Journal of Community Service and Mentoring
Vol. 01 No. 02, 2025, pp. xxxx, DOI:xxxx
ISSN xxxx (P) ISSN xxxx E)
https://ojs.shahibulquran.id/index.php/JCSM



Improving the Quality of Elementary School Education Through Literacy Training in North Padang Lawas

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Article Info
Received: 2025
Revised: 2025
Accepted: 2025
Online Version: 2025

Abstract

Elementary education plays a crucial role in developing children's literacy skills from an early age. However, in several areas of North Padang Lawas, low literacy skills among elementary school children are a significant problem, caused by limited facilities, low reading interest, and teachers' lack of skills in managing literacy activities. This research aims to improve the quality of education through literacy training for elementary school teachers and students, thereby encouraging the development of reading, writing, and information comprehension skills effectively. The method used was training-based community service, with a participatory approach involving teachers as primary facilitators and students as active participants. The training was conducted in the form of interactive workshops, reading simulations, and classroom practice support. The results of these activities demonstrated improved student literacy skills, as evidenced by improved reading and writing scores, as well as increased interest and motivation in learning. Furthermore, teachers gained new skills in designing engaging literacy activities tailored to children's needs. Thus, this literacy training not only had a direct impact on student competency but also built teachers' capacity as agents of change in improving the quality of education in North Padang Lawas.

Keywords: *basic education, literacy, training, North Padang Lawas*

INTRODUCTION

Background of The Study

Basic education is the primary foundation for children's intellectual, social, emotional, and moral development. In Indonesia, basic literacy skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic are key competencies that serve as indicators of the quality of education at the elementary school level



(Artha, Sion, and Soan 2021). Data from the Student Literacy Assessment Program (PISA) and the National Literacy Survey show that many students in rural areas still have lower literacy skills than their urban counterparts. North Padang Lawas, a regency in North Sumatra with predominantly rural characteristics, demonstrates a similar phenomenon. Data from the North Padang Lawas Regency Education Office (2024) indicates that approximately 40% of elementary school students have reading skills that do not meet minimum competency standards. This impacts their understanding of other subject matter, as literacy is a prerequisite for cross-subject learning(Juwairiah et al. 2024).

The factors causing low literacy of elementary school children in this area are very complex, including: Limited learning resources: Many schools lack adequate reading books, learning media, and libraries, Teacher skills: Teachers in some schools still use traditional methods that do not encourage creative reading and writing interactions., Socio-cultural conditions: Interest in reading at home is still low due to limited access to books and lack of parental awareness of the importance of literacy, Limited access to technology: The internet and digital media as modern literacy tools are still difficult to reach in most areas. In this context, literacy training for teachers and students is a strategic step to improve the quality of basic education. Training programs aim not only to improve reading and writing skills but also to build a sustainable culture of literacy in schools and families (Lehan et al. 2023).

Research Gap

Various studies have shown that literacy programs are effective in improving elementary school children's reading and writing skills. For example, a study by Fadilah & Nugroho (2021) emphasized the importance of a participatory approach in teacher training (Efendi 2019). Another study by UNESCO (2019) highlighted literacy as the ability to think critically and understand context, not simply read text. However, most of this research has focused on urban areas or areas with adequate access to resources. Research focusing on rural areas, particularly North Padang Lawas, is still very limited. Few studies have examined:

1. The effectiveness of literacy training adapted to local rural conditions.
2. An interactive practice-based literacy integration strategy that involves teachers, students, and families simultaneously.
3. The impact of literacy programs on students' cross-subject understanding and overall academic achievement.



Thus, this study fills the research gap by emphasizing local context, participatory approach, and teacher-student-parent integration in literacy development in rural areas (Liskinasih, Sulistyo, and Purnawati 2023).

