

Students' Literacy Skills and Quality of Textbooks in Indonesian Elementary Schools

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: to find out: 1) basic literacy skills (ability to read, write and count) elementary school early grades students; (2) quality of textbooks in aspects of content, presentation, language, and graphic design; and (3) The significance of the relationship between the quality of textbooks and students' basic literacy skills. Methodology: This research uses a quantitative approach with a survey method. It was conducted in eight provinces in Indonesia. The sampling technique used stratified random sampling, 805 teachers. Data collection used a questionnaire for elementary school teachers who teach in low grades. The data analysis used descriptive statistics and correlation analysis.

Main Findings: It was found that there are still relatively many early grades elementary school students who are not fluent in reading, writing, and arithmetic. These students' basic literacy skills have a significant and positive relationship with the quality of textbooks in the aspects of substance, presentation, language, and graphic design. **Applications of this study:** To improve basic literacy skills (reading, writing, and arithmetic) in early grades elementary school students, it is also necessary to improve the quality of textbooks in the aspects of substance/Content, presentation, language, and graphic design.

Novelty/Originality of this study: It was found that there is a significant and positive relationship between basic literacy skills (reading, writing, and arithmetic) of early grades elementary school students and the quality of the textbooks they used both in terms of substance/Content, presentation, language, and graphic design.

Keywords: Reading; writing; arithmetic; textbooks; basic literacy; elementary school students

Introduction

Basic literacy skills or the ability to read, write and count are fundamental skills that need to be mastered by every individual. This ability becomes the basic requirement in taking the next education. According to Stanovich, failure to read leads to failure in other areas (McLachlan & Arrow, 2017). Stanovich's research results showed that children who have a lot of vocabulary get a lot of reading. Meanwhile, children who have less vocabulary, read slowly and without pleasure, and have slower vocabulary development, found difficult because those problems impair their reading ability (McLachlan & Arrow, 2017).

Research on children with monolingual and bilingual learning has shown that vocabulary development supports children's later ability to decode text and understand the meaning of what they have read (Braze, Tabor, Shankweiler, & Mencl, 2007; Davison, Hammer, & Lawrence, 2011; Verhoeven & Van Leeuwe, 2008). Likewise, according to Liao's research (2017) results, the ability of Mandarin for grade III students shows that students' reading comprehension in grade III is predicted by their literacy skills in grade I. Therefore, students' basic literacy skills need to be instilled and mastered since they are at early grades elementary school level (class I, class II, and class III).

To improve basic literacy skills, it can be started with supporting quality books, especially children's books. Children's book is a medium to increase intelligence, open insights to develop new thoughts, and enrich imagination with its three strengths: the aspects of entertaining, educating, and providing information (Sihombing, 2014). Anderson and Mykol (2005) view that children's books play an important role in building children's world view of their immediate environment. This shows the importance of textbooks at the early grades elementary school level in building children's literacy and character. Building literacy skills requires a multidimensional construction covering a set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Therefore the textbooks used in schools need to be quality designed. This quality book is a book that is interesting and arouses students to enjoy reading. A quality book also has a book substance that is useful for students, especially in building their character.

The preparation of textbooks contains content/subject matter and is required to build various skills to achieve the competencies stipulated in the curriculum (Anwas, 2016). Textbooks needed are those that can contribute to the development of students' creativity, motivation, and activeness and improve the quality of students' independent learning. Books must be designed to be fun, interesting, and relevant for each student's level (Makarim, 2020).

Students at the early grades elementary school level are transitioning from the family world to the school world. Because of the characteristics of children this age, they still tend to like to play. Likewise, the language used is still a transition from using the mother tongue (regional language) to the national language (Indonesia). Research that specifically focuses on aspects of textbooks at the elementary school level, especially grades 1, 2, and 3, is still rarely conducted. Therefore, it needs to be studied through research on basic literacy skills (reading, writing, and arithmetic) of students at the Elementary School Level 1, 2, and 3; quality of textbooks in SD; as Very Good as any aspects in the textbook that are related to the improvement of basic literacy of these early grades elementary school students.

This study aims to determine: (1) basic literacy skills (reading, writing, and arithmetic skills) of low grade-elementary school students; (2) the quality of textbooks in elementary schools in terms of

content, presentation, language, and graphic design; and (3) The significance of the relationship between aspects of the quality of textbooks with elementary students' basic literacy skills.

