

The Effect of High-Quality Storybooks with Question-Based Activities on Elementary School Students' Reading Literacy Skills

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Abstract. The urgency of this study is to enhance elementary school students' reading literacy through high-quality storybooks combined with question-based activities. Reading literacy is one of the fundamental competencies that elementary school students need to develop. However, preliminary observations at SD Negeri 3 Lembuak indicated that fourth-grade students had relatively low reading literacy skills. One instructional strategy that can address this issue is the use of high-quality storybooks accompanied by guiding questions, which encourage students to actively engage with and comprehend reading texts. This study aimed to determine the effect of using high-quality storybooks with question-based activities on the reading literacy skills of fourth-grade students at SD Negeri 3 Lembuak. This research employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental method with a Pretest-Posttest Control Group Design. The participants consisted of an experimental class that received instruction using high-quality storybooks with guiding questions and a control class that received conventional instruction. Data were collected through a reading literacy test and analyzed using the Shapiro-Wilk normality test, Levene's homogeneity test, and the Independent Samples t-test. The findings revealed that the experimental class achieved a higher Posttest mean score (74.17) than the control class (65.65). Furthermore, the Independent Samples t-test yielded a significance value of 0.001 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Therefore, the use of high-quality storybooks with question-based activities had a significant positive effect on improving students' reading literacy skills. These findings suggest that this instructional medium can serve as an effective alternative for enhancing reading literacy among elementary school students.

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Introduction

Education in Indonesia is an important aspect of developing the quality of human resources. The government continues to make various efforts to improve educational quality through policies such as the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka and the School Literacy Movement, hereafter abbreviated as GLS. However, challenges remain in terms of equitable infrastructure, teacher quality, and students' low interest in learning

(Mirnawati & Fabriya, 2022). These conditions indicate that the Indonesian education system still needs to be improved so that it can produce students who have strong character, are creative, and are prepared to face global challenges (Gogahu & Prasetyo, 2020). One important indicator of educational quality is reading literacy. The previous study reported that, based on the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey, Indonesia ranked 74th out of 79 countries in reading ability (Sajidah et al., 2023). In addition, a survey by Central Connecticut State University placed Indonesia 60th out of 61 countries in literacy (Mirnawati & Fabriya, 2022). These data indicate that Indonesian students' reading literacy remains relatively low and requires greater attention from various stakeholders.

Low reading literacy in Indonesia is influenced by several factors, including the limited availability of engaging reading materials for children, insufficient reading habits in family and school environments, and learning models that still focus on monotonous textbooks (Gogahu & Prasetyo, 2020). In addition, literacy activities conducted at school are often formal and do not yet involve reading materials that are appropriate to the developmental level of elementary school students (Hendratno et al., 2025; Yuninda et al., 2024). As a result, students become bored quickly and are less motivated to read independently. Based on an interview with Mrs. S, the homeroom teacher of Grade IV A at SD Negeri 3 Lembuak, students' reading literacy was still relatively low. The teacher stated that students' ability to identify the main idea of a text was weak and that reading activities tended to focus only on reading speed and accuracy. The teacher also noted that books provided by the government had not yet been optimally utilized.

This condition was reinforced by a test administered to Grade IV A students at SD Negeri 3 Lembuak. In pre-reading activities such as identifying important ideas and discussing difficult words, most students had not demonstrated adequate understanding. Many students were unable to identify the main character completely; 9 of 18 students did not answer at all. In identifying story characters, only a few students could name the characters correctly, while most were unable to locate character details even when the questions were explicit. Regarding the story setting, some students could identify 'Lombok' as the general setting but could not provide more specific details, such as Pantai Seger or the palace described in the story. For understanding the moral message, only 5 of 18 students were able to write one moral value, while the others had not yet understood the message conveyed in the story. Furthermore, in post-reading activities, most students were unable to retell the text coherently because they had not fully understood the plot and message of the story.

Storybooks are a form of children's reading material that function not only as entertainment but also as learning resources that foster reading interest and develop literacy skills (Yulia et al., 2026). Storybooks are written using communicative language, accessible content, and attractive illustrations so that children can understand the text more easily and experience enjoyable reading activities (Grolig et al., 2023; Conica et al., 2023). One type of storybook is a high-quality storybook. High-quality storybooks are reading materials that children enjoy, offer diverse themes and stories, and are matched to children's reading levels (Rizati et al., 2025). High-quality books for children are based on three main principles: they are books that children genuinely want to read, they provide a variety of themes and stories, and they are appropriate to children's reading abilities. Thus, high-quality storybooks are not only visually and substantively engaging but are also relevant to children's developmental stages and interests (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2024).

