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Empowering Communities through Applied Literacy: A Case Study of the Syahmi Community Reading Center

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ABSTRACT

The Syahmi Community Reading Center is one of the reading parks that stands to provide free book reading services that can be used by the people of Betungan Village for educational purposes and daily community activities. The purpose of this study is to find out how Syahmi Community Reading Center supports productive community activities. This research is included in the category of descriptive qualitative research. The informants in this study are the managers of the Syahmi Community Reading Center, children around the community reading park, and the surrounding community. Data collection is carried out by observation, interviews and documentation. Data analysis consists of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. This research demonstrates that the Syahmi Community Reading Center encourages productive community activities through community empowerment with computer learning guided directly by the reading park manager. The main target in this activity is students and housewives so that there is an application in supporting the results of daily activities. Then, conducting counseling and consultation to the community.

ABSTRAK

Taman Baca Masyarakat Syahmi adalah salah satu taman baca yang berdiri untuk memberikan layanan baca buku gratis yang dapat dimanfaatkan oleh masyarakat Kelurahan Betungan untuk keperluan pendidikan dan kegiatan masyarakat sehari-hari. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui bagaimana Taman Baca Syahmi dalam mendukung aktifitas masyarakat yang produktif. Penelitian ini termasuk dalam kategori penelitian kualitatif deskriptif. Informan dalam penelitian ini adalah pengelola Taman Baca Masyarakat Syahmi, anak-anak sekitar taman baca masyarakat, masyarakat lingkungan sekitar. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan observasi, wawancara dan dokumentasi. Analisis data terdiri dari reduksi data, penyajian data, penarikan kesimpulan. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa Taman Baca Syahmi mendorong aktivitas masyarakat yang produktif melalui pemberdayaan masyarakat dengan pembelajaran komputer yang dibimbing langsung oleh pengelola taman baca. Sasaran utama dalam kegiatan ini yaitu mahasiswa dan ibu rumah tangga sehingga adanya penerapan dalam mendukung hasil aktifitas sehari-hari. Kemudian, melakukan penyuluhan dan konsultasi kepada masyarakat.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Community Reading Center (TBM) is not a library that must meet national library standards, such as standards for collection, facilities and infrastructure, services, library staff, and management. TBM serve as places for learning, fostering a love of reading, providing reading materials to the community, and developing innovative TBM activities (Pramudyo et al., 2018). TBMs are platform that provides the reading materials needed by the community as a venue for developing reading and learning skills. Additionally, TBM can

serve as a space for productive activities. With the advancement of science and technology, TBM is no longer limited to reading but can also be used as learning and training resources for the surrounding community. One of the government's initiatives to advance educational development is the expansion of TBM. This is in accordance with Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia No.20 Tahun 2003 Tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional, 2003, which states that non-formal educational institutions consist of course centers, training centers, study groups, community learning centers, religious study groups, and similar educational units.

Community reading gardens in Indonesia play a strategic role in providing a space for creativity and uncovering the hidden talents of children living in the vicinity of these reading gardens. Forms of community support at community reading gardens include initiatives in the fields of education, the environment, and the arts. Examples of empowerment and community support practices that community reading gardens in Indonesia can implement include providing access to reading materials, training in making hand sanitizer, training in caring for livestock, and drawing classes (Agustiani, 2021).

TBM Syahmi is one of the community reading centers located in Bengkulu City. It was founded by a librarian at a university library in Bengkulu City. Like other community reading centers, the primary purpose of establishing TBM Syahmi is to assist and enhance the knowledge and skills of the surrounding community while supporting their productivity..

Research related to community reading gardens is not a new field of study; rather, it has been extensively researched. First, a study by Dewanty & Nawangsari (2024) suggests that the community reading garden program has been effective in achieving its goals of integration and adaptation. Community reading gardens are considered capable of providing comprehensive and professional services. However, a shortage of staff has resulted in service hours being shorter than they should be. Second, a study by Prayogo & Syahputra (2022), suggests that TBM, as a facilitator of community reading, fosters leadership character in children through activities such as reading Islamic books on the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad, character education, social norms, maintaining social ties, and others. Third, a study by Wardah (2019), found that TBMs provide services aimed at community empowerment through literacy. TBM Ar-Rasyid has programs for children's empowerment, such as letter recognition, reading, counting, knitting, writing, painting, foreign language introduction, computer literacy, and literacy programs for the general public; furthermore, TBM's empowerment efforts are inseparable from the role of literacy volunteers.

