

## TRANSFORMING COMMUNITY READING PARKS INTO CENTERS FOR STRENGTHENING CHILDREN'S LITERACY

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to analyze the transformation of Community Reading Parks (TBM) into centers for strengthening children's literacy and to identify their impact on increasing reading interest and community involvement. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Research subjects included TBM managers, literacy facilitators, parents, and children as program participants. Data analysis was conducted interactively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions and verification. The results of the study indicate that the transformation of TBM through a shared reading program, storytelling, book discussions, and community-based literacy habits can increase the frequency of children's visits, their interest in reading, and their parents' participation in supporting literacy activities at home. Participatory and structured community-based literacy learning centers (TBMs) have been proven to function not only as reading spaces but also as non-formal learning centers that foster a sustainable culture of literacy in children. However, the program's success is still influenced by the availability of book collections, the competence of facilitators, and the support of cross-sector partnerships. The transformation of TBMs has the potential to become a model for community-based literacy strengthening that is applicable and sustainable.*

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## Introduction

Literacy is the primary foundation for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Reading skills not only support academic achievement but also open access to knowledge, imagination, and critical thinking skills. In Indonesia, there are serious concerns regarding reading culture: various reports and studies indicate low reading interest and inadequate student literacy outcomes on an international scale. PISA results and national surveys reflect low literacy skills, which in turn threaten the readiness of the younger generation to face the challenges of the 21st century (Fadila & Nurhasanah, 2025).

In this context, the community literacy movement has become one responsive effort growing in various regions. The Community Reading Park (TBM) model, or community reading spaces, has emerged as a community-based initiative that provides access to reading materials, informal learning spaces, and literacy programs for children and families. The role of TBMs goes beyond small bookstores; they serve as arenas for literacy socialization, centers for creative activities, and platforms for community empowerment, reaching groups marginalized by formal library services. The TBM movement in Indonesia has even received national attention and policy support due to its potential to expand literacy access.

Transforming a TBM into a Children's Literacy Strengthening Center means going beyond the function of a passive reading room to a structured learning ecosystem: providing reading habituation programs, shared reading sessions, parent training in reading practices, literacy mentoring for early childhood education (PAUD) and elementary school teachers, and simple digital literacy integration. These interventions align with evidence that shared reading activities (reading aloud, *storytelling*) and a rich literacy environment enhance children's early language skills, vocabulary, comprehension, and interest in reading—key factors for later literacy development. Educational research confirms that reading aloud practices provide significant benefits to children's linguistic and affective aspects (Rahmani, 2021)

Beyond the direct benefits to children, TBMs as literacy centers play a strategic role in community empowerment. Participatory literacy programs—involving local volunteers, schools, and parents—form a network of support that extends the program's impact from the TBM space to homes and schools. This collaborative model also facilitates program adaptation to local needs—for example, focusing on functional literacy for elementary school-aged children, or bilingual materials for multilingual communities. Evaluations of community-based programs have shown that interventions involving co-design with families are more effective in fostering engagement and sustainability (Rukmana et al., 2024).

However, the revitalization of TBM into a children's literacy center faces operational challenges: limited collections relevant and interesting to children, the capacity of managers (volunteers/TBM staff) in designing pedagogical programs, sustainable funding, and access to technology to enrich literacy experiences in the digital era. Therefore, effective transformation requires a holistic approach: (1) development of contextual and engaging children's collections; (2) training in children's literacy methods (e.g., reading aloud, dialogic reading, activity-based literacy); (3) partnership mechanisms (schools, education offices, universities, local publishers); and (4) monitoring and evaluation plans based on indicators of reading interest, frequency of visits, and improvement of literacy skills. This approach has been shown to be effective in a number of community literacy program evaluation studies (Zikri & Agustina, 2025).

From a community service perspective, transforming TBM into a Children's Literacy Strengthening Center offers multi-stakeholder benefits: children gain access to and experience quality literacy; parents and teachers gain practical capacity to support children's literacy; communities gain productive spaces for educational activities; and universities gain partners for action research and sustainable program development. Therefore, the TBM transformation strategy needs to be designed as an evidence-based, participatory, and results-oriented program—with clear indicators of success, such as increased reading interest, children's reading frequency, simple text comprehension, and family participation levels.