The characteristics of high-quality reading books include: (1) strong visual appeal through attractive and meaningful illustrations; (2) an engaging storyline that is close to children's lives; (3) content that provides enjoyment and inspiration; (4) suitability to children's interests, hobbies, and reading abilities; and (5) representation of social and cultural diversity familiar to children (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). High-quality storybooks are non-textbook reading materials designed to support children's literacy by considering standards of content quality, presentation, and graphics and by adapting to students' developmental levels. Such books are characterized by appealing illustrations, communicative language, and moral values that support character development (Kemendikbudristek, 2024).

One form of high-quality storybook is the leveled book. Leveled books are reading materials organized according to students' reading abilities, ranging from letter-recognition stages to proficient readers. The system consists of five levels: Level A (emergent readers), Level B (beginning readers), Level C (intermediate readers), Level D (developing readers), and Level E (proficient readers) (Kemendikbudristek, 2023). Leveled books are categorized as high-quality storybooks because they consider readability, language appropriateness, and educational moral values (Alfiani & Sismulyasih, 2024; Puspitasari et al., 2021).

Leveled books are a type of high-quality storybook that serves as supplementary reading material outside the main textbook (Kusuma et al., 2024). Their content is adjusted to the abilities of students in the early grades of elementary school and is designed to help children quickly develop the ability to read and understand words in the text. These books are generally large in size, contain many illustrations, and use a limited number of simple sentences that are easy for students to understand. Similarly, the previous studied explain that leveled books are designed to follow students' cognitive development by presenting materials with gradually increasing levels of difficulty, from simple to complex (Nugrohaji et al., 2025). This type of book functions as scaffolding that helps students understand texts progressively according to their reading ability. Furthermore, the previous studied emphasizes that each reading level is designed by considering vocabulary complexity, sentence structure, and story content so that it is appropriate to children's literacy abilities at each developmental stage (Tortorelli, 2020).

However, the use of high-quality storybooks alone may not optimally improve students' reading comprehension unless it is accompanied by a strategy that encourages active student engagement. One approach that can be used is the presentation of text-based questions (question-based approach). High-quality storybooks with question-based activities are reading materials accompanied by guiding questions during the pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading stages. These questions guide students in understanding the text, identifying important information, and developing critical and reflective thinking. Through questioning, students do not read passively; instead, they actively process information, formulate responses, and connect the content of the text with their experiences. Therefore, integrating high-quality storybooks with a question-based strategy is expected to be more effective in improving students' reading literacy skills (Liu, 2021; Xu et al., 2022).

The effectiveness of storybook media in improving reading literacy has been demonstrated in several previous studies. The previous studied found that illustrated storybooks helped students understand reading texts more effectively because the presentation was engaging and developmentally appropriate (Sabilillah, et al., 2025).

Similarly, the previous studied found that folklore-based comics effectively improved students' reading literacy through a contextual combination of text and images (Nuraihan et al., 2025). In line with these findings, demonstrated that children's storybooks containing moral values could also improve reading literacy and foster students' reading interest (Zakiah et al., 2024).

Previous research has demonstrated the potential of various forms of storybooks to improve elementary school students' reading literacy. However, studies specifically examining high-quality storybooks combined with a question-based strategy remain limited. The novelty of this study lies in integrating high-quality storybooks with questions that accompany reading activities, so that students are guided not only to read and understand information in the text but also to interpret, reflect on, and evaluate the content through the questions provided. This approach is expected to create more active and in-depth reading activities. Therefore, this study aimed to determine the effect of using high-quality storybooks with question-based activities on the reading literacy skills of Grade IV students at SD Negeri 3 Lembuak.

Method

This study employed a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental method using a Pretest-Posttest Control Group Design. The design involved two groups, an experimental group and a control group, both of which completed a pretest and a posttest, while the treatment using high-quality storybooks with question-based activities was administered only to the experimental group. This design was used to determine differences in reading literacy skills between students who received instruction using high-quality storybooks with question-based activities and students who received instruction without the media.