Previous research has examined the performance of Community Reading Parks (TBM) programs, their role in character building, and how TBMs promote literacy-based community empowerment. However, most of these studies have focused on the role of TBMs as providers of reading services and promoters of literacy activities. The focus of this study is the Syahmi Community Reading Center (TBM), which not only provides reading services but also develops community empowerment programs through computer training, digital literacy, mentoring for livestock breeders and farmers, and community consultations to encourage productive community activities. Thus, this study offers a more comprehensive

perspective on the role of TBMs as community learning centers that contribute to increasing community productivity.

Consequently, this study aims to determine how the Syahmi Community Reading Center supports productive community activities through its collection and to identify the specific activities it has initiated to foster productive behaviors among the surrounding community. Regarding the collection, the study examines what materials are provided and how these support the center's role and objectives in fostering community activities. Furthermore, what activities have been and will be carried out to develop and enhance productive behavior among the community? These two indicators are used to determine their correlation in supporting the role of the Syahmi Community Library. This is because the Syahmi Community Library, as a learning center, has shifted its support from conventional roles to innovative ones, particularly in fostering productive activities among the surrounding community.

2. METHOD

This study falls under the category of qualitative research with a descriptive approach. In this method, the primary focus is on the research process itself rather than on achieving a final result, as the main objective of qualitative research is to develop concepts and understandings that ultimately form a theory. This study does not formulate a hypothesis but rather aims to discover one. Furthermore, this study is descriptive in nature and does not rely on numerical data (Walidin et al., 2015). Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on the consideration that they possess knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the operation and utilization of services at the Syahmi Community Reading Park. The informants consisted of TBM managers, children, school students, college students, homemakers, cattle farmers, and farmers who actively participated in various empowerment activities organized by the Syahmi Community Reading Park.. Data collection in this study was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis in this study employed the Miles and Huberman analytical model (Ash-shiddiqi et al., 2025) which comprises three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and data verification to draw conclusions. To ensure data validity, this study employed source triangulation which involves comparing information from various informants, such as TBM managers, visitors, livestock farmers, crop farmers, and the surrounding community. Additionally, technical triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation.

Table 1. Research Informant Profiles

Informant Code	Role/ Occupation	Data Collected
MS	TBM's Manager	TBM management, empowerment programs
LL	Children	Experience participating in reading activities
DN	Children	Literacy Activities at the TBM
DR	Children	Visiting and Reading
IR	Student	Use of the TBM for Learning
FD	College Student	Computer Learning
HK	Housewife	Computer training and business
SM	Cattle Farmer	Livestock extension

LM	Farmer	Agricultural extension

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Syahmi Reading Center was established to strengthen literacy and reading interest among the community from families to rural areasto improve the local economy, and to support the community's daily activities through community empowerment initiatives in the fields of livestock and agriculture. The Syahmi Reading Center open every weekend on Saturday and Sunday, with flexible hours based on the availability of the reading center's managers.

Visitors to the reading center include children, teenagers, housewives, livestock farmers, and farmers. The collection consists of 578 titles, featuring a variety of reading materials for children and the other community. The collection was acquired through purchases and donations from various sources, such as lecturers and council members. In addition to providing a diverse collection, its also offers other facilities, such as laptops, computers, and children's toys.

