

Picture Book Development as a Response to the Early Literacy Crisis and Efforts to Increase Children's Interest in Reading

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Volume

5

Issue

1

Edition

Mey

Page

165-173

Year

2024

Article History

Submission: 01-11-2022

Review: 02-11-2023

Accepted: 03-04-2024

Keyword

Literacy;
Children's Literature;
Picture Books;

How to cite

Annisa I. O., Nuzulul A. N. (2024).
Picture Book Development as a
Response to the Early Literacy
Crisis and Efforts to Increase
Children's Interest in Reading.
Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat,
Volume 5(1), 165-173
<https://doi.org/10.32815/jpm.v5i1.1394>

Abstract

Purpose: The objective of this research is to enhance children's enthusiasm for reading and improve their literacy abilities by introducing innovative forms of children's literacy media, such as picture books. The researchers created a visual publication specifically designed for sixth-grade students at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan. The purpose of this book is to inspire and engage youngsters, ultimately fostering a greater enthusiasm for reading and addressing the issue of early literacy challenges.

Method: The research employed a qualitative methodology. The activity is structured into three distinct stages: (1) preparation, involving observations and interviews; (2) implementation, which includes creating picture books, promoting children's literature and picture books, and engaging in group reading sessions; and (3) evaluation, which entails self-reflection and assessing the performance of the service program.

Practical Applications: Seventeen grade VI children at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan strongly valued picture books as a form of non-academic reading. Schools should maintain children's literature, particularly picture books, by offering non-academic reading resources to foster a greater interest in reading.

Conclusion: Therefore, the specific early literacy crisis in Pandeyan Village can be mitigated. It is crucial to foster children's interest in reading at a young age in order to cultivate their literacy skills, which will then be sustained throughout their adult lives.



Introduction

The issue of literacy remains a significant one in Indonesia. Literacy is a crucial endeavor in enhancing the caliber and proficiency of human resources in Indonesia, making them more sophisticated and accomplished. Teale and Sulzby (1986) define literacy as the linguistic abilities an individual possesses to effectively communicate through reading, speaking, listening, and writing, adapting their methods to suit their specific objectives. Developing literacy abilities is crucial for fostering analytical, imaginative, and logical mindsets among contemporary youth in addressing challenges and concerns encountered in life. Nevertheless, what is the current state of literacy in Indonesia? According to a survey conducted by PISA and released by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2019), Indonesia was placed among the ten countries with the lowest literacy levels, ranking 62nd out of 70 countries. Developing children's literacy skills requires fostering their interest in reading at a young age, ensuring that these skills are sustained into adulthood and effectively addressing the early literacy crisis in children. The pervasive stigma surrounding low literacy in Indonesia is a fundamental issue that demands immediate resolution due to its far-reaching impact on various aspects of life, including diminished competitiveness, limited capacity for critical thinking and problem-solving, reduced per capita income, and inadequate nutritional ratios. These consequences, in turn, hinder the progress of the nation.

Pandeyan Village is situated inside the Jatinom District, which is located in the Klaten Regency of the Central Java Province. The majority of individuals in Pandeyan Village, particularly primary school pupils, have a poor inclination towards reading. The author performed a survey on grade IV children at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan, Jatinom District, Klaten Regency to determine their level of interest in reading. The survey findings indicate that fewer than 10% of grade VI students at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan exhibit an inclination for reading during their leisure hours. There are several factors contributing to this issue. Firstly, children have a natural inclination towards the devices they use, which leads them to prioritize playing with their friends during their free time. Additionally, children often lack enthusiasm and curiosity when it comes to reading content. Furthermore, the visual presentation of books, which is predominantly text-based, tends to be less engaging for children, resulting in boredom and a reluctance to read extensively. (Rini, private correspondence, September 3, 2022)." In addition to this, there are other external factors contributing to the lack of interest in reading among children at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan. These factors include parents' insufficient understanding of the significance of introducing and familiarizing children with literacy, as well as the extremely limited and monotonous availability of reading materials. The school library still has a limited number of reading books. This leads to children concentrating solely on textbooks. Indeed, it is crucial to expose children to non-academic texts, such as children's literature, that convey societal moral lessons from a young age.

