



# Using Sambel Terong Game to Enhance Students' Literacy at Elementary School

Elma Meliana<sup>1</sup>, Sulistyani<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Nusantara PGRI Kediri, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup>[melianssi00@gmail.com](mailto:melianssi00@gmail.com).

<sup>2</sup>[sulistyani@unpkediri.ac.id](mailto:sulistyani@unpkediri.ac.id)

## ABSTRACT

*Indonesia faces challenges in developing a strong reading culture, as shown by its low ranking in a UNESCO reading literacy survey. It is due to a lack of interest in reading which threatens educational quality. This research aims to describe "Sambel Terong" game as strategies to enhance reading literacy among elementary school students. The descriptive qualitative was used as a design for this research. The data concerning with teacher's strategies were collected through observation and interview which then analyzed qualitatively. The steps taken to analyze the data include data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The research results shows that Using Sambel Terong can enhance students' literacy. These findings offer valuable insights for teachers who want to employ different learning strategies especially in literacy development at elementary schools.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Sambel Terong Game, Students' Literacy, Elementary School*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, reading has not yet developed into a widely regarded essential habit. A UNESCO survey placed Indonesia 60<sup>th</sup> out of 61 countries in reading literacy. This low interest in reading can hinder educational quality, causing it to stagnate or even decline (Mahrani, et al. 2022). In today's environment, reading literacy is crucial since information is becoming more and more accessible and widespread (Nurai & Gulsara. 2023). Reading literacy refers to the ability to read and write, closely linked to literacy skills. Mastering literacy is crucial for participating in the 21st century. This skill encompasses three essential components that the current generation must develop: competence, character, and literacy (Zaenal Abidin et al., 2020; Rizki & Priatna, 2019). According to Aziz (2023), reading literacy encompasses an individual's ability to understand texts to gather and process information. Through reading, we can explore different perspectives and acquire knowledge that is crucial for our future. Reading is an essential practice that needs to be cultivated, especially in today's information age, where reading is crucial for everyone. It is important to provide training for teachers to promote literacy in schools; teachers must be equipped to facilitate effective reading strategies for their students. Effective reading encourages students to read quickly and understand the material, leading to positive outcomes such as acquiring new knowledge. Students at elementary schools encounter various challenges in learning literacy.

Based on the previous researches, factors such as low interest in reading, insufficient resources, and limited reading time contribute to weak literacy skills (Zakiah & Sukmandari, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened these challenges, making it harder to establish literacy habits at home and access reading materials (Abidin et al., 2021). In English lesson, students also

struggle with literacy due to a lack of understanding of concepts and limited problem-solving skills (Ilfia Nur Ayuningtyas et al., 2024; Kurniawati et al., 2020). To tackle these issues, collaboration among teachers, students, and parents is essential (Abidin et al., 2021). Incorporating local contexts in literacy activities can enhance students' comprehension (Ilfia Nur Ayuningtyas et al., 2024). Teachers should use diverse teaching methods, provide engaging materials, and implement digital literacy strategies to improve students' reading and English skills (Zakiah & Sukmandari, 2024; Kurniawati et al., 2020). Additionally, creating reading corners in classrooms and enhancing school libraries can further support literacy development (Zakiah & Sukmandari, 2024).

Based on the problems above, Hamzah (2021) stated the government plays a vital role in establishing programs like "Kampus Mengajar" to improve students literacy. By providing funding, resources, and support, the government facilitates partnerships between universities and schools, enabling students to engage in teaching and community service. This initiative not only enhances literacy skills among students but also promotes a culture of learning and mentorship. Additionally, the government can implement training and workshops for future educators, ensuring they are equipped with effective teaching methods and strategies tailored to diverse learning needs. Overall, government involvement is essential in fostering an educational environment that prioritizes literacy development.

When the researcher joined the Kemendikbud "Kampus Mengajar" program at an elementary school in Kediri, she faced significant challenges while teaching English, particularly in the area of reading. Many students demonstrated difficulty with basic reading skills, and some had not yet mastered the alphabet. This lack of foundational literacy posed a considerable obstacle to their ability to engage with English texts. During her lessons, the researcher observed that students struggled to recognize letters and sounds, which hindered their reading fluency and comprehension. Despite her efforts to use engaging materials and interactive methods, the gap in their literacy skills remained evident. She recognized the importance of addressing these foundational issues to foster a more effective learning environment. To tackle these challenges, the researcher began implementing targeted strategy, such as game-based learning for literacy.