In an effort to encourage productive community activities, the Syahmi Community Reading Center (TBM) organizes various programs designed to meet the needs of the surrounding community. These programs are not only focused on increasing reading interest but are also aimed at developing skills, digital literacy, and community empowerment through various educational activities. To strengthen literacy and reading interest among the community, the Syahmi Community Reading Park has implemented several programs and activities, including:

Table 2. Syahmi Community Reading Park Programs and Activities

Activity	Description
Group Reading	This activity is part of efforts to strengthen the literacy movement and foster a love of reading among the community. In this activity, the reading park facilitates the community especially children to read, learn, and share stories together
Digital Literacy for Children	Helping children in the local community access digital books and educational videos on YouTube, such as those about religious practices and how to read digital books.
Digital Literacy for Livestock Farmers	Providing guidance to cattle farmers, particularly in the Betungan area, to help them find specific information about cattle farming. Cattle farmers in this area still use traditional farming methods, so they need guidance on accessing information about cattle farming through digital media with the assistance of the reading garden staff.
Literacy Aquarium	A librarian's innovation in an effort to attract children's interest in reading through cartoon characters displayed in a miniaquarium at the reading garden. The literacy aquarium was created by a creative team of housewives who were unemployed during the COVID-19 pandemic; through this project, they earned income from crafting the aquariums. In addition, this activity is organized through reading booths set up at tourist attractions, such as Berkas Beach in Bengkulu City

Literacy Cafe with the Literacy Aquarium	The purpose of this activity is to serve as a platform for sharing knowledge and experiences through programs such as "One Book, One Visit," "Millennial Youth," "Share Knowledge and Experience," and efforts to increase monthly revenue.

Source: Researcher's Data (2024)

Based on Table 2, it can be seen that the programs developed by TBM Syahmi demonstrate a transformation in the function of the community reading garden from merely a provider of reading materials to a community learning center. This finding aligns with the research by Reynaldi & Halim, (2022) which states that innovative training can improve the quality of human resources through enhanced work skills and productivity. The similarity of these findings indicates that innovations in computer training not only improve participants' technical abilities but also provide tangible benefits in supporting both academic and economic activities within the community. The programs implemented not only support the improvement of reading literacy but also develop digital literacy, technology skills, and community capacity in line with the nature of local jobs and the needs of the local community.

3.1 Empowering Children and Youth Activities at the Syahmi Community Reading Center

The activities carried out by the Syahmi Community Reading Park to attract children's interest in visiting and reading began with the creation of a "Literacy Aquarium" featuring cartoon characters that children often love. The aquarium contains beautiful, colorful betta fish designed to capture children's attention and serve as a hands-on lesson in caring for and nurturing animals. The following is information from a participant who has been visiting regularly from the very beginning until now.

> "*At first, during the COVID-19 pandemic, I was just studying at home but spent most of my time playing on my phone. Then one day, I heard that there was a book-reading activity at Mrs. Meri's house, and my parents told me to go check it out. I was curious, so I went there. It turned out that besides books, there was a betta fish aquarium. There, we took care of the betta fish, and our mothers also bought and cared for them. Some of the fish successfully laid eggs and had offspring. That's how we were able to sell a few betta fish.*" (LL, June 30, 2024).

This activity as the first step in launching the reading center, ran smoothly and received a positive response from the local community. Parents whose children were learning from home due to the pandemic supported the initiative by participating in buying, caring for, and selling betta fish at the Literacy Aquarium. The proceeds from these sales were used to purchase additional books for the reading center. However, the "Literacy Aquarium" program has temporarily paused now that the pandemic has ended and life has returned to normal. Nevertheless, children's interest in visiting remains strong, as more and more children are attending school in the area surrounding the reading center.

Furthermore, the Syahmi Reading Center continues to organize weekly reading and play sessions to help children avoid becoming addicted to gadgets. There is a various

collection of children's books designed to spark an interest in reading such as novels, comics, fairy tales, and textbooks, because the age range of the visiting children vary a lot. Information about the activities at this reading center was provided by an informant who is about to start elementary school.

