



## Strengthening National Character through Literacy: STPHBK and Kayuh Literasi Collaboration

Yudha Avirati<sup>1✉</sup>, Abdul Wahab Nafiyah<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Sekolah Tinggi Pendidikan Holistik Berbasis Karakter, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Suez Canal University, Ismailia, Egypt

✉Email: [yudha.avirati@phbk.ac.id](mailto:yudha.avirati@phbk.ac.id)

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Article Info	Abstract
<p><b>Received:</b> 01-02-2025</p> <p><b>Revised:</b> 24-04-2025</p> <p><b>Accepted:</b> 10-07-2025</p> <p><b>Published:</b> 30-08-2025</p> <p><b>Keyword:</b> Children's Literacy, Character Building, Community Service, Family, Community Reading Center</p>	<p><b>Background:</b> Low literacy levels in communities contribute to broader social issues, including school dropout rates, limited workforce skills, and intergenerational poverty. Strengthening family-based literacy is essential to support character development and improve quality of life.</p> <p><b>Aims:</b> This community service program aims to enhance literacy awareness among parents, improve the capacity of Taman Bacaan Masyarakat (TBM) tutors, and foster children's literacy skills as a foundation for character building.</p> <p><b>Methods:</b> This program employed a community development approach with an empowerment strategy, involving collaboration between lecturers, students, and the Kayuh Literasi community. The implementation consisted of three stages: (1) raising parents' awareness through seminars and literacy workshops, (2) mentoring TBM tutors in designing engaging and leveled literacy activities, and (3) assessing children's literacy skills using leveled reading books. Data were collected through observation and program documentation and analyzed descriptively.</p> <p><b>Result:</b> The results indicate an improvement in parents' understanding of their role in supporting literacy at home, increased creativity and competence of tutors in developing literacy activities, and positive changes in children's reading motivation and abilities. The program also demonstrated the effectiveness of collaborative efforts between higher education institutions, literacy communities, and families in promoting literacy culture.</p> <p><b>Conclusion:</b> The implementation of a community-based literacy program through a community development and empowerment approach effectively strengthens literacy awareness and practices among families and communities. This program offers a sustainable and replicable model for fostering literacy culture and character development.</p>
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Low literacy levels remain a persistent global challenge, particularly in developing countries, where they are closely associated with educational inequality, limited economic opportunities, and intergenerational poverty (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2020). Contemporary perspectives no longer define literacy merely as the ability to read and write; rather, it is understood as a multidimensional competence encompassing critical thinking, meaning-making, and the capacity to participate effectively in social life (Gee, 2015; Street, 2014). A substantial body of research highlights that early literacy experiences within family and community contexts play a decisive role in shaping children's cognitive and socioemotional development (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2014; Bus et al., 1995). Nevertheless, in many underserved communities, literacy practices remain limited due to restricted access to learning resources, low parental engagement, and insufficient institutional support (Snow et al., 1998; OECD, 2019).

Evidence from prior community service and intervention-based studies indicates that literacy programs can improve children's academic outcomes; however, such initiatives often emphasize school-based interventions and short-term outputs. Ruri (2024) demonstrates that social environments and peer interactions significantly influence children's engagement in literacy-related activities. Similarly, Over (2012) and Over (2013) argue that imitation and social affiliation are fundamental mechanisms through which children acquire behavioral and cognitive competencies, including literacy practices. Sarkar (2025) further emphasizes that social norms and the need for belonging can sustain participation in learning activities. Despite these insights, many literacy interventions remain fragmented and fail to integrate family, community, and informal learning environments into a cohesive ecosystem.

In addition, existing community-based literacy initiatives frequently encounter challenges related to sustainability and scalability. Gavcar (2024) identifies parental involvement as a critical determinant of children's developmental outcomes; however, many programs do not provide practical and accessible strategies that enable parents to actively support literacy at home. Studies on community reading centers suggest that while such facilities can expand access to reading materials, their effectiveness is often constrained by limited tutor capacity and the absence of structured mentoring systems (Auerbach, 1989; Rogers, 2003; Freire, 1970). Participatory and empowerment-oriented approaches have been widely recognized as effective in promoting long-term behavioral change (Chambers, 1994; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Ledwith, 2016), yet their application in literacy programs is frequently partial and lacks systematic integration across stakeholders.

