



## Engagement:

### Jurnal Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat

Vol. 10, No. 02, May, 2026, pp. 445 – 454

ISSN: 2579-8375 (Print), ISSN: 2579-8391 (Online)

<https://engagement.fkdp.or.id/index.php/engagement>

 OPEN ACCESS

# Reimagining Rural Literacy Spaces: Lessons from a Community-Based Reading Corner in a Serang Regency Village

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Indonesia's literacy culture remains at a concerning level, with the PISA survey placing the country 62nd out of 70 nations. Sukajaya Village reflects this challenge, characterized by limited access to high-quality reading materials and high levels of gadget dependency among children.

**Purpose of the Study:** This study aims to analyze the strategies employed by the local community to optimize the Reading Corner as a sustainable and self-reliant center for non-formal education.

**Methods:** The initiative utilized a descriptive qualitative approach, applying Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) through a 5D cycle: Define, Discovery, Dream, Design, and Deliver.

**Results:** The program successfully strengthened literacy governance by mobilizing local assets and relocating the facility to a strategic, weather-protected residence of a local educator. Quantitatively, this intervention resulted in a significant increase in accessibility, with the number of weekly visitors rising from zero to an average of 20 children per week. Success was driven by participatory management, including the establishment of a Village Literacy Committee involving Karang Taruna youth and women activists. The emergence of local champions and increased parental support have ensured the program's sustainability. The study concludes that mobilizing social capital and internal village assets is more effective for rural literacy development than relying solely on external assistance.

## Keywords

Reading Corner; Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD); Community Participation; Rural Literacy

## Article History:

Received: Feb 03<sup>th</sup> 2026

Revised: Apr 30<sup>th</sup> 2026

Accepted: May 28<sup>th</sup> 2026

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## Introduction

Education is a fundamental pillar of human development and social progress, with literacy as its primary foundation (Joko & Nugraha, 2023). In the current information era, literacy extends beyond the mechanical ability to read and write to include the capacity to comprehend, analyze, and utilize information to solve everyday problems (Umaroh et al., 2024). However, empirical evidence indicates that Indonesia's literacy culture remains at a concerning level. According to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), the proportion of Indonesians with regular reading habits is only around 0.001%, meaning that merely one in a thousand people reads routinely (Farhan et al., 2022; Sihombing, 2018). Furthermore, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) places Indonesia 62nd out of 70 countries in terms of literacy performance (Hidayah & Hidayah, 2022; Gewati, 2016). This low level of reading culture is influenced by limited literacy facilities, the dominant use of digital gadgets for non-productive purposes, and insufficient environmental motivation (Hidayah & Hidayah, 2022).

A situational analysis of Sukajaya Village, Pontang Subdistrict, Serang Regency, reveals objective conditions similar to those of many rural areas in Indonesia, where access to high-quality reading materials is extremely limited (Anjani, Dantes, & Artawan, 2019; Suwanto, 2017). The main problems identified include the lack of non-formal educational facilities that can accommodate community learning interests outside school hours, as well as high levels of gadget dependency among children, which reduce their engagement with their social environment. This community engagement initiative focuses on establishing a Reading Corner—defined as a facility that provides reading materials such as books, magazines, and multimedia resources, accompanied by spaces for discussion and creative literacy activities (Erawati et al., 2024). The emphasis is not merely on physical provision, but on local community strategies for managing these assets in a self-reliant and sustainable manner.

As the subject of the program, Sukajaya Village possesses strong local human resource potential, characterized by a high level of social cohesion and mutual cooperation. Nevertheless, this potential has not been matched by adequate technical capacity in managing community-based libraries. In this context, the presence of a Reading Corner or Community Reading Park (Taman Bacaan Masyarakat, TBM) is crucial as a core element of the village's academic life and as a center for lifelong learning. This condition further underscores the urgency of strengthening the Reading Corner, particularly given that the elementary schools in Sukajaya Village have not yet been equipped with library facilities to support the teaching and learning process.

The expected social change resulting from this program is the establishment of a strong literacy ecosystem in Sukajaya Village. Qualitatively, it is anticipated that a collective awareness will emerge, recognizing reading as an investment in the future, alongside the development of local champions from among youth and housewives. Quantitatively, the program targets an increase in visit frequency and community reading interest, as supported by findings from similar interventions in other rural schools, which reported increases in reading interest of up to 68.8% and reading comprehension levels exceeding 70% following the implementation of reading corner initiatives (Intansari et al., 2025).

