

## DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMUNITY LITERACY PROGRAM TO INCREASE CHILDREN'S INTEREST IN READING IN RURAL AREAS

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### ***Abstract***

*A vital part of life is reading. Reading has several advantages, including strengthening memory, expanding knowledge, and enhancing brain function. It is believed that developing literacy in children will lead them to better reasoning abilities, because the best learning can be obtained by reading. This research aims to describe a community literacy program to increase children's interest in reading in rural areas. The method used in writing this article is a literature review. The results obtained in this research are that the Community Literacy Program has an important role in improving literacy culture in children. Where children who usually feel bored studying alone at home can turn to a reading house to be able to study together while also being able to find entertainment with games.*

**Keywords:** *Community literacy program, children's interest in reading*

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## INTRODUCTION

Books are windows to the world, reading books opens the gate to mastering various things such as science, technology, economics, social and culture (Sitopu et al., 2024; Tubagus et al., 2023; Aslan & Shiong, 2023). By reading, Indonesian people can look out to see the vastness of the world. So without us realizing it, reading brings a better mindset to change the future to be more prosperous (Muharrom et al., 2023). Apart from that, reading can train and stimulate the brain, such as increasing concentration, improving memory quality and improving mental quality (Nurhayati et al., 2023). However, this is all just an expectation, as the Indonesian people's interest in reading decreases day by day. They are busy with activities far from books. Reading is an activity to explore the world and life. With this activity, anyone who reads diligently will create a bright future for a learning society. The learning community needs to be enthusiastic about learning activities such as literacy, so that these good activities slowly become a culture in society. The concept of developing human resources through the literacy movement is still practiced by several communities (Muhsin Kalida, 2020).

Many factors underlie the decline in literacy in Indonesia. The decline in interest in reading is due to problems such as problems with access, facilities, flow of information and the quality of literacy understanding in Indonesian society (Nurdiana et al., 2023; Erwan et al., 2023). According to UNESCO, every year one person must read at least 3 books. When compared with countries in East Asia, Europe and the United States, on average, they are able to read 15-30 books per year. Meanwhile in Indonesia, the ideal number of books in Indonesia is 270 million people multiplied by 3 books, meaning that 810 million copies of books need to be circulated each year (Iis Lisnawati & Yuni Ertinawati, 2019).

However, the number of readers in Indonesia is only 22,318,083 copies. This means that the supply of books has not been met to equalize the book needs of the Indonesian people. A more even distribution of books requires facilities for good book management. With library facilities and reading parks, books can be managed using the correct mechanism and facilitate the community in increasing their interest in reading. However,

the limited number of libraries and reading parks is part of the problem in Indonesian society's literacy. As there are still many rural areas that do not have libraries and reading parks. Based on field surveys, the low interest in reading in rural areas is caused by the absence of facilities and infrastructure to support activities to increase reading interest.

Literacy can be said to be an activity of reading and writing which is the main thing that every person must have. Literacy is closely related to the acquisition of knowledge and skills that are useful in improving the quality of human resources (Harefa, Sari, & Hia, 2022).

Through literacy, it is hoped that it can increase interest in reading in society, especially children, so that they will love reading and writing activities more (Sarmila et al., 2023; Sulastris et al., 2023). The sooner a child is introduced to books, the more appropriate his mental readiness will be. Therefore, a child with high literacy skills is expected to be able to solve various problems and make decisions based on what he knows and/or learns. So this is in accordance with one of the benefits of literacy activities, namely analytical and thinking skills and being able to increase critical power and focus (Munawar & Mahendrawanto, 2019).

However, unfortunately literacy among children today is still low. This is due to their lack of motivation to read. The capacity to use words and visuals in a variety of rich and varied contexts for reading, writing, speaking, listening, seeing, presenting, and critical thought about ideas is known as literacy. This enables us to communicate, exchange knowledge, and create meaning. Building on prior information, cultural norms, and life experiences to create new and more profound understandings is the process of being literate. In order to develop and actively engage in a democratic society, literacy serves as a bridge between individuals and society (Lisnawati and Ertinawati, 2019).

Empowering communities that encourage reading interest in increasing the literacy of Indonesian society has an important role. Giving the community the tools, chances, information, and abilities to improve their ability to decide their own destiny and to engage in and impact community life is known as empowerment.

The community makes it easier to achieve effective communication so that it makes it easier to convey and understand the direction of goals. One way to build literacy with the community is to build a literacy network. There is no definite definition of a literacy network. In general, networks based on literacy are built by literacy activists, one of whom is a librarian, to collect existing literacy potential, then they gather in a forum that always provides information, shares experiences and together advances literacy in their area. The emphasis is on collaboration between librarians as the driving force and the community involved in all forms of literacy activities (Momuat et al, 2021).