Furthermore, prior community service practices reveal a tendency to prioritize cognitive literacy outcomes while underemphasizing character formation and reflective capacities. Several studies report improvements in reading proficiency without corresponding development in values such as responsibility, empathy, and

critical awareness (Epstein, 2018; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Mol & Bus, 2011). This indicates a conceptual gap between literacy as a technical skill and literacy as a transformative process that shapes individual character and social behavior. Moreover, the absence of structured collaboration among families, community institutions, and educational actors often results in disconnected interventions that limit long-term impact.

Another significant gap lies in the limited incorporation of contextual and culturally grounded approaches in literacy programs. Many existing interventions adopt generalized models that are insufficiently aligned with local socio-cultural realities, thereby reducing community engagement and ownership. Research suggests that community-based initiatives are more effective when they integrate local values, social structures, and everyday practices into program design (Chambers, 1994; Ledwith, 2016). However, there remains a lack of integrative models that simultaneously strengthen parental awareness, tutor capacity, and children's literacy experiences within a unified and context-sensitive framework.

Babakan Madang District in Bogor Regency represents a context in which these challenges are particularly evident. Over the past two decades, the area has undergone rapid socioeconomic transformation, largely driven by the development of Sentul City as a self-contained urban area characterized by modern residential, commercial, tourism, and educational infrastructures (Bathororesi, 2016). While this development has generated an image of progress, it has also intensified disparities between local residents and incoming urban populations. Field data and local government reports (Srh., 2023) indicate that a substantial proportion of the indigenous population continues to rely on informal and low-income occupations, including construction labor, small-scale trading, and domestic work. These conditions have direct implications for educational access and quality. Agusti et al. (2014) report that school dropout rates in the area remain relatively high, with the average educational attainment limited to the junior secondary level. Limited access to reading materials, low family engagement in literacy practices, and the absence of a supportive home literacy environment contribute to children's low proficiency not only in reading and writing but also in comprehension, interpretation, and critical thinking.

The consequences of low literacy extend beyond education, affecting broader social and economic conditions. Rahmi and Adry (2018) assert that limited literacy skills significantly contribute to poverty and social vulnerability. In Babakan Madang, these challenges are compounded by minimal parental involvement in children's learning processes. Many parents lack both the time and the capacity to support literacy activities due to their own limited educational experiences. This situation perpetuates an intergenerational cycle of low literacy, in which limited parental literacy is associated with similar constraints among children, thereby restricting opportunities for upward social mobility (Islami et al., 2024). In response to these

conditions, Kayuh Literasi was established in 2019 as a community-based literacy initiative led by Indira Ratna. The initiative seeks to address limited access to reading materials and low literacy engagement among children. Through community participation, it has developed multiple community reading centers across several villages, functioning not only as spaces for accessing books but also as social hubs that connect children, parents, and local stakeholders within a community-based learning ecosystem. Its programs include family literacy education, strengthening of formal and nonformal education through reading corners and tutor training, and character-building activities grounded in storytelling and social values. Despite these efforts, the initiative continues to face challenges related to funding, human resource capacity, and the lack of systematic support from higher education institutions.

In light of these challenges, lecturers and students from Sekolah Tinggi Pendidikan Holistik Berbasis Karakter engage in a community service program aimed at strengthening and sustaining the literacy movement initiated by Kayuh Literasi. This collaboration is designed not merely as a knowledge transfer activity but as a process of social transformation, in which parental awareness and tutor engagement are developed into collective capacities for fostering children's character through literacy practices.

This community service program, entitled Literacy for Nation Character Building, adopts a holistic and integrative approach that addresses three key components of the literacy ecosystem, namely family, community, and children. The novelty of this program lies in its systematic integration of community development and empowerment approaches within a structured literacy intervention. Unlike previous initiatives that tend to operate in fragmented ways, this program simultaneously enhances parental awareness, strengthens tutor capacity, and facilitates meaningful literacy experiences for children within a coherent and contextually grounded framework. Accordingly, the primary objective of this program is to improve literacy awareness among parents, enhance the capacity of community-based tutors, and strengthen children's literacy skills as a foundation for character development and sustainable social transformation.