Game-based learning (GBL) is an educational strategy that improves information acquisition and skill development through engaging gaming activities (Eslami & Chowdhury, 2021). One of the most interesting features of game-based learning environments is the capacity to offer efficient and captivating learning experiences (Andrew et al., 2020). The researcher implemented an engaging game-based strategy called "Sambel Terong," which translates to "Learning Literacy, Let's Go!" or in Indonesia is "Sambil Belajar Literasi, Dong!". This approach is part of the researcher's project at Kampus Mengajar 7 that held by Kemendikbud, designed to enhance the learning experience and support students with reading literacy difficulties. By offering diverse literacy methods, Sambel Terong effectively captures students' attention and fosters their engagement in the learning process.

The use of game-based learning to enhance literacy skills has been well-documented in recent research, but there are notable gaps that the current study seeks to address. For example, Chen et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of both game-based teaching literacy and general games literacy, urging instructors to balance these elements to improve teaching practices and reduce knowledge gaps between students and instructors. While this research provides valuable insights into the integration of games in literacy teaching, it does not explore how culturally specific games might impact literacy outcomes. Similarly, Susanti (2024) developed an educational game aimed at enhancing students' understanding of legal regulations using the ADDIE model, but this game focuses on a specialized subject matter rather than general literacy skills. Rahmat et al. (2024) found that the Word Wall Game significantly improved students' literacy competence, particularly in reading, writing, and comprehension, showing that interactive learning games can be effective in elementary education. However, this study primarily focuses on a general game (Word Wall Game) and does not address the potential of culturally relevant games to increase engagement and improve



literacy skills. Therefore, there is a clear gap in the literature regarding the use of culturally rooted games, such as the "Sambel Terong (Let's Learn Literacy)" game, to enhance literacy skills in elementary school students. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how a culturally specific game like "Sambel Terong" can contribute to improved literacy outcomes, offering a unique perspective on how local culture and interactive play can enhance student learning in the literacy context.

This research aims to describe strategies for enhancing literacy among elementary students, specifically by sharing ideas with teachers on using Sambel Terong as an educational resource in SDN Kedawung 2. The purposes of this research: 1) To provide the solution for the lack of students' literacy in SDN Kedawung 2. 2) As a means of fostering literacy, as it is hoped that by instilling literacy habits early on, students will develop a reading culture that will prepare them for the future. 3) The importance of being aware of literacy can support an individual's success in addressing various challenges.

## 2.0 METHOD

This research used a qualitative research method to describe the implementation of Sambel Terong or "Sambil Belajar Literasi, Dong!" one of the work programs in Kampus Mengajar 7 that was conducted at SDN Kedawung 2 to enhance students' literacy. As a fundamental research process, the data collection in this research was conducted naturally to interpret phenomena. The data collection methods involve two primary techniques: (1) Observation, which takes place in the classroom, the setting being studied. In this case, the researcher took the role of a teacher, while colleagues from the "Kampus Mengajar 7" program act as observers during the process. (2) Interviews, where the data were gathered through direct communication with students to know how the students participate and involve themselves in learning activities to support data from observation. The interview questions focus on students' perspective with Sambel Terong strategy in enhance their literacy.

The data were analyzed by the researchers by presenting evidence qualitatively. The data described were then interpreted based on the concepts of game-based learning. Finally, the conclusion drawing was made.

## 3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 *The Strategy used by the Teacher is name Sambel Terong*

The analysis results indicate that literacy activities were implemented by engaging students with some games through Sambel Terong or while learning literacy as part of the educational process. Despite some challenges, students were able to participate well in these activities.

"Sambel Terong" or "While Learning Literacy, Let's Go!" or in Indonesia we called "Sambil Belajar Literasi, Dong!" is one of the programs which designed to enhance students' literacy skills. It is conducted for 15 minutes at the beginning of lessons, where students either read a book or play literacy games. Chen et al. (2020) cite Day (1973), who noted that early conceptions of games literacy primarily focused on observing games. Developing literacy in games was thought to require players to repeatedly engage with games across different contexts, such as varying scenes and platforms. This understanding emphasized the practical and beneficial role of games literacy in enhancing the overall gaming experience for learners. During these activities, students not only read but also observe and learn through play. Using a variety of learning media will engage students and keep them interested, preventing boredom during the learning process. The goal of this program is to develop students' literacy skills, including reading, writing, and receiving information. The researcher implemented Sambel Terong in 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> classes in SDN Kedawung 2.

### 3.2 *The Steps of Sambel Terong to Enhance Students' interest in Literacy*

Zakiah & Sukmandari (2024) stated that reading literacy skills are crucial, as reading serves as the foundation of knowledge. Developing these skills is essential for gaining a deeper understanding of various subjects. Based on the results of the application of Sambel Terong with students, information was obtained that the implementation of this work program made students interested in improving their literacy skills.

