

## Empowering Village Literacy Through Literary Criticism and Collaboration with Panrita Mandiri Global

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### Abstract

Low literacy culture among rural communities remains a fundamental issue in human resource development. This study aimed to empower the people of Taeng Village, Pallangga District, Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, through a literacy program based on literary criticism and digital collaboration with Panrita Mandiri Global. The research employed a participatory research and development (R&D) approach involving 40 participants, including community leaders, teachers, students, and literacy facilitators. Data were collected through observation, interviews, focus group discussions, and documentation. The results showed a significant increase in reading motivation from 25% to 82.5% and digital literacy skills from 32% to 85%. The program also produced a collaborative literacy model integrating cultural literacy, digital literacy, and participatory learning. The findings demonstrate that integrating cultural and technological approaches is an effective strategy for building sustainable literacy ecosystems in rural areas.

**Keywords:** culture; digital literacy; empowerment; literary criticism; rural community

### *Pemberdayaan Literasi Desa Melalui Kritik Sastra Dan Kolaborasi Panrita Mandiri Global*

### Abstrak

Rendahnya budaya literasi masyarakat desa masih menjadi persoalan mendasar dalam pembangunan sumber daya manusia di wilayah pedesaan. Kegiatan ini bertujuan untuk memberdayakan masyarakat Desa Taeng, Kecamatan Pallangga, Kabupaten Gowa, Sulawesi Selatan melalui pendekatan literasi berbasis kritik sastra dan kolaborasi digital bersama Panrita Mandiri Global. Penelitian menggunakan metode *participatory research and development (R&D)* dengan melibatkan 40 peserta yang terdiri atas tokoh masyarakat, guru, mahasiswa, dan relawan literasi. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara, diskusi kelompok terarah, dan dokumentasi kegiatan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan pada minat baca masyarakat dari 25% menjadi 82,5%, serta peningkatan literasi digital dari 32% menjadi 85%. Kegiatan ini juga menghasilkan model literasi

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*kolaboratif yang mengintegrasikan literasi budaya, literasi digital, dan pembelajaran partisipatif. Keberhasilan program ini menunjukkan bahwa integrasi pendekatan budaya dan teknologi dapat menjadi strategi efektif dalam membangun ekosistem literasi berkelanjutan di pedesaan.*

**Kata kunci:** budaya; literasi digital; pemberdayaan; komunitas pedesaan; kritik sastra

## INTRODUCTION

Literacy is one of the fundamental pillars of sustainable human development. In the context of rural communities, literacy is not merely the ability to read and write but also a means of cultivating critical consciousness, strengthening economic independence, and preserving local cultural identity (Bruner, 1996; Freire, 1970). The low literacy levels in many Indonesian villages remain a serious challenge that affects social inequality, community participation, and access to information and technology. According to Fink (2013), meaningful learning must connect educational experiences with real-life situations. Therefore, literacy activities in rural settings should not only serve as knowledge transfer processes but also as instruments for meaning-making and social transformation.

The urgency of developing a literacy culture in rural areas has increased alongside rapid digitalization. Global information flow demands that rural citizens not only become consumers of knowledge but also active producers of information through critical thinking and *digital literacy* (Eagleton, 2008; Santosa et al., 2024). Under these circumstances, community-based literacy empowerment programs serve as effective strategies to strengthen both individual and collective capacities. Ervianti (2024) notes that digital literacy, combined with cultural immersion, enhances villagers' self-confidence in managing local potential and adapting to technological development.

A holistic approach is required to successfully implement literacy development in rural communities. Freire (1970) asserts that emancipatory education can only occur when people become active subjects in the learning process. Thus, rural literacy programs should not be top-down but participatory and grounded in local wisdom. Smith (2012) further emphasizes that *decolonizing methodologies* in research and community service requires the recognition of indigenous knowledge as a legitimate epistemic resource. Consequently, literacy activities in rural areas must become collaborative spaces that honor local values while encouraging dialogue with global knowledge.