The study was conducted at SD Negeri 3 Lembuak, Narmada District, West Lombok Regency, during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The research population consisted of all students at SD Negeri 3 Lembuak. Samples were selected using purposive sampling, in which participants are selected based on specified considerations. The sample consisted of 35 Grade IV students: 18 students in Grade IV A as the experimental group and 17 students in Grade IV B as the control group. Grade IV A was designated as the experimental group, while Grade IV B was designated as the control group. The two classes were deliberately selected because they were at the same grade level, had student characteristics relevant to the objectives of the study, and were suitable for treatment using high-quality storybooks in reading-literacy activities. The use of purposive sampling also considered the fact that the classes were pre-existing groups; therefore, individual students were not randomly assigned to the research groups. The selection of Grades IV A and IV B was consistent with the research design, which used both classes as the study sample.

The participants were Grade IV elementary school students in Phase B. Because both groups were at the same grade level, the learning content and basic abilities measured were situated within comparable instructional contexts. The experimental group consisted of 18 Grade IV A students, while the control group consisted of 17 Grade IV B students. Both groups completed an initial measurement (pretest) and a final measurement (posttest), but only the experimental group received the treatment using high-quality storybooks with question-based activities. The instrument used to measure reading literacy was a reading-literacy test administered as a pretest and posttest. The test was developed based on reading-literacy indicators referring to (Gomes et al.,

2024). In this study, reading literacy was measured through five indicators: (1) accessing and locating information, (2) understanding text content, (3) interpreting text, (4) reflecting on text content, and (5) evaluating text. These indicators were used to assess students' ability to locate information in a text, understand its content, draw conclusions and identify cause-and-effect relationships, relate the text to personal experience or moral messages, and evaluate the content of the text.

The instrument consisted of 10 items adapted to the characteristics of Grade IV or Phase B students. The items were in the form of short-answer questions and simple constructed-response questions. The test blueprint included several subindicators: identifying characters and setting under the locating-information indicator; determining the main idea and explaining the text under the understanding-text indicator; drawing conclusions and identifying cause-and-effect relationships under the interpreting-text indicator; identifying moral messages and relating the text to personal experience under the reflecting-on-text indicator; and evaluating the text and identifying text type under the evaluating-text indicator.

Each response was scored on a scale from 0 to 5. A score of 5 was awarded for a highly accurate and complete response, whereas a score of 0 was given when a student did not provide an answer. For the locating-information indicator, scores were based on the accuracy and completeness of information; for understanding text, on the completeness and appropriateness of the explanation; for interpreting text, on the accuracy and logic of the conclusion; for reflecting on text, on the relevance and depth of the response; and for evaluating text, on the accuracy and critical quality of the student's evaluation. Scores obtained from each item were then used to determine students' reading-literacy scores on the pretest and posttest. Thus, the scoring procedure considered not only whether students provided an answer but also the quality of the response based on the rubric for each indicator.

Instrument validity was examined through content validity using expert judgment. The test instrument was validated by Dr. Heri Setiawan, M.Pd., a lecturer at Universitas Mataram. Validation used a test-instrument validation sheet assessing three main aspects: content, language, and presentation. The content aspect included alignment of the questions with reading-literacy indicators and research objectives, use of high-quality storybooks with question-based activities, and the ability of the questions to measure comprehension, information retrieval, and drawing conclusions from the text. The language aspect included comprehensibility, clarity and communicativeness of sentences, conformity with language conventions, and the absence of ambiguous meanings. The presentation aspect included question organization, ease of instrument use, and clarity of instructions.

This study was conducted after obtaining a research recommendation from the National and Political Unity Agency of West Nusa Tenggara Province (Bakesbangpol Provinsi NTB) as an administrative basis for carrying out the research. The researchers subsequently obtained permission from SD Negeri 3 Lembuak to conduct the study with students in Grades IV A and IV B. The research was implemented in coordination with the school and classroom teachers and was adjusted to the school's instructional schedule.

Results and Discussion

A normality test was conducted to determine whether the research data were normally distributed. In this study, normality was examined using the Shapiro-Wilk test

because the total sample consisted of fewer than 50 students. The decision rule was that a significance value (Sig.) greater than 0.05 indicated normally distributed data, whereas a significance value below 0.05 indicated non-normal data. The normality-test results for the pretest and posttest data in the control and experimental groups are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Normality Test

Group	Data	Shapiro-Wilk (Sig.)	Description
Control	Pretest	0.750	Normal
Control	Posttest	0.375	Normal
Experimental	Pretest	0.098	Normal
Experimental	Posttest	0.645	Normal

Based on Table 1, the Shapiro-Wilk normality test produced a significance value of 0.750 for the control-group pretest and 0.375 for the control-group posttest. For the experimental group, the pretest significance value was 0.098 and the posttest significance value was 0.645. All significance values were greater than 0.05. Therefore, the pretest and posttest data for both the control and experimental groups were normally distributed. A homogeneity test was conducted to determine whether the variances of the control and experimental groups were equal or homogeneous. Homogeneity of variance is one of the assumptions that should be satisfied before conducting a hypothesis test using parametric statistics.