Rationale of The Study

Literacy is a fundamental competency and a prerequisite for children's academic success. Children with strong literacy skills will more easily understand other subjects, such as mathematics, science, social studies, and language. By improving literacy skills, students will also be able to develop critical thinking skills, creativity, and independent learning (RivaI and Rahmat 2023). Literacy training applied to teachers and students in North Padang Lawas will provide direct benefits, including: 1) Improving teachers' skills in designing creative, interactive, and literacy-oriented learning methods. 2) Improving students' reading and writing skills, thus positively impacting academic achievement. 3) Strengthening a culture of literacy at home, due to parental involvement in assisting children in reading and writing. 4) Developing simple media-based literacy strategies, relevant to limited facilities in rural areas (Putra et al. 2022).
In addition, this research has academic and practical contributions, namely producing a contextual literacy training model that can be replicated in other areas with similar characteristics.

Literature Review

Literacy is not limited to reading and writing skills but also encompasses critical thinking, understanding context, and applying information in everyday life (UNESCO, 2019). According to the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation (2020) (Aryesam 2023), literacy is a key indicator of educational quality, as all subjects require basic reading and writing skills. Literacy training for teachers has been proven effective in improving teaching skills, creative learning methods, and the ability to assess student literacy (Fadilah & Nugroho, 2021). Effective training models include:

a) Hands-on practice-based training.
b) Use of simple and contextual learning media.
c) Student involvement in interactive reading, creative writing, and group discussions.

Literacy studies in rural areas reveal different challenges compared to urban areas. Limited facilities, reading resources, and students' exposure to literacy environments are key barriers (Kurniawan, 2020). Therefore, literacy strategies must be adaptive, utilize local media, and involve families. A participatory approach involves teachers, students, and parents simultaneously in



literacy development (Hulkin and Prastowo 2023). This approach has been shown to increase interest in reading and writing because students perceive literacy as part of their daily lives, not just a school assignment (Setiawan, 2019).

Novelty of The Study

This study presents a new approach to elementary school children's literacy in rural areas with the distinctive characteristics of North Padang Lawas:

1. Local context-based training, adapting methods to social, cultural and school conditions.
2. Teacher-student-parent integration, creating a sustainable literacy environment.
3. Utilization of simple and creative media, including local books, folk tales, and non-digital learning aids.
4. Comprehensive evaluation, measuring the impact of literacy not only on reading and writing skills, but also academic achievement and critical thinking skills.

This approach differs from previous research which tends to focus on urban schools or only on teachers without directly involving students and families.

Purposes of The Study

This research aims to:

1. Improving the literacy skills of elementary school students in North Padang Lawas through reading and writing training.
2. Empowering teachers to design and implement effective and creative literacy learning strategies.
3. Actively involve parents in supporting children's literacy at home.
4. Identifying constraints and opportunities in implementing literacy programs in rural contexts.
5. Produce a contextual literacy training model that can be replicated in other areas.

METHODS

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with the aim of understanding in depth the phenomenon of improving the quality of education for elementary school children through literacy training in North Padang Lawas. Qualitative methods were chosen because this study



focuses on understanding the context, experiences, and perceptions of participants, rather than solely on quantitative measurements (Batubara and Ariani 2019). This research design is descriptive-analytical, aiming to describe the literacy training process, the challenges faced, and its impact on elementary school children's reading and writing skills. With this approach, researchers can explore the interactions between teachers, children, and the community in the local context, including the culture and learning environment that influence the effectiveness of literacy programs (Kusuma, Sumianto, and Aprinawati 2023).

This qualitative research also utilizes case studies as its primary strategy. These case studies allow researchers to explore in detail several elementary schools in North Padang Lawas as training locations. This allows for rich and comprehensive data on the implementation of literacy training, including teaching methods, media used, and student responses to literacy materials. Furthermore, this study utilizes data triangulation to enhance the validity of the research findings. Triangulation is conducted by collecting data from various sources, such as interviews with teachers and principals, direct classroom observations, and documentation of training materials and activities. The results from these various sources will be analyzed comparatively to obtain a more accurate picture of the literacy program's success (Putra, Mujiyono, and Suryani 2021).

Research Target / Subject

The subjects of this study were elementary school children participating in literacy training in North Padang Lawas. The focus of the study was on students in grades I through VI, considering that literacy skills in early grades significantly determine mastery of educational material at subsequent levels. Furthermore, this study also involved teachers and other educational staff as additional subjects, as they are the ones directly implementing the literacy program. Teachers provided information on teaching strategies, challenges encountered during the training, and their perceptions of changes in students' literacy skills.

