The Effectiveness of Reading Culture in Increasing Public Interest in Reading at the Pematangsiantar City Archives and Library Service

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Reading Interest Reading Culture Development Mobile Library Community Literacy Effectiveness of Activities	Reading interest is a crucial factor in the development of literate human resources. However, a low reading habit remains a persistent issue, including in Pematangsiantar City. In response, the Pematangsiantar City Archives and Library Office implemented the Reading Culture Development Program to enhance public literacy awareness through activities such as mobile library services, reading culture campaigns, and literacy competitions. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of these activities in increasing public reading interest, identify challenges encountered during implementation, and propose strategies for future development. A qualitative, descriptive design was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with three key informants involved in program implementation and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the program has significantly influenced reading behavior, increased library visits, and fostered literacy habits among students. Despite technical barriers such as limited facilities and time constraints, the program was effectively executed through strong coordination and adaptive delivery strategies. In conclusion, the Reading Culture Development Program has proven effective in cultivating a reading culture. It holds potential as a replicable model for other regions through strategic, theory-based, and community-participatory approaches.

KATA KUNCI	ABSTRAK
Minat Baca Pembudayaan Gemar Membaca Perpustakaan Keliling Literasi Masyarakat Efektivitas Kegiatan	Minat baca merupakan faktor krusial dalam pembangunan sumber daya manusia yang literat. Namun, rendahnya kebiasaan membaca masih menjadi permasalahan klasik, termasuk di Kota Pematangsiantar. Merespons hal tersebut, Dinas Arsip dan Perpustakaan Kota Pematangsiantar melaksanakan kegiatan Pembudayaan Gemar Membaca untuk meningkatkan kesadaran literasi masyarakat melalui kegiatan Perpustakaan Keliling, Sosialisasi Budaya Membaca, dan Lomba Literasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis efektivitas kegiatan tersebut dalam meningkatkan minat baca masyarakat, mengidentifikasi kendala pelaksanaan, serta merumuskan strategi pengembangan ke depan. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam pada tiga informan dengan pihak pelaksana kegiatan dan dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis interaktif Miles dan Huberman yang mencakup reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kegiatan ini memberikan dampak signifikan terhadap perubahan perilaku membaca, peningkatan kunjungan ke perpustakaan, dan terbentuknya kebiasaan literasi di kalangan pelajar. Meski terdapat

hambatan teknis seperti keterbatasan fasilitas dan waktu, kegiatan tetap terlaksana secara efektif berkat koordinasi dan strategi penyampaian yang adaptif. Kesimpulannya, kegiatan Pembudayaan Gemar Membaca terbukti efektif dalam membangun budaya membaca, serta dapat menjadi model yang layak diterapkan di daerah lain dengan pendekatan strategis berbasis teori dan partisipasi komunitas.

1. Introduction

Reading interest is a key element in developing high-quality human resources (Artana, 2015). Reading functions not only as a means of acquiring information but also as a medium for shaping perspectives, improving literacy skills, and strengthening society's critical thinking (Fhadillah, 2020). A strong interest in reading fosters individuals who are more adaptable and creative in responding to the dynamics of changing times. In this regard, reading interest holds an important role in building a solid literacy culture within society (Hermawan et al., 2020). According to Amalia & Dewi (2023), reading interest refers to a deep enthusiasm for reading, accompanied by enjoyment and a continued desire to engage in it. However, in practice, Indonesia continues to face ongoing challenges related to low reading interest.

Although Indonesia's literacy rate is considered relatively high, reading habits have not yet become an integral part of people's daily lives (Priasti & Suyatno, 2021). This reveals a gap between the ability to read and the willingness to read. Low reading interest remains an obstacle to building a literate and globally competitive society (Fatmawati, 2022). This issue affects not only the education sector but also the social and economic development of communities (Lestari, 2021). A lack of reading interest leads to shallow, unsustainable knowledge and information (Artana, 2017). Therefore, efforts to strengthen reading interest are a critical agenda in promoting human development and national literacy culture

This low reading interest is also evident in Pematangsiantar City. Data from the Pematangsiantar City Archives and Library Service shows that library visits in 2024 totaled 60,224. This number accounts for only about 21.6% of the city's total population of 279,198 people. Although this marks a significant increase compared to 2022, which recorded 41,406 visitors, and 20,695 visitors in 2020, the figures still reflect underutilization of library services (Pematangsiantar, 2022). This disparity demonstrates that a strong reading culture has yet to take root in society, requiring focused attention and strategic efforts (Holik, 2013). It also indicates that libraries, as literacy centers, are still not being fully maximized by the broader community.