Children's interest in reading and literacy abilities can be enhanced by the implementation of innovative media designed for children's literacy. Children's interest in reading the complete contents of a book is diminished when the book is tedious and too wordy. Picture books serve as an educational tool for youngsters, fostering their enthusiasm for reading at a young age. Picture books are a form of children's reading that has enjoyed widespread popularity throughout the 20th century. Picture books, also referred to as picture tale books, are a kind of written children's literature. As stated by Nurgiyantoro (2005), picture story books are books that provide stories for youngsters along with illustrations to enhance their interest in reading. Picture books feature narratives that foster creativity, enhance cognitive abilities, elucidate emotions, and aid in coping with distress when youngsters encounter challenges.

The drawings or illustrations found in picture books serve as the primary element of the narrative, as youngsters get their understanding of the story's content from the sequence of presented illustrations. In this instance, writing serves as supplementary material to aid

children in comprehending the subject matter of the story. Picture books integrate visual pictures with written text in a manner that fosters interaction and facilitates comprehension for children. Nodelman & Reimer (2003) identifies several characteristics commonly found in children's literary works, such as picture books. These include the use of simple diction and language style, a focus on the actions and consequences of the characters, the presence of images or illustrations that convey visual and emotional information not expressed in the text, and the portrayal of main characters who are typically children or animals with childlike characteristics or behavior.

Picture books can serve as a creative and non-academic tool for learning. Picture books are an effective medium for enhancing children's social attitudes as they incorporate topics and ideologies that cultivate children's minds and imagination, enabling them to approach real challenges with greater openness. Picture books, particularly in the English edition, are constructed based on narrative philosophies that encompass not only the positive aspects of life but also the negative aspects. The story explores forbidden subjects through an ideology that is presented from the perspective and linguistic level of children, ensuring that they can still comprehend the content. Ultimately, the narrative will construct a tale that instills a positive outlook in children. Taboo narratives are delivered sequentially using optimistic language that expands children's perspectives and understanding in addressing life's challenges.

The author's objective in providing this service is to introduce children at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan to picture books as a creative educational tool that can enhance reading engagement and literacy abilities among sixth-grade students. The author authored a picture book titled "Being A Great Student". The objective is for the students at SD Negeri VI 2 Pandeyan to develop a stronger inclination towards reading and to be inspired by the ethical principles embedded within the narratives. This picture book is bilingual, featuring both Indonesian and English languages. The purpose of this initiative is to enhance children's enthusiasm for reading and improve the English vocabulary of sixth-grade students at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan. This will ultimately enhance their competitiveness as they transition to junior high school. In essence, the purpose of this service is to address and mitigate an impending early literacy problem in Indonesia by implementing tiny yet impactful measures.

Method

The research for this service was conducted between August and October 2022. The research sample consisted of 18 students from class VI at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan. The service research conducted by researchers is classified as qualitative research. Sulisty-Basuki (2006: 78) defines qualitative research as a type of research that focuses on exploring and understanding the ideas, perceptions, and views of the individuals under study, which cannot be quantified by numerical measurements. Researchers concentrate on delineating the outcomes of empowering communities that are the subject of service research projects. According to Ulber Silalahi (2009), qualitative research is a systematic inquiry method that aims to comprehend social issues by constructing a full and organized depiction using words. It involves providing detailed accounts of informant perspectives and adhering to scientific principles. The researchers conduct their research by engaging in preparatory activities, which involve defining the problems and objectives of the service research program. They then proceed with observation and data collection to refine their research objectives and explore further. Finally, they implement the service program by utilizing the data and instruments that were prepared, targeting the specific community. The primary instrument in qualitative research is the researcher themselves. Researchers serve as instruments for collecting data. The researchers utilized interview sheets and laptops as supporting instruments to create picture book literacy media prior to launching the program. The data collection methodology involved the use of observation and interviews. Observations were conducted at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan, where the researchers collected data on the specific topic of investigation, which