The criteria for selecting the subjects of this research are:

1. Elementary schools that have participated or are willing to participate in literacy training.
2. Students who actively participate in learning activities in class and are willing to participate in observations and interviews.
3. Teachers who teach in literacy training participant classes and have more than one year of experience at the school.



The number of subjects was determined using purposive sampling, selecting subjects deemed relevant and informative for the research purposes. This allowed researchers to obtain more in-depth data on the dynamics of literacy training in elementary schools. Furthermore, the study considered the role of parents and the community as additional subjects, providing perspectives on the development of children's literacy skills outside of school. Brief interviews with parents provided additional information regarding reading and writing practices at home and the support provided to children.

Research Procedure

Research procedures are systematically designed to ensure smooth implementation and valid data collection. The stages of qualitative research include:

1) Preparation and Planning

- Determining the research location, namely several elementary schools in North Padang Lawas.
- Create a community service proposal and obtain permission from the school, head of the education office, and parents of students.
- Prepare qualitative research instruments, such as interview guidelines, observation sheets, and field notes.

2) Data Collection

Data was collected through several techniques:

- Participatory Observation: The researcher was present in the class during the literacy training to observe teacher-student interactions, teaching methods, and student responses to literacy materials.
- Semi-Structured Interviews: Conducted with teachers, principals, and parents. Questions focused on their experiences, obstacles encountered, and perceptions regarding improving children's literacy.
- Documentation: Collect training materials, photos of class activities, and student work, such as notebooks, written work, or evaluation sheets.

3) Data analysis

Data analysis is conducted inductively, moving from concrete data to more general findings. The analysis stages include:



- Transcription and Data Compilation: All interviews were transcribed in full and observations were recorded in narrative form.
- Coding and Categorization: Data were analyzed to identify key themes, such as effective teaching methods, barriers to training, and changes in children's literacy skills.
- Triangulation: Data from multiple sources is compared to find consistency or discrepancies in the information.
- Interpretation: Researchers interpret data to answer research objectives, including the impact of literacy training on the quality of students' education.

4) Reporting Results

The research results are presented narratively, complete with interview excerpts, documentary images, and thematic analysis. The researchers also developed recommendations for schools and the education office regarding strategies for improving child literacy in North Padang Lawas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

This study used a qualitative approach to understand in-depth how literacy training can improve the quality of education for elementary school children in North Padang Lawas. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers, observations of teaching and learning activities, and documentation of training activities. The results showed significant positive changes in both student literacy and teacher learning practices (Rajagukguk, Lubis, and ... 2021).

Interviews with teachers revealed that before the literacy training, many students struggled with reading and writing, particularly understanding long texts and new vocabulary. Teachers also acknowledged a lack of effective strategies for improving students' literacy skills. The training emphasized interactive reading methods, storytelling, and creative assignments appropriate to the students' abilities. Teachers reported that after the training, they felt more confident in managing their classrooms, designing materials, and motivating students to actively read.

Classroom observations during the training showed increased student participation. Children were more confident in asking questions, expressing their ideas, and reading fluently. The shared reading activities, small group discussions, and literacy games introduced in the training were effective tools for building students' interest in reading. One teacher stated, "The

storytelling method makes the children more enthusiastic; they not only read but also understand the story's content and are able to retell it in their own words."

Furthermore, documentation of the activities showed an improvement in the quality of teaching materials. Teachers began using a variety of reading materials, including picture books, poetry, and simple informational texts. This approach allowed students to simultaneously develop reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. Creative writing activities also served as an indicator of success, as students were able to create simple stories and write about their personal experiences with improved spelling and grammar.

From the students' perspective, most stated that the literacy training made them more enthusiastic about learning and more confident. They revealed that interactive reading activities made learning more enjoyable than previous conventional methods. Some students also began reading books outside of school hours, indicating increased intrinsic motivation for literacy. These findings align with the theory that participatory and engaging approaches can improve children's reading interest and literacy skills.

