



## ENHANCING CHILDREN'S LITERACY THROUGH CREATIVE MEDIA STRATEGY IN COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING IN MEDAN

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### Abstract:

*The development of children's literacy remains a critical challenge, particularly in community-based learning contexts where access to engaging and relevant learning resources is often limited. This study investigates the effectiveness of creative media as a strategy to enhance children's literacy in a community setting in Medan, Indonesia. Employing a Participatory Action Research (PAR) design, the study involved 25 children aged 7–12 years, along with parents and local facilitators. The intervention integrated illustrated storybooks, interactive storytelling, and literacy-based games, enriched with cultural and religious values. Data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and pre- and post-literacy assessments. The findings reveal significant improvements in both engagement and literacy skills. Active participation increased from 36% to 84%, while average literacy scores improved from 64% to 81%. Children also demonstrated higher motivation, longer attention spans, and greater involvement in literacy activities. In addition, 88% of children reported increased enjoyment in learning, and 90% of parents observed positive changes in their children's reading habits at home. These results indicate that creative media serves as an effective, contextually relevant approach to literacy development by combining cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions of learning. The study contributes to the literature by extending the application of multiliteracies and sociocultural frameworks into community-based settings and highlighting the importance of integrating local values in literacy practices.*

**Keywords:** *creative media, children's literacy, participatory action research, community-based learning, cultural integration*

### Abstrak

Pengembangan literasi anak tetap menjadi tantangan kritis, khususnya dalam konteks pembelajaran berbasis komunitas di mana akses terhadap sumber belajar yang menarik dan

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relevan seringkali terbatas. Studi ini menyelidiki efektivitas media kreatif sebagai strategi untuk meningkatkan literasi anak di lingkungan komunitas di Medan, Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan desain Penelitian Aksi Partisipatif (PAR), studi ini melibatkan 25 anak berusia 7–12 tahun, bersama dengan orang tua dan fasilitator lokal. Intervensi tersebut mengintegrasikan buku cerita bergambar, mendongeng interaktif, dan permainan berbasis literasi, yang diperkaya dengan nilai-nilai budaya dan agama. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dokumentasi, dan penilaian literasi sebelum dan sesudah intervensi. Temuan menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan baik dalam keterlibatan maupun keterampilan literasi. Partisipasi aktif meningkat dari 36% menjadi 84%, sementara skor literasi rata-rata meningkat dari 64% menjadi 81%. Anak-anak juga menunjukkan motivasi yang lebih tinggi, rentang perhatian yang lebih panjang, dan keterlibatan yang lebih besar dalam kegiatan literasi. Selain itu, 88% anak melaporkan peningkatan kesenangan dalam belajar, dan 90% orang tua mengamati perubahan positif dalam kebiasaan membaca anak-anak mereka di rumah. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa media kreatif berfungsi sebagai pendekatan yang efektif dan relevan secara kontekstual untuk pengembangan literasi dengan menggabungkan dimensi kognitif, sosial, dan budaya pembelajaran. Studi ini berkontribusi pada literatur dengan memperluas penerapan multiliterasi dan kerangka kerja sosiokultural ke dalam lingkungan berbasis komunitas dan menyoroti pentingnya mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai lokal dalam praktik literasi.

**Kata kunci:** media kreatif; literasi anak; penelitian aksi partisipatif; pembelajaran berbasis komunitas; integrasi budaya

## **INTRODUCTION**

Literacy development in early childhood has become a central concern in global education, particularly in the context of rapid technological transformation. Literacy is no longer limited to the ability to read and write, but extends to the capacity to interpret, analyze, and engage with multimodal texts across various media. The emergence of digital environments has reshaped how children access and process information, making creative and interactive media increasingly relevant in literacy education. Recent studies highlight that digital and multimedia-based learning environments can significantly enhance children's engagement and literacy outcomes by providing interactive and meaningful learning experiences ((Neumann, 2018);(Kucirkova & Flewitt, 2020). In this sense, literacy practices must evolve to accommodate the characteristics of contemporary learners who are deeply embedded in digital cultures.

A growing body of research has emphasized the effectiveness of creative

media—such as digital storytelling, educational games, and multimedia applications—in fostering children's literacy skills. For instance, interactive digital storytelling has been found to improve reading comprehension and motivation by combining narrative elements with visual and auditory stimuli (Rizvić et al., 2017). Similarly, the use of game-based learning and multimedia tools has been shown to enhance students' motivation and participation, which are critical factors in literacy development (Khoo et al., 2025); (Arnab et al., 2012). In the Indonesian context, empirical studies also confirm that interactive digital media and edutainment approaches can significantly improve early literacy skills and increase children's interest in reading ((Meriyanti & Roza, 2025); (Rejekia et al., 2025). These findings suggest that creative media can serve as an effective bridge between traditional literacy practices and contemporary learning needs.