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is outlined as follows: (1) Artist. The researchers conducted an observation of student reactions during English teaching and learning activities for class VI students at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan, specifically focusing on the concept of space/place. The researchers examined the state of the sixth grade classroom at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan in relation to the availability of non-academic reading books and other educational materials, as well as events taking place in the classroom. The researchers monitored the actions of the perpetrator during English teaching and learning activities in class VI at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan, with a focus on the goals of these activities. The researchers observed the goals of English language teachers in implementing English learning techniques for class VI SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan in order to assess the progress of learning media that can enhance learning activities in schools as implemented by English teachers; (5) Emotions. Researchers conducted an observation of the affective responses of sixth-grade students at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan in comprehending English lessons. The study focused on analyzing students' enthusiasm and comprehension levels through their actions, verbal expressions, facial cues, and body language in response to the teacher's instruction.

The steps of this service research include of planning, implementing, and evaluating activities. During the planning phase, researchers conducted observations and interviews as outlined. During the implementation stage, researchers conducted actions that were categorized into two parts: (1) creating a pictorial publication. The production of the picture book was conducted at the student Real Work Lecture position for a duration of two weeks, commencing with the generation of ideas, followed by the composition of ideas and story scripts, creation of illustrations, and concluding with the printing of the book. The program was implemented by introducing picture books to class VI students at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan. This was done by distributing the books and allowing the students to read together using the read aloud approach. Activities are conducted to educate children about the significance of cultivating non-academic literacy in order to foster their imagination and critical thinking skills, as well as enhance their understanding and social awareness. During the evaluation phase, the researcher asked sixth-grade students from SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan to engage with the message provided in the tale. The session concluded with students reflecting on their own thoughts and considering how to apply the content of the distributed picture book. Researchers also assess the program in terms of its aims and the actual execution that was done.

Figure 1. Observations and Interviews of English Subject Teachers



Source: Private Documentation, 2022

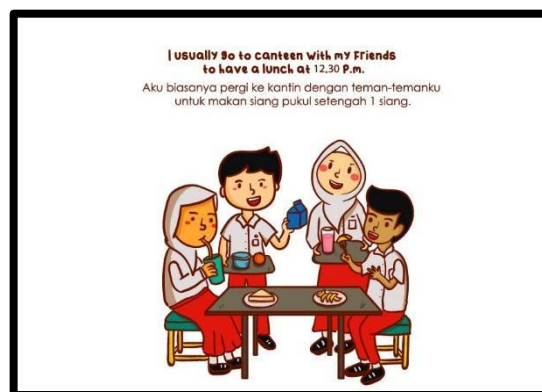
Result

Based on the findings of researchers' interviews and observations, it can be concluded that the average interest in reading and English vocabulary proficiency among grade VI students at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan is low. The lack of passion among Class VI students for

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reading school-assigned novels is evident via their attitudes and responses during English lessons. The scarcity of non-academic reading materials at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan restricts children's opportunities for self-exploration. Therefore, children typically exhibit a discerning mindset and limited creativity. In response to this, a project was undertaken to provide community service, specifically targeting class VI students at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan. This project involved creating a bilingual picture book in English and Indonesian, with visual illustrations that enhance the narrative. In addition to that, this endeavor is undertaken by showcasing the significance of familiarizing oneself with children's books at a young age and fostering a passion for reading. The implementation of these actions is as follows: (1) Creation of Picture Books. Children have a restricted level of understanding. Children should be provided with information about life events to facilitate the development of their identity, personality, and behavior. Children's literature serves as a platform for crafting narratives that have the potential to ignite children's passion and hopefulness as they navigate their destiny. Children's literature has a crucial part in fostering the development of a sophisticated and broad-minded younger generation, influencing various areas of their conduct. Children's literature enables children to emulate and cultivate the behavior and motivation of the characters depicted in the story. Researchers also acknowledge that children are entitled to experience enjoyment in their life. Children's literature has the capacity to bring joy and enjoyment to children.

