

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MERDEKA MODEL AS AN EFFORT TO BUILD A FAMILY LITERACY CULTURE

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### ABSTRAK

Family literacy plays an important role in fostering children's reading habits, strengthening emotional bonds, and supporting character development from an early age. However, family literacy practices in Indonesian households remain largely sporadic and are not yet supported by a practical framework that parents can implement independently. This study aims to describe the implementation of the MERDEKA Model in home-based literacy activities and to identify parents' initial responses to its implementation. The study formed part of a Research and Development (R&D) project and focused on a limited field trial involving six families with children aged 4 to 10 years at the SDIT Al-Amanah Library in Lembang. The MERDEKA Model was implemented independently by each family over a seven-day period through seven sequential stages: Shared Reading, Meaning Exploration, Critical Reflection, Guided Discussion, Literacy Empathy, Effective Communication, and Literacy Action. Data were collected through observation, interviews, questionnaires, and written reflections, and were analyzed descriptively. The findings indicate that the implementation of the model received positive responses from most parents, as reflected in stronger emotional connections with their children, greater ease in conducting regular literacy activities, and appreciation for the model's structured stages. Nevertheless, the relatively short implementation period did not result in meaningful changes in children's reading interest. These findings suggest that the MERDEKA Model has the potential to serve as a practical framework for implementing family literacy activities at home. Further implementation over a longer period and adaptation to children's developmental characteristics and reading interests are needed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the model's impact.

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## INTRODUCTION

Literacy is a fundamental foundation for developing the quality of human resources because it involves not only the ability to read and write, but also the ability to understand, interpret, evaluate, and critically use information in everyday life. These abilities are

prerequisites for lifelong learning, rational decision-making, and active participation in social life. In the context of Indonesia, which is characterized by cultural, linguistic, and social diversity, strengthening literacy is also an important component in developing a knowledgeable and character-driven generation capable of responding to various challenges of contemporary life. Therefore, the development of a literacy culture cannot be placed entirely on schools but needs to begin within the family, where children first gain learning experiences (Ummah & Fitri, 2020; Wuryani & Nugraha, 2021).

Families occupy a strategic position in developing literacy habits because interactions within the family occur naturally, repeatedly, and continuously. Various studies have shown that parental involvement in shared reading activities contributes to the development of vocabulary, reading comprehension, thinking skills, and children's readiness to participate in formal education (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997; Reese, 2019). A positive home literacy environment (HLE) also influences children's reading development, particularly when parents actively provide reading materials, allocate time for shared reading, and communicate about the content of texts (Hermawati & Sugito, 2021). Moreover, recent meta-analytic evidence indicates that family-based literacy interventions have positive effects on the literacy development of school-aged children, although the magnitude of the effect is influenced by program characteristics, intervention intensity, and parental involvement (Dahl-Leonard et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, family literacy practices in Indonesia continue to face various challenges. Shared reading activities have generally not yet become routine practices, but instead depend largely on the awareness and initiative of individual families. At the same time, the increasing use of digital devices and media has changed patterns of interaction within families, resulting in less time available for shared reading. This does not mean that digital technology should be viewed as a threat; rather, it indicates that families need strategies capable of maintaining the quality of literacy interactions amid changing patterns of social life. Thus, the main challenge of family literacy today lies not only in the availability of reading materials but also in how parents manage reading activities so that they become meaningful learning experiences for children.

The importance of parental involvement in literacy activities can be understood through Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective, which positions social interaction as a primary factor in children's development. According to Vygotsky, children develop various new abilities through learning processes with individuals who possess greater knowledge or experience. In the context of family literacy, parents provide scaffolding, namely support

that helps children understand reading materials through questions, explanations, and discussions adapted to their developmental level. Through this process, abilities that initially develop with the assistance of others are gradually internalized into abilities that children can perform independently.