## **METHODS**

### **Community Service Design**

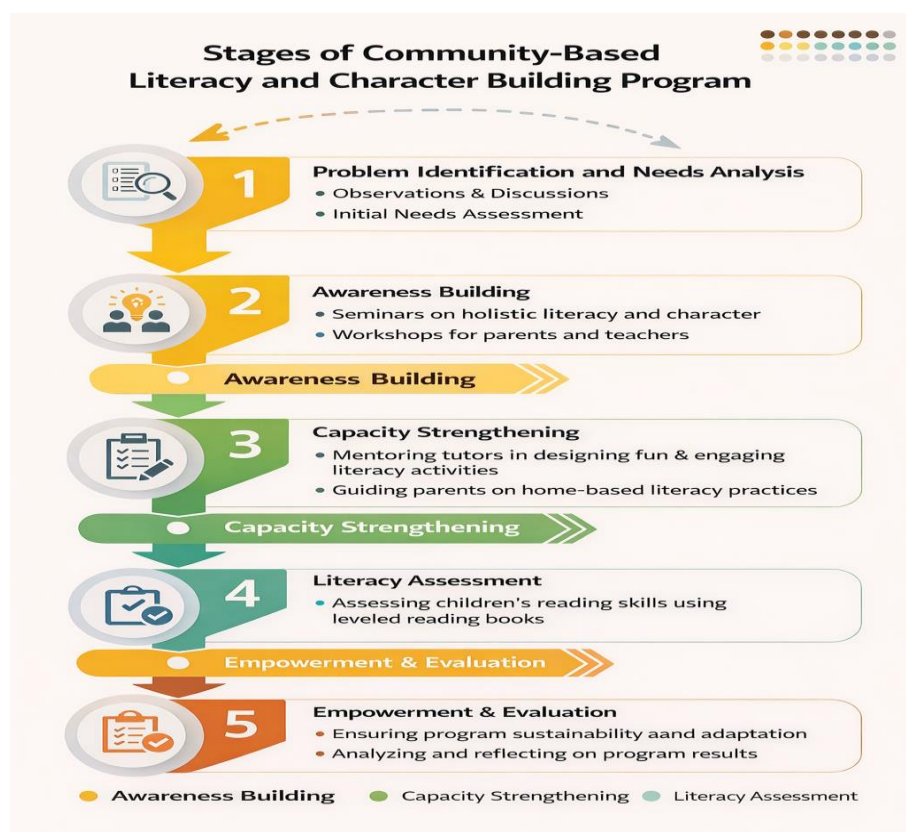
This community service program adopted a community development approach with an empowerment strategy, emphasizing collaborative engagement between lecturers, students, and the Kayuh Literasi community. This approach focuses on strengthening community capacity through participatory and context-based interventions. The program was designed not only to transfer knowledge but also to foster sustainable behavioral change by integrating family, community, and children within a unified literacy ecosystem. Through this approach, community members were positioned as active participants who contributed to the implementation and sustainability of the program.

## Problem Identification and Needs Analysis

The initial stage involved identifying problems and analyzing community needs through preliminary observations and discussions with the Kayuh Literasi community and local stakeholders. The findings revealed that literacy practices in the community were still limited and often understood narrowly as basic reading and writing skills. In addition, parental involvement in children's literacy activities was relatively low, and tutors in Taman Bacaan Masyarakat had limited capacity to design structured and engaging literacy programs. This needs analysis served as the foundation for designing an intervention that was relevant, practical, and aligned with the local context.

## Stages of Program Implementation

The implementation of this program consisted of three main stages, namely awareness building, capacity strengthening through mentoring, and literacy assessment.



**Figure 1.** Stages of Literacy Program Implementation Based on Community Development and Empowerment Approach

In the first stage, awareness-building activities were conducted through seminars and workshops aimed at parents and teachers. These activities focused on strengthening participants' understanding of literacy as a foundation for character development and critical thinking skills. The sessions applied andragogical and participatory learning approaches to encourage active engagement. In the second

stage, mentoring activities were provided to tutors and parents. Tutors were guided in designing and implementing engaging, contextual, and leveled literacy activities appropriate to children's developmental stages. Meanwhile, parents were provided with practical guidelines and ready-to-use literacy activities that could be implemented at home to support children's literacy development. In the third stage, literacy activities were implemented directly with children in TBM settings. In addition, literacy assessments were conducted using leveled reading books to identify children's reading abilities and monitor their progress. This stage aimed to ensure the alignment between awareness, capacity, and practice in literacy development.

### **Target Participants and Setting**

This program was conducted in Babakan Madang District, Bogor Regency, involving collaboration with the Kayuh Literasi community. The participants included parents, tutors of Taman Bacaan Masyarakat, and children participating in literacy activities. Teachers from early childhood education and elementary levels were also involved in the awareness-building stage. The selection of participants was based on their active involvement in literacy activities and their relevance to the program objectives. This setting provided a meaningful context for implementing a community-based literacy program.