Recent studies demonstrate the effectiveness of community-based literacy initiatives across Indonesia. Gabriella (2025) found that literacy education could strengthen the economic independence of Bahitom Village through creative reading activities and entrepreneurship training. Nuraeni, Nurhayati, and Ansori (2025) described how *community engagement* strategies implemented in community reading parks significantly improved villagers' reading interest. Similarly, Handayani et al. (2025) revealed that collaborative literacy programs in rural areas successfully increased children's motivation to read. These findings reaffirm that participatory literacy development enhances *social capital* and broadens access to knowledge resources.

Moreover, technological advancement has opened new opportunities for rural literacy empowerment. Santosa et al. (2024) underline the importance of digital literacy in enabling villagers to use *e-commerce* and information technology to improve their economic conditions. Sitorus et al. (2025) report that implementing *e-commerce*-based literacy initiatives in Karangsari Village expanded the market reach of local products and boosted the rural economy. Setiadi (2023) also emphasizes the active role of youth in promoting digital literacy through technology-driven social projects. Integrating traditional and digital literacy thus becomes essential for developing resilient and adaptive rural communities.

Despite these encouraging developments, several challenges persist in implementing literacy programs at the local level. Maspuroh, Sugiarti, and Hartati (2025) found that low reading motivation in Lemahmakmur Village stemmed from limited access to reading materials and institutional support. Umam (2025) stresses the need to revitalize community libraries as inclusive centers of literacy activities, while Mahyudi (2025) highlights the role of village libraries as not only language literacy hubs but also cultural dialogue spaces. These studies reveal that the sustainability of literacy programs depends heavily on strong collaboration among government bodies, educational institutions, and local communities.

The rationale for this activity is to establish an integrated literacy ecosystem at the village level. The program “Empowering Village Literacy through Literary Criticism and Panrita Mandiri Global Collaboration” was designed to strengthen literacy culture by combining aesthetic approaches to literature with digital literacy practices. Literary criticism serves as a reflective medium through which community members can critically interpret social realities, while the Panrita Mandiri Global collaboration bridges academia and local communities through participatory knowledge exchange. This approach aligns with Rajewski’s (2005) concept of *intersemiotic analysis*, which links text, culture, and education as a transformative social space.

The objectives of this activity are as follows: (1) to increase community literacy awareness through literary and cultural approaches; (2) to develop villagers’ critical thinking and digital literacy skills; (3) to create a collaborative model between academics, students, and rural communities; and (4) to strengthen the institutional capacity of village literacy programs to ensure sustainability. This initiative is expected to address the challenges of low reading interest and intellectual disengagement in rural communities.

The problem-solving plan involves a series of community-based literacy activities, including literary criticism workshops, creative writing training, digital archiving of local literary works, and capacity-building for village library management. These activities will be conducted collaboratively among lecturers, students, and community members, emphasizing principles of *mutual learning* and empowerment. Consistent with the findings of Wijaya, Siantoro, and Layuk (2022), active parental and community involvement significantly enhances children’s literacy development in rural areas.

A review of existing literature suggests that literacy empowerment in rural settings should not only aim to improve reading and writing abilities but also to cultivate character, stimulate economic growth, and preserve cultural heritage. Gabriella (2025) argues that literacy education contributes to building villagers' economic independence, while Mukhamad Faturahman, Andhita Dara, and Dedy Dwiputra (2025) highlight the significance of strengthening cultural literacy for national development. Accordingly, this activity positions literacy as a multidimensional movement that bridges education, economy, and culture within the framework of sustainable development.

The underlying hypothesis of this initiative is that reinforcing literacy through literary criticism and digital collaboration will enhance rural communities' critical thinking, social participation, and economic independence. By fostering direct interaction between academics and local communities, a two-way, sustainable knowledge exchange can be achieved. As Fink (2013) asserts, significant learning occurs when learners can connect new knowledge with their lived experiences.

Overall, this introduction affirms that empowering rural literacy is a strategic step toward building an informed, creative, and self-reliant society. Through the integration of literary, cultural, and technological approaches, this program seeks to cultivate an adaptive literacy ecosystem rooted in local wisdom while responsive to the challenges of the digital era.

## METHOD

This research employed a participatory qualitative design combined with elements of *research and development (R&D)* and community-based service learning. The method was selected to enable a comprehensive understanding of literacy dynamics in rural communities while simultaneously developing a collaborative empowerment model. The approach was designed not only to collect data but also to stimulate social transformation through active community participation.