This perspective is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development, which positions the family as the closest environment (*microsystem*) exerting the most direct influence on children's development. The quality of parent-child interactions, including shared reading habits, shapes learning experiences that influence not only language and literacy development but also children's social and emotional development. Therefore, the success of family literacy is determined not only by reading frequency but also by the quality of communication, parental involvement, and opportunities for children to express ideas, ask questions, and discuss reading content in an environment that supports learning.

In addition to the quality of interaction, literacy activities also need to consider children's developmental characteristics. Piaget (1952) explained that cognitive abilities develop gradually, from recognizing simple symbols to abstract thinking, while Chall (1983) demonstrated that reading ability also develops through different stages according to age and developmental level. Thus, literacy activities at home cannot be implemented through a uniform approach but need to be adapted to children's abilities, interests, and needs so that reading experiences genuinely provide meaning for their learning processes.

The development of the concept of literacy also indicates that reading is no longer understood merely as an activity of recognizing words and understanding information literally. UNESCO views literacy as the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and use information to develop one's potential and participate in society. This understanding emphasizes that reading activities should encourage readers to think, reflect, and connect the information obtained with their life experiences. Accordingly, family literacy activities need to be directed not only toward improving children's reading abilities but also toward developing habits of dialogue, critical thinking, and the ability to understand diverse perspectives from an early age.

Based on this understanding, family literacy activities need to be designed as a process that not only fosters reading habits but also develops the ability to understand, interpret, reflect on, and communicate reading content. One approach consistent with this objective is deep reading. Unlike reading activities oriented toward fluency or completing a text, deep reading positions readers as active subjects who construct meaning through

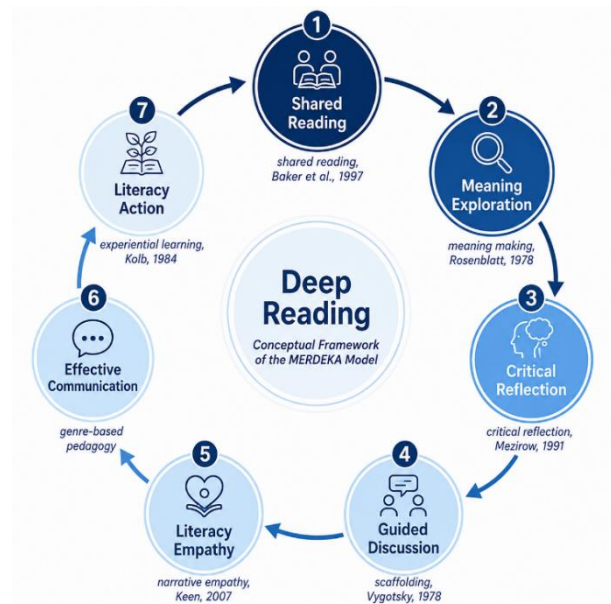
thinking, dialogue, reflection on experience, and connections between the text and everyday life (Sari & Setiawan, 2020; Hafidz, Samiaji, & Sari, 2024). In the family context, this approach enables reading activities to develop into an interactional space that promotes critical thinking, empathy, communication, and stronger emotional bonds between parents and children.

Various studies have emphasized the importance of parental involvement in family literacy activities, but most research has focused on the relationship between parental support and children's reading development or on the effectiveness of literacy programs organized by schools and educational institutions (Baker et al., 1997; Hermawati & Sugito, 2021; Dahl-Leonard et al., 2025). Meanwhile, discussion of how parents can implement literacy activities systematically and independently at home remains relatively limited. Consequently, many families recognize the importance of shared reading but do not yet have clear guidance on how to manage the reading process so that it can promote comprehension, reflection, dialogue, and the application of values derived from reading in everyday life. This gap indicates the need for a practical, systematic, and easily applicable implementation framework for family literacy activities.

To address this need, this study applies the MERDEKA Model, a family literacy model designed as a practical framework for implementing a *deep reading* approach in family literacy activities. The model consists of seven interconnected stages: Shared Reading, Meaning Exploration, Critical Reflection, Guided Discussion, Literacy Empathy, Effective Communication, and Literacy Action. These seven stages are arranged sequentially so that reading activities do not stop at understanding the content of a text but develop into a learning process that integrates cognitive, affective, and social aspects.