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This paper was written using a literature review methodology. The act of gathering, evaluating, and assembling data from dependable sources that is pertinent to the subject under discussion is known as a literature review. In this instance, statistics and information about the creation of community literacy programs to boost kids' interest in reading in rural areas were gathered through a literature study.

In order to spark children's interest in reading in rural areas, the author first looks for trustworthy sources, including scholarly publications, reference books, and websites pertaining to community literacy initiatives. Relevant keywords like "Development of community literacy programs" and "Increasing children's interest in reading in rural areas" were used in this search.

After reading and analyzing each source's material, the author made notes on key ideas, conclusions, and supporting data for community literacy initiatives. Subsequently, the facts and information that have been evaluated are arranged by the author in accordance with the specified article structure, which consists of an abstract, introduction, methodology, results, and conclusions.

The history and significance of literacy for young people are covered in the introduction section. The literature review utilized as the research approach in this paper is explained in the method section.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Literacy and the Importance of Reading in Children**

A vital part of life is reading. Reading has several advantages, including strengthening memory, expanding knowledge, and enhancing brain function. Experts concur that reading is beneficial to people and has a significant impact on them. History even demonstrates that the intellectuals of the country were raised in a setting where reading was commonplace (Dina Ony Maharani, 2017).

It is regrettable, though, that there isn't much of a reading culture in Indonesia (Haddar et al., 2023). Indonesia's literacy rate is placed 62nd out of 70 countries in a Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) report. This demonstrates how low Indonesia's literacy rate is. Consequently, in order to strengthen Indonesia's position, we must begin encouraging reading habits (Muslimin, 2017).

The habit of reading can be started from an early age because children of this age have so many privileges (Tuhuteru et al., 2023). At this time children are at a very rapid stage of physical and psychological development. The developmental age of children during this period is also known as the golden age, which starts from birth to six years of age. This is also reinforced by research results which show that the intellectual growth of the brain of children aged 4 years reaches 50%, while at the age of 8 years it increases to 80%, and becomes optimal at the age of 18 years (Jamaris, 2013). These data show that an early age is very important for children's development.

Therefore, introducing children to reading from an early age is very useful. One way is to provide interesting reading books for children from an early age. This method can improve reading habits from an early age and form children's interest in reading. Apart from that, another benefit that children get from reading from an early age is that it can enrich vocabulary, increase reading speed, increase understanding of meaning, word structure, and so on (Fatur Prahardika, 2020).

However, choosing literature for children can be said to be difficult because there are so many types of children's books so a fairly strict selection process is required. When selecting novels that are appropriate for

young readers, one may take into account the book's physical characteristics as well as its inherent value. Children's books with terrible content or negative morals, for instance, can affect children's conduct or serve as a model for imitation. Of course, in this case, children need supervision from adults. Therefore, choosing books for children is not only based on their physical appearance, but also takes into account the values contained in them.

When selecting books for children, age group, content quality, moral lesson, character values, and language are all important factors to take into account. However, children relatively like books that have lots of pictures and colors. For this reason, we can select books based on the color and uniqueness of the book cover. After that, we also have to see what message we want to convey. If these two aspects have been fulfilled, it can be used as a reading book for children.

To avoid the difficulty of finding books for children to read, we can also create books of our own design with various selected materials that can be given to children. With this personal design, we can control what materials can be given to children. Examples of materials that can be given to children are alphabet books, animal introduction books or everyday objects.

It is believed that developing literacy in children will lead them to better reasoning abilities, because the best learning can be obtained by reading. Understanding children's literacy begins with the idea that children's literacy skills can begin even before children are able to read and write formally at school, namely starting at an early age with the help of parents (Yulisa Wandasari, 2017).

The concept of literacy in children departs from the following ideas.

1. Children grow up aware of letters. Home becomes a place where reading and writing are part of daily activities, and wherever children are, they are introduced to reading activities.
2. Children are exposed to an environment with and provide opportunities for them to participate in reading activities, so that children try to understand writing.
3. Children are invited to try to interpret the writing they see.

4. Children are also encouraged to start writing.  
(Kurniawan et al, 2020).

Thinking about literacy in children is a child-centered concept that does not only take into account experiences related to reading activities in the family. Researchers also consider that children always try to understand the information they receive. However, children's understanding of literacy is still limited to the ability to recognize letters, understand vocabulary, and pronounce writing without picture instructions.