Table 2. Normality Test

Test of Homogeneity of Variance					
		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Posttest Results	Based on Mean	2.721	1	31	.109
	Based on Median	2.241	1	31	.144
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.241	1	28.687	.145
	Based on trimmed mean	2.721	1	31	.109

Based on Table 2, the homogeneity test using Levene's Test produced a significance value of 0.109. This value was greater than 0.05 ($0.109 > 0.05$). Therefore, the variances of the control and experimental group data were homogeneous.

Hypothesis testing was conducted to determine the effect of using high-quality storybooks with question-based activities on the reading literacy skills of Grade IV students at SD Negeri 3 Lembuak. The hypothesis was tested using an Independent Samples t-test because the analysis aimed to determine whether reading literacy differed between the experimental group, which used high-quality storybooks with question-based activities, and the control group, which received conventional instruction.

Table 3. Independent Samples t-Test Results

Variable	Sig. (2-tailed)	Description
Reading literacy skills	0.001	There is a significant effect

Based on the Independent Samples t-test results, the mean posttest score of the control group was 65.65, while that of the experimental group was 74.17. These results indicate that students in the experimental group had higher reading literacy scores than students in the control group after receiving the treatment using high-quality storybooks with question-based activities. In addition, the significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) was 0.001. Because this value was less than 0.05 ($0.001 < 0.05$), H_0 was rejected and H_a was accepted. Thus, there was a significant difference in reading literacy between the experimental and control groups, indicating that the use of high-quality

storybooks with question-based activities was associated with students' reading literacy skills at SD Negeri 3 Lembuak. The hypothesis test using the Independent Samples t-test produced a significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.001. This value was smaller than the significance level of 0.05 ($0.001 < 0.05$), so H_0 was rejected and H_a was accepted. The result indicates a significant difference in reading literacy between students who learned using high-quality storybooks with question-based activities and students who received conventional instruction. The Group Statistics results showed that the mean posttest score of the experimental group was 74.17, which was higher than the control-group mean of 65.65.

Thus, the use of high-quality storybooks with question-based activities had a statistically significant effect on the reading literacy skills of Grade IV students at SD Negeri 3 Lembuak. For the indicator of accessing and locating information, the pretest percentage was 62.20%, increasing to 80.60% on the posttest, an improvement of 18.40 percentage points. Before the treatment, most students still experienced difficulty locating information explicitly stated in the text, such as identifying characters, settings, and events in the story. During reading-literacy activities using high-quality storybooks with question-based activities, students were guided to read carefully and answer questions related to important information in the text. These questions helped students focus their attention on information contained in the story, resulting in improved information-location skills after the treatment. This is consistent with studies reporting that structured reading activities can help students locate and understand information in texts more effectively and improve reading comprehension (Abidin, 2022; Suherpan et al., 2025).

For the indicator of understanding text content, the pretest percentage was 50.00% and increased to 61.60% on the posttest, an improvement of 11.60 percentage points. Before using high-quality storybooks with question-based activities, students still had difficulty understanding the text as a whole, particularly when asked to identify the main idea and explain the text in their own words. During the reading-literacy activities, students were given questions that gradually guided them in understanding the story. Through these activities, students were better able to connect information within the text and develop a stronger understanding of its content. This is consistent with studies showing that story media in reading instruction can help students understand texts more deeply because they actively engage in interpreting and restating information obtained from reading (Indriani et al., 2026).

For the indicator of interpreting text, the pretest percentage was 47.80% and increased to 70.00% on the posttest, an improvement of 22.20 percentage points. Before the treatment, students tended to understand only information explicitly stated in the text and had difficulty interpreting implicit meanings. Most students experienced difficulty drawing conclusions and explaining cause-and-effect relationships in the story. During the use of high-quality storybooks with question-based activities, students were given questions that required deeper thinking about the text. These questions encouraged students to connect information across the text so that they could draw conclusions and understand cause-and-effect relationships more effectively. This is consistent with studies indicating that reading activities emphasizing interpretation and information processing can improve students' ability to integrate information and draw conclusions from texts (Abidin, 2022; Gomes et al., 2024).