> "*I'm not a very good reader yet, but I still come here (to the reading garden) because it's fun and there are lots of friends. Here, we can read together and laugh when there are funny stories like Doraemon. There are also friends who read stories aloud. Sometimes we play games, too*." (DN, June 30, 2024)

Based on the informant's statements above, beside to reading comics, the boys also play games such as running around or role-playing by imitating characters from the comics they read. Due to differences in age and grade level, the children naturally form their own groups, yet their reading preferences aren't too far apart because, at their age, they view reading as both entertainment and a way to support their learning. Most children enjoy reading comics and novels across a variety of genres. For the girls, prefer novels with horror and comedy themes. Some girls also enjoy cookbooks.

> "*I like coming here every week because I have plans with my other friends. It's become a regular routine to visit the TBM. Activities we often do include reading books together or on our own, depending on the book. There are also books about food, and sometimes the TBM owner provides snacks for us to share during the activities.*" (DR, June 30, 2024)

Besides offering a collection of books for various age groups, one of TBM Syahmi's main attractions is providing snacks to share during activities. These snacks are provided to keep the children from getting bored and to teach them practical skills in selfreliance and cleanliness, as the trash from the snacks is cleaned up and disposed of in the trash bin. At other times, it's not uncommon for children at TBM Syahmi to work on school assignments or homework together. According to informants IR and KM, they sometimes come to work on homework assignments they don't fully understand.

> "*We like doing assignments with friends because it saves time—we learn while playing. If there's an assignment or homework we don't understand, we can ask Ms. Meri* (*the TBM manager*)." (IR, June 30, 2024)

Acoording to (Uyun et al., 2023), TBMs are used as an alternative learning resource because they are easily accessible and inexpensive often even free. The Syahmi Reading Center strongly supports the school education of children in the surrounding community. Although it is only open once a week, the support provided to the children is highly beneficial because it helps them read fluently, offers supplementary lessons to help them complete their school assignments, provides moral support by encouraging children to read books, and reduces the time they spend on gadgets to prevent addiction. For

teenagers, the Syahmi Reading Center serves as a beneficial space and activity that helps them become better individuals by fostering discipline and expanding their knowledge. They realize that reading isn't always boring; in fact, it helps them save money and spend their time on more meaningful activities.

Saepudin et.al.,(2017) explain that literacy-based community empowerment at the TBM is carried out through various educational activities, such as reading, writing, computer literacy, and the development of community skills. The findings of this study reinforce these results because the Syahmi TBM also organizes group reading sessions and study mentoring, which not only increase children's interest in reading but also foster positive learning habits and social interaction.

3.2 Empowerment Through Computer Learning Activities

The Syahmi Community Reading Center provides computers and laptops for its visitors to use. These devices are often used by adults who need them to support their daily lives. One example is a visitor who is currently pursuing a college degree and uses the resources to support their studies. Furthermore, the availability of laptops and computers helps visitors improve their skills and knowledge in operating various software programs, enabling them to address the needs of their community. Additionally, it assists housewives one of whom runs a laundry business in streamlining their work. The following is an excerpt from an interview with an informant:

> "*I often come here to learn about computers. Sometimes I study on my own, and other times I'm taught by Mr. Syahril (the owner of TBM Syahmi). I'm very grateful because TBM Syahmi has been a huge help with my coursework. I use the computers at TBM Syahmi to study. I've learned how to write research papers, use Microsoft Excel, and more. I still use what I've learned from these computer classes, especially during midterms and finals. Visiting the TBM has been a huge help to me."* (FD, June 30, 2024)
>
> "*I've been visiting TBM for about half a year now, usually once a week. I come to learn how to use computers, Microsoft Excel, and social media. Mrs. Meri taught me how to promote my laundry business on Facebook and YouTube. At first, I learned how to turn on the computer, familiarize myself with the menus, and eventually use the applications and software on it.*" (HK, June 30, 2024)

These computer classes are held flexibly according to the schedule set by Ms. Meri and Mr. Syahril, the owners and managers of TBM Syahmi. Each session typically has between 2 (two) and 5 (five) participants. Local mothers often come to TBM with their children to take the computer classes together. The activities carried out by the Syahmi TBM's program align with the Implementation Guidelines for Creative-Recreational TBM Appreciation, at (KEMENDIKBUD, 2021), these include activities that can be developed at the TBM, such as learning about and using computer devices, and utilizing technology for entrepreneurship. According to Simamora, as cited by (Darlan & Miko, 2021) the benefits and impacts of computer training include: increasing the quantity and quality of productivity; fostering more beneficial attitudes, loyalty, and cooperation;

reducing the training time required for employees to meet accepted performance standards; meeting human resource needs; reducing costs; and supporting the improvement and self-development of human resources.