Furthermore, slowly, understanding and comprehension of literacy in children develops along with the times. Children's understanding of literacy is becoming broader. Children are not only accustomed to a reading-friendly environment; printed material in the form of books or writing on walls or the surrounding environment. Children are now being introduced to the ability to understand literacy through literacy and images that complement writing (Sukaesih et al, 2017).

Illustrations and pictures that complement the writing help children better understand the writing they read. Through illustrations and pictures, children are invited to understand additional information that is not stated explicitly in writing.

Literacy skills are very important for children, especially when children go to school. Because their learning success is very dependent on reading and writing skills. Through literacy learning, it is hoped that children will have good thinking skills, not just literal understanding (Rohim & Rahmawati, 2020).

In early grades, children are introduced to learning to read and write. Learning to read and write in early grades is the basis for determining success in children's subsequent learning activities. Good reading and writing skills in the early grades will encourage thinking skills, sharpen reasoning, expand knowledge and experience, and ultimately be able to help children achieve progress and self-improvement.

At this level, children's literacy skills also need to be supported with literacy media that can help children improve their literacy skills. Children will more easily understand information taught through visual media, in

the form of pictures, illustrations, or objects that can be touched and touched. Verbal media can also be used to support literacy learning.

Another media that plays an important role in literacy learning is non-text reading books that are appropriate to the child's reading ability level. These reading books, which are adapted to the child's reading ability level, are arranged in stages with special characteristics at each level. Each level will help children improve their reading skills and lead them to be able to continue to the next level. Furthermore, if the use of leveled reading books is done correctly and optimally, it will really help teachers in assessing children's literacy skills according to their respective ability levels (Muhsin Kalida, 2020).

It is hoped that these various efforts can improve reading habits and foster interest in reading in Indonesian children. As a result, it will change Indonesia's literacy ranking in the world in the future.

### **Challenges of Children's Interest in Reading in Rural Areas**

Village communities have many basic needs that need to be developed, including through the support of the village literacy movement through Community Reading Gardens, with diverse segments and from different educational backgrounds because the community environment is not only elementary schools, junior high schools, but high schools, or equivalent, even universities. high, therefore joint efforts to develop libraries will help literacy growth (Abadi, 2018).

Meanwhile, the literacy movement seeks to encourage village communities to love the culture of reading and writing through literacy communities, community reading gardens, and the caring role of stakeholders to build interest in reading in the community.

Within the scope of the country, Indonesia as a developing country is expected to be able to utilize digital technology and the Industrial Revolution 4.0 era for the nation's progress, especially in the world of education. Because as the main foundation of a country, education is in a very strategic position to determine the future of the nation. Where this nation wants to go is determined by how interested its people are in reading, writing and arithmetic.



Literacy as the heart of education will be very important in supporting people's imagination and creativity, therefore literacy plays a very important role in shaping the character of village communities, increasing intellectuality is very much needed by village communities. The weakness of interest in literacy in village communities is that this problem seems to never end and has no end in sight and seems to be embedded in the characteristics of village communities (Suharmono Kasiyun, 2015).

It's a challenge to encourage people to like reading books, but this is a challenge for us. What we can do is just start with small steps that exist in the community. Later, after the community is very interested in the world of reading, then the village library can prepare all the facilities and infrastructure. its support.

The main way to absorb information is reading. If we consider that poverty, unemployment and education are problems of interest in reading, this is actually the nation's problem. Reading is directly proportional to the progress and prosperity of the nation. However, in Indonesia this problem has received little attention, both from the government and from the community.

Building a reading culture is not just about providing books or a reading room, but also building thoughts and behavior from a generation that doesn't like reading to a generation that likes to read. From a generation unfamiliar with books to a generation of book lovers. From there creativity and knowledge transfer can take place and develop (Hafizal Indra & Nunung Nurwati, 2017).

In addition to reading newspapers and magazines, there are a number of other factors that can prevent people from appreciating and loving books as a source of information. For example, Indonesia's educational system does not yet require students to read more books than are taught, nor do they require them to seek out information or knowledge beyond what is taught. that is covered in class, or it's possible that the majority of leisure consists of TV watching and games played at home or elsewhere that divert people's attention from reading.

Since the internet is a visual tool that is often associated with a more current source of information, the advancement of internet technology will

actually have an effect on people's desire in reading more. However, this is handled differently because what is searched on the internet is mostly in the form of visuals that are not suitable for children's consumption, besides that there are also many entertainment places, such as recreation parks, malls, supermarkets, etc., which can keep us away from the book.