For the indicator of reflecting on text content, the pretest percentage was 51.60% and increased to 57.20% on the posttest, an improvement of 5.60 percentage points.

Although this was the smallest improvement among the indicators, it still indicates development in students' ability to reflect on reading content. Before the treatment, students had difficulty connecting the text with their own experiences and identifying the moral message of the story. During the reading-literacy activities, students were guided to relate the story to everyday life and identify values that could be learned from the text. However, reflection requires a more complex thinking process because students must connect personal experiences with information in the text. This is consistent with studies indicating that reflective ability can develop when students are provided opportunities to connect information in a text with their experiences and prior knowledge, thereby making comprehension more meaningful (Gomes et al., 2024; Nuranjani et al., 2022).

For the indicator of evaluating text, the pretest percentage was 46.20% and increased to 72.20% on the posttest, an improvement of 26.00 percentage points. This was the largest improvement among the reading-literacy indicators. Before the treatment, students still had difficulty evaluating the content of the text and providing logical reasons for their opinions. Most students tended to accept information in the text without critically evaluating it. During the use of high-quality storybooks with question-based activities, students were given questions that encouraged them to provide responses, evaluations, and opinions about the characters and events in the story. These activities helped students develop critical thinking, resulting in the greatest improvement in text-evaluation skills after the treatment. This is consistent with studies showing that evaluation of reading material can be developed through reading activities that encourage students to make judgments, provide responses, and justify their views regarding information obtained from texts, thereby strengthening critical thinking (Gomes et al., 2024; Abidin, 2022).

Overall, the use of high-quality storybooks with question-based activities had a positive effect across all reading-literacy indicators, including accessing and locating information, understanding text content, interpreting text, reflecting on text content, and evaluating text. The largest improvement occurred in evaluating text, with an increase of 26.00 percentage points, while the smallest improvement occurred in reflecting on text content, with an increase of 5.60 percentage points. These findings indicate that high-quality storybooks with question-based activities not only help students understand information contained in texts but also train them to think critically, make evaluations, and develop the ability to understand meaning within a text. This is consistent with studies indicating that story media in learning can improve reading comprehension, support interpretation of information obtained from texts, and develop critical thinking in evaluating reading content (Indriani et al., 2026; Gomes et al., 2024; Abidin, 2022). A comparison of improvements in reading literacy for each indicator is presented in the following figure.

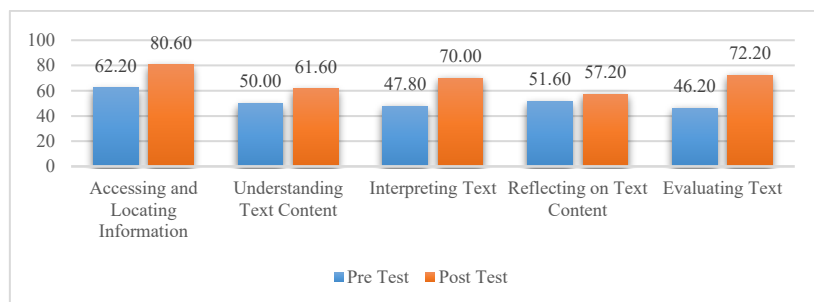


Figure 1. Mean Score for Each Reading Literacy Indicator

Reading literacy in the experimental group improved after the use of high-quality storybooks with question-based activities. The improvement indicates that the instructional media helped students develop various aspects of reading literacy, ranging from locating information to evaluating the content of a text. These findings suggest that reading-literacy activities using high-quality storybooks with question-based activities provided meaningful learning experiences, enabling students to engage more actively in understanding and processing information contained in the reading material. The findings are also consistent with the Independent Samples t-test results, which showed that reading literacy in the experimental group was higher than in the control group.

Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that the use of high-quality storybooks with question-based activities had an effect on the reading literacy skills of Grade IV students at SD Negeri 3 Lembuak. The Independent Samples t-test produced a significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.001, which was smaller than the 0.05 significance level ($0.001 < 0.05$), so H_0 was rejected and H_a was accepted. This result indicates a significant difference in reading literacy between students who learned using high-quality storybooks with question-based activities and those who received conventional instruction. In addition, Group Statistics showed that the experimental group obtained a mean posttest score of 74.17, which was higher than the control group mean of 65.65. This study was limited by the use of an observation sheet that did not specifically measure students' activities and responses during learning. Future studies are therefore recommended to use a more detailed student-activity observation sheet and to involve larger samples and longer study periods in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of high-quality storybooks with question-based activities.

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