Figure 1. Observations and Interviews of English Subject Teachers



Source: Private Documentation, 2022

Engaging with children's literature, particularly picture books, can enhance children's creativity and foster empathy by promoting an awareness of human diversity. According to Stewing (1980), children's literature serves the purpose of both entertaining youngsters and imparting them with an understanding of both the positive and negative aspects of life. Fun may be derived from various sources, one of which is an engaging picture book that is tailored to a child's comprehension level. Based on this premise, researchers employed a children's literature methodology to carry out community service initiatives in Pandeyan Village. The researcher authored a script for a children's narrative that was specifically tailored to meet the needs of class VI students at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan. The script was altered to align with the students' English reading abilities, vocabulary level, and appropriateness for school settings. The central focus of the picture book is the conduct and actions of youngsters. The researcher selected this theme with the intention of inspiring the children of SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan to exhibit improved behavior both at home and as students at school, using vivid illustrations and engaging tale content. In addition to that, this study is grounded in the researchers' observations of the daily conduct of sixth-grade students at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan, both within the school premises and within the community. The researcher's picture book is titled "Being A Great Student". This picture book narrates the tale of Zeanda, a studious and conscientious student who embarks on a voyage. Zeanda is not only rigorous in her studies but also takes pleasure in assisting her parents. The researchers want to inspire the sixth grade pupils at SD

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Negeri 2 Pandeyan to emulate the qualities and behavior portrayed by the character Zeanda. Following the completion of the writing process, the researcher collaborated with an illustrator to visually depict the story's substance through images, aiming to prevent children from becoming disinterested and fostering a strong curiosity about the book's contents. Visual representation plays a crucial role in picture books. Hence, the illustrator's contribution is crucial for the achievement of research endeavors. Once the process of writing and creating the images had concluded, a total of 18 booklets were made specifically for a group of class VI students. The researcher provided a non-academic reading material, in the form of a book, to SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan. It is hoped that children will increasingly develop a liking for picture books and that schools will progressively prioritize them in order to improve student reading. (2) Introduction of Children's Literature and Picture Books to sixth-grade students at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan. Upon the completion of the picture book creation process, the researcher engaged in a service activity by conducting interactive outreach to the sixth grade students of SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan. The purpose of this outreach was to emphasize the significance of literacy and the enjoyment of reading, introduce children's literature, and distribute picture books to the students. Consequently, youngsters comprehend the significance of literacy and the value of deriving pleasure from reading at a young age. Children also comprehend the significance and impact of children's books on their realm of pleasure and comprehension. The children were eager to read the story in the picture book titled "Being A Great Student" because the book's illustrations sparked their curiosity and desire to comprehend the story's contents. (3) Engage in a collaborative activity of reading out loud together. Observing the fervor of the sixth grade students at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan upon receiving picture books, the researchers extended an invitation for the children to engage in shared reading sessions, alternating between English and Indonesian languages.

Figure 3. Realization of Service Program.



Source: Private Documentation, 2022

Figure 4. Children's Enthusiasm for Community Service Programs.



Source: Private Documentation, 2022

The research was read before to the children's subsequent actions. The purpose of this is to enhance children's comprehension and expand their English lexicon, while also facilitating their understanding through the provided Indonesian translation. (4) Introspection. The previous action concluded with introspection. Researchers are requesting children to articulate the moral message they acquired from reading the picture book titled "Being A Great Student". The sixth grade pupils of SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan comprehend that being a student and a nice child can be exemplified by Zeanda through rigorous studying, assisting parents, completing schoolwork conscientiously, displaying kindness and friendliness towards peers, and maintaining discipline.