Based on the above reasons, transforming TBM into a Center for Strengthening Children's Literacy is a strategic step and an urgent community service program. This program not only addresses limited access to reading materials but also builds a sustainable literacy culture through local capacity building, multi-actor collaboration, and proven pedagogical practices. Therefore, research and community service that design, implement, and evaluate the TBM transformation model are essential as a tangible contribution to improving the quality of Indonesian children's literacy.

## **Method**

This community service activity uses a collaborative approach *participatory community development*, an empowerment model based on active community participation in every stage of the activity. This approach was chosen because transforming Community Reading Parks (TBM) into centers for strengthening children's literacy requires the involvement of managers, volunteers, parents, and children as the primary subjects of the activity, not simply the program's objects.

The implementation of the activity is carried out through several systematic stages. First, needs assessment stage This was conducted through initial observations

and focus group discussions (FGDs) with TBM managers and parents to map children's literacy status, book collection availability, and ongoing activity patterns. This stage aims to ensure the designed program aligns with the real needs of the target community.

Second, program planning stage, namely the preparation of literacy activity modules which include reading aloud, *storytelling*, a thematic literacy corner, and a 15-minute reading habit before playtime. During this phase, the TBM space was also reorganized to make it more child-friendly and support interactive literacy activities.

Third, program implementation stage, namely the implementation of literacy activities routinely during the service period. The activities involve facilitators and volunteers who have been given brief guidance on children's literacy strategies, read-aloud techniques, and simple discussion methods for elementary school-aged children. The approach used is participatory and activity-based.

Fourth, monitoring and evaluation stage, conducted periodically through observations of children's attendance, frequency of book borrowing, and brief interviews with parents regarding changes in children's reading interests at home. Evaluation is conducted by comparing initial conditions and developments throughout the program. Indicators of success include increased child participation, increased reading interest, and active parental involvement in literacy activities.

Through this participatory empowerment approach, it is hoped that TBM will not only become a reading space, but will develop into a sustainable and community-based center for strengthening children's literacy.

## **Results and Discussion**

The results of the study show that the transformation of the Community Reading Park (TBM) becoming a center for strengthening children's literacy has had a significant impact on increasing reading interest, basic literacy skills, and community participation in literacy activities. These findings were generated from analysis of observational data, in-depth interviews, and documentation of activities that took place during the program's implementation.

### **1. Children's Involvement in Literacy Activities**

Observational data shows that the literacy program at TBM is able to increase the number of children's visits, especially during the joint reading sessions (*shared reading*) and storytelling activities (*storytelling*). This routine activity demonstrates the transformation from a mere gathering place to an interactive learning space that implements a child-centered pedagogical approach. Book facilities, thematic reading corners, and children's discussion spaces are felt to be able to attract children's

interest in continuously engaging in literacy activities. This is in line with the results of studies that state that involvement in community literacy programs increases children's reading time and stimulates reading together with their families (Bhatt, 2010).

Other findings show that shared reading sessions by TBM facilitators and volunteers help children develop early reading skills, particularly word comprehension and vocabulary. These activities also boost children's confidence when asked to share simple stories based on their own reading.

## **2. Increasing Children's Interest in Reading**

The next indicator measured was children's reading interest, based on the frequency of visits to the Community Learning Center (TBM) and self-reports from parents. Interviews showed that most parents reported an increase in their children's reading interest after regularly participating in TBM activities. Children now read books more often at home and borrow books to take home to TBM activities. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that community-based literacy programs can significantly increase children's reading interest and positively impact their academic skills (Muhammadah & Ahyad, 2024).

Furthermore, parents' active participation in literacy activities, such as reading together at home or accompanying their children to the Community Learning Center (TBM), also appears to be higher. This demonstrates that TBMs are not merely formal reading spaces, but rather serve as a medium for strengthening literacy relationships within families. This strong parental support is a crucial factor in fostering children's interest in reading and sustaining their literacy beyond the TBM environment (Wijaya et al., 2022).