### 3.2.1 Preparation and Game Selection

Game-based learning (GBL) has demonstrated benefits for students, but effective implementation necessitates teachers developing specialized game literacy skills (Chen et al., 2020). GBL can improve literacy teaching by actively involving students in problem solving and delivering fast feedback (Hilliard & Kargbo, 2017). The use of the Sambel Terong game for third-grade students at SDN Kedawung 2 in Tritis, Mojo, Kediri Regency starts with an introduction. In the first meeting, the researcher explained the objectives, rules, and benefits of the Sambel Terong game, emphasizing its role in enhancing students' literacy skills. For instance, in a 3th-grade elementary class, the researcher explained that the Sambel Terong Game is an approach that blends learning with play. Its purpose is to help students deepen their understanding of literacy skill through engaging and creative interactions. In the subsequent meeting, the focus shifted to preparing and selecting the games.

As the teacher, the researcher designed games that aligned with the lesson plan and learning objectives. For instance, to improve vocabulary and spelling, an English lesson for third graders might include games like "Guess Who I Am," which uses descriptive clues or body language, and "Word Puzzles," where students form groups and race to correctly solve word challenges. The Sambel Terong games aim to be dynamic and engaging, with varied activities to maintain student interest and reduce boredom.

The Sambel Terong approach offers several literacy-based games for students, including:

- a. Literacy Environment: Immersive activities that transform the classroom into a reading-rich space, such as creating a reading corner.
- b. Treasure Hunt: An exciting activity where students use clues and puzzles to find hidden "treasures," such as books, words, or pieces of information. This game can be applied to any lesson and can also be used for assessments.
- c. Word Puzzles: Includes crosswords, word searches, and anagrams, which require students to decode and manipulate words.
- d. Guess Who I Am: A game where students use descriptive clues or body language to identify a person or object. The teacher can add creative variations to make this game more engaging.
- e. Environmental Literacy: In this game, students play Fruits of the Forest. This activity looks at a variety of forest-based products surrounding the school yard and describe it in their own language.
- f. Digital Game: Using platforms like Wordwall, students play in groups of 3-4, with each group sharing a Chromebook.

Some of mentioned games above can be use in every lessons. By incorporating these diverse activities, the Sambel Terong game enhances student engagement and literacy development in a fun and interactive way. In addition, this approach can boost student engagement and involvement in the learning process, foster a more dynamic and enjoyable classroom atmosphere, and enhance overall academic performance.

Based on the observation, the students enjoyed this kind of activity. They always ask for more activity like that in every literacy class. The students who had lack of reading literacy, they joined the activity happily eventhough the researcher had to spelled some letters for them and explained many times.



### 3.2.2 Implementation and Observation

Students actively participate in Sambel Terong game activity. When conducting every activity, the researcher divided the students into groups or pair based on the class size. This aimed to build students' cooperation and made the activity more engaging. Creating a vibrant and engaging learning environment is critical for attracting students' attention and developing a positive attitude toward learning (Dörnyei 2001).

First, in the literacy environment activity, the teacher and students worked together to create a reading corner. This space was designed to help students build confidence and enhance their literacy skills by providing a dedicated area for reading and learning. By using the reading corner, students were encouraged to engage more with books and written materials, which in turn contributed to their overall literacy development.

Next, the Treasure Hunt game successfully captured the students' interest. The teacher used this game as a warm-up activity before the English lesson. Students were tasked with finding the answers to the teacher's questions hidden in various corners of the classroom or schoolyard. This activity involved both finding correct answers and identifying incorrect ones, keeping the students active and engaged while reinforcing their knowledge in a fun and interactive way.

The third activity, Word Puzzles, included games like word searches and crosswords. The teacher gave students blank blocks and pieces of paper with random letters. Working in groups, students had to quickly search for words within the letters and write them in the corresponding blocks on the whiteboard. This exercise not only reinforced vocabulary but also tested students' ability to think quickly and organize information, making it an excellent measure of their literacy skills.

The fourth game, Guess Who I Am, involved a fun interactive activity where the teacher provided clues to a student representative from each group. The student would then convey the clues to their group, and the first group to guess the correct answer would earn a point. The excitement and eagerness shown by the students when their group scored highlighted their enthusiasm and motivation to participate, reflecting their interest in the learning material.

The fifth activity, Environmental Literacy, was called Fruits of the Forest. In this activity, students were divided into groups and given empty cards. Each group had to choose a forest product from the school yard (which had a variety of trees) and describe it. The group that responded the quickest was declared the winner. The speed with which the students participated indicated their readiness to process and absorb new information, as well as their ability to connect different ideas and concepts in a meaningful way (Rahmat et al., 2024).