These findings indicate that the computer training organized by TBM Syahmi not only improves the community's ability to operate computer devices but also strengthens their digital literacy. Digital literacy in this context is not merely defined as the ability to use technology, but also as the ability to leverage technology to support both academic and economic activities such as completing college assignments, managing data using Microsoft Excel, and promoting businesses through social media. Thus, TBM Syahmi has fulfilled its role as a community learning center that practically fosters the improvement of the community's digital competencies.

3.3 Empowering Cattle Farming Activities at the TBM Syahmi

TBM Syahmi empowers cattle farmers by utilizing digital media as a learning tool to broaden their knowledge and enhance their ability to learn independently when seeking information related to cattle farming. Ms. Meri took advantage of this opportunity to provide training to cattle farmers in the Betungan neighborhood by using her tablet to search for relevant information sources. Currently, cattle farmers in the Betungan neighborhood still use traditional methods of cattle farming, which tend to be less effective in today's context. Therefore, it is necessary to utilize digital books through digital e-resources on cattle farming ranging from cattle-rearing practices to the prevention and treatment of cattle diseases, all the way to beef marketing. Cattle farmers can also regularly access information from digital media with guidance from extension workers or librarians.

TBM Syahmi has provided capacity-building support to several cattle farmers facing challenges in their operations. These issues include outbreaks of Foot-and-Mouth Disease in cattle. When faced with this issue, farmers typically slaughter their cattle immediately. However, through TBM Syahmi, they are provided with effective solutions derived from information gathered via digital media such as Google and YouTube.

> "*There was a time when two of my cows were affected by a condition that caused them to drool constantly. So we asked her (Ms. Meri Susanti) for help in finding a solution. She eventually told us which medications were easy to find and effective. After giving the recommended medication, my cows finally recovered, and the drooling stopped*." (SM, July 3, 2024)

In addition to the FMD outbreak, the informant mentioned above also stated that he had experienced a case of cattle theft and a large number of flies on his cows, which caused scabies.

> "*I lost a cow about 6 (six) months ago, so Mrs. Meri advised me to build a cow shed. As night falls, we bring the cows into the shed and turn on a light. In the past, we would just tie our cows to oil palm trees when night was approaching, but ever since*

> *a cow went missing, we finally built the shed. I've also consulted her about how to keep the flies away from the cows and increase their feed intake. She* (*Ms. Meri Susanti*) *recommended getting a vitamin injection from a veterinarian to address the issue.*" (SM, July 3, 2024).

In his statment who is a cattle farmer, he discussed the problems he had encountered while raising cattle. Some of these issues included foot-and-mouth disease, cattle theft, cattle surrounded by swarms of flies, and insufficient feed intake. SM reported these problems to the TBM manager in order to find appropriate solutions to address them.

The research findings indicate that the use of Google and YouTube has become an alternative information source for farmers in finding solutions to various livestock-related problems. Access to digital information enables farmers to acquire knowledge that was previously obtained only through generations of experience. This situation demonstrates that digital literacy plays a role in driving a shift in livestock farming practices from traditional approaches toward more information-based practices, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of problem-solving in the field.

3.4 Empowering Rice Farmers at TBM Syahmi

According to Hamid, as cited by (Uyun et al., 2023), the programs implemented by the TBM go beyond merely eradicating illiteracy; they also foster a culture of reading and information literacy among the community through various types of activities. The Syahmi Community Reading Center (TBM), through its community digital literacy movement, enables the community to make the most of the internet and digital devices for the betterment of society. In terms of empowering the agricultural community which has long relied on traditional farming practicesefforts are directed toward digital literacy to improve the quality of agriculture. TBM Syahmi not only provides a collection of printed literacy materials but has also transformed into a digital resource center, with TBM staff serving as mediators.

