

Utilization of RUMAN Aceh Community Reading Center as a Literacy Strengthening Hub for Equivalence Program Learners

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Abstract: The low functional literacy rate among equivalence program learners remains a pressing issue in the landscape of nonformal education. This study investigates the utilization of the Community Reading Center or TBM at PKBM RUMAN Aceh as an integrated hub for strengthening learner literacy. Equivalence program learners often face barriers to reading due to their working status, prior academic trauma, and limited access to relevant reading materials. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were gathered through participant observations, in depth interviews, and document analysis involving TBM managers, tutors, and learners. The findings indicate that PKBM RUMAN Aceh does not treat the TBM merely as a passive book repository. Instead, it is actively integrated into the pedagogical process. Tutors design assignments that require learners to utilize TBM resources, thereby fostering independent research skills. Furthermore, the TBM serves as an interactive space for creative literacy workshops, such as short story writing, which successfully transforms learners from passive readers into active creators. The study concludes that integrating a community reading center into the nonformal curriculum significantly boosts functional literacy and restores the academic confidence of marginalized learners.

Keywords: Community Reading Center, Functional Literacy, Nonformal Education, Equivalence Program, Learning Ecosystem

Received October 29, 2025; **Accepted** November 29, 2025; **Published** December 10, 2025

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INTRODUCTION

Functional literacy is the fundamental cornerstone of lifelong learning, particularly within the realm of nonformal education. In Indonesia, equivalence education programs such as Primary, Junior and Senior High School Equivalence Program are designed to provide a second chance for individuals who have dropped out of the formal schooling system. These learners often come from complex socioeconomic backgrounds. Many of them are working adults, street youths, or individuals who experienced academic trauma in their past. Consequently, fostering a genuine interest in reading and writing among these demographics is highly challenging. Traditional classroom environments and rigid textbooks frequently fail to capture their attention, leading to stagnant literacy development (Pratiwi & Haryanto, 2023).

To address this literacy gap, the government and various educational foundations have advocated for the establishment of the Community Reading Center or Taman Bacaan Masyarakat (TBM). However, in many institutions, the TBM functions as an isolated facility. It

operates separately from the core academic curriculum and merely serves as a quiet room filled with donated books (Rahman, 2024). This separation prevents the facility from reaching its full potential as an active learning catalyst. PKBM RUMAN Aceh presents a compelling counter-narrative to this common trend. This institution has deliberately positioned its TBM not as a supplementary facility, but as the central nervous system of its literacy strengthening initiatives for equivalence program learners.

Previous literature has extensively covered the role of community libraries in rural empowerment (Kusuma, 2022) and early childhood literacy (Widodo & Anwar, 2025). Yet, there is a noticeable research gap regarding the structural integration of TBM into the adult and youth equivalence curriculum. Existing studies rarely explore the pedagogical strategies employed by tutors to force a natural intersection between mandatory school subjects and voluntary reading center visits.

This study aims to fill that academic void by exploring the specific strategies utilized by PKBM RUMAN Aceh. The research formulates the problem of how TBM is managed and integrated into the equivalence program to boost functional literacy. Furthermore, this study seeks to dissect the impact of this integration on the academic confidence and productive literacy skills of the learners, providing a replicable model for other nonformal educational institutions.

METHODS

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach with a descriptive analytical design. This methodology is highly suitable for exploring the natural setting of educational phenomena and understanding the subjective experiences of the individuals involved (Creswell, 2021). The research took place at PKBM RUMAN Aceh, a nonformal institution renowned for its inclusive educational ecosystem.

Data collection was carried out from March to May 2026 utilizing three primary techniques. The first technique was participant observation, where the researchers observed the daily dynamics inside the TBM and how equivalence classes interacted with the facility. The second technique involved in-depth interviews with key informants. These informants included the head of the institution, the TBM manager, two equivalence program tutors, and five active learners representing different age brackets. The third technique was document analysis, which involved reviewing the TBM visitor logs, lesson plans integrating library visits, and actual literacy products created by the learners such as short stories and reading summaries.

The data collected were systematically processed using an interactive analysis model. This process included data reduction to filter relevant information regarding literacy strategies, data display in a thematic narrative format, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2021). To ensure the credibility and validity of the findings, the researchers applied source triangulation by cross verifying the claims made by the tutors with the physical evidence found in the learners portfolios and the TBM management records.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The utilization of the Community Reading Center at PKBM RUMAN Aceh represents a significant paradigm shift from a passive book repository to a dynamic academic hub. The first noticeable strategy implemented by the institution is the psychological reconditioning of the reading space. Unlike conventional formal school libraries that often impose strict silence and rigid seating arrangements, the TBM at RUMAN Aceh is designed to be highly welcoming and egalitarian. The management provides comfortable floor seating, open discussion areas, and a categorization system that prioritizes relevant life skills books, popular fiction, and applied sciences alongside mandatory curriculum modules. Interview results with the learners revealed that this relaxed atmosphere significantly lowers their academic anxiety. Working

adult learners, who often feel intimidated by formal educational settings, reported feeling more comfortable exploring reading materials in the TBM after their working hours. This spatial design effectively dismantles the psychological barriers that typically prevent marginalized learners from engaging with literature (Rahman, 2024).

Building upon this conducive environment, the tutors implement a structural pedagogical integration. TBM is actively woven into the equivalence program curriculum through project-based assignments. Instead of delivering long lectures, tutors frequently design tasks that require learners to conduct independent research within the reading center. For example, during sociology and civic education classes, learners are assigned to find specific case studies from the newspaper archives or reference books available in TBM. This method forces a natural interaction between the learners and the reading materials. The curriculum coordinator explained that this strategy is deliberately designed to foster self-directed learning. By navigating the TBM resources to solve academic problems, learners unconsciously develop functional literacy skills, such as information extraction, critical reading, and reading comprehension (Pratiwi & Haryanto, 2023). This approach is particularly effective for learners who previously viewed reading as a tedious chore dictated by the teacher.

Furthermore, the TBM serves as an incubator for productive literacy. RUMAN Aceh does not stop encouraging its learners to read. It actively pushes them to produce original works. A prime example of this initiative is the creative writing workshop facilitated directly within the TBM environment. Tutors and guest facilitators utilized the existing literature collection as mentor texts to inspire the learners. During a recent short story writing project, learners from the Junior High School Equivalence Program and Senior High School Equivalence programs were guided to transform their personal life struggles and workplace experiences into narrative fiction. This transformation from passive consumers of information to active creators of literature marks a high level of functional literacy achievement (Kusuma, 2022). The learners expressed immense pride upon seeing their written works displayed on the TBM bulletin boards and compiled into modest anthologies. This tangible output not only improves their writing mechanics but also drastically restores their self-esteem, proving that nonformal learners possess intellectual capabilities comparable to their formal school counterparts.

CONCLUSION

The utilization of the Community Reading Center at PKBM RUMAN Aceh demonstrates a highly effective model for strengthening functional literacy in nonformal education. The institution successfully transforms the TBM from a mere supplementary facility into the core engine of its equivalence program. By creating a psychologically welcoming space, structurally integrating library research into daily assignments, and facilitating productive literacy workshops, RUMAN Aceh manages to cultivate a genuine reading culture among its diverse learners. This integrated approach effectively mitigates the literacy crisis often found in equivalence programs and proves that marginalized learners can achieve high academic literacy when provided with the right ecosystem. It is highly recommended that other PKBMs across the region adopt this active TBM integration model. Policymakers should also consider allocating specific funding to upgrade community reading centers from simple book collections into interactive, curriculum aligned learning hubs.

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