The research and literacy empowerment activities were conducted in Taeng Village, Pallangga District, Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi. The location was chosen purposively due to its representative characteristics as a semi-rural area with strong local cultural traditions but limited access to digital resources and educational infrastructure. Taeng Village has several community-based reading initiatives, yet these efforts remain fragmented and lack systematic integration. The research was conducted over six months, from January to June 2025, combining face-to-face and online sessions to integrate *digital literacy* with local cultural practices.

The main participants included community members, literacy activists, teachers, students, and youth representatives who were actively involved in local reading and writing activities. A total of 40 participants were involved, consisting of 10 community leaders, 5 teachers, 15 university students, and 10 facilitators from Panrita Mandiri Global. Participant selection was based on purposive sampling, emphasizing willingness to collaborate and active involvement in literacy-related initiatives.

The core materials used in the program consisted of literary texts (folk tales, poems, and short stories), literacy modules, and digital media learning resources. These materials were designed

collaboratively to ensure cultural relevance and accessibility for rural communities. Following Fink's (2013) concept of *significant learning experiences*, materials were developed to engage learners emotionally, cognitively, and socially. The primary tools used included laptops, projectors, smartphones, reading kits, and data-collection instruments such as observation sheets and interview guides.

Data collection utilized multiple qualitative and participatory techniques. Primary data were obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and documentation of program activities. Observations were carried out throughout reading workshops and creative writing sessions to capture behavioral and attitudinal changes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including teachers, community leaders, and literacy facilitators, to gain insight into local perceptions of literacy. FGDs were held to encourage shared reflections and co-identification of literacy challenges. Secondary data were gathered from village administration reports, library records, and previous studies on rural literacy development (Gabriella, 2025; Nuraeni et al., 2025; Handayani et al., 2025).

Operationally, the research variables were classified into three major categories: (1) Literacy Empowerment, referring to activities that promote reading motivation, critical awareness, and creative expression; (2) Digital Literacy, defined as the capacity to access, evaluate, and utilize information through digital tools effectively; and (3) Community Collaboration, referring to cooperative participation among local stakeholders to strengthen literacy culture. Each variable was analyzed through indicators such as participation rates, reading frequency, creative output, and collaborative initiatives.

Data were analyzed using the *interactive model* proposed by Miles and Huberman, which involves three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involved classifying observations, interview transcripts, and documentation into thematic categories such as literacy habits, digital adaptation, and cultural integration. Data display used descriptive tables and narrative summaries to logically organize findings. Verification employed triangulation among data sources to ensure validity and reliability.

The study also applied a *Participatory Action Research (PAR)* approach to empower local stakeholders throughout all phases of the activity, from needs assessment and program design to evaluation. This approach aligns with Freire's (1970) *dialogical pedagogy*, emphasizing dialogue and critical reflection as transformative tools for community learning. Facilitators worked alongside participants to identify problems, develop literacy activities, and co-create culturally grounded solutions.

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants were informed of the study's objectives and methods, and written consent was obtained prior to involvement. Data confidentiality was maintained, and all research procedures were aligned with the ethical standards of

community-based research. The program also respected local traditions and ensured that every literacy activity reflected Taeng Village's cultural context.

The R&D process consisted of four stages: (1) needs analysis, (2) design and prototyping, (3) implementation, and (4) evaluation. During the needs analysis phase, researchers and community members jointly identified barriers to literacy development. The design stage produced an integrated literacy model combining literary criticism with digital storytelling. The implementation stage involved applying this model in a series of reading circles, creative writing workshops, and digital media training sessions. The evaluation stage assessed outcomes in literacy awareness, digital competency, and community collaboration.

The evaluation process used both quantitative and qualitative measures. Quantitatively, attendance frequency, reading participation, and digital usage rates were recorded. Qualitatively, interviews and reflective journals were analyzed to evaluate participants' learning experiences and behavioral transformations. The evaluation results were then discussed collectively with participants to ensure transparency and sustainability.