Multiple factors contribute to low reading interest, including limited access to relevant and engaging reading materials, inadequate supporting facilities, and a lack of internal motivation shaped by both the individual and their environment (Mansyur, 2020). Children and adolescents, the primary targets of literacy programs, often show greater interest in digital entertainment than in reading (Safitri et al., 2021). As a result, cultivating a reading culture requires innovative strategies to address these barriers. Enhancing both the quality and availability of reading materials, as well as improving accessibility, are essential elements for promoting reading interest (Maulida, 2016). A comprehensive and sustainable approach is also necessary to foster a strong literacy culture (Achmad & Asmas, 2021). In this effort, the government and related institutions hold a vital role in driving these initiatives

To address these conditions, the local government of Pematangsiantar City, through the Archives and Library Service, has implemented several initiatives to foster a love of reading. One of its key programs is the Reading Culture initiative, which falls under the Library Development sub-activities. This program includes Mobile Library services designed to reach communities with limited access to reading materials. In addition, Reading Culture Socialization activities are carried out to raise literacy awareness among various groups. Literacy competitions are also

routinely organized to motivate the public and increase their interest in reading. These three activities target a wide range of segments, from children and teenagers to adults, ensuring the program's benefits are felt across the board.

Several previous studies have explored literacy programs in different regions. For instance, research by Damanik & Ali (2024) highlights the effectiveness of public library literacy programs in responding to digital-era challenges. Meanwhile, Melfan & Batubara (2023) examined the effectiveness of children's services at the public library in Deli Serdang Regency. However, most of these studies focus on formal education settings or emphasize only one specific activity. Comprehensive research evaluating multiple forms of Reading Culture initiatives carried out by local government agencies, primarily within specific local contexts such as Pematangsiantar City, remains scarce. This highlights the need for more in-depth, context-specific studies.

This study seeks to fill that gap by systematically mapping various Reading Culture activities and assessing their effectiveness in increasing public interest in reading. It not only describes each activity but also evaluates its impact, identifies challenges encountered, and proposes development strategies grounded in field realities. The main emphasis of this research is on programs implemented by formal local government institutions, which distinguishes it from earlier studies that have primarily focused on community-based or school-based initiatives. This approach is expected to provide a more complete understanding of how the Reading Culture program is executed. Ultimately, the findings can serve as a foundation for improving and developing more effective programs in the future.

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the Reading Culture activities conducted by the Pematangsiantar City Archives and Library Service in increasing public interest in reading. Additionally, it seeks to identify the obstacles that hinder program implementation. The results are expected to inform the development of practical and sustainable improvement strategies. This research will offer recommendations to local governments and relevant stakeholders to optimize reading culture initiatives. With these improvements, interest in reading in Pematangsiantar City is expected to rise significantly, ultimately contributing to the development of high-quality human resources supported by a strong literacy culture.

More broadly, increased reading interest strengthens a society's competitiveness and its ability to navigate global challenges. A strong reading culture enables communities to access up-to-date knowledge and develop skills relevant to evolving times. This contributes positively to local and national economic, social, and cultural progress. Therefore, cultivating a reading culture is not solely the government's responsibility; it also requires participation from all levels of society. Families, schools, communities, and the mass media play critical roles in building a sustainable literacy ecosystem. This research represents one important step toward encouraging such collaboration for shared progress.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Reading Interest and Its Importance in Human Resource Development

Interest in reading is one of the main factors that affect the quality of human resources in a society. According to Mitra (2024), reading not only serves as a medium for obtaining information but also helps form a mindset, improve literacy skills, and hone critical thinking skills. According to Febianti (2021), reading interest is defined as an individual's interest in reading activities, accompanied by pleasure and a consistent desire to engage in them. In the context of national development, a strong interest in reading will foster a literate society able to adapt to changing times (Fatimah et al., 2021). However, interest in reading in Indonesia remains low, despite a high literacy rate. This is a significant challenge in creating a strong literacy culture in society.