A review of recent studies highlights various successful strategies for developing Reading Corners. In Thailand, the Reading for Pleasure (RfP) initiative emphasizes a relaxed, enjoyable, and non-coercive reading environment. In Malaysia, rural library development has focused on youth engagement supported by information and communication technology (ICT) (Sopiatun & Nurjamjam, 2021). Meanwhile, studies in Indonesia emphasize the importance of the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, which focuses on identifying and mobilizing existing community assets rather than deficiencies (Arif et al., 2025). Key publications also underline that the sustainability of Reading Corners depends on strategic management

encompassing planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling (POAC) (Tarlani & Sirajuddin, 2020). Accordingly, the primary objective of this study is to analyze the strategies employed by the local community in Sukajaya Village to optimize the role of the Reading Corner as a center for education. The main conclusion indicates that active community involvement in participatory management, regular updating of book collections through donations, and the integration of creative activities are the key determinants in establishing a sustainable Reading Corner amid limited resources (Intansari et al., 2025).

## Method

### *Research Approach, Subjects, and Procedures*

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at providing an in-depth understanding of community strategies in managing local literacy initiatives. The methods applied were Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). These approaches were selected because they emphasize active collaboration between researchers and the community in addressing problems independently by utilizing existing village assets. The research subjects consisted of reading corner managers, village officials, community leaders, and students as the primary users of the reading corner in Sukajaya Village. The research procedure followed a reflective cycle that included joint action planning, strategy implementation, observation, and periodic evaluation of outcomes (Amelia et al., 2023).

### *Materials, Instruments, and Data Analysis Techniques*

The materials used in this activity included collections of fiction and non-fiction books, as well as physical facilities supporting the reading corner. The primary research instrument was the researcher as the key instrument, supported by field notes and a camera for activity documentation. Data were collected through:

- a. direct observation to capture facility conditions and the dynamics of user visits; and
- b. document analysis in the form of activity and visitation records.

Data analysis adopted an interactive model consisting of data reduction (selecting relevant information), data display (organizing narrative texts), and conclusion drawing/verification. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation by comparing observations with field notes to obtain objective findings.

### *Community Action Planning (Community Organizing)*

Community organizing in Sukajaya Village was conducted based on the principle of a self-governing community, in which residents acted as the main driving agents.

- a. Community Engagement Subjects: The Village Literacy Committee, comprising youth volunteers (Karang Taruna), Posyandu women cadres, and village officials.
- b. Activity Location: Activities were centered at the Sukajaya Village Reading Corner, strategically located in the village hall or other easily accessible public spaces.
- c. Community Involvement: Community members were fully engaged in the planning stage through village deliberation meetings to map existing literacy assets and determine management concepts aligned with local culture. In the organizing stage, a simple volunteer-based management structure was established, with responsibilities collectively distributed according to members' capacities.