### **Data Collection Techniques**

Data were collected using observation and documentation techniques. Observations were conducted during seminars, mentoring sessions, and literacy activities to capture participants' engagement, participation, and behavioral changes. Documentation included field notes, activity reports, and visual records to support and validate the findings. These techniques were applied systematically throughout the program implementation.

### **Data Analysis**

The data obtained in this program consisted of qualitative descriptive data, including observations of participant engagement, responses to activities, and changes in literacy practices. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive analysis by organizing, summarizing, and interpreting the data to evaluate program effectiveness. The analysis focused on changes in parental awareness, tutor capacity, and children's literacy development.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the program implementation. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from participants, particularly from parents for children's involvement. All documentation involving participants was handled carefully to ensure privacy and confidentiality. These measures were taken to ensure that the program adhered to ethical standards in community service activities.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

The implementation of the program demonstrates that the community development approach with an empowerment strategy has generated substantial impacts on improving literacy awareness, capacity, and practices among teachers, tutors, parents, and children. The findings indicate that the program not only strengthened participants' understanding but also triggered observable behavioral changes and the emergence of sustainable literacy practices within the community. These results are presented based on the stages of program implementation.



**Figure 1.** Key Outcomes of Community-Based Literacy and Character Building Program

### Awareness Building

#### Enhancement of Teachers' and Parents' Conceptual Understanding

The implementation of the first stage showed highly positive results in terms of both knowledge enhancement and transformation of teachers' perspectives on literacy. A clear paradigm shift was identified, moving from perceiving literacy as a technical skill toward understanding it as a comprehensive life skill that integrates thinking, communication, and emotional expression.

One early childhood teacher reflected, "Previously, I only focused on helping children recognize letters, but now I realize that literacy also involves encouraging children to ask questions, tell stories, and express their feelings." This reflection indicates a deep conceptual transformation, where literacy is internalized as a meaningful and holistic process rather than a mechanical activity.

The seminar and workshop sessions also fostered productive cross-level collaboration among educators. Early childhood teachers gained insights from elementary school teachers regarding structured reading guidance, while elementary teachers learned the importance of play-based exploration in building children's reading interest. This exchange of knowledge created a shared understanding that literacy development must be continuous and interconnected across educational levels.

Furthermore, interactive discussions and group simulations generated various innovative ideas to extend literacy practices beyond school settings into family environments. Participants began to recognize the importance of integrating literacy into daily routines at home, such as storytelling, shared reading, and reflective conversations. This stage not only enhanced conceptual understanding but also stimulated intrinsic motivation among participants to initiate literacy practices independently. The emergence of these initiatives reflects the early formation of a community-driven literacy movement.

### **Capacity Strengthening**

#### **Enhancement of Pedagogical Competence and Creativity of Tutors and Teachers**

At the second stage, significant improvements were observed in the pedagogical competence and creativity of teachers and tutors. Participants demonstrated increased ability to design and implement literacy activities that are engaging, contextual, and developmentally appropriate. This improvement reflects the effectiveness of the mentoring process in translating theoretical understanding into practical application.

Teachers began to apply a variety of literacy strategies in their learning environments. For instance, early childhood teachers developed interactive read-aloud sessions, utilized word cards to enrich children's vocabulary, and designed creative games using accessible and recycled materials. These practices indicate a shift toward more dynamic and student-centered learning approaches that encourage active participation and meaningful engagement. From a pedagogical perspective, teachers developed a stronger understanding of differentiated literacy instruction. They became more aware that each child possesses unique learning characteristics, which require adaptive teaching strategies. This awareness contributed to the development of more inclusive learning environments, where children are supported according to their individual needs and potentials.

In addition, the mentoring process extended to parents, resulting in increased awareness and involvement in supporting children's literacy at home. Parents began to adopt simple yet effective literacy practices, such as reading together, storytelling, and engaging in daily conversations that stimulate children's thinking. The provision of practical and accessible activity guidelines enabled parents to overcome previous limitations and actively participate in their children's learning processes. This

strengthening of parental roles significantly contributed to the development of a supportive home literacy environment.

## **Literacy Assessment**

### **Implementation and Impact on Children's Literacy Skills**

The third stage demonstrated that the direct implementation of literacy activities in community reading centers led to increased motivation and active participation among children. Children showed greater enthusiasm when literacy activities were presented in interactive and enjoyable formats that aligned with their developmental stages.