Literature review

Literacy skills

Literacy is very important in the success of pursuing education and acquiring various other life skills. The purpose of literacy is not only being able to read, write and count but is directed so that students have a love for reading, writing, and arithmetic. Literacy learning which includes learning to read and write, basically requires students' ability to collect, process, and present information (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). Literacy is directed at building a fondness culture for reading and writing, which ultimately leads to skills and various creative innovations.

The Language and Book Development Agency of the Ministry of Education and Culture (2020) states that the basic literacy capacity of early readers or elementary school (SD) students in grades 1, 2, and 3 also needs to be improved with various activities that are evocative and fun. Among the six basic literacies, the most basic is literacy which refers to language skills, such as reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Apart from that, the ability to count, calculate, observe, draw, and various other basic skills are comprehensively implanted. Building basic literacy in children is very important. According to social cognitive theory (Bussy and Bandura, 1992), children develop their thinking concepts and attitudes about the world during their early years. Likewise for elementary school students. Early grades for children are a transition period from the family environment to the school environment.

Carroll's (2020) study found several important findings. First, compared to other children, those from poorer home backgrounds with less-educated parents received less parental support in their education. Second, the least educated parents of poor companions aged seven years or more tended to lack confidence in helping their children with math education. And third, the disproportionate number of poor participants suffered other losses. In a pandemic situation, it causes the condition to get worse.

In addition, referring to the literacy context of a study from Wong et al. (2020) shows the importance of listening to children of various ages and then using alternative methods to support children's different views. This study explores the perspectives and experiences of children of primary school age regarding Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA). Friedlander (2020) conducted a study in rural Rwanda regarding literacy with children's reading development. This study found that family learning, parental competence, and children's interest significantly predicted early grade reading achievement.

Churchill's research (2020) results show that digital storytelling patterns with cellular technology contribute to the development of students' digital literacy skills by enabling them to (a) access information anytime and anywhere, (b) test assumptions and reflect on their thinking, (c) represent and share their ideas and solutions to problems, and (d) receive feedback from colleagues and teachers. Meanwhile, Vorkapić & Katić's study in Croatia shows a positive impact on the development of early literacy skills and children's Very Good-being. Since different play activities do not carry the same initial literacy elements, this study has strong implications for modifying the educator study program in Croatia.

Textbooks of study

The development of textbooks is in accordance with the mandate of Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 3 of 2017 concerning the Bookkeeping System, mandating that the government is obliged to provide quality main textbooks or textbooks that are prepared based on the applicable curriculum. The applicable curriculum is competency-based. In the guidebook for compiling textbooks (Puskurbuk, 2020), it is emphasized that this book, including presenting content in theory and practice, developing 21st-century skills and the 4.0 industrial revolution, high-level thinking (HOTS), building character, instilling literacy, and adapting to development science and technology and the diversity of society. These indicators are manifested in various interesting learning activities in achieving curriculum goals.

Textbooks are compiled by the government from the early childhood levels, elementary schools, junior high schools, and senior high schools. The preparation of each level is based on the curriculum and the level of development of students. At PAUD, listening to stories and having conversations about stories can help children to learn new vocabulary, solve problems, develop new language and language

competencies, and improve their thinking. Storytelling, reading stories, and playing stories are experiences that support children's literacy development in the home environment, at school, and in childcare settings (Isbell et al. 2004 in Kerry-Moran and Aerila, 2019).

A study conducted by Korat et al. (2013) examined children's language progress at an early age using an ebook. This study measures language progress through phonological awareness, word meaning, story production, and understanding; literacy progress is measured by naming letters, reading words, and writing words. The results showed that reading ebooks supported all language and literacy skills, except for letter naming. Meanwhile, a study from Eutsler & Trotter (2020) found that reading digital books with adults can increase engagement and time spent reading, which can affect reading motivation. Without a doubt, technology will continue to influence reading practice, which makes it imperative for parents and teachers to make the right decisions to encourage children's motivation to read.

Research by Gugssa et al. (2020) pointed out that textbooks play a central role in preparing environmentally literate citizens. There needs to be a fundamental reform in Ethiopian school textbooks. The Ouedraogo et al. (2020) study examines how school-level and student-level factors influence primary school dropouts in Burkina Faso. The results showed that many children dropped out of school before acquiring basic skills in literacy and arithmetic.

Each child has different characteristics and maturity. Schools in Indonesia are grouped by grade level. The preparation of textbooks needs to pay attention to the book gap according to students' level of development (Pusbuk, 2019). Book-spacing models are generally based on the aspect of reading competence (Chall, 1995) which does not directly relate to educational levels. However, all of the ranking models still mention the age range that can be used as a general reference. The preparation of textbooks based on class levels can refer to the age range of these students.