Mothers are not used to gaining knowledge through reading because they are too busy with various activities at home or in the office and helping earn extra money for the family. This means that the culture of reading has not been passed down from our ancestors, as evidenced by the habit of mothers telling stories to their sons and daughters before they go to sleep (Indriyani et al, 2017).

As a provision for them to become complete Indonesian people with character, because literary works contain many messages and exemplary values in understanding and interpreting life, at first reading activities were not carried out regularly, they began to be carried out more frequently and regularly, which in the past was only reading school textbooks, starting to be moved to read literary works. They did all this because of the emergence of awareness and understanding of the importance of reading for them.

Literacy is an invaluable foundation in our children's development. The ability to read, write and understand text is not only a basic skill, but also a window into a vast world of knowledge. However, in the digital era and the continued development of technology, honing children's literacy skills is not an easy task (Arym Nisma et al, 2019).

There are several challenges that must be faced by both parents and educators in teaching literacy to children. These challenges are:

1. Technological Disruption

The main challenge today is competition with technology. Children are often more interested in gadgets and video games than reading books. Parents and educators need to strike a balance between time spent in front of screens and time spent reading.

2. Difficulty Reading

Not all children experience literacy development easily. Some children may have difficulty reading, either due to dyslexia or other factors. In this case, educators need to provide special support and additional guidance.

3. Lack of Access to Reading Material

Not all children have easy access to quality books. Some families may not be able to afford books, and schools in rural areas often have limited libraries. Community and government initiatives to provide better access to reading materials are essential.

4. Diverse Interests

Every child has different interests. Some may prefer fiction, while others are more interested in nonfiction or certain genres. Parents and educators need to identify children's interests and provide appropriate reading materials. (Sudarsana, 2014).

**The Role of Community Literacy Programs in Increasing Children's Interest in Reading**

Community literacy programs are a type of educational service that tries to encourage people to love reading by providing access to library services. The presence of a community literacy program is a form of concern for the low interest in reading in society. So it is hoped that its existence will enable the public to obtain sources of information more easily. Role meaning is a description of a person's function and duties in social life (Saepudin, Sukaesih, & Rusmana, 2017).

To foster children's interest in reading, several strategies are needed to foster interest in literacy. Apart from that, to increase the interest in reading in village communities, especially children, one way is to hold various literacy movement activities such as linguistic literacy movements (writing poetry, writing rhymes, telling stories and so on). This activity aims to attract children's attention and requires education regarding the benefits of searching for reading sources that have been carried out (Paramitha, 2020).

With these strategies, it is hoped that they can attract children's attention to reading:

1. Provide interesting reading material, especially suitable for children.

The management always provides reading books by continuously seeking donations in the form of money or books suitable for use in order to provide

interesting reading material for children. Then we select books that are still suitable to be read.

2. Hold joint learning activities.

It is hoped that with this joint learning activity, children will be able to go to the reading house more often to study together and read with some of the learning ideas provided.

3. Providing adequate facilities and infrastructure.

Management continues to strive to provide facilities and infrastructure to support services for children. One of them is by providing a reading corner which the manager places on the terrace of the house.

4. Organize reading stalls and/or mobile library motorbikes every week.

Opening a reading stall using a mobile library motorbike is one strategy for promoting literacy among the wider community.

(Rohim & Rahmawati, 2020).

Community literacy programs play an important role in life because knowledge is gained through reading. Therefore, children must develop this skill from an early age. Apart from that, to foster people's interest in reading, cooperation between the village government and the surrounding community is needed so that the goal of creating a community literacy program can be achieved optimally (Zainal Arifin, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

There are many ways that all parties can do to develop villages. This can start from a few simple things that we can do for the village. One of the efforts to develop villages is to build the mindset and habits of village communities, namely cultivating literacy. This community service activity aims to familiarize village residents with holding literacy activities. Literacy activities can be carried out anywhere, but adequate supporting facilities and infrastructure can motivate residents to cultivate literacy.

The presence of the Community Literacy Program can be a bridge to a solution for children whose interest in reading is low. Therefore, the Community Literacy Program has an important role in improving literacy culture in children. Where children who usually feel bored studying alone

at home can turn to a reading house to be able to study together while also being able to find entertainment with games. Existing strategies can be a force for increasing interest in reading, such as by providing various interesting library materials, holding joint learning activities, providing appreciation and the best service, and providing adequate facilities and infrastructure.

However, the Community Literacy Program also faces obstacles in fostering interest in reading in children, such as technological interference, reading difficulties, lack of access to reading materials, and diverse interests.

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