



# Journal of Community Services (Abdisci)

e-ISSN 3047-2431  
p-ISSN 3047-3489



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## REVITALIZATION OF COMMUNITY READING CENTERS AND STRENGTHENING CHILDREN'S LITERACY THROUGH THEMATIC COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAMS: A COLLABORATION WITH THE NATIONAL LIBRARY IN WATUBELAH VILLAGE

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### Abstract:

**Background:** Taman Baca Masyarakat (TBM) serves as a strategic non-formal educational facility for fostering a culture of literacy. However, low public interest in reading has led to underutilization—as observed in Watubelah Village, Sumber District, Cirebon Regency, where the reading center is used exclusively by early childhood education (PAUD) students.

**Aims:** This study aims to describe the process and impact of revitalizing Community Reading Centers (TBM) and strengthening children's literacy through the Thematic Student Community Service (KKN-T) program, in collaboration with the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia.

**Method:** The program was implemented in four stages: (1) observation and identification; (2) participatory planning; (3) renovation of the Community Reading Center (TBM), accompanied by the addition of approximately 1,000 donated books from the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia; and (4) literacy-strengthening activities—including read-aloud sessions, reading corners, and tutoring—culminating in coloring and story review competitions.

**Result:** The community reading center attracted over 20 elementary school children for visits, while the tutoring program drew approximately 30 children. Among the 15 children who initially lacked reading fluency, 10 demonstrated improved reading skills.

**Conclusion:** Cross-sector collaboration involving university students, the community, and the National Library proved effective in enhancing children's access to reading materials and fostering their interest in reading at the local community level.

**Implications:** Sustainable, community-based management is required to maintain the program's long-term impact.

**Keywords:** literacy; community reading center; thematic community service program; children's reading interest; community engagement



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## INTRODUCTION

Taman Baca Masyarakat (TBM) serves as a strategic non-formal educational facility for fostering a culture of literacy, particularly among early childhood and primary school-aged children. When well managed, TBMs can serve as alternative learning spaces that bring children closer to literacy without relying on formal schools or libraries (Agustiani & Wicaksono, 2021; Sukaesih et al., 2024). In reality, however, many TBMs face limitations in physical facilities and book collections and often fail to attract significant community interest (Jufriadi et al., 2024; Suntini et al., 2025).

A similar situation was observed in Watubelah Village, Sumber District, Cirebon Regency. Prior to the implementation of the community service program in the village, the Community Reading Center (TBM) was utilized almost exclusively by early childhood children—with approximately 80 of them using the facility—while local elementary school students rarely made use of it; in fact, the majority were unaware of its existence. A lack of promotion, a limited book collection, and low reading interest among children prevented the TBM from functioning optimally. This was further reflected in the results of a tutoring program attended by around 30 children, where approximately half still could not read fluently. These findings align with national data indicating low reading interest in Indonesia; UNESCO data reveals that the proportion of the population who read regularly is only about 0.001% of the total (Kurniasari & Sabardila, 2025).

In response, students in the Thematic Community Service Program (KKN-T) at Universitas Swadaya Gunung Jati Cirebon implemented a community service initiative to revitalize Community Reading Centers (TBM) and foster children's interest in reading. The program was further enriched through a collaboration with the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia, which contributed additional book collections to the centers. This

collaboration aligns with the importance of institutional support for strengthening TBMs—as emphasized in the national guidelines for TBM development (Directorate of PMPK, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2021)—and is consistent with findings regarding community-based literacy strengthening that involves local governments and external partners (Nuryanto et al., 2025).

This study aims to describe the process, outcomes, and impact of the Community Reading Center (TBM) revitalization and child literacy strengthening program—implemented through cross-sector collaboration involving KKN-T students, the local community, and the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia in Watubelah Village—given that reading proficiency serves as a crucial foundation for children's future educational success (Dewayani, 2017).

## **METHOD**

This community service activity was carried out in four interconnected stages, adapting a participatory action research model based on prior research on strengthening community-based reading centers (TBM) (Abhyasa et al., 2024; Suntini et al., 2025). The first stage involved observing and identifying the initial conditions of the TBM, revealing that the facility was used primarily by early childhood education (PAUD) students, while elementary school students rarely used it.

In the second stage, the team planned the program collaboratively with the community and stakeholders, including coordinating with the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia for book donations. The third stage involved renovating the community reading center (TBM) and reorganizing the reading area, as well as adding approximately 1,000 books facilitated by the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia. This stage also included promotional activities for the center aimed directly at local children, prioritizing primary school-aged children.