Despite these advancements, several challenges remain, particularly in local and community-based contexts such as Medan. Access to quality literacy resources, uneven digital literacy among educators and parents, and limited integration of cultural and religious values into literacy materials continue to hinder optimal literacy development among children. Previous studies tend to focus on formal educational settings, with less attention given to community-based interventions. Moreover, there is still a lack of research that explores how creative media can be contextualized within local cultural and religious frameworks to support holistic literacy development in children. This gap indicates the need for more contextual and practice-oriented studies that address the realities of literacy education at the community level.

Responding to these gaps, this study aims to examine the use of creative media as a strategy for enhancing children's literacy in Medan through a PAR approach. Specifically, this study explores how creative media can be designed and implemented to improve children's literacy engagement while integrating local cultural and religious values. By focusing on a community-based setting, this research is expected to contribute not only to the theoretical discourse on literacy and media but also to practical strategies for educators, parents, and policymakers in promoting meaningful and sustainable literacy development among children.

The novelty of this study lies in three main aspects. First, unlike prior studies that predominantly focus on formal school environments, this research situates literacy development within a community-based context, emphasizing participatory collaboration among children, parents, and local facilitators. Second, this study integrates creative media with culturally and religiously grounded content, offering a contextualized literacy model that reflects children's socio-cultural realities, which is still underexplored in existing literature. Third, methodologically, this research applies a PAR framework not only as an intervention model but also as a co-creation process, where stakeholders actively contribute to the design and implementation of literacy media. This combination of participatory methodology, contextual content integration, and multimodal literacy strategy distinguishes the present

study from previous research and provides a more holistic approach to children's literacy development.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to explore the use of creative media as a strategy for enhancing children's literacy in a community setting in Medan, Indonesia. PAR was selected as it emphasizes collaborative inquiry and active participation between researchers and community members, making it particularly suitable for community-based literacy interventions. Through this approach, children, parents, and local facilitators were not merely positioned as research subjects, but as active contributors in the process of identifying problems, implementing solutions, and reflecting on outcomes ((Kemmis & McTaggart, 2020);(McIntyre, 2019)).

The participants of this study consisted of children aged 7 to 12 years who were actively involved in community learning activities. In addition, parents and local educators were engaged to support the implementation of the literacy program. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring that those involved had direct relevance to the objectives of the program, particularly in terms of literacy needs and access to learning resources.

The research was conducted through a cyclical process consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection. In the initial stage, preliminary observations and informal interviews were carried out to identify the literacy challenges faced by children in the community. These findings informed the design of creative media tailored to the children's needs, including illustrated storybooks, interactive storytelling materials, and simple digital-based learning tools. Importantly, the media were developed by integrating local cultural contexts and religious values to ensure relevance and meaningful engagement.

The action phase involved the implementation of structured literacy activities using the developed creative media. These activities included guided reading sessions, interactive storytelling, and literacy games designed to stimulate children's interest and participation. During this stage, children were encouraged to actively engage with the materials, express their understanding, and interact with peers and facilitators in a supportive learning environment.

Data collection was conducted throughout the implementation process using multiple techniques. Observations were carried out to document children's engagement, participation, and responses to the learning activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents and facilitators to gain insights into perceived changes in children's literacy behaviors. In addition, documentation such as photographs, field notes, and samples of children's work were collected to support the analysis. To complement the qualitative data, simple literacy assessments were administered before and after the intervention to identify changes in reading interest and basic literacy skills.

The data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach, following the processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing as proposed by Miles et al. (2014). Qualitative findings were triangulated with the results of the literacy assessments to ensure the credibility and validity of the data. This combination of methods allowed for a comprehensive understanding of both the implementation process and its outcomes.

Throughout the study, ethical considerations were strictly maintained. Informed consent was obtained from parents or guardians prior to children's participation, and all data were treated confidentially. The activities were designed to ensure a safe, inclusive, and child-friendly environment, where children could participate freely and comfortably.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study addresses three main research questions related to the use of creative media in enhancing children's literacy in a community setting in Medan.

**RQ1: How does the use of creative media influence children's literacy engagement?**

The findings demonstrate a substantial improvement in children's engagement during literacy activities after the implementation of creative media. Prior to the intervention, participation levels were relatively low, with only 36% of children actively engaged. Most children showed limited attention spans and minimal interaction during reading sessions. However, after the introduction of creative media such as illustrated storybooks, interactive storytelling, and literacy games, engagement increased significantly to 84%.

In addition, the average duration of children's attention during literacy activities increased from 10–15 minutes to 25–30 minutes. Children also became more responsive, actively participating in discussions and demonstrating greater enthusiasm for literacy tasks.