2.2. Reading Culture and Culturing Reading Interest

A reading culture is a deeply embedded habit that supports people's everyday lives. It represents a systematic and continuous effort to cultivate reading interest and develop reading habits as an integral part of societal culture (Alfina, 2012). Reading culture programs are commonly implemented through activities such as mobile library services, literacy awareness campaigns, and literacy competitions that engage individuals across different age groups (Pramudyo et al.,

2018). Through these initiatives, people's attitudes and behaviors can shift, encouraging them to become more active readers and make greater use of reading resources. Numerous studies have shown that reading culture programs can enhance both the frequency and quality of communities' reading activities (Atmi et al., 2022). However, the effectiveness of these programs relies heavily on well-targeted and continuous implementation.

2.3. The Role of Libraries in Increasing Reading Interest

Libraries hold a strategic function as community hubs for information and literacy resources. As stated by Lestari (2021), libraries not only offer book collections but also implement various innovative literacy programs to spark public interest in reading, particularly among children and teenagers. User-friendly services and accessible facilities are essential elements that encourage people to utilize libraries more effectively (Maulida, 2016). In the digital age, libraries must also evolve by providing digital services and electronic reading materials to meet the increasingly diverse needs of society. This is supported by findings from Budirman, Mas'ud Muhammadiah (2024), which indicate that libraries integrating information technology are more successful in fostering reading interest. Nonetheless, in many areas, the use of library services remains below optimal levels due to several challenges, including limited access and insufficient outreach.

2.4. The Effectiveness of the Reading Culture Program

The success of a reading culture program can be assessed by how far it enhances public interest in reading and develops a literacy-oriented society. Alfina (2012) explains that literacy initiatives supported by digital technology can address the challenges of globalization and increase reading motivation. Febianti (2021) also shows that literacy competitions and mobile library services are effective in reaching community groups that are usually not served by traditional libraries. However, the level of effectiveness is influenced by several internal factors, such as the quality of program implementation, resource availability, and support from local authorities (Budirman, Mas'ud Muhammadiah, 2024). Research by Achmad & Asmas (2021) further underscores the need for a comprehensive evaluation of government-run literacy programs to enable continuous improvement. Therefore, evaluating program effectiveness is crucial to ensuring that literacy initiatives produce optimal outcomes.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach (Sugiyono, 2020). selected to obtain an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of the Reading Culture activities organized by the Pematangsiantar City Archives and Library Service. The research took place at the Pematangsiantar City Archives and Library Office, located at Jalan Merdeka No. 3, West Siantar District, Pematangsiantar City. The key informants in this study were Yoginasari Tamba, S.Si, M.Si, Head of Library Personnel Development and Reading Culture, along with library staff directly involved in planning and implementing the activities.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with informants who had experience carrying out Reading Culture programs. The interviews were conducted separately from the activities themselves and focused on past experiences with program implementation, the types of activities, the strategies applied, the evaluations conducted, and the impact on community reading interest. The data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Abdussalamad, 2015). Data reduction was performed to filter information relevant to the research focus. The information was then systematically presented in a thematic narrative, and conclusions were drawn through cross-verification of interview findings with supporting documents to ensure validity. Data validation was conducted through triangulation of techniques and sources to ensure that the findings were objective and academically accountable. (Sulistyawati, 2023)

4. Research and Discussion Results

4.1. Forms and Varieties of Reading Culture Activities

Service is a strategic effort to enhance public literacy awareness and nurture a culture of reading within the community. Each activity within the program has its own

characteristics, methods, and objectives, yet all are aligned with the overarching goal of strengthening habitual reading practices. The initiative consists of three main types of activities that function in a complementary manner, namely:

4.1.1. Mobile Library

To strengthen efforts in enhancing the community's literacy culture, the Pematangsiantar City Archives and Library Service has implemented several strategic programs through its Reading Culture initiative. This program consists of multiple activities, such as Mobile Library services, Reading Culture Socialization, and Literacy Competitions, which are systematically carried out in accordance with the principles of effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability. To gain a deeper understanding of how these activities are implemented, an interview was conducted with Yoginasari Tamba, S.Si., M.Si., Head of Library Personnel Development and Reading Culture. She provided insights into various aspects of the program, including its challenges and its impact on the community, particularly students.