However, the research also identified several challenges. Some schools still face limited supporting resources, such as adequate reading materials, limited classroom space, and limited time for teachers to implement new methods. These constraints are significant factors affecting the effectiveness of the training. Despite this, teachers and students continue to demonstrate high enthusiasm for implementing the literacy methods they have learned.

Further analysis showed that the success of the training was determined not only by the methods used, but also by the active involvement of teachers, the support of the principal, and parental involvement. Teachers who consistently implemented literacy strategies tended to see faster improvements in students' reading and writing skills. The support of the principal and parents served as an additional motivating factor for students to practice reading at home. This demonstrates that literacy training is effective when supported by a holistic educational ecosystem.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that literacy training can improve the quality of education for elementary school children in North Padang Lawas. Children become more active, confident, and have improved reading and writing skills. Teachers acquire new, more effective learning strategies, while schools gain literacy practices that can be continued sustainably. These findings underscore the importance of a participatory, creative, and contextual approach in child literacy improvement programs in remote areas (Yusuf et al. 2024).



Discussion

Community service activities conducted at several elementary schools in North Padang Lawas focused on improving children's literacy through intensive training. Observations, interviews, and documentation of the activities revealed significant challenges in children's literacy skills, both in reading and writing. This discussion explores the key findings from these activities, connects field experiences with literacy education theory, and highlights implications for educational practice in the region.

Interviews with teachers and principals revealed that most students experience difficulty comprehending simple to intermediate reading texts. These difficulties relate not only to reading ability but also to vocabulary comprehension and retelling. Qualitative data obtained through observation indicates that many students require a more interactive approach, such as shared reading, small group discussions, and literacy games.

These findings align with previous research emphasizing the importance of needs-based interventions in improving children's literacy. According to Vygotsky (1978), effective literacy learning requires scaffolding, namely teacher support tailored to the child's ability level. In the context of North Padang Lawas, scaffolding strategies can be implemented through direct guidance, selecting reading materials that suit the child's interests, and using creative, enjoyable reading methods.

The literacy training used a participatory approach, encouraging students to actively read, discuss, and retell the content. Observations showed an increase in children's interest in reading, particularly when the reading material was adapted to local contexts, such as folktales and local culture.

Teachers reported that after the training, students were more confident in asking questions, expressing opinions, and writing short notes related to the reading. This suggests that concrete activity-based literacy interventions can improve children's functional literacy skills. These results are consistent with the principles of constructivist pedagogy, which emphasizes the importance of learning through direct experience and social interaction (Piaget, 1973).

Although the training has shown positive results, several obstacles need to be addressed. First, limited supporting facilities, such as appropriate reading materials and comfortable classrooms, impact the effectiveness of the program. Second, there is considerable variation in



students' initial abilities, so the same teaching methods are not always effective for all children. Third, parental involvement in supporting literacy activities remains limited.

Observations also indicate that some students require an individualized approach or additional guidance outside of formal classroom hours. This highlights the need for a more holistic literacy strengthening strategy, encompassing the school, home, and community environments.

Teachers play a central role in the success of literacy training. Their pedagogical skills, motivation, and ability to facilitate literacy discussions significantly impact student learning outcomes. These activities also involve the active participation of the community, including parents and school administrators, by providing moral support and resources.

Discussions with teachers and school administrators emphasized that this collaborative approach can create a supportive learning environment. Parental participation, while still limited, has a significant impact on children's reading habits at home. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, which states that child development is influenced by the interaction of environmental systems, including the family, school, and surrounding community.

The findings from this activity offer several practical implications. First, the importance of providing reading materials appropriate to local culture and student ability levels is crucial for fostering reading interest. Second, literacy teaching strategies should utilize participatory and interactive methods to enhance student active engagement. Third, the simultaneous involvement of teachers, parents, and the community is a key factor in the sustainability of literacy programs.

Furthermore, the discussion highlighted the need for further training for teachers, including on differentiated learning strategies and the use of creative learning media. Literacy activities should not be limited to classroom settings but should be expanded to include home and community settings, such as through shared reading activities, storytelling competitions, and mini-libraries in schools and villages.