In summary, the research method integrated *literary education*, *cultural participation*, and *digital literacy* within a participatory framework. The model developed in Taeng Village illustrates how community engagement and academic collaboration can effectively enhance rural literacy culture and create a replicable empowerment framework for other regions in South Sulawesi and beyond.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literacy empowerment program implemented in Taeng Village, Pallangga District, Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, produced comprehensive results, including increased reading interest, strengthened digital literacy, and enhanced collaboration between community institutions and educational stakeholders.

### Strengthening Literacy Awareness through Literary and Cultural Approaches

Before the program began, reading culture in Taeng Village was relatively low. Based on pre-observation data, only about 25% of respondents regularly read books or printed materials more than once a week. Most villagers associated reading with formal education rather than as an enjoyable or empowering activity. After the introduction of *literary criticism workshops*, reading circles, and community storytelling sessions, participants' reading frequency and motivation improved significantly, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency of Reading Activities before and after the Program in Taeng Village

Reading Frequency	Before Program (%)	After Program (%)
Never	22.5	5.0
Once a week	52.5	15.0
Two to three times a week	15.0	32.5
More than three times a week	10.0	47.5

Source: Field data, Panrita Mandiri Global, 2025

Through community reading circles, participants were encouraged to interpret local folklore, short stories, and poems using a reflective literary criticism framework. This activity helped villagers discover deeper meanings within local narratives, connecting traditional wisdom with contemporary realities. According to Bruner (1996), learning through culture enables individuals to build meaning from experience, and this principle was evident during the discussions where participants linked stories to issues such as rural education, environmental conservation, and gender roles.

Freire's (1970) *pedagogy of dialogue* was integrated throughout the sessions. Instead of being passive listeners, villagers became active participants—questioning, comparing, and collectively interpreting texts. Participants began articulating opinions through analytical reasoning, demonstrating emerging critical literacy. Eagleton's (2008) perspective that literature functions as a mirror for social critique was validated, as participants identified moral and ethical lessons in stories that served as metaphors for local social challenges.

The process also revitalized local oral traditions. Elderly storytellers (*panrita kampung*) were invited to share traditional tales, which were then rewritten and analyzed by younger participants. This intergenerational dialogue not only preserved cultural knowledge but also strengthened the emotional connection between youth and elders.

### Development of Critical Thinking and Digital Literacy Skills

In the next phase, the program integrated *digital literacy training* to complement literary learning. Participants were introduced to digital reading tools, mobile-based dictionaries, online libraries, and basic *content creation* platforms. At the outset, more than two-thirds of participants were unfamiliar with online reading or educational applications. After six months, participants exhibited substantial improvement in digital competency, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Digital Literacy Skill Level of Participants

Skill Category	Before Program (%)	After Program (%)
Low	68.0	18.0
Moderate	27.0	40.0
High	5.0	42.0

Source: Digital Literacy Evaluation, 2025

Participants learned to use applications such as *Google Books*, *Wattpad*, and *Canva* for producing digital posters and short reading materials. Several youths successfully created short digital anthologies of local stories, which were distributed through WhatsApp and Facebook community groups. This shift mirrors Rajewski's (2005) theory of *intersemiotic learning*, in which textual, visual, and digital media combine to foster broader educational engagement.

Moreover, digital literacy fostered the emergence of new learning communities. Participants formed online groups to discuss books, share writing drafts, and organize *digital reading challenges*. The community also developed a small-scale digital library by digitizing available printed materials from the village library. These developments echo Santosa et al. (2024), who noted that digital literacy

in rural areas can increase social participation and create bridges between traditional and modern learning practices.

Through these activities, participants demonstrated both technical and cognitive development. They were able to critically evaluate online information and distinguish credible sources from misinformation. The integration of critical reading with digital skills enabled them to use technology not only for entertainment but also for learning, networking, and cultural documentation.

