



Increasing Reading Interest and Literacy in the Community Through the Community Reading Garden (TBM) Program in Gempol Village, Gempol District, Cirebon Regency

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Abstract— Reading interest and literacy among the public are crucial aspects in developing quality human resources and active participation in development. However, the literacy rate in Indonesia, especially in rural areas, remains very low. The Community Reading Garden (TBM) program in Gempol Village, Gempol District, Cirebon Regency, was initiated as a strategic effort to increase reading interest and literacy among the community. By providing easy access to reading materials, this program aims to foster a strong culture of literacy among elementary and junior high school students. This program not only provides reading materials but also organizes various literacy activities involving all elements of the community, using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach that emphasizes active community participation. The results of this program show an increase in reading interest, community participation, and a positive impact on the quality of literacy in the village. The TBM program in Gempol Village serves as a model for other villages in developing the quality of life of the community through improved literacy.

Keywords— Reading Interest; Literacy; Community Reading Garden

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I. INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental skill that plays a vital role in individual and societal development. As an activity involving cognitive and affective processes, reading is not merely about understanding texts but also encompasses the ability to interpret, analyze, and evaluate the acquired information. According to Yulianah Prihatin and Raras Hafidha Sari (2020), reading is a process involving both visual and cognitive abilities, which are essential to make sense of written symbols and provide meaning to the reader. Thus, reading ability serves as the foundation for broader literacy development, including writing skills, critical thinking, and effective communication.

Literacy is defined as the ability to utilize one's potential and skills to access, comprehend, process, and use information intelligently through various activities, including reading, observing, listening, writing, and speaking (Ella Masita et al., 2023). In the current era of globalization and information technology, literacy has become increasingly important, not only in formal education but also in daily life. Digital literacy, for instance, is now a fundamental requirement for understanding and managing information amidst the flood of data generated by technological advancements.

Reading interest and literacy are fundamental elements in developing high-quality human resources, enabling

critical thinking, problem-solving, and active participation in development. However, reading interest in Indonesia remains significantly low compared to other countries. UNESCO data reveals that Indonesia ranks second to last in global literacy, with a reading interest rate of only 0.001%. This means that only one out of every 1,000 Indonesians actively reads. A study titled *World's Most Literate Nations Ranked* by Central Connecticut State University (2016) placed Indonesia 60th out of 61 countries in terms of reading interest, below Thailand (59th) and just above Botswana (61st) (Yulianah Prihatin and Raras Hafidha, et al., 2020).

Low levels of reading and literacy can hinder individual and societal progress, limiting access to education, employment opportunities, and active participation in social life. Research by Muslikhah & Supriyadi (2021) indicates that low literacy levels in rural areas correlate with low quality of life. This presents a significant challenge, particularly in rural areas like Gempol Village, Gempol District, Cirebon Regency.

Gempol Village holds great potential in industry and tourism. However, low reading interest and literacy among its residents impede its progress. Initial observations and interviews with village officials revealed several issues, including limited access to reading materials, the absence of a village library, and a lack of programs promoting a reading culture. Additionally, children and adolescents spend more time on unproductive activities like playing

with gadgets or watching television (Asep, 2024; Ja'far, 2024). The lack of reading materials and supporting facilities such as libraries further hinders efforts to improve reading habits and literacy in the village.

To address these challenges, the Community Reading Garden (Taman Bacaan Masyarakat or TBM) program in Gempol Village was initiated as a strategic solution. As a non-formal institution, TBM plays a crucial role in enhancing reading interest and providing access to reading materials for the community. Additionally, TBM serves as a platform for character education for children, fostering their skills and creativity (Santy & Husna et al., 2017). TBM aims to increase reading interest and literacy by providing easily accessible reading facilities for all community members. It is designed as a welcoming and enjoyable space where villagers can read books for free. The program also serves as a literacy activity center, offering book discussions, tutoring, drawing, and play activities.

The TBM program goes beyond providing books, integrating various supporting activities involving all community elements, including youth, parents, and educators. Active community participation in managing and utilizing TBM is key to its success. With TBM, it is hoped that not only children and teenagers but also adults who lack access to reading materials will benefit. The importance of TBM in improving literacy is emphasized in the *Guidelines for Community Reading Gardens Development* published by the Ministry of Education and Culture (2013).