Figure 1
Mobile Library Activities

Source: Researcher, 2025

In her interview, Yoginasari Tamba explained*,*

> *"The Mobile Library is one of our innovations that has had a great impact. We schedule visits to schools, including kindergarten, elementary, junior high, and high schools, in Pematangsiantar up to three times a week. The books we bring are selected based on the children's needs. In addition to providing access to reading, children are also invited to interact, read together, and play while learning."*

He also added,

> *"For reading culture socialization activities, we use a more interactive approach, such as quizzes, casual discussions, and reading simulations. We carry out this activity in schools, communities, or in public events to reach more of the wider community."*

Regarding literacy competitions, he said,

> *"We routinely hold speech, storytelling, poetry reading, and the election of Reading Ambassadors. This activity is not only a competition but also builds participants' confidence and interest in reading. We involve schools and teachers so that there is a strong connection in building a literacy culture."*

Based on the interview findings, the three sub-activities, Mobile Library, Reading Culture Socialization, and Literacy Competitions, are implemented through a planned and continuous strategy. The Mobile Library is a practical initiative to reach communities without access to permanent literacy facilities, aligning with Fatimah's (2021) perspective that such services help reduce literacy disparities. The Reading Culture Socialization is conducted using communicative and participatory methods, consistent with Amalia's (2023) conclusion that persuasive approaches are essential in fostering public literacy awareness. Meanwhile, literacy competitions function as an effective platform for developing participants' potential while instilling literacy values from an early age. These activities not only bring the community closer to reading but also help build a collaborative literacy ecosystem involving educational institutions, families, and the wider community.

4.1.2. Socialization of Reading Culture

The Socialization of Reading Culture is one of the key strategies supporting the success of the Reading Culture program implemented by the Pematangsiantar City Archives and Library Service. This activity is designed to cultivate broad public literacy awareness through persuasive, communicative, and educational approaches (Febianti, 2021). Its implementation occurs across various settings, including educational institutions, community groups, and public events with diverse audiences. The core message of this socialization is the importance of reading as a fundamental life necessity and as essential preparation for meeting the increasingly complex demands of the modern era. Through engaging and interactive methods, these socialization activities serve as an effective medium for fostering a collective reading culture.

Figure 2
Socialization Activities

Source: Researcher, 2025

In her interview, Yoginasari Tamba said,

> *"We realize that literacy cannot be built only from the provision of books, but must also be accompanied by education that touches people's awareness. Therefore, we carry out massive socialization of reading culture, targeting various age groups and backgrounds."*

He continued,

> *"We use various media such as visual presentations, leaflet distribution, and interesting activities such as quizzes and reading simulations. We want this socialization to be a fun experience, not just a one-way talk. For example, when we enter schools, we invite students and teachers to discuss the benefits of reading and how to make reading a part of their daily routine."*

She also emphasized,

> *"We involve communities, women's organizations, and even community leaders so that this literacy message is stronger and has a wider reach. In essence, we want to instill that reading is not a choice, but a necessity."*

The reading culture socialization conducted by the Pematangsiantar City Archives and Library Service is not only informative but also brings about positive change. The strategy used adopts a two-way, participatory communication model, ensuring that the audience does more than passively receive information; they also take an active role in conveying literacy messages. This approach aligns with Qurbi's (2024) perspective, which emphasizes the need for persuasive, context-specific methods to promote literacy awareness. By engaging participants across various social groups, from students to adults, and utilizing media suited to their characteristics, this initiative has successfully created an educational and inclusive forum for dialogue. Moreover, the program reinforces collaboration among the government, schools, and the broader community in embedding a reading culture as part of contemporary societal habits.