Research method

This research uses a quantitative approach with a survey method. It was conducted in schools at the elementary school level in Indonesia. The sampling technique used stratified random sampling, 805 teachers. Through this sampling technique, eight provinces were obtained: North Sumatra, West Java, East Java, South Kalimantan, South Sulawesi, West Nusa Tenggara, Maluku, and West Papua as sampling. The province's distribution represents the diversity of provinces and schools in Indonesia. The number of samples was 833 respondents: elementary school teachers who taught in grade 1, grade II, and class III (Early grade) elementary schools.

Data collection was carried out through questionnaires that had previously been tested for validity and reliability. The variables studied were basic literacy skills and the quality variable of textbooks. These two variables are measured based on the perceptions of elementary school teachers who teach in low grades. This is based on the assumption that the teacher knows his students' literacy skills and knows the quality of the textbooks that students use on a daily basis in the learning process at school.

Basic literacy abilities of low-grade elementary school students are measured based on students' abilities in reading, writing, and arithmetic. The books studied were thematic textbooks for elementary school grades 1, 2, and 3, published by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The variables of textbook quality include aspects: substance/content, presentation, language, and graphic design. The Content aspects are measured through indicators: the Content supports the achievement of the learning objectives, the ease of understanding the Content by students, the Content encourages students to enjoy learning, and the comparison of text and pictures/illustrations. The presentation aspect is measured through indicators: presentation in the form of learning activities to make it easier for students to achieve learning goals, variations in learning activities, and flexibility in learning activities with school conditions. Aspects of language are measured through indicators: the systematics of Content delivery, the ease with which students can understand sentences, and the attractiveness of using storylines in books. Book graphic design aspects are measured through indicators: the ease with which students understand illustrations/pictures, the quality of the book layout, the size of the letters, and the quality of the book cover.

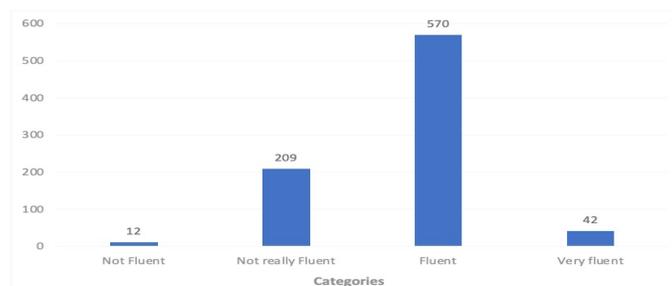
Data collection was carried out during the Covid 19 pandemic through the help of the google form application and the assistance of enumerators in each of these provinces. Prior to data collection, training

was conducted for the enumerators in data collection techniques in the field. Data collection was carried out from July s.d. August 2020. Data processing and analysis using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. To facilitate data processing and analysis, the researchers used the SPSS version 25 application.

Results

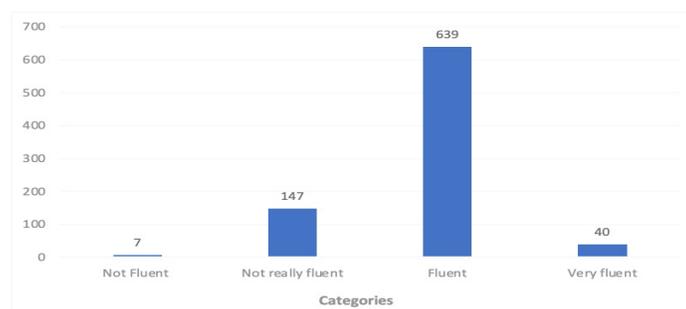
Students' basic literacy skills

The basic literacy skills of low-grade elementary school students are measured based on the teacher's perceptions. Table 1 shows the reading ability of low-grade elementary school students. It is known that most (68.4%) are fluent, and only 5% of students are very fluent in reading. On the other hand, 26.5% of students are still not and not fluent in reading. Observing students' mastery of reading skills is very important, so the process is still very high. All students should have mastered this reading ability, even though they are in low grades.