Discussion

An example of the efficacy of creative methods in combating literacy problems is the service project that involves making picture books for sixth graders at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan. Building a culture of literacy and instilling a love of reading in youngsters are the overarching goals of this campaign (Kasanova et al., 2021; Le Roux, 2018). The combination of visual and linguistic features in picture books makes reading more engaging and pleasant for youngsters, making them a particularly effective medium for literacy (Kachorsky et al., 2017; Pantaleo, 2015). Visually appealing and easy to understand, picture books pique children's interest and motivate them to seek out more information about the stories they read. Their reading comprehension, along with their cognitive and emotional capacities, are both bolstered by this. On top of that, the lessons kids learn from these stories help them be ready for whatever the future brings. Essential for managing an ever-more-complicated world, they learn about values like optimism, open-mindedness, and resilience. There has been a notable effect from the researchers' interactions with the faculty and students at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan. It has prompted a change in attitude towards reading books that aren't traditionally associated with academia, acknowledging their importance in fostering literacy and expanding children's worldviews. In the future, the researchers hope to see more picture books published and distributed nationwide. They argue that children's imaginations, insights, and exposure to many points of view can be greatly enhanced through the access to non-academic reading materials, which schools and parents should do more to supply (Baba & Affendi, 2020; Sibanda & Kajee, 2019).

An illuminating illustration of how fresh perspectives can revolutionize the early literacy scene is the program at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan. Keep in mind, though, that this is only the first step. If this program is successful, it will hopefully spur more comprehensive reforms to the way we teach reading and writing. The significance of creating a positive reading experience for children is one of the main conclusions drawn from this study. Reading is more likely to be an activity that youngsters willingly participate in when they link it with positive

emotions like enjoyment and wonder (Hopple, 2018; Kohm et al., 2016). They will develop a passion of learning that will last a lifetime and their reading abilities will improve. So, it's important for schools and parents to work together to make the classroom an inviting and exciting place to learn.

Teachers and parents also play an important role in encouraging reading and writing (Bingham et al., 2017; Snow & Matthews, 2016). How they feel about reading can have a big impact on how their children view it. Teachers and parents can provide a good example for their children by reading aloud frequently and showing enthusiasm for the activity. The experiment also shows how non-academic books can help with reading comprehension. Schools tend to prioritize academic texts above non-academic ones, ignoring their worth. Nonetheless, our experiment proves that picture books and other non-academic reading materials can be effective literacy promoters. Not only can they improve kids' reading comprehension, but they also introduce them to new ideas and viewpoints, which helps them develop a more well-rounded perspective.

Finally, there is no simple solution to the early literacy problem; rather, it calls for a comprehensive strategy. We can learn a lot about how to address this problem from the initiative at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan. In order to combat the early literacy crisis and encourage children to develop a love of reading, it is crucial to make reading fun, encourage positive attitudes towards it, and use non-academic reading materials to their full potential. This conversation should inspire everyone with a stake in education to reevaluate their strategies for teaching children to read and write and to take the initiative to foster a lifelong passion for reading in the next generation. Raising reading rates is important, but so is preparing our youth to make a difference in the world as thoughtful, active, and compassionate adults.

Conclusion

Researchers at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan took part in a community service project by making picture books for sixth graders. This is a novel way to combat the early literacy crisis and kids' lack of interest in reading, since children's literature helps them not only enjoy reading for pleasure but also understand the story's meaning and the moral lesson: to be brave and open to a future filled with endless possibilities. Curious about the story's content and the book's presentation keeps children engaged, which in turn improves their reading interest. Researchers' contacts have helped educators at SD Negeri 2 Pandeyan inspire a love of reading among students at other SDs. Scientists are crossing their fingers that picture books will keep popping up across the nation for kids and that parents and educators will be more receptive to the idea of letting kids read for pleasure rather than for school in order to help them develop their creative capacities, gain perspective, and broaden their worldview. Kids all around Indonesia. As a result, we can help kids become more interested in reading and alleviate the early literacy epidemic.

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