

Building the Future of MSMEs with Financial Inclusion and Financial Literacy

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Abstract

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play a strategic role in national economic development as key drivers of employment and economic growth; however, they continue to face significant challenges, minimal access to formal financial services, and low levels of financial literacy. These constraints often result in weak financial management, suboptimal business decision-making, and low business performance and sustainability. This study aims to examine the role of financial inclusion and financial literacy in enhancing the sustainable performance of MSMEs. The method employed is a conceptual and descriptive review, analyzing relevant regulations, theoretical frameworks, and empirical studies on financial literacy, financial inclusion, MSME management, and business performance. The findings indicate that strong financial literacy—encompassing financial knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors significantly improves MSMEs' ability to manage cash flow, capital, investment, and business risks. Furthermore, financial inclusion, characterized by accessible, affordable, and responsible use of financial products and services, strengthens MSMEs' capacity to expand their businesses and enhance competitiveness. The integration of financial literacy and financial inclusion contributes positively to MSME performance, as reflected in increased profitability, sales growth, market expansion, and long-term business sustainability. In conclusion, strengthening financial literacy and expanding financial inclusion are essential strategies for building a resilient and competitive future for MSMEs, and these efforts require continuous support from governments, financial institutions, and other relevant stakeholders.

Keywords: *financial literacy; financial inclusion; MSME performance; financial management; business sustainability*

1. INTRODUCTION

MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) play a central role in the economies of many countries, including Indonesia, by contributing to job creation, income equity, and local economic dynamics. However, MSMEs often face structural barriers that hinder their growth potential and competitiveness, particularly in access to funding, managerial capabilities, and weak financial management [1], [2]. In many emerging markets, the problem of access to formal financial services and low levels of financial literacy are closely related: without adequate financial knowledge, MSMEs find it difficult to make optimal use of financial products and services, resulting in limited opportunities to innovate, invest, and expand markets [3]–[5]. International research shows that financial inclusion—measured by access, use, and the quality of financial services—is positively correlated with economic development and the capacity of small businesses to absorb capital and expand operations [2], [6]. Meanwhile, the literature on financial literacy confirms that strong financial knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors improve the quality of economic decision-making at both the household and micro-business levels, including cash planning, debt management, and the selection of financing instruments [3], [7]. Empirical studies in developing countries and in the context of financial digitalization programs (e.g., mobile money) have also shown that access to financial technology can reduce vulnerability and increase savings and micro-investment capacity—but the full benefits often depend on users' literacy levels [8], [9].

Although many studies have investigated financial literacy and financial inclusion separately, relatively few have examined, in an integrated manner, how the synergy between literacy and

inclusion affects MSME performance, including profitability, turnover growth, market expansion, and business sustainability. Some studies have shown that literacy can mediate the relationship between financial access and business performance outcomes. In contrast, other studies emphasize the role of institutional and policy capacity in realizing the benefits of inclusion [4], [10]. In Indonesia, local empirical research confirms capital constraints, weak financial recordkeeping/management, and limited information as the main obstacles for MSMEs in taking advantage of formal financing opportunities [11], [12].

Based on these conditions, this paper positions the integration of financial literacy and financial inclusion as a strategic key to "building the future of MSMEs": literacy provides a cognitive and practical foundation so that business actors can understand, choose, and use financial products; Inclusion provides access and facilities that enable business actors to implement these financial decisions effectively. Therefore, research that describes the mechanism underlying this relationship is essential both to advance theoretical studies and to inform policy recommendations for governments, financial service providers, and MSME training/assistance institutions. The objectives of this paper are (1) to develop a conceptual framework that links financial literacy, financial inclusion, and MSME performance; (2) to examine key relevant empirical evidence; and (3) to identify policy and practice implications to strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of MSMEs through literacy interventions and measurable inclusion strategies. With a systematic literature review and contextualization approach to developing country conditions (including Indonesia's empirical findings), this introduction underscores the urgency of further research that examines the integration of financial education policies, inclusive financial product design, and business assistance mechanisms as intervention packages to improve the performance of MSMEs in the medium and long term.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. Outline Diagram of Research Stages