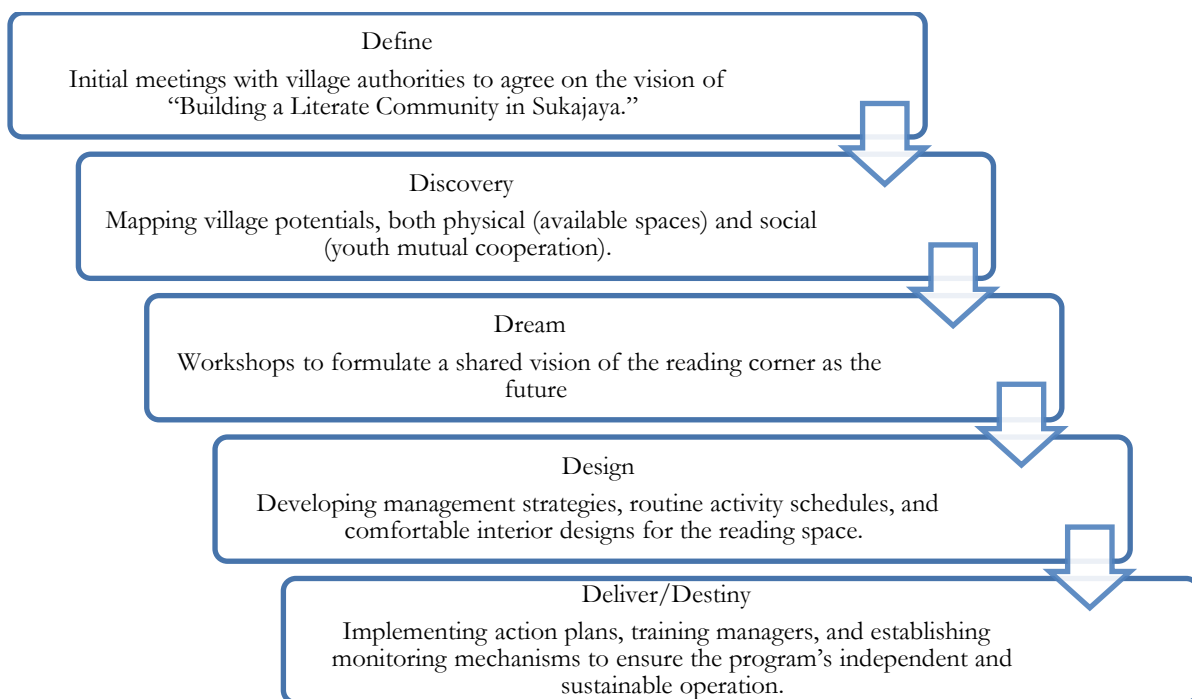
## ***Methods and Strategies for Achieving Objectives***

The strategies implemented to establish a sustainable reading corner included:

1. Strengthening Human Resource Capacity: Providing training in library management, storytelling techniques, and the use of information technology for local managers.
2. Needs-Based Collection Development: Conducting collection audits and procuring books relevant to community interests through donation drives or external partnerships.
3. Literacy Program Innovation: Organizing creative activities such as reading competitions and skills workshops to attract visitors.
4. Technology Integration: Utilizing social media for promotion and initiating access to digital books to respond to the challenges of the new normal era.

## ***Stages of Community Engagement Activities***

The activities were implemented through the 5D cycle within the ABCD framework, as follows:



*Figure 1.* Stages of Community Engagement Activities

## **Result**

The community engagement process in Sukajaya Village resulted in the strengthening of literacy governance based on community self-reliance. The Reading Corner, which was initially located in an open post/shelter near SDN Sukanegara 3, had to be relocated due to weather constraints, particularly heavy rainfall that hindered reading activities and posed a risk of damage to the book collections. As a temporary solution, the Reading Corner was moved to the house of a local resident who works as a Qur’an teacher and demonstrates a strong commitment to children’s education. This location was considered strategic because his house, the former post/shelter, and SDN Sukanegara 3 are situated within close proximity to one another. Moreover, SDN Sukanegara 3 does not yet have a library facility, making the Reading Corner an alternative learning resource for students, particularly during school break times.



*Figure 2.* The Reading Corner Location Flooded Due to Heavy Rain

Prior to relocation, no children visited the Reading Corner on a weekly basis; after relocation, this number increased to an average of 20 children per week, indicating improved accessibility and attractiveness of the facility. The Reading Corner had been established approximately two years earlier; however, its placement at the Sukajaya Village Office was considered less effective and had not been optimally managed in terms of accessibility and management sustainability. Through the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, the local community successfully identified and mobilized physical assets in the form of village public spaces, as well as social assets reflected in the residents' strong spirit of mutual cooperation.



*Figure 3.* The Process of Relocating the Book Collection from the Sukajaya Village Office

In addition, the establishment of Karang Taruna as a youth organization played an active role in managing and developing the Reading Corner, thereby strengthening institutional capacity and ensuring the regeneration of local managers. The facilitation process was carried out through a series of technical interventions systematically structured within the 5D cycle (Define, Discovery, Dream, Design, and Deliver). The actions implemented included: (1) physical revitalization through the reorganization of the Reading Corner location, along with the provision of supporting facilities such as bookshelves, carpets, and creative decorations to create a comfortable environment for users; (2) collection management through donation- and crowdfunding-based book acquisition, followed by the classification of materials into fiction and non-fiction categories

to facilitate information access; and (3) the development of creative literacy programs, including read-aloud activities, handicraft skills classes, storytelling sessions, and free tutoring for children.