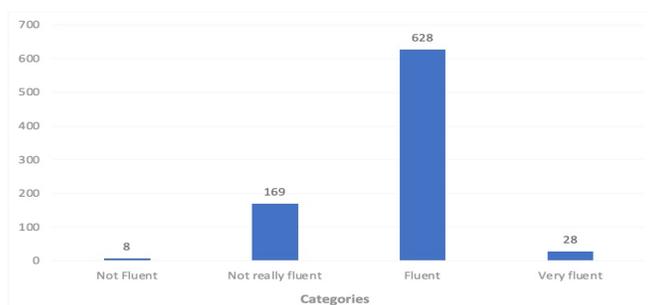
Graph 1: Low grade elementary school students' reading ability

Graph 2 shows the writing ability of low-grade elementary school students. It is known that more than half of it, or 76.7% of students, are already fluent in writing and only 4.8% of students are already very fluent in writing. However, there were still 0.8% of students who were not fluent at all or could not write, and 17.6% of students were not fluent in reading. Writing skills are also important for all students to master as capital in further education. The percentage who cannot write even though only 17.6% needs to find a solution immediately.



Graph 2: Low grade elementary school students' writing ability

Graph 3 shows the ability of low-grade elementary school students to count. Based on the table, most or 78.8% of students are considered to be fluent and very fluent in calculating. It is also known that there are still 21.2% of students who are not fluent and less fluent in counting. The ability to count is also a fundamental skill that all students need to master, so a solution needs to be found.



Graph 3: Low grade elementary school students' counting ability

Textbook quality

Content aspects

Aspects of textbook Content are measured on indicators: the Content supports the achievement of learning objectives, the ease of understanding the Content by students, the Content encourages students to enjoy learning and the comparison of text and pictures/illustrations. Table 4 shows that the quality of low-grade elementary school textbooks is known to be mostly (64.7%) in the sufficient Categories. Respondents who stated good were 19.1%, and only 7.7% said they were Very Good. This means that the quality of textbooks in this aspect of the Content still needs to be improved.

Table 1. Book quality on content aspects

No	Kategori	F	%
1	Very less	10	1,2
2	Less	62	7,3
3	Sufficient	536	64,7
4	Good	160	19,1
5	Very Good	65	7,7

Presentation aspects

Textbooks are directed at achieving competence. The dominant book Content is presented in the form of various learning activities that are appropriate and support the achievement of learning objectives. The presentation aspect is measured through indicators: learning activities to make it easier for students to achieve learning objectives, variations in learning activities, and flexibility in learning activities with school conditions.

Table 2. Book quality on the aspect of presentation

No	Categories	F	%
1	Very less	11	1,4
2	Less	97	11,7
3	Sufficient	591	70,9
4	Good	105	12,5
5	Very Good	29	3,5

It shows the quality of textbooks on the aspect of the presentation. It is known that most (70.9%) stated that it was sufficient; only 12.5% said it was good, and 3.5% said it was very good. This data shows that the quality of textbooks on the presentation aspect is generally in the sufficient Categories, so it still needs to be improved.

Aspects of language

The language aspect in the preparation of the book is very important. It is measured by indicators: the systematics (wrinkling) of the Content's delivery in the book, the sentences in the book are easy for students to understand, and the stories contained in the book are interesting.

Table 3. Quality of textbooks on the aspect of language

No	Categories	f	%
1	Very less	7	0,8
2	Less	67	8,1
3	Sufficient	604	72,5
4	Good	111	14,5
5	Very Good	34	4,1

Table 3 shows that, in general, the quality of textbooks on the language aspect is in the sufficient category. It can be seen that most or 72.5% said it was sufficient, and only 14.5% said it was good, and 4.1% said it was very good. Therefore, the language aspect of the book needs to be improved.

Graphic design aspects

The book's design and graphic aspects are measured through indicators: the ease with which students understand illustrations/pictures, the quality of the book layout, the size of the letters, and the quality of the book cover. Table 4 shows the quality of the book on the graphic design aspects. More than half (59.6%) of respondents said it was sufficient, 26.1% said it was good, and only 10.6% said it was very good. This means that textbooks from the graphic design aspect are in a sufficient category, so they still need to be improved.

Table 4. Book quality on the aspect of graphic design

No	Categories	f	%
1	Very less	7	0,9
2	Less	24	2,8
3	Sufficient	497	59,6
4	Good	217	26,1
5	Very Good	89	10,6

Relationship between students' basic literacy skills and quality of textbooks

Table 5. The Relationship between students' reading ability and quality of textbooks

Book indicator	r	Sig.
Content	.311**	.000
Presentation	.364**	.000
Language	.297**	.000
Graphic Design	.254**	.000

The correlation test results in Table 5 indicate a significant relationship between the reading ability of low-grade elementary school students and the quality of textbooks. In detail, it is explained that students' reading ability is significantly and positively related to aspects of the book Content, book presentation, the language used in the book, and book design and graphics. The significance values for these relationships are all 0,000, and the correlation is positive. These results prove that the better the quality of the books from these four aspects, the better the ability of low-grade elementary school students to read, and vice versa.