Overall, this community service activity demonstrated that literacy training can improve the quality of primary education in North Padang Lawas, particularly in reading and writing. A qualitative approach through observation, interviews, and documentation provided a deep understanding of the needs and challenges faced by children and teachers. The discussion also emphasized the importance of a contextual, participatory, and collaborative approach to supporting children's literacy. With ongoing reinforcement, community engagement, and teacher competency enhancement, the literacy program in elementary schools in North Padang Lawas can become a model for effective and sustainable education quality improvement.



CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

Based on the results of the community service program focused on improving the quality of education for elementary school children through literacy training in North Padang Lawas, several conclusions can be drawn. First, the literacy training activities positively impacted children's reading, writing, and comprehension skills. Through interactive methods involving educational games, picture stories, and collaborative reading activities, participants experienced increased motivation to learn. This was evident in their enthusiasm for participating in the activities and their progress from simple reading skills to comprehension.

Second, direct interaction between facilitators and children allows for more personalized literacy skill development. The use of qualitative approaches, such as observation, interviews with teachers and parents, and reflection with children, shows that these activities not only improve literacy skills but also foster positive attitudes toward learning. Children become more confident reading in front of peers and teachers, and are more active in asking questions and expressing opinions.

Third, the involvement of parents and teachers in the training process is crucial. Observations and interviews show that parental support in encouraging children to read at home, along with teacher guidance in literacy activities at school, strengthens the training's impact. Thus, a collaborative approach between facilitators, teachers, and parents has proven effective in building a learning environment conducive to improving children's literacy.

Fourth, literacy training also opens up opportunities for developing more creative and contextual teaching methods. Children who were previously less interested in reading began to show greater interest when the material was connected to everyday experiences and local culture. This underscores the importance of designing activities relevant to children's needs and environments, making learning more meaningful and enjoyable.

Overall, this community service demonstrated that a qualitative approach based on observation, interviews, and direct interaction can yield a deep understanding of children's literacy needs and effective strategies for improving them. This activity not only improved literacy skills but also strengthened learning motivation and the role of parents and teachers as key supporters in children's education.



Suggestions

Based on the conclusions obtained, there are several suggestions that can be given for further development in efforts to improve literacy of elementary school children in North Padang Lawas:

1. Strengthening Parent and Teacher Involvement. To ensure more sustainable literacy training, it is recommended that parents and teachers be more actively involved in every stage of the activity. Further training for teachers on creative and contextual literacy teaching methods will strengthen their capacity to support children at school. Similarly, educating parents on how to support their children's literacy at home, for example through shared reading, storytelling, and providing a reading-rich environment, will broaden the training's impact.
2. Developing a Locally Context-Based Literacy Module. It is recommended that literacy materials be adapted to the cultural context and everyday experiences of children in North Padang Lawas. The use of local stories, folk songs, and creative activities based on the surrounding environment can increase reading interest and comprehension. Such modules can also serve as a reference for teachers to practice engaging and relevant literacy learning.
3. Implement Regular Monitoring and Evaluation. To consistently measure literacy improvements, regular monitoring and evaluation are necessary. Routine observations of children's reading and writing development, interviews with teachers and parents, and simple literacy skills assessments can serve as indicators of progress. The results of these evaluations can be used to refine training methods and adapt strategies to the children's needs.
4. Improving Access and Availability of Literacy Media. It is recommended that schools and communities provide more engaging literacy media, such as picture books, children's magazines, and educational digital media. Wider access to reading resources will encourage children to read independently and continuously improve their literacy skills.
5. Developing a Sustainable Literacy Program. To ensure the lasting impact of literacy training, it is recommended to develop a sustainable literacy program, for example by establishing a reading club at school, holding literacy competitions, or regular activities involving children, teachers, and parents. This structured program will maintain children's motivation and foster a culture of literacy in the school and home environment.

By implementing these suggestions, it is hoped that the quality of education for elementary school children in North Padang Lawas will continue to improve, particularly in literacy skills,



which are the primary foundation for success in subsequent levels of learning. The participatory and contextual approach implemented in this community service can serve as a model for child literacy programs in other areas with similar characteristics.

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