**Table 1. Children's Literacy Engagement Before and After Intervention**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Before Intervention</b>	<b>After Intervention</b>	<b>Improvement</b>
Active participation (n)	9 (36%)	21 (84%)	+48%
Average attention duration	10–15 minutes	25–30 minutes	+15 minutes
Participation in discussion	Low	High	Significant
Willingness to engage in activities	Limited	Very active	Significant

These results indicate that creative media plays a crucial role in fostering active engagement by making literacy activities more interactive, enjoyable, and aligned with children's learning preferences.

**RQ2: To what extent does creative media improve children's basic literacy skills?**

The results of the literacy assessments reveal a notable improvement in children's basic literacy skills after the intervention. All three measured indicators such as letter recognition, word reading, and basic comprehension, showed consistent progress.

Letter recognition increased from 68% to 85%, while word reading ability improved from 64% to 80%. Similarly, children's basic comprehension of simple texts and stories increased from 60% to 78%. Overall, the average literacy score rose from 64% in the pre-test to 81% in the post-test, reflecting a gain of 17 percentage points.

**Table 2. Improvement in Basic Literacy Skills**

Literacy Indicator	Pre-Test (%)	Post-Test (%)	Gain (%)
Letter recognition	68%	85%	+17%
Word reading ability	64%	80%	+16%
Basic comprehension	60%	78%	+18%
<b>Average Score</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>+17%</b>

Further analysis of literacy levels shows a significant reduction in the number of children categorized as having low literacy skills, decreasing from 40% to 12%. At the same time, the proportion of children in the high literacy category increased from 20% to 48%.

**Table 3. Distribution of Literacy Levels Before and After Intervention**

Literacy Level	Before (n/%)	After (n/%)
High	5 (20%)	12 (48%)
Moderate	10 (40%)	10 (40%)
Low	10 (40%)	3 (12%)

These findings confirm that creative media is not only effective in increasing engagement but also contributes significantly to the development of foundational literacy skills.

### **RQ3: How do children and parents perceive the integration of creative media in literacy activities?**

The perceptions of both children and parents toward the use of creative media were overwhelmingly positive. A large majority of children (88%) reported that they enjoyed literacy activities more when creative media was used. Additionally, 92% of children expressed that learning became more enjoyable, while 84% preferred creative media over conventional methods.

**Table 4. Children's Perceptions of Creative Media**

Indicator	Number of Children	Percentage
Enjoy literacy activities more	22	88%
Feel learning is more fun	23	92%
Prefer creative media over conventional method	21	84%

From the parents' perspective, the results also indicate strong positive responses. A total of 90% of parents observed an increase in their children's interest in reading, while 80% reported that their children became more independent in

engaging with literacy activities at home. Furthermore, 95% of parents agreed that the integration of cultural and religious values within the media added meaningful value to their children's learning experience.

**Table 5. Parents' Perceptions of Literacy Changes**

Indicator	Number of Parents	Percentage
Observed increased reading interest	18	90%
Children read more independently	16	80%
Children ask for reading activities at home	17	85%
Value integration (cultural & religious) is beneficial	19	95%

These findings suggest that creative media not only enhances children's literacy experiences but also strengthens parental involvement and support, which are essential factors in sustaining literacy development beyond formal learning settings.

The results above demonstrate that the integration of creative media in literacy activities has a significant positive impact on children's engagement, literacy skills, and learning experiences. The combination of increased participation, measurable improvements in literacy performance, and positive perceptions from both children and parents confirms the effectiveness of this approach in a community-based context.

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of creative media significantly enhances children's literacy engagement, skills development, and learning experiences in a community-based setting. These results can be interpreted through several theoretical lenses and positioned within the broader discourse of literacy and educational technology.

First, the substantial increase in children's engagement aligns with the principles of **constructivist learning theory**, particularly the idea that knowledge is actively constructed through interaction and meaningful experiences. The use of creative media such as interactive storytelling, visual narratives, and game-based activities, provides multimodal stimuli that allow children to actively participate in the learning process rather than passively receive information. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that interactive and multimedia-rich environments enhance learner engagement by accommodating diverse learning styles and promoting active meaning-making ((Kucirkova & Flewitt, 2020); (Khoo et al., 2025)). The observed increase in attention span and participation further supports the notion that literacy practices must be aligned with the characteristics of digital-native learners.

Second, the improvement in children's basic literacy skills can be explained through the framework of **multiliteracies**, which emphasizes the importance of integrating multiple modes of communication such as linguistic, visual, and digital, into literacy education. The results show that children's abilities in letter recognition, word reading, and comprehension improved significantly after

exposure to creative media. This supports the argument that literacy development is not merely a cognitive process but also a multimodal and socially situated practice ((Cope & Kalantzis, 2015)). In this context, creative media functions as a scaffold that bridges abstract literacy concepts with concrete and engaging representations, thereby facilitating deeper understanding.