4.1.3. Literacy Competitions

Literacy Competitions serve as practical initiatives to nurture a love for reading, not only by providing reading materials but also by enhancing community capacity and participation, particularly among young people. The Pematangsiantar City Archives and Library Service presents this program in an engaging, educational competition format, including speech contests, storytelling sessions, poetry recitations, and the selection of Reading Ambassadors. Each activity aims to build confidence in self-expression, spark creativity, and promote an appreciation of literacy as a daily value. Beyond being competitions, these events also function as enjoyable and enriching learning platforms. By involving students from elementary to secondary levels, along with the active support of schools and teachers, the program creates a collaborative environment that strengthens literacy networks within both educational settings and the broader community.

Figure 3
Competition Activities

Source: Researcher, 2025

Yoginasari Tamba explained,

> *"We realize that to foster a literacy culture, children and adolescents need to be actively involved in fun and challenging activities. We design literacy competitions not only as a competition, but also as a means of expression and self-development."*

He added,

> *"Every year we hold storytelling competitions, poetry readings, and speeches. One of the most interesting is the election of Reading Ambassadors. The selected children not only received awards, but also became an inspiration in their schools. We also involve teachers as companions, so that there is a continuous coaching process."*

Furthermore, he said,

> *"We want this competition to be a means to build confidence, critical thinking skills, and love for reading. In addition, we hope that these students can become literacy agents who spread the spirit of reading to the surrounding environment."*

Based on the interviews, it was found that literacy competitions play an important role in shaping students' literacy character. These activities not only boost reading interest but also enhance participants' language abilities, critical thinking, and public communication skills. The competition model implemented by the Pematangsiantar City Archives and Library Service proves effective as an engaging, educational, and motivating platform. It also promotes a collaborative learning environment among students, teachers, and educational institutions, thereby strengthening the broader literacy community. Consistent with Alfina's (2012) perspective, literacy competitions function not merely as competitive events but as spaces for developing values, skills, and a shared enthusiasm for reading as part of character building and efforts to improve community quality of life.

The execution of the Reading Culture program, as part of the Library Development initiative managed by the Pematangsiantar City Archives and Library Service, is carefully organized with consideration for effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability. Each component activity, such as the Mobile Library, Reading Culture Socialization, and Literacy Competitions, is carried out within a structured process that extends from planning to evaluation. The implementation also adheres to established Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and involves coordination across sectors, particularly with educational institutions and other relevant stakeholders.

4.1.1. Activity Planning

The initial phase of the program begins with the preparation of the Annual Work Plan by the Division of Library Workforce Development and Reading Culture. This plan breaks down the Reading Culture program into detailed sub-activities, complete with objectives, timelines, budget allocations, and performance indicators. Its formulation is based on the previous year's achievement data, the evaluations of earlier activities, and the evolving literacy service needs of the community. Intensive internal coordination is carried out, including task distribution among staff, scheduling activities, and preparing logistics and media. Additionally, external coordination is established with the Education Office and schools as implementing partners, particularly for arranging activity locations and determining target participants. Administrative documents such as assignment letters, activity proposals, and requests for implementation permits are formally prepared as part of institutional accountability.

4.1.2. Work Patterns and Implementation SOPs

Each activity is implemented according to the workflow specified in the SOP. In the case of Mobile Libraries, for instance, there are clear standards for selecting book collections by age group, guidelines for transporting service vehicles, and field service protocols for librarians. For socialization programs, the procedures for delivering materials, methods of interactive communication, and mechanisms for evaluating participants' comprehension are systematically arranged. Meanwhile, for competitions, the committee adheres to established standards that cover the entire process from registration and administrative screening to the execution of the competition, assessment, and awarding of winners.

4.1.3. Media and Delivery Methods

The implementation strategy also incorporates diverse media and delivery methods tailored to participants' characteristics. In the Mobile Library program, the primary media consist of selected physical book collections, supported by tools such as information boards and mini-brochures. The delivery method is personal and informal, involving light discussions between librarians and readers or direct introductions to new books.

