and students at Indonesian Overseas School in the Philippines so that provide in-depth and flexible information, adapting questions to the context and responses of the informants. Face-to-face interviews were conducted to focus on the important aspects of reading literacy implementation, including school policy, teaching strategies, the roles of teachers and students, technology use, evaluation, and the impact of the literacy program. The interview guides for teachers and students were structured as the following table 1.

Table 1. Interview Guide for Teachers

Aspect	Indicators
Teacher Background	Teaching duration at IOS Educational background Literacy competence
Reading Literacy Program	Types of literacy programs Program duration Involved stakeholders
Strategies and Methods	Teaching methods Reading habit routines Use of media and technology
Evaluation and Impact	Evaluation forms Reading improvement indicators
Implementation Challenges	Implementation obstacles Coping strategies
Support and Policy	School support Provided training and facilities Program development suggestions

The interview guide for students was developed based on five key aspects that reflect the interrelation between reading habits, understanding of school programs, environmental support, behavioral changes, and student input for program development. The details of these aspects and their corresponding indicators are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Interview Guide for Students

Aspect	Indicators
Reading Habits	Initial interest in reading Favorite reading materials Preferred reading time and place
School Literacy Program	Student understanding of the literacy program Activities during reading sessions Perceptions of reading activities
Support and Environment	Role of teachers or peers in supporting reading Availability of reading materials at school
Changes and Impact	Changes in reading interest and behavior Ability to comprehend reading materials
Student Suggestions	Enjoyable aspects of reading activities Suggestions for improving the school literacy program

Data analysis in this study adopts the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Gusnardi and Muda 2019). In the data reduction stage, interview data were sorted, selected, and simplified based on research focus so that the information become more organized and meaningful. Then, the reduced data were displayed through thematic narratives to help identify patterns and relationships, incorporating both direct quotes from informants and the researcher's interpretations of the observed literacy practices. The final stage involved drawing preliminary conclusions, which were critically reviewed and refined through reflective analysis to ensure their validity and accountability. To enhance the systematic organization of codes and themes, NVivo software was employed during the analysis process. NVivo facilitated data categorization, coding consistency, and visual mapping of emerging themes.

RESULTS

Reading literacy is implemented in a structured and adaptive way at the Indonesian Overseas School in Philippines. The core activity is the Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) program, conducted every morning after morning school ceremony. This is supported by various complementary programs such as classroom reading corners, language competitions, reading journals, and literacy classes across grade levels.

“DEAR has been part of the school's daily routine since 2011/2012, by Mr. X's term as principal. It continues to this day, held every morning after the assembly. The students pick up their books and read independently for a few minutes. Our goal is to make reading a habit, not an obligation.



Figure 1. Implementation of the DEAR Learning Model

Literacy activities are also integrated into thematic lessons and extracurricular programs. Reading corners are provided in each classroom to ensure easier access to books, and students are encouraged to read texts aligned with their interests and reading levels. Additionally, some teachers incorporate storytelling and reading journals into Indonesian language instruction.

“We set up reading corners in each class, and students are free to choose the books they like. After reading, we ask them to write reading journals. On certain days, students read a story and retell it in their own style.”



Figure 2. Literacy Reading Corner

These programs stem from internal school initiatives and collaboration. Teachers play an active role in every stage of implementation, from planning to monitoring literacy activities. The collaboration extends beyond administrative tasks, encompassing pedagogical and cultural dimensions as well. IOS teachers used strategies based on routine reading habits, personalized

approaches, and technology integration to optimize their reading literacy. These strategies aim to create a literate learning environment, foster daily reading habits, and apply methods aligned with students' interests and abilities such as setting 15-minute reading time each day, either before lessons or during determined periods.

"We make a 15-minute daily reading activity that become a part of the classroom culture after the morning school ceremony between lessons. The important thing is that they have dedicated time to read independently."



Figure 3. 15-Minute Reading Activity Before Class

Teachers also provide age-based and interest-based reading materials, ranging from academic texts to picture books, educational comics, and light fiction. The goal is to make reading feel accessible and enjoyable.

"If the books are too difficult, they get bored quickly. So I choose the illustrated books with fun stories aligning with their age such fables or fairy tales. This makes them interested and helps them finish what they start reading."

Technology is also used to improve literacy including e-books, web-based applications like Wordwall and Kahoot, and social media to increase accessibility and engagement, especially given the digital habits of today's students.