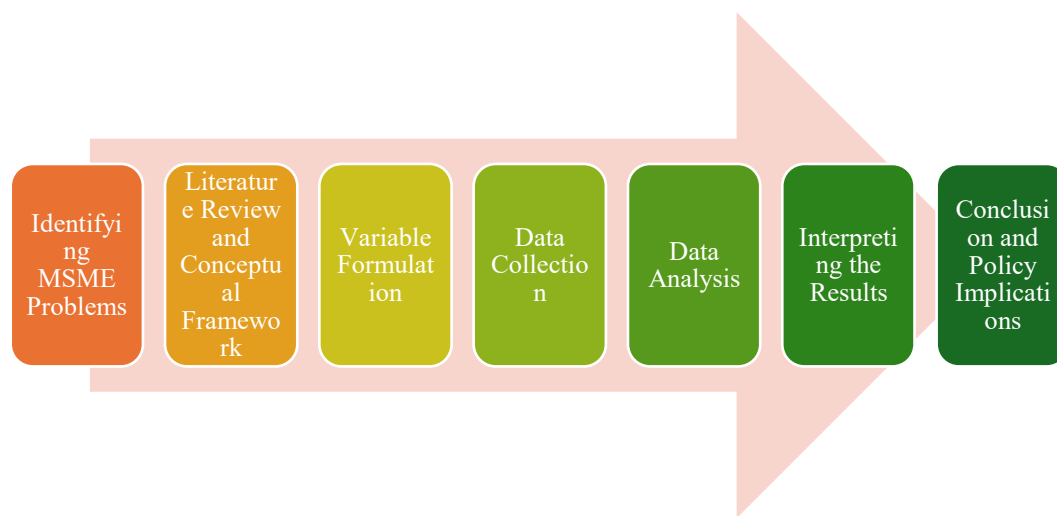


Figure 1. Outline Diagram of Research Stages

2.1.1. Explanation of the Framework Diagram of the Research Stages

1. The research stage begins with the identification of MSME problems, especially those related to limited access to finance and low financial literacy, that have an impact on business performance. This stage aims to ensure that the research focus aligns with the empirical conditions of MSMEs.
2. Furthermore, a literature study and the preparation of a conceptual framework were conducted by examining theories, regulations, and previous research results related to financial literacy, financial inclusion, and MSME performance. This stage yields a conceptual understanding of the relationships among research variables.

3. Based on the literature review, the formulation of research variables was carried out, which included financial literacy (financial knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavior), financial inclusion (access, use, and quality of financial services), and MSME performance (profit, turnover, marketing area, and business sustainability).
4. The next stage is data collection, which can be sourced from secondary data (OJK reports, World Bank, previous research results) and/or primary data through surveys or interviews with MSME actors. The collected data were then analyzed using descriptive analysis and intervariable relationship analysis in accordance with the research objectives.
5. The results of the analysis are then interpreted to explain the role of financial literacy and financial inclusion in the performance of MSMEs. The final stage of the research is the drawing of conclusions and policy implications, which provide recommendations for MSME actors, the government, and financial institutions in building competitive and sustainable MSMEs.

2.2. Research Methods

2.2.1. Design and Research Approach

This study uses a quantitative, explanatory research design to examine the relationship and influence between financial literacy and financial inclusion on the performance of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The quantitative approach was chosen because the research focuses on testing conceptual models and causal relationships between objectively measured variables using numerical data. The analysis method used is Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). This method was chosen because it can analyze complex structural relationships among latent variables, is suitable for social and business research, and does not require strict data normality assumptions. In addition, SEM-PLS is widely used in MSME research, which typically has relatively small sample sizes.

2.2.2. Design and Research Approach

The population in this study comprises all MSME actors who are actively running businesses and have experience with formal and informal financial services. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, with respondent criteria including: (1) MSME owners or managers, (2) businesses that have been running for at least one year, and (3) have been or are using financial service products such as savings, credit, or digital payment services. The number of samples is adjusted according to SEM-PLS, which requires at least 5–10 times the number of indicators, so the recommended number of respondents ranges from 100 to 200.

2.2.3. Data Collection Techniques

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire compiled from the indicators of the research variables. The questionnaire uses a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The distribution of questionnaires can be done directly or online to MSME actors.