## **3. Literacy Module and Program Development**

One of the most notable outcomes is the TBM's ability to design activity modules tailored to children's needs. Literacy module development focuses on selecting books appropriate to the children's ages and interests, as well as using presentation methods such as reading aloud, small group discussions, and creative storytelling. This approach supports active learning that is more engaging for children and provides a broader literacy experience than simply reading alone.

In addition, the TBM module also includes functional literacy elements such as *information literacy*, namely the ability to search for and understand simple information from reading material. This aligns with findings showing that managing TBM with relevant materials and a strong information literacy context can improve literacy skills among the wider community (Sinaga et al., 2023).

## **4. The Role of Community and Sustainability Programs**

Other findings indicate that the success of TBM transformation is highly dependent on the active role of the community in planning, implementing, and evaluating activities. The community is not only a beneficiary, but also a participant. *Literacy agent* which spreads a reading culture to their families and immediate communities. The involvement of volunteers, teachers, and parents in the literacy dynamics strengthens the program's sustainability. These results align with studies that emphasize the importance of community participation in literacy activities to establish TBM as centers of sustainable learning and teaching (Sinulingga & Krisswibowo, 2024).

One indicator of sustainability is the regular schedule of activities developed by the TBM management and the community. These activities include a weekly reading club, monthly book discussion sessions, and storytelling competitions, all of which foster healthy competition in reading. The participatory program demonstrates that literacy is not solely the responsibility of the TBM facilitators but a culture shared by all community members.

## **5. Challenges in Implementing TBM as a Literacy Center**

Despite the positive impacts, several challenges remain. First, the limited collection of books appropriate to children's reading levels makes it difficult for some children to find engaging reading material. This aligns with findings that community-based learning centers (TBM) in several locations struggle with a collection of high-quality books relevant to readers' needs (Kamalia et al., 2025).

Second, human resource support, such as pedagogically trained volunteers, remains limited. This has implications for the variety of literacy activities, which are less than optimal, and facilitators' ability to motivate children individually. Therefore, training facilitators and volunteers on literacy strategies and developing child modules is essential for future program implementation.

## **6. Implications and Recommendations**

Based on the research results, TBM as a center for strengthening children's literacy shows great potential in creating a reading culture. However, to improve the quality and sustainability of the program, recommendations that can be given include: (1) increasing the collection of books that are varied and appropriate to children's needs; (2) ongoing training for facilitators and volunteers to improve pedagogical skills; (3) collaboration with schools and education offices to expand access to literacy programs; and (4) regular monitoring and evaluation based on children's literacy competency indicators.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the transformation of TBM has had a concrete positive impact on children's reading interest and literacy skills. TBM, which

functions as an interactive, participatory, and contextual community literacy space, can bring about significant changes in children's literacy culture in the community.

## **Conclusion**

Based on research and discussion, the transformation of Community Reading Parks (TBM) into Children's Literacy Strengthening Centers has significantly impacted reading interest, children's involvement in literacy activities, and community participation in building a culture of literacy. TBMs no longer function simply as spaces that provide books, but have evolved into interactive and participatory educational spaces through shared reading programs *storytelling*, book discussions, and literacy habits in the family environment. This transformation has successfully increased the frequency of children's visits, expanded their literacy experiences, and encouraged parental involvement in reading activities at home. Collaboratively designed and locally-based programs have proven effective in creating a more vibrant and sustainable literacy environment. Thus, TBM holds strategic potential as non-formal learning centers capable of strengthening children's literacy foundations from an early age. However, the effectiveness of TBM transformation is still influenced by several supporting and inhibiting factors, such as the availability of relevant book collections, the competence of literacy facilitators, and resource support and partnerships with formal educational institutions. Therefore, the sustainability of the program requires strengthening the management system, increasing the capacity of administrators, and cross-sector collaboration so that TBM can function optimally as centers for strengthening children's literacy.

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