These interventions triggered significant social transformation in Sukajaya Village. First, a new institution emerged in the form of a Village Literacy Committee or Reading Corner Management Forum involving Karang Taruna youth and women community activists, serving as a social institution that ensures program sustainability. Second, behavioral changes were observed, as reflected in increased enthusiasm among children to visit the Reading Corner and borrow books regularly, as well as greater parental support for learning activities outside school hours. Third, the emergence of local leaders (local champions) who independently mobilize literacy activities without reliance on external parties. These findings affirm that locally based community management strategies are effective in establishing a sustainable Reading Corner. Community involvement from the planning stage through evaluation has been shown to enhance a sense of ownership toward village literacy facilities, while simultaneously strengthening social resilience in the management of non-formal education.



*Figure 4.* Facilitation of Reading Corner Management in Sukajaya Village

## Discussion

The results of the community engagement program in Sukajaya Village demonstrate that a locally based community management strategy successfully optimized the function of the Reading Corner as a functional and sustainable center for non-formal education. The relocation of the Reading Corner from an open post/shelter to a more representative and weather-protected private residence, combined with its proximity to SDN Sukanegara 3—which does not yet have a library facility—was shown to enhance accessibility and the intensity of use among school-age children. These findings emphasize that location, spatial comfort, and proximity to the formal education ecosystem are critical determinants of the effectiveness of community-based literacy facilities.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that the Reading Corner functions not merely as a storage space for book collections, but as a social learning space that facilitates educational interactions among community members. Spatial flexibility that allows the Reading Corner to be embedded within the everyday social spaces of the community strengthens the sustainability of village literacy programs. This is consistent with [Oldenburg's \(1999\)](#) concept of the third place, referring to informal social spaces outside the home and school that foster learning, social participation, and community cohesion.

Scientific interpretation of these results indicates that the success of literacy programs is not determined solely by the availability of physical infrastructure or reading materials, but by the creation of vibrant and meaningful social-educational interactions. Activities such as read-aloud sessions, storytelling, tutoring, and the involvement of local volunteers cultivate participatory and inclusive learning experiences. These findings reinforce the view of literacy as a social practice, in which literacy is understood as an activity embedded in social, cultural, and interpersonal contexts rather than merely an individual skill ([Street, 2003](#); [Barton & Hamilton, 2012](#)). This approach has

proven to be more effective in increasing children's reading interest in rural areas than formal, instructional, and top-down learning models (UNESCO, 2017).

From a community empowerment perspective, the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach applied in the management of the Sukajaya Village Reading Corner successfully shifted the development paradigm from a needs-based approach to a strength-based approach. Community members were not positioned as passive beneficiaries, but as key actors in managing and developing their own literacy resources. The utilization of local assets—such as social networks, informal leadership, youth volunteers, and a strong spirit of mutual cooperation—was shown to enhance a sense of ownership and social legitimacy. These findings are consistent with Mathie and Cunningham (2003) as well as Green and Haines (2016), who argue that asset-based initiatives exhibit higher levels of sustainability than programs that rely solely on external assistance.

In addition, the application of the POAC management functions (Planning, Organizing, Actuating, and Controlling) in the management of the Reading Corner contributed to the consistency and operational stability of the program. The establishment of a Village Literacy Committee involving Karang Taruna youth and women community activists functioned as a mechanism for organization, social control, and managerial regeneration. From the perspective of public management and community governance, this local institutional structure ensured role distribution, social accountability, and program continuity despite limited resources (Ostrom, 2010). These findings align with Tarlani and Sirajuddin (2020), who emphasize the importance of participatory governance in managing public facilities at the village level.

Comparatively, the results of this study share similarities with international research on community libraries and Reading for Pleasure (RfP) initiatives, such as those implemented in Thailand, which emphasize relaxed, child-centered, and non-coercive reading environments. Such environments have been shown to effectively foster reading interest and long-term literacy habits. However, the findings differ from studies in Malaysia, where rural literacy development is largely supported by information and communication technology (ICT). In Sukajaya Village, limitations in digital infrastructure were instead offset by strengthened human resource capacity and local volunteerism, underscoring the central role of social capital as a pillar of literacy development (Sopiatun & Nurjamjam, 2021). These findings are also consistent with the study by Dent and Yannotta (2005) on community libraries in developing countries that rely heavily on community participation as their primary strength.