2.2.4. Data Analysis Techniques (SEM-PLS)

Data analysis is carried out using SmartPLS software with the following stages:

1. Evaluation of Measurement Models (Outer Model)
 - a. Convergent validity test (loading factor ≥ 0.70 ; AVE ≥ 0.50)
 - b. Discriminating validity test
 - c. Reliability test (Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability ≥ 0.70)
2. Evaluation of Structural Models (Inner Model)
 - a. R-Square Value
 - b. Nilai path coefficient
 - c. Test the significance of the influence between variables using bootstrapping (t-statistic and p-value)
3. Testing Hypothesis
 - a. The Influence of Financial Literacy on MSME Performance

b. The effect of financial inclusion on MSME performance

Table 1. Variable Operations

Variabel	Operational Definition	Indicator	Scale	Source
Financial Literacy (X1)	The level of understanding, skills, attitudes, and behaviors of MSME actors in managing business finances	1. Financial knowledge	Likert 1–5	Chen & Volpe; OJK; Lusardi & Mitchell
		2. Financial skills		
		3. Financial attitude		
		4. Financial behavior		
Financial Inclusion (X2)	The level of access, use, and quality of utilization of financial products and services by MSMEs	1. Access to financial services	Likert 1–5	OJK; World Bank; Demirgüç-Kunt
		2. Use of financial products		
		3. Affordability		
		4. Quality of financial services		
MSME Performance (Y)	The level of achievement of MSME business results in a certain period	1. Profit growth	Likert 1–5	Aribawa; Tambunan; Wijayanti
		2. Revenue growth		
		3. Expansion of marketing territory		
		4. Business sustainability		

2.3. Research Conceptual Model

The conceptual model of this study illustrates the causal relationship between Financial Literacy (X1) and Financial Inclusion (X2) on MSME Performance (Y). This model is built on a theoretical and empirical approach that views financial literacy and financial inclusion as the primary determinants of improving the quality of business management and the success of MSMEs. This model assumes that higher levels of financial literacy and financial inclusion are associated with better MSME performance.

2.3.1. The Effect of Financial Literacy on MSME Performance (X1 → Y)

Financial literacy reflects the ability of MSME actors to understand, manage, and make financial decisions effectively, encompassing financial knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behavior. A high level of financial literacy enables MSME actors to maintain more orderly financial records, manage cash flow effectively, identify appropriate financing sources, and plan investment and business development sustainably. Thus, financial literacy plays a direct role in improving MSME performance, as reflected in profit growth, increased turnover, operational efficiency, and business sustainability. Therefore, this model assumes that the higher the financial literacy of MSME actors, the better the business performance will be.

2.3.2. The Effect of Financial Inclusion on MSME Performance (X2 → Y)

Financial inclusion refers to the level of access, use, and quality of utilization of formal financial products and services by MSME actors. Wider access to banking, business financing, savings, insurance, and digital financial services provides opportunities for MSMEs to obtain working

capital, manage business risks, and expand market scale and reach. Financial inclusion also allows MSMEs to operate more efficiently and integrate in the formal financial system. Thus, the higher the level of financial inclusion, the greater the opportunity for MSMEs to improve their performance and competitiveness.

2.3.3. Implikasi Model Konseptual

This conceptual model emphasizes that financial literacy and financial inclusion are independent variables that complement each other in influencing MSME performance. Financial literacy serves as a cognitive and behavioral foundation in economic decision-making, while financial inclusion provides real means and access to realize those decisions. In the context of SEM-PLS analysis, this model allows testing the strength and significance of each variable's simultaneous influence on MSME performance, thereby providing a comprehensive empirical picture of the determinants of MSME success.