Finally, in the Wordwall game activity, the teacher divided the students into pairs or small groups, depending on the class size. Each group took turns selecting a game from the Wordwall platform. These games involved various tasks, such as finding sentences with synonyms, matching words with corresponding images, and filling in blanks with appropriate words. Each game had a set time limit, which varied based on the complexity of the task, the number of words involved, and the learning objectives. The diverse range of activities on Wordwall kept students engaged and provided opportunities for them to practice different aspects of language and literacy in an interactive way.

### 3.2.3 Review and Evaluation

Review and evaluation are essential activities for keeping professional standards and enhancing practice (Thompson & Campling, 1996). To check understanding and make learning stick, the teacher regularly review literacy skills using Sambel Terong. Then, the teacher encourage students to express what they've learned by sharing their favorite game moments or getting creative through drawing and acting. Keeping detailed records of the games used, student progress, and teacher observations is critical for teachers who incorporate hands-on learning experiences such as

preparing "Sambel Terong" into their curriculum. This allows teachers to better evaluate the success of their teaching techniques, identify areas for improvement, and personalize their classes to their students' needs and preferences. This careful approach not only improves the educational experience, but also helps to create a more interesting and effective classroom atmosphere in which kids can grow intellectually and personally.

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of integrating game-based learning strategies, specifically the *Sambel Terong* game, into elementary school literacy instruction. The research, conducted at SDN Kedawung 2, demonstrated that game-based methods can play a pivotal role in addressing the literacy challenges faced by Indonesian students, particularly those related to reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and overall engagement with learning materials.

The findings from this research align with previous studies highlighting the potential of game-based learning (GBL) to engage students and improve their literacy skills (Eslami & Chowdhury, 2021). By incorporating games like *Guess Who I Am*, *Word Puzzles*, and *Treasure Hunts*, the *Sambel Terong* program combines learning with play, which significantly increases students' motivation to participate in literacy activities. These games are designed to be dynamic and interactive, offering students an opportunity to actively engage with language in both structured and creative ways.

The research echoes Chen et al. (2020), who emphasize that GBL can be effective in promoting deeper learning through repeated exposure to concepts in different contexts. The variety of literacy-based games within the *Sambel Terong* strategy provides students with different ways to practice and reinforce their literacy skills, thus catering to diverse learning styles. Furthermore, the use of both traditional and digital games, such as those on platforms like Wordwall, supports the development of digital literacy, which is increasingly important in the modern educational landscape (Zakiah & Sukmandari, 2024).

The study shows that the teacher's ability to adapt the *Sambel Terong* approach to suit the needs of the class is crucial. In the case of the third-grade students at SDN Kedawung 2, the researcher designed the game sequence to be both challenging and accessible, helping to build students' confidence in their literacy abilities. As suggested by Hilliard & Kargbo (2017), games like these provide fast feedback, which is essential in reinforcing students' learning and improving their literacy skills.

As mentioned by Winingsi et al. (2023), creating a supportive and engaging learning environment is essential for enhancing literacy skills. By allowing students to play and learn at the same time, the *Sambel Terong* approach helps students feel more confident in their abilities, even if they have initially struggled with reading.

The study was conducted in a single elementary school (SDN Kedawung 2) and focused primarily on 1st and 3rd-grade students. The small and localized sample size limits the generalizability of the findings to other schools or broader educational contexts. The *Sambel Terong* game was conducted for only 15 minutes at the beginning of each lesson. While this may be sufficient for engaging students and providing short bursts of interactive learning, it may not be enough to see significant long-term improvements in literacy. Future research could include a larger and more diverse group of schools, as well as different grade levels, to test the effectiveness of the *Sambel Terong* game across various contexts. In addition, future researcher could make the duration long enough.



## 4.0 CONCLUSION

Numerous government policies regarding literacy have been introduced in elementary schools, reflecting the government's awareness of its importance for students. Literacy is deemed crucial because it broadens students' perspectives and knowledge (Winingsi, et al. 2023). The "Sambel Terong" program offers an effective and engaging approach to improving literacy skills among elementary students in Indonesia. By incorporating game-based learning activities, such as treasure hunts, word puzzles, and digital games, the program captures students' attention and makes learning literacy enjoyable. This approach has proven successful in increasing student interest and participation in reading and writing tasks, especially in schools like SDN Kedawung 2, where students face challenges with basic literacy skills.

The program also highlights the importance of teacher preparation and collaboration, with educators using diverse, interactive strategies to meet students' needs. Government initiatives, such as "Kampus Mengajar," further support these efforts by providing resources and professional development for teachers.

Overall, fostering strong literacy habits from an early age is essential for students' success in the 21st century. By continuing to implement creative solutions like "Sambel Terong," educators can better equip students with the literacy skills needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

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