> "*We also educate farmers on how to find high-quality seeds and solutions for pest control through YouTube.*" (MS, July 3, 2024)

The information provided by TBM Syahmi comes from its own collection and through digital media such as YouTube. This information includes insights on how to cultivate rice fields, control pests, find high-quality seeds, and increase harvest yields.

> "*Yesterday, Mr. Syahril taught us how to increase our harvests. As laypeople, we used to rely on traditional methods, so with the technology he taught us for example, what used to be two harvests a year might now become three. He also taught us yesterday how to select good seeds and what kind of irrigation system works best here. As for seed varieties, they're provided here by the Department of Agriculture, so we get them and buy them there as well.*" (LM, July 3, 2024)

The informant above states that the TBM, through its managers, provides education to local farmers on better farming practices by utilizing technology. Farmers who previously relied on traditional methods have been able to transition to modern approaches, such as increasing harvest frequency, selecting high-quality seeds, and implementing effective irrigation systems. The extension program for farmers is conducted informally, with TBM staff visiting the fields directly. These agricultural extension sessions are held by gathering farmers who are taking a break in the rice fields; typically, about 10 (ten) farmers attend. This activity has been conducted three times, with each session lasting approximately 3 (three) hours. The informant also mentioned that, in addition to Mr. Syahril, he gains knowledge from reading books and his parents' experiences.

> "*Besides Mr. Syahril and Mrs. Meri, I've gained knowledge about farming from reading books, the internet, and my parents' experiences. I've applied this knowledge here in the rice field. The plots or ridges in this rice field used to be scattered. So, my older brother and I organized them into a straight system. We filled in the high areas and leveled the low ones, making the field appear wider. However, the downside is that when the ridges are wide, rats often gather in the middle*." (LM, July 3, 2024)

This farmer empowerment initiative involves gathering farmers in one place to provide them with agricultural information. The goal of this empowerment is for farmers to minimize their labor by utilizing current technology. Farmers can become more proficient in applying technology to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of their farming practices.

These findings indicate that TBM Syahmi not only provides access to information but also serves as a knowledge mediator for farmers. Information obtained through digital media is translated into more effective agricultural practices, such as selecting high-quality seeds, managing irrigation, and increasing crop yields. This demonstrates that digital literacy can serve as a tool for community empowerment by enhancing farmers' ability to utilize information to support agricultural productivity.

4 CONCLUSION

This study shows that TBM Syahmi has made a genuine commitment to promoting productive community activities through several programs oriented toward the surrounding community. These efforts are evident in the availability of a diverse collection with flexible opening hours, computer training, digital literacy programs, and the provision of outreach and insights to the community such as mentoring for farmers and livestock breeders, as well as community consultation services. These programs demonstrate that TBM Syahmi functions not only as a provider of reading materials but also as a community learning center that supports the improvement of community literacy, skills, and productivity in accordance with their needs.

Although the Syahmi Community Library has provided benefits and made an impact through supporting facilities such as computers and other literacy-building programs, it is hoped that these programs can be conducted on a regular basis with a clear timeframe so that they will have a more significant impact on the other community. Programs that have been implemented previously should continue on an ongoing basis, such as the "Literacy Aquarium," one of the benefits of which is increasing the productivity of homemakers. Collaborating with various other parties to provide outreach and training to the community, so that the center does not rely solely on its own staff. This collaboration can take the form of providing competent human resources to help the community become more productive in the programs organized by the TBM. Thus, TBM Syahmi can contribute even more effectively to promoting productive community activities.

This study offers practical implications: the empowerment model implemented by the Syahmi TBM can serve as a model for other TBMs in developing programs based on digital literacy and community needs. Therefore, TBM administrators are advised to expand digital literacy training and community skills through collaboration with local public libraries, the Department of Libraries and Archives, the Department of Education, and the Department of Agriculture so that the empowerment programs implemented are more sustainable and provide broader benefits to the community.

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