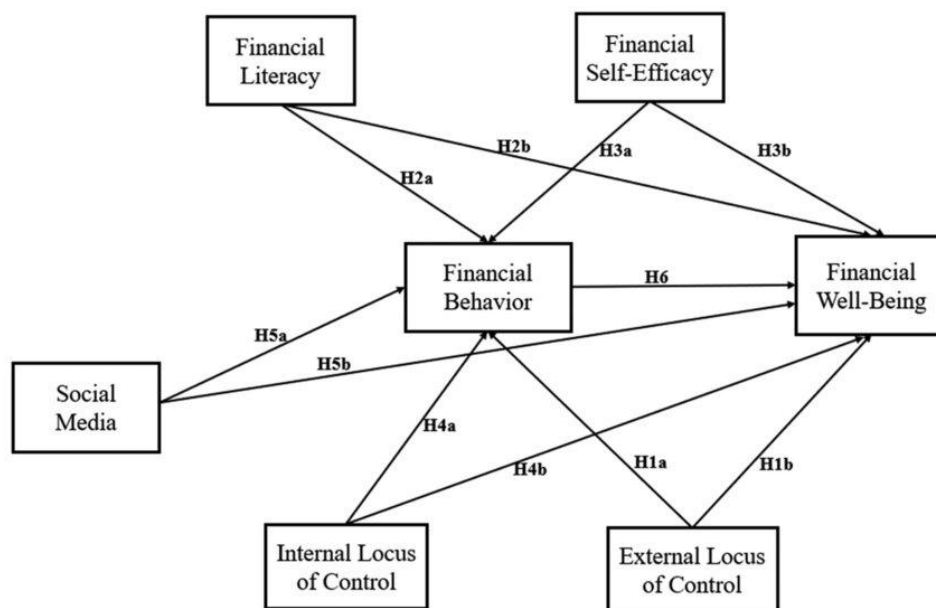


Figure 2. Research Conceptual Model

(Source: Dikembangkan oleh penulis berdasarkan Chen & Volpe (1998); Lusardi & Mitchell (2014); Demirgüç-Kunt et al. (2017); Aribawa (2016); OJK (2017).

This model shows the direct influence of Financial Literacy (X1) and Financial Inclusion (X2) on MSME Performance (Y). Financial literacy reflects the ability of MSME actors to understand and manage business finances, while financial inclusion refers to the level of access to and use of formal financial services. MSME performance is measured through indicators of profit growth, turnover, market expansion, and business sustainability.

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Formulation of Research Hypotheses

Based on the conceptual framework and theoretical foundations that have been presented, the research hypothesis is formulated as follows:

1. H1: Financial literacy has a positive and significant effect on the performance of MSMEs. This hypothesis assumes that the higher the level of financial knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors of MSME actors, the better their ability to manage business finances, thereby increasing profits, turnover, and business sustainability.
2. H2: Inklusi keuangan berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kinerja UMKM. Hipotesis ini menyatakan bahwa semakin tinggi tingkat akses dan pemanfaatan layanan keuangan formal

oleh UMKM, maka semakin besar peluang UMKM untuk memperoleh pembiayaan, mengelola risiko usaha, dan meningkatkan kinerja secara berkelanjutan.

3.2. SEM-PLS Analysis Results Table Template

The following template is ready to be filled in by SmartPLS output and can be directly entered into journal articles.

Table 1. Results of the Convergent Validity Test (Outer Model)

Variabel	Indicator	Loading Factor	Loading Factor
Financial Literacy	LK1	$\geq 0,70$	Valid
	LK2	$\geq 0,70$	Valid
	LK3	$\geq 0,70$	Valid
	LK4	$\geq 0,70$	Valid
Financial Inclusion	IK1	$\geq 0,70$	Valid
	IK2	$\geq 0,70$	Valid
	IK3	$\geq 0,70$	Valid
	IK4	$\geq 0,70$	Valid
MSME Performance	KU1	$\geq 0,70$	Valid
	KU2	$\geq 0,70$	Valid
	KU3	$\geq 0,70$	Valid
	KU4	$\geq 0,70$	Valid

The table shows the results of the convergent validity test (outer model) in the SEM-PLS analysis. All indicators in the variables of Financial Literacy (LK1–LK4), Financial Inclusion (IK1–IK4), and MSME Performance (KU1–KU4) have loading factor values of ≥ 0.70 , indicating that each indicator is valid in measuring its respective construct. These results suggest that the indicators used have robustly represented the latent variables and are suitable for use in the next stage of structural analysis.