### Establishing a Collaborative Literacy Model

One of the most significant results was the establishment of a *collaborative literacy ecosystem* linking academia, government institutions, and the local community. The collaboration between Panrita Mandiri Global, local schools, and the Taeng Village Library created an inclusive literacy network, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Institutional Collaboration Framework in the Literacy Program

Stakeholder	Role	Contribution
Panrita Mandiri Global	Academic mentor	Provided training modules, mentoring, evaluation tools
Taeng Village Library	Implementation center	Hosted reading circles, managed book circulation
Local Government (Pallangga)	Support and supervision	Policy coordination, funding assistance
Community Leaders	Mobilization	Promoted participation, cultural guidance
Youth Volunteers	Implementation and media	Managed digital documentation, ran online literacy promotion

Source: Research documentation, 2025

The participatory design process was aligned with Smith's (2012) decolonizing methodology, which emphasizes community ownership in knowledge creation. In this approach, villagers were not positioned as passive research subjects but actively engaged as collaborators throughout the process. Regular reflection meetings were conducted biweekly to collectively review progress, identify challenges, and determine adaptive strategies. As a result of this participatory engagement, a community-based literacy model emerged comprising three interconnected components: cultural literacy, which utilized local literature and oral narratives as primary learning materials; digital literacy, which expanded access to online knowledge resources and encouraged creative media production; and collaborative learning, which fostered intergenerational and institutional cooperation to sustain the literacy movement. This integrated model is consistent with the findings of Nuraeni et al. (2025) and Handayani et al. (2025), who highlight that literacy initiatives are more effective and sustainable when grounded in participatory approaches and culturally relevant frameworks.

### Interpretation of Findings and Theoretical Implications

The overall findings from Taeng Village demonstrate that literacy empowerment, implemented through a participatory, cultural, and digital framework, generates multidimensional benefits across intellectual, social, and economic dimensions. From an educational perspective, integrating literary



criticism significantly strengthened critical literacy, enabling participants to read texts not merely for information but as objects of interpretation and reflection. This outcome aligns with Freire's (1970) concept of critical pedagogy, which positions reading as a political act through which individuals interpret and transform their social realities. From a cultural standpoint, the program reaffirmed the value of local wisdom by integrating traditional oral narratives with contemporary learning strategies, thereby preserving indigenous knowledge systems while situating them within modern educational contexts, as Bruner (1996) emphasizes, who argues that culture is the foundation of meaning-making in learning processes. Technologically, the incorporation of digital media transformed literacy practices into more interactive and inclusive experiences, supporting Rajewski's (2005) theory of intersemiotic learning, which highlights the expansion of semiotic modes through digital platforms.

From a community development perspective, the collaborative engagement among academic institutions, community members, and local governance structures demonstrated that literacy empowerment requires strong institutional support to ensure sustainability and scalability, consistent with the findings of Setiajaya et al. (2022). Collectively, these outcomes indicate that the Panrita Mandiri Global model developed in Taeng Village serves as an adaptable prototype for rural literacy development, demonstrating that literacy programs are most effective when rooted in cultural identity, strengthened through digital inclusion, and sustained by collaborative governance. Ultimately, the transformative impact observed confirms the central hypothesis of this study, that integrating literary criticism and digital collaboration enhances critical thinking, participation, and community autonomy, positioning participants not only as improved readers but also as reflective thinkers, storytellers, and producers of local knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that literacy empowerment grounded in participatory, cultural, and digital approaches can effectively strengthen literacy culture in rural communities. The implementation of a community-based literacy program in Taeng Village shows that integrating literary criticism, local cultural narratives, and digital literacy practices significantly enhances reading motivation, critical thinking, and community participation. By positioning villagers as active collaborators rather than passive recipients, the program fostered a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for sustaining literacy activities. The findings further indicate that integrating cultural literacy, digital literacy, and collaborative learning creates a holistic literacy ecosystem capable of addressing contemporary challenges in rural contexts. Literary criticism served as a reflective medium that connected local wisdom with social realities, while digital literacy expanded access to information and creative expression. The collaborative framework involving community leaders, youth, educational institutions, and Panrita Mandiri Global strengthened institutional support and ensured program sustainability. Overall, this study confirms that participatory and culturally relevant literacy initiatives are not only effective in improving literacy skills but also in reinforcing social capital and community resilience.

The collaborative literacy model developed in this program offers a replicable framework for rural literacy empowerment in other regions, provided that it is supported by continuous community engagement, institutional collaboration, and adaptive integration of local culture and digital innovation.

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