Each stage of the MERDEKA Model is built upon complementary conceptual foundations. The Shared Reading stage is grounded in the concept of shared reading, which emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in fostering children's interest and participation in reading activities (Baker et al., 1997; Hume & Lonigan, 2015). The Meaning Exploration and Critical Reflection stages guide children to understand, interpret, and evaluate reading content more deeply. The Guided Discussion stage optimizes parent-child interaction through scaffolding as proposed by Vygotsky (1978). Furthermore, the Literacy Empathy stage develops the ability to understand the perspectives and experiences of characters in texts through the narrative empathy approach (Keen, 2007), while the Effective Communication stage helps children express ideas coherently according to the communicative context based on the principles of genre-based pedagogy (Emilia, 2011;

Fang & Schlepppegrell, 2008; Rose & Martin, 2012). The final stage, Literacy Action, encourages children to implement the results of their understanding and reflection in concrete actions as a form of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). Through this sequence of stages, the MERDEKA Model views literacy as a learning process that integrates thinking, communication, empathy, and action within a holistic learning experience.



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the MERDEKA Model**

This study forms part of a Research and Development (R&D) project and specifically reports the initial implementation of the MERDEKA Model through a limited field trial involving six families with children aged 4 to 10 years at the SDIT Al-Amanah Library, Lembang. The study did not aim to directly test the effectiveness of the model in improving children's literacy abilities; rather, it sought to describe the implementation of the model in family literacy activities and identify parents' initial responses to its application. The findings are expected to provide an overview of the practicality of the MERDEKA Model as a guide for implementing family literacy at home, while also serving as a basis for refining the model and conducting further research on a broader scale.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study forms part of a *Research and Development* (R&D) project and specifically reports the initial implementation of the MERDEKA Model through a limited field trial. Within the overall R&D process, the initial implementation stage serves to obtain empirical evidence regarding the practicality of the model, user responses, and various findings that

can provide a basis for refining the model before it is tested on a broader scale. Therefore, this article does not discuss the entire Keluarga MERDEKA process in home-based family literacy activities.

The MERDEKA Model implemented in this study is a *deep reading*-based family literacy implementation framework developed through a synthesis of various theoretical foundations concerning family literacy, children's learning development, and experiential learning. The model consists of seven interconnected stages: Shared Reading, Meaning Exploration, Critical Reflection, Guided Discussion, Literacy Empathy, Effective Communication, and Literacy Action. In this study, the seven stages were independently implemented by families as a guide for conducting reading activities at home.

The limited field trial was selected to obtain an initial picture of the model's implementation in a real-world context, particularly in terms of ease of application, parents' responses to each stage of the model, and families' experiences while implementing literacy activities at home. The findings from this stage are positioned as preliminary findings that provide input for refining the model and serve as a basis for further research with broader participant coverage and a longer implementation duration.

The limited field trial was conducted at the SDIT Al-Amanah Library, Lembang, which served as a training center and facilitator for family literacy activities. This location was selected on the consideration that the school library functions not only as a provider of reading resources for students but also has the potential to serve as a collaborative space between schools and families in supporting literacy activities at home. In addition, based on the initial conditions, access to reading materials in some participants' homes was still relatively limited; therefore, the presence of the school library was expected to strengthen support for the implementation of the family literacy program.

The study participants consisted of six families with children aged 4 to 10 years. Participants were selected purposively based on the families' willingness to participate in the entire series of activities, from training to independent implementation of the MERDEKA Model at home. This age range was selected because it encompasses a developmental period in which children begin to develop early reading skills and progress toward reading to obtain and understand information, making parental support highly important in the literacy process.

In this study, parents served as the primary implementers of the MERDEKA Model, while children participated in the literacy activities. Therefore, the research data were primarily obtained from parents' experiences, responses, and reflections while

implementing the model, whereas children's involvement was observed through shared reading activities, discussions, and responses throughout the implementation process.