The literacy assessment conducted using leveled reading books revealed notable progress in children's reading abilities. Improvements were observed in word recognition, basic comprehension, and confidence in expressing ideas verbally. Children also became more willing to participate in literacy-related activities, indicating a positive shift in their attitudes toward reading and learning.

Importantly, the results highlight a strong alignment between the increased capacity of tutors and parents and the development of children's literacy skills. The integration of structured guidance from tutors and consistent support from parents created a reinforcing learning environment that accelerated children's literacy development. This demonstrates that literacy improvement is most effective when supported by a collaborative ecosystem involving multiple stakeholders.

The implementation of literacy activities in TBM classrooms served as tangible evidence of the program's effectiveness in bridging the gap between knowledge and practice. The consistency between awareness, capacity building, and practical application indicates that the program design successfully facilitated meaningful and sustainable learning experiences.



**Figure 2.** Implementation of Stage 1 Literacy for Nation Character Building Program

## **Reflection and Social Implications**

The broader social impact of the program is reflected in the emergence of collective awareness and commitment among participants to promote literacy within their respective communities. Teachers expressed a strong intention to continue literacy initiatives, such as read-aloud activities and shared reading sessions, both in

classrooms and at home environments. A significant transformation was observed in how teachers perceive their professional roles. They no longer see themselves solely as knowledge transmitters but as active agents of change who contribute to social development through literacy. This shift in professional identity strengthens the potential for long-term impact, as teachers become key drivers in sustaining literacy practices within their communities.

The program also fostered a sense of shared responsibility among stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and community members. This collective engagement indicates the formation of a community-based literacy ecosystem that supports continuous learning and character development. The integration of literacy into daily social interactions further reinforces its role as a cultural practice rather than a formal educational requirement.



**Figure 3.** Reflection of Community Services Program

Overall, the success of this program is not only reflected in increased participation and improved literacy skills but also in the development of a sustainable literacy movement rooted in community engagement. The empowerment-based approach has proven effective in generating both individual transformation and broader social change, ensuring that literacy becomes an integral part of everyday life.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this community service program demonstrate that the integration of awareness building, capacity strengthening, and literacy practice can effectively enhance literacy outcomes in a community-based context. The observed transformation in teachers' perspectives, pedagogical practices, and parental involvement indicates that literacy development is most impactful when approached as a holistic and collaborative process. This aligns with recent studies emphasizing that sustainable literacy improvement requires the integration of multiple actors within the educational ecosystem, including families, educators, and community institutions.

The significant shift in teachers' conceptual understanding of literacy reflects the effectiveness of awareness-based interventions. Teachers moved from

perceiving literacy as a mechanical skill toward understanding it as a multidimensional competence involving critical thinking, communication, and emotional expression. Similar findings have been reported in recent community-based literacy programs, where professional development activities were shown to reshape teachers' beliefs and instructional approaches (Ningsih et al., 2021; Pratama & Widodo, 2022). This transformation is crucial, as teachers' beliefs directly influence classroom practices and learning environments. However, unlike some previous programs that reported limited transfer of knowledge into practice, this program demonstrates a stronger linkage between conceptual understanding and pedagogical implementation, suggesting the added value of combining seminars with participatory workshops.

The improvement in pedagogical competence and creativity among teachers and tutors further supports the importance of mentoring-based approaches in community service programs. Participants were able to design contextual and engaging literacy activities, indicating that capacity strengthening was not merely theoretical but operational. This finding is consistent with recent studies highlighting that continuous mentoring significantly enhances teachers' ability to implement innovative learning strategies (Sari et al., 2023; Hidayat et al., 2022). In contrast to earlier PKM initiatives that often relied on one-time training sessions, the structured mentoring component in this program appears to have played a critical role in ensuring the sustainability of pedagogical improvements. This suggests that ongoing support mechanisms are essential in bridging the gap between knowledge acquisition and classroom practice.

Another notable outcome is the increased involvement of parents in supporting children's literacy at home. The provision of practical and accessible literacy activities enabled parents to actively participate despite their limited prior experience. This finding reinforces recent evidence that family-based literacy interventions significantly contribute to children's literacy development when parents are equipped with simple and applicable strategies (Rahmawati et al., 2021; Putri et al., 2020). Compared to previous programs that primarily focused on school-based interventions, this program demonstrates a more comprehensive approach by integrating home literacy practices. The strengthening of the home literacy environment is particularly important in addressing intergenerational literacy challenges, as it creates a continuous learning context beyond formal education settings.