For the Reading Culture Socialization, digital presentations, educational posters, and printed materials are utilized to strengthen the visual delivery of information. Interactive techniques such as literacy quizzes, educational games, and question-and-answer sessions are employed to boost participant engagement. Meanwhile, in Literacy Competitions, the media used are more expressive, including speech manuscripts, poetry texts, stage performances, and audiovisual equipment, all of which help evaluate participants' performance.

4.2. Program Effectiveness in Increasing Reading Interest

The effectiveness of the Reading Culture activities implemented by the Pematangsiantar City Archives and Library Service is evident through two key indicators: shifts in participants' reading behavior and increased community engagement with the library. The program, comprising Mobile Libraries, Reading Culture Socialization, and Literacy Competitions, not only expands access to reading materials but also creates enjoyable and meaningful literacy experiences. Findings from observations, documentation, and interviews with program implementers indicate that this initiative has successfully sparked students' interest in reading, encouraged the development of reading habits, and heightened public awareness of the value of literacy. Moreover, the program's success is demonstrated by the substantial annual growth in library visits, which reflects the community's increasing participation in literacy-related activities.

In an interview, Yoginasari Tamba explained,

> *"We see the real impact of this program, especially in schools. After the Mobile Library arrived, many children became curious and began asking for other similar books. There are even schools that routinely invite their students to come directly to the city library."*

He continued,

> *"Socialization activities also give positive results. Some teachers have testified that their students have started bringing their own books to school and reading during breaks. It shows that there is a change in the way of looking at reading, from the previous obligation to a habit."*

Regarding interaction with the library, he said,

> *"The number of visitors has increased drastically from year to year, but the most important thing is how they start to feel comfortable in the library. They discuss, participate in activities, and some even volunteer in children's literacy programs."*

Based on interviews with program implementers, the Reading Culture initiative is viewed as effective in encouraging positive literacy behaviors within the community, particularly among students. These changes are reflected in emerging habits such as bringing books for independent reading, actively discussing book content, and increasing participation in literacy activities at school and in the community. The interactive, contextual approach used in the socialization activities has successfully transformed the perception of reading from a mere academic requirement to a personal necessity. Additionally, the marked rise in library visits, from 20,695 in 2020 to 60,224 in 2024, indicates that libraries are increasingly recognized as accessible learning spaces. The growing community engagement with librarians, digital services, and community programs demonstrates that libraries have become vibrant, inclusive hubs for literacy activities.

4.2.1. Changes in Reading Behavior

One of the leading indicators of the Reading Culture program's effectiveness is the positive shift in participants' reading habits, particularly among students. Activities such as Mobile Libraries, Reading Culture Socialization, and Literacy Competitions not only offer access to reading

materials but also provide enjoyable, constructive, and motivating literacy experiences. These initiatives are intentionally designed to touch both the emotional and social dimensions of participants, helping transform reading from an academic requirement into a lifestyle choice. Through an interactive and contextual approach, participants not only gain a theoretical understanding of the value of reading but also begin incorporating reading habits into their daily lives. Another sign of progress is the increased enthusiasm among participants to discuss books, borrow additional reading materials, and express themselves through creative literacy forms such as poetry and speeches.

Yoginasari Tamba revealed in an interview,

> *"We are delighted to see the change in students' behavior after participating in our activities. For example, after a visit to the Mobile Library, teachers told me that children began to ask more questions about books and began to bring their own readings to school."*

He continued,

> *"One of the schools even held a special time in the morning before the lesson started, just to read together. It was an idea from the teacher, but the increased enthusiasm of the students drove it."*

Regarding socialization activities, he said,

> *"We deliberately deliver material with a relevant approach, so that students feel that reading is close to their lives. Some students even admitted that they started to set aside about 15-20 minutes at home to read, even without assignments from school."*

Regarding literacy competitions, he added,

> *"Children who participate in speech and poetry competitions become more confident. They not only read the text, but also begin to understand how to convey ideas and the content of the reading in an interesting way."*

Interviews with program implementers indicate that the Reading Culture initiative has brought about notable changes in participants' reading habits, particularly among students. They have begun to develop routines such as bringing books to school, taking part in book discussions, and voluntarily recommending reading materials to their peers. This demonstrates that the activities not only provide access to reading but also build emotional and social connections with it. During socialization sessions, the use of everyday-life materials motivates participants to see reading as an intellectual necessity. The practice of reading at home, even for a short time, lays an early foundation for strong literacy habits. Meanwhile, competition activities such as poetry reading and speech delivery do more than spark interest in reading; they also enhance participants' soft skills in critical thinking, argumentation, and effective communication. As a result, these activities contribute to the development of adaptive and confident literacy traits suited to the demands of the modern era.