The study was conducted through four interrelated stages: (1) family literacy training, (2) simulation of the MERDEKA Model implementation, (3) independent implementation of the model at home, and (4) research data collection. This sequence of activities was designed to ensure that all parents understood the concepts and stages of the MERDEKA Model before implementing it independently in family literacy activities. A summary of the research procedure is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Stages of Research Implementation**

| Stage | Activity                           | Activity Description                                                                                                                         | Output                                                                  |
|-------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I     | Family literacy training           | Parents participate in training on the importance of family literacy, the concept of deep reading, and an introduction to the MERDEKA Model. | Parents understand the basic concepts and stages of the model.          |
| II    | Model implementation simulation    | Parents practice the seven stages of the MERDEKA Model with their children under facilitator guidance using the provided reading materials.  | Parents gain initial experience in implementing the model.              |
| III   | Independent implementation at home | Each family independently implements the MERDEKA Model for seven days according to family conditions and routines.                           | Experience of model implementation in the family's real-life context.   |
| IV    | Data collection                    | Data are collected through observation, interviews, questionnaires, and written reflections after the implementation period.                 | Data on the implementation of the MERDEKA Model and parents' responses. |

In the first stage, all parents participated in a training workshop lasting approximately 120 minutes, held at the SDIT Al-Amanah Library, Lembang. The training materials covered the importance of family literacy, the concept of deep reading, and an introduction to the seven stages of the MERDEKA Model. The training aimed to establish a shared understanding of the principles for implementing the model before it was applied within the family environment.

After the training, the activities continued with a simulation of model implementation. At this stage, parents directly practiced the seven stages of the MERDEKA Model with their children using the provided reading materials. During the simulation, facilitators provided guidance and feedback on how to guide reading activities, explore children's understanding, develop discussions, and connect reading content with everyday experiences. The simulation was intended to provide parents with initial experience before they conducted literacy activities independently at home.

The next stage involved independent implementation of the MERDEKA Model for seven consecutive days in each family's home. At this stage, parents served as the primary facilitators of all model stages, from shared reading to literacy action. Activities were adjusted to the children's schedules, characteristics, and interests so that implementation took place naturally within family routines. During the implementation period, no direct assistance was provided by the researchers so that the experiences obtained would reflect the use of the model in real-life situations.

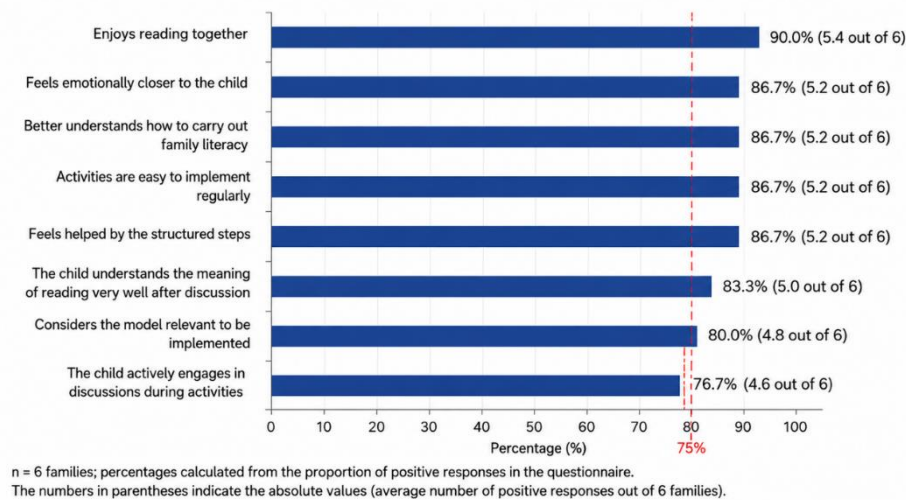
After the implementation period ended, data were collected to obtain an overview of the implementation of the MERDEKA Model within the family environment. The data obtained at this stage served as a basis for evaluating the practicality of the model, identifying parents' responses to the implementation of each stage, and identifying various experiences and challenges that emerged during implementation as input for model refinement in subsequent research.