The broader implication of these findings is that a community-based Reading Corner management model—grounded in the ABCD approach, literacy as a social practice, and participatory management—can be replicated by local governments to revitalize village libraries and other literacy spaces across Indonesia. Collaboration among communities, schools, and parents has proven to be a fundamental prerequisite for sustaining village literacy ecosystems. Future research is recommended to examine the long-term quantitative impacts of Reading Corners on children's academic and non-academic outcomes, as well as to explore the gradual and contextual integration of digital literacy in ways that do not erode the humanistic and social characteristics that have been established at the community level.

## Conclusion

Based on the implementation of the community engagement program and the analysis of findings in Sukajaya Village, this study concludes that the local community strategy implemented through the 5D cycle (Define, Discovery, Dream, Design, Deliver) within the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) framework has proven effective in establishing a functional and sustainable Reading Corner. The success of this program was not determined solely by the

provision of physical facilities, but more importantly by the community's capacity to identify, organize, and mobilize internal village assets, such as social capital, local leadership, and the strategic use of spaces surrounding a school environment that lacks library facilities.

The results indicate that participatory management of the Reading Corner—through adaptive relocation, the involvement of local volunteers, and the application of POAC management functions—has enhanced accessibility, spatial comfort, and the intensity of use among children. Thus, the primary objective of the community engagement initiative, namely fostering local self-reliance in the management of non-formal literacy, was achieved through capacity building for local managers, the establishment of local institutions, and active community participation.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce the position of the ABCD approach and Participatory Action Research (PAR) as transformative empowerment strategies. Communities are no longer positioned as objects of intervention, but as subjects of development with authority to design, implement, and evaluate literacy programs. The main contribution of this study lies in affirming the role of social capital as the foundation for the sustainability of rural literacy ecosystems, particularly in areas with limited formal and digital infrastructure.

The social changes observed in Sukajaya Village can be summarized into three main dimensions. First, institutional transformation through the establishment of a Village Literacy Committee or Reading Corner Management Forum as a new social institution that ensures independent operational sustainability. Second, behavioral change reflected in the increased frequency of children's visits and the growing awareness and support of parents for literacy activities outside school hours. Third, the emergence of local leadership (local champions) among youth and village cadres who possess the managerial capacity to sustainably manage educational assets.

Based on these findings, this study recommends that future community engagement initiatives prioritize: (a) strengthening the human resource capacity of local managers through training in management and community leadership to maintain program consistency; (b) integrating the Reading Corner with established village social institutions, such as Posyandu, religious organizations, or educational units, to expand user reach and reinforce community support; and (c) developing sustainable, community-based book donation mechanisms (crowdfunding) to ensure that reading collections remain relevant to children's needs and interests.

Future research is expected to examine the long-term impacts of Reading Corners on children's academic achievement and literacy skills in rural areas using quantitative approaches. In addition, studies on the contextual integration of digital literacy within a blended literacy model should be further developed, while maintaining the humanistic and asset-based characteristics that have proven effective in the context of Sukajaya Village.

## Acknowledgements

The authors express their deepest appreciation and sincere gratitude to all parties who have contributed to and supported the implementation of this community engagement program. The highest appreciation is extended to the Government of Sukajaya Village and Pontang Subdistrict for their policy support, permission for field observations, and the provision of public facilities that served as the location of the Reading Corner. Sincere thanks are also conveyed to the donors and literacy volunteers who generously contributed material support in the form of high-quality book collections (fiction, non-fiction, and multimedia), bookshelves, carpets, and other supporting equipment that enabled the Reading Corner to operate effectively. The authors further acknowledge the invaluable role of the Village Literacy Committee and the local champions who demonstrated strong dedication in independently managing these literacy assets. Finally,

appreciation is extended to all community members and children of Sukajaya Village who actively participated with a strong spirit of gotong royong, transforming the Reading Corner into the heart of academic life within their community. It is hoped that this synergy and collaboration will become a valuable investment in advancing education and literacy for the golden generation in the future.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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