"We can't avoid technology, so we use it instead. We encourage students to read e-books and play literacy quizzes on Kahoot. Sometimes, I ask them to find short articles online and read them together. They can keep reading through the media they enjoy."

Therefore, integrating routine, personal relevance, and digital tools is effective in fostering sustained interest, familiarity, and reading habits among students at SILN Philippines.

The literacy products created by IOS students at Philippines reflect a blend of daily reading practices, reflective habits, and creative expression guided by teachers. These outputs shows not only reading proficiency but also comprehension, summarization skills, critical thinking, and

imagination. The reading journal is the main product to document and reflect daily reading activities. Students record the titles, characters, and summaries of the books they read. Teachers use these journals to assess individual progress in literacy.

“We ask students to keep a reading journal. After reading, they write the title, main characters, and the story summary. Sometimes we add simple questions like their favorite part. This helps us know if they really read and understood the story.”



Figure 4. Books Used for Reading Journals

During special events like Language Month competitions, students produce more creative works such as short stories, literacy posters, and poetry recitations. These outputs demonstrate a shift from functional literacy to expressive and critical forms of literacy, with students encouraged to choose their preferred form of expression.

“For Language Month competitions, students are free to choose. Some write stories about their families, others create poems about friends, and some draw scenes from books they’ve read. We value all forms of work because they’re all part of literacy.”

Therefore, IOS students’ literacy products reflect their growth in both functional and expressive-reflective reading skills. Journals, stories, poems, and posters illustrate their ability to understand, process, and creatively express what they have read. Indonesian Oversea School Student responses to reading literacy program show their enthusiasm, selective interest, and persistent language challenges. In addition to regular activities such as DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) and reading journals, students expressed positive attitudes toward thematic literacy initiatives. Language Month isn't just a competition, but also a moment that offers a different literacy experience from the usual reading routine. They feel more motivated to read when they know they can share their reading in the form of work or performances.

“I like the Language Month because I get to read a story and then draw it. I also tell the story to my friends in class. When there’s an event like that, I want to read more so I can join the performance.”

These experiences illustrate how students engage with texts not only through reading but also by interpreting and expressing them creatively based on IOS objectives: to understand, process, and creatively communicate the meaning of texts.



Figure 5. Activities and Posters from IOS's Language Month

However, not all students responded the same way. Some admitted to still having difficulty understanding reading due to their limited Indonesian language skills. This is understandable, considering their daily environment uses a foreign or mixed language, and Indonesian literacy presents a unique challenge.

"I enjoy reading, but sometimes I don't understand the story especially when there are difficult words. I'm still learning Bahasa Indonesia, so I often have to ask the teacher what they mean. But if the text is easy, I can understand a little bit."

Nevertheless, several students showed positive progress after participating in literacy activities regularly. They reported improvements in reading comprehension and greater confidence in reading aloud or retelling stories.

"Now I enjoy reading more because of the reading journal. I used to be lazy, but now it feels like a habit. There are no books at home, so I prefer reading at school. I'm also better at sharing the story with my friends."

Therefore, reading literacy program at IOS Philippines has successfully improved student interest and motivation through varied and contextual approaches. Despite ongoing language challenges, students showed the improved reading skills and confidence in expressing text content. The program faces several significant challenges. First, low student reading interest and varying levels of Bahasa Indonesia proficiency among students from multilingual backgrounds that hinder comprehension and assessment accuracy. Teachers report that many students do not practice reading in Indonesian at home, which limits their ability to grasp texts meaningfully.

“Their reading interest is still low, and many prefer playing games over reading. Since their Indonesian is limited, they often read without truly understanding. This makes it difficult to assess their actual abilities.”

Second, limited access to age-appropriateness and fun reading materials show another challenges. Although reading corners and Indonesian-sourced books are provided, the collection lacks variety.

“There are books in class, but not many types. Students get bored with the same titles. We need more illustrated books, educational comics, or light adventure stories.”

Third, there was a lack of support at home is one of another challenge. Since many students live outside Indonesian-speaking environments, reading practices are often restricted to the school setting.

“There are no books at home, so I prefer reading at school. But when I go home, I can't read anymore because there's nothing to read.”

These issues are summarized in the table 3 below:

Table 3. Literacy Program Challenges

No.	Challenge	Description
1	Limited Reading Materials	Insufficient variety of age-appropriate, engaging texts affects motivation.
2	Limited Instructional Time	Literacy activities are constrained by the tight school schedule.
3	Varying Reading Proficiency	Wide disparities require differentiated teaching strategies.
4	Inadequate Technology Access	Digital access is uneven across students and classrooms.
5	Teacher Workload	Literacy program increases demands on teachers, affecting implementation.