Research data were collected through observation, interviews, questionnaires, and written reflections. Observations were conducted during the training and simulation to examine participants' involvement in implementing the MERDEKA Family Literacy Model. Interviews and written reflections were used to explore parents' experiences and responses while implementing the model at home, whereas questionnaires were used to obtain data on parents' responses regarding ease of implementation, children's involvement, and the relevance of the model to family literacy activities.

Questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of percentages to describe patterns in parents' responses for each indicator. Meanwhile, data from observations, interviews, and reflections were analyzed descriptively and interpretively through data reduction, categorization, and interpretation to complement and deepen the meaning of the quantitative findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Implementation of the MERDEKA Model Supports Parental Involvement in Family Literacy



**Figure 2.** Percentage of Parents Who Responded Positively to the MERDEKA Model

The data in Figure 2 show that the highest positive response was found for enjoyment of shared reading activities (90.0%), followed by emotional closeness between parents and children, parents' understanding of family literacy implementation, ease of applying the model, and clarity of the MERDEKA Model stages, each of which received a percentage of 86.7%. These findings indicate that parents not only accepted the model as a guide for reading activities but also experienced benefits in developing more meaningful interactions with their children.

These quantitative findings were reinforced by reflections provided by participants after the implementation period. One parent stated that participating in literacy activities through the MERDEKA Model made them "think about doing better in everything," while another participant reported feeling "more enlightened and greatly helped by the MERDEKA model that was presented." These reflections indicate that implementing the model not only provided new experiences in accompanying children during reading but also encouraged parents to reconsider their role as literacy facilitators at home.

These findings indicate that the primary contribution of the MERDEKA Model lies in its ability to provide a systematic and easy-to-follow framework for implementing family literacy. Previously, shared reading activities at home often occurred spontaneously without clearly defined stages, so the interaction tended to stop at reading the text. Through its structured stages, the MERDEKA Model helps parents develop reading activities into more meaningful processes of dialogue, reflection, and communication. This finding is

consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) view that parent-child interaction constitutes scaffolding that supports children's development through gradual assistance. In addition, the findings strengthen the results of Baker et al. (1997) and Hume and Lonigan (2015), which show that active parental involvement in shared reading contributes to increased children's participation in literacy activities.

Furthermore, the increased emotional closeness perceived by parents indicates that family literacy activities function not only as a means of developing reading skills but also as an interactional space that strengthens relationships among family members. From Bronfenbrenner's perspective, the quality of interactions within the family environment as a microsystem has a direct influence on children's development. Thus, the implementation of the MERDEKA Model not only facilitates shared reading activities but also expands the function of family literacy as a medium for communication and strengthening emotional bonds between parents and children.

### **Implementation of the MERDEKA Model Promotes Meaningful Parent-Child Interaction**

In addition to receiving positive responses from parents, the implementation of the MERDEKA Model also showed initial indications of improved interaction quality between parents and children during literacy activities. A total of 76.7% of parents reported that their children were actively involved in discussions during reading activities, while 83.3% stated that their children were able to understand the meaning of the reading after participating in discussions together. These findings indicate that reading activities no longer stop at reading a text aloud but develop into a dialogic process that encourages children to express opinions, connect the content of the reading with their experiences, and construct shared understanding with their parents.

The increased involvement of children cannot be separated from the activity structure established in the MERDEKA Model. The Meaning Exploration, Critical Reflection, and Guided Discussion stages provide children with opportunities to express their understanding of the reading content through questions, conversations, and simple reflections with their parents. This approach creates a more participatory learning environment in which children are not merely listeners but also engage as dialogue partners in the reading process.

These findings are consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective, which positions parent-child interaction as a form of scaffolding in the learning process. Through questions, guidance, and discussions provided gradually, parents help children

construct understanding that they were previously unable to achieve independently. In this context, shared reading functions as a learning space that enables children to develop their ability to comprehend reading content through interaction, rather than merely through individual reading activities.