Table 6. The Relationship between students' writing ability and quality of textbooks

Book indicator	r	Sig.
Content	.323**	.000
Presentation	.334**	.000
Language	.204**	.000
Graphic Design	.235**	.000

Table 6 shows a positive and significant relationship with a significance value of 0.000 between elementary students' writing ability and textbooks' quality. It is explained that students' writing skills are significantly and positively related to aspects of the book Content, book presentation, the language used in the book, and book design and graphics. This means that the better the quality in all aspects of the book, the better the students' writing skills will be.

Table 7. The Relationship between students' counting ability and quality of textbooks

Book Indicator	r	Sig.
Content	.359**	.000
Presentation	.406**	.000
Language	.336**	.000
Graphic Design	.283**	.000

Table 7 shows a positive and significant relationship between the writing skills of elementary school students and the quality of textbooks in aspects of book Content, book presentation, the language used in the books, and book design and graphics. This means that if the quality of books in all these aspects increases, then the students' ability to count will also increase, and vice versa.

Table 8. Relationship between Students' Basic Literacy Skills and Quality of Textbooks

Book Indicator	R	Sig.
Content	.381**	.000
Presentation	.424**	.000
Language	.359**	.000
Graphic Design	.303**	.000

Table 8 describes, in general, the positive and significant relationship between elementary literacy skills (reading, writing, and arithmetic) of elementary school students and the quality of textbooks, both aspects of book Content, book presentation, language used in books, and book design and graphics. This means that the better the quality of the book in this aspect, the students' basic literacy skills will also increase, and vice versa.

Discussion

Reading skills and quality of textbooks

The study results in Table 1 indicate that low-grade elementary school students' reading ability is still found 26.5% who are still not fluent in reading. In Table 8, it is known that there is a significant and positive relationship between students' reading ability and the quality of low-grade elementary school textbooks both in the aspects of the Content, presentation, language, and graphic design.

Reading ability is related to the availability of books as interesting reading Content. The results of this study are in line with the results of Dewayani's research (2018), which states that to nurture reading interest, schools need to foster students' intrinsic motivation, among others, through providing and utilizing children's readings, making school environments rich in reading, providing reading collections in schools of quality and variety, holding programs to read aloud, inviting teachers and educators to love reading for children and adolescents, utilizing high-quality illustrated readings in discussions about reading, and inviting reading creators, such as writers, illustrators, editors, and designers to go to school talking about the creative process of reading creation. Our findings suggest that children are more likely to experience high verbal interactions while reading textbooks together. These results support the claim (Korat & Or, 2010) that parents and children are more likely to engage in the extended talk when they read printed books together.

The focus on reading skills can be transferred to writing instruction as student-writers become more careful in their writing decisions and more aware of their own ability to "answer, explain, or describe." Writing is a vehicle for students to demonstrate what they have learned about content and genres in reading,

and reading discussions provide opportunities for students to share their understanding of writing and authoring. 'crafts (Duke Et Al., 2011; Ippolito et.al., 2017).

Students need experiences that involve "high success reading" (Allington, 2002, p. 743); Regardless of their level of ability, reading texts that are not too challenging can improve children's reading abilities (Fountas & Pinnell, 2018). Obviously, as educators, we must emphasize to our prospective teachers the importance of providing daily opportunities for students to read and solve problems independently.

Clark and Poulton (2011) cited research by Lindsay (2010), which found that access to printed Content improves children's reading performance, encourages children to read more and for a longer period, and results in improved attitudes towards reading and learning among children.

Encouragement or interest in reading is related to the substance or Content needed by the reader. Clark and Phythian-Sence's (2008) study concluded that preferences and interests are closely linked and often mingled: children are more likely to choose books that they find interesting. But to influence reading behavior, children have to do more than simply choose a book and then choose to read that book, rather than any other activity available. Quality books are presented attractively and enjoyably. Encourage students to enjoy reading. Learning to read needs to consider the needs, potentials, and local communities' culture (Warsihna and Anwas, 2017). The results of research by McGeown et al. (2015) showed that children's attitudes towards reading, reading confidence, and pleasure in learning to read correlated with their word reading skills. However, only reading attitudes and reading beliefs predicted differences in reading success.