In the third stage, the team implemented a literacy-strengthening program featuring read-aloud sessions, a reading corner, and tutoring attended by about 30 children, prioritizing those who were not yet fluent readers. As an evaluation and as the program's culmination, a coloring contest for early childhood education (PAUD) students and a storytelling competition for elementary school students were held to gauge the children's enthusiasm and literacy progress after the program.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Revitalization and Improved Access to Community Reading Centers

Before implementing the community service program, the Community Reading Center (TBM) in Watubelah Village was used almost exclusively by early childhood education (PAUD) students, serving around 80 children, while elementary school students rarely used the facility. Following the TBM's renovation, the expansion of its book collection, and the implementation of promotional activities, children's interest in visiting the center grew, fostering a greater love for reading. These findings align with previous studies demonstrating that increased visits and community participation—particularly among children—are driven by TBM revitalization efforts, such as facility upgrades and expanded book collections (Jufriadi et al., 2024; Sinulingga & Krisswibowo, 2024; Firdaus & Haq, 2025). Furthermore, the collaboration with the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia underscores the importance of inter-institutional support for the sustainability of this community literacy program, especially given the development challenges previously faced by similar institutions—such as TBM Matahari Indonesia in Kediri—due to limited book collections and funding constraints (Agustiani & Wicaksono, 2021).



Figure 1. Read-aloud session at SDN 1 Watubelah

### Enhancing Children's Reading Interest and Ability through Mentoring

In the initial phase, approximately 15 elementary school children in Watubelah Village were not yet fluent readers. This finding formed the basis for a tutoring program attended by about 30 children, ranging from early childhood education (PAUD) to sixth grade. After implementing the program, 10 of the 15 children who initially lacked reading fluency showed significant improvement in their reading abilities. Although not all children achieved optimal reading proficiency, these results indicate that the intensive program

conducted during the KKN-T (Thematic Community Service Program) positively impacted the children's literacy skills.



Figure 2. Read-aloud session at SDN 1 Watubelah

This aligns with findings that read-aloud activities effectively foster early interest in reading (Triwinarti & Hajidah, 2024) and that structured guidance can increase reading interest among elementary school children (Pramayshela et al., 2023).



Figure 3. Reading Corner at Car Free Day Watubelah



Figure 4. The renovated Taman Baca Masyarakat (TBM))

As an evaluation and culmination of this literacy program series, we held a coloring contest for early childhood education (PAUD) students, which attracted 80 participants, alongside a story review contest for elementary school students in grades 3 through 6, which drew 20 participants. The high participation in both contests reflects the children's growing enthusiasm and confidence in literacy activities. These results align with similar community-based reading center (TBM) programs in Citapen and Tundagan villages, which reported 97% community satisfaction and enthusiasm after implementing community-based literacy-strengthening initiatives (Abhyasa et al., 2024; Sunti et al., 2025). These findings also align with research showing that community-based literacy movements drive social change in local communities (Agustino, 2019).



Figure 5. Coloring competition at PAUD Alam Cendekia and storytelling competition for grade 4–6 elementary school students

In Kalimanggis Kulon Village, this literacy movement has significantly increased public knowledge of literacy, the availability of high-quality books and reading materials, and reading culture. Although village-level literacy groups have improved social cohesion and community empowerment, literacy outreach and training have also inspired adults and children to read more. (Riski et al., 2025).

In Wanagara Village, Patmawati et al. (2025) found that this KKN program not only improves basic literacy in the short term but also creates an inclusive learning community and encourages a sustainable literacy culture. This program is an effective model of community empowerment for improving human resource quality at the village level.

In Setyanegara Village, Faqih et al. (2025) found that implementing the Thematic KKN Program significantly improved community awareness and engagement in environment-based, health-oriented, and education-driven development. This program is expected to generate sustainable community impacts and serve as a multidisciplinary collaborative community service model for future KKN implementations.

In Cilegud Wetan, Permana et al. (2025) show increased children's literacy through interactive storytelling activities, encouraging their reading interest and critical thinking. Economically, MSME actors received training in branding, digital marketing, and promotional material creation to enhance the competitiveness of local products. In addition, public awareness of environmental cleanliness has increased through education on clean and healthy living behaviors (PHBS) and the management of organic and inorganic waste.

## CONCLUSION

This community service program, conducted through the KKN-T (Thematic Community Service Program) and focused on revitalizing the Community Reading Center (TBM) and strengthening children's literacy in Watubelah Urban Village (Sumber District, Cirebon Regency), has yielded highly positive results. Following the program's implementation, the TBM—previously visited only by early childhood education (PAUD) students—now attracts a broader range of children, particularly elementary school students. Additionally, the TBM received a donation of 1,000 books from the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia. An intensive tutoring initiative also successfully boosted children's interest in reading; children who initially struggled with reading fluency demonstrated increased engagement after participating in the program. Furthermore, the children showed great enthusiasm during the coloring and story review competitions. The effectiveness of cross-sector collaboration—involving KKN-T students, the local community, and national institutions like the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia—is evidenced by the

program's success in strengthening literacy at the local village level. However, the sustainability of this impact depends heavily on the community's consistent management of the TBM after the KKN-T program concludes.

## IMPLICATION

This program demonstrates the potential of student-led community service combined with inter-institutional collaboration to tangibly strengthen literacy infrastructure at the local community level. From an academic perspective, the initiative yields a proven collaboration model that can be replicated in future community service research. For the community and local government, the paper emphasizes the importance of sustainably managing Community Reading Centers (TBM), including training local literacy volunteers. At the national level, this model offers insights for broader library outreach strategies aimed at addressing low reading interest in Indonesia.

## Acknowledgment:

The author extends their gratitude to the Watubelah Village Government, the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia, the field supervisor, and all the residents and children who participated in this community service program.

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