The improvement in children's literacy skills observed during the implementation stage further confirms the effectiveness of the integrated approach. Children's increased engagement, motivation, and confidence in literacy activities indicate that learning experiences were meaningful and developmentally appropriate. Recent studies have similarly found that literacy programs incorporating interactive and play-based approaches lead to higher engagement and improved

learning outcomes among young learners (Wulandari et al., 2022; Fauziyah et al., 2023). However, what distinguishes this program is the alignment between tutor capacity, parental support, and classroom implementation, which collectively reinforce children's learning experiences. This integrated ecosystem appears to be a key factor contributing to the observed improvements.

From a broader perspective, the emergence of a collaborative literacy ecosystem among teachers, parents, and community members represents a significant social outcome of the program. Participants began to position themselves as active agents of change, indicating a shift from passive participation to collective ownership of literacy development. This finding supports recent literature suggesting that empowerment-based approaches are effective in fostering community engagement and sustaining educational interventions (Kusuma et al., 2021; Lestari et al., 2023). In contrast to top-down intervention models, which often face sustainability challenges, the community-driven nature of this program enhances its potential for long-term impact.

Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges remain. Variations in participants' initial literacy understanding and differences in resource availability may influence the consistency of program implementation across settings. Similar limitations have been identified in previous PKM studies, where contextual factors such as socioeconomic conditions and institutional support affected program effectiveness (Ananda et al., 2020). Therefore, future programs should consider adaptive strategies that accommodate diverse community conditions while maintaining core program principles.

Overall, this program contributes to the growing body of evidence that community-based literacy interventions are most effective when they integrate awareness, capacity building, and practical application within a unified framework. The findings highlight the importance of combining educational, social, and contextual dimensions in literacy development. By fostering collaboration among key stakeholders and emphasizing empowerment, this program offers a sustainable model for literacy improvement and character development in community settings.

### ***Community Service Contribution***

This community service program provides significant contributions at both the community and academic levels. At the community level, the program strengthens literacy awareness among teachers, parents, and tutors, leading to improved literacy practices in both school and home environments. The program also enhances pedagogical competence and creativity in designing contextual and engaging literacy activities, while fostering children's motivation and basic literacy skills. From an academic perspective, this program offers an integrative model based on community development and empowerment that connects awareness, capacity building, and practice, which can be adapted and replicated in similar community-based literacy settings.

### ***Limitations and Suggestions***

Despite its positive outcomes, this program has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The implementation was conducted within a relatively short time frame, limiting the ability to observe long-term impacts on literacy development and behavioral change. In addition, the program was implemented in a specific community context, which may affect its generalizability to different settings with varying socio-cultural conditions. Therefore, future programs are recommended to be implemented over a longer duration, expanded to broader contexts, and strengthened through continuous mentoring and evaluation to ensure sustainability and greater impact.

### **CONCLUSION**

This community service program demonstrates that the integration of awareness building, capacity strengthening, and literacy practice effectively enhances literacy awareness among parents, improves the pedagogical competence of tutors and teachers, and strengthens children's literacy skills as a foundation for character development; the findings confirm that a community development approach combined with an empowerment strategy can create a collaborative literacy ecosystem that connects families, community learning centers, and educational actors in a sustainable manner, where the program does not function as isolated interventions but successfully aligns knowledge, practice, and social engagement, resulting in meaningful behavioral changes and increased collective responsibility toward literacy development, indicating that literacy programs are more impactful when implemented through participatory, contextual, and community-driven approaches; for future implementation, it is recommended that the program be expanded over a longer duration to capture sustained impacts and deeper literacy development, scaled to wider communities with diverse socio-cultural contexts to enhance adaptability and generalizability, supported by continuous mentoring and structured evaluation mechanisms to maintain consistency and effectiveness, and further strengthened through the integration of digital supports and collaborative partnerships with stakehol

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## **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT**

YA contributed to the conceptualization, coordination of the community service program, and manuscript writing. AWN contributed to language editing, proofreading, and verification of data and overall manuscript accuracy. Both authors approved the final version of the manuscript.

## **AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**

During the preparation of this manuscript, language assistance tools were utilized to enhance clarity, grammar, and overall academic expression. All outputs generated through these tools were carefully examined, revised, and validated by the authors. The authors remain fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the content presented in this article.

## **CONFLICTS OF INTERES**

The authors declare that there are no financial, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conduct of this study, the analysis of the data, the preparation of the manuscript, or its publication.

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