Concerning gender differences, girls' reading attitudes are more positive than boys, even after controlling for reading skills differences. Motivation and interest in reading are related to the use of communicative language and according to students' development level. Research Results about Encouragement to read related to the presentation of illustrations, images, and book design or layout. Study from Kotaman and Tekin (2017) in Turkey showed that children like books that have complete information. According to the teachers, this model book is more educational, increases curiosity, and triggers follow-up activities so that children gain greater benefits.

The results of research on book quality in all aspects: content aspect (Table 4), presentation aspect (Table 5), language aspect (Table 6), and graphic design aspect (Table 7) show sufficient categories. Considering the relationship between reading ability and all aspects of the book's quality, to improve students' reading ability, the quality of textbooks in low-grade elementary schools needs to be improved in all these aspects.

Writing skills and quality of textbooks

The research results in Table 2 show that low-grade elementary school students' writing ability is known to be 18.5% still not fluent in writing. The ability to write is crucial as an asset in following further education. Therefore, even though the percentage is below 18.5%, the number is still very large. According to Lerkkanen et al. (2004), writing productivity predicts subsequent reading performance during grade one primary school. The results of a full-year experimental study conducted by Jones and Reutzell (2015) showed that code-based writing instruction can complement the acquisition of important early reading skills.

In Table 9, it is known that students' writing ability has a significant and positive relationship with all aspects of the quality of the books tested: aspects of content, presentation, language, and graphic design. Why does students' writing ability have a significant positive relationship with the substance of book content?

Writing provides a vehicle for students to demonstrate what they have learned about content and genres. Writing about what they read is the first step for students, but not the last. Prospective teachers can be challenged to go further "writing about reading" in their literacy lessons and to make authentic connections between the reading and writing processes (Condie and Pomerantz, 2020). The book graphic design aspect has a positive and significant relationship with low-grade elementary school students' writing ability. Huang & Xiaoning Chen's (2016) research results showed the importance of book illustrations for students' understanding and insights about different cultures.

This result implies that to improve low-grade elementary school students' writing ability, the quality of books in the aspects of content, presentation, language, and graphic design also needs to be improved. The results of the research are in Table 4 s.d. Table 7 shows that the quality of textbooks is in the sufficient category. This means that to improve writing skills, it is necessary to improve the quality of textbooks in all these aspects. This is in accordance with the results of research by Hurd et al. (2006), which shows that improving reading standards and improving children's ability to utilize textual sources and learning and children's enjoyment of learning is needed books and other text media. The provision of quality books is very important in the success of the literacy strategy.

Ability to count and the quality of textbooks

The correlation test results in Table 8 indicate a positive and significant relationship between the reading ability of low-grade elementary school students and the quality of textbooks. This is consistent with the research results showing that initial alphabet knowledge and word identification are key early literacy skills that set the basis for later reading (Mancilla-Martinez & Lesaux, 2010; Schatschneider et al., 2004; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002). Table 3 shows the ability of low-grade elementary school students in counting. It is known that there are still 21.2% of students who are not fluent and not fluent in counting. In Table 4 s.d. Table 7 shows that the quality of textbooks is in the sufficient category. This data can be interpreted that there are students who have not been able to count. One of the reasons is that the quality of the books is not good. Therefore, to improve numeracy skills for low-grade elementary school students, the quality of textbooks needs to be improved in the aspects of substance, presentation, language, and graphic design. Some research shows the importance of textbook quality. Oates (2014) showed that high-quality textbooks support both teachers and students. Having high-quality textbooks frees teachers to concentrate on perfecting pedagogy and developing engaging and effective learning. In addition, textbooks and various other resources should be considered as an integral part of establishing, in educational settings, the policy intentions of the national curriculum.

Conclusion

The ability to read, write and count is essential for all low-grade elementary school students. However, it was still found that 26.5% of students were not fluent in reading, 18.5% were not fluent in writing, and 21.2% were not fluent in arithmetic. Therefore, basic literacy skills need to be improved as an important asset for students to follow the next education level. On the other hand, the quality of textbooks as mandatory books for use in low-grade elementary schools in the aspects of substance/material, presentation, language, and graphic design, all in the sufficient category.

There is a significant and positive relationship between basic literacy skills (reading, writing, and arithmetic) of low-grade elementary school students and the quality of books on substance/content, presentation, language, and graphic design. Therefore, to improve basic literacy skills in low-grade elementary school students, it is necessary to improve the quality of textbooks in all these aspects.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this work.

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