In conclusion, the implementation of literacy programs at IOS Philippines requires more adaptive strategies, cross-sectoral support, and continuous innovation to ensure meaningful impact on students' literacy development. The results of the interview data analysis through NVivo showed ten main themes that reflect key dimensions in the implementation of reading literacy at Indonesian Oversea School Philippines. Thematic analysis identified key dimensions in the literacy program at IOS Philippines. Strategy and Methods become central theme, emphasizing daily reading habits, integration of digital tools (e.g., e-books, Kahoot), and varied instructional approaches aligned with student characteristics. Literacy Program Read outlined the types, duration, and active involvement of stakeholders such as teachers and principals. Under Support and Policies, institutional backing was evident through teacher training and reading corner facilities. The Literacy Program School theme showed students' understanding of the program's structure and objectives, including shared reading and journal writing. Evaluation and Impact captured teacher-led assessments and indicators of individual reading improvement.

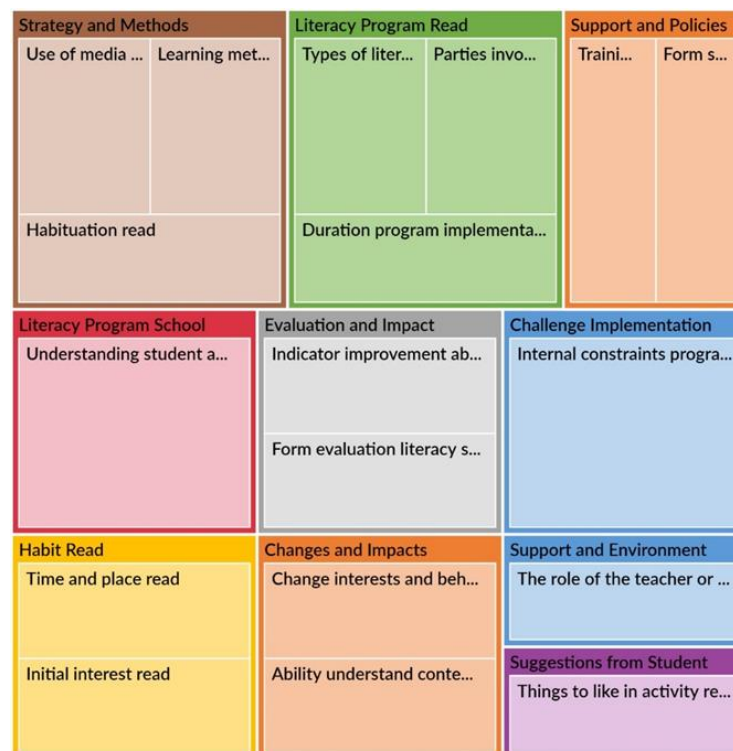


Figure 6. Visualization of Coded Literacy Themes from NVivo Analysis

Challenges in implementation included limited time, insufficient reading materials, and diverse student abilities. The Habit Read theme reflected students' regular reading routines and emerging interest. Changes and Impacts indicated positive behavioral shifts, increased reading motivation, and improved comprehension. Support and Environment highlighted the critical roles of teachers and peers in fostering a literacy-friendly atmosphere. Finally, Suggestions from Students offered valuable insights for future program development.

DISCUSSION

The implementation of reading literacy at IOS Philippines shows how Indonesia's national literacy policy can be contextually adapted within a transnational educational space. Literacy at IOS Philippines is not merely an academic instrument, but also a strategic tool for maintaining Indonesian cultural identity amidst the dominance of foreign cultures (Baratau 2024; Putri, Arasy, and Nelwati 2023). Therefore, IOS plays a dual role: as a formal educational institution and as an agent of cultural diplomacy (Lee 2015; Nazliati, Rita Sari, and Alfiatunnur 2024). One of the key practices in literacy implementation at IOS Philippines is the Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) program implemented since 2011/2012. This program has become part of the school culture and is held every morning after morning school ceremony. This habituation strategy aligns with the behaviourist approach to education, which emphasizes habit formation through repetition (Hinduja, 2021; Chen et al., 2020). Literacy success in elementary school-aged children is strongly influenced by reading routines established from an early age (Nash et al., 2021; Buckingham et al., 2023; Hendratno et al., 2025).