The Literacy Competition activities also motivate participants to become more active and confident in developing their expressive literacy abilities. Students who took part in poetry or speech competitions, for instance, demonstrated better text comprehension and improved skills in delivering messages clearly. This shows that interest in reading is closely linked to the development of other competencies, including critical thinking, argument construction, and effective communication. Therefore, these competitions not only foster a more substantial interest in reading but also enhance the soft skills essential for academic success and social interaction.

4.2.2. Increased Visits and Interaction with the Library

The activity's effectiveness is also evident in quantitative data showing a rise in public library visits following its implementation. According to the Archives and Library Service report, the number of visitors has grown each year substantially, from 20,695 in 2020 to 41,406 in 2022, and to 60,224 in 2024. This growth not only reflects success in engaging a larger audience but also

demonstrates that the literacy programs have encouraged people to return to libraries as active learning spaces and valuable sources of information.

The rise in library visits and growing community engagement are key indicators of the Reading Culture program's effectiveness in Pematangsiantar City. Data from the Archives and Library Service show a notable increase in visitors, from 20,695 in 2020 to 41,406 in 2022, reaching 60,224 in 2024. This demonstrates that libraries are increasingly recognized and utilized as open and inclusive learning spaces. Beyond visitor numbers, the quality of interactions has also improved, with more people using facilities such as reading rooms, internet access, and opportunities to participate in the literacy community. This success is closely linked to the program's proactive strategy, which not only waits for the community to visit but also actively reaches out through initiatives like the Mobile Library.

In an interview, Yoginasari Tamba said,

> *"We really feel the impact of the activities that have been running. Year-on-year visit data shows a considerable increase. However, what is even more encouraging is the change in visitor behavior. Now, children and parents are not only coming to borrow books, but also to read on site, use computers, or join reading community activities."*

He added,

> *"The Mobile Library also has a big role. When we come to the school or community, they know the city library exists and are curious to visit in person. Some teachers and principals even invite students to visit the library as part of learning activities."*

Furthermore, she explained,

> *"We also see an increase in participation from the community. Some are volunteers, some want to help become reading mentors. This is extraordinary because it shows that people are starting to feel like they belong and are part of this literacy movement."*

The increase in library visits represents more than just numerical growth; it reflects a shift in the community's literacy culture. Libraries are now seen not only as places to borrow books but also as enjoyable, shared learning environments. The enhanced quality of interaction is evident in how visitors utilize available facilities and participate in literacy activities. The Mobile Library program plays a strategic role by providing access to literacy for previously hard-to-reach populations while also serving as a gateway to broader library services. In this way, libraries have become active participants in the community, fostering engagement and building connections. The involvement of community volunteers and reading mentors further demonstrates a sense of ownership and participation, establishing the library as an inclusive, collaborative, and transformative public space.

The growth in both the number and quality of interactions is closely linked to the consistent implementation of the program and the staff's adaptive strategies. The library team goes beyond administrative responsibilities by actively fostering social connections with visitors, thereby creating a welcoming and inclusive library environment. Consequently, libraries are no longer seen as dull or exclusive to top-performing students; instead, they have become communal spaces that foster learning communities across all ages and backgrounds.

The Reading Culture Activity has produced a notable positive impact in two main areas: shifts in reading behavior and greater community engagement with libraries. First, changes in reading behavior, particularly among students, are evident in increased interest in books, the habit of bringing reading materials to school, and active participation in literacy discussions and competitions. Programs such as Mobile Libraries, literacy socialization, and competitions have successfully reshaped participants' perception of reading, showing that it is not merely an academic requirement but also an intellectual and social necessity. Second, quantitative data highlights a substantial rise in library visits, from 20,695 in 2020 to 60,224 in 2024. This growth is accompanied by increased interaction, with visitors not only borrowing books but also actively using library facilities and engaging in literacy activities. Contributing factors, such as interactive approaches, service expansion through the Mobile Library, and the social connections fostered

by library staff, have further supported the transformation of libraries into inclusive and participatory public spaces.