Moreover, the findings resonate with **Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978)**, particularly the concept of the *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*. The involvement of facilitators and parents in guiding children through literacy activities reflects the importance of social interaction in learning. Creative media, when combined with guided support, enables children to perform literacy tasks that they might not achieve independently. This is evident in the significant reduction of children in the low-literacy category and the increase in those reaching higher levels of literacy proficiency.

Third, the positive perceptions from both children and parents highlight the affective and contextual dimensions of literacy learning. The enjoyment and motivation reported by children indicate that emotional engagement plays a crucial role in sustaining literacy practices. At the same time, parents' recognition of improved reading habits suggests that literacy development extends beyond formal learning environments into the home context. This finding supports ecological perspectives on literacy, which view learning as a dynamic interaction between individuals, families, and communities.

Importantly, this study also addresses a critical gap in the existing literature. While previous studies have extensively examined the effectiveness of digital and creative media in formal educational settings, there remains limited research focusing on **community-based literacy interventions**. Furthermore, many existing studies tend to emphasize technological aspects without adequately considering the integration of **local cultural and religious values**. This study contributes to the field by demonstrating that creative media can be contextualized to reflect children's socio-cultural environments, thereby enhancing both relevance and meaning in literacy learning.

The integration of cultural and religious elements within the media represents a significant contribution, as it positions literacy not only as a technical skill but also as a medium for character and value development. This is particularly relevant in contexts such as Medan, where cultural diversity and religious identity play an important role in shaping educational practices. By embedding these values into creative media, the study extends the application of multiliteracies to include moral and cultural dimensions.

However, despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted within a relatively small sample and a specific community context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the duration of the intervention was relatively short, making it difficult to assess long-term impacts on literacy development. Future research should

consider longitudinal designs and larger, more diverse samples to further validate and expand upon these findings.

In conclusion, this study reinforces the argument that creative media, when designed and implemented within a participatory and culturally responsive framework, can serve as an effective strategy for enhancing children's literacy. It not only bridges the gap between traditional and digital literacy practices but also integrates cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions of learning. As such, it offers both theoretical and practical implications for the development of sustainable literacy programs in community-based settings.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that the integration of creative media in community-based literacy programs has a significant and measurable impact on children's literacy engagement, skills development, and learning experiences. The findings reveal that creative media not only increases children's participation and attention during literacy activities but also contributes to substantial improvements in foundational literacy skills, including letter recognition, word reading, and basic comprehension.

Beyond cognitive gains, the study highlights the importance of affective and contextual dimensions in literacy learning. Children's positive emotional responses, along with parents' observations of increased reading habits at home, indicate that creative media fosters a more meaningful and sustainable literacy environment. The integration of cultural and religious values further strengthens the relevance of learning, positioning literacy as both a skill and a medium for value formation. Overall, this study confirms that literacy development is most effective when it is interactive, contextually grounded, and socially supported. By combining creative media with participatory approaches, the intervention successfully bridges formal and informal learning spaces, offering a holistic model for literacy development in community settings.

## **Implications**

### **Theoretical Implications**

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on literacy and educational technology by extending the application of multiliteracies and sociocultural theories into community-based contexts. It demonstrates that creative media functions as a multimodal learning tool that facilitates meaning-making through visual, auditory, and interactive elements. Furthermore, the findings reinforce the relevance of Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective by highlighting the role of social interaction and guided participation in literacy development. Importantly, this study adds a new dimension by integrating cultural and religious values into creative media, thus expanding the conceptualization of literacy beyond technical skills toward a more holistic and value-oriented framework.

### **Practical Implications**

From a practical perspective, the results suggest that educators, community practitioners, and parents can effectively utilize creative media as a strategy to enhance children's literacy. Literacy programs should prioritize interactive and engaging materials that align with children's developmental characteristics and learning preferences. Additionally, the involvement of parents and local facilitators should be strengthened to ensure continuity of literacy practices beyond formal sessions. The integration of culturally relevant and value-based content is also essential to increase children's motivation and deepen their understanding.

### **Policy Implications**

The findings provide important insights for policymakers, particularly in the context of literacy development programs at the local and national levels. There is a need to support the development and dissemination of creative, culturally responsive literacy media that can be accessed by communities. Policies should also encourage collaboration between schools, communities, and families in promoting literacy. Furthermore, training programs for educators and community facilitators should include competencies in designing and implementing creative media-based learning.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its relatively small sample size and specific community context, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. The short duration of the intervention also restricts the ability to assess long-term impacts on literacy development. Future research should consider longitudinal designs, larger and more diverse populations, and comparative studies across different regions. Additionally, further investigation is needed to explore the integration of advanced digital technologies and their potential role in enhancing literacy in diverse socio-cultural contexts.

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