With TBM, the reading culture and community productivity can be enhanced, creating a learning-oriented community capable of developing their skills independently. Reading materials and programs are tailored to meet the local community's informational needs (Hendriyana et al., 2022). As part of non-formal education, TBM offers engaging and educational programs to attract community interest.

Overall, this program supports the national vision of strengthening literacy culture in Indonesia. As mandated by Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 on Strengthening Character Education, literacy is one of the five main pillars to be reinforced and is recognized as a fundamental educational right in Indonesia's Constitution, Law No. 23 of 2003 on Child Protection, Law No. 39 of 1999 on Human Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Indonesia. With TBM, Gempol Village can serve as a model for other villages in improving the quality of human resources through literacy, contributing to sustainable improvements in education, welfare, and community self-reliance.

II. METHOD

The community engagement program adopts the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, a process where the community scientifically studies problems to guide, improve, and evaluate their decisions and actions (Abdul Rahmat, Mira Mirnawati, et al., 2020). This approach emphasizes empowerment-oriented and change-driven research, conducted *by*, *with*, and *for* the community. Through this method, the community is assisted or facilitated in making decisions and taking initiatives to

become more self-reliant in improving their quality of life (Agus Afandy et al., 2022). The PAR approach was chosen because it allows students participating in community service programs (KKN) to collaborate with the community in identifying issues, designing solutions, and evaluating the impact of proposed literacy programs. This design provides space for active community participation at every stage, fostering a sense of ownership and ensuring program sustainability.

A. Data Collection Techniques

The program employs several data collection techniques: interviews, observation, documentation, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD).

- Interviews: Conducted with stakeholders related to the community reading garden (TBM) program, such as the village head, village officials, community leaders, and program participants. The goal is to gather perceptions, experiences, and expectations related to the TBM program.
- Observation: Direct involvement in TBM program activities to observe and record the dynamics of interactions between the TBM program and the community.
- Documentation: Collecting documents related to TBM activities, including reports, photos, and videos.
- FGD: Organized with community groups to gather information about their needs, challenges, and aspirations regarding the TBM program.

B. Stages of Activities

These data collection techniques support the following activity stages:

1. Planning

At this stage, the community service team identifies problems, formulates goals, and develops the TBM program. The planning process involves five key steps:

- Understanding the community's current situation (*to know*).
- Identifying existing problems (*to understand*).
- Planning solutions (*to plan*).
- Taking actions to address the problems (*to act*).
- Building awareness for sustainable change (*to change*).

The planning aims to determine reading interests, preferred book genres, barriers to accessing reading materials, mechanisms for book procurement, and strategic locations for the TBM.

2. Implementation

During this stage, the community service team implements the TBM program according to the plan. Activities include:

- Collecting books that meet the needs and interests of children aged 6-15 years through open donations and partnerships.
- Preparing strategic locations for the TBM program.
- Setting operational schedules.

- Conducting outreach and promotion to raise community awareness.
- Organizing literacy-related supporting activities.

3. Monitoring and Evaluation

Regular monitoring and evaluation are conducted to assess the program's impact on the community. Activities include interviews, observations, and FGDs to measure participation levels, changes in reading interest, and other social impacts. Collected data are analyzed to identify program successes, challenges, and improvement opportunities.

4. Program Sustainability

The final stage ensures the TBM program's continued benefits to the community even after the community service program concludes. Activities include:

- Establishing a management team and providing guidance to the community for independent TBM management.
- Collaborating with village governments, regional libraries, and non-governmental organizations to support program sustainability.

By following this structured approach, the program aims to create a lasting positive impact on the community, fostering a culture of reading and literacy that benefits all members of Gempol Village.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Preparation and Planning

The first step taken by the community service team to establish the Community Reading Garden (TBM) program involved coordination and discussions with the Village Head and village officials. These discussions focused on planning and conceptualizing the TBM program while considering several critical aspects:

1. Identifying Barriers: Understanding the challenges faced by the community in accessing reading materials.
2. Program Objectives: Presenting the primary goals of the TBM program as a center for literacy activities that are inspirational, educational, and enjoyable for all community members.
3. Book Needs: Assessing the need for books catering to the 6-15 age group, from children to teenagers.
4. Strategic Location: Selecting an easily accessible and comfortable location for reading activities.
5. Promotion and Socialization: Actively promoting the TBM program through social media, pamphlets, and announcements in public places.
6. Engaging Activities: Planning interesting activities at TBM, such as free reading, discussions, drawing, storytelling, and educational games to attract public interest and increase visits.