On the other hand, the field trial also showed that children's reading interest had not changed significantly during the seven-day implementation period. Although most parents reported that their children showed enthusiasm when reading together, this change cannot yet be interpreted as the formation of sustainable reading habits. These findings indicate that positive responses to literacy activities may emerge within a relatively short period, whereas the development of reading interest and habits requires a longer and more consistent process.

These findings show that the earliest change resulting from the implementation of the MERDEKA Model was not an increase in children's reading interest but a change in the quality of interaction during reading activities. Parents began to view reading activities as opportunities for dialogue, listening to children's opinions, and developing more open communication. Thus, the findings indicate that implementing the MERDEKA Model has the potential to enrich family literacy experiences by creating more meaningful interactions between parents and children, although its impact on the development of reading habits requires observation over a longer period.

### **Implementation of the MERDEKA Model in Terms of Practicality and Its Implications**

The field trial results showed that the MERDEKA Model had a good level of practicality (ease of use) based on parents' responses during the implementation period. A total of 86.7% of parents stated that the model was easy to implement routinely at home and that they were helped by its systematically organized stages. In addition, 80.0% of parents considered the model relevant for implementation in family literacy activities. These findings indicate that the structure of the MERDEKA Model can be understood and implemented by parents without requiring intensive assistance during the activities.

The ease of implementation indicated that the presence of clear stages helped parents conduct reading activities in a more directed manner. Before participating in the program, most participants viewed shared reading as an activity that occurred spontaneously without a specific support strategy. After implementing the MERDEKA Model, parents had a more systematic guide for developing reading activities through meaning exploration, reflection, discussion, and the application of values derived from reading in everyday life.

Thus, the model not only provides a sequence of reading activities but also helps parents manage learning interactions with their children in a more structured manner.

This change was also reflected in how parents perceived literacy activities at home. Based on interviews and reflections, shared reading was no longer viewed merely as an activity to train children's reading abilities but developed into an opportunity to build communication, share experiences, and strengthen family relationships. These findings indicate that implementing the MERDEKA Model has the potential to broaden the function of family literacy from an academic activity into a shared learning experience integrating cognitive, affective, and social aspects.

Nevertheless, the field trial also showed that model implementation needs to consider each child's characteristics and interests. One parent reported that their nine-year-old child showed greater interest in nonfiction reading materials, such as encyclopedias, history, technology, and global issues. This finding indicates that the selection of reading materials and forms of parental support need to be adapted to children's development and interests so that literacy activities remain engaging and meaningful. Therefore, the MERDEKA Model should be understood as a flexible framework that can be adapted to the needs of each family.

Overall, the findings show that implementing the MERDEKA Model provided parents with positive experiences in conducting family literacy activities. However, these findings need to be interpreted in accordance with the characteristics of the study, which involved a limited field trial with six families and a seven-day implementation period. Therefore, the findings cannot yet be used to conclude the model's effectiveness in improving children's reading abilities or reading interest; rather, they provide an initial picture of the model's practicality and parents' responses to its use. These findings also provide a basis for refining the MERDEKA Model and conducting further research with a larger number of participants, a longer implementation period, and more diverse family characteristics.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The implementation of the MERDEKA Model among six families with children aged 4 to 10 years received positive responses from parents in conducting literacy activities at home. The model was considered easy to implement because it provides structured stages, helping parents accompany reading activities in a more directed manner while encouraging more meaningful interactions through reading, discussion, reflection, and communication

with children. In addition to supporting literacy activities, model implementation also encouraged parents to view reading as part of the process of building emotional closeness and shared learning experiences within the family.

Nevertheless, the field trial did not show meaningful changes in children's reading interest during the seven-day implementation period. Therefore, the findings should be understood as an initial picture of the implementation of the MERDEKA Model in family literacy activities rather than as evidence of the model's effectiveness. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the MERDEKA Model has the potential to serve as a family literacy implementation framework that helps parents conduct reading activities in a more directed, systematic, and meaningful manner within the family environment.

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