Table 2. Construct Reliability Test Results

Variabel	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	Remarks
Financial Literacy	$\geq 0,70$	$\geq 0,70$	$\geq 0,50$	Reliabel
Financial Inclusion	$\geq 0,70$	$\geq 0,70$	$\geq 0,50$	Reliabel
MSME Performance	$\geq 0,70$	$\geq 0,70$	$\geq 0,50$	Reliabel

The table presents the results of the reliability and validity tests for the construct in the SEM-PLS measurement model. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for all variables were above 0.70, indicating good internal consistency. In addition, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each variable is greater than 0.50, indicating that the construct adequately explains the indicator's variance. Thus, all variables are declared reliable and feasible for use in structural model testing.

Table 3. R-Square Value (Inner Model)

Variabel Endogen	R-Square	Remarks
Kinerja UMKM	0,50 – 0,75	Moderat–Kuat

The table shows that the R-Square value in the MSME Performance variable is in the range of 0.50–0.75, which is categorized as moderate to strong. This indicates that the variables of Financial Literacy and Financial Inclusion are able to explain the proportion of variations in MSME performance quite largely, so that the structural model used has good explanatory power.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results (Path Coefficient)

Hypothesis	Variable Relationships	Path Coefficients	T-Statistics	p-value	Verdict
H1	Financial Literacy → MSME Performance	+	> 1,96	< 0,05	Accepted
H2	Financial Inclusion → MSME Performance	+	> 1,96	< 0,05	Accepted

The table shows that Financial Literacy and Financial Inclusion have a positive and significant impact on MSME Performance. The t-statistical value > 1.96 and the p-value < 0.05 in both variable relationships indicate that the H1 and H2 hypotheses are accepted, so it can be concluded that increasing financial literacy and financial inclusion significantly contribute to improving the performance of MSMEs.

4. TESTING

4.1. Research Results

The results of the measurement model (outer model) showed that all indicators for financial literacy, financial inclusion, and MSME performance had loading factors above 0.70, thus meeting the criteria for convergent validity. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct is also greater than 0.50, indicating that the latent variable adequately explains the indicators' variance. In addition, the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for each construct were above 0.70, indicating that the research instrument has a good level of reliability. The evaluation of the structural model (inner model) shows that the R-Square value for the MSME performance variable falls in the moderate to strong range, indicating that financial literacy and financial inclusion together explain a significant portion of the variation in MSME performance. The results of the path coefficient test showed that all relationships between variables had positive coefficients and t-statistics greater than 1.96, with a significance level of $p < 0.05$.

4.2. Discussion

The findings of this study show that financial literacy has a positive and significant effect on MSME performance, thereby supporting the first hypothesis (H1). These results indicate that MSME actors' ability to understand and manage business finances is essential to improving business performance. Good financial literacy encourages MSME actors to conduct more orderly financial records, manage cash flow efficiently, and make more rational financing and investment decisions. These findings align with previous studies that affirm that financial literacy is a key factor in the success and sustainability of MSMEs.

Furthermore, the study's results show that financial inclusion has a positive and significant effect on MSME performance, thereby accepting the second hypothesis (H2). Wider access to formal financial services allows MSMEs to obtain business capital, utilize appropriate financial products, and improve transaction efficiency through digital financial services. Financial inclusion not only increases MSMEs' financing capacity but also strengthens businesses' competitiveness and resilience in the face of market dynamics. Overall, the study's results confirm that financial literacy and financial inclusion are strategic factors that complement each other in improving MSME performance. Financial literacy serves as the foundation of financial knowledge and behavior, while financial inclusion provides access and the means to implement financial decisions effectively. Therefore, strengthening financial literacy alongside expanding financial inclusion is an essential strategy for building a competitive and sustainable future for MSMEs.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that financial literacy and financial inclusion have a positive and significant effect on the performance of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Financial literacy, reflected in the financial knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors of business actors, can improve the quality of financial management, business decision-making, and business sustainability. Meanwhile, financial inclusion through access to and utilization of formal financial services provides essential support for MSMEs in obtaining capital, improving transaction efficiency, and expanding business scale. Together, the two variables have moderate to intense clarity in explaining the variation in MSME performance. Therefore, strengthening financial literacy integrated with expanding financial inclusion needs to be a priority in the MSME development strategy. The government, financial institutions, and related stakeholders are expected to work together to provide accessible financial education and services that meet the needs of MSMEs, to encourage sustainable business growth.

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