This careful preparation and planning aim to ensure that the TBM program is effective, sustainable, and able

to address the literacy needs of the community comprehensively.



Figure 1: Discussion with the Village Head and Village Officials

The next step involved the procurement of reading materials. The community service team, in collaboration with village officials and local residents, organized an open book donation drive to collect quality and appropriate reading materials free from elements of SARA (ethnic, religious, racial, and intergroup issues) and pornography. To gather donations, they distributed pamphlets on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp and posted them in strategic locations, including the village hall, schools, madrasas, mosques, and prayer rooms.

Additionally, the team established partnerships with external parties. The donated books were then carefully selected and categorized based on the needs of elementary and middle school students. Through this donation drive, the community service team in Gempol Village, along with local residents, successfully collected around 300 books across various categories.

The collection at the Community Reading Garden (TBM) is diverse, encompassing textbooks, novels, encyclopedias, storybooks, and picture books. These books were sourced from various contributors, including Taman Baca Jalanan Plumbon, university lecturers, local community members, fellow students, Taman Baca Pangenan Cirebon, and Plaza Collection.



Figure 2: Open Book Donation

After gathering reading materials, the community service team held discussions with the local community to select suitable locations for the TBM activities. The selection process included input from community leaders, village officials, and residents of Gempol. After thorough consideration, three strategic locations were chosen for the TBM program: the veranda of SMPN 1 Gempol, SDN 1 Gempol, and MDTU Al-Ikhlas. These locations were selected based on several factors: their

strategic position along the village's main route, making them easily accessible for residents from various areas; the availability of spacious and comfortable spaces ideal for reading activities for school students and the general public; and the high potential for community interaction at these locations.

B. Program Implementation

The community service team, along with the local government and residents, disseminated information about TBM activities and operational schedules through pamphlets containing detailed information about TBM. These pamphlets were distributed to various strategic locations, such as prayer rooms, schools, madrasahs, and residents' homes. Additionally, social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp were utilized to reach a broader audience, particularly elementary and junior high school students.

The TBM team also proactively visited nearby junior high schools, elementary schools, and madrasahs in Gempol Village to introduce the TBM program and encourage students to take advantage of the available facilities. Through direct socialization efforts, the program aims to foster a growing interest in reading and learning among the younger generation.



Figure 3: TBM Socialization at Schools and Madrasahs

The community service team, in collaboration with the local community, consistently strives to create a comfortable and engaging reading environment for residents. One of the innovations introduced is the establishment of a reading corner. This initiative offers a relaxed and nature-friendly reading space. Mats are spread under shady trees, and the collection of books is neatly arranged on these mats, allowing visitors to easily pick a book of their choice and read it on the spot. This setup creates a cozy atmosphere where visitors can enjoy reading while breathing fresh air, fostering a greater interest in reading, particularly among children and teenagers.

The community service team operates the TBM program with a regular schedule every Sunday, from 9:00 AM to 11:00 AM (WIB). During operational hours, TBM offers a variety of activities for visitors aged 6–15 years (elementary and middle school students), including:

1. Free reading: Visitors can enjoy a wide range of books, including storybooks, novels, encyclopedias, picture books, and educational materials.

2. Storytelling sessions: Visitors can listen to captivating stories.
3. Drawing activities: Visitors can express their creativity through drawing.
4. Traditional games: Visitors can participate in fun traditional games.
5. Origami folding and paper crafts: Visitors can create various crafts using origami paper.



Image 4: TBM (Reading Booth) Activity

C. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are conducted by observing the attendance of TBM visitors at each weekly activity. Below is a diagram of the attendance of TBM visitors through the reading booth program held every week in Gempol Village, Gempol District, Cirebon Regency.