The integration of literacy into thematic learning and extracurricular activities such as reading corners, reading journals, and literacy competitions reflects the application of a contextual

and multimodal approach to literacy learning. This aligns with Tohara et al. (2021) findings, which state that literacy must be adapted to the sociocultural context of students to maximize its meaning and function. In IOS, this approach is crucial because students live in an environment that does not entirely use Indonesian. Literacy products such as reading journals provide concrete evidence of how literacy functions as a tool for reflection and strengthening understanding. Students are not only asked to read but also to rewrite the story content, name characters, and explain their favorite parts. This process strengthens students' critical thinking and metacognitive skills (Rivas et al., 2022; Nobutoshi et al., 2023). Furthermore, this reflective approach aligns with constructivist learning principles, where students actively construct meaning from the texts they read (Solichin 2021).

Teachers play a crucial role in ensuring the success of this literacy program. They serve not only as curriculum implementers but also as innovators and facilitators, designing reading activities based on students' interests and abilities. This approach is supported by Awan (2023) and Marleni et al. (2024), who state that teacher involvement in developing a literate learning environment is crucial to students' literacy success. The selection of reading materials, such as educational comics, fables, and picture stories, also reflects teachers' sensitivity to students' linguistic and psychological conditions. Technology is used to optimize strategy. Teachers use e-books, Wordwall apps, and Kahoot to connect literacy activities with students' digital worlds. This approach reinforces 21st century literacy theory, which demands the integration of conventional reading skills and digital literacy (Martínez-Bravo, Sádaba Chalezquer, and Serrano-Puche 2022; Mo-Björkelund 2020). This demonstrates the importance of utilizing technology as part of literacy innovations that can increase student engagement (Sabila and Hadi 2024).

In addition to individual products such as journals, IOS Filipino students also produced expressive works such as short stories, poems, and literacy posters during Language Month activities. These practices demonstrate achievements in the realms of expressive and performative literacy, which, according to Taridi et al. (2022), are important indicators of culture-based literacy education. These activities also bolstered students' confidence in speaking, writing, and performing in public using Indonesian. However, challenges such as students' limited Indonesian language skills, especially those who are more accustomed to using local or foreign languages in their daily lives. This aligns with the findings of Mirza et al. (2022) and Lynch et al. (2024), who revealed that IOS students tend to experience linguistic barriers, which impacts poor text comprehension. This challenge is exacerbated by the lack of literacy reinforcement at home. Widiyanto & Pusse (2025) state that most families abroad lack a reading culture or Indonesian-language reading materials.

The limited and less varied book collection in reading corners is one of the problems to maintain students' interest in reading. This contextual teaching material is crucial at the elementary level (Prastiwi, Sumantri, and Dallion 2025; Wijaya et al. 2022). Furthermore, policy support for IOS is still weak, particularly in terms of resources and teacher training that lead to lack of data-driven program development. Therefore, IOS Philippine can become a good practice example that is relevant to be developed in border areas, diaspora communities, and 3T (Frontier, Outermost, and Underdeveloped Areas) areas with similar socio-linguistic challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully investigated reading literacy practices at Indonesian Schools Abroad (SILN) in the Philippines by examining implementation strategies, literacy outcomes, student responses, and the challenges faced throughout the program. The findings demonstrate that the literacy program has been systematically implemented through contextually adapted strategies, with the Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) program supported by reading corners, journals, Language Month competitions, and literacy-integrated activities effectively fostering daily reading habits and enhancing students' basic and expressive literacy skills. Teachers were shown to play a central role by designing routines, selecting age-appropriate and interest-based reading materials, and integrating digital tools such as e-books, Wordwall, and Kahoot, all of which significantly increased student motivation and engagement. Student-created literacy artifacts further reflected meaningful progress in their ability to comprehend, analyze, summarize, and creatively express reading content. Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges were identified, including students' limited Indonesian language proficiency due to multilingual environments, inadequate availability of varied reading materials, insufficient home literacy support, limited instructional time, and high teacher workloads. While student feedback was largely positive particularly for thematic programs like Language Month these findings emphasize the need for strengthened data-driven literacy policies, diversified resources, and sustained teacher professional development. To build on these results, future research should involve additional SILNs in various countries to better understand the adaptation of Indonesia's national literacy policy in transnational education contexts, explore the role of diaspora communities in supporting reading development, and evaluate the effectiveness of digital tools and customized teaching materials in addressing linguistic challenges.

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