4.3.   Obstacles in Program Implementation

The implementation of the Reading Culture program, managed by the Pematangsiantar City Archives and Library Service, generally proceeded smoothly and effectively. Interviews with key informants indicated that no significant systemic or structural challenges were encountered during its execution. The obstacles that arose were mainly technical and operational, including scheduling conflicts with school activities, limited time for implementation, and weather conditions that occasionally disrupted Mobile Library field activities. Nevertheless, these challenges were addressed through effective coordination and the implementation team's flexibility in rescheduling or adjusting technical aspects of field operations.

To offer a broader understanding of potential challenges in implementing reading activities at local, regional, and national levels, several common obstacles are frequently observed in community literacy programs across different areas. These challenges should be carefully monitored and taken into account when planning and developing future activities.

4.3.1. Limited Human Resources (HR)

A common challenge in carrying out literacy activities is the limited number of librarians or program implementers and their capacity. Many regional libraries lack sufficient human resources in terms of staffing, literacy training, and communication skills (Melfan & Batubara, 2023)

4.3.2. Limited Facilities and Supporting

Effective literacy programs require sufficient facilities, including Mobile Library vehicles, current book collections, presentation tools, and suitable activity spaces. In many regions, limited facilities pose a significant challenge. Additionally, a restricted, outdated, or poorly matched book collection can hinder efforts to cultivate public interest in reading activities.

4.3.3. Budget Constraints

Funding literacy activities often presents a significant challenge. Even well-designed programs are difficult to implement effectively without sufficient budget support. Financial needs encompass various aspects, including the operation of mobile library vehicles, provision of competition prizes, distribution of socialization materials, and honoraria for resource persons. Reliance on government budgets can make certain activities unsustainable when funding allocations are reduced.

4.3.4. Low Response and Public Awareness

In some areas, low community literacy levels contribute to limited participation in literacy activities. Where a reading culture has not yet developed, some individuals perceive reading as uninteresting or irrelevant to daily life. This passive attitude presents a significant challenge, particularly in regions that have not been exposed to intensive literacy programs.

The findings indicate that literacy activities across regions continue to face significant challenges, which can be categorized into four main areas. First, the limited number and competence of librarians hinder the effective implementation of literacy programs. Second, inadequate facilities and supporting infrastructure, such as relevant book collections, Mobile Library vehicles, and proper activity spaces, impede the creation of a conducive literacy environment. Third, budget limitations are a primary obstacle to program continuity, as most activities rely heavily on government funding. Finally, low public awareness and engagement regarding the importance of reading reveal that literacy challenges are not only structural but also cultural. These four factors are interconnected, forming a cycle of obstacles that must be addressed simultaneously for literacy programs to operate optimally and sustainably.

5.   Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion presented, it can be concluded that the Reading Culture activities conducted by the Pematangsiantar City Archives and Library Service have been effective in fostering reading interest, particularly among students, through three main initiatives:

Mobile Libraries, Reading Culture Socialization, and Literacy Competitions. These activities have positively influenced reading behavior, enhanced community engagement with libraries, and achieved measurable outcomes, including increased visits and program participation. Despite technical challenges, including limited time, facilities, and participant numbers, the activities were implemented effectively and received support from various stakeholders. With a strategy grounded in theory and active community involvement, this program can serve as a model for evaluating the effectiveness of efforts to cultivate reading interest through structured, sustainable institutional interventions.

To ensure sustainability and improve the program's impact, it is recommended that the Pematangsiantar City Archives and Library Service strengthen partnerships with schools, literacy communities, and the private sector to secure funding, resources, and support for innovative literacy media. Additionally, expanding the program's reach to the broader public through digital literacy campaigns and integrating information technology will help promote reading interest not only among students but across all segments of society.

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