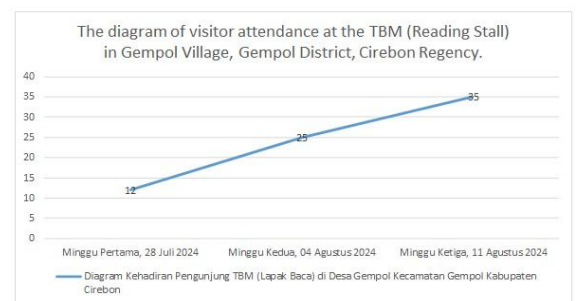


Figure 5: Diagram of Visitor Attendance at the TBM.

Based on the attendance diagram above, the number of visitors increased in the third week due to intensive promotion and cooperation with MDTU Al-Ikhlas Madrasah. The madrasah encouraged students to participate in the fun and child-friendly TBM activities through educational games. From this data, it can be concluded that the TBM program can run optimally, even though the number of visitors is still low. However,

with intensive socialization and collaboration with the village government and educational institutions, there is a high possibility of a significant increase in the number of visitors.

In the implementation of the TBM program, based on the evaluation results conducted by the community service team, several challenges were found, including: a. The number of available books is still limited and dominated by encyclopedias and college materials, making it lacking in books suitable for elementary and middle school students. b. The reading habits in the community are still very low, so further habituation and guidance are needed. c. There is a shortage of several supporting materials for TBM activities, such as book boxes, event banners, office supplies (ATK), and secretarial facilities. d. Difficulty in finding youth figures, volunteers, or organizations that can be involved in the management of TBM.

Based on the evaluation results above, constructive feedback is needed to overcome the challenges faced. The feedback is formulated as follows: a. The community service team should conduct a book donation campaign focused on the needs of elementary and middle school students. In addition, establishing partnerships with the village government, local publishers, or bookstores to acquire relevant textbooks can be a solution. Inventorying book needs should be conducted regularly to ensure that the available collection remains relevant and beneficial for the target audience. b. The mentoring and habituation program should be enhanced with more interactive and engaging methods, such as hosting reading sessions, story competitions, or book discussions with prizes. Forming weekly study or reading groups could be an effective way to foster reading habits among children. c. A short-term solution could involve fundraising or contributions from the village government and local volunteers to fulfill these needs. Additionally, the community service program could seek sponsorship from companies like PT Indocement, which may be interested in supporting this literacy activity as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). d. Organize discussion forums or socialization events involving local youth, youth organizations, and relevant communities. Capacity-building programs for prospective TBM managers could also be considered to equip them with the necessary skills.

D. *Sustainability of the Reading Garden Program*

The community service team, the village government, and the community are committed to developing the TBM program through sustainability efforts. This sustainability aims to ensure that the reading garden program continues to benefit the community even after the service period has ended. Some steps taken to guarantee the sustainability of the program include:

1. Formation of Management The community service team conducts a focused group discussion (FGD) with the village government and the community to form the TBM management. This management consists of village residents who have a strong

commitment to literacy. With an active management team, TBM operations can be more effective and sustainable.

2. Establishing Partnerships with the Village Government, Regional Libraries, and NGOs The community service team provides mentoring to the TBM management to establish partnerships with various parties to provide facilities, book procurement, and funding. The village government plays an active role in providing facilities and budget support. Additionally, collaborating with regional libraries enables TBM to access a more diverse collection of books. Non-governmental organizations also contribute through mentoring and literacy programs.
3. Regular Mentoring by the Community Service Team To ensure the continuity of the program, TBM Desa Gempol will receive regular mentoring from the community service team. This mentoring is conducted weekly and covers various aspects, including book collection management, literacy activities implementation, and the development of new programs.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Community Reading Garden (TBM) program in Gempol Village, Gempol District, Cirebon Regency, has successfully increased the reading interest and literacy levels of the local community through a participatory and sustainable approach. This program demonstrates that with active community involvement, easy access to reading materials, and the implementation of engaging literacy activities, a reading culture can be significantly enhanced. The success of this program is evident not only from the increase in visitors and utilization of the TBM but also from the change in attitudes and mindset of the community regarding the importance of literacy. This TBM program can serve as an example for similar initiatives in other regions, especially in the context of community empowerment and the enhancement of human resource quality through literacy. The sustainability of this program is expected to continue through collaboration between the government, the community, and relevant stakeholders, so its benefits can be felt in the long term.

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